



CAUCASUS NEIGHBORHOOD: TURKEY AND THE SOUTH CAUCASUS

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FOREWORD

This book is a collection of papers from the conference entitled “Caucasus Neighborhood: Turkey and the South Caucasus” which was held in Istanbul on August 1-4, 2008. Its participants were NGO actors from Turkey and various parts of the South Caucasus, including the three internationally recognized republics and three unrecognized entities. Participants made their presentations and went home; three days later, war began in South Ossetia. The South Caucasus once again became the focus of international attention. Its problems once again became the concern of superpowers. New efforts to resolve its conflicts are being made by various governmental and non-governmental organizations based in Europe, the U.S., Russia and the South Caucasus itself.

The conflicts did not spring up in August 2008. Ever since the disintegration of the USSR, the region has had to face problematic interaction between recognized and unrecognized political entities, ethnic groups, political movements and militarized groups. In the two post-Soviet decades, all these problems have become closely intertwined and have never ceased to interfere with the region’s development, obstructing regional communication projects, preventing countries from joining forces in order to deal with common problems, and hindering economic integration and the creation of a common market.

The fact that parts of the South Caucasus remain isolated from one another and from their neighbors is one of the main obstacles to sustainable development in the region. The very name of the conference, and now also of the volume, was chosen in analogy to the European Neighborhood, the project that the countries of the South Caucasus joined with great enthusiasm. However, in their quest for a place in the global world, the countries of the South Caucasus usually look very far and very often fail to notice each other and their immediate neighbors. During long years within the USSR, the South Caucasus has become psychologically and culturally detached from adjacent countries, including Turkey. Almost two decades after the disintegration of the USSR, the South Caucasus is not adequately reflected in the political discourses existing in Turkey, whereas in the South Caucasus, Turkey is not fully perceived as an important regional player.

Meanwhile, if efforts to understand the region as a whole and not as a number of detached constituencies are to be effective, these efforts must embrace all adjacent countries. Debates on regional development should not only be held in Brussels, Strasbourg or Moscow, but also in Istanbul, Yere-

van, Tbilisi and Baku. One of the reasons why the Caucasus Neighborhood conference was held in Istanbul was the fact that it would have been impossible in any of the cities of the South Caucasus, because, for example, participants from Yerevan would have had problems with going to Baku, participants from Sukhumi, with traveling to Tbilisi, and so on.

In the framework of this project, we tried to overcome these difficulties. Participants of the conference came from all recognized and unrecognized entities of the South Caucasus. They represented their societies, not their states. While speaking about the challenges faced by their societies, they placed them in the regional context in all its complexity and variety. In the papers collected in this volume, revised after the war in South Ossetia, the authors analyzed regional development prospects based on current trends and the positions of all regional players.

We are very grateful to all participants for their input into the project which was an intellectual act of courage for many. Our thanks go to the United Nations and the Swiss Development and Cooperation Agency whose support made the conference and the book possible. We hope that the book will not remain the only effort to understand the South Caucasus as a region seen both from inside and from the Bosphorus. Unless such efforts are made, our region may never start to exist.

Disclaimer

The papers in this volume reflect the personal opinions of the authors and not those of the Caucasus Institute, the United Nations, the SDC or any other organizations, including the organizations with which the authors are affiliated.

The spellings of some personal and geographical names form part of conflict discourses existing in the South Caucasus. To avoid misunderstanding, all names used in the papers in this volume are spelled the way they were spelled by the authors.

Alexander Iskandaryan
Yerevan, November 2008

SOUTH CAUCASUS BETWEEN ISOLATION AND INTEGRATION: GENESIS AND PROSPECTS

BY ALEXANDER ISKANDARYAN

The South Caucasus is a relatively small region situated between the Black and Caspian Seas, bordering on Russia, Turkey and Iran. The area of the South Caucasus is smaller than that of the United Kingdom, and its population, roughly that of the Netherlands. An isthmus connecting Russia to the Near East and Central Asia to Europe, it has strategic significance for the development of a large and important region lying on the intersection between South-Eastern Europe and the Greater Near East.

To understand the current developments in the South Caucasus, it is useful to look at the genesis of this region. The notion of South Caucasus as a cohesive region with more or less clearly defined borders originated fairly recently. Up to the 19th century, parts of the region belonged to the Persian and Ottoman Empires, or to feudalized principalities and kingdoms located between the two empires. People living in the region did not realize they had anything in common, and there was no such thing as a “Caucasian identity”. Numerous religious, local and ethno-linguistic identities coexisted and overlapped. A person could identify as a Persian-speaking resident of She-makha belonging to the Armenian Apostolic Church, or a Georgian-speaking Sunni Muslim resident in Adjara and subject of the Turkish Sultan. Even the educated people of the time had no idea about living in a common region.

In the early 19th century, the region was annexed by the Russian Empire as a result of several waves of Russian-Turkish and Russian-Persian wars. A name was needed to refer to the new lands in administrative papers. The new name, “Transcaucasia” or “Transcaucasus”, was a very natural coinage for parts of the Russian Empire lying on the other side of the Caucasus Mountain Range. After a while, the lands known as Transcaucasus began to be perceived as a unified region by internal as well as external actors. By its very name, the new region had a natural boundary on the north – the Caucasus Mountains. In the beginning, it did not have a southern boundary. It was the border of the Russian Empire, and later that of the Soviet Union, that became the southern border of the Transcaucasus. The border changed several times as a result of wars and political developments. Thus, from the 1870s until the 1920s, the Transcaucasus included three regions - Kars, Ardahan and Surmalu – that were at that time included in the Russian Empire but have since been parts of Turkey. However, most of the territo-

ry of the Transcaucasus – the part of the Russian Empire south of the Caucasus Mountains – gradually merged into a whole by means of economy, transportation routes and cultural policies, and became a unified region.

A common education system, common legislation, increasingly widespread use of Russian as the regional *lingua franca* (interethnic communication language), a road network connecting the region to the center of the Empire, the state borders on the south, and an emerging common market – all this made people living in the Transcaucasus gradually lose their connections to former parent countries such as Persia or Turkey, and identify themselves with the new region. Their obvious cultural and geographical dissimilarity to Central Russia led to the emergence of a super-ethnic cross-cultural identity of “Caucasians” who began to see themselves as a separate group within the Empire. After the USSR was established in the 1920s, this identity became even stronger because the southern borders were locked, and neighboring Turkey became as inaccessible for people in the Transcaucasus as geographically distant countries like, say, Sweden. The cultural world of the Soviets was contained within the Soviet borders, so that the cultural ties between, for example, the ethnic Georgians in Georgia and the Laz people in Turkey, or between ethnic Azerbaijanis living in Azerbaijan and Iran, were gradually severed. Meanwhile, the difference between Caucasians and other groups living in the USSR was becoming more significant.

In 1922, a short-lived attempt was made to establish proto-statehood in the region, called the Transcaucasian Federation. By the mid-1930s, the initiative was abolished in full accordance with the modernization paradigm of Soviet nation-building. The Federation was dispersed, and the Soviet republics of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia were directly included in the Soviet Union. Some artifacts remained, though, including the Transcaucasian Economic Region and a variety of festivals, culture days and student exchange programs that survived until the disintegration of the USSR. The Transcaucasus had thus become a region inside the USSR, both in external and internal perceptions. Breakup into regions was happening all over the USSR: Central Asia and the Baltic region also became regions of their own, in many ways contrary to history and cultural heterogeneity. However, the differences or even contradictions that existed between Lithuania and Estonia, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, Armenia and Azerbaijan, did not prevent the emergence of common identities, based on a number of markers by means of which the “Caucasians”, “Central Asians” and “Baltic people” distinguished themselves from other people living in the USSR.

According to Benedict Anderson’s theory, imagined communities actually exist in public perception. By the mid-twentieth century, Transcaucasus certainly began to exist as a meta-ethnic multicultural region; it was no longer just a geographical name. People identified themselves with this

region which had clearly defined borders and internal economic links (which are, however, often overstated nowadays).

Administrative borders inside the USSR were drawn using a nesting-doll approach. Three Soviet republics (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia) included autonomous formations of various levels (autonomous republics and autonomous oblasts). Some ethnic groups became the “title nations” of two administrative units at various levels in the taxonomy (for example, Armenians in the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic and in the Autonomous Oblast of Nagorno-Karabakh), and others, of only one (like the Abkhazians in the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia). Some autonomous units were not based on an ethnic principle: for example, Adjara was a Georgian-populated autonomous republic inside Georgia, and Nakhichevan, an Azerbaijani-populated autonomous republic inside Azerbaijan. At the same time, there was no autonomy in many cases where numerous representatives of an ethnic group lived compactly in an administrative unit named after another ethnic group (e.g. hundreds of thousands of Azerbaijanis living in Soviet Georgia, about two hundred thousand Lezgins living in Soviet Azerbaijan etc.).

In Soviet legislation and practices, various levels of autonomy corresponded to various levels in the cultural and administrative hierarchy. For example, a Soviet Socialist Republic would have its own Academy of Science, its Central Committee of the Communist Party, and an Opera and Ballet Theatre. Autonomous republics had none of the above, but they could manage to get permission to open a university (Abkhazia did), something autonomous oblasts could not do, so that there weren't any universities in Nagorno-Karabakh or Southern Ossetia. Nevertheless, all autonomous formations were perceived as ethno-national structures, in a way, as embryos of national statehood. In the capitals of Soviet republics, autonomous republics and autonomous oblasts alike, elites were forming. Semi-undercover national discourses were born, mythologies emerged, and potential claims to the Center and to neighbors gradually accumulated. This topic deserves focused research; it is worth mentioning here that in the entire multiethnic Transcaucasus with its numerous interethnic tensions, the only conflicts that lead to armed hostilities after the disintegration of the USSR were the ones that existed in the “official” autonomous formations (Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh and Southern Ossetia). Tensions in other areas densely populated by ethnic minorities did not lead to wars, although the size of the minority groups in some of them was even larger than in the official autonomous formations. For example, Georgia had more Armenians than Abkhazians and Ossetians put together, but armed controversies only happened in Abkhazia and Southern Ossetia. It is probably the formalization of ethnicity and the institutionalized emergence and concentration of elites that

enable an ethnicity to become politicized more easily when external pressures are removed.

In any case, two trends were manifest during the Soviet era; the first was the creation of a meta-ethnic Transcaucasus region; the second, the emergence of a proto-nationalist paradigm amongst the “title nations” of ethno-national formations inside the region. Both trends were signs of modernization, the first because a multicultural meta-ethnic community was not formed on a dynastic imperial basis, but on the basis of cultural identity. People were not brought together as subjects of a Sultan or Shah but as a cultural entity differing from other subjects of the Tsar (or later of the Communist Party). The second trend consisted, in practice, in the emergence of diverse national identities within the borders of the USSR. It was quite similar to processes that unfolded in Eastern Europe in the 19th and early 20th centuries, when ethnic movements and ethnic identities born inside the Austro-Hungarian Empire became the foundations for new nation-states formed after the disintegration of the Habsburg Monarchy in 1918.

Ironically, the two trends coexisted and did not necessarily contradict one another. For example, in modern Europe, Latvian nationalism does not contradict the Latvians’ European identity and often serves to enhance it; likewise, Georgian nationalism coexisted with and was even fostered by the Caucasian identity of the Georgians back in the 1970s.

However, the formation of ethnopolitical identities follows a logic of its own, described in the work of Miroslav Hroch. The result was inevitable: with the weakening of communist ideology and of the legitimacy based on this ideology, new opportunities opened for free expression of opinions and claims. At this point, political activity began and ethnic issues soon became politicized. There was ample ground for politicizing ethnicity. Sufficient numbers of educated activists were prepared to produce ideologies, become political actors and organize various groups and parties, thus increasing opportunities for public participation and becoming the leaders of newly emerging movements. Marxist, or Soviet, ideological legitimacy was by that time too weak to glue the Empire together any more. The only way the Empire could have been preserved was using its repressive machinery, also weakened by that time. Liberalization during Perestroika increased opportunities for free expression, thus further loosening the Empire and launching the process that led to disintegration of the USSR.

In many parts of the Soviet Empire, the disintegration took the shape of revolutions, requiring large-scale mobilization of the population. Mobilization required popularly comprehensible ideologies that would generate the required amounts of social energy. In all parts of the USSR, there were short-lived attempts back in 1986-1987 to mobilize the masses based on social, democratic or even environmental ideologies. However, national or

even nationalist ideologies began to emerge very soon, first coexisting with the rest and then engulfing them all. What is more, a nationalist component was present from the start even in environmental or social ideas, phrased as “THEY are destroying our environment and THEY are taking away our resources to the Center”. Nationalism proved to be the most basic, comprehensible and universal basis for solidarity; the emerging political elites were well aware of this fact.

It was quite natural that ethnic nationalism was preferred to civil nationalism. The way to this was paved in the long history of pre-Soviet and Soviet modernization. People did not solidarize as potential citizens of independent Georgia or Armenia etc. but as ethnic Georgians, Armenians, Ossetians etc. Territories were perceived as ethnic domains, even in cases like Abkhazia, where the title ethnic group amounted to less than 20% of the population. What mattered that Abkhazia was for the Abkhazians and Armenia for the Armenians as ethnic groups. This approach was distilled in a widely quoted saying by Georgia’s first President, former Soviet dissident Zviad Gamsakhurdia, “Georgia for the Georgians”; it was also Gamsakhurdia who invented the concept of Georgia’s ethnic “hosts” and “guests”. No kind of meta-cultural unity proved stronger than ethnic solidarity. Unlike the time when the Russian Empire was disintegrating in the early 20th century, this time no efforts were made to build a Transcaucasian state. Then again, the 1918 project of a Transcaucasian Seim (parliament) just survived a few months. In the 1990s’ turmoil of nation building, Caucasian solidarity was marginalized; the mainstream ideology was the establishment of nation-states based on a European model dating back the Wilson era, and the transition from planned economies to free markets was also understood as a foundation for national prosperity.

Another reason why Caucasian solidarity was marginalized was that the chosen course of development inevitably led to ethnopolitical conflicts. Politicized ethnicity in a region where ethnic groups lived dispersedly and administrative divisions were based on a nesting-doll principle could not but lead to a situation where some territorial projects overlapped or competed against each other. For example, both Armenians and Azerbaijanis could claim the Armenian autonomy inside Azerbaijan as their own, and both Ossetians and Georgians laid claims to Southern Ossetia. Although simplistic explanations are often published in the press, the ethnic conflicts in the Caucasus were not isolated phenomena or random occurrences or evil doings of individuals. They were part of the region’s nation building process, similar to conflicts over Alsace and Lorraine in European history. Some of the conflicts were not purely secessionist but involved irredentist movements, similar to the Italian Unification, *Risorgimento*, and to the syndrome manifest during the disintegration of some parts of Austria-Hungary, when

Transylvania did not become independent but joined Romania, and Polish Silesia joined Poland.

What is striking about the disintegration of the USSR was not that the building of ethno-national identities led to conflicts, but that the conflicts were so few. Controversies between various subjects of politics thus made ideas of a unified Transcaucasus increasingly unpopular. Perhaps the only successful project in this sphere was the change of the region's name from Transcaucasus to South Caucasus. The new name expressed conscious rejection of a "Russian perspective" and thus served to distance the South Caucasus from Russia. However, the name change was purely mechanical: no attempts were made to understand the new meaning of the region, and the region continued to exist by inertia.

This inertia of unity continues to exist in various dimensions. The first dimension is cultural unity: common cultural codes, Russian as the language of interethnic communication, elements of Soviet culture (meaning both 'high culture' and lifestyle), nostalgia and other consequences of having lived within the unified Soviet space that are better preserved in the older age groups but visibly diminishing in younger generations. The second is the pressing need for economic cooperation; based on geography, this need is often fulfilled by the construction of transit gas pipelines and the like. Not very different economies have little to give to each other; in reality, all countries aspire to integration with Europe and not with one another. The third dimension consists in the countries' profound lack of confidence in their own ability to build successful states and economies, which leads to the idea of combining efforts. All aspects of unity are further strengthened by external demand — this time coming from Brussels instead of St Petersburg or Moscow — to create a unified region that would be easier to integrate into Europe.

The region's understandable sincere wish to become part of Europe is thus strengthening all existing tendencies for the creation of a unified South Caucasus region. However, it could happen that the very same reasons — wanting to join Europe, lack of self-confidence — may lead to a quest for a new regional identity (for example, as part of the Black Sea region) if there is hope that in this way the desired results would be achieved more quickly. The main obstacles to integration trends are still the conflicts. In the current political reality, it is impossible to imagine any sort of realistic integration project between Armenia and Azerbaijan, Abkhazia and Georgia etc. Inertia peters out, and nostalgia disappears together with the generations that felt it. Ethnically mixed populations disappear as a result of ethnically motivated migrations; so that people no longer speak the languages of other ethnic groups, and so on.

There are thus two trends manifest in the region: the trend for integration and another for mutual isolation. Theoretically, if it resolves its con-

flicts, the South Caucasus can remain a unified region. However, it can stop being a region, or fail to become one, and turn into several neighboring countries. All of these countries can form part of a wider region, or several regions, for example, Azerbaijan can be part of the Caspian region, Georgia of the Black Sea region, and Armenia, of the Mediterranean region. One thing is clear: it is impossible to predict the fate of the South Caucasus solely on the basis of the inertia of the times of the Russian Empire or of the Soviet Union. The inertia serves to mitigate the disintegration of the region, but it is not a foundation upon which one can build. The emergence of new national identities can go hand in hand with the emergence of a regional identity, but it cannot grow out of history alone. The region must become a project for the future.

In order for this to happen, the region needs to be understood as a current reality and not as historical legacy. It should not be “reconstructed” or “recreated”; for one, this is not feasible. The project of building the region needs to be designed and linked to a particular terrain. Such a project might succeed. It might also fail. Then we shall know for sure which of the trends wins: the one for integration, the one for isolation, or both.

TURKEY'S POLICY TOWARDS THE CAUCASUS

BY DIBA NIGAR GOKSEL

Executive Summary

Turkey has in recent years experienced a transformation in domestic policy and in foreign policy at the same time. Democracy has advanced in the country, and many of the leading political actors of the 1990s have lost support, to the advantage of the Justice and Development Party (AKP). The AKP came to power in 2002 as a party embodying many differences within itself – sometimes referred to as a coalition in one entity. It was a new party with many of the individuals in its ranks gaining national power for the first time. Foreign policy experience was slight and relations with state institutions were strained. The institutions of the state, including the foreign policy bureaucracy and the military sphere held (and still do to a degree) significant skepticism towards the AKP. In the era when Ankara's traditional actors and the new government were getting accustomed to each other, there were many faultlines shifting in the world, most of them concerning Turkey's neighborhood. It was a period when Turkey needed to redefine or reiterate its placement on the global map. And "diversification" of foreign policy through "maximizing strategic dividends" was a (rare) direction that the opinions of the government and the state institutions seemed to converge on.

With the operation of the U.S. in Iraq starting in 2003 and the tension between Turkey and the U.S. over Iraqi Kurds' empowerment, anti-U.S. sentiments grew in Turkey. Moreover, from 2005 onwards, the conviction that EU membership was a viable goal started to wane in the country. Some central actors in AKP and in the state were already keen on loosening Turkey's engagement with the West, so this new conjuncture offered a rare opportunity. This new approach is traceable in the doctrine of "strategic depth" formulated by a leading foreign policy advisor of the prime minister and in the policies towards Black Sea security and Middle East dynamics.

For the most part the government has been pursuing a policy of calculating the low cost-maximal gain option on arising issues. This has required playing a different hand to different counterparts from time to time, domestically and internationally. Rather than relying on a particular power bloc, keeping options open has been the fall-back strategy. This has led some analysts to claim that Turkey has become unpredictable or without vision. Others have noted that this balancing act is inevitable, given the unsettled nature of the region, the remaining doubts about the eventual EU mem-

bership, miscalculations of the U.S. vis-a-vis Iraq, and the rising assertiveness (the implications of which are not yet clear) of powers such as Iran, Russia and China.

Naturally, Turkey's policies towards the Caucasus are part and parcel of the policy orientations and the debate about Turkey's place in the world; these have also been colored by case-by-case calculations of cost versus gain. The recent crisis in the region which originated over South Ossetia has complicated Turkey's strategies. The suggested platform to bring together regional countries likens other such initiatives in neighboring regions in this era of Turkish foreign policy-making. The depth and feasibility of this new proposal is yet to be seen, as is the question of how Armenia can be integrated given the lack of formal diplomatic relations with Turkey. Turkey may find it difficult to juggle different partners at the same time and in parallel forge a breakthrough.

Disillusionment with the West

Ever since the foundation of the Republic the main foreign policy priority for Turkey has been to belong to the Western bloc. During the Cold War this was strategically critical. It was also an alignment that reflected Turkey's regime choice and modernization aspirations. Emulating the Western development patterns and democratic principles was central to the core of Turkey and served as an anchor.

More recently the status of EU member candidate granted to Turkey in 1999 triggered a cycle of long-due reforms. This was coupled with the strengthening of civil society, more open debate and empowerment of agents of change.

However, the momentum was shaken, particularly from 2005 onwards due to the convergence of factors such as Turkey-skeptic public opinion and leadership in critical EU countries (particularly Angela Merkel in 2005 and Nicolas Sarkozy in 2007), rising nationalism in Turkey fuelled by developments in Iraq and a restart of terrorism in the country, as well as opposition parties' exploitation of national sensitivities. Two other issues were also central to the loss of enthusiasm about the EU. One was the realization that the Turkish Cypriots' vote of 68 percent in favor of the Annan plan in April 2004 did not alleviate the problems caused by this stalemate. In fact, in December 2006, eight of the 35 chapters of the *acquis* were suspended until Turkey will have opened its ports and airports to Greek Cypriot ships and aircraft in line with the Customs Union with the EU. The other issue that shook the enthusiasm of many Turks about the EU was the debate about genocide recognition and resolutions fuelled by the Armenian Diaspora and exploited by Turkey-skeptics in Europe. In particular the effort to make it illegal to deny that the massacres of 1915 were a genocide in France in 2006 were seen in Turkey to be hyp-

ocritical and an indication of insincerity in Europe about its own values of freedom of expression.

The feeling that ‘no matter what Turkey does it will not be admitted into the EU’ spread, and this led to a loss of incentive to push through with the agenda of transformation.

A conviction that the interests of Turkey and the U.S. diverge in the present conjuncture strengthened after September 11th and after the Iraq-War. “Although Turkey was not happy with the Saddam regime in Iraq, it preferred the status quo lest any change destabilize the fragile balances of the Middle East.”¹ The risks of post-Saddam instability in Iraq were communicated by Ankara to Washington consistently. That these did not lead Washington to change its approach has created resentment and “justified” disregard of U.S. interests in calculating Turkey’s moves in the region. As many have pointed out, the decision by the Turkish Parliament in March 2003 not to allow American deployment in Turkey to open a northern front in the War had a dramatic impact on Turkish-American relations.

Rhetoric about relations with America also took on a sentimental tinge. That the U.S. does not “respect” Turkey enough were articulations one could hear even from diplomats. Coupled with the rise of nationalism in Turkey and not much meaningful effort to prevent destructive conspiracy theories, the mood towards the U.S. spiraled downwards.

Anti-Americanism hit an all-time high but the support for EU membership, an all-time low. Seeing the rise of problems in the Middle East and the loss of ground of the Western alliance in Eurasia, doubts rose that the U.S. would succeed in its goals in the region or that the EU could be a serious global actor rose.

It was in this environment that ideas about alternative paths for Turkey’s foreign policy gained more support. In Ankara, arguments that Turkey should not invest too much into aligning with Europe or the U.S. could be heard more frequently. The assumption was that no loss would be incurred from such an approach because being less “subservient” to the West would gain Turkey more leverage rather than less.

However, an event occurred in 2008 that weakened this trend. The case in the Constitutional Court against AKP renewed enthusiasm about the EU accession path among AKP and its constituency as leading actors from Europe gave strong messages in favor of democratization. The Party was not closed down and it is yet to be seen how sustained the rejuvenated Europeanization rhetoric will be.

¹ Aydin, Mustafa and Damla Aras. “Political conditionality of economic relations between paternalist states: Turkey’s interaction with Iran, Iraq, and Syria,” *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Winter-Spring 2005

In 2006, Ankara and Washington signed a joint declaration reaffirming shared goals; however how substantial a difference this made in restoring mutual trust is doubtful. Relations with the U.S. did pick up since late 2007 when the U.S. stepped up its support of Turkey in the struggle within Iraq against the PKK terror organization. Nevertheless, how far-reaching an effect this rejuvenation was is also not clear.

Rebranding Turkey to put it 'back on the map'?

Recent articulations of priorities in Turkish foreign policy have included the following: stability in the neighborhood, zero-problems and increased economic ties with neighbors (trade and investment), being an energy hub between Eurasia and Europe, and bridging the global religious/civilizational divide. Turkey's "new" foreign policy has been defined by analysts with adjectives such as self-reliant, multi-dimensional, and assertive.¹

Taking into account "new realignments in the international system and the shifts in the center of gravity of the global economy" is a central theme in frameworks presented about Turkey's new foreign policy. The underlying logic is that "the trend of regionalization" will increase and thus investing political capital in surrounding areas is of rising importance. "Making Turkey a center country, both in its near geography and on a global scale" in economic spheres is a goal that naturally requires political and strategic relations to be adjusted accordingly.² Being a "center for peace," "tending to any sore in the world" and being critical about most global issues possible are other ambitious visions articulated for Turkey.³

The end of hegemony of any country or bloc (which can be read as the "transatlantic bloc" or the U.S.), is largely seen as inevitable and/or desirable. This rhetoric, coupled with moves countering the U.S. and aligning with Russia, has led some critical observers to liken Turkish leaders' approach to that of Putin when he said in Munich in February 2007 that the U.S. was "trying to establish a unipolar world."

The widespread logic is that while this major transition is taking place, the supremacy of the West is doubtful in the longer term, and Turkey needs to keep all doors open and position itself in a way to maximize its influence. As stated above, the effort to make Turkey indispensable in the region is

¹ *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Winter 2007/8, www.turkishpolicy.com

² The Opening Statement of the Turkish Foreign Minister Ali Babacan at the Ambassadors Conference, Bilkent Hotel and Conference Center, Ankara, 15 July 2008, "Global Trends and Turkish Foreign Policy", http://www.mfa.gov.tr/the-opening-statement-of-the-minister-of-foreign-affairsali-babacan-at-the-ambassadors-conference-bilkent-hotel-and-conference-center_15-july-2008_-_global-trends-and-turkish-foreign-policy__.en.mfa

³ Speech by Egemen Bagis at the certificate ceremony of the Politics Academy in Kutahya, 30 July 2008

assumed to give Turkey more leverage. However the backside of this coin, voiced by critics with concern, that Turkey will be seen as an unpredictable country, risky to count on in alliances.

One dimension of Turkey's new activism has thus been through taking more active part in establishing new multilateral organizations or taking part more actively in existing ones. Turkey is currently a candidate for the UN Security Council non-permanent seat for the term 2009-10. The need for reform of the UN in order for it to more effectively address global problems has been consistently voiced at the highest level in Turkey. The Alliance of Civilizations initiative under the leadership of Turkey and Spain has been one of the means through which Turkey has institutionalized its desired role as bridge between civilizations.

For the last few years there have been efforts to make the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), which recently celebrated its 16th anniversary, more effective. In recent years, Turkey has also played a more active role in the 57-member Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), the Secretary General of which, Professor Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, is from Turkey. Turkey was influential in notions such as democracy and human rights finding place in the new Charter of the Organization of Islamic Conference in March 2008. For the past 5 years, Turkey's diplomatic activity in the Arab world has also intensified.

The African Union Organization, to which Turkey is a "permanent observer" declared Turkey a "strategic partner" in early 2008. In mid-August 2008, the Turkey-Africa Cooperation Summit was held in Istanbul. Turkey is also initiating a "strategic dialogue process" with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). As of the start of September 2008, a "memorandum of understanding" was planned between GCC and Turkey for intensified cooperation. Efforts to work more closely with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization are underway.¹

The ministerial level platform bringing together neighbors of Iraq upon Turkey's initiative has been held regularly since early 2007. Bring a "facilitator" in the settlements of conflicts has been a role the AKP government has attempted to play. Being active in Palestinian-Israeli negotiations, Pakistan-Afghanistan dialogue, Syria and Israel talks are several such recent examples. After the Georgia-Russia war, Turkey was quick to suggest another regional initiative: the Caucasus Stability & Cooperation Platform. Messages emanating from the U.S. have reflected that Turkey did not discuss this suggestion with the U.S., which was seen to be awkward given U.S. is a significant stakeholder in the region and has promoted Turkish influence in the region since the early 90s.

¹ Ali Babacan, "Global Trends and Turkish Foreign Policy", *ibid.*

Another basic tenet of Turkey's foreign policy under AKP has been its emphasis on neighbors - economically, politically and strategically. Change in some of the neighbors' stances towards issues Turkey prioritizes undoubtedly played a role too (such as Syria and Iran abandoning their support for terrorist elements in Turkey); however, it was also a leaning strategically conceived and spelled out in Ankara.

Economically this reorientation has served Turkey well. Avoiding problems, trying to take advantage of every existing potential with any country has contributed to stability and increased economic opportunities. The ratio of Turkey's trade with neighboring and close-by countries to total foreign trade has increased steadily by virtue of activities such as free trade agreements or frequent high level official visits accompanied by businessmen.

On the other hand though, Turkey's increased bilateral cooperation with countries towards which the West is trying to forge a united position has been attracting skeptical attention too.

In March 2006, Erdogan traveled to Sudan at the height of the world's outcry about Darfur atrocities. In January 2008, Bashir visited Ankara, drawing criticism from the international community. This was yet another issue that contributed to the analysis that Turkey is not in synch with the Western bloc any more. A U.S. official commented as follows: "The international community has spoken through the International Criminal Court concerning the charges of genocide against al-Bashir. We would be very happy if Turkey would join the international community in their condemnation of him."¹ In August 2008, Sudanese President Omar Hassan al-Bashir traveled to Turkey again, this time for the Turkish-African summit, soon after the International Criminal Court indicted him for genocide.

From 2004 onwards questions began to be raised among Western analysts about whether Turkey was shifting its position, based on its efforts to forge close relations with Iran and Syria at a time when not only the U.S. but also European leaders were discussing means to pressure these two neighbors of Turkey into compliance with international norms. The security implications of a nuclear Iran for Turkey, Syria's purchase of military hardware from Russia have been the recent issues highlighted in questioning Turkey's closer engagement. By disassociating itself from the U.S. interests, Turkey may have gained short-term trust in these and other countries and "balanced" its foreign policy; however, the long run will no doubt bring other dynamics.

Widening cooperation with countries that were not traditionally focused on in such a way by policymakers is presented as complementary to rela-

¹ "All Eyes on Sudan's Bashir during summit", *Turkish Daily News*, August 19, 2008 <http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/article.php?newsid=112983>

tions with the transatlantic bloc. However, if global faultlines so dictate, which can be over Russia or Iran at present, Turkey might have to again make a choice about which “side” to be on, as was the case during the Cold War. What decision Turkey would make is not self-evident. Moreover, by avoiding making a choice in certain settings, Turkey risks being left without very reliable allies.

Calculations regarding the Caucasus

After the dissolution of the USSR in the early 90s, Turkey’s rhetoric towards the Caucasus (and Central Asia) was ambitious; Turkey would step in as the leading regional power. By the end of the century, Russia’s prevailing leverage in this region and Turkey’s inability to back up its rhetoric became obvious. Political infighting within Turkey, frequent reshuffling of governments, and economic stresses were also reasons for the weak performance in realizing the goal of asserting influence in the region. The Caucasus was not a priority area for Turkish foreign policy for the years following; however, a new activity was introduced recently. In line with the general new framework of foreign policy described above, Turkey is engaged in increasing its pull in the Caucasus and being an ‘indispensable actor’ for decisions and actions pertaining to the region. In order to proceed to increased activity in the region, Turkey is aware that it needs to accommodate Russian interests at least until it has consolidated its own influence. Increased investment (also into education by private actors in Turkey) and “soft” power initiatives have been most pronounced. This time around, contrary to the early 90s, care is taken not to hype up the rhetoric about regional power before it can be substantiated.

Turkey was by-and-large skeptical about U.S. democratization efforts in the Black Sea region (i.e. the Orange and Rose revolutions in Ukraine and Georgia respectively). The U.S. is either seen to be “naive” in its stated aims or just covering up its real self-interest-based motivation in propping up pro-U.S. leaders. Ultimately, a widespread opinion among decision makers in Ankara is that the U.S. is irresponsible to be meddling in the region as such and will leave behind turmoil and that the countries in the region will be the losers of U.S. intervention.

Turkey-Russia relations have been developing since the end of the 90s in both economic and political spheres. The growth in the volume of trade has been steep and political ties have intensified particularly since 2000 in the form of “multidimensional co-operation” including energy and military spheres. In 1992 the trade between Russia and Turkey amounted to under 450 million USD; by 2004 it was 11 billion USD and the figure for 2008 is expected to be 38 billion USD. This year Russia is Turkey’s number one trading partner – partially by virtue of the fact that Turkey buys 63 percent

of its natural gas from Russia, and 29 percent of its oil. Turkish construction companies are active in Russia and Turkish investment in Russia totals \$1.5 billion. The number of Russian tourists who visited Turkey fluctuated around 1.5 million every year since 2004 – and is apparently the largest group of tourists in terms of nationality.

Particularly after then-President Putin's visit to Ankara in December 2004, an intensified series of meetings between the executive leaders of the countries took place. Meeting with then-President Ahmet Necdet Sezer in March 2006 in Ankara, Putin explained that developments in the relations have been in line with the framework decided in 2004 and that the relations had taken on a new nature.

Preparations for Blue Stream, which carries natural gas from Russia to Turkey under the Black Sea started in 1997 – by 2003 gas was flowing (official inauguration was in November 2005). Turkey is committed to a purchase plan for 25 years from this route. Blue Stream also embodies a strategic positioning. Instead of Blue Stream, routes that would reduce European dependence on Russian energy sources had been advocated by the U.S. and newly independent countries possessing gas to transport to European markets like Azerbaijan. Now Russia's Gazprom is working on further increasing the dependency through "the South Stream pipeline project" (to run under the Black Sea to Bulgaria and on to Central Europe).

Since 2002, the Nabucco route, spanning from the Caspian Basin to Central Europe that would stretch through Turkey to compete with Russian-controlled pipelines has been discussed widely. When demands rose from Turkey to purchase the energy resource and resell it to European consumers at a higher price (instead of settling for mere transit fees), Europeans, Azerbaijanis and Americans voiced concern that this would jeopardize the realization of Nabucco by making it less competitive than the Russian alternative. Turkey was overly ambitious about maximizing its own interest at the risk of overplaying its hand in a way that would lead to the consolidation of the energy monopoly of Russia. In fact BOTAS, the Turkish pipeline conglomerate, was likened to a "mini-Gazprom."¹ This style of testing the waters by shooting high and then retreating when unfeasibility is blatant has become a pattern in recent Turkish foreign policy.

Turkey has been a NATO member since 1952 and a strategic partner of the U.S. for decades. It was thus unexpected that Turkey block the extension of NATO's Operation Endeavor from the Mediterranean to the Black

¹ The Azerbaijan-Turkey-U.S. Relationship and its Importance for Eurasia, December 10 2007, Event Summary and Conclusions, organized by Center for Eurasian Policy & Azerbaijan-Turkey Businessmen Association & Central Asia-Caucasus Institute of the Silk Road Studies Program, Washington DC

Sea. Sensitive about not disrupting its increasingly cooperative relations with Russia, Turkey also seemed to share with Russia the sense of being “encircled” by the U.S. in the region.

It is obviously in Russia’s interests that Turkey feel the confidence to dismiss European and American strategic interests. And Russia has exploited the cooling relations with the West rather successfully in this sense.

It is also arguably in Russia’s interests that Turkey-Armenia relations remain in a stalemate as this maintains Armenia’s dependence on Russia and Russia’s leverage not only in Armenia but in the region in general.

Armenia is today the only neighbor Turkey has problems with. Though dialogue has been ongoing with intensified pace since 2000 among NGOs, intellectuals, press and even officials, normal diplomatic relations are still not established.

Talks that were ongoing to open the border with Armenia were halted in 1993 when Armenia moved ahead in occupying Azerbaijani regions beyond Nagorno-Karabagh. The assumption was that the border being sealed would render the occupation less sustainable. Azerbaijan’s position, officially and among the public, is that the maintenance of the status quo (i.e. the closed border) is critical for Armenia to have an incentive to solve the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict – and for the international community to care. However, conviction in Turkey seems increasingly to be waning as 15 years down the line, the existing equilibrium has not delivered the intended results.

With the many other issues politicians in Turkey needing to make bold moves on, the Armenia question fell relatively low on the agenda. 2003 and 2004 were years when decisions were made that strained the nationalist support of the government on issues regarding the Kurdish Southeast, the Cyprus deadlock, and EU-driven democratization. These were issues which promised higher gains than “concessions” on problems with Armenia – and in themselves used up a lot of political capital of the government vis-a-vis nationalists in the country. Genocide resolutions pursued by the Armenian Diaspora, references to Eastern Anatolia as Western Armenia, questions regarding Armenia’s recognition of the borders with Turkey all provoked the nationalist segments and fuelled concerns in Turkey that requests for reparations would follow. Of course it does not help that some members of the Diaspora are vocal about this demand. Many diplomats in Turkey feel Turkey has been wronged by the international community on a number of accounts in years past and bet on the worst possible case while making projections. There is an embedded sense of being discriminated against and victimized. Many Turkish diplomats have also experienced loss of colleagues by ASALA terror and resent the perceived lack of justice. These are issues that surface when normalization of relations is discussed among decision makers.

Relatively speaking, there has not been a sense of urgency regarding the stalemate with Armenia in recent years. Pragmatic thought seemed to imply that waiting for a solution might yield better results – Turkey would solidify its position in Georgia and Azerbaijan and develop stronger ties with Russia; Nagorno-Karabagh negotiations might yield results in the meantime; more Armenians might realize hostility to Turkey is more at their expense than vice versa; Turkey would proceed albeit slowly down the track of EU membership... There is no doubt also an element of pride involved – and this is the case in Armenia as well. Thus while rational deliberations are at the fore, an emotional component certainly plays in. While keeping doors open for dialogue, Turkish policymakers opted against dramatic shifts of policy. It appears that a certain ambiguity as to what the conditions for opening the borders are has been more convenient than clarifying the road map to move forward.

There is a growing group of influential Turks pushing for change in relations with Armenia though. This includes liberal intellectuals, businessmen with a stake in normalization, municipalities and interest groups in Turkish provinces that lie on the border with Armenia, the Armenian minority in Turkey and NGOs that carry out bilateral projects with support from countries like the U.S. and foundations based in Europe. In both Armenia and Turkey, advocates of normalization have been labeled as unpatriotic by radical groups. Particularly under pressure from organized Diaspora members, certain joint projects have had to be abandoned. Interest in resolution of existing problems is questionable among the activist Diaspora; however, there is indeed a segment among the Armenian Diaspora that is constructive and increasingly offers hope for the future.

Azerbaijan is important for Turkey for a number of reasons. Strategically the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline which was completed in 2006 is critical for Turkey's stated goal to be an energy (transit) hub. Other economic links have also proved to be important in recent years, with significant Turkish investment in Azerbaijan in areas such as energy, construction, transportation, banking and the service sector. Bilateral trade is not high, standing at around 1 billion USD, partially because of lack of shared border (except with Nahcivan).

Particularly the nationalists of Turkey give importance to Turkic solidarity and ethnolinguistic ties – this has made bilateral relations an item of political nature in Turkey and reduced the sympathy of liberals in Turkey to Azerbaijan's causes. In a sense the hearts of the right-wing ideological segments of Turkey have been won by Azerbaijan but the minds of the rest have been reached with less effectiveness. This is partially due to the nature of the spectrum of opinion leaders in Turkey too - unless ideologically motivated, many have neglected to examine policy and opportunities in Eurasia.

Uneasiness with perceived Armenian “expansionism” is shared by both Azerbaijan and Turkey and both have been strongly targeted by the Armenian Diaspora – these have somewhat united the two countries in the arena of foreign policy, as evidenced by the Joint Forum of Azerbaijani and Turk Diaspora Institutions which was launched in March 2007 and the occasional diplomatic collaboration in centers such as Washington DC.

There are a significant number of Azerbaijani university students studying in Turkey, and they have been organized in lobbying activities. There are many Turkish schools opened in Azerbaijan (15 secondary schools, 11 high schools and 1 university). Students graduating from high school in Turkey can apply to universities in Azerbaijan. There are around 4000 Turks currently studying in Azerbaijan (1200 is the quota allocated for new entries last year). Exchange programs have been initiated in recent years to transfer know-how from Turkey on issues ranging from municipality models to training of diplomats and NGO gender practices.

All this said, there are also glitches in the relations; partly because of the initial high expectations, disillusionment has been experienced over the years. In the early years of its independence Turkey may have been able to play a role in linking Azerbaijan to the West; however, with its vast energy reserves and own style of diplomatic maneuvering, Azerbaijan no longer needs any “brotherly help” from Turkey. Moreover, there have recently been periods when Turkey’s relations with the U.S. were so strained that close association with Turkey would have been more of a burden than a benefit for Azerbaijan.

The patronizing approach towards “younger kin” Azerbaijan that Ankara has projected at times has turned off some intellectual segments of the Azerbaijani society. While the Turkic issue is less significant for AKP than it was for the more nationalist parties of Turkey, it is not necessarily romanticized by President Aliyev (as was also the case with his father) in comparison to, for example, former president Abulfaz Elcibey.

Tensions have risen over issues, for example in March 2008 when Turkey demanded more than transit fees for Azeri gas to flow along the prospective Nabucco route, or over considerations of Turkey opening the border gate with Armenia. In the past there were instances where Turkey supported opposition leaders in Azerbaijan who they saw to be more favorable to relations with Turkey; however, on such accounts Turkey is more pragmatic now and more aware of the need for balance if any Azerbaijani foreign policy is to be sustainable.

Despite the ups and downs, the relations are usually characterized as close and mutually supportive.

Regarding Georgia, Ankara has been intent on developing its influence but was skeptical of U.S. involvement in supporting “democracy” in Geor-

gia. Business ties have increased significantly since the Rose Revolution and diplomacy has become more active. That being said, many in the foreign policy establishment of Ankara have held Saakashvili responsible for the recent crisis with Russia. Turkey was put in a position where it had to “sell out” one side for another, and this was exactly what it had been trying to avoid in every possible context. The Abkhaz minority in Turkey was also influential in introducing anti-Saakashvili rhetoric.

A diplomacy traffic has since unrolled with Prime Minister Erdogan visiting Moscow, Tbilisi and Baku, and in reverse order, the foreign ministers of these countries visiting Turkey. Given the existential problems between Georgia and Russia or Armenia and Azerbaijan, how the new platform Erdogan proposed can be realized remains a question.

In the recent crisis, Ankara did not allow the passage of American naval vessels through the Turkish Straits to deliver humanitarian relief to Georgia based on the Montreux Convention of July 20, 1936. Though this problem was to some degree resolved in a few days, this has been one additional example of how, rather than relying on Turkey as an ally, an element of uncertainty as to how much Turkey will cooperate is getting entrenched in the minds of those in Washington who deal with Turkey.

As Ian Lesser points out in his recent article “After Georgia: Turkey’s Looming Foreign Policy Dilemmas”:

“Across a range of issues, Turkey’s ability to conduct a foreign policy based on breadth rather than depth – engaging diverse partners with conflicting interests simultaneously – would be severely constrained by more overt competition between Russia and the West.”¹

With some of the transatlantic differences having been overcome in the last couple of years, the transatlantic bloc, and the NATO platform, might take on a more assertive policy towards both Russia and Turkey’s Muslim neighbors. Challenges may arise to Turkey’s newfound nature of foreign policy.

On the other hand, the recent confrontation between Russia and Georgia coupled with President Sargsyan’s invitation to Gul to watch the world cup qualifier match together on September 6 2008, induced opinions that Turkey should normalize relations with Armenia sooner rather than later and might trigger the incentive that to date has been insufficient.

¹ Lesser, Ian. *After Georgia: Turkey’s Looming Foreign Policy Dilemmas*. German Marshall Fund, 26 Aug 2008 http://www.gmfus.org/publications/article.cfm?parent_type=P&id=476

AZERBAIJAN: REGIONAL INTEGRATION IN AN EXPLOSIVE REGION AND THE NEXT TEN YEARS OF THE SOUTH CAUCASUS

BY HIKMET HAJIZADEH

Ever since the disintegration of the USSR, the attention of scholars and of the international community has been constantly focused on domestic transformations in the newly formed independent republics and the way they integrate or conflict between themselves and with the neighbor countries of the former USSR. Whereas the Baltic States have relatively quickly transformed into democracies and integrated into Euro-Atlantic structures, there is much less clarity concerning the future of the South Caucasus and its neighbors Russia, Turkey, and Iran. While every South Caucasus country is actively trying to make new economic ties with the rest of the world, the three countries have not yet succeeded in tackling either their domestic political problems or conflicts with each other. Despite this, their economic cooperation with the external neighbors of the region is growing. However, current problems and unpredictable futures of the three countries have considerable negative impact on their social and economic development and interstate cooperation.

The South Caucasus and the New World Order

The domestic transformation of the South Caucasus states and their political and economic integration with neighboring countries is now affected by the new global situation, including the war on international terrorism, the struggle for non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, and the global resource crisis that was predicted back in 1972 in the *Limits to Growth* report of the Roman Club¹, and two hundred years earlier, in 1796 by Thomas Malthus in *An Essay on the Principle of Population*.² Things that substantially impact the situation in the South Caucasus include the growing discord between democratic and authoritarian superpowers as the latter strive to increase their presence in the region. And although ordinary people in the South Caucasus can't quite get used to this, they get more evidence every day that no country is an

¹ Meadows D. H., Meadows D. L., Panders J., Behrens W.W. *The Limits to Growth*. N.Y. Potomac. 1972.

² Malthus Th. *An Essay on the Principle of Population*. Library of Economics, Liberty Fund, Inc., 2000, *EconLib.org* webpage: <http://www.econlib.org/library/Malthus/malPop.html>

island, so that developments concerning atomic power in North Korea can affect the prospects of resolving the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh.

Far from the idea of blaming ethnic conflicts and integration failures in the South Caucasus on external actors, I still maintain that the conflicts will never be settled until NATO countries, on the one hand, and Russia, China and Iran, on the other, resolve the disputes that they have in various locations on the planet. A vivid example: when in July 2008, Russia vetoed UN sanctions against Zimbabwe's repressive regime, it was retaliating for the unfolding of U.S. rocket defense systems in the Czech Republic, as well as against other steps that the West has been making in various places without heeding Russian interests.

While the world was expecting an era of liberalism and unclouded international cooperation to begin right after the end of the Cold War as predicted by Frances Fukuyama,¹ it ended up in an era of constant concerns over the conflicts that sparked between former Soviet republics, and increasing tensions that they have with one another and with the neighbor states of the former USSR. One has to admit with regret that the South Caucasus is now the world's most explosive region next to the Near East.

Political Integration in the Region

The wishes for multilateral integration in the Caucasus that were expressed in the early 1990s have been forgotten by now; instead, the countries of the South Caucasus were offered to choose between two mutually exclusive integration trends and two competitive systems of international security. It's either a full-fledged tight union with Russia (the Collective Security Treaty Organization) or integration into Euro-Atlantic bodies (the Council of Europe, NATO and the European Union). It's harder every year to postpone the choice of partner, as NATO comes closer to the region's borders and Russia uses its oil revenues to become more active in the South Caucasus. It's hard to speak of political integration or cooperation when all the above factors have combined to produce an almost classical layout in which all actors fight with each other:

- Armenia is fighting with Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh;
- Georgia has a grave conflict with Russia over Abkhazia and South Ossetia;
- Russia is pressurizing its neighbors in order to bring them all back under its influence;
- Azerbaijan has a controversy with Iran and Turkmenistan over the Caspian oil shelf;

¹ Fukuyama F. "The End of History" // *The National Interest*, Summer, 1989.

- Iran is trying to export Islamic Revolution to Azerbaijan;
- Northern Azerbaijan is dreaming of unification with Southern Azerbaijan (which is part of Iran);
- Armenia is making territorial claims to all its neighbors except Iran.

Regional cooperation is further complicated by the domestic problems of all countries listed above: problems with democracy; the lack of guarantees for human rights and freedoms including economic freedom;¹ corruption; poor environment for business and foreign investment...²

The countries of the South Caucasus have so far failed to make a final choice between the two competing global security systems. Georgia has apparently opted for Euro-Atlantic integration and applied for NATO membership; however, given Russia's increasing resistance to this decision, Georgia may have to face a tragic choice either to return to Russia's zone of influence or to lose a significant share of its territory.

Moldova is already facing such a dilemma in very concrete terms, and I would like to stress that a similar project may be offered to all CIS republics that want to be part of the West. *Interfax* news agency reported that the West, Russia and Ukraine agreed on a project for resolving the conflict over Transdniestria under which Moldova must drop out of GUAM, discontinue steps to accede to the NATO and forget about unification with Romania.³ In this case, Moscow will negotiate the re-inclusion of Transdniestria into Moldova. Transdniestria gets the status of a republic with its own Constitution, a Parliament with the right to legislative initiative, and the right to secede from Moldova in the event that Moldova loses its independence. Transdniestria will have 20 per cent of the seats in Moldova's parliament, and Moldova must become a neutral demilitarized state. As Moldova's President Voronin told Chisinau TV on June 20, 2008, "Following lengthy repeated negotiations, Russia, Ukraine and the West have agreed on an expedient final resolution of the Transdniestria issue". Previously, President Voronin said that Chisinau was prepared to pull out of GUAM and give up its aspirations to join the NATO should this be required for the management of the conflict over Transdniestria...

The abovementioned peace project for Transdniestria, which can be called "Peace in exchange for neutrality", is currently the only project in the entire history of post-Soviet separatist conflicts that is satisfactory for all stakeholders in a conflict. Moreover, "Peace in exchange for neutrality" is

¹ Freedom House, Freedom in the World // www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=15.

² Transparency International, Corruption Perceptions Index, 2007 // www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2007.

³ *Interfax* News Agency, 04.07.2008.

seen as an alternative to the need to choose between the Collective Security Treaty Organization and the NATO, something that the countries of the South Caucasus and Ukraine find it so difficult to do.

The future will show whether such a project will be offered to Georgia, and whether Georgia will accept it. Georgia has already made some progress on its way into the Euro-Atlantic community and even established a Ministry of European Integration. Moreover, ever since summer 2008 the West has increasingly supported Georgia in its conflict with Russia, condemning the flights of Russian military aircraft over Georgia¹ and backing up Georgia's initiative to replace Russian peacekeepers in Abkhazia with an international force.²

Will Azerbaijan get a similar offer with regard to the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, and will Azerbaijan agree to "Peace in exchange for neutrality"? The answer to the second question is very probably "yes". Despite its declared foreign policy of Euro-Atlantic integration, Azerbaijan is in fact trying to keep a balance between Russia and the West, striving to fulfill the economic and strategic demands of both while preserving its own sovereignty. As a result, both U.S. and Russia's leaders every now and then proclaim Azerbaijan their 'strategic partner'.

Azerbaijan does not wish to accede to the Collective Security Treaty Organization but heeds every demand made by Russia. For example, Azerbaijan has discontinued its support of separatist groups in the Northern Caucasus. Despite being poorly equipped for participating in Azerbaijan's oil projects, Russia still gets its share in them, and some of Azerbaijan's energy resources are transported via Russian territory. Still, Azerbaijan has built the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline which bypasses Russia and is using it to transport Caspian oil to world markets. Another example is that, despite Russian demands, Azerbaijan does not suspend its aid to Georgia, the country that enables Azerbaijan's only connection to the world ocean.³

Azerbaijan is closely cooperating with the West in mining oil and shipping it to European markets. It is also an active partner of the West in the anti-terrorism coalition: it allows the NATO to use its airports for flights to Afghanistan, sends its troops to Iraq and Afghanistan, participates in the NATO Partnership for Peace and implements its Individual Partnership Action Plan. Azerbaijan has based its relations with the West on what is known as "oil diplomacy", hoping that by offering the West access to its

¹ *Interfax News Agency // www.interfax.ru/politics/news.asp?id=21391.*

² *Ria-Novosti News Agency // www.rian.ru/world/20080605/109262703.html.*

³ *Prime-TASS News Agency // www.prime-tass.ru/news/show.asp?ct=articles&id=1425.*

energy resources, Azerbaijan can expect the West to afford it the kind of support in the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh that Armenia is getting from Russia. However, this support was not given, and despite assurances of strategic partnership, the West refused to fight with Russia over Nagorno-Karabakh. “Oil diplomacy” even failed to induce the U.S. congress to abolish its 1993 sanctions against Azerbaijan (Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act) or to cut U.S. aid to Armenia or Nagorno-Karabakh. All the above has doubtless become one of the main reasons for a cooldown in Azerbaijan’s relations with the West and in particular towards the idea of joining NATO. President Ilham Aliev said on March 20, 2008 in an interview with *Interfax-Azerbaijan*: “We are satisfied with our current level of cooperation with the NATO. It is hard to say what will follow, what will happen in the world and what the developments in our region may be. Therefore, based on today’s situation, accession to the NATO is not on the agenda.”¹

Clearly Azerbaijan is in no hurry to join the NATO and would be prepared to accept a project of “Peace in exchange for neutrality” in Nagorno-Karabakh. The question is, will Russia offer such a project to Azerbaijan? There is another reason why Azerbaijan does not rush its Euro-Atlantic integration: membership would require profound democratic reform to ensure political pluralism, respect of human rights, rule of law, free market and social justice, all of which would threaten the country’s authoritarian regime. According to Freedom House yearly report on *Freedom in the World* in 2007, Azerbaijan is rated as “not free.”² Transparency International named Azerbaijan as one of the world’s most corrupt countries in 2007.³ With ratings like this, you don’t get accepted to Euro-Atlantic bodies. To join, Azerbaijan would have to implement liberal reforms, fight corruption, and worst of all, have a fair election. None of this is on the agenda of the present government. Reacting to international criticism of the situation with civil liberties in Azerbaijan, President Ilham Aliev told the heads of Azerbaijan’s diplomatic missions abroad: “Azerbaijan is not in need of financial support and recommendations of the international community... No one has the right to interfere in the domestic affairs of Azerbaijan. Let the people who say “there is something wrong in Azerbaijan” look in a mirror and at their own countries... Azerbaijan has commitments to international organizations, and it honors them... If our membership of these organizations is not advan-

¹ *Interfax-Azerbaijan* News Agency // www.interfax.az/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=18570&Itemid=9.

² Freedom House, *Freedom in the World* // www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2007&country=7129.

³ Transparency International, *Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) 2007* // www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2007.

tageous for someone, let them say this directly. What will happen if we are not in international organizations? Azerbaijan will not die.”¹

In the final analysis, neither external factors (a policy of balancing between the West and Russia) nor domestic ones (the country is not free) stimulate Azerbaijan to move towards NATO membership, and Russia is aware of this fact. As illustrated by the above quotation from President Aliiev, the current regime is even prepared to give up membership in international organizations in order to remain in power. Therefore, it does not make sense to offer Azerbaijan a project of “Peace in Nagorno-Karabakh in exchange for neutrality” because Azerbaijan is already neutral and so far does not intend to change its policy.

Armenia’s choice between the West and Russia appears to have been the most decisive of all. Armenia is party to the Collective Security Treaty Organization and has Russian military bases on its territory. Armenia’s borders are guarded by joint Russian-Armenian patrols, and most of Armenia’s assets in the energy sector and major industrial plants have been turned over to Russia as part of a Property-for-debt scheme. However, events after the last presidential election in Armenia have shown that Armenian society is increasingly disgruntled with the country’s one-sided orientation towards Russia. Opponents of the present government point out that the current foreign policy will lead to a dead end in terms of the country’s development. Since the current authorities of Armenia are unable to suppress pro-Western opposition groups, or to deprive them of public support, we can expect a change of government in Armenia in the future, and a reversal of its unequivocal pro-Russian orientation. For the sake of development, Armenia must overcome its isolation, and the Armenian society is increasingly aware of this fact. Even now, we see the Armenian government trying to normalize its relations with Turkey.²

There is thus a chance, even though a small one, that Armenia may change the direction of its integration. We can also hope that, if the NATO establishes itself in Georgia and gives an impetus to the development of this country, this will affect the thinking of people in Armenia.

Politics vs. Economics

So long as the industries of South Caucasus states and their neighbors are insufficiently developed for multifaceted cooperation, the main engines for regional integration are the Caspian energy resources and the unique geo-

¹ “Azeri Leader Brushes Aside Foreign Pressure”. *TURAN* News Agency, Baku 08.07.2008. <http://www.newstin.co.uk/tag/uk/67755440>

² *Day.Az* News Portal <http://day.az/news/armenia/124803.html>

graphical situation of the South Caucasus as an intersection of East-West and North-South routes across Eurasia. The main obstacles to integration are ethnic conflicts and the fact that the countries have not elaborated consistent domestic or foreign policies.

As we observe the implementation of mutually beneficial interstate industrial and transportation projects, we see that domestic and external factors constantly lead to problems. Fortunately, political problems do not completely obstruct economic projects but only make them more expensive:

- In the early 1990s, Russia did its best to prevent the signing of oil deals between Azerbaijan and transnational corporations; it went as far as a coup d'état in Azerbaijan in 1993 but the deals were made nonetheless, even though on worse terms than originally planned because Azerbaijan was rated as a high-risk country;
- In the mid 1990s, Russia, Turkmenistan and Iran began bargaining over Caspian borders and ownership of oil reserves, and Iran even sent its warships to Azerbaijan's oil platforms. However, Russia soon agreed to the divisions proposed by Azerbaijan, and oil is still mined in the Caspian albeit in a rather tense environment;
- Azerbaijan insisted on excluding Armenia from the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline and the Baku-Kars railroad projects, which made the projects more costly and enhanced Armenia's isolation;
- Azerbaijan is preventing Armenia from participating in an "energy ring" that is planned to link Turkey, Georgia, Iran, Russia and probably Turkmenistan as well¹;
- Armenia lays claims to Azerbaijan's Nagorno-Karabakh, Georgia's Javakheti and parts of Turkey adjacent to its border, and consequently finds itself in a hostile environment and de-facto transportation blockade;
- The North-South Railroad project, planned to enable transportation from Europe via Russia, Azerbaijan and Iran to other countries, was never launched because of Iran's unpredictability and instability²;
- Russia has imposed trade and visa restrictions on Georgia and is trying to talk Azerbaijan out of shipping cheap gas to Georgia, albeit to no avail so far;
- Turkey has signed, denounced, amended and again signed projects to buy and transport Iranian gas³;

¹ *Echo Daily* Online, Azerbaijan, <http://echo-az.info/politica01.shtml>

² *Echo Daily* Online, Azerbaijan http://www.echo-az.com/archive/2007_06/1589/economica03.shtml

³ *Vremya Novostei* Online, <http://www.vremya.ru/2002/167/8/26936.html>

- Today's Turkey is continuously rocked by government crises and the war on Kurdish terrorism; worst of all, the threat to Turkey's secular development model is no longer hypothetical, and is by no means stimulating foreign investment in Turkey;
- Russia is exerting diplomatic pressure on Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan in order to prevent them from selling their energy resources to Europe directly, without Russia's mediation;
- Russia's imperialistic logic makes it violate any interstate economic agreement with the greatest of ease, as was the case during disputes over oil and gas with Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan and Western importers¹;
- Western countries are tightening economic sanctions on Iran because of its uranium enrichment program;
- Potential investors are discouraged by the ubiquitous corruption and lack of legal guarantees for private enterprise in Azerbaijan...

Obviously, the integration and development of abovementioned countries would be quicker and more efficient if they were stable today and predictable tomorrow.

The Next Ten Years: the Best Case Scenario

The next ten years of domestic development and integration in the South Caucasus will unfold against the background of global trends such as the growing shortage of natural resources and the growing competition between Russia and the West for access to those resources, which can only exacerbate tensions in the region. Scientists will not discover any adequate alternative energy sources. If the South Caucasus countries fail to build efficient democratic states by that time, the region will remain one of the planet's main zones of conflict.

- *The role of the UN* in resolving international conflicts will probably go down, and both NATO and Russia will increasingly often carry out operations without the UN's consent;
- *The NATO* will continue its expansion to the East, so that Ukraine and Georgia will become de-facto NATO members even if they do not actually join;
- *Russia's oil revenues* will allow it to sustain its current "national-patriotic" domestic and foreign policies. Russia will still be run by Putin's team;

¹ *Radio Liberty Online*
<http://www.svobodanews.ru/Article/2008/07/14/20080714195222660.html>

- *Iran's nuclear program* will be arrested by the efforts of the international community. Moreover, in exchange for the survival of its regime, Iran will discontinue its support of terrorist activities in Israel, Iraq and Afghanistan;
- *Iran* will preserve its territorial integrity but its regime will weaken;
- *The civil war in Iraq* will end, Iraq will become a federative state with a pro-Western quasi-democratic regime (similar to Egypt);
- *Turkey's main problem* will be combining freedom with religion, i.e. concluding a sort of 'tolerance pact' between the religious and secular parts of Turkish society;
- *Cyprus* will unify and become a full-fledged EU member;
- *Turkey* will not manage to join the EU;
- *An independent Kurdish state* on the territories of Iraq, Iran and Turkey will not be created;
- *The Near East* will be pacified;
- *The gaze of the international community* will then turn to the South Caucasus, still a zone of contention between the West and Russia;
- *The conflicts over Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia* will not be resolved;
- *The present democratic government of Georgia* will stand up to Russia's pressure and succeed in resolving domestic contentions;
- *The ruling regime of Armenia* will change, Armenia will strive for peace with Azerbaijan and Turkey more actively but will remain under Russia's strong influence;
- *Azerbaijan* will continue generating tremendous incomes from its energy resources, and will continue transporting them to world markets. Oil revenues and repressive domestic policies will enable the present regime to prevent social conflicts and remain in power. Azerbaijan will go on with its time-tested policy of balancing between Russia and the West. The overall goal of the regime will be to transform the country into something like the Persian Gulf oil monarchies. Changes in Azerbaijan will probably become possible only after the oil revenues go down, which won't happen in the next ten years, or when one of the competing global actors, the West and Russia, finally takes the upper hand in this region.

The Worst Case Scenario

- *Iran* makes a nuclear bomb, bullies Israel and its neighbor states, and threatens oil mining in the Persian Gulf;
- *The civil war in Iraq* goes on;
- *Turkey* goes through chaos, military coup and then chaos again;
- *A regional war for independent Kurdistan* begins;

- *Armenia and Azerbaijan* resume large-scale armed hostilities;
- *Russia forces Georgia and Azerbaijan* return to its zone of influence;
- *South Caucasus countries* continue with mindless extensive development, the environment is ruined and there is no more sturgeon in the Caspian (let us hope this last prediction does not come true).

The worst case scenario is not very probable. The West will do its best to prevent it, as it lays big hopes on Caspian oil now that the global energy crisis is expanding.

ARMENIA AND THE CAUCASUS: CROSSROADS OR DEAD END?

BY GEVORG TER-GABRIELYAN

1. Diagnostics

Armenia's independence was very sudden: in 1988 the Karabakh Movement started under the banner "Lenin, Party, Gorbachev". In March 1991, at the time of the USSR-wide referendum, despite Armenia's non-participation, most Armenians refused even to think that the Soviet Union could disappear. In the September 1991 Referendum, the Armenians' vote was based on their emotions, as it frequently happens. Among all political groups of those years, only very few and extreme actors such as Paruyr Hairikyan would dare to advocate independence or secession from the Soviet Union. By the time the Karabakh Movement was transformed into the ANM (Armenian Nationwide Movement), some of its leaders, like Vazgen Manukyan, had already sorted out and deployed argumentation of how and why Armenia would gain independence. Their thesis was simple: the Union is leaving us, rather than we are leaving the Union, even more precisely: Russia is leaving, it is imminent. The Diaspora naively rejoiced in the national revival of Armenia, without however meddling into the status issues of that period.

Armenia, in contrast to, say, Baltic countries, even though it initiated a referendum on sovereignty, did in actual fact gain independence due to the Belovezhsky Agreements endorsed by the leaders of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. And also in contrast to Baltic countries, it had never had any provisions at the state level as to what its independence would look like, in what way it was going to be supported, or how Armenia was going to survive. There was a lot of rhetoric but very few realistic ideas. The ongoing Karabakh conflict developed into a full-scale war with the events of May 1992 when the capture of the Shushi fortress happened precisely at the time when Armenia's and Azerbaijan's Presidents met in Tehran and the Iran authorities were offering mediation.

There was thus, on the one hand, an absence of a clearly defined project, and on the other, an inherited war with Azerbaijan: that was what the beginning of independence was like for Armenia.

And how about the project? Manukyan formulated the program of the Armenian Nationwide Movement: Farewell to Russia, Long Live Turkey. A country should have no permanent friends or foes. His economic plan was no less radical: to distribute public property to private persons and to start the market game from scratch.

However, in the Armenian politics another approach prevailed: the approach of balance, or the so-called “complementarity”. Turkey refused to develop relations with Armenia, so that the two remaining players to set up relations with Armenia were Russia and the U.S. (relations with Iran got more complicated after the capture of Shushi). Of course, Europe too played a role, mostly France, with its Armenian Diaspora. The Diaspora will help out – that was the main premise that enabled Armenia to barge in, with both the war and independence on its hands, having no project other than national mythology. And the Diaspora did save the day: many volunteers came to fight in Karabakh. The Diaspora helped to open embassies in major countries. Some contacts were established. This, however, was the end of the Diaspora miracle: no smashing investments were coming to Armenia through the Diaspora. It could hardly be said that the Diaspora made little investment in Armenia, but it was done in a haphazard manner, bit by bit, so that the entire sum came to be below the expectation figure. The situation was aggravated by the conflict between President Ter-Petrosyan and the Party of Dashnaksutyun: he banned this party in Armenia, branding it as conspiratorial and seeking to overthrow the legitimate authorities. The aftermath for the Diaspora was of course negative: it was split and became even less united than before. Any systematic use of the Diaspora capabilities for Armenia proved to be impossible at the time of Ter-Petrosyan, particularly because of his conflict with the Dashnaks.

Armenia, as also most republics of the USSR, was “innocently” corrupt before the break up of the Union: public property was being looted right and left, bribery was rampant. Corruption was inherited by the independent Armenia, exacerbated by economic difficulties: power utilities disabled in the war, blockade and the onset of market prices. Sum total: years of cold and blackouts, exodus of one third of the population. Added to economic difficulties was the attitude adopted by the Karabakh Committee and by the new administration of the independent Armenia with their ongoing successive targeting of sweeping changes, which were perceived as cynical by the population. They declared that Armenia was unable to feed its population and had enough living space for only one half of its inhabitants (which implicitly meant that the second half had to leave). People were leaving not only because of economic difficulties, but also because of cynical contempt for their fate on the part of the inexperienced administration which was proclaiming this contempt from the housetops.

We shall summarize: we see a President unwilling to make war against Azerbaijan but leading a full-scale victorious war. A noble impulse by the entire nation to make a stand for defending compatriots in Karabakh but a psychological corruption of the same nation to the core in everyday peaceful life. The wish to drift further away from Russia while signing a strate-

gic alliance with it, an alliance later reinforced by explicit and implicit economic bonds. Nagorno Karabakh doing its best to acquire all the attributes of an independent state, with Armenia denying it recognition, though without annexing it officially. Declaring Karabakh as party to the conflict but recalling the declaration after Karabakh dweller Kocharyan became President of Armenia. Relying on the Diaspora, though introducing an unprecedented discord into it. Endorsement of the most humanistic international treaties alongside violating a number of international rules of warfare. An intention to establish neighborly relations with Turkey, while dwelling on the subject of Genocide. Valuing Georgia as the only good neighbor (apart from Iran, with its restricted access) and the only land communication line against the problems of Javakhk and its Armenian population (to say nothing of Abkhazia). Prioritizing ancient values along with the desire to be a progressive and competitive country within the rapidly changing global world, and also vain aspirations to become a “regional financial center” or “the Tiger of the Caucasus”. Finally, a victorious war with Azerbaijan, resulting in many years of institutional blockade, and a failure to reap the benefits of military victory in a peace-time format.

What does this picture show? There is a blatant inconsistency of the urges for action. The scale of problems is far beyond the capabilities of national ideology.

Therefore, despite having criticized Armenia’s authorities at every step of the way, I take the view, shared by some successful managers, that had Armenia been governed by brilliant managers, they could have raised its efficiency by no more than 20-30 percent. Even a 15-percent improvement would have been great. That is to say, it would have been very difficult, nearly impossible, to do better than was actually done, given the starting position. That does not mean, however, that the management of Armenia can be excused for having failed to do better. They should have tried.

The list of contradictions would be incomplete without mentioning that the aid extended to Armenia by the international community was fabulously large. That aid generated an entire stratum of the population in symbiosis with the network of international links: grants, donors, international organizations, European values, etc. The Ombudsman’s office has 42 staff members, and every draft law on its way from the Government to Parliament is scrutinized by the Ombudsman’s office. Some laws, e.g., the one on the Right for Information, are the most advanced worldwide. On one hand, that is. On the other – the election processes are fully corrupted and orchestrated. In all, this generally good-hearted country with a not very belligerent population has suffered not only the bloody shock of the Karabakh war, but also the 1999 terrorist act, when Nairi Hunanyan led an armed group into the Parliament shooting a number of political figures, as well as the

events of March 1, 2008, when special forces, or the army and or the police (remains unknown) assaulted the demonstrators (who were seething by that time), killing 10 people in a brawl. Ten people killed in the center of Yerevan is as significant as a thousand slain in the center of Washington, DC. N.B.: apart from the wars with South Ossetia, Abkhazia and Russia, Georgia sustained no casualties in political clashes since the Civil War of 1991. The many years of political confrontation in Ukraine have also been peaceful. Chechnya, Ossetia, Dagestan, and Central Asian countries are areas where political processes are accompanied by enormous casualties.

Finally, the controversies of the Armenian Diaspora: in their countries of residence those respectable citizens never pass a bribe, while often assuming bribing in the home country to be OK, and they do pay up. They were sometimes OK with plundering humanitarian aid, because assuming that in Armenia everyone is unhappy, everyone deserves aid, so no rules are needed for its distribution... According to official data, only three percent of the old Diaspora have visited Armenia at least once during the 15 years of independence. In the meantime, had Armenia renounced the public rhetoric of nationalism (“give back our land”), all 100 percent of the old Diaspora, including 3 attendees and 97 non-attendees, would have raised Cain.

Those controversies are typical of Armenia, although the controversies seem to be inherent to every country or state. Those have been the findings, anyway.

2. Tendency

I started working on this article before the August events in South Ossetia but have completed it only now. My gloomy forecasts, as well as those of others, have been confirmed. It was noted in the initial version of this article that the tendency in the Caucasus was an ever greater effort to eradicate the specifically Caucasian entities, the most powerful ones being what we call “unrecognized states”. The pioneering experience of this kind was provided by Chechen War II. To understand what it was about, it should be kept in mind that Chechen War I had been triggered within the context of disintegration, and in the context of the major USSR population being unprepared to the processes of decay and their aftermath. Much in the same way, Armenia entered the war unprepared and was engaged in the war with Azerbaijan quite unexpectedly, Chechnya, too, got into the first war with Russia with very little notice. Chechen War II was deployed predictably, as a pre-planned response by Russia to Chechen War I and its aftermath. Unleashing the second war may not have been fully scheduled (Basaev’s sortie into Dagestan). However, the deployment of the second war was a quite pre-programmed affair, prepared well in advance. Following the Khasaviurt truce, when observers noted that a true peace spirit does dwell in some Russ-

ian public figures, General Alexander Lebed in this case, Russia isolated Chechnya. Chechnya, in turn, turned out to be unable to use the respite and to develop proto-governmental bodies with a sufficient survival capability. The country was being regenerated into an anarchic territory, with groups of gangsters making war against one another within a most reactionary environment of Sharia (Wahhabism), with a flourishing economy of abductions. The world community was mostly lending ear to the hazards of terrorism, so that after 9/11 public opinion turned away from all forces associated with Islamic terrorism in any way. Thus, Chechnya, due to the isolationist policy of Russia, lost a major part of its support among its erstwhile sympathizers. During Chechen War II, Russia managed to gradually modify the discourse around that war, a difficult but important objective, and the war between a subject region denied recognition as state and the former host country was transformed into an operation against terrorists and illegal armed formations. In the meantime, the war was accompanied by tightening of the regime all over Russia, and in the North Caucasus in particular, restricting freedom of speech, attacking non-governmental organizations and overseas donors, a collapse of national ethnic clubs and non-governmental traditionalist formations in the North Caucasus (Adyge Khassa) (Russia used to be apprehensive of those organizations since the time of Confederation of the Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus). While in some domains Russia succeeded in tightening the regime by knocking out potential troublemakers, in the area of terrorism and illegal armed groupings Russia got several very severe setbacks, like “Nord Ost” and Beslan. Beslan enabled Russia to complete the dismissal of potential hazards so as to establish a rigid authoritarian vertical system, having unscrupulously converted the Caucasus into a militarized zone, having disbanded its administrative structure (by including it into the Southern Federal Area spread over a huge territory outside the North Caucasus, with a capital in Rostov-on-Don), at the same time discarding the electiveness of leaders in subject states, like the republics of the North Caucasus. However, there are no visible guarantees for stabilizing the situation in the North Caucasus, the Caucasian populations grow in numbers, and despite the exodus, they remain large, opening a way to new fermentations and explosions in case of any loosening of grip by the Center, particularly within the context of the ongoing Islamization. It is thus a temporary success at the cost of enormous human suffering and of crushing of entire nations, with no guarantee of stability: such is the result of the Russian policies of the last few years.

Mikheil Saakashvili, the new young leader of Georgia, started to do as Russians do after coming to power by way of the so-called Rose Revolution. His number one great success - and simultaneously his number two strong-arm action after the election campaign - was conquering Adjaria and exil-

ing Abashidze. However, his second campaign in the summer of 2004 against South Ossetia was not crowned with success. In spite of that, he resorted to more actions to stop the disintegration of his country: the closure of Ergnet Market; establishing the “cooperative government” in South Ossetia under Dmitry Sanakoev; conquering the upper part of Kodor Gorge, reinforcing this position and creating the concept of “Upper Abkhazia”, whereby the so-called “de jure government of Abkhazia” (Georgian term) or the “government in exile” (as it is referred to most often), i.e. ethnically Georgian structures, which were either state structures of the Soviet time expelled from Abkhazia as a result of the conflict, or successors to those state structures, were moved (at least formally) from the center of Tbilisi to the “Upper Abkhazia” closer to home. The break-up of the “integrity” of Abkhazia and South Ossetia is an important trick in the armory of the struggle for power. An identical trick, and a very important one, was equating the actions of restoring Georgia’s territorial integrity with democratization and measures against corruption. For instance, the Ergnet Market was an unregulated symbiosis of Georgian-Ossetian mutually beneficial cooperation. By having smashed it, Saakashvili actually reduced the significance of this cooperation, thus promoting anti-Georgian feelings amongst the Ossetians. He did it, however, in the same manner as the conquest of Adjara, under a banner of a democratic and anti-corruption Georgia-wide campaign.

The comparison of unrecognized formations with “black holes” – sources of corruption and terrorism – is not new. It was used by Russia against Chechnya, by Azerbaijan against Nagorno Karabakh, by the West against Transdniestria, etc. This accusation makes it possible to justify the pressure on such formations – to a certain degree – by the need to establish or to restore law and order.

On the whole, the second South-Ossetian war that peaked on August 8, 2008, will probably yield the same outcome as Chechen War II: there will follow a new round of relative superficial stability; however, there does not seem to be any way to solve the problems of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In contrast to the Chechen war, despite the many dead and exiled, neither the two nations nor the very geopolitical configuration of South Ossetia and Abkhazia will be completely destroyed, owing to the military support from Russia. However, Russia’s support is opportunistic and egoistic, while the root cause of Georgia’s failure in the South-Ossetian campaign and of the ongoing instability of South Caucasus will remain unchanged: it is the Caucasus type of person.

The Caucasian is essentially a lone ethnic warrior; the traditions of Caucasus wars against states are those of wars by individuals or groups of individuals against state machines. Just as a terrorist, alone or within a small group, can be a serious threat to the state machine and can inflict

serious damage, so in the Caucasus wars, it is sufficient to have a ratio of 1 ethnic warrior to 100 regular soldiers to rule out controlled termination of any war.

To recapitulate: experience shows that the problem of the Caucasus cannot be resolved by military force; nevertheless, the tendency of the last two decades reveals persistent efforts to resolve the Caucasus problems using combined pressure, hatred, decay of civil structures, and ban on democratic processes.

3. Resource

Despite what has been said, or by virtue of it, Armenia and Armenians continue coming forward as a positive integrating force, a resource for the world and for the region. On the international scale this power manifests itself not only in Armenia's belonging to the Christian civilization together with Russia, Europe and the U.S., but also in its Diaspora: it is everywhere, and it is quite successful, including Armenians in India, China, and Arab countries. Therefore Armenians, like the Hebrews, are a global nation, provided they can organize this resource and make use of it. The region itself has two entities. One is the Diaspora. The time of its inception is irrelevant. Armenians constitute an essential part of Abkhazia's population, two-thirds of Samtskhe-Javakheti, despite the displacement, and still there is a great number of them in Tbilisi; in Russia their number is enormous, it is the only Caucasian nation that still retains the status of "valuable nation" in Russia, very much like the "valuable Jews" who survived in Nazi Germany. The North Caucasus harbors some concentrations of Armenians, e.g., a considerable part of the population in the city of Adler is Armenian.

In civilized countries this type of resource is indeed a resource, while in our regions it may become a security problem: the situation may change at any moment due to interethnic clashes and collisions, or Armenians may be targeted for displacement by local authorities. Quite recently, e.g., following many assurances that nothing of the kind could ever happen in Javakhetia, there were some fresh conflicts between Armenians and Georgians. Georgia, despite having declared adoption of European values, affords no status to the Armenian Church or to any other church, the Armenian Church in Georgia has merely a status of a non-governmental organization. Preservation of Armenian churches in that country is under no guarantee at all.

On the other hand, the Karabakh conflict resulted in Armenia becoming almost completely monoethnic; as a result of the decline of tourism and an infinitesimal immigration by other ethnic groups, a non-Armenian is a rarity in Armenia, and even though the number of newcomers is growing, those are mostly members of the Diaspora. Yet in 1992, when a large-scale creative game "Armenia" was conducted, the problem of monoethnization of

Armenia was formulated and categorized as one of “soft” security. In monoethnic societies, there is more conservatism and less development. It may, however, be balanced by the fact that the Armenians do a lot of foreign travel, going away as labor migrants or visiting their next of kin all over the world. Anyway, the lack of ethnic diversity within the country while making it perhaps more secure in the South Caucasus at the time of Realpolitik, leaves it with fewer resources in the long-term, in case the Caucasus politics stops being a zero-sum game.

However, the value of the Armenian nation is not only in its “body”, but also in its imagination: despite the deplorable policies inside the country and difficult surroundings, Armenia is a leader in a certain still marginal undertaking that is bound to be successful in the future: in imagining the creation of a peaceful and good-neighborly system of the future Caucasus.

The stereotypic mind of both Armenians and its neighbors is more familiar with the old-fashioned Armenian expansionist ideologies of the type “Armenia from sea to sea”. Those ideas today hold the same marginal places on the outskirts of Armenian ideologies as, say, Pan-Turkism on the fringes of the Turkic ideologies. It is becoming less and less meaningful to argue about Pan-Turkism or Armenia from sea to sea. Even the Party of Dashnaktsutyun, having recovered from the blow dealt by Ter-Petrosyan, chose very advanced political approaches, both domestically and abroad. Today it is focused on Turkey’s recognition of the Genocide by and on reparations, rather than on “our lands”. Even this party prefers a civilized process of mutual respect.

Meanwhile, many intellectual circles of Armenia and Armenians already promote the ideas of building a unified Caucasus following the model of unified Europe or some other model. As far back as in the early 1990s, when those ideas were advanced by Schelling, a member of the German Bundestag, he had been preceded by Suren Zolyan, the Armenian philologist and politician, who had advanced the model of “Switzerland in the Caucasus”. The “OSCE of the Caucasus” model as a reduced option of the “UN of the Caucasus” was advanced in the early 1990s by the team of Ashot Manucharyan, the erstwhile Chief Presidential Advisor on National Security, with my participation. It was long before Michael Emerson proposed the idea of the Stability Pact for the Caucasus. For many years Links tried to promote the establishment of the Parliamentary Assembly of South Caucasus, with Armenia in a more active role than Georgia or Azerbaijan.

International organizations, particularly non-governmental ones, adopted the regional approach with great interest when visiting the Caucasus. It was in this way that a number of networks appeared, such as Gringo of the Danish Refugee Council, the Group on Conflict Management of UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees), the ethnopolitical monitoring network of the Russian Academy of Sciences, and many others.

Some donors, too, supported the projects on dialogue and border-line cooperation: Soros Foundations, German Foundations, development agencies, Eurasia Foundation, etc.

However, interest in regional projects gradually changed its focus: when the unhurried institutions of the European Union only intended to regard South Caucasus as a region (EU offices in Armenia and Azerbaijan were finally opened this year, and now we face another problem: their coordination, particularly with the office in Georgia), many actors dropped the initial idea of a regional approach, changed the substance of regional approach or were disappointed in its potential. Thus, the same Council of Europe (CoE) often replaces a serious regional approach by the policy of egalitarianism: unable to facilitate the resolution of the Karabakh conflict, CoE takes extra care not to do in Armenia what it does not do in Azerbaijan, and vice versa.

Realistic regional ideas included representatives of “unrecognized states” or “unrecognized formations”, or “zones of conflict”, or “regions of conflict”, depending on whose political correctness is used to designate those regions, that is, Abkhazia, Karabakh or South Ossetia. It is not mandatory to include representatives of “unrecognized authorities”; in fact, the opposite is true: it is possible to achieve many things within the same format as today’s conference. The less realistic regional initiatives excluded the unrecognized entities. It is my firm belief that the recent Turkish idea of the Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform (the latest idea of building any acceptable regional system; it coincided in time with the Georgian-South-Ossetian-Russian war) is important and has to be welcomed; however, it will not lead to real stability here unless a way will have been found of including Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno Karabakh into the structures.

To understand which ideas of regional systems can work and which cannot, we need to distinguish between *alliance* systems and *holistic*, or inclusive, systems. The Black Sea cooperation was conceived as inclusive but became an alliance system, therefore it is still neither fish, nor fowl. GUAM was an alliance, and therefore it failed. The ideas of integration by alliance are short-lived: they create alliances, and alliances are inevitably established against somebody. Therefore, what we need are inclusive ideas that would absorb all major actors who can stabilize the idea. The project of transporting hydrocarbons is an alliance; therefore it will always be under the threat of failure. The overlapping of alliance projects (Georgia’s attempt to join NATO, plus all the other alliances Georgia is trying to create) was the last drop that resulted in the violent conflict between Georgia and Russia. The Caucasus needs inclusive rather than alliance-type exclusive structures for its stability and security.

The first stage of regional thinking in the Caucasus can be explained by two crucial factors: on one hand, by the habit of Caucasian nations to coex-

ist under the Russian control and language, and on the other – by the origination of four large unrecognized formations (including Chechnya). Attempts to regionalize the Caucasus were seriously harmed by the Second Russian war in Chechnya, and by the drift away from the Soviet era. Russia practically killed the independent non-governmental movement in North Caucasus that was not associated with national liberation movements, and banned the civil society actors from North Caucasus from socializing with their counterparts in South Caucasus. That was the political background of a gradual weakening and petering out of the Caucasus forum, a group that was based on the interaction between North and South Caucasus.

Acquisition of sovereignty and consolidation of statehood in Georgia and Azerbaijan were destructive to the regionalization tendencies. Establishment of a clearly defined visa system between Russia and Georgia, qualifying the Rok pass crossers from Russia to Georgia as illegal aliens in Georgia; elimination of the Ergnet Market as an unauthorized free economic zone: those and similar actions resulted in dwindling of contacts at non-governmental level as well. Also corroborative to this process was the rhetoric of the Russia-Georgia face-off, when the main party to the conflict was declared to be Russia rather than Abkhazia. In all, it was very similar to the absorption of small companies by large ones, or to crushing of small feudal principalities by a modern technologically advanced state.

Moreover, Georgia as it were wanted no regional projects at all: Georgia would prefer Armenia and Azerbaijan not to be there so it could enter the European Union on its own. The Azerbaijani oil – Ok, yes, let it go via Georgia, but that's about it. "To enter Europe by playing a lone hand", that was how the Georgian project could be characterized.

With Azerbaijan, another thing happened: in the situation of the Realpolitik deadlock, with the Karabakh solution seen only in terms of giving up land, achieving victory or, at most, achieving a compromise, an opinion was gradually formed in Azerbaijan that any dialogue with Armenia outside the channel of Realpolitik would only consolidate the de-facto situation, i.e. that de-facto Karabakh does not belong to Azerbaijan. Therefore, most traceable contacts were gradually vetoed, particularly those involving visits to Karabakh or meeting Karabakh Armenians.

As a consolation to the colleagues in Georgia and Azerbaijan, I can say that the official Armenia does not differ too much from the official Azerbaijan or Georgia in their views on regionalization: Armenia, too, like Georgia, closed the Sadakhlo Market, which had been neutral ground, an offshore zone, and a peacekeeping mechanism of Armenian-Azerbaijani trade relations, and replaced it with the Market of Bagratashen, on a smaller scale (non-wholesale). Armenia cannot think in categories other than Realpolitik either.

4. Forecast

The Armenian “schizophrenia” as described in the first part of my article, enables it to be more flexible, even requiring more flexibility than that shown by Georgia and Azerbaijan. This schizophrenia smoothly transfers into diplomatic behavior: the Genocide is important, we do not waive our claim for its recognition, but we invite the Turkish President to attend a football match, and we agree to open the borders without preconditions. Russia is our strategic partner, but we will try our best to meet the European Council requirements, to activate our Millennium Challenge Account, etc.

We recognize the territorial integrity of any country and have not yet recognized Kosovo, Abkhazia, or South Ossetia. However, we also recognize the right of nations to self-determination by secession and shaking off the control by another state, even the way it is happening in the Caucasus...

History, too, is against the regionalism of the Caucasus: the experience of formations like the Transcaucasian Seim or the Transcaucasian Federation is interpreted as absolutely negative.

There are, however, peremptory factors that demand a return to that idea. Among these factors is the awareness of the fact that the remaining unconquered and unrecognized formations in the Caucasus can disappear by violent means, and only by them; that the violent option is disadvantageous for the Caucasus, which is developing in spite of everything; that the market of any of the three (or six) South-Caucasus countries is smaller than the would-be common market of the Caucasus; that the European experience and the process of globalization have established a precedent, a breeding ground and an imperative for regionalization; that the peaceful option for resolving these and similar conflicts is oriented in the direction in which economic development is so far ahead of political development that the status of a certain territory is becoming more and more of an academic problem, very much like the ones we witness in Quebec, Northern Ireland, or the Aland Islands that are so popular with both Armenians and Azerbaijanis.

Armenia dreams of brokering peace programs in the region. It is a potential mediator between Georgia, Abkhazia and Russia on opening the rail carrier with no pre-conditions for conflict settlement. It is a splendid negotiating site for resolving the contradictions between Iran and the U.S. And it is such an advanced explorer of peace in the region that if Turkey opens borders with Armenia, Turkey may become a rightful broker in talks between Armenia and Azerbaijan: Armenia will accept it.

There was a time when people believed that if borders are opened, Turkey will overwhelm Armenia with a deluge. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Armenian children have been writing in copybooks with

Turkish wording on the covers, and, curiously enough, suffering no humiliation to national dignity. By unverified data, 40 to 70 thousand Armenians work in Turkey officially or unofficially, including many prostitutes who like all Armenians were brought up in hatred of Turks but managed to change their minds in the face of economic pressure.

Armenia's independence has been recognized by the UN and is impregnable. The identity of Armenians has a millennia-long history and is more solid than the identity of many other nations. Thank God, Armenians are no longer threatened with extinction.

Therefore, under favorable conditions and with the good will of its neighbors in the South Caucasus, including the "unrecognized" and the "partially recognized" states, as well as Turkey, Europe, Russia, the U.S. and Iran, Armenia is prepared to undertake the role of a helper and a regional mediator in resolving the Caucasus contradictions; moreover, it is prepared to assume the role of a broker in resolving the severe problems existing between Russia and Europe, whose boundaries will meet some day at Vladikavkaz.

In contrast to events of fifteen years ago, Armenia now has a project, at a rudimentary stage so far, even though it may seem too idealistic. The only thing that can stifle the project in the bud is the domestic political crisis, which, if not fairly resolved, will prevent Armenia from acting with ethical integrity in foreign politics, because this certainly requires national unity.

GEORGIA: BETWEEN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS AND THE BLACK SEA (IN THE MIDST OF MOSCOW, WASHINGTON AND BRUSSELS)

BY IVLIAN KHAINDRAVA

I was puzzled by the title of this paper at the time it had been suggested by the conference organizers. It sounded as if Georgia was located at the interface between the two regions, facing a choice: which one of them to prefer, or in which one of the two the Masters of Destiny will grant Georgia a place in geopolitics. It would be more logical to think that Georgia, being naturally a South Caucasus country, is just as naturally a Black Sea country. Peter Semneby, Special Representative of the EU in the South Caucasus, shares this vision with regard to Georgia, as well as with regard to Armenia and Azerbaijan; he qualified the EU as “a Black Sea power” and a part of the extended Black Sea coastal area, the region embracing the three states of South Caucasus.¹

The representative Caucasus-Caspian Commission produced a report intended to stimulate the generation of common policies for EU and other European Institutions with regard to the future region. It suggested yet another global, or rather, globalistic, vision: Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, located between the Black Sea and the Caspian and constituting what is commonly designated as the South Caucasus, constitute the core of the Caucasus-Caspian area enclosed in a “shell” (Russia, Turkey, Iran, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and EU) which is in turn encased within the outside world, including the countries of the Near East, the USA, China and India.²

By no means questioning the appropriateness of this idea, and deliberately trespassing beyond the framework that has been set for me, I propose to regard herein the South Caucasus as a sub-region of the Extended Black Sea Coastal Area, with both these projects as mutually complementary. With respect to Georgia, however, those projects are not just complementary, but in a way, alternative, as will be shown below.

¹ Semneby, P. “European Union – South Caucasus: Prospects for Partnership and Some Challenges” // *South Caucasus-2006. Main tendencies, threats and risks*. Ed. G. Novikova. Yerevan: Spectrum Center for Strategic Analysis, 2007, pp. 16-22.

² www.caucascom.org.

The Black Sea and the Sacred Caucasus

The ‘South Caucasus Region’ remains a concept that is rather volatile, a fact that has been frequently underscored.¹ This skeptical, or rather, realistic, view is shared by many in Georgia, e.g., by Irakli Menagarishvili, the former Minister for Foreign Affairs: “The region of the South Caucasus can actually be viewed as a geographic entity, rather than an economically or politically integrated body.”²

Indeed, the period following the collapse of the USSR has proved to be the time of mutual estrangement for the three largest (and most of the smaller) nations of the South Caucasus, the time of searching for new identities in the new reality, as well as for new partners and allies, the time of laying the cornerstones of new statehoods, formulating and implementing national projects. And although the Georgians, the Armenians and the Azerbaijanis have retained certain similarities of their cultures and lifestyles, with a visible Soviet legacy still remaining in things big and small, with the old and medium generations still conversant in the Russian language, the divergences between the three nations are still largely underestimated.

Indeed, these nations:

- have differing historical experience, attaching to their own history a differing, mostly overestimated, significance;
- identify themselves with parts of diverse geographic and subcultural communities: some Armenians perceive themselves as related to the Greater Middle East, Azerbaijanis overwhelmingly gravitate to belong with the Turkic world, while Georgians, although having no related worlds outside the Caucasus, identify themselves as Europeans;
- each country has a dominant religion: the Gregorian Church in Armenia, the Orthodox Church in Georgia, Shiite and Sunni Islam in Azerbaijan;
- Armenia can actually be viewed as a mono-ethnic and mono-religious country, Georgia is quite heterogeneous in terms of ethnicities and religions, while Azerbaijan sits somewhere between the two.

No wonder that foundations that differ that much give rise to differing identities, leaving no room for a common South Caucasus identity. As to the dubious label of “persons of Caucasian nationality”, put into circulation in Russia, it conveys no more common identity than the phrase “persons of

¹ Menagarishvili, I. “Three Main Problems of the Region: the View from Georgia”//*South Caucasus-2006. Main tendencies, threats and risks*. Ed. G.Novikova. Yerevan: Spectrum Center for Strategic Analysis, 2007, p.52.

² Ibid.

Slavic nationality”. With due respect for the linguistic community, I will venture the following parallel: the Georgians, Armenians and Azerbaijanis are only as similar as their languages are, which share some common words but pertain to diverse linguistic groups (Kartvelian, Indo-European and Turkic, respectively) and are completely different and mutually incomprehensible.

Naturally, countries with differing identities and differing or even conflicting national projects have divergent temporal and spatial orientations (let us call them ‘foreign policies’ here):

- In its quest for national security guarantees, Armenia has established strategic partnerships with Russia and Iran, and is a member of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), although cooperating with EU and NATO within the framework of the Partnership for Peace (PfP) and the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), respectively. Armenia calls this its ‘complementarity policy’. Georgia and Azerbaijan left CSTO, the former seeking to join the NATO as soon as possible and not concealing its European ambitions, the latter remaining cautious towards both NATO and EU, and maintaining nothing more than stable relations with Russia.
- The Russian military presence is retained in all three countries of the South Caucasus, but to different extents and in different formats. The Russian military base and the presence of Russian border guards in Armenia are fully legitimate. Azerbaijan and Russia have agreed on using the Gabala Radar Station. From Georgia, the Russian bases have been almost withdrawn (“almost” because the one in Gudauta is still there). In Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Russian peacekeepers remain although Georgia refuses to regard them as such.
- Each of the South Caucasus states has had various complications with one of the region’s immediate neighbors: Armenia has no diplomatic relations with Turkey, relations between Georgia and the Russian Federation have gone to pieces,¹ while Azerbaijan-Iran relations fluctuate and for various reasons have not attained the level of trusting neighborly relations.

Finally, relating to each other and to the rest of the world as independent states is a new experience for the young and relatively inexperienced political elites of these South Caucasus countries. This brings to mind the words of an Armenian politician who said that Armenia had only one border and the rest were front lines.

¹ The actual Georgia-Russia war has happened after this article was completed, so it was not reflected in it (editor’s note).

Consequently, prospects for trilateral cooperation or integration in the South Caucasus, with its stalemate in Nagorno-Karabakh, are not discernible, at any rate until a way is found out of that stalemate. Therefore, it is now difficult to attach any meaning other than geographic, to the concept of the “South Caucasus Region”. The above-quoted Peter Semneby once called the South Caucasus a ‘broken region’ which could only be put back together in a wider format.¹

Despite its Black-Sea-Western drive, Georgia is naturally developing relations with its closest neighbors in the South Caucasus. However, it is simply constrained to build them with Armenia on a de-facto bilateral basis. This asymmetrical situation (Georgia has more common interests with Azerbaijan), has emerged not through free choice or determined action, but by virtue of the objective reality.

It can be argued that “the Black Sea Region” or “the Extended Black Sea Coastal Area” is a concept at least as volatile as “the South Caucasus Region”. This is true to some extent, since various multilateral formats of Black Sea cooperation, whether economic, political, or military, cannot be regarded as altogether efficient. At the same time, three countries of the Black Sea coastal area - Turkey, Bulgaria and Romania – are NATO members, the latter two also EU members, and all maintain dynamic and good-neighborly relations with Georgia. Mustafa Aydin, a Turkish researcher, has noted that with the EU accession of Bulgaria and Romania, the EU has become a regional player both in the Black Sea region and in the South Caucasus.² As to the Black Sea basin, in the last few years it has started to enjoy increasing attention by EU and U.S., having gained special importance due to the transit of energy carriers, and to other things as well. As stated by Judy Garber, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, the U.S. and EU have agreed to conduct coordinated policies in the region with regard to problems such as Iran, non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, counterterrorism and energy security.³ Put together, that amounts to an overall security policy. Senator Richard Lugar was even more specific when he called for supporting Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey in their joint transportation and energy projects, as well as for supporting the Nabucco gas pipeline as an alternative to the South Stream pipeline.⁴ Although official

¹ Semneby, P. “The Role of the EU in the Resolution of Conflicts in the South Caucasus” // *Turkish Policy Quarterly* Vol.5 No.2, summer 2006. P.20. (www.turkishpolicy.com).

² Aydin, M. “Europe’s New Region: The Black Sea in the Wider European Neighborhood” // *Journal of Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*. London, 2005, no 5. P.257.

³ Judy Garber: Keynote Address at the Woodrow Wilson Center Conference: “Trans-Atlantic Perspectives on the Wider Black Sea Region”. Washington, DC June 10, 2008 (<http://www.state.gov/p/eur/rls/rm/105827.htm>).

⁴ Senator Lugar’s speech to the U.S.–Ukraine Energy Dialogue Series, April 15, 2008 (<http://lugar.senate.gov/energy/press/speech/ukraine.cfm>).

Washington has a markedly reserved position with regard to the Kars-Tbilisi-Baku railway line, the project is underway. The line is to start operating in 2010, and is particularly attractive in the light of plans to build a tunnel under the Bosphorus. There are some more common issues in the domains of tourism, environmental protection, etc. Considering the pro-Western policies of Georgia and Ukraine, the Black Sea has prospects of becoming an inner European sea, like the Baltic; some refer to these developments as to the Black Sea transforming into a 'NATO Lake'. Last but not least, Abkhazia is also located on the shores of the Black Sea, and under certain developments its path to Europe may coincide with that of the Georgians.

Clearly, if we regard the U.S. and the EU as stakeholders in developments on the Black Sea coast, the factor of Russia should never be underestimated. Itself a Black Sea power, Russia has most serious interests in the region, pursues them in every way, and never misses the slightest opportunity to extend the spheres and vary the instruments of its influence within the region, and also beyond the region as wide and deep as it can go. Here, too, the operational factors are communications and energy projects and issues. There is also the concept of border security inherent to the Russian mentality, as well as the search for a permanent abode for the Russian Black Sea navy and submarine force. With the approaching Winter Olympics in Sochi, tourism is also going up in the agenda. In light of the looming expiry in 2017 of the Russian-Ukrainian agreement on the Russian naval base in Sevastopol and the pro-NATO aspirations of official Kiev and Tbilisi, on one hand, and Russia's ever-growing regional and Eurasian ambitions on the other hand, Moscow is keeping up tension around Crimea and the Straits of Kerch, suppressing all attempts at resolving the conflict in Abkhazia within the framework of Georgia's territorial integrity, and acting most inventively in hindering the joint multilateral military exercises in the Black Sea under the auspices of the NATO.¹ In a word, the Black Sea and the Black Sea coastal countries (Georgia, Ukraine, plus Moldova which is often viewed as such) that have not yet integrated into European structures today constitute an arena of direct competition between Russia and the West.

The time has come to comment upon the already mentioned alternative character of the "Black Sea" and the "South Caucasus" projects. The 'Black Sea trends' are voiced more distinctly in Georgian politics than South Caucasus trends, for very clear reasons: on the one hand, the Black Sea is perceived as the road to the West, while the Euro- and the Euro-Atlantic vector of Georgian policy has overall priority; in fact, in Georgia this priority

¹ See, e.g.: Blank, S. "Russia as a Black Sea Power" // *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Vol.6, No.2, summer 2007 (www.turkishpolicy.com).

is a rare occasion of a solid public and political consensus on a specific issue. On the other hand, there are concerns that the South Caucasus may become a closed or 'semi-closed' region, with Russia playing the dominant role, and the three regional countries bound to one another for no special reason. The cause for these concerns has been provided by both Russia and the European Union, initially quite indifferent to the South Caucasus, and subsequently showing a kind of 'regionally symmetrical' approach to this sub-region, as if saying: very well, we shall give you some money, but it's up to you, the South Caucasus nations, to sort things out among yourselves and with your neighbors. Settle your conflicts, learn to integrate – in a word, learn to be good, and only then come together and knock on the doors of Europe. There is logic in this approach, but today's logic does not always agree with a long-term strategy. Quite clearly, this approach caused legitimate discomfort in Georgia: the country felt doomed to either persuade Armenia and Azerbaijan to jointly move towards the EU and NATO, which would be unrealistic from any viewpoint, or else cast its Euroatlantic ambitions to the winds and stagnate, which would go against national interests.

Another reason why this 'package approach' of the EU to the South Caucasus countries caused disappointment in Georgia was the fact that the EU approach to the Balkans had been just the opposite. There, the EU adopted a step-by-step strategy, and the countries which displayed the strongest drive and highest preparedness to join the united Europe were integrated into the EU one by one. It should, however, be mentioned that eligibility standards were not always the same for everyone in the Balkans either.

Now the EU has made a shift from the 'package approach' to the step-by-step strategy. This has been due, firstly, to the crystallization of European interests on the Black Sea, as noted above, and secondly, to the active pro-Western policies of the two Black Sea Coastal states – Ukraine and Georgia. Lithuanian analyst A. Poviliūnas made a comparative study of the ENP Action Plans for Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, and discovered that, apart from standard (or stereotypic) formulations, in some issues the EU has adopted differentiated approaches to the countries of our sub-region.¹

In the context of international politics with regard to the Black Sea region and Georgia in particular, it seems appropriate to speculate on the subject of "Georgia between Moscow, Washington and Brussels". I have even put this phrase as the sub-headline of this paper, as I believe that this digression will still keep us on the right track.

¹ Poviliūnas, A. "South Caucasus in the Context of European Neighbourhood Policy". *Lithuanian Foreign Policy Review*, No. 17, 2006. www.lfpr.lt/uploads/File/2006/Poviliunas.pdf

The Good, the Bad and the Ugly (The Big, the Bad and the Beautiful)

The name of a once popular film came to my mind as a sub-heading for the part of report dealing with the role of U.S., EU and Russia in Georgia's life today. However, when my eyes fell upon the article by K. Paulauskas entitled: "The Big, the Bad and the Beautiful: America, Russia and Europe's Mellow Power,"¹ I decided that what fits Lithuania can also be used to describe the roles of the three outside players in the fate of Georgia. In a nutshell, while still faithful to my two-way heading, I offer the reader a choice of whichever they prefer; they can also choose which of the attributes fits which actor. I will now share some fragmentary observations, not necessarily pretending at originality, which seem to be determinant within the current context, and will *pro tanto* make it easier to follow the author's logic, if any.

Russia

Since the first day of Georgia's independence, Russia has remained the principal external player directly involved in key events concerning Georgia. It would be unnecessary and impossible to account for every detail of Russian-Georgian relations: that subject has been thought over (mostly badly), spoken about (mostly out of place), described (mostly inadequately), and dealt with (badly, out of place and inadequately), so that sorting it all out is going to be a protracted and difficult effort.

The thing that now infuriates Russia especially badly is Georgia's strive to join the NATO (implying Georgia's irreversible withdrawal from the Russian sphere of influence). Naturally, Russia would not like to relinquish control over the transportation and energy corridors running across Georgia; however, this is just a secondary reason for its attitude to Georgia. There are a third, a fourth, a fifth etc reasons too but I won't discuss them here.

Russia made use of the Kosovo situation to increase its pressure upon Georgia; however, it had openly warned Georgia beforehand of its intentions to do so. Russia's main leverage over Georgia (or, if you will, the instruments it uses for blackmailing Georgia) are the unresolved conflicts over Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Without entering speculation on which of them is more difficult to resolve, I will only underscore that the Abkhazian coastal area of Georgia has special appeal for Russia in a whole range of domains: naval, transportation, tourism, Olympic etc. However, with regard to 'practical' military strategy, the breakaway South Ossetia presents even a greater threat to Georgia's security than Abkhazia.

¹ Paulauskas, K. "The Big, the Bad and the Beautiful: America, Russia and Europe's Mellow Power". *Lithuanian Foreign Policy Review*, No. 20, 2008.
http://www.lfpr.lt/uploads/File/2008-20/Paulauskas_ENG.pdf

Russia's long-term strategy with regard to Abkhazia went through two stages. The first one pertains to the late 19th century and can be called "Abkhazia without Abkhazians". At that time, most ethnic Abkhazians were deported to Turkey and countries of the Near East (they are now known as Muhajirs). However, Abkhazia's depopulation did not last long. Incidentally, in contrast to the widely propagated idea that the Abkhaz component of the local population was replaced by Georgians, facts prove that between 1897 and 1939, the number of Abkhazians remained practically unchanged (56-58 thousand), the number of ethnic Georgians in Abkhazia grew by a factor of 3.5 (from 25.9 to 91.9 thousand), whereas the number of Russians grew by a factor of 12 (from 5.1 to 60.2 thousand), and of Armenians, by a factor of 8 (from 6.5 to 49.7 thousand).¹

The second stage of Russia's strategy was implemented during the Abkhaz conflict in the late 20th century; it can be called "Abkhazia without Georgians". This time, the population of Abkhazia became over two and a half times smaller, and the number of ethnic Georgians decreased by a factor of four. No one knows how long the current depopulation will last, but I doubt that the expatriated Georgians, if disallowed to return, will be replaced by the Muhajirs' posterity. Russia needs Abkhazia for its territory and water area, and is little concerned about the fate of ethnic Abkhazians or Georgians. Incidentally, this is a case where the interests of Abkhazians and Georgians may coincide.

The USA

Sergey Markedonov identifies three phases of U.S. policy with regard to the South Caucasus. According to him, prior to 1997 the U.S. diplomacy did not regard the South Caucasus as the sphere of its strategic interests, leaving Russia to play the leading role on the CIS territory. After 1997, the Americans enrolled the South Caucasus into the scope of their geopolitical priorities. 9/11 and the subsequent Iraqi campaign stepped up the U.S. involvement in the region, boosting their influence upon the domestic policies of the South Caucasus countries. This was manifested, for instance, in the U.S. support of Georgia's Rose Revolution.²

The basic characteristic of the American policy with regard to the post-revolutionary Georgia has been keeping its "eyes wide shut" on many of the country's problems, primarily concerning its (under)developing democracy.

¹ Lezhava, G.P. *Changes in Class and Ethnic Structure of the Population of Abkhazia*. Sukhumi, 1989 (in Russian).

² Markedonov, S. "South Caucasus: Competition of Geopolitical Projects" // *Aspects of Regional Security: 2007*. Ed. G. Novikova. Yerevan: Spectrum Center for Strategic Analysis, 2007, pp. 81-94.

As far back as May 2005, President Bush, while visiting Tbilisi, named Georgia a “Beacon of Democracy”, and since that moment the Washington administration has behaved as if that beacon is shedding light on something else beside the Tbilisi street that has been named after President Bush. American glorification of Saakashvili is best exemplified by the words of Richard Holbrooke, former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations: “In fact, the 38-year-old Saakashvili represents almost everything the United States and the European Union should support.”¹ An alternative opinion was brewing in the U.S. analytical circles, and after the events of November 7, 2007 it saw light at last. “The U.S. policy of praising Georgian accomplishments in other areas but not criticizing the increasingly clear shortcomings in the democracy area led the Georgian government to believe that they could move further away from democracy without consequences. So they did”, wrote Lincoln Mitchell, U.S. expert in international politics who had worked in Tbilisi in 2002-2004.² Even an analyst as loyal to Saakashvili as David Smith (Senior Fellow at the Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, Washington and Director of the Georgian Security Analysis Center, Tbilisi) suggested that “truncheons and teargas in Tbilisi on November 7, and the shuttered Imedi television station have faded Georgia’s prospects” for getting a NATO Membership Action Plan in Bucharest.³ However, governance methods demonstrated by Saakashvili on November 7, 2007, while shocking many of his supporters, did not affect the U.S. policies. No wonder: the “Beacon of Democracy” is one of the few international phenomena that the Bush administration lists as one of its assets. Admitting that the project turned out less successful than they had been telling everyone for four years would amount to undermining their own prestige on the eve of the U.S. presidential election.

A propos: as a reward for their eyes wide shut, the Americans got an increased Georgian presence in Iraq (2000 troops) at a time when most other countries are moving out.

The United States champion Georgia’s territorial integrity and yet they had persistently promoted the Kosovo independence project in the center of Europe all the way until it became reality. Some Americans seem to underestimate the background of the Abkhazian conflict and the existential significance that the problem has for both its parties, including the Abkhazians.

¹ Holbrooke, R. “David and Goliath” // *The Washington Post*, November 27, 2006. P.A19.

² Mitchell, L. “Inside Track: Beacon of Democracy or Khachapuri Republic?” *National Interest Online*, December 13, 2007. <http://www.nationalinterest.org/Article.aspx?id=16352>.

³ Smith, D.J. “Georgia’s Railway to NATO Passes through Turkey” // *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Vol.6, No.3, fall 2007. P.68 (www.turkishpolicy.com).

Sometimes one gets the impression that the Americans love Georgia more than the Georgians themselves can, and therefore the Americans know better what the Georgians must think and how they must behave outside, and, interestingly, also inside their own country. With the help of Congressman E. Hastings who had born the burden of leading a short-term OSCE Election Observer Mission for a whole two days, the early Presidential Election of January 5, 2008 acquired “external legitimacy.”¹ As to Matthew Bryza, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, he is very good at explaining, whenever the need arises, both to his European colleagues and to the citizens of Georgia, that the Georgians’ life is far better than it really is.²

The U.S. lobbies a MAP (NATO’s Membership Action Plan) for Georgia, patrons it in other international organizations, and supports direct financial infusions into the Georgia of Saakashvili at a very enticing level.

In other words, it appears that Georgia would hardly have survived without sizeable U.S. support in the sphere of politics, finance, diplomacy, military expertise etc. In any case, it would not have had the opportunities or capacities that it now has. At the same time, I believe part of those opportunities has been missed mostly as a result of the Americans’ abovementioned ‘eyes wide shut’ and easy-giving approach.

The European Union

Though incapable of elaborating a consolidated approach to the Kosovo problem, the European Union allowed that precedent to exist. Heavy dependence of some EU countries upon Russian energy carriers can impact those countries’ policies with regard to Georgia (and not only Georgia).

The failure to get the European Constitution ratified, followed by Ireland’s non-ratification of the Lisbon Agreement, prove that rank-and-file Europeans, whether consciously or unconsciously, prefer the EU elite to implement policies that avoid creating new headaches on top of the ones Europe already has. It should be noted that the European political elite is somewhat more inclined to heed the public opinion at home than do the political elites of the South Caucasus countries.

Most new EU members being enthusiastic with regard to Georgia’s Euro- and Euro-Atlantic aspirations, and Old Europe being mostly apathetic or even skeptical, this dualism enables external actors like the U.S. and the Russian Federation to play their own games on the European political field.

¹ At a press-conference on January 6, 2008, Alcee Hastings called this election “a triumphant step toward democracy”.

² See, for example, the interview Matthew Bryza gave the Russian Service of the BBC on May 29, 2008: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/russian/international/newsid_7426000/7426403.stm.

The European “soft power” is not always as much of a power as intended, particularly with regard to those who fail to or pretend not to understand the European diplomatic language. Indeed, Georgia has blatantly disregarded international recommendations, even the most adequate and unambiguous ones, for example, the November 29, 2007 Resolution by the European Parliament on the situation in Georgia, wherein, among other things, Georgia’s authorities were called upon “to carry out a thorough, impartial and independent investigation into the serious violations of human rights and freedom of the media, notably the allegations of excessive use of force by law enforcement officials, in order to identify all those responsible, bring them to trial and apply the penal and/or administrative sanctions provided for by law.”¹

Nevertheless, the apparently growing EU involvement in Georgian affairs is certainly welcome. It is enough to mention Javier Solana’s recent visit to Tbilisi and Sukhumi, the regular trips to Sukhumi and Tskhinvali made by European ambassadors to Georgia, and the German plan for settling the conflict in Abkhazia. All this is encouraging because it means that the future of Georgia on the world’s political map is not that of the 51st state of the U.S., or of one more administrative region of the Russian Federation, but that of a EU member country. Another reason to welcome EU involvement is that European standards with regard to small nations and ethnic minorities constitute a potentially solid (if hypothetical) foundation for normalizing Georgian-Abkhaz relations based upon a “together-to-Europe” approach.

Now the time is probably ripe to look at Georgia’s place inside the Moscow-Washington-Brussels triangle.

Under the leadership of Mikheil Saakashvili, Georgia’s anti-Russian orientation has been the cornerstone of Georgia’s foreign policy, and strangely enough, of its domestic policy too. Such a simplified vision of the challenges faced by the country is not appreciated in Europe, or at least, not appreciated by many Old Europe leaders. Georgian authorities do not merely ignore fundamental European values in their domestic politics, saying one thing and doing another; in fact, they have renounced the very idea of developing democracy or observing democratic procedures. As a result, Saakashvili’s Georgia is becoming more and more similar to Putin’s Russia, a fact that has already been noted by unbiased and knowledgeable analysts and independent international institutions.²

¹ <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P6-TA-2007-0572+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN>.

² See: de Waal, T. “Putin’s Copycats” // *New Statesman*, November 29, 2007, <http://www.newstatesman.com/200711290030>; “Georgia: Sliding towards Authoritarianism?” International Crisis Group, December 19, 2007 <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=5233&l=1>.

In the post-revolutionary years, there came about a clear misbalance in Georgia's international policies, whereby all eggs were being put in a well-padded Washington basket in the hope that the Americans would help, drag, squeeze and push through. In fact, those hopes have for the most part come true. The European vector of the Georgian external policies only started to gather the necessary momentum immediately prior to and following the Bucharest fiasco at the NATO summit at which the vigorous onslaught by the Americans and their allies on the Eastern EU borders failed to overcome the resistance of the old Europeans, led by the Germans, to giving Georgia a NATO MAP.

A Stopover in Bucharest

I now suggest we stop over briefly in Bucharest during the month of the April, because the story of MAP for Georgia (and Ukraine) has highlighted many interesting aspects in the relations which are now under our scrutiny. Despite the predictably negative position of Germany, the Americans, along with the Poles, the Lithuanians, the Estonians and some other Central and Eastern Europeans, spared no efforts to get MAPs for Georgia and Ukraine. The main argument of the German leadership against granting MAP to Georgia was the existence of unresolved conflicts and the absence of any positive developments in them. A few hints were also made at domestic troubles, particularly, at repressive measures against the opposition.¹

For the good of the business, it would be better to reverse the order of these two arguments, for the way to the peaceful solution and prevention of conflicts lies through dynamic and irreversible democratization and liberalization of Georgia in all directions, rather than otherwise. Presenting or accepting conflicts as a justification of the authorities' anti-democratic behavior is a disservice to the Georgian nation, and serves to delay conflict resolution. It was however no great secret that lingering behind the German obstinacy was the oil-and-gas shadow of Russia; the latter made several harsh pre-emptive statements (coupled with equally harsh steps) targeted against the Georgian (and Ukrainian) integration to the NATO. The position of France, also negative, was more straightforward: France made it clear that strained relations with Russia were too high a price to pay for the support of Georgia.² In fact, this issue, which had to be decided by consensus, drew a clear line between New and Old Europe. Statements made by Saakashvili right before and after the summit were quite typical of this orator. In an interview to *The Financial Times*, he said that any decision made

¹ Williamson, H. "Germany Blocks Ex-Soviets' NATO Entry" // *Financial Times*, 01.04.2008, http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/ab8eb6a6-ff44-11dc-b556-000077b07658.html?nclick_check=1

² <http://www.civil.ge/geo/article.php?id=17910&search=>

in Bucharest short of awarding Georgia a MAP would be “a great Russian victory.”¹ However, when the MAP was predictably refused, and all the summit document contained was a “consolation prize”, i.e. a statement that Georgia and Ukraine would be admitted to NATO at some undefined later date, Georgia’s president proclaimed (at least, for domestic consumption) another great victory of Georgian diplomacy. In a spectacular word-juggling act, the President and his team told the nation that Georgia got even more than it had hoped for, i.e. a definitive promise of NATO membership instead of just an ordinary MAP. What they preferred not to mention was that the final stretch on the way to NATO always lies through a MAP, and that as a result of the Bucharest Summit, Georgia’s MAP will be postponed until the NATO Ministerial in December in the best case scenario, and indefinitely, in the worst.

Incidentally, the German three-stage plan of Abkhazian settlement (the Steinmeier Plan) can be seen as a preemptive measure against the American insistence on awarding a MAP to Georgia: we have developed this very comprehensive plan, why don’t you try to achieve some progress in its realization so that we can wholeheartedly vote for a MAP for Georgia? However, the target of this message it is not quite clearly set: is it aimed at Georgia or the U.S., or Russia after all, or at all of them?

In any case, the very fact that the central country of the EU has come up with a plan for settling one of the conflicts in the South Caucasus raises the level of EU involvement in the sub-region and the degree of European responsibility for developments in this part of the world.

It Can’t Be (a Time of Paradoxes)

Summing up this cursory and fragmentary review of recent years’ developments around Georgia, I would like to propose a thesis that might sound paradoxical: although Russia is playing the role of Georgia’s worst enemy, and the United States, of Georgia’s best friend, Moscow and Washington are in fact working together to consolidate antidemocratic tendencies in Saakashvili’s Georgia. Washington strengthens these tendencies by giving Saakashvili a *carte blanche*, by excusing or encouraging his actions regardless of their overall efficiency. Moscow is strengthening the same tendencies by hostile steps which almost inevitably cause the nation to consolidate around the authorities in the face of an external threat, regardless of the policies implemented by those authorities (the same was happening under Edward Shevardnadze). On the international

¹ Williamson, H. “Germany Blocks Ex-Soviets’ NATO Entry” // *Financial Times*, 01.04.2008, http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/ab8eb6a6-ff44-11dc-b556-000077b07658.html?nclick_check=1.

arena, Russia's pressure on Georgia makes many countries wish to support the weak in its struggle against the strong. This response is especially typical of those European nations which had suffered Russia's yoke for decades and even centuries, and have first-hand experience of how hard and how important it is to shed it. Saakashvili is very good at understanding current trends and using them to his advantage, although the political stakes are sometimes too high.

As it is, Washington and Moscow have willingly or unwillingly nurtured Saakashvili and allowed him to become an *enfant terrible* for the EU, in particular, for the Old Europe governments. One should, however, bear in mind that the stake Saakashvili is gambling is the fate of Georgia and not just his own.

In conclusion, I shall cite data from opinion polls conducted in March 2008 by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation¹. I am quite skeptical about public opinion polls carried out in my country, particularly in the post-election period. In this case, however, I believe that neither the sponsors nor the implementing agencies had any political bias. Another reason to consider the results of this poll seriously is its timing: the poll was done at a time when the presidential election passions had already subsided and the date of the parliamentary election had not yet been set.

A total of 1000 respondents in three Georgian cities (500 in Tbilisi, 200 in Gori and 300 in Kutaisi) were asked to assess the influences that foreign countries have upon the public and religious developments in Georgia. Their answers are shown in the table below:

Countries	Positive	Rather + than -	Rather - than +	Negative	Don't know	Sum +	Sum -
USA	5.0	29.3	35.4	23.0	7.3	34.3	58.4
Germany	9.7	51.3	16.4	5.7	16.9	61.0	22.1
Ukraine	25.0	60.4	5.8	1.4	7.4	85.4	7.2
Armenia	3.7	37.2	32.3	7.1	19.7	40.9	39.4
Azerbaijan	5.8	26.1	25.0	6.2	16.9	31.9	31.2

When asked how they would like those influences to change (to increase, remain the same or decrease) the respondents answered as follows:

Countries	Increase	Status quo	Decrease	Don't know
U.S.	9.1	22.1	65.4	3.4
EU	48.1	24.0	22.4	5.5

¹ The Georgian rural population on religious and political issues // www.kas.de/kaukasus.

There is no need to comment on these data, they are self-explanatory. One should just note that the polling questionnaire contained questions about attitude to religion, so that an especially positive attitude to Ukraine could have been determined, amongst other things, by the fact that Georgians and Ukrainians share the same faith, Orthodox Christianity. Meanwhile, the figures for Germany (in this case standing for the entire EU) and for the USA in the first table, and those for the EU and the U.S. in the second table, clearly show that anti-American feeling is gaining momentum in Georgia's domestic discourse. These figures will not just surprise the people who glide along the surface of Georgian political reality and limit their experiences of Georgia to visiting government offices and leaving them as optimists, enthusiasts or altruists. Those figures are apparently a complete surprise for the officials sitting in those offices who also glide on the surface of reality and are now heading in the direction of the nearest abyss.

The EU remains quite popular in Georgia, although the poll was conducted prior to the NATO Summit in Bucharest; indeed, the position held by Germany (and "Old Europe" as a whole) at that Summit could have had a negative impact upon the Georgians' attitudes to the EU.

In a word, the U.S. policy, perceived in Georgia today as one more incidence of the our-son-of-a-bitch doctrine, is now less attractive to the Georgians than Europe's offer of its values, which one can either accept or reject without risking to lose respect as an individual or as a community.

Conclusion

I believe all the parties would do well by drawing appropriate inferences from the above.

ARMENIA IN KARABAKH, KARABAKH IN ARMENIA: THE KARABAKH FACTOR IN ARMENIA'S FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC POLICY

BY SERGEY MINASYAN

Since the time the military phase of conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh ended in May 1994, Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh have formulated their own strategies with respect to the conflict.

All this time, the conflict has remained a factor that influenced the development of independent Armenia; this fact has had significant impact on Yerevan's approaches to conflict settlement. Moreover, the Karabakh issue in Armenia merged with anti-Communism and with the struggle for independence from the USSR, and ended up as the cornerstone of the ideology promoted by Armenian political actors in 1988-1992, prior to the disintegration of the USSR and the independence of Armenia.

It is thus essential to allow for the role of the "Karabakh factor" when discussing the foreign or the domestic policies of Armenia.

2. Nagorno-Karabakh in Armenia: the Impact of the Conflict on Domestic Developments in Armenia

In terms of domestic issues, the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh is no less important for Armenia than it is for Azerbaijan, and in terms of the formation of political elites, it is much more important for Yerevan and Stepanakert than for Baku, being a basic and systemic factor. An important part of the current political elite in Armenia consists of former activists of the Karabakh movement, former combatants, or just people originating from Nagorno-Karabakh or the formerly Armenian-populated regions of Soviet Azerbaijan. The issue of Nagorno-Karabakh, seen from various angles, is one of the main components of the program of almost every political party, whether in coalition or in opposition.

The exaggerated influence of the Karabakh issue over Armenia's political system and its political development is best illustrated by the biographies of independent Armenia's first three presidents. Levon Ter-Petrosyan, Robert Kocharyan and Serzh Sargsyan all played leading roles in the Karabakh movement. During the war, each of them either led Armenia and/or Nagorno-Karabakh or was in direct military command of the actions. The first president, Levon Ter-Petrosyan, had to resign in 1998 because he came up with a conflict settlement plan that was unacceptable to Armenian elites and society. Ter-

Petrosyan was succeeded by Robert Kocharyan, formerly the first president of Nagorno-Karabakh. Since 2008, Armenia has been lead by Serzh Sargsyan, former minister of defense of Armenia who had led the military command in Nagorno-Karabakh during the war.

Azerbaijan is different in this respect. Although the Karabakh issue led to a series of coups d'état and power handovers in Baku in the early nineties, it has not been as instrumental for the formation of today's political elite in Baku as it has in Yerevan. After Azerbaijan lost the war, mid-nineties' political elites, including the ruling People's Front, gradually became unpopular, leading to the demise of president Abulfaz Elchibey and his government, and the accession of neo-Communist nomenclature led by Heidar Aliev. As a result, the activists who gained prominence during the conflict were either politically marginalized or even physically destroyed. However, Heidar Aliev incorporated some combatants and some of the military elite into the camp of his supporters and the power pyramid. Still, the role of the "Karabakh guys" in Azerbaijan's elite is negligible compared to the political, military and social-economic importance that Karabakh combatants and activists have in Armenia and especially in Nagorno-Karabakh.

The role of "Karabakh guys" in Armenia's political and economic life reached its peak in the last years of Levon Ter-Petrosyan's presidency and only began to decrease with the start of the presidency of Robert Kocharyan, himself a Karabakh man. This may sound illogical but it isn't: as someone coming from Nagorno-Karabakh, Kocharyan was not feeling enough support in Yerevan and needed to incorporate strong local actors, both in the capital and in the provinces, into his bureaucracy and economic elites. The turning point was May 2000, when Kocharyan dismissed Armenia's prime minister Aram Sarkisyan - the brother of war hero Vazgen Sarkisyan who had also held the post of prime minister and was murdered during the October 27, 1999 shootout in the parliament. From that time on, Armenia's political system was gradually de-militarized; in most offices, the supporters of the murdered prime minister were replaced by the new generation of bureaucrats. This did not dramatically reduce the role the Karabakh factor in politics, especially since the rotation of elites was still incomplete. However, political developments in Armenia before and especially after the 2008 presidential election proved that the elite rotation and the decrease of the role played by "Karabakh guys" are still underway and will in all probability intensify during Serzh Sargsyan's presidency. Regardless of the wishes of President Sargsyan or his team, this potential intensification follows from the overall trend in the interplay between coalition and opposition, and from the new political situation in Armenia that begs for expedient rotation of the political and economic elites.

Meanwhile, the "Karabakh factor" has been losing its prevalence in Armenia's political landscape. The last two years' domestic developments

showed this very clearly. The society and part of the elites gradually started to pay less attention to the struggle for Nagorno-Karabakh, because in the public perception, Armenia already “owns” Nagorno-Karabakh. Moreover, in the last few years, exploiting the “Karabakh factor” has no longer been a good way to win over the support of the underprivileged strata of the population, perhaps with the exception of people living along the border with Azerbaijan for whom the settlement of the conflict is directly linked to survival. Unlike Azerbaijan’s authorities, Armenia’s leadership cannot use the non-settled status of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh as a convincing explanation for their country’s social problems. The Armenian opposition does use this kind of logic with some degree of success to mobilize the disgruntled part of the electorate with promises of rapid conflict resolution. However, the authorities cannot mobilize the disgruntled electorate in their favor in the name of protecting something the country already has (i.e. the province of Nagorno-Karabakh) because the society does not perceive this as important any longer.

Another aspect of the issue is that as a result of Armenia’s victory in the war, Armenian society is more open to compromises than the Azerbaijani society. This creates illusions in Azerbaijan, whose experts are inclined to see this openness as a sign that the Armenian society is weary of the conflict. However, they overlook the fact that the compromises that Yerevan (and to some extent also Stepanakert) may be willing to make do not concern the vital interests of Nagorno-Karabakh, i.e. its security and the protection of its citizens’ fundamental rights.

Despite the fact that the Karabakh issue has moved down on the political agenda in the domestic landscape of Armenia, no other political issue is so instrumental for political actors in Armenia, whether opposition or coalition. Authorities are trying to take a hard line on the issue, and the opposition criticizes the official approach, albeit only where the methods of implementing Armenia’s policies are concerned. As to the overall approach to the future and the status of Nagorno-Karabakh, there is almost complete consensus in the Armenian society over this issue. Therefore, the approaches can hardly be expected to change should opposition come to power in Armenia. Very little depends on the leaders’ personal opinion; whatever steps the Armenian president may try to make to achieve dramatic changes in Armenia’s policy with respect to the conflict, they will certainly fail due to a combination of domestic deterrents and external influences. Moreover, it has been clear since the 1990s that Yerevan cannot make completely independent decisions with regard to the conflict, because Nagorno-Karabakh is an important actor with a will of its own.

Consequently, the fact that some Armenian political actors address domestic audiences with visions of potential compromises in the Karabakh issue does

not in fact imply that these actors are defeatists in real politics. It is highly improbable that Armenia's main strategic priorities, including those that concern Nagorno-Karabakh, should change even as a result of changes in the power layout. Just as in the coalition, many of Armenia's actual opposition actors used to be involved in Armenia's military and political successes during the war; after moving over into the opposition, they continued to participate in the dealings over Nagorno-Karabakh. It would be very superficial to divide Armenian politicians into doves and hawks as far as foreign policy is concerned. The experience of many modern local conflicts showed that at some stage of the ethnopolitical conflict, compromises are often promoted by politicians who started out with the most radical nationalistic policies, have extensive experience of political struggle or undercover activities, and/or were the most brilliant and successful military commanders. Contrastingly, it is the liberal politicians with a reputation for compromises and peace initiatives in an armed conflict with a neighboring state that often (consciously or unconsciously) make the toughest and most radical decisions, start wars or form military coalitions. For example, one of the strongest criticisms of the 1967 Six Day War in Israel came from David Ben-Gurion, the founder and first Prime Minister of Israel who spent his lifetime fighting for his nation's independence and security. He believed Israel would be unable to win the war and thus doomed to perish as a result of it. The decision to start the 1967 war, leading to Israel's victory and ensuring dramatic change of the entire political landscape in the Near East, was made by Prime Minister Levi Eshkol, a reputedly mild and timid politician inclined to concessions and endless negotiations.¹

¹ See *Epstein A.* "Twelve False Axioms of the Arab-Israeli Conflict" *Jews of Euro-Asia*, 1(2) (2003), pp. 26-32. http://www.eajc.org/publish_print_e.php?rowid=18 "The experience of those Israeli political leaders belonging to the «national» camp testifies to the following: it is not necessary to give power to the social democrats in order to develop and promote relations with Palestine and/or other Arab countries. It was a right-wing «nationalist», prime minister Menachem Begin, who signed the peace Agreement with Egypt in 1979, as a result of which the whole Sinai peninsula, a territory of which exceed that of the sovereign State of Israel, 3 times was returned to Egypt; it was his successor Itzhak Shamir, who headed the Israeli delegation at the Madrid international peace conference in 1991; it was another right-wing prime minister, Binyamin Netanyahu, who signed the Wye River Memorandum, according to which Israel undertook to give the Palestinian Authority full or partial control of 40 percent of the Judea and Samaria territory. The dominant political party, be it as it may, should neither take the full credit for concluding agreements between Israel and the Arab countries, nor be held responsible for the failure of the talks. Both success or breakdown of a negotiation process depend mostly on the (non-)readiness of the Arab leaders to reach accord. This fact became particularly evident when the prime minister Ehud Barak was prepared to make unprecedented concessions in order to enter into a peace treaty with the Palestinians. His extraordinary efforts, however, resulted in nothing but a new cycle of the uprising... Ehud Barak, who was ready to generously compromise with both Palestine and Syria, had been the chief of Israeli special troops and the military intelligence."

Moreover, even the most radical opposition actors in Armenia believe that surrendering lands occupied by the Karabakh army or otherwise yielding to Azerbaijan's pressure would not lead to the settlement of the conflict (since the controversy is about who owns Karabakh!) but would simply transform it so that Armenians will find themselves in a less advantageous position for defense and sustention of the political and technical balance in the conflict. The public opinion in Armenia is that any change in the geography of the frontlines would only upset the balance in favor of Azerbaijan, giving Baku a new motive to resume the war. By this logic, any change of the status quo would increase rather than decrease the probability of war. The placement of peacekeeping forces on the borders will not solve the problem because the experience of other countries shows that peacekeepers are no guarantee against war in the conflict zone in the case of external pressures.

3. Armenia in Karabakh: How Armenia Influences Political Developments in Nagorno-Karabakh

Armenia's policy with regard to resolving the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh strongly impacts the society, as well as political actors and elites of Nagorno-Karabakh. The impact has remained very strong regardless of exactly who was in charge in Armenia. Yerevan has constantly pressurized the leadership of Nagorno-Karabakh to moderate its approach to conflict settlement and to the prospects of improving relations with Azerbaijan. While maintaining some degree of independence in conflict resolution matters, the authorities and society of Nagorno-Karabakh perceive Armenia and the Armenian leadership as their only reliable allies in the confrontation with Azerbaijan.

Accordingly, the elites of Nagorno-Karabakh usually support the leadership of Armenia in periods of political tensions and especially during elections. This was what they did in 1996, 2003, and 2008. Stepanakert's reaction to the 1998 removal of President Ter-Petrosyan from office was also part of the trend. Since the reason why Ter-Petrosyan had to resign was his proposal to make concessions in the Karabakh issue, the society and elites of Nagorno-Karabakh were obviously not on his side. However, at that time the position of Nagorno-Karabakh had little impact on the situation in Yerevan, and the resignation of the first President resulted from pressure coming from inside the Armenian political elite and was determined by the position of domestic players.

4. Karabakh in Armenia: the Conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh as a Factor and Resource in Armenia's Foreign Policy Agenda

The impact of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh on Armenia's foreign policy has two dimensions. The first consists of Yerevan's reactions to Azerbaijan's policies with respect to Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. The sec-

ond is the way the conflict itself is used by foreign policy makers, and the way it affects Armenia's foreign policy priorities.

It is only natural that reactions to Azerbaijan's actions are part of Yerevan's and Stepanakert's strategies. All parties to conflict use techniques typical for a "propaganda war"; apart from that, each party has its own methods and approaches. Azerbaijan's policies include pressure in the communication sphere; exploitation of the Caspian oil as a political, psychological and material resource; threats to resume warfare and an arms race. The strategies used by Yerevan and Stepanakert have the following dimensions:

- *Asymmetrical perceptions of the conflict*: first of all, asymmetrical interests of the parties and differing attitudes towards the conflict. What is regarded in Baku as a political problem, a component of nation building, and an issue of prestige and revanchism, is considered a survival issue in Yerevan and even more so in Stepanakert. This asymmetric perception, often leading to a situation of the weaker side winning and the stronger side losing, has been manifest since the 1990s in the armed conflicts between unrecognized entities and former parent states. Political asymmetry has its disadvantages, especially where its psychological perception is concerned. The losing party can never forget that it lost to a weaker opponent.¹ Since irredentists are fewer in numbers and formally weaker, the losing party starts to believe they would have been unable to win the war on their own and had only won thanks to the support of external actors. Former parent states thus have difficulty coming to terms with their defeat; this is a lot easier to do if one's opponent is more powerful. Historical experience shows that the revanchism of the losing party can only go down after another devastating defeat (or series of defeats); it can also diminish over time if the *status quo* prevails for a long time. As military theorist Carl von Clausewitz pointed out, defeat in a war is almost never regarded by the losing side as an

¹ The founder of Israel David Ben-Gurion wrote on November 27, 1948: "What is our reality: the Arab nations have been beaten by us. Will they forget that swiftly? 700,000 men have beaten 30 million. Will they forget this insult?" David Ben-Gurion, *War Diary: the War of Independence. 1948-1949* (in Hebrew), G.Rivlin and E.Orren (eds), (Tel-Aviv, Ministry of Defense, 1982), cited in Avi Shlaim, *Collision Across the Jordan* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1988), p.343. The Arab world was extremely bitter about the 1949 victory of Israel. The defeat the Arab nations suffered in Palestine became the embodiment of everything they disliked about their governments: their weakness, corruption, military incompetence, and inability to act together with other Arab countries. What made the defeat especially painful was that it came from a mere handful of "Zionist intruders". This bitterness laid the foundation for many years of Arab revanchism with regard to the much less numerous Jews.

absolute and final reality, because “The conquered state often sees in it only a passing evil, which may be repaired after times by means of political combinations.”¹

- *The “complementarism” of Armenia’s foreign policy*, i.e. the fact that Armenia avoids opposing either Russia or the West but tries to combine the interests of both while also taking heed of the Iranian factor in the conflict. Under whatever external conditions, Armenia comes across as much more pro-Western than Azerbaijan whereas Russia perceives it as more pro-Russian than Azerbaijan. Moreover, Western political perceptions of Nagorno-Karabakh, given that Russian peacekeepers are not stationed in the zone of the conflict, are very different from perceptions of Southern Ossetia or Abkhazia.
- *Sustained military and technical parity* as a result of the fact that defensive action requires fewer men and smaller material resources. Moreover, many experts believe Armenia’s army and even more so Nagorno-Karabakh’s army are better trained and better motivated than the army of Azerbaijan. Though smaller in size, the armies of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh are mobile, have well-trained officers, and their mid- and top-level command consists almost entirely of 1992-1994 war veterans. The structure of the two armies enables mobile and efficient action of small units, as suitable in the case of a defensive in the highlands. The current fortified frontline puts Armenian armies at an advantage when defending their positions against an offensive of Azerbaijan’s more numerous troops. As regular military exercises in Nagorno-Karabakh have shown, almost the entire male population of Nagorno-Karabakh can be drafted in the case of war. These men include many veterans of the last war who have experience of warfare and good knowledge of the terrain. All this can compensate for the much larger numbers of soldiers on the side of Azerbaijan. A recent illustration was the March 3-4, 2008 encounter near Levonarkh village in Nagorno-Karabakh, probably the largest-scale military engagement that happened on the frontline in Nagorno-Karabakh since the May 1994 ceasefire.²

¹ Clausewitz C. von. *On War*. Project Gutenberg, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1946/1946-8.txt>

² During this encounter, timed to coincide with post-election unrest in Armenia in early March 2008, a reconnaissance unit of the Azerbaijani army assailed Karabakh positions on the north-west stretch of the frontline. The unit met with Karabakh troops, including many veterans, and had to withdraw. The encounter left 13 to 15 Azerbaijani soldiers dead, and just two Armenians wounded.

- *Balance of threats, or the containment policies of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh.* The probability of war goes down with each next round in the arms race within the conflict zone. Seemingly ironic, this situation has been common since the time of the Cold War, and is quite well researched by political scientists. The arms race leads to mutual containment, when the military potentials of the parties in conflict become so high that any benefits a country might hope to get from starting the war cannot compensate for the potential human and material losses, to say nothing of the political consequences of a negative reaction on the part of the international community. At the time of the Cold War, it was the potential of nuclear weapons owned by superpowers involved in a bipolar confrontation that led to containment. In the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, containment is ensured by conventional weapons. As a result of the arms race, the military potentials of parties in conflict are incomparably larger than they were during the nineties' war; it is very probable that should the warfare resume, all parties would lose tens of thousands of soldiers and civilians in the very first days of combat. From a technical perspective, there is no reason to expect Azerbaijan to win a *blitzkrieg* in Nagorno-Karabakh; the most probable scenario is long-term trench warfare similar to the 1980-1988 war between Iran and Iraq. In the case of a long-term engagement, the side that starts the war would suffer more military losses and more political damage too (in the eyes of the international community). By continuing to buy more weapons, Azerbaijan can change the military balance in its favor to some extent; however, it is another type of balance — the “balance of threats” — that that will ensure stability in the zone of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh and make the parties in conflict sustain fragile and unstable peace for quite a long time. British military theorist and historian Basil Liddell-Hart once said that “The object in war is to attain a better peace — even if only from your own point of view.”¹ In a situation when every party in conflict is aware that whatever the outcome of the war in Nagorno-Karabakh, it is going to lose tens of thousands of men and suffer huge material and economic damage, it will think very hard before deciding to resume the war. Should Azerbaijan make this decision, there is not much chance that the resulting peace would be a better one. As Liddell-Hart put it, “Victory in the true sense implies that the state of peace, and of one's people, is better after the war than before. Victory in this sense is possible only if a quick result can be gained or if a

¹ Liddell-Hart, Basil. *The Strategy of Indirect Approach*. London: Faber and Faber, 1941, p.202.

long effort can be economically proportioned to the national resources. The end must be adjusted to the means.”¹

- *Conversion of the time factor into a power resource in the political struggle:* time is a resource that all post-Soviet unrecognized states use to strengthen their political de-facto existence and status. In most modern local conflicts, success in a military campaign does not directly depend on the military and technical potentials of the parties in conflict. Non-military factors are at least as important; these include political, psychological and ideological factors, including the ability to mobilize society and legitimize military action in all population strata². Time plays a leading role here. As a potential initiator of a revanchist outbreak of war, Azerbaijan would face more problems with legitimizing a military campaign than Nagorno-Karabakh, for which this war would become a war for survival. The history of colonial wars and current confrontations between unrecognized quasi-states shows that the asymmetrical motives and ambitions of parties in conflict lead to a situation when, as David Lynch put it, “the de facto states are playing the long game, in which not losing means winning.”³ Nagorno-Karabakh might not win a new exhausting war with Azerbaijan, whether a trench war or long-distance war, but it won't be the same as losing it. As to the leadership of Azerbaijan, which has been talking about reclaiming Nagorno-Karabakh by military force for 14 years now, any outcome short of total control over the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh will amount to political and military defeat with ensuing irreversible consequences for the ruling elite.⁴

Obviously, Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh do not limit their strategy to reacting to Azerbaijan's policies, especially since it had been the two Armenian parties that initiated the original conflict back in 1998. Yerevan, and to some extent also Stepanakert, make their own steps towards using the

¹ Liddell-Hart, Basil. *The Strategy of Indirect Approach*. New York: Fredrik A. Praeger, 1954, p.370.

² Deriglazova, Larisa. “The Asymmetry Paradox in International Conflict.” *International Trends*. Volume 3. Issue 3(9), Oil and International Security. September-December 2005 (in Russian)

³ Lynch D. Separatist States and Post-Soviet Conflicts // *International Affairs*, Vol.78, №4, 2002, p.848.

⁴ Henry Kissinger described the asymmetry of the U.S. engagement in Vietnam, where the “weak” side was able to win the war by not losing it. Small nations which are at war for a meaningful cause that unites the society (e.g. Finland in the 1939-1940 Winter War, Algeria in 1950-1960, Vietnam in its wars against France and the U.S. between the 1940s and the 1970s, Israel in the wars with Arab nations in 1948-1982, unrecognized post-Soviet states in the early 1990s) can, under favorable political and psychological conditions, keep mobilizing material and human resources for a long enough time to win a war against a much stronger opponent.

“Karabakh factor” as a foreign policy resource regardless of current developments in their confrontation with Azerbaijan. In a way, Georgia does the same when it uses its conflicts over Abkhazia and Southern Ossetia and its confrontation with Russia as major trump cards in its foreign policy game, bringing Georgia significant political and economical dividends that flow in from the West regardless of developments in Abkhazia and Ossetia proper. This dimension of the Karabakh factor in Armenia’s foreign policy, though intertwined with the direct confrontation with Azerbaijan, still deserves to be considered as a separate trend.

At any rate, Armenia’s leadership insists that it is prepared to unfold its foreign policy regardless of developments in the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh or of the economic and political price that Armenia has to pay for those developments; it is set on pursuing its strategies and integrating into European structures. The stringent reality of the conflict does not give much hope to any improvement of relations with Azerbaijan in the short-term or even in the mid-term perspective. Accordingly, Armenia needs to put up with the situation and try to build its relations with other countries in its region, international organizations and leading world powers. Armenian authorities believe that by creating a positive environment for regional integration, cooperation and trust, they can hope to create a platform for improving relations with Azerbaijan in the future.

An approach that may prove the most important in this sphere is the effort to normalize relations and potentially open the borders between Armenia and Turkey. Another dominant approach, seemingly contrasting with Armenian-Turkish normalization, is to make use of the conflict to attract the interest of European organizations and world powers to the South Caucasus. The conflict and the information flow arising from it are used to attract political interest and to stimulate economic aid and political support. In other words, Yerevan exploits the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh to boost the geopolitical importance of Armenia in the regional format and on European platforms. For the same purpose, Armenia also utilizes Western political formats, for example, it uses the European and U.S. interests as resources for Armenian-Turkish normalization. This, too, has direct impact on the situation in the conflict and on the relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

NAGORNO-KARABAKH: A FACTOR IN AZERBAIJAN'S FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC POLICY

BY RASIM MUSABAYOV

Summary

For two decades the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh has been the pivot problem in Azerbaijan's domestic and foreign policy. At the current stage, the government is trying to use the colossal economic growth and financial revenues from sales of oil and gas, as well as the country's growing geopolitical importance, to promote resolution of the conflict in ways which are acceptable for Azerbaijan. Military expenses are growing rapidly, arms build up. At the level of the UN, the Council of Europe and the OSCE, and in bilateral relations with various states, Armenia is subjected to growing diplomatic pressure to give up its demands in connection with the secession of Nagorno-Karabakh from Azerbaijan, and to withdraw its troops from the occupied regions adjacent to Nagorno-Karabakh. There is a consistent policy of isolating Armenia from regional projects, and state-controlled media enhance a confrontational anti-Armenian discourse.

The fact that the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh has not been resolved is constantly exploited by the ruling elite to distract the attention of the population from flourishing corruption, inefficient governance, human rights abuse and the absence of democratic practices. All this, plus the lack of progress in negotiations with the mediation of the OSCE Minsk group, does not serve help to bring the parties in conflict closer to peace based on compromises and to renewed cooperation, but pushes them to a dangerous divide; crossing it would be fraught with more armed hostilities, destruction and human suffering. It is harder every year and every month to sustain the precarious no-peace-no-war situation. The only way to prevent negative developments lies through consolidated effort of clearheaded peace-oriented people and political forces in both Azerbaijan and Armenia, and of the decisively expressed will of the international community.

A Seemingly Hopeless Deadlock in Negotiations over Conflict Resolution

Ever since the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh resumed in the late 1980s, it has remained the focus of Azerbaijan's domestic and foreign policy. Opinion polls and media monitoring projects regularly conducted in Azerbaijan in the last few years show that the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh remained a priority. The military and foreign policies of Azerbaijan are also pinned on the conflict resolution issue. Appeals to patriotic feelings in con-

nection with the conflict are widely used in domestic politics. Prior to analyzing this situation, we need to dwell on the current status of efforts to resolve the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh.

Some foreign political actors believe that windows of opportunity to achieve a breakthrough in conflict resolution existed in 2006 and early 2007 but were not used. The current round of negotiations going on with the mediation of the Minsk group and reported in the media as the “Prague process” did not yield even the tiniest result such as the signing of a document that would coordinate and establish resolution principles. The inefficiency of negotiations and the election cycles that started in both countries in 2007-2008 led to an arms race, exacerbation of militarist discourses, frequent shootings across the frontline and decreased intensity of negotiations.

As a result of elections, Armenia got a new President and new Minister for Foreign Affairs. The new President Serge Sargsyan, having previously held the posts of Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, is well-informed of the course of negotiations and ensures the continuity of governance with respect to this very important issue. Nevertheless, negotiations were paused, albeit briefly. Ministers for Foreign Affairs have already held an introductory meeting, and the two Presidents met for the first time in early June 2008 at an informal CIS summit in St. Petersburg. Suspended during elections in Armenia, the dialogue between parties in conflict has now resumed but can hardly be expected to bring quick results.

Just as before, negotiations went into a deadlock over the status of Nagorno-Karabakh. Realizing that it is impossible to harmonize the positions of the two parties, because Yerevan insists that Nagorno-Karabakh should either become independent or part of Armenia, whereas Baku can only grant it a “high level” of autonomy within Azerbaijan, the mediators who co-chair the OSCE Minsk Group proposed a step-by-step plan in which the status of Nagorno-Karabakh will be determined by referendum. Now discussions center on the referendum.

The Armenian side insists that the referendum should be held no later than 5 years after the sides reach an agreement, and that the final decision should be made based on a simple majority vote. Given the fact that Armenians made up about 70 per cent of the population of Nagorno-Karabakh before the conflict, and 100 per cent after the displacement of ethnic Azerbaijani, it will not be hard to ensure the decision that suits them. Baku proposes an option that allows for maneuvering and does not legalize the secession. Azerbaijani negotiators suggest holding a plebiscite rather than a referendum in Nagorno-Karabakh. The difference is that the results of the plebiscite are merely taken into account but are not decisive. According to the Constitution of Azerbaijan, secession or transfer of

part of the country's territory can only be implemented by country-wide referendum, not just by one conducted in the area that aspires to secession. Therefore Baku accepts the option of a plebiscite following the return of Azerbaijanis to Nagorno-Karabakh, and will approve their vote on status only in the event that both communities cast the same vote. In the event that they do not (which is certainly going to be the case), Baku proposes to keep the issue open and continue negotiations in the quest for a mutually acceptable decision.

One of the reasons why peaceful resolution is being endlessly postponed is that the ruling elite of each country has one-sided understanding of the way this conflict will develop over time. Armenians seem to believe that Azerbaijanis will eventually reconcile with the loss of Nagorno-Karabakh and agree to make this fact legal, whereas the world will accept the new reality which will not change or contradict international law. Meanwhile, Baku believes that its oil resources have helped it to win the favors of powerful oil corporations and awaken the interest of leading world powers, and its growing oil revenues will enable it to equip and strengthen its army. The leadership of Azerbaijan expects both financial revenues from export of oil and the level of international support to Azerbaijan to grow in the coming years. Therefore, they hope to make sure the conflict will be resolved in a way which is more acceptable to Azerbaijan. To put it short, the parties in conflict are fighting a war using diplomacy and propaganda. To external actors, both Armenia and Azerbaijan advertise their commitment to peaceful resolution and preparedness for compromise; domestically, both governments demonstrate a hardliner stance.

The present leaderships of both Azerbaijan and Armenia are composed of people who were brought to power in the wake of the conflict as a result of being critical of their predecessors who were willing to compromise or unable to organize strong resistance to the secession. They have no convincing achievements to show the people. Instead, people in both countries face poverty, unemployment, corruption and abuse at the hands of conceited officials who embezzle state property and incomes. In a state like this, it is hard to ensure unity by democratic means based on a vision of national security and development that would be convincing and acceptable to most people. Therefore, the ruling elites, and sometimes opposition groups too, revert to surrogate methods of uniting the nation by exaggerating external threats or threats coming from a different ethnic group, creating enemy images and exploiting patriotic feelings.

Public Opinion Is Not Open to Compromise. No One Is Making It Ready

Opinion polls show that public opinion is contradictory with regard to prospects for conflict resolution. Similar results were obtained during public

opinion monitoring projects that the Puls-R sociological service has conducted for several years under my supervision.¹ When asked “*How do you evaluate short-term prospects of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh?*” respondents gave the following answers:

	December	December	February
	2005	2006	2008
	%	%	%
1. There will be some progress toward peaceful resolution of the conflict	37,2	38,4	31,6
2. Warfare will resume	13,9	12,7	16,5
3. The no-peace-no-war situation will continue	43,9	46,7	48,8
4. Cannot answer / no answer	5,0	2,2	3,1

As we see, just over a third of all respondents believe in prospects for peaceful resolution of the conflict, and their number has notably decreased after 2007. People who expect warfare to begin again are few but their numbers have grown slightly in the last poll. The biggest group believes the no-peace-no-war situation is to last.

The polls also show that society is not ready for serious concessions that are essential for progress in negotiations over conflict resolution. Answers to the question “*What type of compromise with respect to the status of Nagorno-Karabakh do you consider acceptable for the sake of peaceful resolution of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan?*” are shown in the table below:

	December	February
	2006	2008
	%	%
1. Only cultural autonomy and local self-government	11,5	5,2
2. Autonomy similar to that of Nakhichevan	9,5	11,9
3. The highest autonomy that exists in the world	3,7	4,1
4. To allow the population of Nagorno-Karabakh to decide at a referendum provided Azerbaijani refugees return to their homes	11,1	9,8
5. To accept the independence of Nagorno-Karabakh and let them live as they please	0,4	1,9
7. No compromise ever	59,4	62,3
8. Cannot answer / no answer	4,4	4,8

¹ We interviewed 1000 persons, or 0,014 % of the population. Respondents were randomly selected in 12 cities and 15 rural areas amongst persons aged 18 and older. Questions were asked during standard face-to-face interviews.

As we can see from this table, the majority of respondents are not ready to compromise at all, and this number grew a little in the last poll. The co-chairs of the Minsk Group are clearly right when they say societies must be prepared for compromise which will be inevitable if the conflict is to be resolved. As to acceptable options, almost one in five respondents agrees to autonomy for Nagorno-Karabakh (cultural, local or even “the highest ever”). The idea of deciding by referendum provided Azerbaijani refugees return to their homes got some support (10-11%) whereas independence is almost completely ruled out by the public.

As a result of many years of propaganda, people see the conflict as a win-lose situation and do not try to weigh potential benefits of peace and resumed cooperation against the losses resulting from the persisting no-peace-no-war situation that entails enormous military spending and slows down social, economic and democratic development. Therefore, people are more prepared to accept the status-quo than to do something to change it.

Some international organizations, mediators and politicians from various countries insist that the two countries resume cooperation without waiting for the conflict to be resolved. However, this suggestion is not realistic. It is true that cooperation leads to trust and increases mutual dependence, thus increasing security. It is, however, clear that it is impossible to cooperate on a reasonably large scale until there is at least a minimal degree of security. If we are not just talking about local cross-border trade, cooperation requires a certain level of interstate relations that must be reflected in legal documents. Meanwhile, Azerbaijan and Armenia have not yet recognized each other and do not have diplomatic relations. Therefore, neither citizens of the other country nor their property are protected by the law on the territory of the enemy state; businessmen and companies cannot make contracts that will be considered valid by administrative bodies or courts of law. No company will insure cargo shipped from one of the two countries to another, so that the goods can be stolen or just “vanish” on the way. All efforts to convince the two countries to cooperate have been rendered inutile by these and other considerations. Refusing to make so much as symbolic steps in this direction, the authorities of Azerbaijan continue their policy of isolating Armenia from all significant regional projects.

Azerbaijan's foreign policy priorities include strengthening alliance with Turkey and with Azerbaijan's partners in GUAM, Georgia and Ukraine, while neutralizing and pacifying Russia and Iran, and pressurizing and isolating Armenia. As such, these priorities correlate well with the public opinion. When asked to name the countries which are friendly or hostile to Azerbaijan, respondents answered as follows:

Countries	December 2005	December 2006	February 2008
	%	%	%
Friendly			
Turkey	82,8	84,9	89,0
Russia	23,0	17,8	20,6
Georgia	6,1	9,3	10,3
Ukraine	6,6	8,0	5,7
Iran	9,2	5,9	5,9
USA	8,5	5,9	5,7
Hostile			
Armenia	93,2	89,0	96,1
Russia	7,5	13,1	8,9
Iran	5,5	9,7	11,0
France	1,7	10,8	3,8
USA	3,6	3,1	2,6

Respondents were not offered a list but had to name three countries in each category. Most people in all three polls named Turkey as Azerbaijan's best friend; its rating was several times that of all the rest put together. Two GUAM countries, Georgia and Ukraine, also made it to the list of friends. Armenia is always named as the country which is the most hostile to Azerbaijan. As to Russia, Iran and the U.S., they appear at the top of both lists, which show that opinions about these countries are polarized. It is hard to say whether public opinion follows in the wake of public policies, or the policies adjust to popular feelings; the connection between the two is rather complicated. Still, it is true that the current government's tough and unyielding policy is the way most people want it to be, despite the fact it has not led to final success.

Azerbaijan Strengthens Its Army While Also Attacking Armenia by Diplomatic Means

In the negotiations held under the auspices of the OSCE Minsk Group, Azerbaijan's position has been getting tougher. While formally agreeing to carry on negotiations based on the Madrid Principles formulated by the co-chairs of the Minsk Group, Baku interprets those principles in a way which is unacceptable for Armenia.

Within the framework of the Prague Process, in 2007 the Presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan met once, and the Ministers for Foreign Affairs, four times. In 2008, there has already been one presidential and one ministerial meeting but progress still appears very hard to achieve. This is apparent from Azerbaijan's position, which Araz Azimov, the Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs in charge of conflict resolution issues, explained in detail in

an interview he gave a popular news portal, Day.Az, on May 15, 2008. Here is how he presented the position:

1. The conflict must be resolved in the framework of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity; there is no alternative to this approach;
2. The goal of conflict resolution is not merely the return of seven regions adjacent to Nagorno-Karabakh. The main goal is the full restoration of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity. Nagorno-Karabakh must remain part of Azerbaijan and its status must reflect this fact;
3. The self-determination of Nagorno-Karabakh can only be realized in the framework of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity. In international law, the principle of self-determination is only applied in the form of internal self-determination. International law does not in any way prescribe or provide the basis for the secession of part of a country's territory without the consent of that country;
4. The determination of the status of Nagorno-Karabakh will require enabling the displaced Azerbaijani residents of Nagorno-Karabakh to return to their homes and providing their security on a par with ethnic Armenian population. Only after this is done can the issue of territorial status be raised;
5. Both sides must have equal and mutual access to the road via Lachin. This will guarantee the normal, safe and stable functioning of this transportation route;
6. To ensure the development of Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan is prepared to take all necessary measures for the benefit of both communities that will populate this region. The main obstacle to this is created by the occupation of Azerbaijan's territories by Armenia;
7. The document setting down the Main Principles of Conflict Resolution must include the return of Azerbaijani population to Nagorno-Karabakh, the access of both parties to the Lachin road and the determination of the status of Nagorno-Karabakh based on Azerbaijan's territorial integrity. Only then can the discussions lead to a result;
8. Nagorno-Karabakh must remain an inseparable part of Azerbaijan. This will lead to conflict resolution and normalization of relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Should Armenia choose another option, it will win nothing except hostility and isolation.¹

Simultaneously, Azerbaijan has been boosting its military spending for four years now. Its military expenditure has grown from 170 million U.S. dollars in 2004 to 300 million in 2005, about 600 million in 2006, over one

¹ "Once again about the principles underlying Azerbaijan's position with regard to the resolution of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict" // www.day.az/news/politics/118039.html, 14.05.2008.

billion in 2007 and one and a half billion (or more) in 2008. As we see, the growth has been almost tenfold, and President Ilham Aliyev's promise to bring Azerbaijan's military expenditure on a level with Armenia's entire state budget are not far removed from reality.

Baku has been purchasing weapons in large quantities. Media publish various data but I would not like to cite them here, knowing that the true figures are kept secret and that local and foreign information sources are all biased in one way or another. Certainly Azerbaijan has bought heavy weapons from Ukraine and Belarus by the hundreds. Azerbaijan has also been taking serious steps toward creating its own military industry. In 2007, the Ministry of the Defense Industry reported the production of 29 types of weapons, spare parts and ammunition. In 2008, the military industry planned to manufacture 444 types of weapons and military equipment, 80 of them new.¹

On June 26, 2008, on the 90th anniversary of its army, Azerbaijan made the first open display of its new military potential. According to the Press Service of its Ministry of Defense, the parade involved 4500 soldiers, 210 units of modern military equipment (tanks, guns and armed personnel carriers), 19 helicopters, 25 airplanes, 31 ships and boats, "Tochka-U" (Scarab B) tactical missiles, "Smerch" multiple rocket launchers etc.²

Baku has not merely toughened its military discourse but uses every opportunity to demonstrate that it is indeed prepared to liberate its occupied lands by military force. In 2008, the number of cross-border shootouts grew, and the largest ever military engagement since the war happened in the north of Nagorno-Karabakh. For several days, the sides engaged in an intensive fire-fight using firearms, grenade-launchers and even heavy equipment; military positions changed hands several times. Tens of soldiers on both sides were killed and wounded since the year began.

Is a New War Approaching, or Is This Attrition Warfare?

"The next few years will bring dramatic changes in favor of Azerbaijan in its military contention with Armenia" — this was the conclusion of an expert poll conducted in 2005 by the Armenian Assembly of America amongst 24 U.S. and West European experts, former government officials and analysts. About 33 per cent of respondents believed that by 2015, Azerbaijan would be able to win a war against Armenia, and just 4 per cent believed in Armenia's victory.³ I would like to draw attention to the fact that

¹ *Mamedov, J.* What does the two-billion budget portend? // *Zerkalo*, 26.04.2008.

² *Orujiev, R.* *Foreign Experts Estimate Baku Parade Very Highly. War Is Not Over, Says the President.* // *Echo*, 28.06.2008.

³ "Expert Poll: Azerbaijan Will Win Over Armenia by 2015 // www.regnum.ru/news/516508.html, 23.09.2005.

those opinions were expressed at the time oil prices stood at 30 to 40 U.S. dollars per barrel, and Azerbaijan's military budget was relatively modest. With today's unprecedented prices for energy, Azerbaijan's colossal financial revenues and soaring military expenditure imply that those forecasts, if reviewed now, would be even less favorable for Armenia.

According to analysts from the influential International Crisis Group, "by about 2012, after which its oil revenue is expected to begin to decline, Azerbaijan may be tempted to seek a military solution. The international community needs to lose its complacency and do more to encourage the leaderships to prepare their societies for compromise and peace."¹

The risk of renewed warfare will indeed grow by 2012 but not for the reason suggested by the International Crisis Group. One of the top managers of British Petroleum, the main operator of oil and gas projects in Azerbaijan, has approached the government with a proposal to increase by a third the amount of oil being mined in the Azeri-Chirag-Guneshli oilfield. This would enable this oilfield to produce a stable 1 million barrels of oil per day (50 million tons a year) until 2019, not until 2013 as was planned earlier.² Some local experts maintain that it will be possible to continue mining at this rate until 2025.³ So this is not about an imminent drop in oil mining and revenues.

By 2012-2013, the population of Azerbaijan will get accustomed to the extent of prosperity enabled by oil revenues; however, more people will be disgruntled by the economic inequality and corruption. President Ilham Aliyev will be at the end of his second term in office. To remain in power, the ruling elite will need to be successful in the Karabakh issue. If it fails to achieve success by peaceful means, its illusions about its bigger military potential can motivate it to liberate occupied territories by military force. However, the main goal is to get Armenia with its weaker economy and finances involved in the arms race, and to wear it down. Combined with the policy of isolating Armenia from regional projects and blocking its land communications, this should overstrain Armenia's budget and make it further reduce its inadequate social welfare, leading to anti-government sentiment and social strain. These trends are already manifest and will be growing stronger in the future, encouraging the Armenian populace and public officials to moderation and compromise in the Karabakh issue.

¹ *Nagorno-Karabakh: Risking War*. International Crisis Group, Europe Report N°187, 14 November 2007. <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=5157&l=1>

² *Alizadeh, F.* "Azerbaijan's Far-reaching Plans" // *Zerkalo*, 06.06.2008.

³ "Inglab Akhmedov: I Foresee Vague Economic Prospects for Azerbaijan" // *Day.Az*, 26.07.2008.

Azerbaijan combines measures to reinforce its army with assailing Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh by means of propaganda and diplomacy. This involves initiating the discussion and adoption of resolutions by various international organization. Despite the warnings and concerns of the Minsk Group co-chairs from the U.S., Russia and France, Azerbaijan insisted on introducing a draft resolution on the situation in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan to the 62nd session of the General Assembly of the United Nations. The resolution was adopted by a vote of 39 in favor to 7 against, with 100 abstentions. According to Resolution A/62/L.42 of 14 March 2008, “the General Assembly

1. *Reaffirms* continued respect and support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Azerbaijan within its internationally recognized borders;
2. *Demands* the immediate, complete and unconditional withdrawal of all Armenian forces from all the occupied territories of the Republic of Azerbaijan;
3. *Reaffirms* the inalienable right of the population expelled from the occupied territories of the Republic of Azerbaijan to return to their homes, and stresses the necessity of creating appropriate conditions for this return, including the comprehensive rehabilitation of the conflict-affected territories;
4. *Recognizes* the necessity of providing normal, secure and equal conditions of life for Armenian and Azerbaijani communities in the Nagorno- Karabakh region of the Republic of Azerbaijan, which will allow an effective democratic system of self-governance to be built up in this region within the Republic of Azerbaijan;
5. *Reaffirms* that no State shall recognize as lawful the situation resulting from the occupation of the territories of the Republic of Azerbaijan, nor render aid or assistance in maintaining this situation;
6. *Expresses* its support to the international mediation efforts, in particular those of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Minsk Group Co-Chairmen, aimed at peaceful settlement of the conflict in accordance with the norms and principles of international law, and recognizes the necessity to intensify these efforts with a view to achieve a lasting and durable peace in compliance with the provisions stipulated above;
7. *Calls upon* the Member States and international and regional organizations and arrangements to effectively contribute, within their competence, to the process of settlement of the conflict;
8. *Requests* the Secretary-General to submit to the General Assembly at its sixty-third session a comprehensive report on the implementation of the present resolution;

9. *Decides* to include in the provisional agenda of its sixty-third session the item entitled 'The situation in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan.'¹

Critics have been downgrading the importance of this resolution, saying it is declarative and emphasizing the fact that the co-chairs of the Minsk Group voted against it and most EU countries abstained. However, the very adoption of the resolution is indicative of important changes in the attitudes of the international community. It is a clear signal that Armenia can no longer count on its continued *laissez-faire* and indulgence, whereas Baku, armed with the new resolution, has already started an offensive at those provisions in the Madrid Principles currently discussed by the OSCE Minsk Group which are not in Azerbaijan's interests.

Azerbaijani diplomacy is not limited to the UN; Azerbaijan is actively promoting its agenda in the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the GUAM. The issue of Nagorno-Karabakh is regularly raised when President Ilham Aliyev travels abroad or when the heads of other states visit Azerbaijan. Since Azerbaijan has much more contacts of this kind than Armenia, Baku increasingly often manages to achieve a bilateral understanding of Azerbaijan's position on Nagorno-Karabakh. It is getting easier to do now that almost all visitors to Azerbaijan are interested in its energy resources and looking for opportunities to participate in large projects like NABUCCO that will bring oil and gas from the Caspian and Central Asia to European markets.

Making Allies of Neighboring Countries

In recent years, Baku has been paying special attention to its policy with respect to Russia. It is on strategic partnership with Russia that Armenia has based its security policy and its strategy with regard to Nagorno-Karabakh. Changes have become imminent when Boris Yeltsin, who gave the cold shoulder to Azerbaijan, was replaced in his office by Heidar Aliyev's former KGB colleague Vladimir Putin. The vector of Russian policy in the South Caucasus is gradually shifting towards Baku as a result of objective interests as well as personal changes in the leadership. An analytical report published by the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy, an influential Russian agency, suggests that the Russian policy in Transcaucasus will gradually focus on Azerbaijan.²

¹ General Assembly Adopts Resolution Reaffirming Territorial Integrity of Azerbaijan, Demanding Withdrawal of All Armenian Forces. UN website, March 14, 2008. <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2008/ga10693.doc.htm>;
Resolution A/62/L.42 <http://www.un.org/Docs/journal/asp/ws.asp?m=A/62/L.42>

² The World Around Russia: 2017 Outlines of the Near Future / Ed. Karaganov S.A., Moscow: 2007, p.133.

The reasons are not just Azerbaijan's major energy resources or important geopolitical situation. With its soaring economic growth, considerable assets and growing market, Azerbaijan has become attractive both as an investor and a country into which to invest. It is no surprise that it was to Baku that Russia's newly elected President Dmitry Medvedev paid his second visit to a CIS country, the first having been to Kazakhstan. During this visit, on July 2-3, 2008, Russia and Azerbaijan signed a Declaration on friendship and strategic partnership that stresses the importance of resolving the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh in the spirit of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and inviolability of borders. The Declaration reads that the signatory states will promote the speedy voluntary and safe return of refugees and persons displaced as a result of the conflict.¹ This issue may not be as interesting for Russia as cooperation in the sphere of gas but Russia has to reckon with Azerbaijan's wishes.

Moscow has reasons to start thinking about the need to overcome the current deadlock in the resolution of the conflict. It is obviously impossible to endlessly sustain the present no-peace-no-war situation with Armenian troops occupying lands outside the borders of Nagorno-Karabakh. Conflicts in the South Caucasus tend to "defrost". As NATO advances into the South Caucasus and the regional arms race unfolds, Moscow faces a difficult choice. To avoid upsetting the existing military balance, it will need to give Armenia billions of dollars worth of economic and military aid. Burdening Moscow financially and cutting it off from the attractive markets of Azerbaijan, this will also inevitably cause Baku to follow Tbilisi on its way into the NATO. Left without massive Russian support, it will not be long before Russia's faithful ally Armenia is crushed by Azerbaijan's much stronger forces.

Should events follow this course, it's a question of how long Armenia, having no land communication to Russia, will remain an isolated pro-Russian island. To avoid a negative scenario, Moscow will either have to give its go-ahead to a new breakout of warfare between Armenia and Azerbaijan, which would be extremely risky, or to promote the settlement of the conflict. Under the new conditions, the only way for Russia to secure its influence on both Yerevan and Baku is to broker a peace agreement and provide the guarantees for it. However, recent years' rapprochement between Russia and Azerbaijan and the positive personal relations between the two presidents have yet to transform into mutual trust between the two countries. Moscow is asking too much in exchange for a positive input into conflict resolution.

¹ "Russian President Medvedev paid an official visit to Azerbaijan" // *Day.Az*, 04.07.2008.

This can become the stumbling block in the peace process. Obviously, Azerbaijan will never agree to accept the role of Russia's satellite, to join in Moscow's pressure on Georgia and Ukraine, or to curtail its mutually beneficial relations with Western oil and gas companies. Should someone in the leadership of Azerbaijan be tempted to reverse the vector of the country's foreign policy in such a dramatic way, national interests and public opinion will prevent them from doing so. However, Baku can balance its policy in a way to take more heed of Russia's interests. It now remains to identify the line along which the interests of the two countries coincide, so they can form a mutually acceptable configuration and set the settlement of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh in motion.

Sustaining and expanding strategic partnership and alliance with Turkey remain important dimensions of Azerbaijan's foreign policy. The two countries maintain intense contacts at top political level, in economics and the military sphere. However, as Azerbaijan becomes stronger economically and reinforces its statehood, the relationship gradually turns into equal partnership. The State Oil Company of Azerbaijan has begun to implement an investment project in Turkey in the sphere of petrochemistry which is worth billions of dollars. Projects being discussed at the moment include Azerbaijan's participation in Turkey's gas supply network, transportation of gas from Azerbaijan to European markets via Turkey, and potential joint projects to manufacture and repair military equipment. Turkey, Georgia and Azerbaijan sustain top-level coordination of activities aimed at maintaining the security of pipelines.

It was probably the apparent rapprochement between Azerbaijan and Russia that recently caused Yerevan to make advances to Turkey, leading to confidential negotiations between top-level diplomats in Switzerland. According to media reports, the negotiations were aimed at normalizing diplomatic relations and opening borders. Similar efforts were previously made on numerous occasions but as long as Armenia does not renounce its territorial claims to Turkey and fails to liberate the Azerbaijani territories it has occupied, there is not much chance that negotiations will lead to an agreement. As material proof of this, the Presidents of Turkey, Azerbaijan and Georgia recently attended the opening celebration of construction works at the Turkish section of the Kars-Tbilisi-Baku railroad that will link Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey, bypassing Armenia and excluding it from yet another regional project. So that if someone hoped that rapprochement between Turkey and Armenia would undermine Azerbaijan's position, their hopes will hardly come true.

Iran also holds a place in Azerbaijan's policies with regard to resolution of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. Iran's conduct is rather ambiguous. Officially, Tehran acknowledges the fact of Armenia's aggression against

Azerbaijan, joins in the demands that Armenia must liberate the territories it has occupied, and supports the settlement of the conflict in the framework of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity. At the same time Tehran maintains close political and economic ties with Yerevan. Tehran's conduct at the General Assembly of the United Nations was very telling: despite previously made assurances, its delegation abstained from voting and later sent Azerbaijan a letter of no political significance in which it supported Azerbaijan's position. However, the international isolation of Iran's ruling regime as a result of its nuclear ambitions and the fact that Tehran has a multi-million strong Azerbaijani ethnic minority leave Tehran little room for maneuver between Yerevan and Baku. Considering the 1990s negative experience of Iran's mediation efforts in the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, and the fact that neither Western countries nor Moscow wish that Tehran should play a role in South Caucasus affairs, Iran is not expected to become involved in the peace process at this stage.

The issue of Nagorno-Karabakh thus remains the focus of Azerbaijan's policy. Baku has started to behave with more assertion and confidence, relying on its increased financial capacities and improving strategic position in regional geopolitics. This is sufficient in order to show intransigence and to withstand any type of external pressure to make concessions. However, this is still insufficient to achieve a solution that would be in the interests of Azerbaijan. Future developments will not just depend on how well Azerbaijan and Armenia draw on their respective advantages, but also on global and regional power balances and the configuration of international relations.

THE PLACE OF NAGORNO-KARABAKH WITHIN THE REGION: PROSPECTS AND DEAD ENDS

BY MASIS MAILYAN

The conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh is considered to be one of the most chronic and intractable conflicts in the South Caucasus. The problem of Nagorno-Karabakh emerged for the first time in 1918, following the collapse of the Russian Empire, when the need arose for territorial demarcation between the newly independent states of Armenia and Azerbaijan. This dispute, which became an object of scrutiny by the League of Nations, lasted until 1921, when after the Sovietization of Armenia and Azerbaijan the Bolshevik Party made the decision to incorporate Nagorno-Karabakh into Azerbaijan and give it autonomous status. The decision was bulldozed through by Iosif Stalin with no regard for the will of Armenians who then amounted to over 90 percent of the population of Nagorno-Karabakh. In 1923, part of Nagorno-Karabakh was converted into an autonomous oblast, whereas other parts of Nagorno-Karabakh and of the bordering Zangezur Province of the Armenian Soviet Republic were joined to form the District (Uyezd) of Kurdistan (Red Kurdistan), which only existed for about seven years. One of the motives for creating and then abolishing the Red Kurdistan had been to make sure Armenia and Karabakh no longer share a common border.

In the nearly 70 years that Nagorno-Karabakh was part of Soviet Azerbaijan, the authorities of Azerbaijan systematically violated the rights of local Armenians, hampered the economic development of Nagorno-Karabakh and implemented a policy aimed at driving Armenians out of Nagorno-Karabakh and thus changing the ethnic proportion in favor of the Azerbaijani minority. Their methods included murder, abduction and torture, arbitrary arrests, show trials of political prisoners, suppression of dissent and open deportations from scores of population centers.

Artsakh (*the historical name of Nagorno-Karabakh – M.M.*) refused to tolerate the repressive policies of Azerbaijani authorities and repeatedly alerted central USSR authorities to the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh. However, all such moves were crushed with cruelty by the Soviet totalitarian system. With the Gorbachev Perestroika, the Artsakh national liberation movement entered a new era that culminated on September 2, 1991 with the creation of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic.

In the course of the disintegration of the USSR, two de-facto and de-jure independent states were thus formed on the territory of the former Sovi-

et Republic of Azerbaijan: the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (NKR).

Back in autumn 1991, Azerbaijan started a full-scale war against the NKR. The war resulted in the deaths of many thousands and inflicted tremendous damage on the region's economy. The people of Nagorno-Karabakh paid a terrible price for the right to a free and dignified life. The cease-fire agreement signed by Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia in May 1994 has been observed up to date. A unique feature of this conflict is that for all these years, the cease-fire has been maintained without international peacekeeping forces or international peacekeeping operations. The armistice in the conflict zone relies on the military and political balance and a number of factors of world politics.

Since the war, Nagorno-Karabakh has managed to restore much of what had been destroyed by the war and achieved a lot of progress in its state-building, social, economic and democratic development. The creation and upgrading of the army of Nagorno-Karabakh has been important for preserving stability and security in the region. The army of the NKR defends it against possible military intervention or terrorist raids from the territory of Azerbaijan, and implements peacekeeping functions in a situation where political relations between Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan have not been normalized.

Since Azerbaijan has constituted a genuine threat to the security of Nagorno-Karabakh under all its regimes, it is still critically important to ensure the external security of the NKR.

Meanwhile, the NKR presents no threat to Azerbaijan's security or development. On the contrary, ever since Azerbaijan and Karabakh separated in legal terms and subsequently also through military action, and eventually signed an armistice, Azerbaijan has been going through a stage of rapid economic development, as confirmed by statistical data quoted by Azerbaijan's President at a cabinet meeting in spring 2008. According to the President, Azerbaijan's economy grew by 96 percent in four years from 2004 to 2007, its economic potential doubled, and it continues to develop at very high rate. Azerbaijan's budget grows every year, reaching for \$12bn in 2008, ten times the 2003 budget. Azerbaijan's per capita budget expenditure is one of the highest in the CIS and is quite high by international standards.

It can thus be said that the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic within its 1994 post-war boundaries does not hinder the development of Azerbaijan. Moreover, today's de-facto border between the NKR and Azerbaijan, demarcated as a result of ethno-territorial separation, is an important component of regional stability. On one hand, the current situation makes it possible for the countries of the region to develop; on the other hand, it guarantees the rights of NKR citizens to physical security and national independence.

Obviously, had the NKR remained an enclave within the illegitimate borders of the former Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast, it would have been unable to develop independently, ensure its military security, protect its environment or provide stable food and energy supplies. It is also obvious that Azerbaijan's territorial claims to Nagorno-Karabakh are based on political ambitions, not on Azerbaijan's vital development needs.

Besides, the armistice between Azerbaijan and the NKR is only sustained as long as their military and political potentials remain in equilibrium. The territories liberated in the course of the war (into which Nagorno-Karabakh was dragged against its wishes) are strategically important for this equilibrium. Should the current layout be changed prematurely and without prior guarantees in the form of duly ratified inter-state agreements, this will immediately upset the equilibrium and most certainly trigger a new war.

Nagorno-Karabakh is against war and plays a stabilizing role in its region. In post-war years, Karabakh regularly came up with peacekeeping initiatives, declared its readiness for direct talks with Baku and facilitated a dialog between non-governmental organizations of the NKR and Azerbaijan. Evidently, Nagorno-Karabakh's openness does not trigger an adequate reaction from Baku. Azerbaijan's position is very different; its declarations sum up to the following: 'we want peace but only on our terms, otherwise we shall seek a military solution'.

In view of the military potentials that the parties have accumulated in the 14 years of truce, it is certain that renewal of hostilities in this region will entail disastrous consequences for the entire South Caucasus and will definitely involve neighboring countries. Therefore, the adherence of the Armenian parties to a peaceful settlement of the conflict is a manifestation of responsibility vis-a-vis one's own nation and the other nations of the region, rather than a sign of weakness.

Rivalry and competition among the countries of the region must be counterbalanced by cooperation and awareness of common destiny. Nagorno-Karabakh believes that regional cooperation in economic and other spheres can start during the peace process, i.e. even before the conflict is fully resolved. Efforts at conflict settlement should run parallel to the creation of multilateral ties among the nations of the region.

Evidently, the establishment of mutually beneficial economic ties among the countries involved in the conflict will create a positive atmosphere for the handling of all complex political issues. The international community approves and supports this approach. In particular, the European Union, the European Council and the OSCE regularly encourage the countries of the region to unblock communications and to establish regional cooperation. Official Baku has so far negatively reacted to calls by European structures and individual countries, perceiving them as attempts to pressurize Azerbai-

jan. Measures to establish trust proposed by the NKR do not evoke a positive response from Azerbaijan's establishment either. Meanwhile, the NKR is proposing measures of a purely humanitarian nature that would benefit both the soldiers stationed on both sides of the border between Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh and the people living in its vicinity.

Baku continues to block the land communications of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh; the standards of international law qualify such actions as hostile. Besides, the blockade violates UN Security Council resolutions on the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. Turkey's land blockade of Armenia further aggravates the regional confrontation and obstructs the region's development. In the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, Turkey plays two contradictory roles at once: on one hand, Ankara is involved in brokering conflict resolution as a member of the OSCE Minsk Group; on the other, it is an open supporter of Azerbaijan and participates in its blockade of Armenia.

There is no doubt that unblocked communications, mutually beneficial economic and humanitarian contacts, and joint scientific, educational and cultural projects would all serve to reduce the tension among the countries of the region. Regional countries sustain considerable financial losses through the absence of direct economic ties: although they continue to trade with each other, they have to do it via third countries. Legalized trade and direct business contacts would reduce corruption risks in the region, promoting the economic integration of the South Caucasus. Economic integration, in its turn, would itself become an incentive to regional peace and stability.

We believe that the security of the NKR must be maintained at several levels: through the NKR's own security system, through Armenia's documented guarantees, through the guarantees that will be included into the text of the future peace treaty with Azerbaijan, and through international guarantees, including the possible incorporation of the NKR into regional and sub-regional security systems.

In the changing world order, time has come for international stakeholders to reconsider the option of including the NKR in regional security systems. That would certainly make sense, since the internationally recognized division of the South Caucasus into just three states does not take all regional actors into account and cannot provide for full-fledged long-term regional stability.

Such an approach can, on the one hand, boost the responsibility of all regional subjects for the fate of the South Caucasus; on the other hand, it will enable international agencies to cooperate with the security structures that are in place in the region. This can be done, for example, within the framework of the OSCE Forum for Security Co-operation.

There is a need for solutions that would acknowledge the existing ethno-territorial layout without upsetting the geopolitical balance of interests in the region. Experience of conflict resolution in the Balkans has shown that it is only the demarcation of de-facto borders between states that can result in peaceful conflict-free coexistence based on the support of the European and international communities. Nowadays more and more countries that become stakeholders in conflict resolution arrive at the opinion that it is safer, less expensive and more efficient to recognize the right of “unrecognized states” to sovereignty and political autonomy than to force them back into former parent states. There is awareness that coercion will only generate new problems with international and regional security.

Based on the natural concept of peaceful coexistence between the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic and the Republic of Azerbaijan, the settlement of the conflict between Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan will become a pledge of stability, cooperation and prosperity of the nations of the South Caucasus and its neighbors.

Nagorno-Karabakh does not pursue aggressive or destructive objectives; it has created and is now developing its armed forces in order to ensure peace and security; it is building its statehood based on modern standards and developing its economy based on market relations. Therefore, in the near future, the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic must become a full-fledged partner of the countries of the region and be involved in EU projects such as the European Neighborhood Policy and Eastern Partnership.

Establishing full-fledged regional cooperation in various domains, including security, will involve overcoming numerous obstacles such as unsettled conflicts, conflicting interests of regional and external players, differences between the political systems of the South Caucasus countries, the arms race, complex Armenian-Turkish relations, poor democratic development and so on.

Due to the above, many moves to adopt a Stability Pact for the South Caucasus failed to receive the well-deserved support of regional players. The policies of the South Caucasus countries must be based on awareness of shared regional interests that will determine the efficiency of regional cooperation and enable all actors to reach consensus on priority issues and to define approaches to problem solving. Evidently, external players will continue using the conflicts to strengthen their hold on the region. Therefore, policies need to be built on common concerns and mutual benefits rather than on conflicts of interest between powerful players. Security and trade must become priorities for regional cooperation. Once normal trade is resumed, blockades are lifted and regional infrastructures rebuilt (for which INOGATE and TRACECA have paved the way), the region can become a WTO-compatible zone of free trade.

South Caucasus has become one of the most militarized regions in the world. Huge amounts of weapons and military equipment accumulated in the region put arms control, restriction and reduction on the immediate agenda. With few exceptions, the South Caucasus has no operational systems for controlling or restricting conventional weapons.

It is important to note that as long as the international community keeps postponing the recognition of the independence of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, and the flow of oil revenues into Azerbaijan continues, Azerbaijan will be encouraged to escalate the arms race, build up its militaristic rhetoric and toughen its position in the peace talks. In the meantime, the de-escalation of the arms race would release resources from the military budget and have positive impact on social welfare and investment into civilian infrastructures. The countries that invest into the oil sector of Azerbaijan bear a lot of responsibility for preserving peace in the region. These countries, and Russia also, should unambiguously and consistently point out the futility of Baku's plans to resolve the conflict with the NKR by military means.

It is especially important that the U.S. should control the use of the military infrastructure which is being built in Azerbaijan with U.S. support for the purpose of maintaining security in the Caspian Basin. The U.S. must put in place an efficient system for preventing the use of this infrastructure against the NKR and the Republic of Armenia.

The recognition of the NKR by the international community will open new opportunities for consolidating regional security. The U.S. and European countries could thus help Azerbaijan to overcome existing psychological barriers and start cooperating with all the countries of South Caucasus, the way the West helped Serbia to start integrating into the European Union while also saving its face in the Kosovo issue. Such developments will bring long-term stability to the South Caucasus and help Europe secure its energy supplies. Some European experts believe that the resolution of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh – the only conflict within the region involving two recognized states and an unrecognized one (actually, half of the six political entities in the South Caucasus) – is the key to significant progress in maintaining security and reaching an agreement on cooperation in the region.

I would like to conclude by saying that regional stability and security will require all countries in the region to join efforts aimed at preventing critical tensions in global and regional issues. The quality of people's lives in the entire region can be greatly improved through joint efforts to maintain peace, achieve sustainable peaceful settlement of conflicts, protect the environment, ensure rational use of natural resources, establish a balanced energy infrastructure, fight diseases and prevent epidemics.

Stability and trust in the region will open up prospects for integration in almost every sphere of social, economic and political life. The dignified future of all nations of the South Caucasus can only be based on mutual respect and equal partnership.

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GEORGIA AND THE CONFLICTS ON ITS TERRITORY

BY PAATA ZAKAREISHVILI

An observer may come to the conclusion that if indeed there is something that holds the South Caucasus together, those are primarily the unresolved conflicts. We can say with certainty that the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh now lacks the dynamism that is apparent in the conflicts smoldering on Georgia's territory. Awaiting resolution in Georgia are two unsettled ethno-territorial conflicts which passed through military phases of confrontation back in the early 1990s and are now in deep stagnation. Those are the conflict in Abkhazia (in which armed hostilities terminated in autumn 1993), and the conflict on the territory of the former South-Ossetian Autonomous Oblast (in which armed hostilities terminated in summer 1992). Today, negotiations are in deadlock and are only reawakened once in a while by incidents which, with the eager help of Georgian authorities, attract the attention of international organizations and foreign media. Meanwhile, incidents have a tendency to expand and threaten regional security. Such were the escalations in May 1998 and October 2001 in Abkhazia, while the July 2004 armed escalation on the territory of the former South-Ossetian Autonomous Oblast was on the verge of turning into large-scale warfare. A number of agreements on conflict resolution have been signed but not one of them was fully implemented, and the parties in conflict are constantly reproached for violation of agreements. To date, negotiations have been suspended and there is no sign that they will shortly be resumed in either of the conflicts.

Even the names of conflicts and of the conflicting sides are subject to misunderstanding. On March 15, 2007 Mikheil Saakashvili in his annual address to Parliament expressed his vexation with people who use the terms "Georgian-Abkhaz conflict" or "Georgian-Ossetian conflict": These terms, he said, "have been invented by silly and uninformed people... We should understand this once and for all. It is another lie by the ideologists and spin doctors of the empire."¹ He had also said similar things a year earlier, on February 14, 2006.

Two different names for the Abkhaz conflict are used in print and in speech: "the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict" and "the conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia". The former version is mostly encountered in the documents co-signed by the Abkhaz side, for example, in the "Declaration on measures for

¹ <http://www.president.gov.ge/?l=E&m=0&sm=6&st=0&id=2164>

a political settlement of the Georgian/Abkhaz conflict”¹, signed in Moscow on April 4, 1994. This version is also used in some of the documents signed by the Commonwealth of Independent States, for example, in the “Statement by the Council of CIS Heads of State on the Implementation of a Peacekeeping Operation in the Zone of the Georgian-Abkhaz Conflict” signed in Moscow on April 15, 1994.²

The other version, i.e., “conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia”, is used in documents developed without the participation of Abkhazia and only signed by internationally recognized formations. In all resolutions of the UN Security Council, including the Resolution of July 29, 2005, the conflict is referred to as “the conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia.”³ The July 29, 2005 Resolution 1615 (2005) is a typical example: “Stressing that the continued lack of progress on key issues of a comprehensive settlement of the conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia, is unacceptable...” However, following the annual address by Georgia’s President to Parliament on February 14, 2006, in which he said, “We should stop using the words the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict and the Georgian-Ossetian conflict. These are incorrect terms made up by our ill-wishers”, all subsequent resolutions of the UN Security Council use the phrase “Georgian-Abkhaz conflict”. This fact shows that vision of the UN Security Council began to differ from that of Georgia’s President. E.g., Resolution 1666 (2006) of the UN Security Council of March 31, 2006, “supports all efforts by the United Nations and the Group of Friends of the Secretary-General which are guided by their determination to promote a settlement of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict.”⁴ Resolution 1808 (2008) of the UN Security Council of April 15, 2008: “*supports* all efforts by the United Nations and the Group of Friends of the Secretary-General, which are guided by their determination to promote a settlement of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict.”⁵

There is a similar problem with the name of the conflict on the territory of the former South-Ossetian Autonomous Oblast. The basic document on the settlement of this conflict signed in Sochi on June 24, 1992, is entitled “Agreement on Principles of Settlement of the Georgian-Ossetian Conflict.”⁶ This is how the conflict has been called ever since. E.g., the “Agreement between the Government of the Russian Federation and the Government of the Republic of Georgia on economic rehabilitation of regions with-

¹ <http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/{65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9}/Georgia%20S1994397.pdf>

² <http://www.un.org/russian/peace/pko/unomig/94-476.pdf>.

³ <http://www.unomig.org/data/file/687/N0544618.pdf>

⁴ http://www.unomig.org/data/file/809/060331_SRES_1666.pdf

⁵ http://www.unomig.org/data/file/973/080415_SC_resolution_eng.pdf

⁶ http://www.rrc.ge/law/xels_1992_06_24_e.htm?lawid=368&lng_3=en

in the zone of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict. September 14, 1993.” This has been the name of the conflict until today. It is also corroborated by all protocols of the Joint Control Commission, starting from autumn 1994, including the “Agreement on the Further Development of the Process for the Peaceful Settlement of the Georgian-Ossetian Conflict and on the Joint Control Commission of 31 October 1994”, or the statement signed in Sochi on November 5, 2003 during a meeting between Zurab Zhvania and Eduard Kokoity, “Statement. Outcomes of Zhvania-Kokoity Meeting... In the course of the constructive meeting, an exhaustive exchange of views on Georgian-Ossetian conflict resolution issues took place... The parties agreed that strengthening confidence measures, demilitarization of the zone of conflict, security guarantees and implementation of the economic programs will give additional impulse to further constructive negotiations with a view to full-scale political conflict resolution” etc.¹ However, the peace plan, developed in detail by Georgia’s government and distributed at the OSCE Ministerial in Ljubljana in late 2005, was officially entitled “Georgian-South Ossetian Peace Plan developed by the Government of Georgia.”² Meanwhile, the document made public at the Batumi Conference in July 2005 was entitled “Initiative of the Georgian Government with Respect to the Peaceful Resolution of the Conflict in South Ossetia.”³

However, a joint statement made by the Presidents of Georgia and Ukraine on April 30, 2008, read: “The Presidents of Ukraine and Georgia have studied the current situation around the settlement of Georgian-Abkhaz and Georgian-South-Ossetian conflicts (...) Ukraine and Georgia confirm that resolutions of the Georgian-Abkhaz and Georgian-South-Ossetian conflicts are possible only by using peaceful means and within the framework of the resolutions by the UN Security Council (...).”⁴

Agreements signed in 1993-1994 created all the institutions responsible for managing and transforming the conflicts through a peaceful process. The legal and political basis for the settlement of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict is the “Agreement on Principles of Settlement of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict” signed June 24, 1992 in Sochi between the Republic of Georgia and the Russian Federation.⁵ This Agreement resulted in a final and genuine ceasefire on the entire territory of the former South-Ossetian Autonomous Oblast. According to the agreement, a Joint Control Commission was estab-

¹ <http://www.iccn.org.ge/ossetia/meetings/2004/2004-11-05%20Statement%20on%20Zhvania-Kokoity%20mtg%20in%20Sochi%20Eng.pdf>

² <http://www.nsc.gov.ge/download/pdf/eutoEN.pdf>

³ <http://www.president.gov.ge/?l=E&m=0&sm=5>

⁴ http://www.embassy.mfa.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=44&info_id=4710

⁵ http://www.rrc.ge/law/xels_1992_06_24_e.htm?lawid=368&lng_3=en

lished, a quadrilateral body with the participation of Georgian, South-Ossetian, Russian and North-Ossetian parties. In June 1992, based upon the agreement, a joint trilateral peacekeeping force was set up, with 1500 servicemen under joint command.

On November 6, 1992, the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (subsequently the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, OSCE) passed a resolution under which it became directly involved in the settlement of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict.

The legal and political foundations for the settlement of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict are the “Declaration on Measures for a Political Settlement of the Georgian-Abkhaz Conflict”¹ signed on April 4, 1994, the “Quadripartite Agreement on Voluntary Return of Refugees and Displaced persons”² signed on the same day, and the “Agreement on a Cease-fire and Separation of Forces”³ signed on May 14, 1994.

The United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) was established on August 24, 1993, by resolution 858 (1993) of the UN Security Council.⁴ Security Council resolution 937 (1994) of July 21, 1994 determined the UNOMIG mandate, consisting in the following: “(a) To monitor and verify the implementation by the parties of the Agreement on a Cease-fire and Separation of Forces signed in Moscow on 14 May 1994; (b) To observe the operation of the CIS peace-keeping force within the framework of the implementation of the Agreement; (c) To verify, through observation and patrolling, that troops of the parties do not remain in or re-enter the security zone and that heavy military equipment does not remain or is not reintroduced in the security zone or the restricted weapons zone; (d) To monitor the storage areas for heavy military equipment withdrawn from the security zone and the restricted weapons zone in cooperation with the CIS peace-keeping force as appropriate; (e) To monitor the withdrawal of troops of the Republic of Georgia from the Kodori valley to places beyond the boundaries of Abkhazia, Republic of Georgia; (f) To patrol regularly the Kodori valley; (g) To investigate, at the request of either party or the CIS peacekeeping force or on its own initiative, reported or alleged violations of the Agreement and to attempt to resolve or contribute to the resolution of such incidents; (h) To report regularly to the Secretary-General within its mandate, in particular on the implementation of the Agreement, any viola-

¹ <http://se1.isn.ch/serviceengine/FileContent?serviceID=47&fileid=A52437C7-1A84-0DD3-D9EC-7C34721F42DF&lng=en>

² <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country,,,MULTILATERALTREATY,GEO,4562d8cf2,3ae6b31a90,0.html>

³ http://www.usip.org/library/pa/georgia/georgia_19940514.html

⁴ [http://www.undemocracy.com/S-RES-858\(1993\)](http://www.undemocracy.com/S-RES-858(1993))

tions and their investigation by UNOMIG, as well as other relevant developments; (i) To maintain close contacts with both parties to the conflict and to cooperate with the CIS peace-keeping force and, by its presence in the area, to contribute to conditions conducive to the safe and orderly return of refugees and displaced persons.”¹

On August 22, 1994, the Council of Heads of State of the Commonwealth of Independent States adopted a resolution on the use of CIS peace-keeping forces in the zone of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict. This decision was based upon requests made by the Abkhaz party on May 15, 1994 and the Georgian party, on May 16, 1994, wherein the parties in conflict asked the leadership of the CIS almost unanimously to set up peacekeeping forces as soon as possible in order to maintain peace in the conflict zone. The CIS Heads of State decided to set up a CIS peacekeeping force (PKF) in the conflict zone composed of Russian troops. The peacekeeping force had to carry out the following tasks: a) to secure the observance of cease-fire, establishment of peace and prevention of hostilities in the zone of conflict through separation of armed formations of the conflicting parties; b) to create the conditions for the safe and dignified return of persons who have abandoned the zone of conflict, to their previous places of residence, and to implement other provisions of the Quadripartite Agreement of April 4, 1994 on the voluntary return of refugees and displaced persons.²

The April 4, 1994 “Declaration on Measures for a Political Settlement of the Georgian-Abkhaz Conflict” launched the Geneva Process which became the framework for sustained Georgian-Abkhaz peace negotiations. At a Resumed Meeting in Geneva on November 17-19, 1997, the Georgian and Abkhaz parties “agreed to establish a Coordinating Council and, within its framework, working groups on the following areas:

- issues related to the lasting non-resumption of hostilities and security problems;
- refugees and internally displaced persons;
- economic and social problems.”³

At the meeting in Geneva, it was also decided to create a Group of Friends of the Secretary-General on Georgia. The status of the Group enables it to take part in meetings and conferences, and come forward with proposals on various aspects of the peace process, including political settle-

¹ <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N94/298/25/PDF/N9429825.pdf?OpenElement>

² Collection of documents on the settlement of the conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia, adopted between 1992 and 1999. Ed. G.Uridia. Tbilisi, 1999, p.40-42 (in Georgian).

³ <http://se1.isn.ch/serviceengine/FileContent?serviceID=47&fileid=BA8A4BA9-0C6F-8D82-DA49-CCBDEBFCF8BB&lng=en>

ment. The Group of Friends of the Secretary-General is not a party at negotiations and is not invited to sign documents agreed upon by the parties in conflict in the course of negotiations. The Group includes the U.S., Russia, the UK, Germany and France.

A common vision of the international community of the basic principles for settlement of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict is reflected in the so-called Boden Document.¹ Notwithstanding its significance, both the Abkhaz and Georgian parties disagree with the Boden Document on matters of principle. The Abkhaz party is apprehensive of reintegration into the Georgian state, while the Georgian party is against the fixation of the sovereign status of Abkhazia. Is this contradiction irresolvable? Solutions stemming from the Boden Document may become acceptable for both parties provided that the basic principles of the document are supplemented with concrete, legally and politically defined democratic mechanisms and guarantees. However, this will have to be done by the Georgian and Abkhaz parties themselves, since neither UN nor the international community are able to determine the degree of sovereignty that would meet the interests of both parties at the same time.

Despite the existence of above-mentioned sustainable institutions, despite many years of work on transformation and resolution of the two conflicts and the signing of multiple treaties and agreements, the conflicting parties have for the last 15 years continued holding radical and irreconcilable positions. At the level of rhetoric, Abkhazia and Ossetia are striving for independence from Georgia and for international recognition of their independence. Meanwhile, Georgia has so far failed to answer the crucial question: what is the Georgian authorities' vision of the future arrangement of the country, what are the mechanisms that guarantee the sovereignty of Abkhazia and former South-Ossetian Autonomous Oblast within the Georgian state, and in general, what level of sovereignty could be on the table? The Georgian authorities have not yet elaborated a consistent position on this issue.

As long as the Georgian authorities do not have a consistent political and legal position on the conflicts, hopes for conflict settlement are mostly fastened upon external forces (the UN, Russia, the U.S., the Group of Friends of the UN Secretary-General, the OSCE, the EU and GUAM). The current situation causes problems for friendly countries and institutions when the government has no clear-cut position on the status and guarantees of the breakaway regions within the Georgian state. Friendly countries have obvious difficulties in persuading the Abkhaz and Ossetian parties to reunite with Georgia.

¹ http://smr.gov.ge/en/abkhazia/documents/bodens_document.

In the past 15 years, 2004-2006 were the most dynamic years in the Georgian-Ossetian conflict. Current trends have clearly been determined by the abrupt change in the Georgian policy with regard to the role of Russia in the settlement of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict. This trend got its first impetus from the armed escalation in the Tskhinvali region in June-July 2004. After Eduard Shevardnadze and then the leader of the Adjarian Autonomy Aslan Abashidze were efficiently and painlessly shown the door, the political elite of Georgia became euphoric and believed that all other problems confronting the new Georgian authorities would be just as easy to handle. That was the approach they decided to apply to the Georgian-Ossetian conflict. Unfortunately, the policies of Georgia were too aggressive and disregarded the interests of the Ossetian population, provoking an armed conflict. The reckless strategy led to deaths on both sides and suspension of social and economic projects and of the support of Western institutions. The alienation between the Ossetian and Georgian populations within the region grew deeper. The result was exactly the opposite of what the Georgian authorities had planned for.

The events of summer 2004 were followed by some re-thinking of strategy. In September 2004 President Mikheil Saakashvili submitted to the meeting of the UN General Assembly a plan of successive resolution of conflicts on Georgia's territory. On January 26, 2005, he successfully presented a new South Ossetia Peace Initiative.¹ In December 2005 at the OSCE Ministerial in Ljubljana, the Government of Georgia came up with a Georgian-South Ossetian Peace Plan developed by the Government of Georgia.²

On December 12, 2005 the de-facto President of South Ossetia Eduard Kokoity unexpectedly proposed an Initiative on the peaceful settlement of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict. Kokoity suggested a number of steps to promote the improvement of relations between South Ossetia and Georgia:

- “1. Since unilateral Georgian-Ossetian peace plans have not yielded the desired results, I consider it necessary to start the joint development of a Georgian-Ossetian program of subsequent steps towards the fair settlement of the conflict;
2. I suggest establishing by February 1, 2006, within the framework of the Joint Control Commission on the settlement of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict, a working group responsible for elaborating such a coordinated program;
3. This program, in my opinion and taking into account some previously made suggestions, has to include the following provisions:

¹ [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=27445](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=27445)

² <http://www.nsc.gov.ge/download/pdf/eutoEN.pdf>

- a three-stage settlement scheme, approved by the parties in conflict:
 - stage one - demilitarization of the conflict zone, rehabilitation of trust and security guarantees,
 - stage two - social-economic rehabilitation,
 - stage three - political settlement,
 - the need for urgent meetings of heads of law enforcement and security bodies within the Joint Control Commission with the purpose of coordinating operations in the conflict zone;
 - meetings among members of Parliament, representatives of public organizations, intellectuals and clergy;
 - establishing an informal structure that will assist the Joint Control Commission, with possible participation of legislators representing the parties involved in the settlement process; initial development of the concept of a most-favored economic zone that could include the Alagir district of Northern Ossetia, South Ossetia and the Gori district of Georgia, with regard to the provisions of the December 23, 2000 Russian-Georgian Intergovernmental Agreement on interaction in rehabilitating the economy within the zone of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict and on the return of refugees;
 - establishing conditions required for the implementation of economic projects in the conflict zone funded by the European Commission and OSCE;
 - political and legal evaluation of events in 1989-1992 and 2004;
 - development and adoption by Georgia of the law for restitution based on international standards;
 - commitments made by parties to the international community not to build up offensive potential and not to use armed forces in the conflict zone;
4. To trigger the development of this joint program, I propose to convene a meeting of authorized representatives of the parties within the format of the Joint Control Commission with OSCE participation not later than February 15, 2006;
 5. The working group must submit a coordinated project of the joint program for approval to the Joint Control Commission by March 1, 2006. This joint program could become the basis for discussion at the meeting of top political leaders of the parties participating in conflict settlement, as suggested at the meeting of the Joint Control Commission in Ljubljana on November 15 – 16, 2005.”¹

¹ *Regnum News Agency*, 12.12.2005 www.regnum.ru (in Russian)

Unfortunately, these interesting and promising initiatives were not implemented. Short-term results overruled the long-term prospects, and at the moment, not a single one of these proposals is being negotiated.

Parallel to peaceful initiatives promoted by the Georgian government, a group headed by Georgia's Minister of Interior Vano Merabishvili on November 19, 2005 arranged the escape from Tskhinval jail of Jemal Karkusov, former Secretary of Security Council of the self-proclaimed Republic of South Ossetia, and his brother, and gave them asylum on territory controlled by the Georgian authorities. "It was a very complex operation that took six months to prepare. It is a great victory", Vano Merabishvili told journalists on November 19, 2005. He thus proved that all the peaceful initiatives had been mere camouflage. It was after this jail escape that Georgia's policy changed completely, and the conflict became confrontational again.

Approaches were reviewed once again, and a new project was launched, based on the idea of dividing the Ossetian population on the territory of the former South-Ossetian Autonomous Oblast. The "alternative government of South Ossetia" was created, headed by Dmitry Sanakoev who had fought against Georgia in 1990-1992 but changed sides in 2006, and has since August 1, 2007 headed the Temporary Administration of South Ossetia. His brief is governmental supervision of self-governance bodies within the administrative territorial unit of South Ossetia. This authority has been granted to Sanakoev by a Georgian Government decree of July 27, 2007.

Since the creation of the "alternative government", Georgia started to demand that changes be made in the existing format of negotiations which has become irrelevant and inoperative. Since summer 2006, not a single Joint Control Commission meeting has in fact taken place. The Georgian side says that it is meaningless to participate in *a priori* inefficient formats. The Georgian side deems it necessary to establish contacts between the Tskhinvali de-facto authorities and the Temporary Administration of South Ossetia headed by D. Sanakoev. On February 29, 2008, State Minister for Re-integration Temur Iakobashvili came forward with the initiative to change the format of the Joint Control Commission (Georgia, South Ossetia, Russia and North Ossetia). In his words, "instead of Joint Control Commission, the negotiations will follow a new formula, 2+2+2, representing the Georgian side and the government of Dmitry Sanakoev; the Russian side and the de-facto authorities of South Ossetia; OSCE and EU. On March 4, Iakobashvili announced that Tbilisi no longer wished to continue talks on the settlement of the conflict in South Ossetia within the Joint Control Commission.¹ In contrast to Georgia, Russia intends to retain the format of the Joint Control Commission.

¹ <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=17257&search=jcc>

The conflict in Abkhazia does not show the same dynamism as was observed on the territory of the former South-Ossetian Autonomous Oblast. Despite the fact that Russia officially recognizes Georgia's territorial integrity, in actual fact Abkhazia has been economically absorbed by Russia. On March 6, 2008, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Russia declared that Moscow was unilaterally pulling out of the 1996 CIS Agreement that established economic sanctions against Abkhazia.¹ By this decision, Russia turned Abkhazia into one more subsidized region in the Caucasus. Almost all residents of Abkhazia hold passports of the Russian Federation, while the domestic political life of Abkhazia is largely dependent on the will of the Kremlin. Georgians constitute approximately one third of Abkhazia's population. Nevertheless, the use and spread of the Georgian language is deliberately restricted. The operation of Georgian-language schools has been formally banned in Abkhazia, so that teaching in Georgian is done on a semi-legal basis at Russian-language schools.

On April 16, 2008, President Putin of Russia instructed the Government of Russia and other state bodies to establish official relations with the relevant bodies of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.¹ The Russian government was instructed:

- To establish cooperation with the relevant bodies of Abkhazia and South Ossetia;
- To ensure cooperation in trade and economy, in social, scientific and cultural spheres, including cooperation with the regions of Russia;
- To establish a list of documents which are issued by the actual bodies of power in Abkhazia and South Ossetia to natural persons and will be recognized in the Russian Federation;
- To recognize legal entities registered under the laws of Abkhazia and South Ossetia;
- To cooperate with Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the framework of legal assistance in civil, family and criminal matters;
- To ensure that territorial bodies of the Russian Foreign Ministry will in case of need perform individual consular functions in the interest of persons permanently resident in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

The principal motivation of Russia's actions along that line is, as stated, protection of the interests of Abkhaz and South Ossetian populations, including Russian citizens who reside there. In fact, this step is an attempt to legalize Russia's annexation of the two self-proclaimed regions of Georgia. In this regard the President of Georgia made a statement, noting, "We

¹ http://www.un.int/russia/new/MainRoot/docs/off_news/060308/newen1.htm

¹ http://www.un.int/russia/new/MainRoot/docs/off_news/160408/newen1.htm

expect and demand that the Russian Federation revise all those decisions, which breach Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity... I am astonished and anxious about the provocative nature of Russia's move and at the same time I am satisfied, for the first time, with the sharp response from the European Union, NATO, and our traditional partners...I think this reaction was a surprise for Russia as well. Russia has got accustomed to many people in the international community ignoring what it does. I think that serious revision of this policy started yesterday. Therefore, we should remain patient and resolute, but at the same time we should be very brave."¹

Among the multitude of documents created within the context of efforts to resolve the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict, there is one very special document called "The Key to the Future". It was produced by the Abkhaz side in May 2005. By reading it, one can see an alternative vision of ways to resolve or transform this protracted conflict. The document has many flaws and is easy to criticize. And yet it contains provisions that make it interesting, attractive and useful, given that the Abkhaz side was the first to officially hand its project to the Georgian side. Under these circumstances, the Abkhaz document is of interest to international organizations as well. Alongside totally unacceptable positions, the document also contains topics that deserve discussing. It says almost nothing on the positive role of Russia in the conflict (except describing as counterproductive Georgia's actions aimed at squeezing Russia out of the process of peaceful settlement of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict). In contrast to this, the document reiterates several times that Abkhazia wishes to start integrating into the Black Sea and European communities.

Another interesting proposition contained in this document is that the level of trust between the parties would rise considerably if the Abkhaz society saw that Georgia had not only conducted democratic reforms but also re-evaluated past mistakes; that the new Georgian leadership was prepared to apologize to the Abkhaz nation for conducting a state policy of assimilation, isolation and war. As a first step towards settlement, Georgia must renounce its political and economic pressure on Abkhazia and especially the economic and information blockade of Abkhazia. Georgia is directly responsible for having unleashed the 1992-1993 war. As the next step, the document proposes the following, "Practical action to improve trust. At the current stage of Georgian-Abkhaz relations, when the apprehensions of the Abkhaz side concerning the intensive militarization of Georgia are well substantiated, it is important to emphasize the need for measures against the renewal of military actions. These steps ask for rapid reaction and resolution

¹ <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=17604&search=saakashvili%20separatists>

because militarization inspires aggressive groups in Georgia's leadership and Georgian society to start a new war. Such attitudes are increasingly embedded into Georgian public opinion, resulting from the growing mistrust and alienation of the Abkhaz society."¹

One of the untapped resources to be used for quelling conflicts in Georgia is regional cooperation; alas, this resource is not yet in demand. A rare positive example has been the inclusion of a draft resolution on "Protracted Conflicts in the GUAM area and Their Implications for International Peace, Security and Development" in the agenda of the 61st Session of UN General Assembly. Should this resolution be adopted, the GUAM countries would be able to raise the scrutiny of their conflicts to a new level. Although Russia qualifies actions of this type as counterproductive and as attempts to dismount the existing mechanisms of conflict settlement, in fact they also pave the way to inventing new constructive and up-to-date models of interaction in the process of conflict management.

Unfortunately, the item has not yet become a resolution, and efforts are made to secure the support of the UN General Assembly of this resolution on frozen conflicts. It is also planned to advocate the adoption of a PACE resolution on frozen conflicts. However, against the background of this activity, on March 14, 2008 Azerbaijan unilaterally introduced to the UN General Assembly a draft resolution on "The Situation in the Occupied Territories of Azerbaijan" which was adopted by a majority vote. Since Azerbaijan is a GUAM member state, and the subject of this resolution corresponds to the declared interests of all other member states, this begs the question why Azerbaijan had to march into battle alone. Perhaps there had been no need to introduce the draft resolution on "Protracted conflicts in the GUAM and Their Implications" to the agenda of the 61st Session of the UN General Assembly, or perhaps this project is unrealistic? The decision by Azerbaijan to play a lone hand on the international arena has challenged the prospects of regional cooperation. Georgia did the same on May 15, 2008 at the UN General Assembly session which adopted the resolution on the return of refugees to Abkhazia. Clearly neither Georgia nor Azerbaijan is ready to join efforts. As to Armenia, it voted against both resolutions.

¹ From the author's personal archive.

OSSETIA: THE CONFLICT WITH GEORGIA AND PROBLEMS OF SURVIVAL

BY KOSTA DZUGAEV

In early July 2008, Georgian military started intense preparations to a military operation in South Ossetia. Troops with heavy military equipment moved close to Tskhinval. Georgian SU-25 Frogfoot aircraft flew over the territory of South Ossetia seven times, and unmanned explorers, five times. Colonel Nodar Bibilov, Police Chief of the village of Dmenis, was killed in a terrorist raid. There was a staged attempt to murder Dmitry Sanakoev, head of the so-called “alternative government”. There were multiple shootings at Ossetian frontier guards and peacekeepers, killing special police force officer Valery Dzakhoev. Ten residents were killed during shootings and mortar bombardments of Tskhinval. Georgian peacekeeping forces abandoned the deployment of the Joint Staff of the Joint Peacekeeping Force (JPKF), leaving their posts without notifying their peacekeeping colleagues. Georgian troops captured Sarabuk, one of the hills from which one can control several important roads in Ossetia. South Ossetian observers expressed their indignation at the fact that the Russian command of the JPKF made no attempt at preventing Georgian detachments from seizing the hill.¹

On July 7, Andrey Petrachenko, a boy of 14, was abducted; this evoked a sharp response both from the Ossetian security forces and the society. On the night of July 8, Ossetian soldiers detained a Georgian colonel and three sergeants who had penetrated the territory under Ossetian control to conduct artillery fire direction. The offensive was scheduled to start immediately after the departure of a delegation of Ambassadors of twenty OSCE member states. By the evening of July 8, the Georgian forces were awaiting orders at full alert, with deployed command posts and ongoing concentration of heavy weapons around Tskhinval. However, at about 9 p.m. two Russian MIG-29 fighters flew over Georgian emplacements after which Georgian troops were withdrawn from Tskhinval, and later the same day several detained Georgian soldiers were exchanged for the abducted boy.

Russia made an official statement justifying the need to carry out regular flights over the Georgia-Ossetia conflict zone: clearly, this brought a fundamentally new element into the conflict structure, indicating a certain turning point in the political, informational and military confrontation of

¹ Kochieva, I. “Tbilisi Leaders Suffer Sunstroke. Fighter Aircraft are the Best Medicine for Overheating” // *Respublika*. No 29 – 30, July 2008 (in Russian).

the conflicting parties and their patrons. In this context, the usually well-informed *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* deemed it permissible to put on its front page an article entitled “Russia May Declare South Ossetia and Abkhazia Its Vital Interest Zones.”¹

Publications in the South Ossetian press included, very symptomatically against this background, materials on a ‘geopolitical repartition’ of Georgia and a respective re-configuration of the entire geopolitical landscape of the South Caucasus.² It is worth noting that the idea of ‘hacking through a passage to Armenia’ had been discussed by South Ossetian militia back in 1992, without, however, attaining the level of public scrutiny.

These threatening developments in the zone of Georgian-Ossetian conflict demonstrate that the current conflict and the resulting self-determination of South Ossetia as an independent republic cannot be understood in terms of political analysis only. These events must be put in their historic and cultural context. The fact is that Georgia denies South Ossetia not only the status of a political formation but also that of a historical and national entity. South Ossetia, in its turn, is asserting its right not only to political existence as the Republic of South Ossetia but also to its historical existence. The current state of research on the issues under scrutiny makes it difficult to deny that following the collapse of the Alan State, the Ossetians established, as defined by R. Bzarov, “a free confederation of self-governed lands” (Ossetian “kombæstæ”), often referred to as “Societies,”³ and the Southern part of this Confederation after the assertion of Russia in the Caucasus conducted a bitter struggle for independence of the South Ossetians against feudal Georgian landlords (tawada) supported by Russian task forces. The first punitive expedition of the imperial troops to South Ossetia took place in 1802, i.e. immediately after the adoption of Kartlo-Kakhetia as subject of the Russian State⁴; then followed the uprisings of peasant highlanders accompanied by regular punitive expeditions in 1804, 1807-1808, 1809, 1810, 1812-1813, 1817, 1820-1821, 1830, 1836, 1838, 1839-1840, 1841-1842, 1848, 1850. It was only

¹ Perevozkina, M. “Flying Ahead. Russia May Declare South Ossetia and Abkhazia Its Vital Interest Zones”// *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 14.07.2008 (in Russian).

² Ostaev, S. “The Southern Project, or a Sober Look at the Territory Called ‘Georgia’”// *Respublika*. No 25 – 26, June 2008 (in Russian).

³ Bzarov, R.S. “The Independence of the Republic of South Ossetia Guarantees the Security and Safe Future of the Ossetian Nation”// *Štyr Nykhas*, No 31, September 2007 (in Russian).

⁴ Ossetia joined Russia of its own will in 1774; as underscored by R. Bzarov in the paper quoted above, “the top-level reception of the mission and conduct of Russian-Ossetian negotiations in St. Petersburg prove that Ossetia was perceived both in the Caucasus and in Russia as an integral country with special geopolitical status”.

in 1852 that the peasants of South Ossetia achieved the status of state sponsorship.¹ Thus, for fifty years the South Ossetians had been conducting a continuous war of liberation against the political administration, being well aware of the essence of what was going on. It is important to note that the Ossetians' resistance was taking place not only in the military field: they confronted the Georgian pressure in the legal field as well, which has been particularly emphasized by M. Bliev: "It is worth noting that, in its struggle for freedom and independence, the South-Ossetian population often relied on political and legal means. Unique in its political culture for the Caucasus where acute social and ethnic conflicts were mostly resolved by violent means, this confrontation has not yet ended."²

It was the national struggle of the South Ossetians that compelled A. I. Baryatinsky, Commander-in-Chief and Governor-General of the Caucasus, to exclude the Nar neighborhood from the Ossetian District in 1859 and to include the South-Eastern part of Ossetia in the Ossetian District of the Gori Region. Thus, except for a small territory in the South-West that remained part of the Rachin Region, South Ossetia became administratively consolidated, in fact, a *prototype of today's Republic*.

A similar step was the setting up in 1922 of the South-Ossetian Autonomous Oblast. This form of the South Ossetians' political existence was also the result of a violent confrontation with Georgian national extremism in 1918-1920. While 19th-century clashes are psychologically perceived as events of remote past, the memory of the 1920 genocide is still alive and has regularly been evoked during the current informational and ideological confrontation. South Ossetia was annihilated as the ethno-territorial homeland of South Ossetians. Its rehabilitation and subsequent institutionalization as an autonomy was by no means the decision of Georgian Bolsheviks led by G. Ordzhonikidze, the chief agent provocateur of South Ossetian massacres, but of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Bolshevik Party in which ethnic issues were supervised by I. Stalin. It is important to know that the original (and frequently reiterated) demand of South Ossetians was to become a Republic within Russia; however, Moscow needed South Ossetia as an anchor inside bolshevized Georgia that would keep the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic within the huge communist state, still under construction at that time. This is the reason why South Ossetia was included into Georgia; meanwhile, a group of Georgian Bolsheviks in the central administrative bod-

¹ *A Historical Chronology // The History of South Ossetia in Documents and Materials (1800-1864)*, Eds. I. Tkhoverbov and T.P. Stalinir, 1960. pp. 646 – 647 (in Russian).

² Bliev, M.M. *South Ossetia in the Collisions of Russian-Georgian Relations*. Moscow: 2006. p.229 (in Russian).

ies of the USSR managed, in the course of undercover dealings, to reduce the status of South Ossetia to an autonomous oblast in contrast to Abkhazia and Adzharia.¹

South Ossetia had lost its Kob-Trusovsky region in which Ossetians had lived for centuries in a compact community with their ethnic compatriots in Tualia (the Dwaleti of Georgian Chronicles); the memory of this separation was preserved throughout Soviet times. Following the collapse of the USSR, this fact was made public and is frequently evoked now that the conflict has escalated again. According to scholars Yu. N. Lalieva and I. N. Tskhovrebov, "In actual fact... the Georgians had covertly seized a whole Ossetian region. Its northern part, from village Kob to the watershed ridge, was annexed to the Kazbek district, and its southern part, from the Krestovy Pass to the south-eastern boundary of the Leningori region, was included in the Dushet District."²

In 1925, the leaderships of the North and South Ossetias made a move to merge the two republics. Stalin approved this initiative and discussed it with Ossetian leaders; however, through the efforts of A. Mikoyan and G. Ordzhonikidze, the initiative was suspended and eventually rejected. Mikoyan objected to the idea of a united Ossetia inside Georgia while Ordzhonikidze was dead against inclusion of united Ossetia into Russia. Nevertheless, this episode shows the profound irredentist rather than separatist nature of the South-Ossetian national movement. This sheds a new light on South Ossetian secessionism and begs for new approaches to the resolution of the conflict over South Ossetia.

¹ In his study "On the History of the South Ossetian Branch of the Georgian Communist Party (1917-1925)", the South Ossetian researcher V. D. Tskhovrebov quotes the first article of the decree which states the need to establish the Autonomous Oblast of South Ossetia. Tskhovrebov refers to p. 221 of a collection called "The Struggle of South Ossetian Workers for Soviet Rule, 1917-1921, Documents and Materials" that he found in Ossetian archives. The source used in this paper is an article by Professor Levon Toidze, PhD History, former Head Scholar of the Institute of Democratic Creation and Political Science of the Parliament of Republic of Georgia: Toidze, L. "The Creation of the Ossetian Autonomy in Georgia" // *The Ossetian Issue*, eds. Akakii Bakradze and Omar Chubinidze, Reviewers: Professors Jemal Stepnadze, Kvili Chataraishvili. Tbilisi: 1994, p. 297. Toidze's sources come from the Central State Archive of Georgian Modern History. In this case, the work of the Georgian historian is more reliable, since the cited Ossetian publications have apparently been doctored by communist censors. It is interesting that for a number of years after it became formally autonomous, South-Ossetia was still administered from the Georgian center. In a paper "On the Borders of South Ossetia" (*Yuzhnaya Osetiya*, February 9, 1994, in Russian) Yu. Lalieva and I. Tskhovrebov quote the resolution by the Presidium of the Caucasian Bureau of Central Committee of the Russian Communist Bolshevik Party of Oct. 31, 1921, wherein the Revolutionary Committee of Georgia was instructed "jointly with the South-Ossetian Executive Committee to delineate the boundaries of the South-Ossetian Republic", thus corroborating the reference quoted by L.Toidze.

² Yu.Lalieva and I. Tskhovrebov, op. cit.

The Republic of South Ossetia was established in 1990. In 1992, it adopted its Independence Act. Once again, this political, legal and historic event was accompanied with mass bloodshed, with the only difference that this time, attempts to destroy South Ossetia failed, although about one third of its territory is still controlled by the Georgians (as of July 31, 2008). Many Georgian and Ossetian analysts even now regard the declaration of the Republic as the personal (some even say arbitrary) political initiative of its leader T. Kulumbegov, a move that exacerbated the strain in Georgian-Ossetian relations. In reality, even the above brief overview of the main landmarks of South Ossetian history and political development is sufficient to conclude that the Republic of South Ossetia is a logical stage in the political development of the Southern branch of the Ossetian nation, reflecting its relatively autonomous ascent up the ladder of political development and the new impetus given to this development by recent circumstances, many of them tragic.

Had Georgia been a European-type state with developed democratic mechanisms of civil participation, the self-determination of South Ossetians would have taken longer but needn't have involved bloodshed. In reality, the Georgian state emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s as an authoritarian regime with extreme nationalistic ideology and the clearly defined political goal of establishing a unitary monoethnic state (exactly what is being done today, though without Abkhazia or South Ossetia).

Continued killings of Ossetians in the conflict zone have driven the situation into a truly hopeless deadlock. Settlement is out of the question, especially since Georgia consistently declines to sign an agreement on the non-use of force. Moreover, the murdered Ossetians are Russian citizens, and the Russian government cannot ignore this fact any longer.

Meanwhile, it must be emphasized that threats to use force or even the use of force by Georgia does not pose a fatal risk for the Republic of South Ossetia. Irakly Okruashvili, Georgia's former Minister of Defense who is now in opposition to Mikheil Saakashvili, was doubtless quite right when he said that it was currently impossible to resolve the South-Ossetian problem by military force, all the more so now that, in addition to Russia's clearly defined will to protect its citizens on the territory of the self-determined Republic of South Ossetia, the South Ossetians themselves have the means of responding to a new war.

Aware of this new reality, Tbilisi does not only carry on its military preparations but has also launched a project of an "alternative government" led by Dmitry Sanakoev. Moreover, it is clearly trying to activate the pro-Western potential of Ossetian non-governmental organizations. A large-scale event is scheduled for early August 2008 in Tbilisi within the framework of the so-called Ossetian-Georgian Civil Forum (cancelled because of the start

of military hostilities in the conflict zone – *Editor's note*); to this event, Georgians will try to recruit a number of Ossetians who only represent themselves as individuals and do not stand for any tangible minority inside the Ossetian society. While this and similar PR actions are clearly necessary to appeal to the Western sponsors of the Georgian authorities, these actions play a destructive role in the process of conflict settlement, because they rule out any genuine search for compromise.

The forecast for the conflict zone is rather distressing. Obviously, Georgia will not halt its movement towards the NATO, and judging from the current situation, the NATO will not renounce its intention to accept Georgia as a member state. However, even if a formal decision on Georgia's accession is not made, the NATO presence in Georgia is already a fact. As a mirror image of Georgia's accession to the NATO, South Ossetia and Abkhazia make efforts to build up their legitimacy which will inevitably culminate in the recognition of the Republic of South Ossetia by Russia and a number of other states, by analogy with Kosovo. These diametrically opposed political and historic trends find their expression in the cultural sphere, primarily in language policies. Georgia is doing its best to oust the Russian language from its cultural life, and the same is done in some other regions of the Caucasus. Meanwhile, the Russian language is one of the essential tools of communication among indigenous Caucasus nations, a valuable resource that it would be very unwise to destroy. The same logic applies to the zone of Georgia-Ossetia conflict: the new generation of Ossetians has no command of Georgian, and Georgians living in the neighborhood no longer understand Ossetian; this state of affairs further complicates relations between the two communities.

Statements by experts on both sides give no cause for optimism. In Ossetia, many people noticed a forecast (or verdict) made by the shrewd Georgian philosopher Gela Baratashvili, "The Georgian nation and the Georgian society, particularly the intellectuals, having failed to supply the society with a political and social alternative, have already forfeited their right to restrain the ruling elite from starting a large-scale war. (...) Georgia is doomed to war and therefore to a catastrophe. But it has to go through all this. Perhaps, a miracle will happen and Georgia will be revived, defying fate. All those grandiloquent debates on security, negotiations and international responsibility are mere hypocrisy."¹

The situation in the Georgian-Ossetian conflict has thus reached a critical stage at which very responsible decisions have to be made, and both sides invested all their resources into paving the way for decisions in their

¹ Baratashvili G. "The Georgian Gambit" // www.regnum.ru/725806.html, 21.10.2006.

favor. Ossetian public opinion reacts to Georgia's determination to achieve total victory over South Ossetia with a commitment to prevent Georgia at any cost from restoring its control over South Ossetia. In the face of this threat, the South-Ossetian society and now also the entire Ossetian society is consolidated and has very strong moral and psychological motivation.

ABKHAZIA IN THE MIDST OF RUSSIA, GEORGIA AND TURKEY

BY VITALY SHARIA

Russia: a Controversial Protector

During the Soviet era, in keeping with the Soviet “Nesting Dolls” principle of territorial administration, Abkhazia was governed by two centers at once: Tbilisi, the capital of the Georgian Soviet Republic, and Moscow, the capital of the USSR. Prior to 1953, the year of Stalin’s death and Beria’s execution, these centers acted in unison and led to events that many people in Abkhazia call “the second Muhajir wave”, i.e. the change of the ethno-demographic situation resulting from compulsory resettlement to Abkhazia of peasants from Western and Central Georgia, and from switching all Abkhazian schools to the Georgian language of instruction beginning with school year 1945-1946.

In the last decades of Soviet history, the Abkhazian Autonomous Republic was the scene of rallies held by Abkhazians once every 10-11 years in defense of their ethnic rights and against Georgian expansion, and each time protestors appealed to Moscow. As a result of this and other circumstances, the Russian Federation found itself involved in the 1992-1993 Georgian-Abkhazian war. At the height of the war, in summer 1993, I was sitting in Gudauta writing my book called “The Tragedy of Abkhazia” (published in Sochi in autumn 1993). I called one of its chapters “The Abkhazia-Georgia-Russia triangle”. It began with the description of a meeting of the leaders of Russia, Georgia, Abkhazia and other oblasts, regions and districts of the North Caucasus in Moscow’s President Hotel on September 3, 1992. The parties in conflict hoped that the meeting would put an end to the hostilities that started three weeks earlier when Georgian troops crossed into Abkhazia. However, the summary document of the meeting created only a semblance of conflict settlement, so that warfare soon flared again.

The position of Boris Yeltsin and of Russia’s leadership, which offered to act as mediator, reflected the contradictory attitudes and approaches to the conflict existing within the Russian society.

“Russia is indeed too big and too politically controversial for me to clearly outline its position with regard to this war,” I wrote in my book. “Let us not forget that the North Caucasus that raises its voice in Abkhazia’s defense is also the Russian Federation. Most ordinary Russians (provided they have heard about the conflict) no doubt sympathize with Abkhazia, first, as a natural response to the Abkhazians’ pro-Russian and the Georgians’ anti-Russ-

ian feelings, and second, as a natural move to defend the weak side from a strong aggressor.”

However, in the political sphere, there were too many complicating circumstances... For quite some time, the syndrome of “April 9, 1989” in relations between the democratic Russia and Georgia merged with another phenomenon, the Shevardnadze syndrome: for many people, standing up against Shevardnadze, a recent companion-in-arms on the August 1991 “barricades” in Moscow and the “peacekeeper” recognized by the international community, was equivalent to standing up against democracy. There was apprehension that an attempt to protect Abkhazians would be perceived by the West as a revival of Russia’s imperial aspirations, of its claims to the role of a gendarme, and Shevardnadze made full use of that apprehension, trying to bend Russian foreign policy to a pro-Georgian position.

At the same time, the primitive but ineradicable logic of politics whereby “the enemy of my friend is my enemy”, and the layout of parties in conflict in the post-Soviet space have created new active allies for the Abkhazians: Russian opposition groups such as the national-patriots and communists, who often call themselves ‘statists’ and are united by their nostalgic feeling about the USSR. Clearly, many of them were merely using Abkhazia as a tool in their own political battles.”¹

From the democratic camp, only a few lone figures came out to defend Abkhazians: Andrei Sakharov’s widow Yelena Bonner, politician and scholar Galina Starovoitova and the writer Andrei Bitov. The Russian press was also divided by its attitude to the parties in conflict: while *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* and *Izvestia* were clearly inclined to support the Georgian side, *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, *Literaturnaya Rossiya* and communist publications supported the Abkhazians.

Russia’s contradictory position clearly manifested itself in the role played by its army. On one hand, the Transcaucasian Military District with its headquarters in Tbilisi had supplied the Georgian Army with weapons and ammunition, although the meeting in Tashkent had previously ruled not to pass on the hardware of the former Soviet Army to states with internal conflicts. On the other hand, the Russian military group in Abkhazia (which was not controlled by the Command of the Transcaucasian Military District) and many Russian military experts did all they could to help Abkhazians to change the course of military action to their advantage.

After September 30, 1993, when almost the entire Georgian population fled from Abkhazia after the retreat of Georgian troops (although dwellers of the Gali Region soon returned), the Russian leadership made a swing towards

¹ *The Abkhaz Tragedy*. Sochi, 1993, p.53 (in Russian).

Tbilisi. The pressure on Abkhazia from Moscow reached its climax in the mid-1990s. The first Russian-Chechen war started in December 1994, a few days later the state boundary on the river Psou was closed in order to prevent Abkhazian militants from penetrating into Chechnya to help Dudaev, as the Kremlin expected they would. Russian border guards were ordered to stop Abkhaz men of conscription age from crossing into Russia. Two years on, in January 1996, the CIS Summit ruled to introduce economic sanctions against Abkhazia. Russia's participation in the sanctions was crucial. The unrecognized republic of Abkhazia found itself in a blockade.

Of all North Caucasus nations supporting Abkhazians in the war of 1992-1993, Chechens were the most numerous (although Johar Dudaev was not very happy about their support). The gratitude for help in that war, the resulting soldierly brotherhood and solidarity with a nation which, like the Abkhazians, rose up to fight for its independence: all this made Abkhazians sympathize with the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, a fact reflected in the non-governmental Abkhaz press.

And although some Abkhaz veterans were upset by being unable to help the Chechen resistance, if only in a symbolical way, subsequent events changed the attitude of the Abkhaz society to the Chechen war. It happened after the leaders of Ichkeria failed to make use of the gains resulting from the Khasaviurt Agreement, started a domestic struggle for power and organized terrorist raids that caused the death of innocent civilians. The attitude of the Abkhaz society to the Second Russian-Chechen war was substantially different from what it had been during the First war, and so was the attitude of pro-democratic actors in the Russian society.

Furthermore, Abkhazia appreciated the new attitude of the Russian leadership. In 1999, Prime Minister Putin revoked the ban for Abkhaz males to enter Russia. During his presidency, Russia simplified procedures for the issue of Russian international passports to Abkhazians, began to pay them Russian pensions and took other measures that substantially improved life in the unrecognized republic.

Winds from the West

In the last decade, Russia thus became Abkhazia's patron. At the same time, first the U.S. and in the last few years also the European Union declared more and more clearly their geopolitical interests in our region; after Romania and Bulgaria joined the EU in early 2007, the region became a neighbor of the EU. The world's two most powerful players oppose Russia and patronize Georgia: the U.S. more, the EU less, as many experts believe. Others note that two resolutions made by the OSCE in the early 1990s reflected the most hard-line position on Abkhazia ever expressed.

The re-orientation of the Georgian ruling elite towards the West, primarily the U.S., is not a recent phenomenon. In 1994, U.S. interest in South Caucasus grew considerably after oil contracts with Baku and the decision to build an oil pipeline. The romance between Washington and Tbilisi started after the Rose Revolution in Georgia in 2003, when Mikheil Saakashvili came to power, and especially after U.S. President George Bush visited Tbilisi and called Georgia “the beacon of democracy” in the region.

Western democracies are not unanimous in their attitude to the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict. In contrast to American diplomacy which maintains contact only with the Georgian side of the conflict (except for Matthew Bryza, Deputy Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, who is a frequent visitor in Sukhum), the European Union is more active in contacting Sukhum. The first sign of this trend was the visit of a delegation of the European Commission to Abkhazia in January 2007. In 2008, contacts intensified. In June 2008, Javier Solana, the EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, paid a visit to Sukhum; a little earlier, Sukhum was visited by 15 Ambassadors of the EU countries to Georgia.

Georgia greeted the EU activation in Abkhazia with enthusiasm, while reactions in Russia and in Abkhazia were ambiguous. While the Foreign Affairs Ministry of Russia officially approved the contacts, some Russian political scientists and writers sounded apprehensive: can it happen that Abkhazians will betray Russia’s interests in the South Caucasus in response, say, to a promise of EU membership? Abkhaz opposition reacted with hostility to the contacts of Abkhaz authorities with Western diplomats in the framework of what became known as “Multi-Vector Foreign Policy”. Thus, Raul Khadzhimba declared that a multi-vector foreign policy was detrimental for Abkhazia. “We have no resources,” he said at a press-conference on June 20, 2008, “therefore, we cannot afford to be unfocused, especially since the EU and the Group of Friends of the UN Secretary-General insist that we exclude Russia from the negotiation process. All Georgian actions are supported by the West, while Abkhaz interests are taken care of by Russia only.”¹ Domestic opponents of the multi-vector orientation in Abkhaz foreign policy joined ranks with Russian actors, demanding that Sukhum officials follow the example of the South Ossetian President Eduard Kokoity who said, “I will cease to be Ossetian if my nation betrays the oath of loyalty to Russia given by our ancestors. Multi-vector policies are unacceptable for us.”

Adherents of a multi-vector policy state that it does not exclude the priority of strategic partnership with Russia but only means being prepared to start a dialogue with any state that may be interested in such a dialogue.

¹ *Respublika Abkhaziya*, No 69 (2237), Sukhum, 24-25.06.2008 (in Russian).

After visiting Turkey, Sergey Shamba said that without a multi-vector policy, he cannot envision success with repatriating the descendants of 19th-century Muhajirs who now mostly live in Turkey but also in Syria, Jordan and other countries.

The Southern Neighbor Chooses a Detached Stance

We shall now consider the role of the Turkish Republic in the settlement of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict, and why it has not become an active player in this settlement alongside Russia, the U.S. and the European Union.

In the 19th century, the Abkhaz nation found itself divided after several waves of compulsory relocation of Abkhazians and other highland nations of the Caucasus to the Ottoman Empire. The total size of the Abkhaz Diaspora is unknown. Estimates of the number of Abkhazians in Turkey vary from two to seven hundred thousand. The Perestroika and the fall of the Iron Curtain opened new prospects for communication between the Diaspora and the ethnic homeland. Ships began to sail between Abkhazia to Turkey, and after nearly a century of complete isolation Abkhazians were able to visit their compatriots in Abkhazia and Turkey. In 1991, Vladislav Ardzinba, Head of Abkhazia's Supreme Soviet, paid a landmark visit to Turkey; he was received by a number of ministers and the leaders of some opposition parties. The Georgian-Abkhaz war of 1992-1993 triggered a flow of volunteers from Syria and Turkey. The Turkish Government at that time took an officially pro-Georgian position, but Ankara never objected to the dispatch of volunteers to Abkhazia, to fundraising for aid to Abkhazia, or to massive protest rallies regularly held in all Turkey's major cities.¹

Following the end of the Georgian-Abkhaz war, a new stage began in the relations between Abkhazia, Turkey and its Abkhaz Diaspora. After the war there was a direct maritime connection between Turkey and Abkhazia. However, in 1996, this channel of communication between citizens of Abkhazia and Turkey was closed on Georgia's insistence, even though freight services exporting nonferrous metal scrap, cheap timber and coal from Abkhazia remained uninterrupted and continue to this day. Incidentally, since the time Yeltsin closed the Russian-Abkhaz border in 1994 and until the late 1990s, maritime supplies of fuel, foodstuffs and pharmaceuticals from Turkey were very important for the survival of Abkhazia's population left under an almost complete Russian-Georgian blockade.²

Communication between Abkhazia and compatriots in the Diaspora met with extreme difficulties, and the main line of communication with Abk-

¹ *Chirikba, V.* Abkhaz Diaspora in the Domestic and Foreign Policy of Abkhazia. Sukhum: 2006 (in Russian).

² *Ibid.*

hazia was the border along the river Psou, i.e. via Russia. Having gained full control over migration to and from Abkhazia, Russia made it extremely difficult for Abkhazians from Turkey and the Near East to cross the border. The repatriates who had already moved to Abkhazia could no longer travel abroad for fear of being denied return. After war began in Chechnya, the entire adult male population of Abkhazia as well as repatriates was denied the right to cross the border.

At the same time, opinion spread amidst the Diaspora in Turkey, particularly in the older generation, that starting a new life in Abkhazia was extremely difficult. Some even believed that Caucasian Abkhazians had changed under the Soviet life conditions and lost the traditional values set down in the Abkhaz Code of Apsuara.¹ Acquaintance with the real Abkhazia dimmed the ideal image, and Abkhazia turned out to be an ordinary country populated by ordinary people, albeit speaking the Abkhaz language. Disappointment was so enormous that many could never forgive the real Abkhazia for ruining the 150-year-old ideal image of their Caucasian homeland. The post-war outbreak of crime in which repatriates were also targeted, the legal and social vulnerability of the repatriates and the wide-spread corruption made these feelings even worse.² In the 1990s, Abkhazians lost their dream of reuniting all Abkhazians in the historic homeland.

V. Chirikba points out that a new generation of Turkish Abkhazians and new nationally oriented Abkhaz elite are now coming to the fore. The Abkhaz Diaspora in Turkey today is well organized; branches of Abkhaz cultural societies or clubs are functioning in many Turkish cities. It is part of the federation of the North-Caucasus cultural organizations that sustains close links with other Diasporas, primarily with the several-million-strong Adyg Diaspora with its huge political and financial resources. The Caucasians are loyal Turkish citizens, a fact that encourages the generally benevolent attitude on the part of current Turkish authorities. Striving for EU membership, Turkey recently had to make some concessions to ethnic and linguistic minorities by granting them restricted cultural rights, e.g., allowing publications in ethnic languages, language courses and broadcasting in native languages.³

Just a few hundred repatriates now live in Abkhazia, and two of the 35 members of the Abkhaz Parliament are repatriates from Turkey, both prominent businessmen. Chirikba believes that Russia is apprehensive of the grow-

¹ In Abkhaz mythology, Abkhazia – Apsni – is a country populated by ideal people, Apsua, guided by ancient traditions and the Apsuara moral and ethical code.

² Chirikba, V. Abkhaz Diaspora in the Domestic and Foreign Policy of Abkhazia. Sukhum: 2006 (in Russian).

³ *Ibid.*

ing Turkish and Islamic impact in Abkhazia, so that, in contrast to citizens of Western countries, who are issued double-entry Russian visas and have free passage to Abkhazia since April 2006, ethnic Abkhazians from Turkey and the Near East bound for Abkhazia face difficulties with obtaining a Russian visa.¹

The policy of the Turkish Republic with regard to Abkhazia has remained contradictory since the Georgian-Abkhaz war. This duality stems from a number of factors that prevent Turkey from playing a more active part in Georgian-Abkhaz conflict settlement. On the one hand, Ankara supports Georgian territorial integrity, first, because it does not wish to quarrel with Georgia and second, because it has its own grave problems with Kurdish separatists. On the other hand, the Turkish government does not prevent its citizens of Abkhaz origin from having contacts with their historic homeland, does not object to private Turkish companies operating in Abkhazia, trading and fishing in the Abkhaz waters (despite scores of cases when the Georgian border guards apprehended or arrested cargo and fishing vessels from Turkey at sea).

Meanwhile, the Georgian-Abkhaz war “has not only stirred the North-Caucasus communities in Turkey but also the previously inconspicuous but significant Georgian Muslim community that set out to institute a maturing pro-Georgian lobby. Turkish political scientists note that conflicts in the Caucasus have direct impact on the Turkish domestic situation. The Georgian-Abkhaz conflict thus received coverage in the form of discussions on Turkish television and produced growing disaffection between the Abkhaz and Georgian communities, which had never been observed before.”²

All these circumstances led to the cancellation of a planned visit to Turkey in October 2007 by the Abkhaz President Sergey Bagapsh. Of course planned to be completely unofficial, the visit took a long time to prepare and was postponed several times. To the Abkhaz Diaspora, however, the first chance in 16 years to meet the leader of Abkhazia appeared to be of extreme importance. On the very eve of the visit, Turkey’s Deputy Foreign Minister phoned Sukhum and asked to postpone the visit. It was nothing more than a polite request, as the visit was private and Ankara could not cancel it except by declaring Bagapsh *persona non grata* which it didn’t want to do. The motives for the request were fully legitimate: terrorist activities by the Kurds and a complicated situation at the Turkish-Iraqi border as a result of the Kurdish problem. After consultations, Sukhum decided to comply with the request.

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Ibid.*

However, in the opinion of many, it was merely a pretext while the true motive was protest from Tbilisi. Meanwhile, in Turkey itself, especially in the Abkhaz Diaspora, the situation caused far more pain than in Abkhazia. The visit was being organized by the Committee of Solidarity with Abkhazia; Irfan Argun, Head of the Committee, and Inal Jigu, his Deputy, announced that the visit was cancelled as a result of a move by Georgian authorities supported by the leadership of Turkey. “The fact that Sergey Bagapsh, President of the Republic of Abkhazia, was banned from entering Turkey is an insulting slap on the face to every one of us. There is no limit to our distress,” they said in their statement.¹

The cancellation of the visit infuriated the entire Circassian Diaspora of Turkey. A protest rally held in the village of Uzuncaorman in Hendek district of Sakarya was attended by many thousands. An appeal circulated by email by the Caucasus Forum stated that Circassians have served the Turkish state with faith and fidelity and never expected something like that to befall them. Now that it did happen, they were dismayed.²

Something very similar to Bagapsh’s aborted visit took place in June 2008 when pressure by the Georgian authorities induced Turkey’s Foreign Affairs Ministry to cancel an official visit by representatives of the Turkish Chamber of Trade and Commerce to Pitsunda to a large three-day International Economic Forum called “Abkhazia-2008: Investments, Prospects”. To save the situation, the organization of the visit was taken up by the Istanbul Friendship Club. The club put together a new delegation, albeit of 25 businessmen instead of 70 as previously scheduled.³ As expected, the main topic discussed at the forum was participation in building Olympic facilities for the Sochi 2014 Olympics.

Prospects for Settlement

In conclusion, we shall return to the key issue: relations between Georgia and Abkhazia. Today they are living through one of the most dramatic, and even tragic, moments in their history. On the whole, this history should neither be seen in a rosy light (“our nations have always had brotherly relations”) nor painted black (“we have always been at war”). In the many centuries of Abkhaz-Georgian relations, as with nearly all neighboring nations, periods of peaceful coexistence and joint struggle against outside invaders alternated with armed conflicts.

When international actors insist that they will not consider the historical aspect in settling inter-ethnic disputes and that the positions have to be

¹ Khashig, I. “A Long Good-Bye and Long Period of Waiting” // *Chegemskaya Pravda*, no 40 (170), Sukhum, 2007 (in Russian).

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ekho Abkhazii*, no 23 (639), Sukhum, 2008 (in Russian).

based upon existing realities, their logic is irrefutable. Indeed, history-based arguments of the parties may take a long time to sort out, and each side will continue to hold on to its own convictions and to insist on the reference points that are of advantage to it.

At the same time, it is impossible to sort out a conflict such as the Georgian-Abkhaz one or to understand its specifics while completely ignoring the historical aspect. The knot of ethno-political problems started tightening a century and a half ago, when after the last mass forced exodus of Muhajirs Abkhazia began rapidly converting from an essentially monoethnic country (according to the 1886 Household Census, Abkhazians made 85.8 percent of its population) to a multiethnic one in which Georgians dominated (according to the 1989 USSR Census, Georgians amounted to 45.7 percent of the population of the Abkhaz Autonomy and Abkhazians, to just 17.8 percent).¹ Quoting 1989 demographic data, Georgians insist that a fair and final settlement of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict cannot take place without the “safe and dignified” return to Abkhazia of all Georgian refugees and their posterity, whereas the Abkhazians, in turn, quote earlier data. Abkhazians insist that it was extremely unfair of neighboring Georgia to use the ethnic disaster suffered by the Abkhazians in the second half of the 19th century in order to radically change the demographic situation in Abkhazia in its favor. Demographic changes of this kind are by no means unique. For example, the share of Russian-speakers reached one third in 20th-century Latvia, and in a number of Soviet administrative regions it exceeded 50% of the population. However, those territories were never claimed as Russian land and the so-called “title nations” were not declared outsiders the way Georgian scholar Pavle Ingorokva did in the notorious theory that he invented in the mid-20th century. All this explains the historical grievances of the Abkhazians and their mistrust of assurances coming from Tbilisi that Abkhazians will enjoy every opportunity to preserve and develop their language, culture and traditions within the future unified Georgian state.

For all the fifteen post-war years, the Georgian society has held endless discussions on topics like “What is it that we can offer to Abkhazia and the Abkhazians?” and “What are the rights that Tbilisi can delegate to Sukhum?” For instance, an initiative is launched to which different people claim authorship: why don’t we exempt Abkhazia after reunification from federal taxes for 15 years? But Abkhazia has paid no taxes to this center for over 15 years anyway. One small detail is being overlooked, namely, “Do Abkhazians want to accept anything from Tbilisi? Do they really need it?” An interesting article appeared in the *Free Georgia* newspaper on May 31,

¹ *The Abkhaz Tragedy*. 1993. Sochi: 1993, p.12 (in Russian).

2008: “It Rains in Tbilisi, or What Did Political Scientists Arno Khidirbegishvili and Jumber Kirvalidze Argue About?” The latter speculated on the dangers of establishing a dual-subject state which, in his opinion, is proposed to Georgia by the West and the U.S., “The Abkhazians will agree but in order for 250 thousand Georgian refugees repatriated to Abkhazia not to upset the ethnic balance, they will insist that refugees be granted double citizenship, and then Abkhazians will hold a referendum, and, relying on international laws, they will secede and create an independent state the way Montenegro conducted a referendum in 2006 and seceded from the common state of Serbia and Montenegro.”¹ According to his calculations, Abkhazians and other non-Georgians would constitute 56 per cent of the population of Abkhazia, and Georgians only 44 per cent. Arno Khidirbegishvili made a sensible rejoinder, “Put yourself in place of the Abkhaz separatists: did they make war in order to first bring the Georgian refugees back and then to hold a referendum in order to displace them again?”

The plans of Georgian-Abkhaz settlement (for example, Dieter Boden’s plan and the plan suggested by the German Vice-Chancellor Frank-Walter Steinmeier in late July 2008) turned out to be practically unrealizable since Abkhazia is dead against getting back the status of a Georgian autonomy and allowing massive repatriation of Georgian refugees. Abkhazia sees this as a return to the troubled years of the 20th century (late 1980s – early 1990s) when Abkhazians and Georgians took turns to hold meetings and strikes, unending debates went on in media, households and offices as to who owned the land, and people gradually armed themselves for combat.

Even now most Abkhazians believe that the 2008 terrorist acts in Gagra, Sukhum and Gali had been organized by Georgian special services. The current attitudes and feelings of Georgians and Abkhazians are such that no compromise solution can even partially satisfy both sides. Abkhazians believe that any substantial concession will be tantamount to capitulation since it will surely entail the loss of everything conquered in September 1993, and that the point of no-return into a unified Georgian state had been passed as early as August 1992. As to Georgia, nothing can make it drop the idea of restoring its territorial integrity. For Georgia, any other decision is also tantamount to capitulation.

In a nutshell, the settlement of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict now appears as hazy and vague a prospect as in late 1993. Given the current equilibrium between main stakeholders worldwide, the currently suspended status of Abkhazia may drag on for another decade or two. As to a radical change in favor of one of the parties, it may only come about as a result of

¹ *Svobodnaya Gruzija*, № 44-45 (23984), 2008 (in Russian).

some global tectonic shifts on the scale of those that had generated new geopolitical realities after WWI or WWII.

Georgi Khaindrava, the former State Minister of Georgia for Conflict Settlement, currently in opposition to the government, said that Abkhazia now has three parties: one advocating independent status, one that wants Abkhazia to join Russia, and one that wants it to join Georgia. That seems to be true but with important qualifications. The pro-Georgian party consists exclusively of the Georgian (Megrel) population of the Gali district within its old borders. The party that favors joining Russia consists mainly of ethnic Russians and Armenians plus a few Abkhazians. The most important point is that these issues are not publicly debated within the society, and in public, nearly everyone supports the pro-independence orientation. Today's minor disagreements between adherents and opponents of a multi-vector policy are most of the time connected to domestic political struggles and cannot split society, since both parties in the disagreement identify Russia and Russia alone as their strategic partner and patron.

As to the possible re-unification with Georgia, this idea did gather a few dozens of supporters who formed the Committee for the Salvation of Abkhazia back in 1992 but nowadays it has none. This makes Abkhazia very different from Chechnya, where the Nadterechny district had never showed disloyalty to Moscow, and also from South Ossetia, where Tbilisi succeeded in establishing a parallel pro-Georgian structure led by Dmitry Sanakoev and his associates.

TURKEY-ARMENIA RELATIONS: AN ETERNAL DEADLOCK?¹

BY AYBARS GÖRGÜLÜ

Introduction

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the international community has witnessed the emergence of fifteen new states on the lands of the former Soviet Empire. The disintegration of the USSR expedited the recognition of Armenia's independence as well as the independence of all other Soviet republics, including those that had not asked or campaigned for it. Armenia's declaration of independence on September 23, 1991 was the fulfillment of an old aspiration for the Armenian society that had always dreamed of statehood. Turkey immediately recognized this new neighbor country on December 16, 1991; however, diplomatic ties were not established between two states in the past seventeen years. In the meantime, Armenian political leaders declared on all occasions that they do not have any preconditions to normalizing relations with Turkey.² On the other hand, Turkish authorities have also conveyed their will to normalize relations with Armenia, but they have introduced some preconditions as follows:³

- The peaceful resolution of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict with Azerbaijan;
- The recognition of the Turkish-Armenian border;
- To call off "genocide" campaigns.

The most acute problem among these questions is the ongoing Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, Turkey's 'brother' state. The remaining preconditions such as the recognition of the border issue and the "genocide" claims are also problematic; however, Turkey's priority is the peaceful resolution of the Karabakh conflict.

Since its foundation, the Republic of Turkey has had quite problematic relations with its neighboring countries. In that sense Armenia is not an exception; however, the inexistence of diplomatic ties and the closed land border between two countries make the nature of the bilateral relations quite unique. The aim of this paper is to describe Turkey's special relationship with Armenia. In order to do so, the study will try to identify the intricate

¹ Some parts of this paper have been published previously.

² Vartan Oskanyan, "Turkey misses its chance with Armenia ...with its neighbour" Armenia Foreign Ministry website (February 7, 2007) (<http://www.armeniaforeignministry.com/minister/070207-la-times.html>)

³ "Türkiye'nin Ermenistan'a sunduğu şartlar" Dünya Bülteni website (December 22, 2007) (http://www.dunyabulteni.net/news_detail.php?id=30113)

problems that both countries try to get over, such as the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the recognition of territorial integrity and the closed land border issues and finally, the “genocide” claims. Then it will discuss why a solution is necessary and evaluate the probable opportunities and outcomes that will be created if Turkey normalizes its relations with Armenia.

I) The History of Bilateral Relations

The disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 was a turning point in the political landscape of the Eurasia. The Caucasus, at the heart of this geography, witnessed the birth of three new states, namely Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia, right after the breakdown of the Soviet Empire. Turkey’s biggest concern during this transitional period was the establishment of stability within the region. That is why Turkey’s immediate attitude towards the changing status quo could be labeled as constructive at the beginning. Turkey recognized the independence of Azerbaijan on November 9, 1991 and one month later on December 16, the international arena witnessed the recognition of all other ex-Soviet countries by Turkey without any discrimination. The year following the recognition of the new Caucasian states, Turkey established diplomatic ties with Azerbaijan and Georgia, and first contacts with Armenia were conducted in a positive atmosphere. In the framework of these first talks, the Turkish Ambassador to Moscow, Volkan Vural, paid a visit to Yerevan in April 1991 to discuss the future of relations between the two countries.¹ During this visit, Vural and the President of Armenia Levon Ter-Petrossian agreed on a draft accord on the establishment of good neighborly relations.² After this meeting, a high level Armenian delegation visited Ankara in order to discuss possible cooperation areas and trade opportunities.

In addition to these preliminary meetings, Turkey invited Armenia to become a founding member of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization (BSEC). Indeed, the presence of Armenian president Levon Ter-Petrossian at the meeting of heads of states of the BSEC countries in Istanbul in 1992 was taken as a sign of Armenia’s willingness to improve relations with Turkey as well. Furthermore, Ter-Petrossian dismissed his then Foreign Minister, Raffi Hovanissian because of his openly anti-Turkish speech at a meeting of foreign ministers at the Council of Europe.³ These moves created a favorable atmosphere and between autumn 1991 and spring 1992, it appeared likely that Turkey and Armenia might be able to develop good

¹ “Türk-Ermeni İlişkilerinin Dünü Bugünü” Anadolu Dergisi website (July 2005) (<http://www.anadolu.be/ermeni/ermeni.html>)

² Graham E. Fuller, *Turkey’s New Eastern Orientation* (Oxford: Westview Pres, 1993), pp. 77.

³ Burcu Gültekin “Prospects for regional ... Russian cooperation in South Caucasus” *Final Report Manfred Wörner Fellowship 2004-2005* (June 2005) p.41

neighborly relations. Turkey sent a diplomatic mission to Yerevan, and pointed out the advantages which Armenia could derive from regular political and economic links with Turkey. However, during this visit Turkey started to underline the importance of a peaceful settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict for Turkish-Armenian relations.

During 1992, as a sign of good will, Turkey tried to relieve Armenia's chronic economic plight by extending humanitarian aid to the country. In November 1992, Turkey agreed to deliver 100.000 tons of wheat to Armenia and to supply urgently needed electricity via a grid connecting the two countries. However, this last move provoked protests in Azerbaijan.¹ The armed conflict in Karabakh started impacting on the development of Turkish-Armenian relations in the wake of the electricity deal. On 8th December 1992, during a visit to Baku, Deputy Prime Minister Erdal İnönü was obliged to announce that the electricity deal would be cancelled, though the possibility of improving economic ties remained if the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh improved.² In brief, despite numerous visits and official meetings, Turkey and Armenia were unable to establish diplomatic relations. The negotiation process of the bilateral protocol for the establishment of diplomatic relations between Turkey and Armenia encountered several problems and eventually became deadlocked. According to Turkey, Armenia has not officially recognized the common border between Turkey and Armenia as established by the Kars³ and Gümrü Treaties of 1921. Thus, as a prerequisite for establishing diplomatic relations, Turkey asked for an official statement stressing that the independent State of Armenia recognizes these treaties and respects the territorial integrity of Turkey. According to the Armenian side, there was no need for such a statement since neither of the two countries had ever denounced the treaty.⁴

Eventually, the exacerbation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict strained the negotiation process and ultimately led to the closure of the entire Turkish-Armenian border. In March 1993, Armenian forces launched a new offensive causing a new flood of Azeri refugees. In response, the Turkish government ceased the supply of wheat through Turkish territory to Armenia and sealed the Turkish-Armenian border, a decision that also ended direct communication between the two countries. The closure of the land border did not lead to total

¹ Akif Maharramazadeh "Armenian-Azerbaijan Relations and the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict in the Foreign Policy of Turkey." The Journal of Turkish Weekly website (February14, 2006) (<http://www.turkishweekly.net/articles.php?id=105#>)

² "8 Aralık 1992" Başbakanlık Basın-Yayın ve Enformasyon Genel Müdürlüğü website (December 1992) (<http://www.byegm.gov.tr/yayinlarimiz/ayintarihi/1992/aralik1992.htm>)

³ The Kars treaty of 1921, based on the highly disadvantageous Gümrü treaty that the Dashnak government signed, resulted from the alliance between Turkey and Bolshevik Russia.

⁴ Rachel Goshgarian "Breaking the Stalemate: Turkish-Armenian Relations in the 21st Century" *Turkish Policy Quarterly* vol.4 no.4. (Winter 2005), pp.4-5.

cessation of bilateral relations between the two countries. For example, after the declaration of the ceasefire in Karabakh with American diplomatic efforts, Turkey opened its air space for the transfer of humanitarian aid to Armenia. Apart from that, both countries' leaders, foreign ministers and high level diplomats came together several times on different occasions, however not much was achieved in the name of the normalization of relations.

In addition to the negative effect of the border issue and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the politicization of the "genocide" claims after Robert Kocharian's¹ accession to power and the active involvement of the Armenian Diaspora started to hamper the normalization process of Turkish-Armenian relations. Turkey felt aggrieved that Armenia accused Ottoman Turkey of having committed a "genocide" about which serious doubts remain and intense discussion is still going on.

To sum up, problems associated with the recognition of the common border, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the "genocide" issue have remained barriers to the normalization of relations between the two nations.

The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is the biggest challenge to the normalization of bilateral relations between Turkey and Armenia. Until now, this issue has had detrimental effects on the rapprochement between the two states. While Turkish-Armenian relations started to improve following the latter's independence, Armenia's position in the conflict and its territorial gains from Azerbaijan worsened relations and led to the closure of the border. Both Azeris and Armenians argue over the history of Nagorno-Karabakh. According to the 1989 census, Nagorno-Karabakh's population was approximately 75 percent ethnic Armenian (145.000) and 25 percent ethnic Azeri (40.688).² This small province is a part of Azerbaijani territory and the conflict over it began in February 1988 when demonstrations in both Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia called for unification of the region with Armenia.³ The territorial dispute escalated to armed conflict rapidly and the war intensified in 1992. In January 1992, Nagorno-Karabakh declared itself an independent republic; nevertheless, this situation is not officially recognized by any nation including Armenia. A ceasefire was signed by military representatives of three sides in May 1994; however, since that time Armenian forces had not only kept Azerbaijanis out

¹ On March 30, 1998, Robert Kocharian was elected President of the Republic of Armenia in early presidential elections.

² "Seven Years of Conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh" Human Rights Watch website (December 1994) (http://www.geocities.com/fanthom_2000/hrw-azerbaijan/hrw-contents/2.html#g-d-h)

³ Rachel Goshgarian "Breaking the Stalemate: Turkish-Armenian Relations in the 21st Century" *Turkish Policy Quarterly* vol. 4, no.4. (Winter 2005), pp.3

of most of Karabakh but also occupied seven regions of Azerbaijan.¹ Since 1988, the conflict produced new refugees and internally displaced persons on both sides: close to 350.000 Armenians from Azerbaijan and Karabakh, almost 700.000 Azeris from Armenia, Karabakh and surrounding Azerbaijani regions.² Attempts have been made at reconciliation, including a promising set of meetings at Key West in 2001. Then, meetings between the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Turkey took place in Reykjavik in May, 2002 and, again, in June 2004.³ Unfortunately, international mediation efforts especially under the aegis of the OSCE Minsk group, which has been involved in mediating peace in the region since March 1992, have failed to bring political settlement to the conflict.

The current situation in Nagorno-Karabakh constitutes a breach of international law. UN Security Council Resolutions 822, 853, 874 and 884 called for an end to this occupation by Armenia and invited it to respect the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan.⁴ Turkey asked Armenia to comply with calls from the Security Council and withdraw from occupied Azerbaijani territory. Turkey basically asks for the political settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and Armenia's respect for territorial integrity of its neighbors in order to normalize relations with Armenia.

Armenian authorities blame Turkey for regulating its relations with Armenia according to its relations with Azerbaijan. This allegation is not that unreasonable since Turkey decided to bind its relations with Armenia to the prospect of an Azerbaijani-Armenian peace agreement. The Republic of Armenia has been nourishing the feeling of being besieged. With the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Armenia antagonized Turkey and was drawn into a tight relationship with Russia. In accordance with the "Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance" of 1997, Russia took up an obligation to protect Armenia from aggression.⁵ Armenia's position concerning Nagorno-Karabakh is that the people of Karabakh have a right to self-determination and that ultimately the region should be allowed to develop within "safe frontiers" and with a "permanent geographic connection to Armenia."⁶

¹ During the war, Armenia occupied approximately 20% of Azerbaijani territory, breaching international law.

² Gerard J. Libaridian. *The challenge of statehood* (Cambridge: Blue Crane Books, 1999), pp. 8–9

³ Rachel Goshgarian "Breaking the Stalemate: Turkish-Armenian Relations in the 21st Century", *Turkish Policy Quarterly* vol. 4, no.4. (Winter 2005), pp.4

⁴ "1993 UN Security Council Resolutions on Nagorno-Karabakh" U.S. Department of State website (<http://www.state.gov/p/eur/rls/or/13508.htm>)

⁵ "Armenia" Britannica Book of the Year, Encyclopedia Britannica Online. (1998) (<http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9114287>)

⁶ "President Robert Kocharian's Inauguration Speech at the Special Session of the National Assembly", Armenia MFA website, (May, 21 2000) (http://www.armeniaforeignministry.com/speeches/000521rk_inauguration.html)

According to Turkish policy, the opening of the border, as well as the normalization of relations with Armenia, depends on Armenia's compliance with "the principles of law and to its willingness to solve problems with its neighbors."¹ Turkey sees the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and Armenia's occupation of Azerbaijani land as the principal obstacles to political stability, economic development and regional cooperation in the South Caucasus.² Contrary to expectations, the Turkish approach towards Armenia is counter-productive in terms of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and Turkey's regional interests. It would be beneficial for Turkey to review this policy and consider potential leverages that Turkey would have over Armenia by opening the border. Turkey's current policy does not help Azerbaijan; on the contrary, it fuels Armenia's fears and pushes Armenia to insist on its irreconcilable policy. Also, Armenia becomes prone to a policy of ambiguity and uses international platforms to criticize its neighbor, which in return fuels mistrust and exasperation in Turkey.

The Recognition of the Turkish-Armenian Border

The recognition of the common border has remained one of the most important topics in Turkish-Armenian relations. Turkey continues to ask for an official acknowledgment that Armenia has no territorial claims on Turkey and that it recognizes the current border. On the other hand, Armenia refers to the obviousness of its recognition of the common border but refrains from issuing a definite statement as requested by Turkey. In fact, Armenia demands that no preconditions are laid down for the normalization of relations, suggesting that unresolved issues should be addressed after bilateral political relations are established.

The Turkish Government highlights the fact that the Declaration of Independence adopted on 23rd August 1990 by the Supreme Council of the Socialist Republic of Armenia, refers to the Eastern part of Turkey as "Western Armenia" and Article 13, paragraph 2 of the Constitution of Armenia depicts Mount Ağrı, which is situated in Turkey, as a part of the coat of arms of Armenia.³ The preamble of the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia refers to the Declaration of Independence signed by Levon Ter-Petrossian and Ara

¹ Statement of The President of the Republic of Turkey, Mr. Sezer, 1st October 2003, Anadolu Agency

² Rachel Goshgarian "Breaking the Stalemate: Turkish-Armenian Relations in the 21st Century" *Turkish Policy Quarterly* vol. 4, no.4. (Winter 2005), pp.3

³ The Declaration of Independence states at its very beginning "Aware of its historic responsibility for the destiny of the Armenian people engaged in the realization of the aspirations of all Armenians and the restoration of historical justice"; and in its article 11: "The Republic of Armenia stands in support of the task of achieving international recognition of the 1915 Genocide in Ottoman Turkey and Western Armenia". Armenia MFA website. (5 July 1995) (<http://www.armeniaforeignministry.com/htmls/conttitution.html#Chapter1>)

Sahakian, the then President and Secretary of the Supreme Council respectively. Thus, Turkey insists that Armenia should officially rule out any irredentist claim and specifically recognize the current Turkish-Armenian border.

According to Etyen Mahçupyan, a respected Turco-Armenian journalist and the chief editor of weekly newspaper *Agos*; the famous passage in the Article 13 of the Armenian constitution refers to the ancient Armenian kingdoms and it is in fact a historical document. That is why this clause should be evaluated as a historical declaration not as a part of a political aspiration.¹ On the other hand this point of view does not exclude the fact that there are still opinions in both Diaspora and Armenia arguing that Armenia has to preserve its “historical rights”² and keep on thinking about what would happen if the geopolitical balance changes and the Republic of Armenia demands that Turkey return Kars region and Surmalu district.³

The border issue has become more complex and less solvable as the “genocide” issue has become more widely discussed on international arena. Although Armenians were trying to disconnect these issues, the existence of some “historical rights” according to Armenian side has raised concerns that Armenia might nurture territorial claims on Turkey. The question of whether the recognition of the “genocide” by Turkey may lead to Armenian territorial demands from Turkey is being kept on the agenda by Armenian opinion makers and apparently meets the expectations of the Armenian public opinion very widely defined.

To sum up, if we take into consideration the clear dissymmetry in the power balance, both militarily and economically, between the two countries, Turkish insistence on the border issue might appear symbolic for the Armenian side. However, Turkey’s insistence on the issue of the recognition of the border makes sense once linked to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the detrimental effects of the politicization of the “genocide” issue.

The Closed Turkish-Armenian Border

After the intensification of the armed conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, in April 1993, Turkey sealed its border with Armenia by closing the Doğu Kapı/Akhourian crossing and halting direct land communications between the two countries.⁴ This closure of borders has brought a new

¹ Interview with Etyen Mahçupyan, Karaköy-Istanbul (January 02, 2008)

² Harut Sassounian, “What Did Kocharian Actually Say About Demanding Territories from Turkey?” California Courier Online. (July 21, 2005) (<http://www.armtown.com/news/en/azg/20050722/2005072201/>)

³ This district embraces Mount Ararat, the historic symbol of Armenian people.

⁴ Nathalie Tocci, “The Case for Opening the Turkish-Armenian Border”, *TEPSA Publications* (2007), pp.2 (<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/activities/expert/eStudies/download.do?file=18288>)

dimension to the intricate relations between Turkey and Armenia. The Armenian Diaspora has been especially involved in this issue and has put a great effort to convince the international arena that Turkey implements economic sanctions against Armenia. Economic sanctions are implemented by a country, groups of countries, or international bodies such as the United Nations in order to influence the policies of the targeted country.¹ In that sense Turkey's strategy of closing its border to force Armenia to adopt constructive policies in her relations with Azerbaijan can be labeled as a kind of an economic sanction. According to the Armenian side, Turkey, as Azerbaijan's most powerful ally in the region, imposed a "blockade" on Armenia by shutting off Yerevan's road and rail links to the West.² On the other hand whether the closure of the border is an aggressive policy aiming at further isolating Armenia by imposing economic sanctions is debatable, particularly when regarding recent Turkish statements. According to Sedat Laçiner, a well-known specialist on Armenia and the director of Ankara based think-tank USAK, "there is no economic embargo or sanction in practice: Thousands of Armenians work in Istanbul, Turkey and the Turkish international airports are open to civilian Armenian planes. As a matter of fact the Turkish-Armenian trade volume is over 200 million dollars though the Turkish-Armenian border is closed."³ So the current situation is neither an embargo nor a "blockade" according to the Turkish side.

Interestingly, successive Armenian Governments downplayed the "blockade" and rarely complained about it either at home, or on the international stage during the 1990's. Armenia has been more active in drawing international attention to the issue since 2001, arguing that the border closure contravenes a range of internationally recognized legal principles.⁴⁻⁵ Turkey has based its argument on international law and argues that according to international public law, the closure of the border can not be qualified as a "blockade" since the notion of "blockade" has a precise meaning.

¹ Bryan Roberts, "The Economic and Social Impacts of Opening the Armenia-Turkish Border: Summary of Conference Research Findings" *AIPRG report* (January 2007), pp.1 (<http://www.aiprg.net/en/content/29/>)

² Jon Gorvett, "Turkey Takes Steps Towards Rapprochement" Eurasianet website (May 29, 2002) (<http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav052902.shtml>)

³ Sedat Laçiner, "Turkey's EU Membership and the Armenian Question" *The Journal Turkish Weekly website* (December 13, 2004) (<http://www.turkishweekly.net/comments.php?id=61>)

⁴ Nicolas Tavitian and Burcu Gültekin, "Les Relations Arméno-Turques: la Porte Close de l'Orient", *GRIP Reports* (Brussels: January 2003) pp.12

⁵ For a presentation of the legal argumentation of the Armenian government, see: communication presented by the Armenian delegation at the Council of Europe related to M. Hovhannissyan's written question n° 398 to Committee of Ministers concerning "the blockade imposed by Turkey against Armenia". October 2001.

The opening of the Turkish-Armenian border is in fact for the benefit of both countries. In a recent report prepared by TEPSA,¹ it is emphasized that the closure of the border has generated severe costs to Armenia. Walled by two disputed countries, Turkey and Azerbaijan, Armenia's only connection with the outside world and distant markets is via expensive routes through Georgia and Iran and thus Armenia's development is heavily handicapped.² The Turkish side has a significant loss as well from the current status quo. Even though Armenia has a quite limited trade volume due to its size and population density,³ this country could become a critical economic partner and market for Eastern Anatolia. According to Üstün Ergüder, the director of the Istanbul Policy Center and a founding member of the TARC initiative, the underdevelopment of Kars city is mainly due to the closure of the border between the two countries.⁴ So the opening would yield major benefits for this city and the whole region, respectively.

Another important aspect of this problem is the inclusion of Armenia in the European Neighborhood Policy. This situation indicates that the European Union puts great emphasis on the good neighborhood relations in the South Caucasus. Besides, in each EU progress report since the start of the negotiation process with Turkey, the EU recommends to Turkey to open the closed border with Armenia and normalize relations on the basis of good neighborhood policies. As it is mentioned in the TEPSA report, "the EU considers conflict resolution and good neighborly relations as one of its prime foreign policy objectives. It calls for all accession candidates to resolve outstanding difficulties with their neighbors before acceding to the EU."⁵ So it can be argued that Turkey will eventually open its closed borders with Armenia in order to become a full member to the EU.

The Impact of "Genocide" Claims on Bilateral Relations

The "genocide" issue, which has come to the attention of many Western parliaments, strains Turkish-Armenian relations very severely. Until

¹ This report is requested by the European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs Committee on Development and is prepared by the Trans European Policy Studies Association (TEPSA), Brussels.

² Nathalie Tocci, "The Case for Opening the Turkish-Armenian Border", *TEPSA Publications* (2007), pp.2
(<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/activities/expert/eStudies/download.do?file=18288>)

³ Armenian Statistics website (2006)
(http://www.armstat.am/Eng/Publications/2007/MARZ_07_e/MARZ_07_e_10.pdf)

⁴ Interview with Üstün Ergüder, Tuzla-Istanbul (25 December 2007)

⁵ Nathalie Tocci, "The Case for Opening the Turkish-Armenian Border", *TEPSA Publications* (2007), pp.29
(<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/activities/expert/eStudies/download.do?file=18288>)

1991, the debate on the recognition of the “genocide” was not linked to bilateral relations, since an independent Armenian state did not exist at the time. During 1991-1998, the controversy went on without the participation of the Republic of Armenia. However, after Robert Kocharian’s election as the President, Armenia decided to integrate the “genocide” issue in the governmental agenda. In this context, it can be argued that the Armenian government has perceived the “genocide” issue as an important asset for its international communications strategy. This policy enabled Armenia to assert itself on world politics, to raise sympathy for the Armenian position in the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and to disqualify Turkey as a potential mediator in the settlement of the dispute. According to the Armenian side, another objective reason behind its policy is the motivation to ensure that Turkey takes Armenia into account as a non-negligible regional actor.¹

The official Turkish position towards the recognition of the “genocide” in national parliaments claims that these attempts have no legal basis and do not bind Turkey. However, it should not be forgotten that once a specific parliament identifies the terrible events of 1915 as “genocide”, the issue becomes a *fact* in that particular country. The case of France is a good example in that sense. After the recognition of the “genocide” in the French parliament in 2001, the discussions about how to label these massacres have suddenly ended. Until 2001, it was normal to read articles in respected French newspapers like *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro* or *Le Monde Diplomatique* about what really happened in 1915. However, once the parliament recognized it, the French press started almost unanimously to consider 1915 events as “genocide”.

Another dimension of the problem is deeply related with the legitimacy of the Armenian Diaspora’s activities. The fact that the Armenian government officially insists that Turkey acknowledge the events of 1915 gives an additional legitimacy to the Diaspora organizations. The Armenian Government does not have direct and full control over the process of the international recognition of the “genocide” issue. Nevertheless, Armenia has the capacity to exert influence on national parliaments to a certain extent. For instance, the bill for the criminalization of the denial of the “Armenian genocide” which came on the agenda of the French Parliament in May 2006 did not find strong support in Yerevan. Similarly, the Armenian Government refrained from explicitly supporting the same bill when it came to the agenda of the parliament in October again. There is not any specific law

¹ Nicolas Tavitian and Burcu Gültekin, “Les Relations Arméno-Turques: la Porte Close de l’Orient”, GRIP Reports (Brussels: January 2003) pp.5-6.
(http://www.grip.org/pub/rapports/rg03-1_armenie.pdf)

criminalizing the denial of the “Armenian Genocide” in force in Armenia. Furthermore, Armenia does not want to further stress relations with Turkey. However, the Armenian government cannot publicly criticize a successful initiative of the Diaspora achieved in the field of international recognition of the “genocide”. The political and financial dependency of the Republic of Armenia has increased significantly in these first fifteen years of independence. Furthermore, the strategy of the former President Ter-Petrosian, who despite strong criticism put aside the “genocide” issue, is perceived as a mistake, since Turkey did not reciprocate his goodwill by normalizing relations.

To sum up, the “genocide” claims seem to constitute the most unsolvable problem between Turkey and Armenia, since both countries have absolutely opposite and hard core approaches to the issue. On the other hand, Turkey’s policies to pass over the “genocide” claims in silence are no longer sustainable and serve only to save the day. Efforts aimed by international actors at qualifying the 1915 events as “genocide” seriously aggravate Turkey and more importantly harm any potential for dialogue between the two societies. Turkey is also particularly sensitive to statements made by Armenian officials on Diaspora platforms. Clearly, negative statements have detrimental effect on the normalization of relations. Furthermore, the Armenian question carries the potential to stress Turkey’s relations with strategic partners. Each year, the possibility of the Congress adopting a bill recognizing the “genocide” is a Damocles sword for U.S.-Turkish relationship.¹ The French government tries desperately to overcome the effects of the bill of criminalizing the denial of the “Armenian Genocide”² which still is not a law. Finally it should not be forgotten that the French President Nicolas Sarkozy has once declared that Turkey will have to recognize the Armenian deaths as “genocide” before it joins the EU.³

II) Why is There a Need for Solution? Strategic Vision in the Caucasus

The chaos in the Caucasian region where stability has never been completely established after the collapse of the USSR mostly affects Turkey. The other powerful neighbor of the region, the Russian Federation, reached its former power again thanks to the large territories it owns and the rising oil prices following the Iraq War, therefore it is not affected by the instability

¹ Murat Yetkin, “The Fourth wave is coming”, *Radikal* (November 17, 2006)

² “NATO, France downplay impact of Turkish military decision”, *Turkish Daily News* (November 17, 2006)

³ Cenk Başlamış, “Soykırım Kriteri”, *Milliyet* (October 1, 2006)

in the Caucasus as much as Turkey. Moreover, since it is the inheritor of the USSR, Russia has a greater power over the states in the region in comparison with Turkey.

The failure of all attempts to normalize the Armenia-Turkey relations and to establish diplomatic relations in the past seventeen years eventually forced Armenia to establish closer relations with Russia. Staying under Russian influence for long years and also having religious ties with Russia naturally pushed Armenia into the Russian zone of influence. In addition, one should never forget that there is a very active Armenian Diaspora in Russia. Therefore, it will be wrong to evaluate the Russia-Armenia convergence just in terms of the problems between Armenia and Turkey. This situation is reflected in the groupings between the countries in the region. As a result of the closure of the Turkish-Armenian border, the polarization between the Turkish-Ukrainian-Azerbaijani-Georgian alliance and the Russia-Iran-Armenia bloc intensified further.¹ On the other hand, it is a fact that the lack of diplomatic relations between Armenia and Turkey creates a circumstance favorable to Russia's regional interests.

It is a well-known fact that the Caucasus has acquired a greater significance during last ten years. Particularly, in geopolitical terms, its position as a circulation and communication junction between Asia and Europe, and its function as a transfer corridor for oil and natural gas pipelines draw to this region the attention of various actors shaping the world politics, the prominent of which are European countries and the USA. In order to eliminate the instability in the Caucasus, there are doubtlessly important tasks for Turkey, which claims to be a regional power and desires to play a role in the production and transfer of the energy resources in the Caspian basin.

The Karabakh problem, which is the greatest conflict in the Caucasus, seems unlikely to be resolved in the near future. 20% of Azerbaijan's territories is still under Armenian occupation and no solution has been found for this problem during fourteen years since the ceasefire signed by the parties in 1994. In accordance with its strategic vision, while Turkey wants to act as a mediator in this deadlock, lacking diplomatic relations with one of the parties and having a 'brother state' understanding with the other make it difficult to take on such a role.

The international community will perceive the normalization of relations with Armenia as a sign of Turkey's will to play a really constructive role in the solution of Karabakh conflict; moreover, it will be possible to give a message about Turkey's equal distance or closeness to Armenia and Azer-

¹ Nathalie Tocci, 'The Case for Opening the Turkish-Armenian Border', TEPSA (July 2007), <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/activities/expert/eStudies/download.do?file=18288>.

baijan. Attempting to play an active role in the solution of Palestine-Israel and Syria-Israel conflicts, Turkey needs to display the same will and constructiveness for ending this war right beside its borders.

Relations with the European Union

For Turkey, another important dimension of improving relations with Armenia is the negotiation process with the EU. As it is well known, the annual progress reports, which evaluate the course of negotiations and the reforms carried out, always put emphasis on establishing good neighborly relations and, within this context, the importance of opening the border without delay.¹

Moreover, the EU accepts Armenia as a country within the scope of the European Neighborhood Policy, and supports high-budget projects to establish democracy and market economy in this country, and one should pay great attention to this fact. The idea of the EU to establish a ‘common market’ with the countries within the scope of the European Neighborhood Policy in future makes it crucial for Turkey to review its relations with Armenia immediately.

Solution of border conflicts and good neighborly relations are some of the EU expectations from candidate states. Both Turkey and Armenia have diplomatic relations with the EU, and this provides the EU with the opportunity to play an active role in the Turkish-Armenian border question. Nonetheless, two factors impede the potential of the EU to improve the Turkish-Armenian relations. The first factor is the difference in the diplomatic relations of the EU with Turkey and Armenia. While Turkey is an accession candidate to the EU, Armenia is just a party to the European Neighborhood Policy.² This difference in the relations of the EU with two countries endows the Union with a greater power over Turkey. In other words, the EU’s ability to ‘exert influence’ on these two countries is not equal, and this hinders the role the EU can play in the improvement of Turkey-Armenia relations.

The second factor that impedes the opportunity of EU to play an active role in the Turkish-Armenian border problem is the ambiguity of the EU-Turkey relations and the Turkish accusations towards the EU of not being sincere in the full-membership process. As it is well known, while the EU recognizes Turkey as a candidate state to membership, there is no consensus within the Union regarding the full membership of Turkey. Led by France and Austria, a group of member states objects to Turkey’s member-

¹ For detailed information, please visit: <http://www.eutcc.org/articles/8/15/document229.ehtml>.

² Armenia signed the European Neighborhood Policy Action Plan in 2006.

ship and this has a negative effect on Turkey-EU relations. Due to this negative effect, Turkey questions EU's sincerity, and that restricts EU's influence over Turkey. Therefore, in order for the EU to play a more active role in the improvement of Turkey-Armenia relations, it is necessary to clear up the ambiguity in EU-Turkey relations. As Turkey's Armenia policy shaped problematically since the emergence of Armenia as an independent state, in case the adopted policy continues, it is inevitable for this problem to be another blind alley for Turkey in the EU membership process, just like the seaport crisis with the Southern Cyprus.

The last important dimension of Armenia relations that influence the negotiation process with the EU is related with the "genocide" allegations. Since recognizing the "Armenian genocide" is not one of the Copenhagen criteria, these allegations did not pose a problem while starting negotiations with Turkey. On the other hand, even the EP, let alone the parliaments of leading EU member countries such as Germany, France, Belgium, Greece, Italy and the Netherlands, adopted the "genocide" allegations. Moreover, some of these countries stress that Turkey should recognize the "genocide" to be an EU member.¹ The general opinion in the EU member countries that adopted the "genocide" is that, by closing its borders, Turkey is now punishing a people against which it perpetrated "genocide" in the past. However, given that Turkey's accession to the EU will be a quite favorable development for Armenia, an EU alienating Turkey by frequently giving voice to the "genocide" issue damages Armenia indirectly and creates a paradoxical situation.

The influence of Armenia-Turkey relations on the Western organizations is not just limited to the EU. Another essential dimension is the matter of Armenian accession to NATO. Although this issue has been debated very much, one should never ignore the fact that Armenia does not want to jeopardize its relations with Russia. Therefore, Armenia sees the NATO membership as a means, rather than as an end, and makes use of this process as an opportunity for its democratic and economic development. As for Turkey, accession of the Caucasus to NATO will be able to both provide an additional security for its eastern borders, and balance the Russian dominance in the region.

Economic Dimension of the Normalization of Relations

Some experts frequently defend the thesis that Armenia has a limited trading volume in view of the size of its population and therefore opening the bor-

¹ Cenk Başlamış, 'Soykırım Kriteri' (Genocide Criterion), *Milliyet Gazetesi* (1 September 2006), <http://www.milliyet.com/2006/10/01/dunya/adun.html>.

der will not make a radical contribution to the economy of Eastern Anatolia. The fact that Eastern Anatolia is the least developed region of Turkey in spite of the currently open border gates to Iran, Georgia and Nakhchivan strengthens these claims. Although Turkey's GDP is forty times greater than Armenia's GDP, the share of Eastern Anatolia in the Turkish GDP is just 4.14%.¹ Primary provinces of the region that are affected by the closure of the Turkish-Armenian border are Kars and Trabzon. After Ardahan became a province, the connection of Kars with Georgia was broken, and after Iğdır became a province, Kars lost its Nakhchivan border gate to this new province, therefore Kars has now no territorial connection with other countries than Armenia to engage in foreign trade. And as the border with Armenia was closed in 1993, the economy of Kars was affected negatively; both the local society and the local authorities reacted against the closure of the border. The basic reason for this dissatisfaction roots in the fact that, while economic relations continue over the Istanbul-Black Sea-Georgia route, Kars was victimized in this sense. Just like Kars, the province of Trabzon also suffers from the closure of the border. The economic power of the Trabzon Harbor reduced and its competitive power with regard to Georgian harbors decreased. By making a contribution to the development of the harbor of Trabzon, opening the Turkish-Armenian border would have a potential to improve the economic condition of this city.²

Doubtlessly, the closure of the border affects Armenia most. The closed border increases the transport costs of Armenia and depresses its economy. Armenia conducts 90% of its foreign trade over Georgia, and that gives Georgia an opportunity to become a monopoly. An open Turkish-Armenian border has the capability to break the Georgian monopoly and reduce the transport costs of Armenia. Another positive effect of opening the border on the Armenian economy is Armenia's potential to increase its export. A study by the World Bank in 2001 forecasts a 100% increase in Armenia's exports if its borders with Azerbaijan and Turkey open.³ Another report prepared by the World Bank in 2001 estimates a 30% increase in the Armenian GNP if the border opens. On the other hand, in its report examining the probable effects of opening the border, the Armenian-European Policy and Legal Advice Centre foresees only a 2.7% increase over five years in Armenia's GNP. Although there are great differences between the predictions of these two reports, it is clear that opening the border will have a positive effect on the Armenian economy.⁴ In conclusion, Turkey has the upper hand

¹ Nathalie Tocci, 'The Case for Opening the Turkish-Armenian Border', TEPSA (July 2007), p.15, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/activities/expert/eStudies/download.do?file=18288>

² *Ibid.* p.16.

³ *Ibid.* p.17.

⁴ *Ibid.* p.11.

in the economic aspect of opening the border. As Armenia is the one that will substantially benefit from an open border in economic terms, this legitimizes the Turkish policy of not opening the border unless other problems between the two countries find a solution.

The greatest advantage that opening the Turkish-Armenian border can provide to the South Caucasus region will be an increase in the economic efficiency in the region as a result of decreases in transportation costs and opening of new markets. An open border has a potential to improve the means of transportation and to increase security in the region by contributing to the solution of the Karabakh dispute. Therefore, one can claim that a positive atmosphere created by opening the border is as important as its economic advantages. People should consider solving the ethnic conflicts in the region, supporting disarmament, achieving a stable atmosphere over all the Caucasus as objectives not less urgent than the economic development of the region. In addition, it is not quite wrong to claim that the Southern Caucasus, which solves the Karabakh conflict and does not suffer from border problems, is likely to achieve great economic development.

Social Perceptions

One of the most important outcomes of the normalization of the Turkish-Armenian relations is the positive effect it is likely to create on the mutual perceptions of the two countries' citizens. According to the findings of the study carried out by Ferhat Kentel and Gevorg Poghosyan through face-to-face interviews in Istanbul and Yerevan, besides the mutual negative prejudices, the societies of the two countries do not really know each other.¹ While there are Turkish attendants who think that the religion of Armenia is Judaism and the Communist Party governs Armenia, all Armenian perceptions towards Turkey are constructed within the framework of the "genocide" issue, which is the foundation of Armenian national identity. Being a particularly important element in socialization of the young generations in Armenia, this issue creates differences in the mutual perceptions of the two societies. Within this context, it will be appropriate to state that there is a great lack of trust to each other. In addition to such "othering" and alienating by the two sides, mutual perceptions of the societies cannot get rid of the past's shadow since there is almost no interaction between the two societies.

Turkish and Armenian societies had lived together since very old times, but their current perception of each other is quite problematic. Vital tasks

¹ Ferhat Kentel and Gevorg Poghosyan, *Ermenistan ve Türkiye Vatandaşları Karşılıklı Algılaşma ve Diyalog Projesi (Armenian-Turkish Citizens' Mutual Perceptions and Dialogue Project)*, (Istanbul: TESEV Yayınları, 2005), p.40.

rest with decision-makers to reverse this perception and improve relations with Armenia within the scope of good neighborhood policies. On the other hand, civil society, as well as the governments, has some tasks to undertake in the matter of perceptions of citizens. Supporting intercollegiate cooperation projects and student exchange programs is pretty essential within that framework. Additionally, it is crucial to accelerate the civil society contacts, and to carry out projects that will draw all attention of Turkey to Armenia, beyond the local attempts that are effective just along the border. Obviously, the closed border obstructs the improvement of such initiatives and reinforces the current perspective shaped around the perception that Armenia is an “alien” state somewhere far away.

Conclusion

This work examined the past of Turkey-Armenia relations, which failed to normalize ever since the day when Armenia emerged as an independent state. Given that the bilateral problems have four different aspects involving Azerbaijan, Russia, the EU and the USA, it is easier to understand why normalization has not been achieved yet.

The Azerbaijani aspect of the problem is important since Turkey is a party to the conflict between this state and Armenia. Turkey regards Azerbaijan as a “brother country” and has economic and political cooperation with this country. Therefore, Armenia-Turkey relations are, in a sense, under the Azerbaijani encumbrance, and as long as no improvement is achieved in Azerbaijan-Armenia relations, it will be necessary to explain the reasons for each improvement in Armenian-Turkish relations to the Azerbaijani side. In conclusion, Turkey must get rid of the dilemma between improving its relations with Armenia at the cost of endangering its relations with Azerbaijan, and leaving them to Azerbaijan’s mercy.

The Russian and American aspect of the problem is far more complicated. Indeed, Russia takes advantage of non-normalizing of Turkish-Armenian relations and keeps Armenia, which suffers from the Karabakh conflict and the closed border, within its area of influence. Given that Armenia is another element of the struggles between the USA and Russia to exert dominance over the Caucasian region, it is not surprising that both countries strive not to lose Armenia. Any improvement in the Turkish-Armenian relations is likely to help reducing the Armenian dependence on the Russian Federation and driving Armenia towards the EU and, particularly, NATO. Although the Russian Federation-Turkey relations reached zenith in the recent past, Armenia’s leaning towards the bloc of which Turkey is a part will push the Russian military presence further away from the Turkish borders.

The EU, which is the last aspect of the problem, hinders the solution through the policies it implements. While there are obvious advantages in

inclusion of Armenia in the European Neighborhood Policy, and in Turkish membership in the EU, some member states of the EU set the recognition of “genocide” as a condition for Turkish accession to the EU, spoiling the normalization process of the Turkish-Armenian relations. Armenian support to this precondition estranges Turkey from the EU and jeopardizes the probable Turkish advances to Armenia.

Considering the seventeen-year history of the Turkish-Armenian relations, it is evident that the past has always overshadowed the relations. During this time period, there have been some serious attempts aiming to contribute to the normalization such as Vienna Turkish-Armenian Historians Platform (VAT), Turkish-Armenian Business Development Council (TABDC), Turkish Armenian Reconciliation Commission (TARC) or secret official meetings in Vienna; however, all these initiatives failed to break the impasse. On the other hand, until now attempts to improve relations between the two communities have undertaken a crucial task in this process of building trust. However, in order for the painstaking efforts of the civil society to bear fruit, it is necessary to explicitly display the political will. As long as the states fail to normalize relations at an official level, the efforts of civil society to establish dialogue between the two communities are likely to fall short of changing the status quo.

Taking the current situation into consideration, it is apparent that both sides believe that they do their part and wait for the next advances from the other side. The Turkish side announces that an important opportunity might emerge for the normalization of the relations, provided that Armenia makes favorable advances after the presidential elections held in Armenia on 19 February 2008¹, while the Armenian authorities put the ball in the court of the Turkish side. President Serge Sargsyan took office after a deeply flawed election in which he promised to improve ties with Ankara, and although the two countries have no diplomatic relations, Turkish President Abdullah Gül was among the first to congratulate him and to express his desire to normalize relations. This was the first sign towards the normalization of relations during Sargsyan’s term and then he has invited Abdullah Gül to visit Yerevan for the football match in September 2008, marking a shift in relations between the two states. Despite these good gestures there is still ambiguity concerning what kind of roadmap will be implemented in normalizing the Armenian-Turkish relations at official level. In addition, the protests triggered by the opposition in the aftermath of the presidential elections in Armenia turned into an armed conflict after

¹ Tansu Peker, ‘Ermenistan’da Seçimler Sonrası Pozitif gelişme Olur mu?’ (Are Favorable Advances Likely in Armenia After the Elections?) *Actual Online* (8 February 2008), <http://www.lactuel.be/detail.php?id=3030>.

1 March and a state of emergency was declared in Armenia; these incidents show that Armenia will be occupied with assuring domestic stability for a while.

Armenia has access to the outside world only through Russian routes over Georgia and through Iranian routes, and gains limited economic benefits from these routes; hence, for how long Armenia can persist on a stalemate in relations with Turkey in the presence of increasing unemployment and poverty in the country is a matter of guesswork. Especially, the Turkish and Azerbaijani embargo on Armenia due to the Karabakh occupation tightens the screws on Armenia further each year.¹ This condition has re-emerged in the last election campaigns in Armenia; all candidates primarily made commitments to fight poverty. However, as long as its most important border gate to the West remains closed and the economic embargo by the two neighbor countries continues, questions concerning how to meet these commitments keep rising. Within this context, the principal rival of Sargsyan in the last elections and currently the indisputable leader of the Armenian opposition, former President Ter-Petrossian's warnings that peace must be achieved in Karabakh immediately are of great importance. According to Ter-Petrossian, Azerbaijan which is gaining strength each passing day thanks to oil revenues is going to reach the power to recapture its lost territories through war in a little while.² In contrast, Armenia is weakening and slowly loses the trumps in its hand. Although the West supports Ter-Petrossian's moderate approach, considering the fact that Sargsyan has won the elections and all opposition in the country has been silenced with oppression, it becomes evident that the status quo in Karabakh is likely to continue.

In near future, it seems impossible for the parties to change their standings towards the issues of "genocide" allegations and Karabakh conflict, which are the primary problems between the two countries. Neither Turkey will recognize the "genocide" officially, nor will Armenia compromise these allegations and its target of achieving international recognition of "genocide". As for the Karabakh conflict, Armenia wants Turkey to look at the problem from, at least, an evenhanded perspective. On the other hand, there are no convincing reasons for Turkey, which has taken Azerbaijan's side since the Karabakh conflict broke out, to change its position. Within this context, in order to be able to start a dialogue process for establishing diplomatic relations, handling the relations of the two countries independently

¹ Semih İdiz, 'Ermenistan Liderini Arıyor' (Armenia Seeks its Leader), *Milliyet Gazetesi* (14 February 2008), <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/2008/02/14/guncel/agun.html>.

² Sinan Oğan, 'Rusya ve Ermenistan'da Devlet Başkanlığı Seçimlerinin Bölge ve Türkiye'ye Etkileri' (The Effects of the Presidential Elections in Russia and Armenia on the Region and Turkey), *2023* (15 March 2008).

from the “genocide” allegations and the Karabakh conflict seems essential. Otherwise, even if new attempts are made in the near future, it is quite likely for these efforts to fail within the same vicious circle.

Turkey-Armenia relations have turned into a matter of domestic politics, and this hinders the success of the advances made through official channels. During the fifteen years since 1993, Turkey has kept the land border closed but opened its airspace to Armenia and allowed direct flights between Yerevan and Istanbul. However, such favorable advances have not transformed into a comprehensive normalization in the relations. Doubtlessly, uncompromising attitudes of the two countries’ governments play a crucial role in that. If decision-makers who have the initiative necessary for the solution continue to implement policies feeding the deadlock, it seems impossible for a comprehensive improvement to be achieved in relations in the near future.

Within this framework, Turkey, while continuing to aim at zero problems with its neighbors in accordance with its regional policy and strategic vision, needs to establish diplomatic relations with Armenia without delay. It is crucial that the Turkish-Armenian relations, which have been tied to the border recognition question, Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the “genocide” allegations, break free from these pressures, and improve the relations within a wider framework. Normalization of the two countries’ relations, which have now acquired an excessively ideological character, has additional importance for the stability of the Caucasian region. Struggling to implement an active and constructive foreign policy in this region, this is certainly the best opportunity for Turkey to watch the developments in a neighboring state in the region closely, and to solve its problems with Armenia through diplomacy.

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