



GEORGIAN-SOUTH OSSETIAN CONFLICT: RESEARCHING PEACE

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Georgian-South Ossetian Conflict: Researching Peace

Collection of Georgian Papers

2011

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C O N T E N T S

INTRODUCTION	
Susan Allen Nan.....	4
FOREWORD TO THE GEORGIAN COLLECTION	
Archil Gegeshidze	5
CONFLICT IN SOUTH OSSETIA: CURRENT PROBLEMS AND PERSPECTIVES OF IDP RETURN	
George Tarkhan-Mouravi.....	6
CIVIL SOCIETY AND PEACE BUILDING PROCESS	
Ivlian Haindrava.....	26
THE HUMAN FACTOR IN THE PROCESS OF RESTORING CONFIDENCE BETWEEN PEOPLES: A STUDY OF OPINIONS OF OSSETIANS LIVING IN GEORGIA	
Revaz Gachechiladze	42

INTRODUCTION

The two sets of papers presented here were once simply an idea that seemed perhaps crazy. Without an introduction, the reader may find this volume schizophrenic. Holding the book in one direction, the reader will find three articles by Georgian researchers. Holding the book in another direction, the reader will find three articles by South Ossetian researchers. To read the other perspective, the reader must change orientation. Different terminology is used in each chapter, and contradictory statements appear from one chapter to another.

All this makes sense in the context of the initial question raised as people with good intentions brainstormed potential confidence building steps: Would there be any chance of engaging scholars to bridge across the Georgian-South Ossetian divide with their writing, and offer some contribution to policy makers? Such confidence building measures once seemed almost impossible, when the first Point of View Civic Process discussion convened civil society peacebuilders in the immediate aftermath of the August 2008 war. But, I have been continuously impressed with the resilience, perseverance, and vision of people on both sides who want to create a stable peace in which Georgian and Ossetian children can grow up feeling at home in the world. After one Point of View discussion in Istanbul in October 2010, Kosta Dzugaev and Archil Gegeshidze decided to give this idea a try. The book you hold in your hands is proof they succeeded.

The two research groups worked independently, but coordinated with each other enough to end up with very different articles assembled together in this one book. After discussions together in Istanbul, the two teams of researchers identified different research priorities, which are reflected in the three articles from each group. Each group sought topics that would offer the most constructive contribution to policymakers on both sides, in the views of that group of authors. Each author worked independently to conduct his or her research. My editorial role was limited and did not engage at all with the content of the research. However, the authors did meet in Istanbul again as they completed drafts, and the articles are richer as a result of that discussion.

Readers will quickly notice that the authors agreed to disagree about terminology. What a Georgian author calls “Georgia proper” may be described as “Georgia” by an Ossetian author. What an Ossetian author refers to as “government” may be described as “leadership” by a Georgian author. Geographic names are also different, as are references to displaced people. The same people are referred to by Georgians as Internally Displaced People and by Ossetians as Forcefully Displaced People or Refugees. The word “border” takes on different significance, as the Ossetians describe an international border, and the Georgians see an administrative border.

This project did not attempt to force any standard terminology. Rather, the project goals are to highlight areas of potential confidence building, build a channel of communication amongst scholars bridging across the divide, and contribute policy relevant writing on areas that have been neglected by research in recent years.

All this would not have been possible without the dedication of Kosta Dzugaev and Archil Gegeshidze, each author, the translators, and a project support staff that kept the two separate projects coordinated with each other enough that they have ended up under one cover.

I hope each reader will find something of value in each chapter—even those chapters with which a reader will want to argue. Understanding the arguments across the current divide requires first knowing what they are. May these two sets of articles be a small step in that direction.

Prof. Susan Allen Nan
School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution,
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FOREWORD TO THE GEORGIAN COLLECTION

The following collection of articles by notable Georgian researchers George Tarkhan-Mouravi, Ivlian Khaindrava and Revaz Gachechiladze was prepared as part of the project - "Georgian-Ossetian Conflict: Researching Peace," implemented by the Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies in 2011. The articles discuss the perspectives of the displaced population, restoring the peacemaking potential of civil society, and the role of the human factor in confidence building between Georgians and Ossetians. The selection and focus of the research areas was defined by two considerations. On the one hand, the results of the August war, which had a profound impact on the life of the population living in the conflict zone, required serious reconsideration. Considering the sharp political standoff between the conflicting parties, the emphasis was placed on the humanitarian and social problems left by the war. On the other hand, the spirit of the project suggested identifying the potential for confidence building between the parties and thus to contributing to the peace process. Accordingly, it was necessary to determine the conditions and resources required for building bridges between Georgian and Ossetian societies in order to identify obstacles on the path to reconciliation.

Considering these circumstances, the Georgian researchers deemed it necessary to look to the future, towards opportunities to escape from the current deadlock. Thus, these articles purposely avoided any political evaluation of the conditions leading to the tragic events of August 2008.

At the same time, the researchers acknowledge the breadth and multidimensionality of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict, and the impossibility of conducting a full and large-scale analysis of the topic under the limited time and other constraints such as the paucity of information available. Simultaneously, we are pleased to note that the following compilation of papers represents the first post-war attempt to scientifically evaluate complicated processes of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict without which it is impossible to find the key to the current state of affairs.

We note that our colleagues from South Ossetia in the framework of a similar project led by the George Mason University (the United States) performed similar research. These two projects together create a platform for dialogue between the Georgian and Ossetian researchers. Two working meetings proceeded with an atmosphere of trust and respect and let the participants clarify the research goals and agenda and create a mechanism for the dialogue and cooperation that is necessary in the current conditions of alienation of these two close people.

Archil Gegeshidze
Project Coordinator
Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies
Tbilisi, June 2011

CONFLICT IN SOUTH OSSETIA: CURRENT PROBLEMS AND PERSPECTIVES OF IDP RETURN

George Tarkhan-Mouravi

Introduction

More than twenty years ago, the breakup of the Soviet Union shaped the factors that increased the likelihood for ethnic conflicts in early 1990s Georgia. They, together with the prolonged process of state building, led to the tragic events of 2008.

Since the dramatic crash of the Soviet Union, ethnic relations within Georgia, and in particular, Georgian-Ossetian relations, experienced tensions that went through periods of severe ups and downs. Rarely was there ever a stage reached of common, mutually friendly cooperation. Moreover, soon after the end of the first, active phase of the conflicts in 1990s, they were then termed as “frozen” by international experts. This definition never meant that the conflicts couldn’t be transformed or that the danger of reemerging conflict had passed. After the tragic events of 1991-1992 and short-term intensification of conflict in 2004, Georgian-Ossetian and Georgian-Russian relations again reached a disastrous low point during the August 2008 war and since then have been mired in a state of latent enmity with a risk of renewed crisis.

On a cluster of key issues, the official positions of Tskhinvali and Tbilisi are utterly contradictory. The first issue relates to the discussion of legal status of South Ossetia. The point of view of Tbilisi is that South Ossetia is a part of Georgian territory and the ruling regime there is first of all illegal, and also a puppet government, as Russia possesses the real power, occupying its territory. Tskhinvali considers South Ossetia as an independent state with all attributes of a sovereign country and regards Russia as its major protector and guardian from the illegal claims of the Georgian government.

The second key contradiction is the interpretation of 2008 August war. Tbilisi believes the war was provoked by the bombardment of Georgian villages and illicit invasion of Russian troops in the northern region of the sovereign state of Georgia, while the Tskhinvali leadership holds that Russian troops saved Ossetians from genocide and slaughter. Georgia (and the great majority of the international community) views the Russian troops in the Georgian territory as an occupying force, stationed there in violation of Medvedev/Sarkozy agreement which foresaw their going back to the pre-war positions, and that the Russian troops represent a threat to Georgian security. Tskhinvali believes that the Russian military bases are legally stationed based on an agreement reached between two independent states - South Ossetia and Russia, and that they are the guarantors of security for South Ossetia.

Ethnic tension and conflict since its beginning affected not only ethnic Ossetians permanently living outside of South Ossetia within Georgia’s territory but also Georgians, living in South Ossetia. This has been a matter of vital importance for tens of thousands of individuals on both sides of the demarcation line. However, it is evident that protection of so called “national interests” should not lead, intentionally, to the violation of the rights and interests of the population who suffered as a result of irresponsible acts of respective authorities before, during and after the end of the military conflict of August 2008.

Tbilisi believes that the majority of the population of Georgian villages in South Ossetia who, due to ethnic cleansing, were forced to leave the region, have the right to return and get restitution for their lost property. Tskhinvali does not deny ousting Georgians and purposely destroying the majority of Georgian settlements, but does not agree that this should be categorized as ethnic

cleansing and concurrently will not allow Georgian refugees to return (except to Akhalgori/Leningori region where return is encouraged).

There are also other principal disagreements with roots in the deep mutual mistrust in addition to the lack of desire from the Ossetians of South Ossetia to live in the Georgian state, which is blamed for all their troubles. Given the irreconcilable differences between the political elites in Tbilisi and Tskhinvali (and also in Moscow) on specific issues, in particular the legal status of South Ossetia and the stationing of the Russian military bases and border guards there, there is no expectation that in the immediate future relations will improve.

Below we attempt to define the foremost problems in Ossetian-Georgian relations, and review and analyze them without bias that might contribute to mitigating the current standoff and assist in finding the optimal model of peaceful coexistence even within current limitations.

One of the key obstacles to achieving a truly impartial analysis presented below is the extremely limited availability of reliable information on all aspects of the functioning of society in South Ossetia.¹ While it is somewhat easier to obtain information in Georgia proper, nevertheless here too information regarding the conditions of IDPs, or ethnic Ossetians, is not easily attainable or fully reliable. Limited time and lack of opportunities to visit South Ossetia was a major constraint for the current research.

General Context: Peace, Russia, North Caucasus

In order to discuss the possible modes of Ossetian-Georgian relations in various time perspectives, it is essential to consider these relations as a geopolitical subsystem defined by many factors, such as: general geopolitical context, objectives pursued by the parties, country specifics, trends and possible scenarios of political developments. It should be noted, however, that taking into consideration the extreme isolation of South Ossetia from the rest of the world, global processes influence the region only indirectly, through economic and political processes in Russia, particularly in the North Caucasus, and also in Georgia. Georgia, in its turn, is directly connected to the international community and is extremely sensitive towards geopolitical shifts and events.

Since the summer of 2008 a few important processes influenced the course of developments in the region and in the world. These have been: the global economic crisis, leading to a reshuffle of the distribution of economic influence in the world; “Reset” of relations between Russia and the West, the most importantly, the United States; unrest and uprisings in the Arab world that have raised renewed questions regarding the stability of authoritarian regimes;² and finally, the recent rash of terrorist acts in Russia and the related increase in nationalistic mood not only among Russians but

¹ “Despite the information content stated in the reports, we can state with confidence that none of them gives the complete information about situation which was created in South Ossetia after the war and even if we compare all reports together we still can’t create full picture. Last year South Ossetia became the “grey zone” in fact where there are obstacles to almost all humanitarian organizations to work. The government and civil society in South Ossetia also don’t provide detailed information. It is possible that limited resources are the reason behind poor collection and analyses of information, or insufficiency of professionalism, or – in certain cases – the silence motivated by political reasons or distortion of certain facts. At present there is no publicly accessible information for individual who is willing to be aware of humanitarian problems of the region” – Pakhomenko, Varvara - *Populated island, Notes on the Demography of South Ossetian Conflict*, Caucasian Knot, 08.26.2010, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/173406>, (in Russian - *Обитаемый остров. Заметки о демографии юго-осетинского конфликта*. Кавказский Узел. 26.08. 2010, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/173406>

² The topic about possible repeat of Arab events in the former USSR region is becoming more popular. See: Hrant Kostanyan. *Spillovers from the Arab Revolts: Is Armenia next in line?* CEPS Policy Brief No. 236, 15 March 2011 <http://www.ceps.eu/book/spillovers-arab-revolts-armenia-next-line>

also among ethnic minorities. In the near future, the important events will include upcoming elections in South Ossetia, Russia and Georgia, as the election results could indicate the direction in which relations will develop in the asymmetric triangle – Moscow-Tbilisi-Tskhinvali.

Russia went through an economic crisis rather painfully,³ though the recovery too began comparatively quickly.⁴ According to the World Bank forecast, the GDP in Russia is expected to grow by 4.2% in 2011, though high inflation will remain as the central problem. In a more long term perspective the big threat to the Russian economy is high dependency on the price of oil in international markets. Taking into consideration the weakness of institutions within Russia, the "resource curse" can become a markedly restrictive factor for stable economic growth.⁵ The second most important factor limiting growth prospects is a monotonic decline of the workforce in the country.⁶ Under such circumstances, it is hard to expect long-term stable growth in the economy, even though the standard of living of the aging population (due to low birth rates), oriented toward export of raw materials, might temporarily increase while oil prices remain high. In conclusion, comparatively low rate of growth of economy (2.5%-4% annually) and low growth rate or stagnation of real income appears to be the most plausible inertial scenario for the near future (provided market conditions for raw materials are favorable).⁷ Nevertheless, Russia intends to increase expenses not only in the social sphere, but also plans to spend trillions of rubles on rearmament of the military in the next several years.⁸

In general, the changing geopolitical context over the past several years has not favored Russia, burdened by multiple problems and weaknesses.⁹ Even the deep economic crisis of 2008-2009 did not generate sufficient stimulus for undertaking radical reforms intended to modernize the country and restore democratic institutions that have been abolished or weakened during the last decade.

³ «The world economic crisis indicated that our affairs aren't in the best state. Twenty years of stormy transformations still didn't save our country from humiliating raw material dependency. Our current economy copied the worst defect from the Soviet past – to a bigger extent ignore the demand of the individuals. Our own businesses, with few exceptions, don't create anything, don't produce technology and goods for consumers. They trade what they didn't make – raw material, or imported goods. The majority of products made in Russia are very uncompetitive yet», D. Medvedev, *Russia Go Ahead!*, September 10, 2009, <http://kremlin.ru/news/5413> (in Russian, Д.Медведев. *Россия, вперед!* 10 сентября 2009. <http://kremlin.ru/news/5413>)

⁴ In addition, situation in the majority of regions is too far from prosperity. According to the statement of Director of the Regional Programs at the Independent Institute for Social Policy – Natalya Zubarevich: "the country is divided into parts. If we look at the dynamics of income the majority of regions couldn't compensate the fall. We are coming through the crisis slowly and shaking. It can be stated that the regions didn't recover from the crisis yet", Sergei Kulikov, *Half of the Regions in Russia Didn't Exit the Crisis*. *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 31.03.2011. http://www.ng.ru/economics/2011-03-31/1_crisis.html (in Russian, Сергей Куликов, *Половина регионов России еще не вышла из кризиса*. *Независимая Газета*, 31.03.2011. http://www.ng.ru/economics/2011-03-31/1_crisis.html)

⁵ See - Roland Beck, Annette Kamps and Elitza Mileva. Long-term growth prospects for the Russian economy. European Central Bank, Frankfurt. March 2007. http://ssrn.com/abstract_id=967603

⁶ « Among the key challenges that determine the model with which we need to go further, is demography. Russia will face a demographic problem more acute than in many countries. According to the Ministry of Economic Development, employment in the economy since 2011 in the amount of 67.9 million decrease in 2020 to 64.6 million, which means that each year we will diminish the number of employed in economy by about 300-400 thousand.» Speech by A.L. Kudrin at the VIII Krasnoyarsk Economic Forum, February 18, 2011. (in Russian- Стенограмма выступления А.Л. Кудрина на VIII Красноярском экономическом форуме, 18 февраля 2011 г.) <http://www.minfin.ru/ru/press/transcripts/printable.php?id4=12090>

⁷ Kiril Rogov, *Hypothesis of the Third Cycle, Pro et Contra*. July/October, 2010, p.11, (in Russian - Кирил Рогов. Гипотеза третьего цикла. *Pro et Contra*. Июль-октябрь 2010. Стр. 11.)

http://carnegieendowment.org/files/ProetContra_50_6-22.pdf

⁸ « Russia will spend 20 trillion rubles on military expenditures through 2020, stated Prime Minister Vladimir Putin. Nearly 5 trillion of them will go to upgrading the Navy complex country, the head of the government said at a meeting on the issue of drafting the state program of armament for 2011-2020 in *Severodvinsk Weekly*». <http://www.newsru.com/russia/13dec2010/strashno.html>

⁹ « Thus, the inefficient economy, semi-Soviet social sphere, the fledgling democracy, demographic trends, an unstable Caucasus, this is a very big problem, even for a state like Russia», Д. Медведев. *Россия, вперед!* 10 сентября 2009 года. <http://www.kremlin.ru/news/5413>

Although Russia continues to play an important role in global affairs, its key factors of international influence remain its nuclear potential and hydrocarbon wealth, in addition to the political unpredictability and ambitions. A decline in the demand for Russian energy resources led to fundamental changes in the energy policy of the Russian Government, as made clear by the approaching agony of the much advertised construction of the South Stream pipeline.¹⁰

It is evident that the influence of Russia in the region and in the world in short- and mid-term perspective will further decline. Even in the post-Soviet space, where Russia remains much more powerful than any of its neighbors, its influence is in fact limited, as has been revealed by their unanimous refusal to recognize the independence of South Ossetia (and Abkhazia). And, of course, Russia also appeared unable to turn around the process of the disintegration of the former Soviet space.

Among the most significant processes defining the situation in Russia, and which dangerously threaten it in the long-term perspective, is the steady decline of its population, in addition to its structural change.¹¹ Experts predict that in following decades the population in Russia will continue to shrink, as the decline in the birth rate is only partly compensated by the inflow of migrants, mainly from the former Soviet Republics. Based on the recent census, RosStat estimated the population in Russia in 2010, as determined by the number of permanent citizens in the country.¹² According to the preliminary data of census, the population of Russia by January 1, 2010 was 142.96 million people, i.e. for the last eight years the population was reduced by 2.2 million people. Experts are worried not just by the population decline and increased gender imbalance,¹³ but more so by the imbalances in the geographical and ethnic distribution of the population.¹⁴ In fact, the process of decline of ethnic Russian population is partially compensated by the increase in the numbers of ethnic minorities, and first of all – the Caucasians, and also of emigrants from Central Asia. Based on the preliminary census data, the highest rate of population growth was observed in the North Caucasus Federal District (6.3%), where the population has reached 9.5 million – this figure is only two times less than the total population living in huge territories of Siberia (where 19.3 million people reside, this number gradually declining, i.e. just 14% of total Russia's population is spread over 57% of the entire territory of Russia).

¹⁰ Anton Kliuchin, Something Strange Happened. Lenta.ru. Comments: 03.18.1011 (in Russian, Антон Ключкин. Случилось странное. Lenta.ru: Комментарии: 18.03.2011) <http://lenta.ru/articles/2011/03/18/potok/>

¹¹ The famous demographer colorfully described this unhappy situation: “A specter is haunting Russia today. It is not the specter of Communism—that ghost has been chained in the attic of the past—but rather of depopulation—a relentless, unremitting, and perhaps unstoppable depopulation”. Nicolas Eberstadt. *Drunken Nation: Russia's Depopulation Bomb*. World Affairs, Spring 2009. <http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org/articles/2009-Spring/full-Eberstadt.html> See also, Nicholas Eberstadt. *Russia's Peacetime Demographic Crisis: Dimensions, Causes, Implications*. The National Bureau of Asian Research. May 2010. http://www.nbr.org/publications/specialreport/pdf/preview/Russia_demography_preview.pdf

¹² Rosstat darkened the picture on extinction of Russian population based on the new data, see Novosti (the News), newsru.com, March 29, 2011. <http://newsru.com/russia/29mar2011/rosstat2010.html>. See also, *Disappearing World Power*, Das Berlin-Institut für Bevölkerung und Entwicklung, 2011. <http://www.berlin-institut.org/selected-studies/the-waning-world-power.html>

¹³ The population of Russia steadily was decreasing since the USSR broke apart in 1991, where the average lifespan for men fell to 60 years comparing to 72 for women. Social and economic factors for this decline were ascribed as alcoholism, depression and in other diseases.. Tony Halpin. Millions of men disappear as demon drink takes its toll. *The Times*, 29.03.2011 <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/world/europe/article2964251.ece>. См. также: Nicholas Eberstadt. *Drunken Nation: Russia's Depopulation Bomb*. World Affairs, Spring 2010. <http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org/articles/2009-Spring/full-Eberstadt.html>

¹⁴ For example, Director of Institute of Globalization Problems, Mychail Delyagin stated that Russia is experiencing a process of extinction of the Russian part of the population through ethno-cultural balance in Russia and if we keep up this trend, in 8 to 20 Russia will be governed by Caucasians. Russian News Service, 03.28.2011. <http://www.rusnovosti.ru/guests/visitor/56172>

The above mentioned processes, along with ongoing (though creeping) war in the North Caucasus, terrorist acts reaching the capital of country, and artificially pumped up alarmist and nationalist rhetoric in mass media, all encourage an increase in Russian ethnic nationalism which is capable of setting up the spiral of violence and destabilization. The December 2010 events in Manege square of Moscow and in some other cities became the first signs of the possibility that the above mentioned government-cultivated ethnic nationalism may slip out of control. The redefining of the Russian state in ethnic terms has the potential to become the most dangerous development in its entire post-Soviet history. Putting forward this type of political objective has the potential to tear apart Russia's integrity and lead to a reexamination of its borders.

In recent years, Russian ethno-nationalism has assumed primarily the form of xenophobia.¹⁵ Large numbers of racially motivated crimes have been observed in Moscow and Petersburg regions. Moreover, the extremists appear to act in a rather favorable public environment. Based on opinion polls conducted by the Levada-Center, 58% of respondents share the idea of "Russia for Russians," an increase from 43% in 1998.¹⁶ Along with the growth of ethnic nationalism, there is also a gradual increase in regional nationalism, which highlights the core differences between regions and the central government, as the latter is regarded as having led a colonial-style robbery of the local population. So, the last census revealed a large number of individuals living in Siberia who claimed their nationality as "Siberian."¹⁷

In connection to South Ossetia the most vital issues to focus on are the alarming processes in the North Caucasus. However, the Russian Government is not simply passive against the background of an increasingly tense situation, but appeared fully incapable of adequately assessing the situation and identifying proactive responses to stabilize the region.¹⁸ The processes in the North Caucasus, gradually spreading elsewhere in Russia, are extremely dangerous for the country. Quoting Aleksei Malashenko, "the entire North Caucasus is in a state of latent war."¹⁹ Russian officials are also no less alarmed. So, Prime Minister Putin, during the meeting of the government commission on social-economic development of the North Caucasus, underlined the role of social factors,²⁰ and

¹⁵Dimitry Trenin: After the imperial consciousness, ideological consciousness on the front position came national consciousness, nationalism, not always in its best form. To this extent anti Caucasian and anti American sentiments originate from the same roots. In "Face to Face", interview with the Director of the Carnegie Center in Moscow Dmitri Trenin. Danila Ganperovich, Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty, March 13th, 2011, <http://carnegie.ru/publications/?fa=43158>

¹⁶ Results of opinion poll based on representative selection of 1,600 Russians ages between 18 and up in 130 residential areas in 45 regions of Russia, took place in January 21-24, 2011 and was carried by Iuri Levada Analytic Centre (Levada – Centre). <http://www.levada.ru/press/2011020407.html>

¹⁷ Vladimir Antilin, The Citizen of Syberia, Russian Reporter, February 22, 2011, No. 7 (185). <http://rusrep.ru/article/2011/02/22/sibir/>

¹⁸ « The present policy of the Kremlin in the Caucasus cannot succeed. The federal government focuses on short-term, quick-results strategy to stabilize the North Caucasus and the preparation for the 2014 Olympics instead of adopting a long-term approach on a national scale that would ensure long-lasting stability and development in the region.. Maria Lipman, Nikolai Petrov, "Tandem" system of governance and decision-making in Russia, presentation in Carnegie Fund for International Peace Washington D.C., October 19, 2010

<http://russian.carnegieendowment.org/events/?fa=eventDetail&id=3100>

¹⁹ See also his recent interview: - - Do you think that the situation in the North Caucasus in general was desperate? - Alas, desperate. For all that it should not be viewed in black and white: that is having positive and highly efficient state, good law enforcement agencies - the Interior Ministry and Federal Security Service, is a kind of civil society, on the one hand, and there are bad people called "Wahhabis" who are constantly stirring up the water - on the other. As you can imagine, this is a very primitive approach, and it does not reflect the seriousness of the situation. Today the North Caucasus has witnessed such overlapping of contradictions - and the social, political, religious and ethnic - that getting rid of them, acting "linear" is practically impossible. Profile, No. 10 (709), March 21, 2011 (in Russian - Профиль №10 (709), 21 марта 2011 г.), <http://www.profile.ru/items/?item=31859>

²⁰ « I would like to reaffirm that our objective is to radically change the situation in the North Caucasus, primarily by improving the quality of life of the people, ensuring their security and giving them the opportunity to work and leave in peace. We must eradicate the roots of terrorism and extremism, first of all poverty, unemployment, ignorance and inadequate levels of education, corruption and lawlessness.» <http://www.premier.gov.ru/events/news/13920/>

promised to invest only in 2011 more than 400 billion rubles for development in the region. In September 2010 the ‘Strategy for Social-Economic Development of the North Caucasus Federal District until 2025’ was approved. In January 2011, at the Davos summit, Russian officials put forward grand plans for the development of ski tourism in Dagestan and Adygea.²¹ In reality, Moscow is losing control of these regions and is unable to pacify the Caucasus either by military means or through multibillion financial injections.

Attempts of “Kadirovization” of different autonomous entities in the North Caucasus carry with them serious risks of the further loss of control over the region, all the more so as the ethnic Russian population continues its slow but steady exit from there. The possible strengthening of coordination between the Caucasus Emirate and radical West-Caucasian groups is capable of sharply exacerbating the situation, and even poses a threat to the Winter Olympics in Sochi of 2014. In the North Caucasus, we not only see the local versions of nationalism and secessionism sprouting up, aggravated by harsh social conditions, poverty and widespread unemployment, but also lawlessness, clanism and corruption, as well as radical branches of Islam are attracting more and more individuals among young Caucasians and not infrequently even ethnic Russians. Moreover, radical Islam threatens to spread widely in the course of time through the Volga-Ural region, where Muslims represent the majority of the population, in particular to Tatarstan and Bashkortostan.²²

The possibility of isolation or separation of the North Caucasus from Russia is becoming a topic of more frequent discussions, while just a few years ago, this theme was entirely exotic and practically not discussed. Many residents of Russia’s central regions are irritated by the cultural and behavioral distinctiveness of the Caucasians, their connection to organized crime (real or imaginary), terrorism, or commonplace violence (especially widespread in the Russian army). Even discussions over issues like a proposed no-visa regime with the European Union, according to many experts, are delayed significantly because of the “Caucasian problem.”²³

State of Affairs in Georgia Proper

The state of affairs in Georgia can be divided here into economic (economic development and growth, macroeconomic trends, investment, manufacture and trade), social (poverty, unemployment, social security, demography, social infrastructure) and finally, - political (government, elections, political groups, internal and foreign policy) areas. The events of August 2008 profoundly shocked Georgian society, and will definitely have far-reaching political, social and economic consequences, further exacerbated by the global crisis. However, against the backdrop of the geopolitical and geo-economic realities described above, equally important are the reforms and public policies implemented by the Georgian government.

²¹ « In terms of socio-economic development it is only a concept of large-scale development of ski resorts in all of the Caucasian republics. Even though this idea seems absurd, it is expected that this idea really will attract tourists and creates jobs for the rapidly growing population. It seems to be more rational if we consider it as a fee for the loyalty of local elites and stability plus the development of construction, which can really give people jobs.», Nikolai Petrov, Grani, 02.28.2011 (in Russian, Николай Петров. Грани, 28.02.2011), <http://grani.ru/opinion/petrov/m.186617.html>

²² As recently was noted by retired Major-General of Police, Vladimir Ovchinski in the New Times, « In addition, Volga region is under a fire. In fact every week one terrorist group we have to liquidate in Bashkiria and Tatarstan, just Mass Media doesn’t write on them....» <http://newtimes.ru/articles/detail/34785/>

²³ « The European Union does not want to introduce visa-free regime with Russia, and soon will not even ease the visa regime. Even if Russia unilaterally will abolish visas for EU citizens, the EU did not respond in kind and will not abolish visas for Russians”, - said the Belgian ambassador in Moscow, Guy Trouveroy in an interview with the Russian News Service. The main reason for lack of interest in the abolition of EU visas - problem in the North Caucasus, the diplomat explained: Europe fears a large influx of refugees from troubled regions of Russia”. Belgian Ambassador: Europe Would Not Cancel Visa for Russians is Afraid for Caucasians, NEWSru.com, March 1rst, 2011. <http://newsru.com/russia/31mar2011/boitso.html>

Despite the fact that the Georgian economy still is weakly integrated into the global economic system, the world economic crisis inevitably hit the already frail economy of the country. The volatility of Georgian economy is determined also by the fact that its prosperity is directly connected to the realization of its transit potential, and furthermore by the prices of transported goods, chiefly energy resources. In contrast to its neighbors Azerbaijan and Russia, Georgia is comparatively poor in hydrocarbon resources, although some moderate optimism is related to already exploited deposits of oil in East Georgia, near the Azerbaijan border, and also the first signs of oil in the Black Sea shelf.²⁴ Still, currently the key factor of development of Georgia is coupled with its transit function, as a few vital oil and gas pipelines cross the country.

Indeed, Georgia was severely affected by the economic crisis that coincided with the urgency to restore its economy after war damage, even though the generous support from the West played a significant role in cushioning the impact of the crisis. While the GDP grew by more than 10% in 2006-2007, the growth rate fell in 2008 and became negative in 2009. Despite major obstacles, such as inflation and stumbling foreign investment, the economy began recovering in 2010. The IMF in its prognosis (made in February, 2011) upped the expected growth rate for Georgia in 2011 from 4.5% to 5.5%. It also forecast a reduced inflation rate - 8% at the end of the year (inflation was 11.8% in December 2010, 12.3% in January and 13.7% in February 2011).²⁵ At the same time, in 2012-2014 the government was expected to face significant international obligations related to servicing its external debt, which should have reached the maximum – more than \$1 billion USD in 2013 (8% of GDP).²⁶ A slight improvement was forecast by the major rating agencies - for example – Fitch Ratings reviewed the long-term prognosis of the Georgian debt and changed “stable” into “positive” and approved B+ level. Fitch agency evaluated the real GDP growth as 6.5% in 2010 after the negative growth of -3.9% in 2009. It also forecast growth by 5% and 6% in 2011 and 2012 respectively.²⁷

Notwithstanding considerable macroeconomic success before the August 2008 war, while widespread poverty saw a slight drop, the unemployment and disparity in wealth remained high. Poverty to a great extent is due to high unemployment and low productivity of labor, especially in agriculture. Regardless of economic growth, the majority of the population has continued to work in agriculture. And while this work provides the bare necessities, there are very few who are able to improve their economic and social conditions. At the same time, while more than half the population is residing in the rural areas and 55% of the workforce is employed in agriculture, its portion in GDP is only 8%-9%.²⁸ Beyond a doubt, it is still unemployment that remains the most severe social problem, and it continues to grow (12% - in 2004, 16% in 2009).

The state system of social welfare acquired particular significance against the background of widespread poverty. Respectively, social welfare – including pensions and pension subsidies for specific groups of individuals, children subsidies, disability benefits, and recently created (in 2006) individual social assistance – takes away a large portion of the state budget. Solidarity based pensions remain the biggest part of the social welfare budget, due to the large number of pensioners in the country (about 838,000 individuals in 2010). At the same time the pension rate of 80 Lari per month is very low, as the subsistence wage in winter 2011 was 150-160 Lari.²⁹ In addition to poverty, other factors stymie the ability to improve standards of living in Georgia. For example, the

²⁴ See: Boyko Nitzov. The Black Sea as the New North Sea. *New Atlanticist*, May 19, 2010.

http://www.acus.org/new_atlanticist/black-sea-new-north-sea

²⁵ <http://civil.ge/rus/article.php?id=21765>

²⁶ IMF. Georgia — 2011 Article IV Consultation Mission Concluding Statement. February 22, 2011 <http://www.imf.org/external/np/ms/2011/022211.htm>. (Later, significant part of this debt got rescheduled).

²⁷ <http://www.interpressnews.ge/en/society/25892-fitch-revises-georgias-outlook-from-stable-to-positive.html>

²⁸ http://www.geostat.ge/index.php?action=page&p_id=428&lang=eng

²⁹ http://www.geostat.ge/?action=page&p_id=178&lang=geo

prospect of offering housing to vulnerable groups of the population remains limited and unsatisfactory. Construction of new homes is almost fully controlled by the private sector, and since the rushed privatization of residences in the beginning of the 1990s, the government almost entirely stopped its involvement in residential building, with the exception of very rare cases of construction for the internally displaced population (in particular in Fall 2008).

Migration still remains a popular way for solving economic and social problems. Traditionally, the Georgian population was not inclined to emigrate and previously only small groups of Georgian Diaspora lived abroad. Nonetheless, since the beginning of the 1990s, the permanent economic crisis and political instability have forced hundreds of thousands of Georgian citizens to leave the country, in order to find security, livelihood, and better opportunities for self-realization. As a result, Georgia has lost to date almost one fifth of its population. Russia and the CIS countries at first were the most popular destinations for migrants; however more recently, Europe and the United States have become more attractive places to emigrate, because of the higher standard and quality of life there, but also due to the deteriorating situation in Russia. Migration leads to the loss of a qualified and able workforce; however, assistance received from abroad, mainly in the form of remittances sent to their kin by the migrants, is extremely important for supporting living standards of many families, and the economy of the country as a whole. At the same time, after a long period of declining numbers, the first sign of Georgian population increase was noted in 2010³⁰ based on the positive balance of the natural growth rate and migration.

Naturally, migration affected ethnic minorities even more than ethnic Georgians, and this has led to a considerable proportional increase of the ethnic Georgian population in the country (67% in 1989 and 82% in 2002). This process was also influenced by the conflicts and nationalistic mood in the beginning of 1990s, as well as by better opportunities for migration for some ethnic minorities – Jews, Greeks, etc. Still, poly-ethnicity remains in Georgia with considerable compactly settled populations of Armenians and Azeris, and some smaller groups. Here, we are primarily interested in ethnic Ossetians residing in Georgia proper, i.e. outside of South Ossetia.

The Ossetian population of Georgia in 1989 [i.e. prior to the breakup of the Soviet Union] numbered 164,000, while out of this number about 99,000 lived in South Ossetia. 33,138 Ossetians resided in Tbilisi. The outcome of 1991-1992 events significantly affected the Ossetian populations. Either by force or willingly, many Ossetians abandoned their homes, mainly in the Borjomi gorge and East Georgian settlements, and moved primarily to North Ossetia. In 2002, the Ossetian population in the Georgian controlled territories (outside of South Ossetia) was 38,000 people. The number of Ossetians in Tbilisi fell to 10,000. Migration of the Ossetian population from Georgia proper continued later as well, particularly from the Pankisi gorge, mainly as a result of pressure by the Chechen refugees resettled there from Russia. Relatively large groups of the ethnic Ossetian population are found in Shida Kartli, Kakheti, Mtskheta-Mtianeti, and to a lesser extent in other regions. Ossetians live in Georgia proper in 130 villages and in most of big urban settlements.³¹ Since no exact demographic data regarding the number of ethnic Ossetians are available, one has to depend on expert projections, estimating their number at approximately 25,000-30,000. It is impossible to avail any exact figures also because there is no clear definition of ethnicity, due to mixed families and high rates of assimilation, reflected in part by assuming Georgian endings to Ossetian family names. In any case, one can conclude that approximately the same number of Ossetians live in Georgia proper, outside of South Ossetia, as those who reside in South Ossetia itself.

³⁰ For a year number of population in Georgia was increased by 51,000, Business Georgia, 08.18.2010 <http://bizzone.info/stats/EklkEEVVyy.php>

³¹ Giorgi Sordia. Ossetians in Georgia in the Wake of the 2008 War. ECMI Working Paper #45, Flensburg: ECMI, August 2009. http://www.ecmcaucasus.org/upload/publications/working_paper_45_en.pdf

There was no noticeable major exodus of Ossetians from Georgia following the August 2008 war, nor was there any notable enmity expressed towards them. In general, outside of South Ossetia there were no major changes in relations between Georgians and Ossetians. At the same time, uncertainty and anxiety is observed among many rural residents of Ossetian ethnicity, with regards to future prospects of their life in Georgia, along with the renewal of military action and its potential consequences.³²

As a result of the optimization process, many schools in Georgia with a small number of students were closed down and merged with bigger schools. This process has also affected Ossetian schools (both those schools entirely teaching in Ossetian, and schools with some classes in Ossetian language), so that there are only a few Ossetian schools left.³³ No less important a problem is the lack of modern textbooks in Ossetian language and lack of qualified teachers (these problems remain unsolved also for the recently opened Ossetian Sunday school in Tbilisi). As for mass media in Georgia – the Public Channel has a 30 minute news report in Ossetian once a week and a short weekly radio program also is aired. In general, there remain big problems with the preservation and usage of the Ossetian language, and unless radical measures are taken, its fate does not cause much optimism. While there are a few Ossetian associations working in Georgia, they do not seem to act vigorously in this direction. Among them is the biggest organization – Association of Ossetians in Georgia Vsimaron (brotherhood), established in 1998.³⁴ These associations focus their activity on organizing cultural events, preserving Ossetian traditions, strengthening ethnic minority rights, and building trust between Georgians and Ossetians. The lack of financial resources and somewhat inert attitudes limit these organizations' work. Since the August 2008 war, Ossetians in Georgia proper are even less visible in society or in state politics.

Recent political activity in Georgia is largely focused on the upcoming 2012-2013 parliamentary and presidential elections. Major changes in the ethnic policy or policy towards South Ossetia are not to be expected prior to these elections. The reputation of the Georgian Government has suffered somewhat in the West, but along with the issues of territorial integrity and the deployment of Russian military bases in the Georgian territory, the Georgian Government still considers Euro-Atlantic integration as the major focus of its foreign policy. The West is still worried that in addition to the conflicts and volatility of the political situation, Georgia is considered to be a part of the major transit channels for illegal drugs to Europe.³⁵ Multiple arrests were also made in Georgia during attempts to send enriched uranium from Russia (mainly through South Ossetia).³⁶

In addition, instability and the spread of terrorism in the North Caucasus is a headache not just for Russia, but for Georgia as well. It should be also noted that the problem of integration of ethnic minorities, and in particular Azeris and Armenians residing in South-East Georgia, has become somewhat less acute in recent years.

Over the last twenty years, Georgia has endured numerous shocks and challenges, and it is not surprising that the population's collective consciousness has been afflicted by a "post-colonial syndrome" along with certain irrational attitudes. Vamik Volkan has defined this affliction, in a

³² G. Sordia. op.cit.

³³ Naira Bepievi. Issue of Ossetians' Education. 2010. <http://www.bspn.gfsis.org/articles/87-issue-of-ossetians-education>

³⁴ Interview with the President of Association of Georgia Tengiz Gagloev, Moscow Ossetian Community (2004), http://www.iriston.ru/ru/more_news_diaspora.php?aid=33

³⁵ «Law enforcement bodies in European countries have intercepted seven to eight tons of illicit narcotics in 2009 in long-haul trucks that had at one point passed through Georgia». The 2011 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report. <http://www.state.gov/p/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2011/vol1/156360.htm#georgia>

³⁶ A. Kapatadze. Radiological Smuggling and Uncontrolled Territories: The Case Of Georgia. Global Crime, Vol. 8, Issue 1, 2007, pp. 40–57. http://cns.miis.edu/npr/pdfs/npr_17-2_kapatadze.pdf

psychoanalytic tradition, as “group regression.”³⁷ The opinion polls demonstrate a deep anxiety caused by the present state of affairs, in particular, by relations with Russia, as well as by distress over the loss of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Maps and borders play a significantly symbolic role in general, and people tend to react sensitively to any territorial losses, as they are considered the most essential elements of a nation’s existence. The population’s foreign policy orientation is defined by these events, and the West and NATO are associated with security, the hope of restoring territorial integrity, and economic prosperity. Russia, in its turn, threatens Georgia’s independence and statehood. This is the main reason why pro-Russian political groups do not enjoy popular support in Georgia.

The official concept of national interests fully reflects public opinion: the war initiated by Russia represents the major threat to state security, with its military bases in occupied territories of Georgia. The vital national task is the return of South Ossetia and Abkhazia under the control of the Georgian government. The major foreign policy task is Euro Atlantic integration. Other important elements of the national concept are: strengthening of government institutions and speedy economic reforms leading to prosperity of country, resolving all social problems.

With no strong logic behind it, either Switzerland or Singapore or any other country is stated as model for Georgia, depending on which place the head of the state has recently visited and liked. However, the actual actions by the government are often in conflict with the declared objectives, and may sometimes appear inconsistent, not thought through, and ineffective. So, one may observe the declaration of pursuing democratic values and freedoms not fully consistent with: establishing effective control over most of the electronic mass media; unwillingness to consult with citizens and opposition on key political decisions; violations in the run-up to the elections; or weakening local governance and the court system. The officially declared deregulation and economic liberalism coexist alongside with weak and often violated property rights and informal methods to pressure businesses. Declared orientation to European integration stands in contrast to excessive deregulation and some of the new laws (for example, the Labor Code), which are not in line with EU standards. Consequently, the impression is that the ruling elites are concerned first of all with retaining power, and many decisions are made under the influence of random and sometimes irrational factors.

Displaced Persons

One of the most painful problems of Georgian reality is the situation of internally displaced persons. It serves as an obstacle for the country’s socio-economic development and stabilization. The great majority of IDPs does not have proper living conditions and live in poverty. They do not have permanent and sustainable incomes and are not fully integrated with the local population, while there is no immediate expectation that they will be able to return home any time soon.

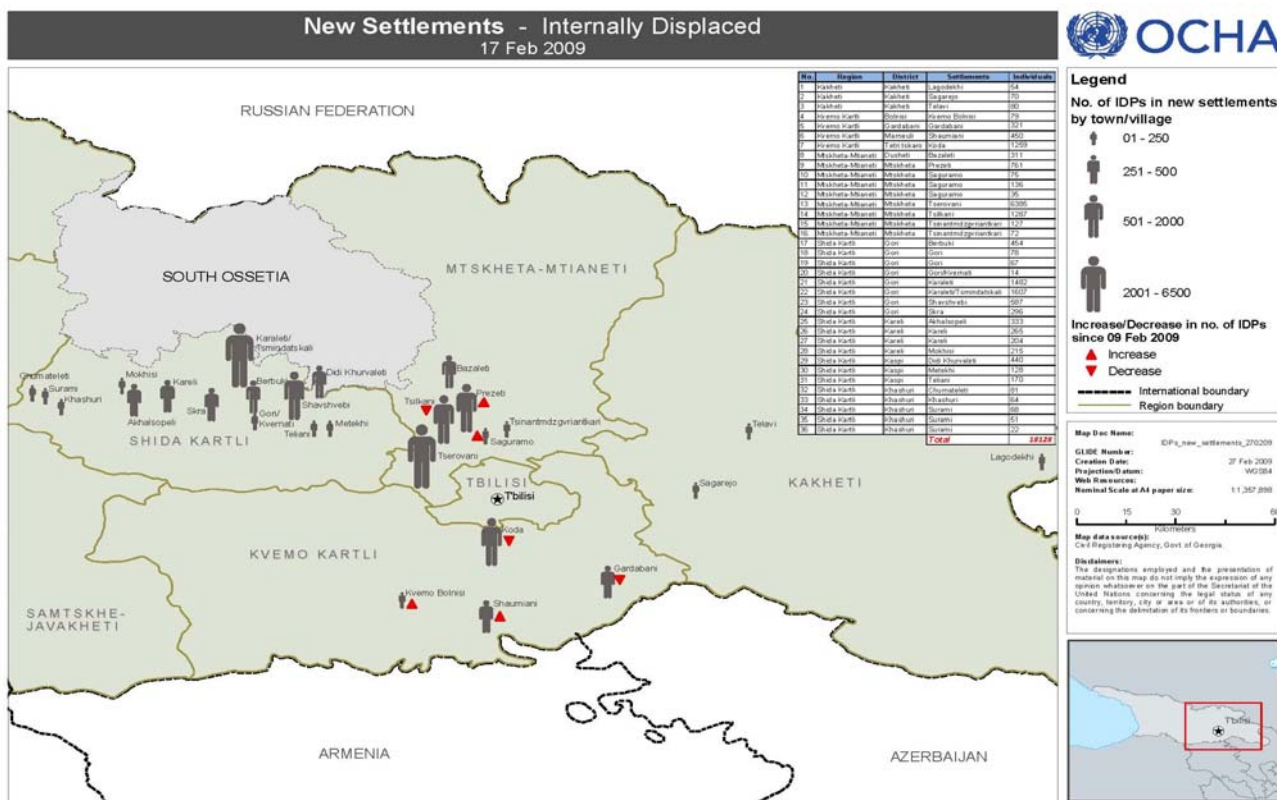
The humanitarian situation in Georgia was unfavorable even before the 2008 war, due to the great numbers of IDPs from the conflict zones, from the early 1990s. Since August 2008, the condition worsened with tens of thousands of additional IDPs expelled (some of them forced to migrate not for the first time).

³⁷ [National and ethnic conflicts] can not be understood if we only focus on material aspects of it, such as: economic, military, legal and political factors. In fact the problems of “material world” are psychological in their highest meaning and they are influenced of specific perceptions, thoughts, fantasies, and emotions (conscious and subconscious), which are tied to the heroic past or memory of traumas received, losses, humiliation and moments of deep sorrow, also the feeling of vengeance, and resistance to accept changed circumstances. Vamik D. Volkan. *Bloodlines: From Ethnic Pride to Ethnic Terrorism*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 1997., p.117

The Government of Georgia was forced to change the already approved “Action Plan for the Implementation of the State Strategy for Internally Displaced Persons”, and at the same time to urgently solve problems of 24,000 new forced migrants from South Ossetia. This number added to the approximately 13,000 migrants who fled South Ossetia in the beginning of the 1990s and lived in Tbilisi, Gori and some rural areas of Shida Kartli, and more than 200,000 IDPs from Abkhazia (even though a part of these IDPs live in Gali region of Abkhazia and their IDP status is questionable).

Based on government data, by the end of December 2008, 95% of IDPs were provided with housing – which made 16, 528 individuals. They moved into 3,963 new homes (the average cost of a house was 27,933 Lari) and 9,342 damaged houses were restored in areas nearby South Ossetia (average cost was 2,000 Lari). Some IDPs could get residence in the cities – mainly in Gori. The IDPs who refused to move into new houses built in Shida Kartli, Kvemo Kartli, and in Mtskheta-Mtianeti had the right to request monetary compensation. The families that moved into restored houses received some small monetary compensation as well.

The state program to assist “old” IDPs aimed to provide the housing through exercising property rights (in most cases the temporary residence was legally privatized) or to pay monetary compensation. In addition, all registered IDPs have the right to receive a small but permanent allowance and some benefits – for example, free health care.



Map of IDP settlements, data based on UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

Obviously, providing housing and monetary assistance does not guarantee proper living conditions for IDPs, and in fact the most important problem remains unemployment and the lack of permanent income.³⁸ While living conditions of some IDPs cannot be considered worse than some other groups of the population (for example some ethnic minorities, people living in isolated mountain

³⁸ G. Tarkhan-Mouravi. Assessment of IDP Livelihoods in Georgia: Facts and Policies. UNHCR, Tbilisi. May 2009 <http://www.unhcr.org/4ad827b12.pdf>

regions, etc.) Still, their problems have specific features. Among the number of specific problems or risks is uncertainty of future and; low income/unemployment; generally inadequate living conditions; degraded social capital; and, post traumatic disorders common among IDPs).

Poverty is the biggest scourge for IDPs, although it also plagues the large majority of the entire Georgian population. To a large extent, poverty is tied to two interconnected factors: whether the members of a family are unemployed or have a job; and the second– the quality of human capital in the family (education, health care, and profession). Many IDPs are struggling daily to survive, as unemployment is high in the country, although IDPs encounter often additional obstacles due to having few connections and resources as they have to compete with locals, overcome administrative barriers and adapt to the unfamiliar labor market.

As already mentioned above, members of households with access to arable land are not considered unemployed. Local government officials can temporarily give land to IDPs on their request, and the officials are authorized to choose the land and its size. Even if the land is there and it is suitable for agricultural cultivation, the IDPs need the fertilizers, machinery and fuel – in other words – all these require additional financial resources that often are missing. Accordingly, the major problem is the lack of property that could be used as collateral for taking credit.

The inability to earn an income means that many IDPs have to depend on temporary income from small trade, remittances and assistance from other family members and friends, subsistence agriculture in small vegetable gardens (if they have the land) and the sale of agriculture products. With time, the habit of permanently depending on outside assistance develops a syndrome of dependency and social apathy, and may lead to extended depression. The biggest concern is the future of children and young adults, as missing their needs can lead to future disasters in their physical and spiritual development. Isolated settlements and poor living conditions are not just problems per se, but can affect educational achievement and social standing as well.



One of the new IDPs settlements. Photo by Sintija Smite

The future of IDPs resettled often in a rush and into poor quality housing is extremely alarming.³⁹ Many of the new IDP settlements often lack all necessary infrastructures, though some measures to improve their conditions are currently taken. In the photo above, one can see an IDP settlement

³⁹ Experts criticize the quality of cottages constructed for the refugees in Georgia, Caucasian Knot, April 28, 2010, <http://chechnya.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/168208/> The houses for refugees were constructed without maintaining quality standards, stated the Association of Young Lawyers, Caucasian Knot, June 22, 2010 <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/170527/>

with outdoor wooden toilets. This arrangement makes it harder for IDPs to keep sanitary/hygienic conditions, in particular during the winter season. Still, the central problem remains whether the IDPs can maintain acceptable living standards in poorly built residences, and also the most important one – whether the small allowance they get will remain the major source of income for the inhabitants of these cheerless houses, or whether these settlements will become slums for impoverished people with no present and no future. Equally alarming is the fate of Georgians from Akhagori, who in search of income make permanent shuttle trips between these settlements and their residence and land in Akhagori. In addition to the difficulties encountered while crossing the administrative border, their future itself remains quite unclear.

Situation in South Ossetia

Attempting to evaluate the perspectives of IDPs returning to South Ossetia, we should acknowledge not only the official position of its de facto government, but also the public opinion there, along with existing social problems. Unfortunately, only very little information is available on these matters.

Even comparatively easy issues like the size of the population in South Ossetia is a problem, and these numbers from different sources are very different. Local officials, for whatever reasons, intentionally but quite inconsistently inflate the respective numbers. As it was mentioned above, according to the population census of 1989 the population in South Ossetia was 98,527 at that time, and 40,000 of these lived in Tskhinvali. Based on various data, before the August 2008 war the number of people living in the region was assessed to be between 60,000 to 83,000. At present, the number of people residing in South Ossetia based on the official website of the President of South Ossetia is 72,000,⁴⁰ although the same official source states that the number of students in public schools does not exceed 5,000, which would indicate that the population listed on the website is unrealistic.⁴¹ At the same time, the International Crisis Group (ICG) stated that some Georgian officials went to the other extreme and estimated the population in South Ossetia at 15,000. Comparing all sources, the most reliable data seems to be presented by a member of the Russian center “Demos” Varvara Pakhomenko.⁴² Based on the data of election commissions, on migration of refugees and on the number of public school students, she estimated that in 2009 the number of population in South Ossetia was in between 26,000 to 32,000. Among these, no more than 17,000 people lived in Tskhinvali district, about 5,000 in Djava district, approximately 4,000 in Znauri district, and almost 2,500 people lived in Akhagori district.

Economic stagnation and a deadlocked situation in the region deepened by bad governance are causes of permanent depopulation. Consequently, more and more residents of South Ossetia, in particular, young and active individuals, are leaving for North Ossetia or for other parts of Russia. Although the life for the new migrants in North Ossetia is not favorable either, as they often settle in the Prigorodny rayon where Ingush previously resided, and this increases the existing inter-ethnic tensions.

⁴⁰ <http://presidentrso.ru/republic/>

⁴¹ The first of September five thousand students will go to schools of South Ossetia, Information Agency RES, 08.31.2010. <http://cominf.org/node/1166484324>. Based on the data from Rosstat even in Russia with its catastrophic birth rate the average number of students is about 11.3% of total population. There are 5,000 students in South Ossetia. <http://valery-dzutsev.livejournal.com/177365.html>

⁴² Varvara Pakhomenko, Populated island, Notes on the Demography of South Ossetian Conflict, Caucasian Knot, 08.26.2010 (in Russian, Варвара Пахоменко. Обитаемый остров. Заметки о демографии юго-осетинского конфликта. Кавказский Узел. 26.08. 2010), <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/173406/>, see also – Varvara Pakhomenko, Populated Island, Polit.Ru 09.22.2009 (in Russian: Варвара Пахоменко. Обитаемый остров. Полит.Ру. 22.09.2009.), <http://www.polit.ru/analytics/2009/09/22/demo.html>

Mass poverty, social insecurity and unemployment are widespread in almost the full entirety of South Ossetia, in particular, among the residents of the areas adjacent to the administrative border, which were significantly affected by the war. The problems of access to quality education, health care and other social services are persistent. Three major problems are: Unemployment, underdeveloped economic and social infrastructure, and, coupled with these, poor quality of life. Since private business is weak,⁴³ the main sources of income, in addition to remittances received from relatives, and to Russian pensions, remain semi-subsistence agriculture, food production, construction work, and also jobs in the public sector and in services to Russian military bases.

The territory of South Ossetia is surrounded by Georgian districts on three sides; only to the North the Caucasus Mountains form the border with Russia, and its only access to the rest of the world is exercised in fact through the Roki tunnel leading to North Ossetia, Russia. Possibilities to develop local agriculture beyond stock breeding are very limited, and while there are certain opportunities to extract polymetallic ores or to bottle mineral waters, without considerable investment and access to the foreign market the perspectives for development are dire. International Crisis Group wrote in the summer of 2010: “South Ossetia’s natural isolation, coupled with the conflict with Tbilisi, has left the economy devastated. After the war and closure of the administrative boundary with Georgia, it has had to be entirely reoriented towards Russia, without whose aid public-sector wages could not be paid. The budget may have increased by half, from 2.7 billion roubles (\$87 million) in 2009 to 4.3 billion roubles (\$140 million) in 2010, but 98.7 per cent of the total is Russian aid. President Kokoity claimed that 120 million roubles (\$3.8 million) were raised in taxes, but the local tax committee claims revenues of only \$2.4 million.”⁴⁴

Uneasy economic conditions are deepened by the undeveloped civil society and strict authoritarianism of the governance system, which lacks respect among the local population. Small civic society organizations working in South Ossetia experience permanent pressure from the authorities and security services. Several existing local NGOs work mainly on humanitarian issues, democracy, gender problems and public diplomacy. A few NGOs are in fact created by the local officials⁴⁵ and hardly represent the independent civic society, although anyway, their influence is merely limited. The activists, journalists or politicians, if they attempt to act independently, without coordination with the official authorities, may experience repressions and/or are forced to leave South Ossetia.⁴⁶ One of the evident examples of the political life of South Ossetia can be the fact that even the official protocols of the parliamentary elections of 2009, which Kokoity’s supporters won by a great majority, remain unpublished.

⁴³ «Small and medium-sized businesses are limited to small scale trade, cafes, markets, hairdressing salons, auto repair shops, bakeries and a few minor enterprises. Around two thirds of local businesses are trade-related.... The near absence of private investment can be explained by the unstable security situation, underdeveloped legal framework and high level of corruption. Even ethnic Ossetian businessmen operating in Russia refrain from investing”, considering lack of information regarding to socio-economic conditions we will refer to publication of the International Crisis Group: South Ossetia: The Burden of Recognition, Europe Report N°205 – 7 June 2010 <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/europe/caucasus/georgia/205%20South%20Ossetia%20-%20the%20Burden%20of%20Recognition%20RUSSIAN.ashx>

⁴⁴ International Crisis Group. Op.cit.

⁴⁵ « Room of the Charitable Foundation Farank, established by Tskhinvali businessman Zurab Kabisov, cut the eyes of Tskhinvali residents with its luxury view » - wrote journalist Olga Timofeeva after visiting the place in the article: Why in Tskhinvali the Promise is No Longer Waiting For? «Russian Reporter», №20 (99), May 28, 2009, http://expert.ru/russian_reporter/2009/20/parlamentskie_vybory/

⁴⁶ July 24 editor in chief of the independent newspaper «XXI Century» and one of the founders of the Republican Party – “Iron” Timur Tskhovrebov was attacked by about ten people, among whom were, reportedly, three deputies of the South Ossetian Parliament. The attackers threatened to kill Tskhovrebov for the statement he and Georgian civil activists signed to appeal the Geneva consultations on Matters of the Caucasus, where they call to give priority to the needs of the region’s population, including issues of security and freedom of movement. As a result Tskhovrebov was hospitalized with multiple injuries», South Ossetia: An Attack on a Well Known Activist, Human Rights Watch, 07.27.2010. <http://www.hrw.org/ru/news/2010/07/27-0>

The upcoming “presidential” election in November 2011 is the major political event of 2011, though many observers express skepticism.⁴⁷ It is not expected that the possible change of authority will lead to rearrangement of power in the region, or a change of fundamental principles and reorientation of governance. More importantly, it is vital to understand the political discourse and system of values of Ossetian official authorities. This is why one should try to describe South Ossetian national interests as understood by the leading officials in power. These attitudes do not create any complete picture, but are divided into separate clusters. It can be mentioned that the authorities do not have clearly formulated plans and visions, even on such key issues as the legal status of the territory and its future relations with Russia.⁴⁸

The official discourse is of foremost interest, i.e. ‘national interests’ as propagated among the population, which on certain level echoes the perceptions of the population itself (partially created by the same propaganda): Ossetia was never part of Georgia except for short periods of history; Georgians are imperialists and fascists; South Ossetia has two reliable allies – North Ossetia and Russia; Ossetians in the South and the North should live in one country, in particular – in Russia; The West and most importantly the United States are the enemies (next after the Ingush) and are always ready to support Georgia in accordance with their own interests; Incumbent government of the country is the only guarantor capable of solving all problems successfully...). In accordance with above mentioned statements, one can formulate the officially declared political path: First of all - unification of two Ossetias, maintaining full control over South Ossetia, and if the opportunity comes – further expansion,⁴⁹ also keeping control over money transfers from Russia.

As the Tskhinvali officials and several public figures many times expressed their general discontent with the Georgian Government’s actions, the claims towards the Georgian Government can be summarized in more concrete terms as follows: the Georgian authorities try to bring South Ossetia under its power and are ready to use force despite the peaceful declarations; the Georgian Government and the Georgian people carry anti-Ossetian (and anti-Russian) sentiments and implement a policy in the region that is favorable to West (to the United States) , thus damaging Ossetian and Russian interests; Georgia sympathizes with and supports secessionist and anti-Russian endeavors of Ingush and other North Caucasian groups (among these is the so called

⁴⁷ See: “today's story of how the South Ossetian authorities without explanation refuse to register the parties "Iron," "Justice" and the Social Democratic Party, also developed by the Russian scenario, and quite painfully reminiscent of pre-election campaigns of Russian opposition when appealing to the Justice Ministry. As a faithful disciple of Vladimir Putin, Eduard Kokoity himself is not going to go for a third term. But he will not let undesirable politicians who undermine that stable and appropriate situation, will not let close to the politics even. The law enforcements will assist their President. As in Russia, elections in South Ossetia are unlikely to have anything to do with real competition and the free will of the people. Until the election is left less than a year, but on both sides of the Caucasus there aren't official candidates for Presidency, neither election programs, no public debates. It is merely a power struggle against the backdrop of endless conflicting signals to society». Alexander Babuev, The Price Issue, Newspaper “Kommersant”, №54 (4595), 03.30.2011 <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1601116>

⁴⁸ Immediately after the recognition of South Ossetia by Russia Kokoity announced: “Yes, we will be part of the Russian Federation... Now we are an independent state, but we look forward to uniting with North Ossetia and joining the Russian Federation.”. Later he immediately repudiated saying “South Ossetia doesn't wish to join up with anyone”. The de facto president then said he had been misunderstood, and “we are not going to relinquish our independence South Ossetia is not going to become part of Russia.” But on the eve of the May 2009 parliamentary elections, he said integration into North Ossetia and Russia should continue, and his ruling party’s slogans called for immediate unification” The International Crisis Group, *Ibid.*, p.13.

⁴⁹ "South Ossetia also intends to demand return of Truso Gorge from Georgia which currently is part of the Georgian state”, declared Kokoity, "This is ancient Ossetian land which, based on unclear reasons went under control of Georgian SSR during the Soviet time”. Kokoity: “South Ossetia Intends to Demand part of Georgia, Caucasian Knot, July 31st, 2009, (in Russian: Кокойты: Южная Осетия намерена потребовать часть Грузии. Кавказский Узел, 31 июля 2009 г.), <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/157331>. See also: South Ossetia will Demand from Georgia to Return Truso Gorge, RIA News, 07.31.2009. <http://www.rian.ru/politics/20090731/179273091.html>

Circassian genocide, unilateral announcement of visa free entrance for North Caucasians, etc.) thus threatening the security of South and North Ossetias; Georgia tries to sabotage important projects for Russia (for example, the 2014 winter olympics in Sochi, attempts to monopolize the transit of Caspian energy resources to the West, or Russia entering WTO). It seeks NATO and EU membership, hence weakening the influence and security of Russia across its south periphery, and with that the security of South Ossetia; Georgia threatens the security of South Ossetia (it initiated the war in South Ossetia), it initiates and enters different anti-Ossetian and anti-Russian groups (for example GUAM); implements a consistent anti-Ossetian campaign in the international media and international fora; Georgian scientists and authorities are falsifying history by discussing the late settlement of Ossetians in South Ossetia, or even refusing to admit that this state entity existed in the past, and also claiming annexation of Georgia by Tsarist Russia in XIX century, and similarly annexation by Soviet Russia in 1921 (while in fact in both cases only a voluntary union took place, which saved Georgia from treacherous neighbors); and finally, Ossetian authorities blame all their troubles on Mikheil Saakashvili personally, and refuse to deal with him...

Key Social Problems and Possibilities for Return

The above description of the situation leaves little place for optimism in regard to the return of IDPs from South Ossetia, especially in the near future. It is evident that unless fundamental changes take place in the internal politics amongst all three participants of the conflict, the question about the return of IDPs in South Ossetia will not be included in the agenda beyond the Akhalkalaki district. The issue of repatriating or compensating Ossetians who were forced to leave the inner parts of Georgia seems to appear more realistic, though even this issue will barely go forward until the beginning of the next political cycle in Georgia, i.e. until 2013.

If we take into consideration the total number of refugees and IDPs since the beginning of the 1990s (both ethnic Georgians and Ossetians) the majority of these have not ever seen their full rights restored. South Ossetia, in less than twenty years, lost more than two thirds of its population. Many tens of thousands of people have their essential rights violated, as they are exiled from their birthplaces, deprived of the possibility to pursue their habitual activities, and lost a stable income, sense of security and any confidence in future. All of these are sources of mutual blame, feeding bitterness and mistrust, and blocking reconciliation of the Georgian and Ossetian people.

The current authorities of Tbilisi and Tskhinvali try to maximize their political capital while unwilling to take any responsibility for the past, presenting their respective communities as innocent victims of aggression (Russian in one case and Georgian in another). Tskhinvali, together with Moscow, attempts to perpetuate the results of ethnic cleansing of the Georgian population of South Ossetia, and to fix the distorted post-war demography by appealing to “new realities.” Preserving the current situation would imply: maintenance of the level of confrontation related to the conflict, more mass disillusionment with the possibility of peaceful resolution of problems through negotiations, and accordingly, a corresponding rise of militaristic, revanchist moods.

Existing problems represent the immediate result of policies implemented not only by authorities of the Russian Federation and the South Ossetian leadership, but by Georgia as well. The first two maintain the course of the final break-off of South Ossetia from Georgia proper. In their turn, the official strategy of the Georgian authorities “Engagement through cooperation,” in reality does not support realization of the declared objectives, due to certain clauses in official documents defining the state policy concerning the conflict territories.⁵⁰ At present, the policies and actions of official authorities of all parties to the conflict perpetuate the existing confrontation and prevent confidence

⁵⁰ <http://www.smr.gov.ge/>

building between the sides. The ongoing process of forced mutual isolation and alienation of the two – Ossetian and Georgian – societies hinders the prospect of transforming the conflict and the opportunity for its subsequent resolution.

There are many unresolved humanitarian problems related to IDPs who lost their residence, property, and livelihood. Among these problems are the government's limited resources (or will) to fundamentally improve their conditions together with difficulty or impossibility of returning to their permanent residence. No less in need are the individuals who returned to their homes or who regularly/seasonally migrate as many Akhagori residents do. Accordingly, it is very important to find ways to reduce the burden on these individuals, independently from the final political decisions regarding the status of the mentioned territories. However, this issue is less related to Ossetian-Georgian relations and more a representation of the moral liability of the Georgian authorities. Even partially resolving the conflict will affect the lives of these people, though that is a distant possibility.

The social and political processes in South Ossetia affect the future of the region. Soon, in November 2011, the presidential term of Eduard Kokoity will end and it is very clear that, with weak political opposition, the decision will be made in Moscow.⁵¹ However, in any political arrangement one should not expect a change in the chances for the return of forced migrants; still, it is expected that the statements of new authorities will be not as irresponsible as those of the current ones.⁵²

After the war in 2008 and the recognition of the independence of South Ossetia, the duties to protect its borders were taken over by Russian border guards. The process of strengthening the division line proceeded, and South Ossetian and Russian authorities named it - "the state border." The result was that the movement of individuals from South Ossetia to Georgia and in opposite directions was reduced to its lowest level since the end of the "hot phase" of the conflict in 1992. Connections between the relatives, neighbors, colleagues, and civil society representatives on the both sides of the conflicted parties were cut off (and are worsening). Accordingly, opportunities for joint ventures in business and the public sector are diminished. The barriers to getting medical assistance, education, etc. became higher. Multiple cases of detaining individuals for "illegally crossing the border" were acknowledged.⁵³

It has become clear that the Russian Government is not fully satisfied with the existing situation, though in the near future neither the withdrawal of Russian troops from South Ossetia nor the recall

⁵¹ « In search of a future president of South Ossetia The Kremlin turned his sights on the current ambassador to Russia Dmitry Medoev - a candidate yet. Eduard Kokoity did not mind seeing the future president of South Ossetia's prosecutor general Teimuraz Hugaev.... the choice of the South Ossetian leader fails: First, he Kokoity, "recently completely lost the electoral potential, and so discredited itself", that negative attitudes will be automatically transferred to the residents of South Ossetia on his henchman, and secondly, Khugaev regularly gets involved in major scandals which in the tiny republic are small in number known», Iuri Simonyan, The Kremlin Is Looking For Replacement to Kokoity, *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, 02.16.2011, (in Russian, Юрий Симонян. Кремль ищет замену Коккойты: В Южной Осетии в преддверии президентских выборов возможна дестабилизация. *Независимая Газета*, 16.02.2011), http://www.ng.ru/cis/2011-02-16/1_kokoyti.html

⁵² «After the liberation of Tskhinvali and Ossetian villages the fighting continued in the Georgian enclaves. What is it now? - Nothing. We almost leveled everything there, set the border of South Ossetia. — That is, the Georgian enclaves are actually destroyed? —What? Should it be allowed to have fired from there? Shot us in the back and humiliate our people again? – Can Georgian civilians go back home? - We are not going to let anyone to go back. More than 18 thousand of Ossetian refugees from Georgia are now in North Ossetia. We need them to return to South Ossetia», Eduard Kokoity: We Flattened Practically Everything There, in *Newspaper Kommersant*, No. 144, (3,961), 08.15.2008 (in Russian - Эдуард Коккойты: мы там практически выровняли все. Газета "Коммерсантъ", №144 (3961), 15.08.2008), <http://www.kommersant.ru/Doc/1011783>

⁵³ <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/europe/caucasus/georgia/205%20South%20Ossetia%20%20the%20Burden%20of%20Recognition%20RUSSIAN.ashx>

of the officially declared recognition of its independence is expected. Moreover, South Ossetia gradually is becoming a periphery of attention for Russian politics in the “Near Abroad” and sometimes is considered as a financial black hole requiring more expenses to support it than any expected return. Besides the fact that the Russian elite is pleased that their tanks and rockets are deployed in such close proximity to the capital of Georgia,⁵⁴ the actual strategic significance of this reality is not as large if we consider the weakness of the Georgian military forces on one hand and the expected international reaction if these bases will be used to attack Georgia, on the other.

Moreover, it is evident that at least in the short-term perspective (until the 2012 presidential elections in Russia and probably the olympics of 2014) fundamental changes in South Ossetia should not be expected. Other possibilities remain quite unpredictable and will be shaped not only based on the price of oil, but also by multiple other factors (also barely predictable) in the internal and foreign policy of Russia, the United States and EU, the world economy, and also by political developments in Georgia. It is also apparent that Georgian society is not ready to agree to the independence of South Ossetia in the foreseeable future.

A major threat for South Ossetia currently is, on the one hand, the irreversible depopulation, and, on the other, the lost sense of existence. Indeed, as there do not exist any realistic prospect for independent development of the territory, under the circumstances of the actual blockage from the south, the population in the region will eventually transform into a community of individuals living just to serve the Russian military bases. This would lead to fully discrediting and devaluing national ideals. However, some compromise models can be created which on one hand will allow the formation of guarantees to preserve key goals of the Ossetian society (i.e. security, control over the territory and resources, and preserving ethnic identity) and at the same time offer some additional stimuli to both sides. It is possible that some symbolic and temporary decisions can be made, allowing at least part of the IDPs to return. At present, however, all this seems highly improbable and barely acceptable to any party.

A few foreign factors can lead to more favorable conditions for resolving the conflict. The first of such factors is Russia, in case it is interested to find a compromise, which, however, is unlikely to be possible with the current government there. Still, not only a change of authorities but also the very dangerous processes in the North Caucasus and in other regions of Russia could force the Russian elite to review their plans and priorities. Another very important factor is the possibility of close cooperation between the EU and the United States, willing to find at least a temporary solution of the problem, and supporting stability until the final resolution of conflict is found. The last factor is the affairs at the southern borders of the Caucasus – in Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Iran. They can also influence the course of events in the Caucasus, in Georgia and respectively, in South Ossetia.

Since the search for stable models of co-existence is inevitable, appropriate discussions are needed around respective options. Such discussions can expand the range of constructive ideas and options for decision-makers, and therefore influence the process.

In fact, there exists enough space for compromise on some issues that currently seem impossible to settle. For example, Russia and South Ossetia under its influence, refuses to allow international observers to enter if the word “Georgia” sounds in their name. Georgia can not agree to rename them, as it will imply possible sovereignty of its own territory. However, it is apparent that with minimal motivation of all sides and a little imagination it is not as hard to find a compromise that

⁵⁴ Russia is Extending Rockets in South Ossetia: to the System “Smerch” Was Added “Tochka-Y”, 01.23.2011 (in Russian, - Россия стягивает ракеты в Южную Осетию: к системе "Смерч" прибавилась "Точка-У". 23.01.11). <http://newsru.com/world/24jan2011/tochkau.html>

would satisfy all the formal demands (for example, to expand geography and name it the South Caucasus mission).⁵⁵

The Georgian government (also South Ossetian and Abkhazian) officially rejected the use of force for resolving the conflicts.⁵⁶ Nothing prevents officially strengthening the statement by adopting a legislative action that would lead to a step in restoring confidence between the sides. At the same time, Russia does not currently agree to take responsibility for non-use of force in bilateral relations with Georgia, implying that it does not represent a party to the conflict. While it is not worth starting here a fruitless discussion of this doubtful argument, it is still worth acknowledging the importance of the above mentioned symbolic actions on one hand, and the lack of serious obstacles to finding a mutually acceptable formula for everyone on the non-use of force.

Similar compromises are possible in regard to many other issues, among which might be the revision of the strategic Georgian documents on the “Occupied Territories”, along with other related legislative acts leading to the isolation of South Ossetia. It would be useful, if the Georgian side would take constructive steps to improve relations with South Ossetia, among them firstly the restitution of property of displaced Ossetians, even more so as the legislative base for such an action already exists.

Recently, some experts discussed the option of recognition *de facto* of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. However, although any constructive point of view deserves to be debated, we do not think that in the near future such decisions seem realistic, and also that such a decision would be useful (referring again to possible interpretations of what national interests are). At the same time, while speaking about South Ossetia as the legal entity, one should not miss the point that the legal entity is created not by the territory but by the population of any particular region, i.e. the rights of IDPs and refugees should necessarily be taken into consideration. At present, and in the closest future, the potential to agree on the key issues such as legal status of the territory and the return of refugees/IDPs does not seem optimistic. Recognition of South Ossetia *de facto* will by no means change this situation.

The Georgian government has an opportunity to lead the policy to restore confidence between the sides. A significant step could be the creation of an economic area on both sides of the separation line and the use of positive elements of the Ergneti Market, though cleansing it from negative components, i.e. disallowing smuggling and shady transactions.

It is essential to care for the cultural identity and at the same time the social integration of ethnic Ossetians living in Georgia proper, outside South Ossetia. Most important is to be concerned with education. It has to be clearly understood that the policy of optimization of schools should be carried out while taking into account key cultural and social functions of rural schools for the corresponding communities, among them ethnic Ossetian communities. A policy supporting Ossetian language and culture is especially important on the ground of the erosion of Ossetian cultural identity and Ossetian language in both North and South Ossetia. One should not exclude considering the possibility that the Ossetian language could be accepted as the official language guaranteed by the Constitution, similar to Abkhazian, with such a step justified by the prospect of restoring of the corresponding autonomy.

⁵⁵ Ivlian Khaindrava, Perspectives of International Participation in the Process of Normalisation Georgian-Abkhaz Conflict. The International Alarm, Tbilisi, 2010, <http://drupal.alertinternational.co.uk/sites/default/files/publications/Georgian-Abkhaz.pdf>

⁵⁶ 'New Context' for Geneva Talks after Non-Use of Force Pledges. Interview of the co-Chairs of Geneva International Discussions. Civil Georgia - 15.12.2010. http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/Interview_Civil_Georgia-FINAL.pdf

At the same time, it must be admitted that from the political perspective Georgia has very limited and weak levers to influence Russia and South Ossetia, and hence to resolve the conflict. Accordingly, it has very limited options to maneuver and compromise. Such levers, in fact, come down to preventing Russia from gaining membership in the WTO, or organizing symbolic protests and making rhetorical statements; or, critically, expecting the third party (the United States, EU) will influence them. Russia has not only multiple sources of leverage, but also its actions often are essentially dangerous and threaten Georgian security. First of all, it is increasing militarization of South Ossetia (and Abkhazia).⁵⁷ Therefore, official discussion about reducing the tensions between the sides under such conditions seems somewhat premature.

Under these circumstances, unofficial contacts and informal exchanges, dialogue between youth, experts and civil society representatives acquire special significance. At present, the only format is personal contacts and also, participation in various seminars and conferences. It is evident that the time has come to look for the new formats of civil engagement and also institutionalize the most effective existing formats. It is necessary to make efforts and the society should learn the new ideas and suggestions by the time the leaderships of both countries will be ready for the constructive dialogue and compromise. Under these circumstances, the channels used to disseminate information, lucidity of statements, and authority of the communicators play the most important role in the creation of public opinion, interpretation of the events, developing the agenda, and making important decisions.

Studying the different aspects of these problems will help clarify the formal obstacles to their resolution. Potential steps forward may be determined that, while not harming any party's national interests, not only makes life easier for individuals living on both sides of the separation lines, but also gives relief to all people of good will who wish to contribute to addressing the consequences of the armed conflict.

In as much as the Georgian-Ossetian public dialogue is the core of this project, it is expected that the first task is to jointly find the ways to activate and intensify this ongoing dialogue. This requires finding common interests and fields where collaboration is possible and welcomed. The result of efforts may be not only finding the common areas of intersecting interests, but also defining the groups of population or representatives of civil society interested in this collaboration. No less important is the identification of the factors capable of influencing the realization and effectiveness of dialogue, including participation of foreign mediators.

It seems that at the moment there exists an inclination towards dialogue in both societies. On the one hand it is a losing battle to ignore the other when there are so many common interests intertwined, in the context of a prolonged ongoing political stand off. On the other hand, more opportunities to carry out dialogue (including access to finance) arose. Under these circumstances, discussion of possible models of dialogue can immediately precede the implementation of the discussed models, if such discussions are open and if their results will be accessible to all relevant groups of the population.

⁵⁷ Interestingly paradoxical and very open statement was made March 4th by the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russian Federation Grigorii Karasin that - "Russian division of operational tactical rockets "Tochka -Y" temporarily, for training purposes, will be deployed in South Ossetia" http://www.militaryparitet.com/teletype/data/ic_teletype/9902

CIVIL SOCIETY AND PEACE BUILDING PROCESS

Ivlian Haindrava

A highly developed and influential civil society is on one hand an integral part of the democratic state, and on the other hand it is itself also a venue for public discussion on the most important processes and decisions facing a country. Civil society devoted to its true calling often stands in the forefront of peace building approaches and often initiates and actively participates in unofficial “civil” or “public” diplomacy in the conflict resolution process. Georgian and Ossetian civil societies, specifically, are called to demonstrate good will to execute peace building projects, exchange information and ideas, and stimulate appropriate political elite to begin peace negotiations. These two civil societies clearly have the potential to directly and efficiently affect the process of reconciliation of the two communities and transform the Georgian-Ossetian conflict.

The essential problem is the fact that the civil society institutions are either weakly developed (unevenly underdeveloped) or for various reasons and conditions are not properly focused on appropriate problems. However, even civil society actors who are firmly rooted in the constructive position that it is necessary to support and develop dialogue between the communities, do not have sufficient resources, opportunities, or influence. Consequently, our research intends to analyze the peace building potential of appropriate civil societies (primarily, Georgian civil society), examine the approaches capable to assist on the one hand, the peace building potential of civil society towards transformation of Georgian-Ossetian conflict, and, on the other – identify existing problems, methods to overcome them and also, the optimal formats of civil activism.

In as much as Georgian-Ossetian public dialogue represents the core of the project within the frames of which we are writing this current piece, it is expected that the first task of our joint effort is to find ways to activate and intensify this dialogue. This, on the other hand requires identifying spheres of common interest and the immediate areas where cooperation is favored and possible. The result of this research is not only finding fields of common interest, but is also defining particular groups of the population and/or civil societies who might be interested in such cooperation. No less important is the identification of the factors which could positively influence implementation and effectiveness of dialogue, amongst them – participation of foreign mediators and sponsors of the process, together with objective or subjective factors preventing the restoration of and/or establishment of contacts and community dialogue between the civil societies.

Our ancestors said: Time is the best physician! Though many politicians in Moscow, Tskhinvali and Tbilisi support a high level of mutual accusations and confrontation, and although the government controlled mass media embraces that same spirit, the sharpness of perceptions of the events of summer and fall of 2008 has decreased amongst the general population. Both sides of the dividing line seem to understand the need for dialogue and joint efforts. The people have to subsist today and tomorrow, not waiting for a time when politicians will begin looking for solutions. Regrettably, inclinations to change the current state of affairs on the political level are not visible. At the same time, with direct assistance from Western mediators and donors, the conditions to begin dialogue between the two communities are emerging. Discussions regarding the models of contact, dialogue, and cooperation among the civil societies will create fertile soil for producing and implementing specific, feasible, targeted, and coordinated projects and programs. It's important, as George Tarkhan-Mouravi writes in the conclusion of his research, that the efforts and discussions of the results of research in this direction not be kept hidden, but rather be open to NGOs, relevant groups of the population, and society in general⁵⁸.

⁵⁸ See: George Tarkhan-Mouravi. Conflict in South Ossetia: Current Problems and Perspectives of IDPs Return

The Starting Point

Taking into consideration the irreconcilable positions of Tbilisi's ruling elite and those of Tskhinvali with Moscow, in regard to the political-legal status of South Ossetia and deployment there of Russian military bases and border guards, in the near future, the relations between the officials of the both sides is not expected to improve. Currently, the only ongoing process of direct political contacts between the two sides is the format of the Geneva consultations, which failed to bring any tangible results so far. At the same time, multiple non-political unresolved problems, in the absence of ongoing dialogue leads to increased mutual mistrust, preserves the enemy image, and reinforces estrangement of the communities. Under such circumstances, unofficial contacts, exchange, and dialogue between the communities take on a particular importance. Until now, the limited formats of communication are individual contacts on both sides of the dividing line, in addition to participation in different seminars and conferences in the third countries. It is evident that the time to look for new formats of civil interaction and the means to institutionalize the most effective of them has arrived.

It must be noted that, based on the their narrow political interests and carrying the burden of their mistakes and missed opportunities to normalize the relations between Georgians and Ossetians in closest past, the Governments of Tbilisi, Tskhinvali and Moscow do not even try to set up and advance relations between the people left on both sides of the dividing line between South Ossetia and the rest of Georgia. Such an attitude negatively affects the activities of the civil society institutions on the both sides. "Unfortunately, both the immediate parties to the conflict last year - the governments in Tbilisi and Tskhinvali - have taken a rather passive role in the establishment of confidence-building measures and de-escalate tensions in the region, expecting that the largest players in the region - Russia, the United States, and European Union - will solve their problems for them. Meanwhile, no one knows the situation on the ground, as the people who directly live in Georgia and South Ossetia, and therefore the main peacekeeping capacity is located precisely at the local level. Entirely relying on foreign donors, both sides are at risk as a result of the fact that their concerns will be solved not quite as they would like" – writes Valery Dzutsev⁵⁹.

However, the State Strategy on Occupied Territories "Engagement through Cooperation" adopted by the Georgian Government in the beginning of 2010⁶⁰ declares the tasks and endeavors we could consider as initiatives aimed to reconcile and draw near the Georgian and Ossetian communities. "The Strategic Intent" section suggests:

- Promoting freedom of movement—as well as people-to-people interaction and contacts across the dividing lines—through identifying areas of common interest and supporting joint inter-community projects and activities in all spheres of mutual interest;
- Promoting the free flow of information across the dividing lines, with the purpose of strengthening understanding and cooperation.

The "Basic Principles" section underlines that «Georgia opposes the isolation of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia and recognizes the negative repercussions of isolating the populations living there.» "The Goals" section includes "People-to-People Interaction," where it is noted: "Create platforms for interaction between interest groups divided by occupation lines, inter alia former combatants, neighbors, mixed families, youth, co-workers, scholars." In the same section, an entire part is dedicated to the free flow of information.

⁵⁹ Валерий Дзутцев. Национальное примирение в Южной Осетии, 06.07, 2009, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/156240/>

⁶⁰ <http://www.smr.gov.ge/uploads/file/strategy.pdf>

The Action Plan for the Strategy of Engagement through Cooperation⁶¹ includes a separate discussion of “Intercommunity Relations” which states the necessity of assisting re-establishment of the connections as an important role in the reconciliation process. In this process, the role of informal dialogue between civil society organizations is underlined. The action plan, among others, supports the following initiatives:

- Allow for visits for family events, including births, weddings, funerals and gravesite visitations and religious rites.
- Enable mixed families to gather and visit across the division lines.
- Allow for meetings of elders councils.
- Allow for religious pilgrimages and access to cultural and historical sites.
- Provide for exchanges between journalists.
- Provide for exchanges between professionals (not limited to exiled communities).
- Promote cultural and athletic exchanges (not limited to exiled communities).
- Establish a commission for reburials, prisoner exchanges and missing-in-action matters.

However, the above-mentioned statements of goodwill encounter obstacles created by the very same Georgian legislation. In October, 2008 the Parliament of Georgia approved the Law on Occupied Territories (and in 2010 this law was amended several times). The law limits several freedoms and activities in the corresponding territories. For example – article #4 limits free movement in the occupied territories (i.e. in South Ossetia and Abkhazia) to the citizens of foreign countries and individuals without citizenship of any state. This means that to enter the territories through any way other than Gori municipality and, accordingly, without control and permission of Georgian Government is prohibited.

The main source of problem, though, became the so called - Modalities⁶², approved by the Georgian Government in September, 2010 regulating all types of commercial and non-commercial activities in the occupied territories⁶³. The Modalities document is heavily criticized by Georgian NGOs. Georgian NGOs assessed the document as “attempt to control the non-governmental sector”⁶⁴. This criticism has solid ground, as no significant project in South Ossetia (and Abkhazia) initiated by international organizations and their local partners (Georgian and South Ossetian at the moment) can be implemented without an agreement with the Georgian Government (the Ministry for Reintegration). In addition – it is required that a bi-annual report regarding past performance should be delivered to the same Ministry. As former Minister of Reintegration Temur Iakobashvili stated, “the Modalities created the opportunities for discretion by the executive power and the latter ever since is able to decide what particular activities will support restoring confidence and transforming the conflict.”⁶⁵

The Minister mentioned the word “discretion.” However, discretion in this case carries a danger of discrimination. For example, Article 7, point 3, of the Modalities states, “If a project entails taking people residing in the occupied territories outside the borders of Georgia, travel for these people should be exercised either by a foreign passport of Georgia or by a Neutral Travel Document.” This point will come into force only after above-mentioned “Neutral Travel Document” is issued, but it leads to confusion. The residents of South Ossetia generally use Russian passports to travel abroad. When and if the mentioned article comes into force, travel abroad from South Ossetia (except to the Russian Federation) using Russian passports will become illegal and international organizations will face two choices: either ignore the Georgian legislation, or never invite to a third country

⁶¹ http://www.smr.gov.ge/uploads/action_plan_en.pdf

⁶² <http://www.smr.gov.ge/uploads/file/041010/statement.pdf>

⁶³ Before activities on the occupied territories were regulated based on the Resolution of the Government of Georgia from December 12, 2008. <http://www.government.gov.ge/>

⁶⁴ <http://www.ekhokavkaza.com/content/none/2235145.html>

⁶⁵ <http://netgazeti.ge/GE/32/Life/3003/>

anyone from South Ossetia who will refuse to get the Georgian passport or the “Neutral Travel Document,” although the latter are in fact the great majority today. Thus, implementation of not only joint projects with international organizations but, formally, even continuation of the Geneva talks, becomes questionable. The Georgian Government itself will face an unpleasant choice: either turn a blind eye as international organizations ignore Georgian legislation, or openly confront these organizations. Neither of these can be part of official Tbilisi’s plan.

NGOs and civil activists from Georgia who are working on conflict transformation appear in the most awkward situation. They became hostages of the legislation as the officials in Georgia through the Ministry of Reintegration are able not only to control their activities but also veto participation by unfavorable project participants on the pretext of non-compatibility of these projects to the “state interests of Georgia, peaceful resolution of the conflicts, de-occupation, or humanitarian goals.” Simultaneously, the Ministry of Reintegration guaranteed an open field for activities (pseudo activities) by its “own” people (i.e. favored and agreeable) who are not hard to recruit from the members of “Governmental NGOs” (GONGO), whose numbers have multiplied in recent years.

In December 2010, the influential NGO Georgian Young Lawyers Association (GYLA) and the Georgian youth group who participated in Georgian-Ossetian (and Georgian – Abkhazian) dialogue submitted their perspective on the legislation to the Ministry of Reintegration. They suggested specific amendments in the documents to reflect the real needs of the population separated by the dividing line, and they also requested termination of artificially created impediments to the activities of civil advocates participating in mentioned projects. However, no appropriate reaction followed that initiative. It is not expected that such an approach from the Ministry of Reintegration would be met with understanding from international organizations and donors. Their priorities do not always in every way correspond with the priorities of the Georgian Government.

Sabine Fisher of the European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) looked ahead and warned that, in this way, the Georgian Government will try not to allow projects by civil activists who have moderate positions towards South Ossetia (and Abkhazia) and are very experienced and knowledgeable in public diplomacy (Track Two Diplomacy). She also believes that space should be preserved for the international NGOs to work in South Ossetia (and Abkhazia).⁶⁶ In unison with the position of Fisher is the recommendation of very experienced International Crisis Group (ICG) in regard to EU, OSCE, European Commission and other international actors: “Continue or renew contacts with authorities and civil society groups in South Ossetia; support dialogue between Georgian and South Ossetian authorities, as well as Georgian and South Ossetian civil society groups.”⁶⁷

Simultaneously, Georgia unilaterally made a step that is evaluated in various ways when viewed through a political lens, but which clearly brings some relief to ordinary people living on both sides of the Caucasus Mountains.⁶⁸ This refers to the October 13, 2010 enactment of a visa free regime for residents of the North Caucasus Republics in the Russian Federation seeking to enter Georgia. At first glance, this act does not seem to have anything in common with direct Georgian-Ossetian relations, but things are not as they first seem. North Ossetia (whose residents, among others, are granted visa free entrance) is an important factor in transformation of the conflict: it can become either an obstacle or a resource. The participation of the North Ossetian-Alanian NGO sector in this

⁶⁶ Sabine Fisher. Abkhazia and Georgian – Abkhazian Conflict, Fall 2009, December, 2009. http://www.iss.europa.eu/uploads/media/Abkhazia_and_the_Georgian-Abkhaz_conflict.pdf

⁶⁷ ICG, Report №205 Europe, South Ossetia: the Burden of Recognition, 06.07.2010.

<http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/europe/caucasus/georgia/205-south-ossetia-the-burden-of-recognition.aspx>

⁶⁸ See: Oliver Bullough. A New Georgian Gamble in the Caucasus, December 23, 2010 <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/features/letters-from/letter-from-tbilisi-0?page=show>

process not only is favored but inevitable. And, the fewer obstacles to direct contacts between Georgians and Ossetians, the better.

In this context, the transformation of the dividing line between South Ossetia and the rest of Georgia into inaccessible “fortified rayons” similar to the borders between the Eastern and Western camps during the “Cold War,” the militarization of South Ossetia executed by the Russian militaries, and the Russian border guards deployed there, all fail to inspire optimism. Taking into consideration that more than 75% of the perimeter of South Ossetia is surrounded by Georgia, it is evident that the cited developments are not promising. Valery Dzutsev believes that “both parts of Ossetia can prosper at a minimum necessary condition if they will bind and not divide the North and the South of the Caucasus”⁶⁹. If South Ossetia will be in a transportation deadlock, connected to the outer world only through the Roki tunnel (which can’t even be called a Transcaucasia highway in this case), and if the entire perimeter of South Ossetia will become a closed border, then it is unclear how it will develop? Subsidies from Moscow are not permanent, particularly when across the mountains there are many pretenders for these subsidies.

In addition, as Sabine Fisher mentions in her report on results of an international seminar (December, 2010) dedicated to informing the policy of the EU “Non-recognition and Engagement Policy,” the de-facto Government of South Ossetia refuses constructive engagement with international actors (except Russia), having more clearly expressed this after the August, 2008 war.⁷⁰

In the already mentioned report of the International Crisis Group,⁷¹ the unbearable conditions of residents on both sides of the dividing line are described. The section “recommendations to the South Ossetian authorities” suggests:

- Refrain from arbitrary detention of Georgian citizens and violation of their freedom of movement;
 - Allow the EUMM and other international officials and organizations full access to South Ossetia.
- To all sides of conflict (Georgia, South Ossetia and Russian Federation) the recommendations call for an agreement “on basic cooperation mechanisms and implementation modalities to ensure:
- a) movement across the administrative boundary line (ABL) for local inhabitants and humanitarian and developmental organizations”

Valuable information regarding to the daily hardship of the residents living on the Georgian side of the dividing line is presented in an October 2010 report by the organization Saferworld⁷².

Recent Public Initiatives

We are not going into the details of previous Georgian-Ossetian projects, but discuss two cases only as evidence of the position and intellectual potential of Georgian civil society representatives.

In 2004 a group of Georgian experts supported by the “Open Society-Georgia Foundation” decided to collect and organize available material regarding the Georgian-Ossetian conflict and necessary measures to restore confidence between the sides. The task incorporated also preparing and proposing an approach to the status of South Ossetia and economic options for conflict resolution. The result of the group’s work was a solid report – “On the Reasons, Dynamics, Ways, and Possible

⁶⁹ Валерий Дзутцев. Северный Кавказ: от клубка противоречий на периферии - к овладению собственной судьбой, 19.11.2010, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/177235/>

⁷⁰ http://www.iss.europa.eu/fileadmin/fichiers/pdf/seminars/2010/NREP_report.pdf

⁷¹ ICG, Report №205

⁷² Malte Viefhues and David Wood. “Life on the boundary line: The future of security in Shida Kartli” <http://www.saferworld.org.uk/downloads/pubdocs/Life%20on%20the%20boundary%20line%20REV.pdf>

Directions of a Solution to the Georgian-Ossetian Conflict.” This work was widely and thoroughly discussed by several focus groups. Well respected Georgian experts analyzed and wrote their feedback on it. Most significantly, Ossetian experts also expressed their opinion evaluating the work prepared by their Georgian colleagues. The first two phrases of the Ossetian experts’ conclusion read as follows: “The experts’ conclusion rarely begins with an expression of gratitude, but this time we have many reasons to be grateful to the authors of the research: Paata Zakareishvili, Revaz Jorbenadze, Tinatin Khidasheli, Konstantine Kublashvili, Ivlian Haindrava, George Gogia, Tengiz Shergelashvili, Mikheil Mirziashvili, Lia Toklikishvili, Khatuna Maisashvili, and David Darchiashvili. In the year 2005, thanks to them, for the first time of the entire period of the conflict we received the text of acceptable and objectionable suggestions on how to resolve Georgian-Ossetian controversies.”

In 2006 the club “Civil Society” in Vladikavkaz published the Georgian experts’ report, the results of focus group discussions, and comments on the document and experts’ conclusions from “Adamon Nehas” and “the Law Above the Authority” (an NGO in North Ossetia-Alania).⁷³ At the moment, the most important is not what issues do Georgians and Ossetians agree or disagree on, but the fact of their cooperation itself.

In April 2005 the Georgian civil society representatives sent an appeal to the President of Georgia⁷⁴ in connection with Georgian Government initiatives on the conflict in South Ossetia.⁷⁵ The text includes a very important announcement and for this reason we cite it fully below.

Appeal to the President of Georgia Mikheil Saakashvili

We welcome the “Initiative of the Government of Georgia with Respect to Peaceful Resolution of the Conflict in South Ossetia.” Certainly, it would be better if the document had been completed earlier, as it might have prevented the escalation of conflict in Summer 2004.

However, the above mentioned document can no doubt become the milestone for peaceful resolution of South Ossetian conflict if possible suggestions by the other side would be considered.

We believe that implementation of the document should begin after certain steps will be taken leading to at least partially restoring confidence between Georgians and Ossetians. Among them we believe are particular measures before implementation of the Georgian government’s initiatives. This will make the process of thawing of mistrust among the Ossetian people irreversible.

The steps that should be considered are the following:

a) The Georgian authorities should give a political evaluation of the armed conflict in 1990-92, moreover, that you made important statements in regard to it. Only after this official assessment, the peace process can begin. In addition, the sporadic clashes between Georgian troops and Ossetian militias that occurred in summer 2004 should be clearly explained;

b) It is extremely important that the Georgian side adopt a Law on Property Restitution for each family that suffered during the 1990-1992 armed conflict, and that this law should be adopted before signing a peace agreement. These steps will support and enhance the Ossetian population’s trust that the Government of Georgia in fact begins executing its obligations;

⁷³<http://www.google.ge/url?sa=t&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CBQQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fuasdan.com%2Fengi ne%2Fdownload.php%3Fid%3D4&ei=-zG3TaKONsOVOqHoqYAP&usg=AFQjCNGyMUZXvBQkN89Sbf-SeT-7woha6g>

⁷⁴ See the Statement in Civil Georgia 06.04.2005 <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=9533>

⁷⁵ March 24, 2005 the document was displayed on the website of the President of Georgia. Its key statements were pronounced at the meeting of the Parliamentary Assembly of European Commission, January 16.

c) The investigation of the tragedy in Kekhvi (May 1992) should be completed in a timely manner and its results should be presented to the public;

d) Despite the statute of limitations, a legislative mechanism should be created to restore the dignity and rights of those Ossetians who were oppressed and insulted because of their ethnicity;

e) The Georgian government's -"Initiative of the Government of Georgia with Respect to the Peaceful Resolution of the South Ossetian Conflict" - should be delivered to the South Ossetian de facto authorities within the frames of the Joint Control Commission or other bilateral context.

We are sure that the considerations mentioned above will support the implementation of the Georgian government's peace initiatives.

If you wish, we could participate in implementing the suggested initiatives.

The appeal was signed by many respected NGOs and Georgian public activists (including the author of the article). It must be underlined that during last six years not one of the mentioned suggestions stated in the appeal lost its importance; these suggestions still await the time (and the political will) when they will be realized. Of course, since then new realities have emerged that call for adequate steps in response (and not only from the Georgian side).

Public Initiatives since August 2008

Here we may mention the initiative of Valery Dzutsev⁷⁶, intending to find common interests between Ossetians residing in South Ossetia and their compatriots living in the Georgia proper. It is important to notice that despite the considerable emigration of ethnic Ossetians from Georgia for the last twenty years the population in South Ossetia is no bigger (and maybe is even less) than the population of ethnic Ossetians residing in Georgia proper. Dzutsev points out the necessity to begin dialogue between these two communities. Under this statement Dzutsev means Ossetians loyal to the Government of Georgia and Ossetians loyal to Tskhinvali authorities should exchange ideas on the most essential problems to form a competitive political space. "Establishing the Commission for National Reconciliation in South Ossetia could assist the stabilization of the situation inside and outside of the Republic and would lead to long term peaceful resolution of the conflict in the region" – Valery Dzutsev states. Discussing the idea the author suggests several steps to realize the idea in practice, offers to avoid a meaningless zero-sum game, and offers to create the conditions where all sides will be the winners.

Under current conditions the mentioned idea seems unrealistic, though to reject it singlehandedly does not look expedient based on several arguments. The Ossetian community in Georgia proper is a significant resource for Ossetians in general and for the Georgian state as well. If in the inter-community dialogue of Ossetians living on the South slopes of the Caucasus Mountains, will be joined to some degree by Georgians as well as Ossetians living in the North Caucasus, the result will be an unprecedented format for exchange of opinion and for confidence building within the different levels of the society. The Georgian community in North Ossetia should be also considered as they have lived long-term among Ossetians. The format may eventually be expanded to include Russian experts and public representatives who are also looking for solutions to problems not only in regard to South Ossetia but the North Caucasus as whole. This is a time when community

⁷⁶ Валерий Дзугцев. Национальное примирение в Южной Осетии, 06.07.2009
<http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/156240/>

initiatives must come before political ones, as the development and discussion of ideas within society creates the condition for political decisions.

As early as November 2008 Susan Allen Nan, George Khutsishvili and Lira Kozaeva-Tskhovrebova wrote that in order to support the official – Geneva talks (Track One Diplomacy) the informal, public dialogue had to begin. Understanding that the final word is on the politicians the authors underline the importance to restore the bridges between the communities and support the multi-level negotiation process.⁷⁷

In July 2010 in Leiden (the Netherlands) the Georgian-Ossetian public forum held its meeting where an appeal to the participants of Geneva consultations was adopted.⁷⁸ The full text of the Appeal we cite below. The appeal was prepared after eleven rounds of Geneva consultation yielded no tangible results.

Appeal to the parties to the Geneva Talks

Leiden, the Netherlands

July 16, 2010

Dear Sirs, Madams,

The war that broke out in August 2008 took away the lives of people, led to significant damage and destroyed many traditional ties. After a few months, political consultations started in Geneva, where representatives of the parties involved started to work on two fronts: on security and on humanitarian issues.

Now, almost two years after the war, the Geneva talks remain the only platform for meetings between the authorities of all parties. With great regret we note that after eleven rounds of consultations no positive results have been reached by any of the working groups. The Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism, created to address the current problems on the ground and so far the only existing discussion platform in the Georgian-Ossetian conflict, is not actually functioning. It is evident that ordinary people and their daily problems are kept hostage to political interests.

We, participants in the Georgian-Ossetian Civil Forum, believe that nothing should block the solution of humanitarian problems.

All parties should try to address the needs of the local population.

In the first place they should solve the problems resulting from the restricted freedom of movement:

- Visits to relatives, religious shrines and cemeteries. War should not lead to the rupture of family ties;
- Access to health care for all inhabitants of the region. If necessary, it should be possible to deliver patients to the nearest hospital;
- Access to fields and pastures for the residents of Ossetian and Georgian villages, which has been restricted after the war. Local residents traditionally engaged in agriculture were left without means of subsistence. The representatives of local communities should be involved to address these issues;
- Water and gas supplies. We believe that the problems of gas and water need to be addressed independently, without making the people hostage to these negotiations;
- Lack of economic and trade ties, which have a very negative impact on the livelihood of the inhabitants of the region. We urge the parties to ensure freedom of economic activity, and all participants in the discussions to promote it;

⁷⁷ 11.25.2008 <http://www.commongroundnews.org/article.php?id=24429&lan=en&sid=1&sp=0>

⁷⁸ 07.21.2010 (in Russian, <http://www.apsny.ge/order/1279759270.php>).

The Appeal was signed by: Akhsar Tskhubarti, Marina Meshvildishvili, Alan Gassiev, Maria Plieva, Varvara Pakhomenko, Megi Bibiluri, George Stefnadze, Nana Chqareuli, Dali Doijashvili, Nodar Sarjveladze, Zema Tedeeva, Rudolf Gubiev, Zurab Bendianishvili, Sarmat Parastaev, Zurab Zubashvili, Cinta Depondt, Zurab Tavasiev, Sonja Van Reide, Irakli Chikhladze, Tamerlan Tadgev, Mari Khmiadashvili, Temur Tskhovrebov.

- Humanitarian access to the whole of South Ossetia. The local population is in dire need of assistance to address humanitarian problems: shelter construction, post-conflict psychological rehabilitation, support to business initiatives. We call upon the authorities of all parties to ensure freedom of access for humanitarian organizations to the region, whereby the organization itself must be able to determine from which side it is most convenient to enter.

To solve these problems, we urge all sides to establish, promulgate and implement general rules for movement of persons, in the first place for the local population. At the moment, local inhabitants move back and forth without such rules, with their absence leading to multiple abuses and human rights violations by all parties. The detention of people is one of the most acute problems. We urge all parties to refrain from arbitrary detention, the practice of hostage taking and the restriction of the freedom of movement of people. We call for investigation of the cases of missing and illegally detained people, as well as investigation of human rights violations committed during military operations.

We also urge the authorities on all sides to promote a gradual solution of the problems of refugees and internally displaced persons who fled their homes as a result of the conflict since the early 1990s.

All parties shall further the development of contacts at the civil society level, support civic initiatives without limiting the freedom of association and assembly.

We urge all participants to the Geneva talks to facilitate the resumption of the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism without pre-conditions on status or political preconditions, and work towards a prompt agreement on basic mechanisms of cooperation in humanitarian issues.

Comparing this appeal to the previous one (the Open Letter of the Georgian NGO representatives to the President of Georgia in 2005), it is evident that the problems have been identified adequately in both cases (this time by the civil society activists from the both sides) and the appeals underline the most essential demands of the people. However, even as time passes, officials on both sides are expressing neither unilateral nor bilateral readiness and/or competence to solve these problems. The priority of political interests and ambitions over the needs and necessities of the war affected population and the fundamental rights and freedoms of the people still persist.

In August 2010 a basic document of the project Supporting Georgian Civil Society in Peace Building was published.⁷⁹ The project was financed by the EU and implemented by the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights (BIM, Vienna), and International Center on Conflict and Negotiation (ICCN, Tbilisi). Together with foreign experts, more than twenty Georgian NGO representatives participated.

The document below is of particular importance in the context we mentioned above. It can be presented as a basic (basic as it is not an exhaustive listing of probable actions) document for preparing a strategy for how Georgian and Ossetian civil societies can cooperate in the near future. Below we present only the structure of the document which clearly gives an idea of its importance:

1. The Relevance of Civil Society in the Peace – Building Process;
2. Civil Society Contribution to Peace Process and Peace Consolidation; below are seven functions civil society can fulfill in the process of peace-building:
 - Protection of citizens against violence from all parties;
 - Monitoring of human rights violations and of the implementation of peace;
 - Advocacy for peace and human rights;
 - Facilitation of dialogue on the local and national level between various actors;
 - Service delivery to create entry points for peace-building;
 - Socialization to values of peace and democracy as well as to development of in-group identity of marginalized groups;
 - Social cohesion by bringing people from adversarial groups together;

⁷⁹ <http://tuta.neru9.com/iccn.org.ge/text/eng/projects/2010/Recommendations-Documents-ENG.pdf>

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3. Georgian Civil Society in Peace-Building and Crisis Prevention (including challenges it faced);
 4. Priority Areas: Problem Analysis and Recommendations (to the civil society, the Government of Georgia, the international donors). They are:
 - Increasing people to people contacts;
 - Engaging youth and education for peace-building;
 - Strengthening IDP participation;
 - Increasing human security in conflict affected areas;
 - Adjustment of legislation, strategies and policies;
 - Assessment and analysis of war crimes and human rights violations;
 - Widening the spectrum of negotiations, dialogue and discussions among the conflicting parties.

Report #5 - "Peace Security and Stability in Shida Kartli, A Community Informed Strategy," contains significant information for anyone who supports the dialogue among the civil society representatives, participates in it, facilitates the dialogue or sponsors it. The report was prepared by the Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development (CIPDD), Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA) and Saferworld in February 2011. The project was funded by the European Union.⁸⁰

Thus, the above mentioned public initiatives implemented during the most recent period illustrate if not fully at least adequately the range of what might, must and should immediately be done by the Georgian and Ossetian civil society organizations. Civil society organizations should be assisted in these efforts by international donors.

Once More on Obstacles

One of the main obstacles preventing the success of dialogue between the Georgian and Ossetian civil societies is the fact that the Georgian Government since acquiring power after the Rose Revolution, intentionally monopolized national broadcasts, forced out the political opposition, and brought under its control some already existing NGOs or created new GONGOs (as we mentioned above). The result of these measures was a significant interruption in the socio-political debates in Georgia. The political discourse as interpreted by the officials can be summed up in a simple dichotomy – Are you for Misha (i.e. President Saakashvili) or against him? At present, the TV broadcast remains the major source of information for the great majority of the population where the official point of view, as the only truth, stated by the Government or its adepts (Georgians and foreigners) dominates. The official attitude is, in fact, not always and not in every aspect actually true, and, in regard to conflicts, it is consistently far from it. The situation in this regard, among the experts in particular, was clearly acknowledged by Archil Gegeshidze: "The polarization of the political life in Georgia based on loyalty to the Government's policy is reflected on the experts' community. They are also divided on a matter - how to interpret the political events? The loyal to the official course the experts, generally, are sympathetic to the authorities and support any decision of the Government in internal and foreign policy issues, and in ... conflicts as well. Accordingly, this group of the experts, despite its small number, has access to the National Mass Media and propagates the view favorable to the officials."⁸¹ The same opinion can be extended to NGO activists as well.

⁸⁰ http://www.cipdd.org/files/40_535_840928_Communityinformedstrategy-ShidaKartlieng-reduced.pdf

⁸¹ A. Gegeshidze and I. Haindrava. Transformation of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict: rethinking the paradigm http://www.c-r.org/our-work/caucasus/documents/2011/CR%20Ge-Ab%20ENG%20web_Georg_perspective.pdf

Under these circumstances, beginning dialogue takes on a significant importance. Paata Zakareishvili calls this dialogue “Georgian-Georgian.” Under conditions in which the Government, without even trying to understand the context, immediately rejects any opinion, expert analysis, initiative, previously not introduced to them and supported by them, the actions of the civil society representatives and experts cannot be efficient. Many times we witnessed the situation when the evaluations, conclusions, recommendations of the Georgian experts reached the Georgian officials by way of Brussels or Washington, and that is a good scenario. The worse case scenario is when the Government ignores the messages from the West and responds to them very slowly and /or inadequately. George Khutsishvili correctly remarks: “Yet public diplomacy can be successful only if it is supported by the political process. An example of this is the dialogues of 1990’s when the Georgian-Ossetian and the Georgian-Abkhaz informal dialogues was active initially but wined down with time...The best results are achieved when and where there is cooperation between the governmental and the non-governmental efforts.”⁸² Revaz Gachechiladze is even more categorical, stating that “Any public diplomacy effort is destined to fail if the state (the states) is not interested in its success or hinders it.”⁸³

How to cooperate if between the public and the authority the latter built a tall and soundproof wall? Maybe not fully, but there is an answer in Chapter 3 - Difficulties of engagement and dialogue between Georgians, and Abkhaz and South Ossetians in Report #6, “Peace, Security and Stability in Georgia: A Community Informed Strategy” prepared by the CIPDD, GYLA and Saferworld. In the report the reasons and core of the obstacles are analyzed and the recommendations are offered to all the sides who are able to influence the situation in a positive direction.⁸⁴

It is evident however that the above-mentioned state of affairs is not just an internal problem of Georgia. The situation in South Ossetia is even worse. Almost a week after the “Leiden Appeal”, Temur Tskhovrebov, the editor of a South Ossetian newspaper, civil activist, Chair of the Union of Ex-Combatants of South Ossetia, and also a participant in the August 2008 hostilities in Tskhinvali, who signed the mentioned “appeal,” was mercilessly beaten in the street of Tskhinvali by ten people. Among the offenders, three members of the South Ossetian Parliament were recognized. The incident was preceded by a public statement of the Official Representative of the President of South Ossetia in Post-Conflict Regulation – Boris Chochiev.⁸⁵ In his interview to the information agency “RES” dated July 22, Chochiev announced that “Participation of South Ossetian citizens in the “Georgian-Ossetian Public Forum” which recently was held in the city of Leiden, in Holland, harmed the state interests of the South Ossetian Republic and positions of the South Ossetian Delegation participating in the Geneva Discussions for Security in the Caucasus”. The title of the interview was ““Georgian-Ossetian Forum’: A Slap in the Face to Every Ossetian.” The content of the interview was also appropriate to the title.⁸⁶

Occasionally, civil society is asked questions of the following type (and the authorities encourage such assaults). For example: For almost fifteen years there have been public dialogues at the NGO level, but what are the tangible results? Truly, unfortunately, the NGO sector neither could resolve the conflict nor even prevent excesses of different types (from the stealing of the cattle to the August 2008 war). However, if we consider what the old and new Governments of Georgia (and Tskhinvali and Moscow) were able to “achieve” for the last twenty years – we get an incomparably gloomier picture than we get from the work of civil society.

⁸² <http://icar.gmu.edu/south-caucasus-project/10458>

⁸³ See: Revaz Gachechiladze. “Human Factor in the Process of Restoring Trust between the People: Study of Point of View of Ossetians Living in Georgia”

⁸⁴ http://www.saferworld.org.uk/Peace%20security%20and%20Stability%20in%20Georgia_Russian.pdf

⁸⁵ <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/172076/>

⁸⁶ <http://cominf.org/node/1166483914>

The Favorable Factors

Among the favorable factors is the attitude of the society (in Georgian society at least) and also the role of the international community.

Overview of Attitudes in the Georgian Society

We believe it is our duty to state that we do not intend to present a perfect and certain picture, expressed in numbers, of the prevailing attitude among Georgians. It is not possible, among other factors, for the reason that we could not find reliable information based on the opinion poll research which was focused specifically on Georgian-Ossetian relations (there is no relevant information at all on the other side of the dividing line, in South Ossetia). Accordingly, we use the fragments of different research and information which to some degree elucidate the issue. Valery Dzutsev mentions: “Before the August war of 2008, I faced a very unusual situation in South Ossetia. If we glance at the majority of other conflicts in the Caucasus we clearly notice the harsh hostility to the opposite side. In this particular conflict – between Georgians and Ossetians – this attitude I met very rarely. On the casual, everyday level Georgians and Ossetians didn’t have serious arguments with each other. Accordingly, in this particular conflict it can be stated confidently that the stand off is created with significant influence by politicians.”⁸⁷

The war in August 2008 certainly tragically affected Georgian-Ossetian relations. If before then it was predominantly Ossetians who considered themselves the victims of violence (in 1920, end of 1980s - beginning of 1990s, in 2004), after the August war Georgians also consider themselves in the same category, as the fact of the ethnic cleansing of Georgians is stated in international documents. However, the emergence of an enemy image focused on Ossetians was mostly prevented, because it was Russia that fought against Georgia. Accordingly, after the catastrophic results of the attempt to restore the territorial integrity of Georgia by using force, a large majority of Georgians do not hold an aggressive attitude towards Ossetians.

The International Republican Institute (IRI, the United States) regularly holds opinion poll research regarding important issues in political and social life.⁸⁸ The table below indicates responses to the question, “How do you observe the solution of problems in Abkhazia and South Ossetia?” The date (month and year) is shown in the first row, the second row indicates the percentage of positive answers to “negotiations and peacefully”, the third row- “using force when necessary”, in the fourth row - “uncertain”.

10.04	06.05	10.05	04.06	02.07	09.07	02.08	09.08	01.09	10.09	03.10	10.10
88	86	89	90	92	91	93	95	92	94	96	96
9	10	9	8	6	7	5	4	4	3	2	2
3	4	3	2	2	2	2	1	4	3	2	2

Based on the data even in 2004 the number of respondents favoring a military approach was small and in six years that number also considerably diminished to its lowest.

The absolute figures of another opinion poll implemented by the Tbilisi Institute for Policy Studies (IPS) in December 2007 and November 2008 differ significantly.⁸⁹ The purpose of the research was the comparison of public opinion before and after the August 2008 war. Still, in the research the

⁸⁷ Валерий Дзутцев. Северный Кавказ: от клубка противоречий на периферии - к овладению собственной судьбой 19.11. 2009 <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/177235/>

⁸⁸ <http://www.iri.org.ge/ka/news/latest-news/149-iri-releases-survey-of-georgian-public-opinion.html>

⁸⁹ Nana Sumbadze. “Georgia Before and After the August War; Report on the Survey of Population: Barometer 2007 and 2008”, Institute for Policy Studies, Tbilisi, 2009

number of individuals allowing for the use of force declined considerably from 27.6% in the end of 2007 to 16.3% in November 2008. These results indicate a similar tendency to IRI poll research. It should also be noted that regardless of the fact that only 16.5% of respondents think that IDPs from the South Ossetia will be able to return home in the following three years, even so 67.3% believe that they can live alongside the South Ossetians. This response is proof that Ossetians, in general, are not considered enemies.

Among the biggest failures of the Georgian Government, based on the same IRI opinion poll research, are: Inability to restore the territorial integrity of the country (25% - indicated it on the first place, 34% of total respondents indicated among others) and war with Russia in August 2008 (22% - the first place, total – 26%). On the third place came the unemployment but it was named by much lesser number of respondents - 12% placed it the first and 21% of respondents name it among others. These numbers can be differently interpreted but one common conclusion can already be made – the public condemned the military venture.

The responses on the question – “Will the Georgian Government solve the problems with Abkhazia and South Ossetia?” – are arranged in the table below (the numbers are expressed in percentages).

	10.04	06.05	10.05	04.06	02.07	09.07	02.08	09.08	02.09	06.09	10.09	03.10	10.10
Probably	29	24	19	18	18	12	17	14	6	5	8	7	13
More Likely	52	53	48	43	53	46	44	38	29	29	32	32	38
Less Likely	10	13	17	23	20	27	25	30	36	34	29	29	26
Not Likely	3	3	6	8	4	8	7	10	20	24	20	18	13
Uncertain/ Don't Know	6	7	10	8	5	7	6	8	9	8	11	14	11

These numbers prove that the number of people holding illusions regarding the quick regulation of the conflict (or conflicts) decreased considerably. Accordingly, switch gears towards transforming the conflict should be understood by many of them. In the case of targeted action by civil society representatives, explaining to the population the rationale for these actions, then the aim can be reached.

The National Democratic Institute (NDI, the United States) published data⁹⁰ showing that 61% of respondents supported the opening of Upper Larsi check point on the border of Georgia-Russia (9% were against, 30% were uncertain or refused to answer), 70% of respondents supported the Geneva Consultation process (3% were against, 27% uncertain or refused to answer). This means that the steps aimed to normalize relations among the conflicting parties were supported by the public even if they didn't bring positive results yet (for example, the Geneva talks).

Even before the August 2008 events (after the summer 2004 excesses) NGO “Iber-Iron” supported by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation performed opinion poll research among the political parties in Georgia. Based on the research results, a round table session was organized and the collected materials were published.⁹¹ The five party representatives who participated in the project uniformly expressed their support for peaceful regulation of conflict (representative of the ruling party just quoted President Saakashvili's speech to the PACE on January 26, 2005). The opinion of the participants was divided in regard to the status of South Ossetia within Georgia. In this regard, Archil Gegeshidze's opinion is important. He states, “Opposition political parties with a rare exception (specifically the Republican Party) failed to elaborate a program or concept in regard to conflict resolution. Generally, they limited themselves to making immature statements or were simply busy criticizing the current Government policy without offering any alternative. After the

⁹⁰ Polls held on June 24 – July 5, 2010 http://www.ndi.org/files/Public_Attitudes_Georgia_July_2010.pdf

⁹¹ «Разрешение грузино-осетинского конфликта: видения политических партий», Тбилиси, 2005

August events, practically all opposition parties, despite agreeing on the key role of Russia in the conflict, blamed the authorities for inciting the war and pointed out at the same time that the war was preventable.”⁹² The above-mentioned facts show that a peaceful attitude prevails in Georgian political circles.

In general, these observations are supported by the research of Revaz Gachechiladze (published in this research project). He studied the point of view of the part of the Georgian population who lives on this side of the dividing line and who could not be neutral to the Georgian-Ossetian conflict and its consequences. Additional material regarding the attitudes in certain segments of the Georgian society can be found in Report #5 – “Community Perceptions of The Causes and Effects of the August 2008 Conflict in Kvemo Kartli, Samegrelo, Samtskhe-Javakheti and Shida Kartli” made jointly by CIPDD, GYLA and Saferworld⁹³.

Role of the International Community

The EU has become a key international actor/mediator/sponsor in conflict resolution in South Caucasus. Its intentions and prospects are relatively fully and consistently declared in the above-mentioned report on the results of the December (2010) seminar in Brussels.⁹⁴ The European logic of “Non-Recognition and Engagement Policy” is focused on two major tasks: de-isolation (of South Ossetia and Abkhazia) and transformation (of conflicts). In respect to de-isolation, contacts with/between civil societies (and people in general) are particularly significant because they can play an essential role in restoring confidence between the conflicting parties. At the same time, European politicians and experts caution that politicization of such contacts must be prevented in order to clear the way from obstacles to conflict transformation. One of the goals of this approach is, on the one hand, to strengthen contacts with the de-facto authorities in Tskhinvali, who do not support the development of favorable conditions for NGO activities. On the other hand, this approach argues for the Georgian Government shifting its attitude to the conflict from isolation to engagement.

The statement regarding the need to de-isolate South Ossetia (and Abkhazia) in the international community underlines that this process should be accompanied by efforts to transform the conflict, including, among others, “opening” South Ossetia (and Abkhazia) to Georgia. This means expansion of relations not only between the civil societies of the conflicting parties, but also between the general public and the economic spheres. Civil society organizations should cooperate with each other to provide help to the population in areas such as human rights, information exchange, education, and health care. These steps will help to strengthen confidence between the people, will create the space for reconciliation and, as a result, the possibilities to regulate the conflict will shape.

In May 2010, the EU allocated funding for the COBERM program. (COBERM stands for Confidence Building Early Response Mechanism). The project is administered by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and is targeted to strengthen and support civil society initiatives on the both sides of the dividing line of the conflict zone. At the end of 2011, COBERM funding is scheduled to end, but if it is judged positively it may be extended. In December 2010, the EU delegation in Georgia published a report regarding EU assistance to the conflict affected

⁹² Archil Gegeshidze and Ivlian Haindrava.Op.Cit.

http://www.c-r.org/our-work/caucasus/documents/2011/CR%20Ge-Ab%20ENG%20web_Georg_perspective.pdf

⁹³http://cipdd.org/files/40_508_452902_community_eng_full.pdf - June, 2010, in English

http://cipdd.org/files/40_508_205441_community_rus_full.pdf Июнь 2010 г. – in Russian.

⁹⁴ http://www.iss.europa.eu/fileadmin/fichiers/pdf/seminars/2010/NREP_report.pdf

population, including, among other forms of assistance, efforts to restore confidence through dialogue.⁹⁵

Very soon after the end of the August 2008 war, the Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution (ICAR) at the George Mason University (Arlington, Virginia, the United States) initiated the “Point of View” project (December 2008). In the Point of View format, representatives of civil society organizations from Georgia and South Ossetia regularly meet and discuss essential problems. One of the Georgian participants believes that “the more often we have similar meetings and dialogues, the closer we will get to the rebuilding of trust between the two people.” Her colleague from South Ossetia mentions: “Hopefully, with time, the conflicting sides that are today expressing and defending their own opinions and ‘point of view’ can come to the peaceful resolution of the conflict, after having understood each other’s point of view.”⁹⁶

Going through the obstacles and the problems (which have been partially mentioned above) with the support and participation of international governmental and non-governmental organizations, the Western donors, the format of the Georgian-Ossetian dialogue between the civil society organizations continues and gains power. The meetings continue between the NGOs, independent experts and youth. New publications are seeing the light, briefings and presentations are organized, and joint projects are realized. In this context, the Russian Federation does not fit. Paata Zakareishvili (from the Institute for the Study of Nationalism and Conflict) delicately described Russia’s position: “Russia doesn’t give money for the development of democracy and civil society. In Russia there isn’t ... democracy and civil society in the sense as it is understood in the European Union. This is the reason that Russia will not spend the money for it. Russia will spend money on the military base, military infrastructure, roads, and houses but not on freedom.”⁹⁷

Conclusion

When working on the present research it became clear that the various research project formats supported recently by the EU on issues of Georgian-Ossetian conflict complement each other well by depicting different aspects of the conflict. Together, they describe very objectively the true state of matters in the Georgian - Ossetian conflict and the possibilities to further develop Georgian-Ossetian civil society dialogue. We must mention that the research in the framework of this project and also the joint projects of CIPDD, GYLA and Saferworld, and the projects of BIM and ICCN, each of which we mentioned above, are essential projects in this field. These projects, taken together with various initiatives suggested by representatives of civil society organizations at different times, alongside the feasible ideas and initiatives laid out in the “Engagement through Cooperation” Strategy and its Action plan, identify the spheres of corresponding interests of Georgian and Ossetian civil societies (and the people living on the both sides of the dividing line). They also help to identify the obstacles on the way to expanding the dialogue, the roles of international institutions to support interaction, and parameters of the process that finally will assist transformation of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict.

In this sense, it is possible to define three major directions along which the two communities are able to interact with each other, while supported by international donors. The first direction is in reducing the burden of the everyday life and improving social conditions of the population most affected by the conflict (the refugees and the IDPs). It is important to respect their rights and freedom, security, health care, education, etc. The second direction is to set up contacts and discussions on the wide range of problems among the different social groups of Georgians and

⁹⁵ http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/georgia/documents/projects/overview_post_conflict_ec_assistance_dec2010_en.pdf

⁹⁶ <http://icar.gmu.edu/south-caucasus-project/10458>

⁹⁷ <http://www.ekhokavkaza.com/content/article/2129129.html>

Ossetians (NGO activities, journalists, professionals in different fields, youth, etc). The third direction should follow the strategic goals of destroying the image of the enemy in both societies, removing the mythical veil from the past and the present, and prevent the rise of new and defeat already rooted stereotypes,⁹⁸ and restore the confidence and reconcile the conflicting sides. These three directions together complement each other and together they will grow into the process of conflict transformation.

It is expected that wider the spectrum of the civil society representatives involved in the process, the larger the opportunity for different clusters of the public to come into direct contact with each other and, accordingly, the more successful result is expected in terms of greater understanding of each other, which is a necessary condition for reconciliation. It is, however, important that common endeavors be well planned and coordinated so that each participant who performs work has extensive experience and knowledge. The results should be made accessible to the general public, and should be evaluated publicly and fairly.

⁹⁸ See: George Tarkhan-Mouravi. Op.Cit.

**THE HUMAN FACTOR IN THE PROCESS OF RESTORING
CONFIDENCE BETWEEN PEOPLES:
A STUDY OF OPINIONS OF OSSETIANS LIVING IN GEORGIA⁹⁹**

Revaz Gachechiladze

Description of the Problem

The problem of alienation between Georgians and Ossetians did not begin in 2008. Its origins should be sought during the end of the 1980s, when the USSR still existed and when the failure of *Perestroika* created the conditions for increased separatism and nationalism, which were quite often built on the basis of illusions. More specifically, among Ossetians living in the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast within the Georgian SSR there arose in 1990 an illusion (not without strong impulses from outside!) that they could establish a small separate Soviet Republic. The reaction of official Tbilisi to the actions of the then leadership in Tskhinvali was immediate. At the same time there arose an illusion among a substantial number of Georgians that they could build a mono-ethnic state, similar to that which was being built in neighboring Armenia. The realities appeared to be much harsher for both ethnic groups. A civil war erupted when not only the rules of war were ignored but also simple moral values were disregarded. The first leaders of the Republic of Georgia employed a shortsighted nationalist policy that forced a portion (in certain cases quite a considerable portion) of ethnic minorities to leave the country. This process concerned Ossetians, among others.

After the 2008 war, contacts between Georgians and Ossetians sharply decreased. (Here and below the Ossetians, living in South Ossetia are meant, unless stated otherwise). A sense of mutual mistrust started to prevail.

Meanwhile, even if it is practically impossible to reach a political solution in the short-term, there exists, at least on the Georgian side (I reckon, that it may exist on the Ossetian side as well), an opinion that alienation is dangerous for both peoples. It is necessary to maintain contacts on the societal level. The “human factor” can play a significant positive role in the process of restoring confidence between Georgians and Ossetians.

The problem lies in studying the real state of both the *necessity* and the *possibility* to restore this confidence.

Structure of Research

The present research attempts to define the potential of the “human factor” – public diplomacy -- in the process of restoring confidence between the Georgian and Ossetian peoples.

In the *first*, rather short, chapter several terms (the human factor, people’s diplomacy) are discussed and several examples (cases) from other countries and regions are presented. In the *second* chapter demographic issues (primarily the number and settlement patterns) of the Ossetian population (including mixed -- Ossetian-Georgian -- families) residing in “Georgia proper”¹⁰⁰ are discussed. I assume that these Ossetians are the very group of people who could serve people’s diplomacy with

⁹⁹It is the Author’s pleasure to thank Ivliane Khaindrava for providing materials on the topic of the present research theme and the students of the Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University -- Gvantsa Darispanashvili, Ketevan Khimshiasvili, Elina Jioeva, Lika Zhvania, Miranda Pagava, Valerian Dvalidze, Beka Khinchagashvili and David Sidamonidze for their participation in the sociological survey.

¹⁰⁰ This conditional term is used to define the territory of Georgia outside of the area occupied by Russian troops since 2008.

the purpose of restoring confidence between Georgian and Ossetian peoples. In the *third* chapter, the results of a small sociological study are analyzed. The *summary* expresses a cautious optimism concerning the possibilities for achieving the common goal –restoring confidence between Georgians and Ossetians. 13 figures (charts) and 6 tables are attached.

Relevance of the Research Problem

The Russian-Georgian war of 2008, which took place primarily in South Ossetia and its adjacent territories inevitably left unhealed wounds in the Ossetian as well as in the Georgian societies. Although the fact of death of any soldier or a civilian and, moreover, the ousting of people from the places where they and their forefathers had lived for centuries, is a tragedy for each family and any nation as a whole, it is even worse that the war created an atmosphere of protracted alienation and deep mistrust between the peoples.

Although the still numerous Ossetian population in “Georgia proper” was not affected directly (economically or physically) during and after the 2008 war, nevertheless, it also suffered a strong moral trauma. These people as well as the ethnic Georgians should understand that tragic wounds are sooner or later to be healed. Georgians and Ossetians have a tradition of coexistence for many centuries, they are interconnected with multiple kinship ties and their great majorities are unlikely to wish any further deterioration of relations including those on personal level.

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of the research is to analyze the current state of the Ossetian population (including mixed families) in “Georgia proper,” and in particular to study its attitudes towards the possibilities and ways of restoring trust between the peoples.

Hypothesis

It can be assumed hypothetically that among the Ossetian population (including mixed families) living in the territory of “Georgia proper” the feeling of regret should prevail because of the actual breaking-off of relationships between the peoples (the severing of ties between the ethnic Ossetians of South Ossetia and those of “Georgia proper” are meant as well) and there should exist a desire to find the ways for reconciliation. Among the internally displaced persons (IDPs) from the areas affected by ethnic conflict, which are mainly ethnic Georgians and partially ethnic Ossetians (members of mixed families), the feeling of distress on the grounds of injustice manifested towards them should gradually make way to a willingness to find some common ground of understanding and cooperation with the Ossetians together with whom they used to live for many generations. It would have been naive to expect that both these groups of population have any precise plan for reconciliation. They, by all means, should understand that they became the victims of big geopolitical players, first of all of those in the Kremlin which these groups are unable to influence, but their readiness for peaceful resolution of conflict may be a certain sign to decision-makers.

Methodology of Research

The methodology of research was created in consideration of the above mentioned scientific hypothesis. A sociological survey was used to study opinion of Ossetians living in “Georgia proper.” The questions in the survey questionnaire were formulated to obtain answers from the Ossetian population living in the villages and cities of “Georgia proper,” thus allowing confirmation or refutation of the above-mentioned hypothesis. For reasons of comparison, Georgians were polled as well using the same questionnaire: such respondents were IDPs from the conflict zone and

Georgians living next to Ossetians in the villages and cities. In addition, we collected and analyzed official statistical data and data from previous research.

The Human Factor? People's Diplomacy? Ideal and Reality (Theoretical Overview and Cases from Different Countries and Regions)

When the "Human Factor" is discussed, a notion of engineering comes to mind. We have a notion of subjective factors when using complicated technology. (It is well-known that after a plane crash the experts first of all investigate the possibility of a "human factor.") But the "human factor" is also important in psychological analysis, such as in social interaction between small and large groups. In general, as Porter notes the "*human factor is a physical or (cognitive) property of an individual or social behavior which is specific to humans and influences the functioning of technological systems as well as human-environment equilibriums.*"¹⁰¹

The "human factor" involves the study of all aspects of the way humans relate to the world around them. Continuing this notion we may state that the "human factor" is important for post-conflict situations when we are looking for common ground amongst groups who were not long ago in a conflict, with the aim to overcome or reduce enmity. Individuals and moreover groups of the population can do if not everything at least something to correct the mistakes made by the decision-makers, the politicians!

People's (public) diplomacy is not a new term. It has been used for almost a hundred years (mainly after the First World War) in many countries and regions, though with various meanings.

Peoples diplomacy is employed almost everywhere when formal diplomacy is powerless, although success is not guaranteed. Ideally, people's diplomacy should reconcile former enemies - the countries and peoples. In fact, the result is considerably modest.

In order to understand the weak and strong sides of people's diplomacy some examples from different countries are discussed below.

Calls to use people's diplomacy are often heard in regions which recently underwent interethnic or military conflicts. In several cases people's diplomacy has acquired a certain significance in improving relations between peoples which participated in conflicts, for example in Timor-Leste, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Philippines, etc.¹⁰²

In the United States the term "public diplomacy" is more often used and comprises the connections among international public, cultural programs, and academic grants, educational exchanges, invitations of foreign professors, experts and strengthening effort of United States' government to prevent ideological support of terrorism¹⁰³. This definition, which is used by the US State Department, underlines the methods which should be used by public diplomacy but some scholars consider, that the purpose and possible results are mostly ignored. This policy implies participation of the state as governing body of public diplomacy.

In fact any type of people's (public) diplomacy is destined to fail if the state or states are not interested in it and even more, if they hinder it.

¹⁰¹<http://www.scribd.com/doc/37402839/Human-Factors-Ergonomics>

¹⁰² John Paluszek. Viewpoints: The New "People's Diplomacy". FPA Features. January 8, 2008; *Diplomacy Training programmes*. Human Rights and Peoples Diplomacy: 15th Annual Training for Human Rights Defenders from the Asia-Pacific Region and Indigenous Australia, University of New South Wales.1989; Ikeda, Daisaku. 'People's Diplomacy': A Power to Resist the Currents of History. *The Japan Times*, May 11, 2006; 20th Annual Human Rights and Peoples' Diplomacy Training Program. 26 July-13 August 2010. Dili, Timor Leste

¹⁰³ Snow, Nancy and Philip M. Taylor (eds.). *Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy*. New York and London: Routledge Publishers, 2009

The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Greece Georgios Papandreou in 2000 declared that he sees the role of public diplomacy in settling the conflict in Cyprus¹⁰⁴. He stated the necessity of contacts between communities, more specifically between youth, women, and non-governmental organizations. The people living in divided Cyprus since 1974 after 30 years of isolation practically were ready for these contacts and this readiness resulted in 2008 in the opening of check points on the division line. Without exaggerating the real results it should be admitted that in recent years Turkish and Greek Cypriots are making some small but still noticeable progress in establishing contacts with each other. Moreover, the Turkish population of Cyprus during the 2004 referendum was ready to support unification of the island. A reporter from a Turkish newspaper “Today’s Zaman,” Ergun Babahan, in his column on April 9, 2011, wrote that “native Turkish Cypriots are against Turkey and even want a union with Greek Cypriots.”

The optimism of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Greece in 2000 arose from examples of the recent past. People’s diplomacy worked well in improving previously strained relations between Greece and Turkey, especially after two earthquakes - the first in Istanbul, on August 17, 1999 and then in Athens, on September 7 of the same year. Unexpectedly stricken by human tragedy, both peoples realized how meaningless the nationalistic slogans and permanent confrontation are. The solidarity and assistance made by both sides’ rescue crews affected changing moods, reduced the atmosphere of enmity, and was a strong message to the leadership of both countries that the peoples both want peace and are ready to cooperate.

It is regarded that even in cases when alienation between the peoples and states have reached a huge scale people’s diplomacy can still give some results. Alexander Rusetsky admits that probably in case of Nagorno-Karabakh (which, together with the adjacent territories of “Azerbaijan proper”, occupied by Armenian forces, is completely cleansed of the ethnic Azeri population) people’s diplomacy will have some effect not in case of rare visits of Azeri intellectuals to Armenia (visits vice versa practically never occurred) but only when these meetings will take place between representatives of the two communities of Nagorno-Karabakh, that is, between “secessionists” and “unionists.” They ought to participate in deciding their fate for themselves and their region.¹⁰⁵

However people’s diplomacy in this particular case will hardly bring any positive results, unless the entire Armenian and Azeri societies will feel that the time has come to throw away the perception of the “enemy image” in the neighbor. But, this is only possible if the politicians will reach some sort of compromise which means concessions (mostly, territorial) from both sides, which, in their turn, the politicians are not able to afford without changing the psychological state of Armenian and Azeri societies. And the vicious circle is closed.

In contrast to the above mentioned case, the potential of people’s diplomacy in restoring confidence between Georgian and Ossetian peoples may be considered to be not yet fully realized. The Georgian-Ossetian conflict is very different from all the other Caucasian conflicts and it would be a mistake to fit it into the frames of strictly defined ethnic or even an ethno-territorial conflicts. It is a political conflict as well where external force played a very important role in its origin and in stirring it up. Ossetians and Georgians had and still have much in common from the cultural point of view, personal contacts are not forgotten as yet, and the nations are open to each other at least on the level of everyday life. Among Georgians and Ossetians there are many individuals of mixed origins: similar phenomena were very rare in the case of Armenians and Azeris in Nagorno-Karabakh or in the case of Greeks and Turks in Cyprus.

¹⁰⁴ Cyprus issue can benefit from 'people's diplomacy', Papandreou says. *Athens News Agency*. 15 January, 2000

¹⁰⁵ Rusetsky, Alexander (director of the Tbilisi-based South Caucasus Regional Security Institute). Ethicized people’s diplomacy in Karabakh to have no effect – analyst. *News.Az interviews*. 19 January, 2010

Hatred, if expressed, is on a personal and not on interethnic level. I confess that in making such a statement I can answer only for the Georgians. But the Ossetians whom I meet almost daily, most of them my students at Tbilisi State University, did not express hatred towards Georgians and, living themselves in Georgia, they never experienced, in their own words, discrimination on the basis of their ethnic identity.

North Ossetian political scientist Valeri Dzutsev could calmly propose the creation of a “Commission for National Reconciliation in South Ossetia” which could have become an important mechanism for reducing tension and finding a long-term political solution in the region¹⁰⁶.

Although under current circumstances the idea to create the above mentioned commission (or something similar) seems to belong in the sphere of fantasy, it is still important that an ethnic Ossetian doesn't exclude the prospect of reconciliation with Georgians. I am convinced that an attempt to do something real in this direction will meet a positive response by Georgians as well.

Efforts by the Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution at the George Mason University (USA) to organize series of meetings under the title “Point of View”¹⁰⁷ with the purpose of restoring confidence and mutual understanding between the Georgian and Ossetian sides do not go in vain. They can bring a positive result.

Demographic State of the Ossetian Population in Georgia

When discussing the opportunities of people's diplomacy it is important to take into consideration the existing demographic structure of the society.

The coexistence of Georgians and Ossetians within the historical Georgian Kingdom (in the 18th century, the East Georgian Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti) has a history of at least several hundred years, while residing as neighbors in the Caucasus region has a history of none less than two millennia. Historical annals confirm multiple instances of positive interaction and mutual assistance amongst these peoples. It is obvious that historical facts can't directly influence current political affairs. But, they can influence the state of the mentality of ethnic communities. Therefore, it is important to remind the peoples of the positive historical examples of interethnic cooperation even if such reminding looks like “old-fashioned propaganda.”

During the Soviet era, Ossetians were one of the largest ethnic minorities in Georgia. For example, they almost twice outnumbered the ethnic Abkhaz residing in the same Soviet Republic.

According to the First Census of Population in independent Georgia (2002) there were 38,028 Ossetians in Georgia¹⁰⁸. This figure includes the number of Ossetians living in the “Georgia proper” as well as those in Akhalkori district and in the Georgian villages of the Didi and Patara Liakhvi river valleys where, naturally, Ossetians also resided (the latter territories were under control of Tbilisi prior to August 2008). It doesn't seem relevant to compare these data with those of the last Soviet Population Census of 1989 when on the entire territory of Georgia more than 164,000 Ossetians were enumerated, among them outside of the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast up to 100,000: the data collected in 1989 and 2002 encompass differently sized territories (and two

¹⁰⁶ Валерий Дзутцев. Национальное примирение в Южной Осетии. *июль 06 2009* <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/156240/>

¹⁰⁷ <http://icar.gmu.edu>

¹⁰⁸ Major Findings of the First General National Population Census of Georgia in 2002. *Demography*. Scientific Journal, 2 (7) 2004. Tbilisi

different epochs!). Nevertheless, in any case it is evident that there was a sharp reduction of the Ossetian population as it migrated mostly towards North Ossetia during the inter-census period.

The number of Ossetians enumerated in urban areas of “Georgia proper” in 2002 amounted to 17,990, among them 10,268 in Tbilisi (where they lived mainly in the urban districts of Gldani-Nadzaladevi where 4,647 resided and Isani-Samgori where 2,535 resided). 20,038 Ossetians resided in rural areas, among them the largest number being 13,383 people in the region of Shida Kartli (Inner Kartli). 6,405 lived in the territory adjacent to South Ossetia, in Gori District, 3,479 in Kaspi District, 2,755 in Kareli District, 6,109 in the region of Kakheti, and 3,977 in the region of Mtskheta-Mtianeti.

The numerical decline of the Ossetian population in Georgia by the beginning of the 21st century as compared to the data of 1989 can be explained, among the other factors, by the unwise policy of the first leadership of the Republic of Georgia which came to power in 1990, and also by the general atmosphere of chaos in the USSR during the last years of its existence. Together, these forces prepared fertile soil for ethnic conflicts to rise in many places of this huge, multinational country. This was a reason many migrated.

It must be underlined that the number of Ossetians currently living in “Georgia proper” is larger than the number of the Slavic and Greek populations whose portion in the total population decreased more significantly due to emigration. The reason that quite considerable Ossetian communities are preserved in “Georgia proper” can be explained by their strong social, cultural, economic, and political integration within Georgian society. A sizeable part of Ossetians living in Georgia as a whole are the members of mixed families. Various research indicates that Georgians formed and are still forming common families with Ossetians more often and readily than with any other ethnic group. .

Before the next population census in Georgia, planned for 2012, will be conducted we have to rely upon estimates of the current number and structure of population. Based on the thorough research headed by Giorgi Sordia and carried out under the auspices of the European Centre for Minority Issues (–referred to below as “ECMI research”) between November, 2008 and June, 2009, i.e. after the 2008 war, there resided c. 26,000 Ossetians in “Georgia proper” (i.e. excluding the territory which found itself on the other side of the dividing line after the Russian occupation) distributed in 132 villages, and 17 cities, towns and townships¹⁰⁹. This figure is hard to confirm prior to the new census. But it is also hard to dispute the figure. I am also inclined to consider that the number of the Ossetians in “Georgia proper” after the 2002 census should have reduced but not at such a high rate. (It is less plausible that their number could have decreased by one third of the total). It must be noted that the entire population of Georgia was also declining during the same period.

Based on the data of the ECMI research, the majority of Ossetians residing in “Georgia proper” since the 19th and in some regions since the 18th century is deeply integrated with Georgian society, almost all of them speak Georgian, and for many Georgian has become the mother tongue. However they don’t lose their ethnic identity and contacts with their kin in South Ossetia and outside of Georgia: this was confirmed in the above quoted ECMI research as well.

It is interesting to notice that the number of the Ossetians in “Georgia proper” based on the estimates of ECMI research of 2009 is almost identical to the number of the Ossetians in South Ossetia as estimated by a neutral Russian expert Varvara Pakhomenko.

¹⁰⁹ Sordia, Giorgi. Ossetians in Georgia in the wake of the 2008 War. ECMI Working Paper N 45, September 2009

According to her estimate the number of local population in South Ossetia, the absolute majority of whom after August 2008 are ethnic Ossetians, did not exceed 26,000-32,000 in 2009. She wrote: "It can be asserted based on the data provided by the officials, that the number of population of all South Ossetia could barely exceed 30,000-32,000. But if we proceed from the number of students in the high schools in South Ossetia, which most probably does not exceed 4,000, we can assume that the approximate population of South Ossetia might be up to 26,000-27,000. These two estimates don't contradict each other. However, they strikingly differ from the official figures by two to three times."¹¹⁰

It is hard to confirm or reject these quantitative figures just as in the case of the estimate of ECMI cited above. Most probably the calculations of Pakhomenko are correct. Even if her maximum estimate is closer to reality and the number of the Ossetians in South Ossetia is not 26-27,000, but 30-32,000, still, this figure is half when compared with that of the Soviet period (66,000). The number of the Ossetians in South Ossetia by no means could have a growth dynamic; on the contrary they were destined to decrease in number under conditions of permanent political tensions, economic hardship and emigration.

If the demographic future of South Ossetia is under a real threat, this ought to be attributed first of all to the armed conflicts, but not to a lesser extent to the absence of natural economic and other type of contacts with the rest of Georgia.

Restoring peaceful relations with the Georgian population could serve as a positive factor for preserving Ossetian ethnos in the territories to the north and south of the current dividing line.

As for the migration attitudes [mood] among the Ossetians in "Georgia proper" ECMI report reveals that before 2008 war such attitudes almost always were predetermined by economic factors and had a tendency to slow down. After the war the dynamics of emigration seemed not to change, i.e. emigration did not increase considerably. But the tendency of emigration exists.

The ECMI field work looked for possible cases of discrimination towards Ossetians in "Georgia proper," but the proof of such cases was not found¹¹¹. Furthermore, the European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM) could not discover the facts of discrimination on the ethnic basis. By the way, the same was noted by our interviewers when polling the Ossetian population in the framework of the current study in February 2011.

At the same time, as based on the conclusions of ECMI research, although in the territory of "Georgia proper" "on an everyday level Georgian-Ossetian relations after the [2008] war continue to be close and friendly, the influence of war can clearly be felt in the atmosphere of cautiousness and fear that has settled on Ossetian communities. The majority of interviewees expressed uncertainty regarding the future."¹¹². The negative experience during the beginning of the 1990s forces a substantial segment of the Ossetian population to look towards the future with trepidation. They will not feel secure if the armed conflict is renewed.

Obstacles facing theoretically possible people's diplomacy are created by the fact that participation of Ossetians in the process of formation of civil society in "Georgia proper" is barely visible. There are not many (or, maybe they are unnoticed?) Ossetian non-governmental organizations which would strive to preserve the Ossetian language, cultural heritage, and ethnic identity. In the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast within the Georgian SSR, more efforts were made in these directions,

¹¹⁰ Pakhomenko, Varvara (Center "Demos" Populated island, (in Russian - *Пахоменко, Варвара (Центр "Демос"). Обитаемый остров*). <http://www.polit.ru/analytics/2009/09/22/demo.html>

¹¹¹ Sordia, op.cit.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 15

by the state organizations, by the way. It is sufficient to say that the Ossetian language had much stronger position in Soviet Georgia as a whole including South Ossetia than in the North Ossetian Autonomous SSR, which was a part of the RSFSR. The conditions for preserving the Ossetian ethnos in fact were more favorable on the southern side of the Caucasus Mountains.

Results of the Sociological Survey

A considerable part of the current research was the carrying out of a sociological survey and analyzing its results. Limited resources precluded executing a full-scale survey, i.e. interviewing 1,000 and more individuals which would have allowed the statistical error to be considerably reduced. A smaller sample of 213 respondents made this error around 5-6 percent. However, even data obtained in this way give valuable results, sufficient to create a generalized picture.

In order to have information about what members of Ossetian families living in “Georgia proper” think about the possibility of restoring trust between the Georgian and Ossetian peoples, 106 persons of Ossetian nationality were polled in 17 localities. The target population were persons whose parents both (or, in some cases, one parent) were Ossetians. Interviewers followed the rule of not carrying out a face-to face interview with more than one individual in a household.

For comparative reasons, a similar number (107) of ethnic Georgians residing in the same locality or having contacts with the Ossetian population for a long period of time were interviewed. The majority of those polled were IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons) from the territory of South Ossetia. Scientific hypothesis suggested that these people could be more knowledgeable (or at least interested) in the problems of restoring trust with the people together with whom they used to live for generations; it was assumed that they could offer certain ways to restore such a trust.

Because the majority of Ossetian population in “Georgia proper” resides in rural areas, 70 percent of the respondents were sampled in villages. (Bakuriani, formally a township, in this particular case was added on to the rural area as actually it is a large village). In the capital city of Tbilisi, the respondents were sampled in Gldani-Nadzaladevi and Isani-Samgori districts, where the majority of Ossetian families are concentrated. The respondents were almost evenly divided by gender – 52 percent male and 48 percent -- female. The age structure of the respondents was more or less evenly distributed: 25 percent were between the ages of 18-30, 14 percent were between 31-40, 26 percent were between 41-50, 18 percent were between 51-60, and 17 percent were older than 60.

Sampling the specific respondents for interviewing required intense efforts. The students of the Faculty of Social and Political Studies of the Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University had successfully dealt with this problem. Part of our interviewers were ethnic Ossetians or from a mixed, Georgian-Ossetian, families. Such a choice was deliberate in order to exclude any doubt of one-sidedness in the approach of the interviewers and to facilitate their work with a specific sample of the respondents.

Major findings of the opinion poll

1. It turned out that the great majority of the Ossetian population in “Georgia proper” considers the Georgian tongue as native or they are fluent in this language. The fact that integration of the Ossetians within the Georgian society is high is revealed in responses of more than half of the Ossetian respondents who admitted that among their friends the majority are Georgians.

Nevertheless the Ossetians don't lose their ethnic identity: this is proved indirectly by the fact that at least half of them have Ossetian friends (see fig. 1 and 2). For comparison –

among the Georgian respondents less than 30 percent have Ossetian friends (including those among “the persons of different nationalities”). However, if we consider the same results from the other point of view, we see almost a third of Georgians have Ossetian friends!

2. As was expected, based on the specific character of the sample, among those who suffered from the 2008 war there were more Georgians than Ossetians in the territory of “Georgia proper” (see fig. 3). 81 percent of Georgians replied affirmatively to the question: “***Did your family or close relatives suffer in the war of August, 2008?***”. Among Ossetians affirmative answer to the same question was given by half as many respondents – 42 percent, the majority of whom were members of mixed families of IDPs with a prevalence of Ossetian women whose husbands and relatives are Georgian.
3. Obviously, 40 percent of respondents consider the relations between Georgians and Ossetians as deteriorated in comparison with those of the pre-war period: an almost similar portion of Georgians (39.3 percent) and Ossetians (40.6 percent) answered so. Approximately the same portion of the overall sample (42 percent) considers these relations as having stayed unchanged (fig. 4 and 5), however, such a “relatively optimistic” evaluation was supported by more among the Ossetian respondents (48 percent) than among the Georgian ones (36 percent), which is a noticeable difference. There are more Georgian respondents who were uncertain on this question (22 percent) than Ossetians (9 percent). The opinion of 2 percent of respondents who think that after the war “relations improved” could be ignored!
4. Opinions of Georgians and Ossetians essentially coincided on the following (open) question “***In whose interests is conservation of the current state of relations between Georgians and Ossetians?***”. Concrete answers given by 72 percent of respondents were coded and they fitted six groups according to their meaning (Fig. 6 and 7 and table 1):
 - Almost similar number of Georgians and Ossetians (43 percent and 45 percent accordingly) pointed to Russia (or it’s government);
 - 9 percent of all respondents (8 percent among Georgians and 10 percent among Ossetians) pointed to the common interests of Russia and South Ossetia (or their Governments);
 - Georgia (or its Government) is considered to be interested in conservation of present level of relations by 8 percent of respondents (6 percent among Georgians and 10 percent among Ossetians);
 - 7 percent of all respondents consider that the conservation of current situation is in the interests of the “other” countries or individuals or of “everybody, participating in the conflict” (i.e. they didn’t name any concrete country or a person);
 - A negligible 2 percent of respondents pointed to South Ossetia alone as the party interested in preservation of status quo;
 - Even more negligible 1 percent thinks that nobody is interested in it.

The percentage of respondents who didn’t answer, or considered it hard to give any answer to the above-mentioned question appeared to be quite high: 32 percent among Georgians, 24 percent among Ossetians; 23 percent among males, 32 percent among females; uncertainty was lower at 22-23 percent among the older generation, above 51 of age, than among the younger generations, among whom 34-35 percent avoided answering.

Thus, almost half of the respondents (Ossetians and Georgians alike) think that Russia is the primary party interested in preserving the current situation and, consequently, the alienation of Georgians and Ossetians.

In general, such an answer was predictable: the 2008 war largely took place between Georgia and Russia and people residing in “Georgia proper” despite their nationality are inclined to blame the other side, i.e. Russia.

5. The next two questions differed by only one word but responses had given very different results. The respondents had to answer to the questions:” ***Does there exist the necessity to restore confidence between Georgians and Ossetians?***” and “***Does there exist the possibility of restoring confidence between Georgians and Ossetians?***”

On the charts (see fig. 8 and 9) these two responses are compared (there are given in parallel the responses to the next question as well – “***Did you [the respondent] contribute personally to the restoration of confidence between Georgians and Ossetians?***” I will turn to this question later). Based on the charts we clearly observe that 92 percent of Georgians and 90 percent of Ossetians see the *necessity* to restore confidence. (A negligible 2 percent of respondents cannot see such *necessity*).

But against the background of such almost absolute consensus about the *necessity* only 62 percent of respondents see the *possibility* of restoring confidence between Georgians and Ossetians. And, differences in responses according to nationalities, age and gender are remarkable and, at the same time, logical.

Among Ossetians, 70 percent believe in such *possibility*, while among the Georgians just 55 percent. Among the males of both nationalities, 70 percent believe in the possibility, while only 55 percent among the females believe. The least convinced are respondents between the ages of 31-40 (45 percent), while in the age groups of 41-50 and 51-60 there are 72-73 percent who believe restoring confidence is possible.

It turns out that among Georgians, women and younger generations skepticism is revealed more than among Ossetians, males and older generation of both peoples who are willing to believe in this opportunity. The older generation, of course, remembers the good old days of coexistence and common feasts!

Uncertainty in responses (30 percent didn’t answer or it was “hard to say” for them) may explain something. Among Georgians such answers (or their absence) constituted 38 percent (among Ossetians – 22 percent); among female respondents 33 percent (this explains their “comparative skepticism”). The highest non-responding was within the age group of 31-40 (42 percent).

6. The following question stems from the previous two: “***Did you [the respondent] contribute personally to the restoration of confidence between Georgians and Ossetians?***” (see table 4). If the answer was “yes” an open question was posed – “***What did you do personally to restore confidence between Georgians and Ossetians?***”

It was found out that according to their own answers only 19 percent of respondents contributed personally to this endeavor (28 percent of Ossetians and 9 percent of Georgians, 22 percent of all men and 16 percent of all women; among age groups the highest participation was revealed in age group of 31-40 where 24 percent reported personally contributing).

But when it came to concretize their efforts in this direction the received responses could be grouped just into two small clusters: about 10 percent of all respondents “*tries to keep relations with individuals of both peoples*” and up to 5 percent “*tries to support dialogue between the two peoples*”.

Not too much! But, in current circumstances it would be hard to expect that ordinary people, the majority of whom suffered economically and morally during and after the war, would have been able to do something essential.

7. Below are presented the answers to the major questions of the research “*What can be done in order to restore confidence between Georgians and Ossetians?*” and “*What is the major obstacle for restoration of confidence between Georgians and Ossetians?*”.

Both questions were open-ended ones and interviewers collected many versions of answers which were coded and grouped (in the attached tables 5 and 6 the distribution of answers, including cross tabulations, is given).

8. Responses to the question - “*What can be done in order to restore confidence between Georgians and Ossetians?*” arranged by decreasing frequency gave such results (see also figures 10 and 11):

- Don’t know, hard to say (40 percent of all respondents; 49 percent among Georgians and 32 percent among Ossetians);
- Restoring of economic ties, personal contacts, using resources of people’s diplomacy (38 percent of all respondents; 25 percent among Georgians and 50 percent among Ossetians);
- Withdrawing Russian troops from South Ossetia, invalidating the recognition of its independence (9 percent of all respondents; 16 percent among Georgians and 2 percent among Ossetians);
- Normalizing relations between Georgia and Russia (5 percent of all respondents; 16 percent among Georgians and 6 percent among Ossetians);
- Changing the state policy of Georgia towards South Ossetia (4 percent of all respondents; 2 percent among Georgians and 6 percent among Ossetians);
- Other – such answers were given by a negligible 2 percent of respondents.

Differences of opinion of Georgians and Ossetians as revealed in the responses to the above questions is striking. 50 percent of Ossetians see the prospect to restore confidence between the peoples using people’s diplomacy, by re-establishing economic ties, personal contacts, and through dialogue. Meanwhile just 25 percent of Georgians would rely on the same measures. Almost half of the Georgian respondents (49 percent) do not know what could be done.

This state of mind indicates serious disappointment, frustration, and spiritual bankruptcy among Georgian respondents. 16 percent of them see the only solution through a radical way, the withdrawal of Russian troops from South Ossetia, etc. Only 2 percent of Ossetian respondents shared the same point of view. Just an insignificant number of respondents of both nationalities marked in their responses the approaches of normalizing relations between Georgia and Russia or changing the policy of Georgia towards South Ossetia. Perhaps they assume that the time for such steps is yet to come?

9. The responses to the question – “*What is the major obstacle to restoration of confidence between Georgians and Ossetians?*” were arranged by decreasing frequency in the following order (see also figures 12 and 13):

- Policy of Russian government, presence of its military bases in South Ossetia (36 percent of all respondents; 47 percent among Georgians and 26 percent among Ossetians);
- Don’t know, hard to say (17 percent of all respondents; 26 percent among Georgians and 9 percent among Ossetians);
- Policy of Georgian government (11 percent of all respondents; 6 percent among Georgians and 17 percent among Ossetians);

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- Lack of conversation, economic contacts between Georgians and Ossetians (9 percent of all respondents; 3 percent among Georgians and 15 percent among Ossetians);
 - Lack of good will among all the participants of the conflict (9 percent of all respondents; 6 percent among Georgians and 12 percent among Ossetians);
 - Old conflicts (“too much blood was shed”), propaganda creating the enemy image 7 percent of all respondents; 5 percent among Georgians and 9 percent among Ossetians);
 - Policy of South Ossetian de-facto government, separatism (6 percent of all respondents; 7 percent among Georgians and 5 percent among Ossetians);
 - Mutual enmity of Georgian and Russian leadership, absence of diplomatic relations (5 percent of all respondents; 2 percent among Georgians and 8 percent among Ossetians).

The largest share of Ossetian respondents -- 26 percent -- considers the policy of Russia and presence of its occupying troops in South Ossetia as the major obstacle to restoration of confidence between the peoples. But this portion is almost half that of Georgians sharing the same opinion -- 47 percent. On the contrary, the policy of Georgia as the main obstacle is pointed by three times more Ossetians than Georgians (17 and 6 percent accordingly) though it should be underlined that the share of Ossetians thinking so is significantly less than the share of those who consider Russia's policy the main obstacle. And, this difference is sound.

While analyzing the responses to the previous questions it was deduced that among the Georgians doubt prevails that there exists a possibility to change something in the direction of restoring confidence between peoples. The same seems to be correct in the case of the current question as well: 15 percent of Ossetians consider that the major barrier in confidence building is lack of conversation, economic contacts, etc. But only 3 percent of Georgians share the same opinion. Even if the relatively small sample size makes confidence levels for observed frequency of responses too wide for the small numbers (i.e. 3 percent of responses in this sample doesn't count as an entirely reliable value) still, the difference between 3 and 15 percent is rather large.

Summary

There is a certain consensus in the opinions of Ossetians and Georgians on the issue of in whose interests it is to preserve the current state of affairs between these two peoples. Almost equal portions of respondents from both sides (43-45 percent) point towards the Russian government.

A similar consensus (90-92 percent) exists about the *necessity* of restoring confidence between Georgians and Ossetians. But 70 percent of Ossetians and only 55 percent of Georgians believes in the *possibility* of it.

The hypothesis that Georgians from IDP groups are able to offer realistic ways of restoring confidence with Ossetian people was proved only partially. Interviewed Georgians (the majority of whom are IDPs, who lost their property and in some cases their family members or relatives) are experiencing frustration, spiritual bankruptcy, and mistrust towards everyone. The majority of them don't know what to do to rectify the current situation.

The observed difference between the opinions of Georgians and Ossetians was an expected one: Ossetians in “Georgia proper”, who haven't been affected directly by the 2008 war, are more inclined to to use elements of people's diplomacy in order to rebuild the bridges between the peoples. Half of them consider it necessary to restore economic ties and personal contacts. (Among Georgians, the same opinion is shared just by a fourth of them.)

In general, the hypothesis that Ossetians in “Georgia proper” are ready enough for people's diplomacy has been confirmed. These Ossetians could serve this endeavor.

It is obvious that this will require political will from all parties of the conflict.

In case restoring confidence will become a common will and turn into a common project of civil societies on both sides of the dividing line, even the occupying state, which is the least interested in ending the conflict, will be obliged at a certain stage to heed to such a call.

A very cautious optimism in this question may exist.

The first chapter of this research mentioned the somewhat positive results of people's diplomacy during the rescue operations after earthquakes in Turkey and Greece.

Is it necessary to follow the example of peoples who "became wise" only after suffering from a natural disaster?

I think that we, Georgians and Ossetians, could reach even more and in a shorter period without the "help" of natural disasters and certain "friends" from close countries.

APPENDIX

Table 1

In whose interests is conservation of the current state of relations between Georgians and Ossetians?

	Total 213	Nationality		Age groups					Gender	
		Georg	Osset	18-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	60+	M	F
Total %	213 100	107 50.2	106 49.8	54 25.4	29 13.6	55 25.8	39 18.3	36 16.9	111 52.1	102 47.9
Nobody's	2 0.9 100	1 0.9 50.0	1 0.9 50.0	0 0.0 0.0	1 3.4 50.0	0 0.0 0.0	0 0.0 0.0	1 2.8 50.0	0 0.0 0.0	2 2.0 100
Russian government's	94 44.1 100	46 43.0 48.9	48 45.3 51.1	26 48.1 27.7	9 31.0 9.6	22 40.0 23.4	22 56.4 23.4	15 41.7 16.0	52 46.8 55.3	42 41.2 44.7
Geogian government's	18 8.5 100	7 6.5 38.9	11 10.4 61.1	3 5.6 60.0	4 13.8 22.2	6 10.9 33.3	1 2.6 5.6	4 11.1 22.2	11 9.9 61.1	7 6.9 38.9
South Ossetian <i>de facto</i> government's	5 2.3 100	2 1.9 40.0	3 2.8 60.0	3 5.6 60.0	1 3.4 20.0	1 1.8 20.0	0 0.0 0.0	0 0.0 0.0	3 2.7 60.0	2 2.0 40.0
In common interests of Russia and South Ossetia	20 9.4 100	9 8.4 45.0	11 10.4 55.0	8 14.8 40.0	2 6.9 10.0	2 3.6 10.0	3 7.7 15.0	5 13.9 25.0	8 7.2 40.0	12 11.8 60.0
In interests of other countries or individuals, of everybody	15 7.0 100	8 7.5 53.3	7 6.6 46.7	1 1.9 6.7	2 6.9 13.3	5 9.1 33.3	4 10.3 26.7	3 8.3 20.0	11 9.9 73.3	4 3.9 26.7
Don't know, hard to say	59 27.7 100	34 31.8 57.6	25 23.6 42.4	13 24.1 22.0	10 34.5 16.9	19 34.5 32.2	9 23.1 15.3	8 22.2 13.6	26 23.4 44.1	33 32.4 55.9

Table 2

Does there exist necessity to restore confidence between Georgians and Ossetians?

	Total 213	Nationality		Age groups					Gender	
		Georg	Osset	18-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	60+	M	F
Total %	213 100	107 50.2	106 49.8	54 25.4	29 13.6	55 25.8	39 18.3	36 16.9	111 52.1	102 47.9
Yes	194 91.1 100	99 92.5 51.0	95 89.6 49.0	53 98.1 27.3	23 79.3 11.9	51 92.7 26.3	37 94.9 19.1	30 83.3 15.5	106 95.5 54.6	88 86.3 45.4
No	5 2.3 100	1 0.9 20.0	4 3.8 80.0	0 0.0 0.0	2 6.9 40.0	1 1.8 20.0	1 2.6 20.0	1 2.8 20.0	0 0.0 0.0	5 4.9 100
Don't know, hard to say	14 6.6 100	7 6.5 50.0	7 6.6 50.0	1 1.9 7.1	4 13.8 28.6	3 5.5 21.4	1 2.6 7.1	5 13.9 35.7	5 4.5 35.7	9 8.8 64.3

Table 3

Does there exist possibility to restore confidence between Georgians and Ossetians?

	Total 213	Nationality		Age groups					Gender	
		Georg	Osset	18-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	60+	M	F
Total %	213 100	107 50.2	106 49.8	54 25.4	29 13.6	55 25.8	39 18.3	36 16.9	111 52.1	102 47.9
Yes	133 62.4 100	59 55.1 44.4	74 69.8 55.6	33 61.1 24.8	13 44.8 9.8	40 72.7 30.1	28 71.8 21.1	19 52.8 14.3	77 69.4 57.9	56 54.9 42.1
No	16 7.5 100	7 6.5 43.8	9 8.5 56.3	1 1.9 6.3	4 13.8 25.0	5 9.1 31.3	3 7.7 18.8	3 8.3 18.8	4 3.6 25.0	12 11.8 75.0
Don't know, hard to say	64 30.0 100	41 38.3 64.1	23 31.7 35.9	20 37.0 31.3	12 41.4 18.8	10 18.2 15.6	8 20.5 12.5	14 38.9 21.9	30 27.0 46.9	34 33.3 53.1

Table 4

Did you contribute personally to the restoration of confidence between Georgians and Ossetians?

	Total 213	Nationality		Age groups					Gender	
		Geog	Osset	18-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	60+	M	F
Total %	213 100	107 50.2	106 49.8	54 25.4	29 13.6	55 25.8	39 18.3	36 16.9	111 52.1	102 47.9
Yes	40 18.8 100	10 9.3 25.0	30 28.3 75.0	10 18.5 25.0	7 24.1 17.5	11 20.0 27.5	8 20.5 20.0	4 11.1 10.0	24 21.6 60.0	16 15.7 40.0
No	157 73.7 100	88 82.2 56.1	69 65.1 43.9	41 75.9 26.1	20 69.0 12.7	41 74.5 26.1	27 69.2 17.2	28 77.8 17.8	77 69.4 49.0	80 78.4 51.0
Don't know, hard to say	16 7.5 100	9 8.4 56.3	7 6.6 43.8	3 5.6 18.8	2 6.9 12.5	3 5.5 18.8	4 10.3 25.0	4 11.1 25.0	10 9.0 62.5	6 5.9 37.5

Table 5

What could be done in order to restore confidence between Georgians and Ossetians?

	Total 213	Nationality		Age groups					Gender	
		Geog	Osset	18-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	60+	M	F
Total %	213 100	107 50.2	106 49.8	54 25.4	29 13.6	55 25.8	39 18.3	36 16.9	111 52.1	102 47.9
Changing state policy of Georgia towards South Ossetia	8 3.8 100	2 1.9 25.0	6 5.7 75.0	1 1.9 12.5	1 3.4 12.5	5 9.1 62.5	0 0.0 0.0	1 2.8 12.5	6 5.4 75.0	2 2.0 25.0
Withdrawing Russian troops from S/O, invalidating recognition	19 8.9 100	17 15.9 89.5	2 1.9 10.5	6 11.1 31.6	1 3.4 5.3	3 5.5 15.8	6 15.4 31.6	3 8.3 15.8	10 9.0 52.6	9 8.8 47.4
Beginning negotiations with Russia and South Ossetia	4 1.9 100	1 0.9 25.0	3 2.8 75.0	0 0.0 0.0	1 3.4 25.0	1 1.8 25.0	1 2.6 25.0	1 2.8 25.0	4 3.6 100	0 0.0 0.0
Restoring economic ties, using people diplomacy	80 37.6 100	27 25.2 33.8	53 50.0 66.3	14 25.9 17.5	8 27.6 10.0	29 52.7 36.3	20 51.3 25.0	9 25.0 11.3	44 39.6 55.0	36 35.3 45.0
Normalizing Georgian-Russian relations	11 5.2 100	5 4.7 45.5	6 5.7 54.5	4 7.4 36.4	1 3.4 9.1	1 1.8 9.1	1 2.6 9.1	4 11.1 36.4	9 8.1 81.8	2 2.0 18.2
Other answer	5 2.3 100	3 2.8 60.0	2 1.9 40.0	3 5.6 60.0	0 0.0 0.0	1 1.8 20.0	1 2.6 20.0	0 0.0 0.0	3 2.7 60.0	2 2.0 40.0
Don't know, hard to say	86 40.4 100	52 48.6 60.5	34 32.1 39.5	26 48.1 30.2	17 58.6 19.8	15 27.3 17.4	10 25.6 11.6	18 50.0 20.9	35 31.5 40.7	51 50.0 59.3

Table 6

What is the obstacle for restoration of confidence between Georgians and Ossetians?

	Total 213	Nationality		Age groups					Gender	
		Georg	Osset	18-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	60+	M	F
Total %	213 100	107 50.2	106 49.8	54 25.4	29 13.6	55 25.8	39 18.3	36 16.9	111 52.1	102 47.9
Russia's state policy, its military bases in S/Ossetia	77 36.2 100	50 46.7 64.9	27 25.5 35.1	23 42.6 29.9	6 20.7 7.8	21 38.2 27.3	13 33.3 16.9	14 38.9 18.2	41 36.9 53.2	36 35.3 46.8
Georgia's state policy	24 11.3 100	6 5.6 25.0	18 17.0 75.0	1 1.9 4.2	3 10.3 12.5	7 12.7 29.2	5 12.8 20.8	8 22.2 33.3	16 14.4 66.7	8 7.8 33.3
S/Ossetia's de facto govt policy, separatism	12 5.6 100	7 6.5 58.3	5 4.7 41.7	4 7.4 33.3	2 6.9 16.7	0 0.0 0.0	2 5.1 16.7	4 11.1 33.3	7 6.3 58.3	5 .9 41.7
Lack of good will from all participants	19 8.9 100	6 5.6 31.6	13 12.3 68.4	3 5.6 15.8	2 6.9 10.5	6 10.9 31.6	7 17.9 36.8	1 2.8 5.3	10 9.0 52.6	9 8.8 47.4
Lack of communication, economic ties	19 8.9 100	3 2.8 15.8	16 15.1 84.2	5 9.3 26.3	3 10.3 15.8	6 10.9 31.6	4 10.3 21.1	1 2.8 5.3	9 8.1 47.4	10 9.8 52.6
Mutual enmity of leaders, absence of Georgia-Russia dip. relations	10 4.7 100	2 1.9 20.0	8 7.5 80.0	4 7.4 40.0	2 3.6 20.0	2 3.6 20.0	1 2.6 10.0	1 2.8 10.0	7 6.3 70.0	3 2.9 30.0
Old conflicts, creation of enemy image	15 7.0 100	5 4.7 33.3	10 9.4 66.7	5 9.3 33.3	4 7.3 26.7	4 7.3 26.7	0 0.0 0.0	1 2.8 6.7	8 7.2 53.3	7 6.9 46.7
Don't know, hard to say	37 17.4 100	28 26.2 75.7	9 8.5 24.3	9 16.7 24.3	9 16.4 24.3	9 16.4 24.3	7 17.9 18.9	6 16.7 16.2	13 11.7 35.1	24 23.5 64.9

Among the closest friends the majority are... (according to nationality)

Among Ossetians

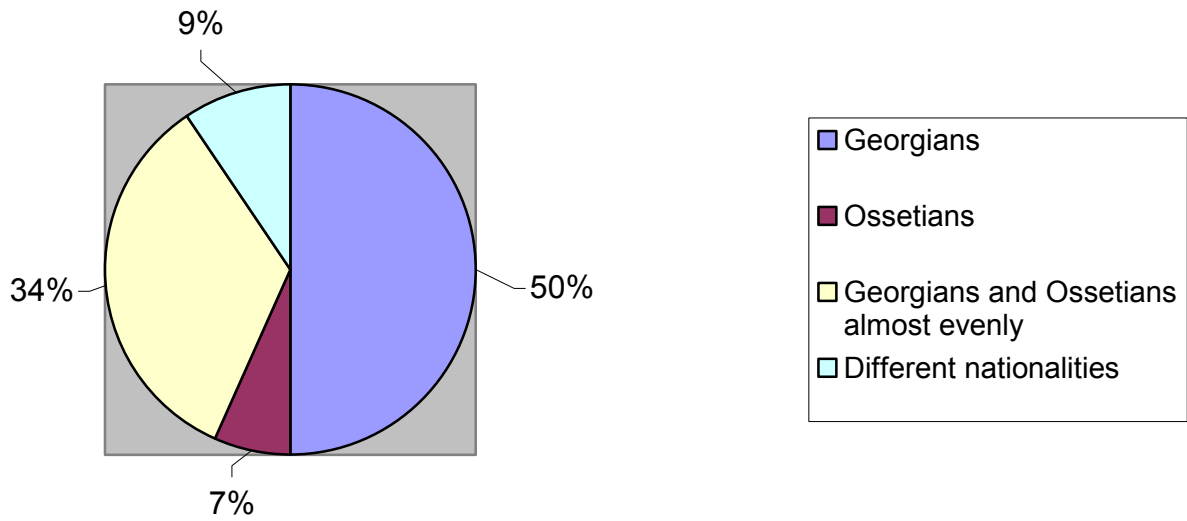


Fig. 1

Among Georgians

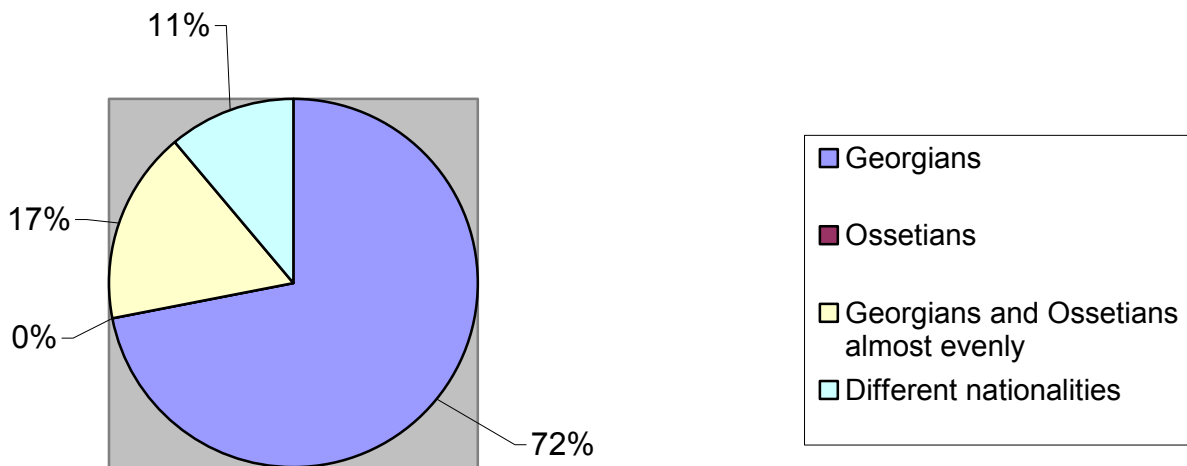


Fig. 2

**Did your family or close relatives
suffer in the war of August, 2008?
(according to nationality)**

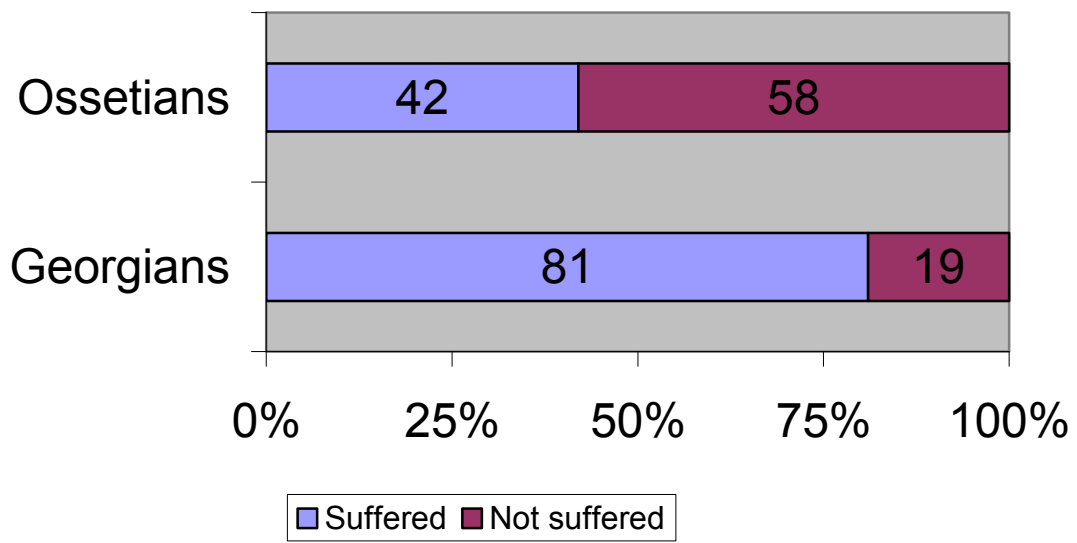


Fig. 3

**How did the relationship between Georgians and Ossetians change during the two years after the war in comparison with the pre-war period?
(according to nationality)**

Among Ossetians

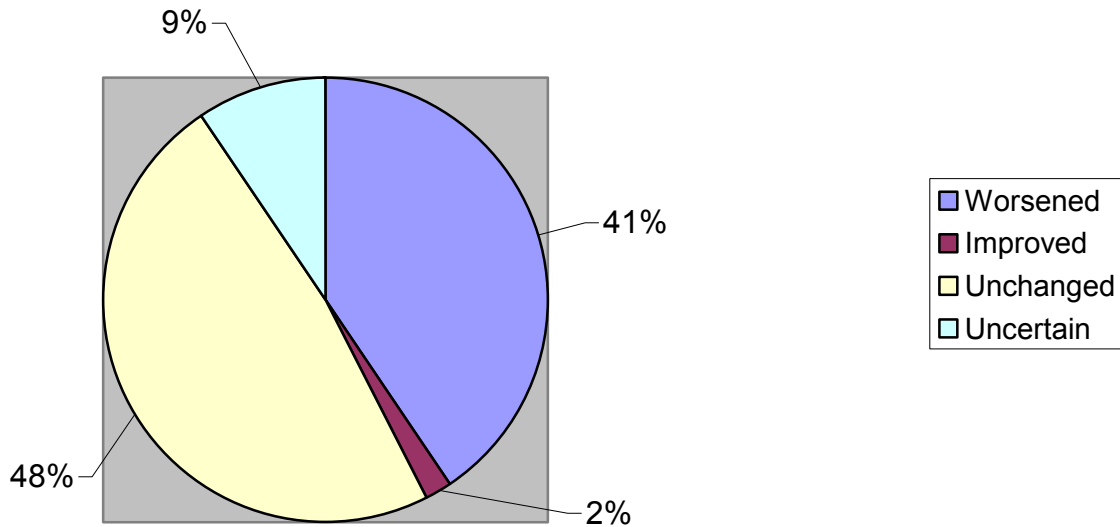


Fig. 4

Among Georgians

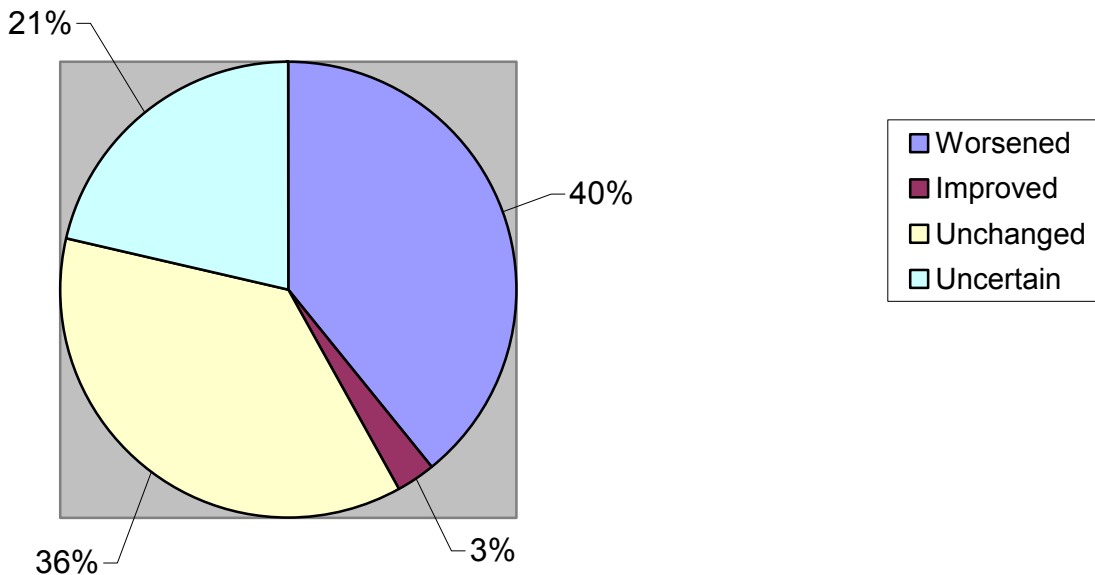


Fig. 5

**In whose interests is
conservation of the current state of relations between
Georgians and Ossetians?
(according to nationality)**

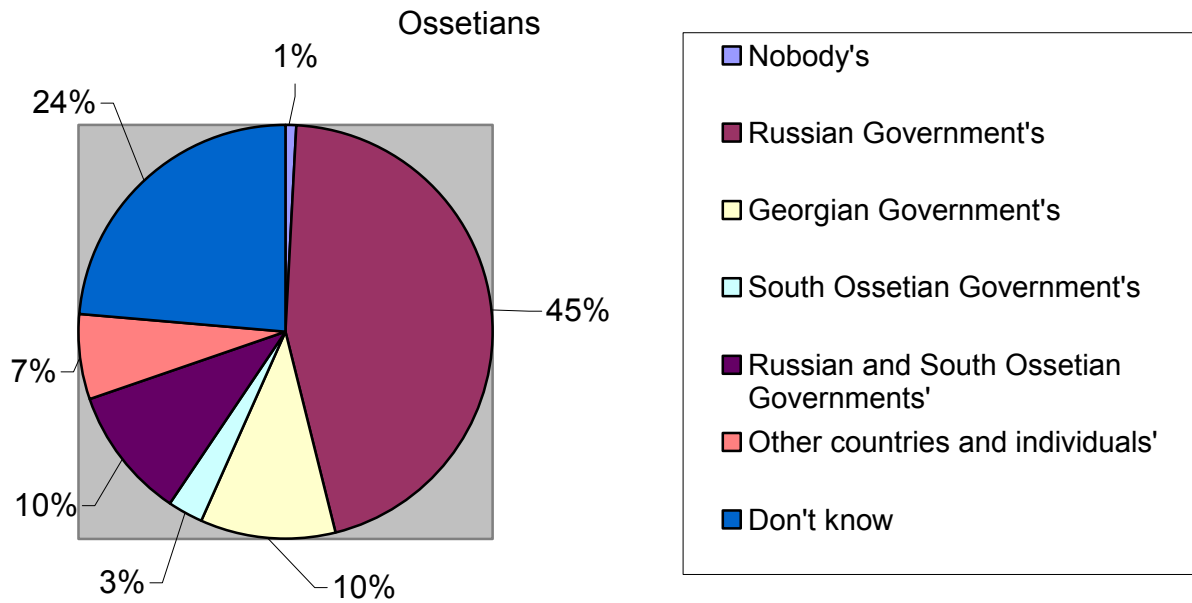


Fig. 6

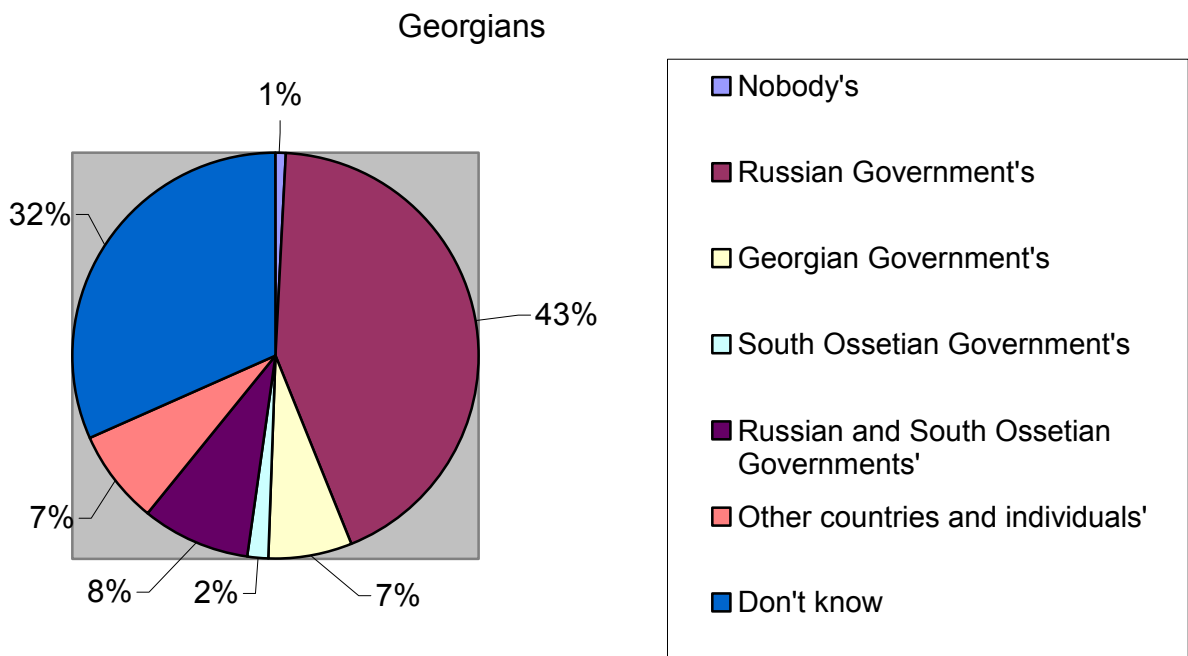


Fig. 7

**Does there exist
a) necessity; b) possibility and
c) did the respondent contribute personally
to the restoration of confidence between Georgians and
Ossetians?
(according to nationality)**

Ossetians

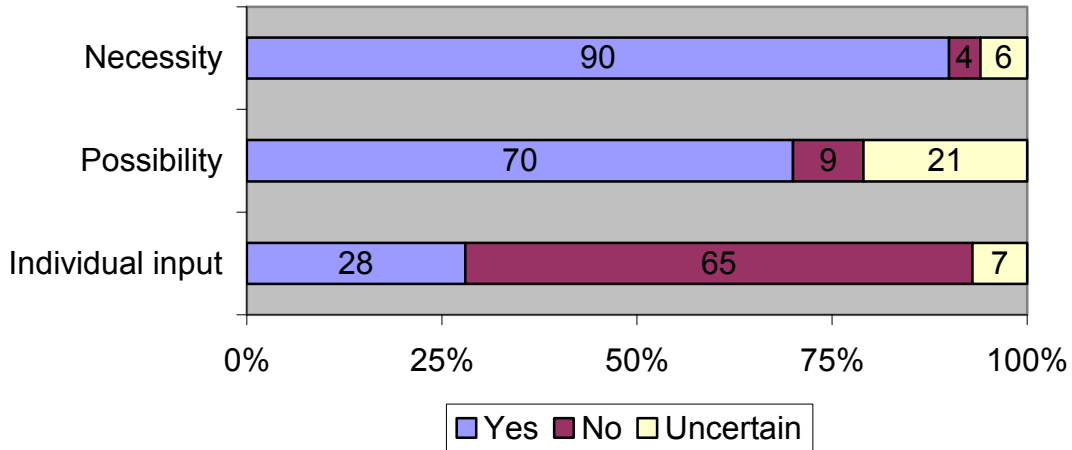


Fig. 8

Georgians

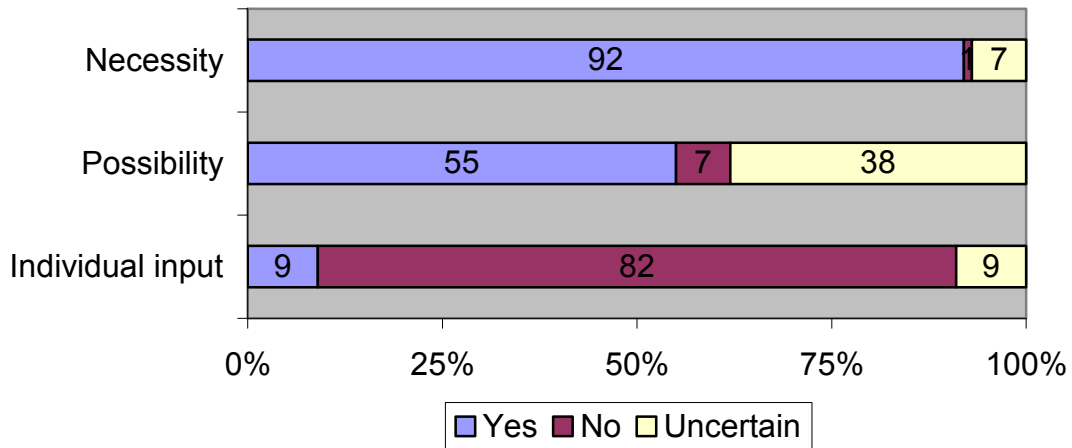


Fig. 9

What can be done in order to restore the confidence between Georgians and Ossetians? (according to nationality)

- To withdraw Russian troops from South Ossetia, to invalidate its recognition as an independent state
- Georgia should begin negotiations with Russia and South Ossetia
- To restore economic ties, personal contacts, to use people diplomacy
- To normalize relations between Georgia and Russia
- To change Georgia's policy towards South Ossetia
- Other answers
- Don't know, hard to say

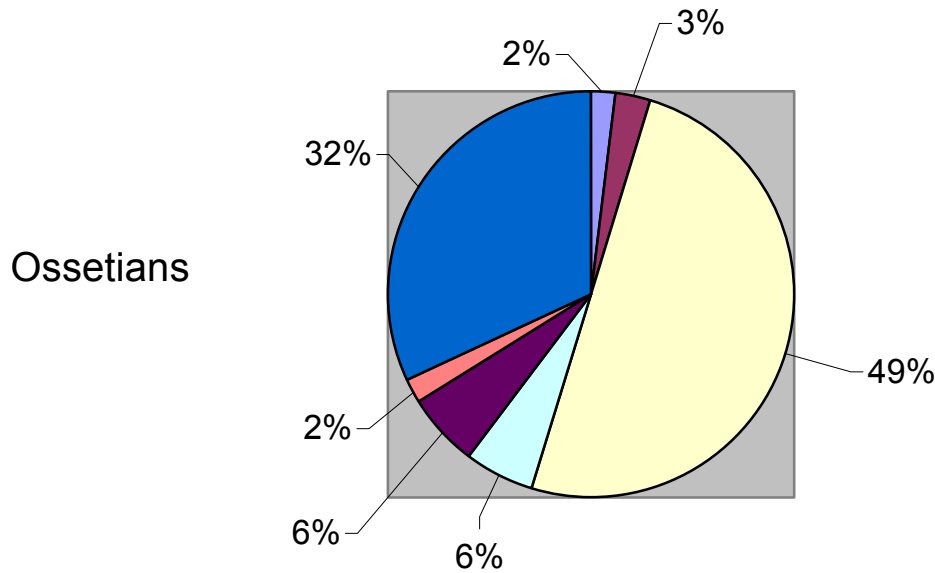


Fig. 10

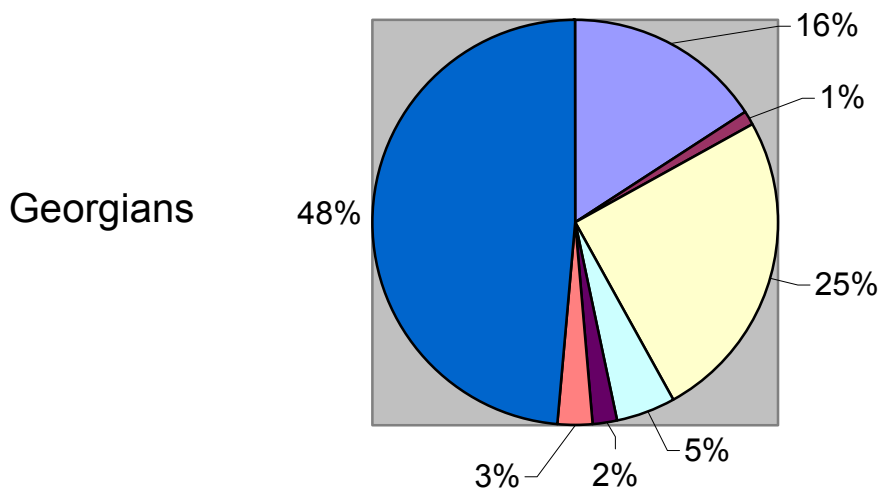
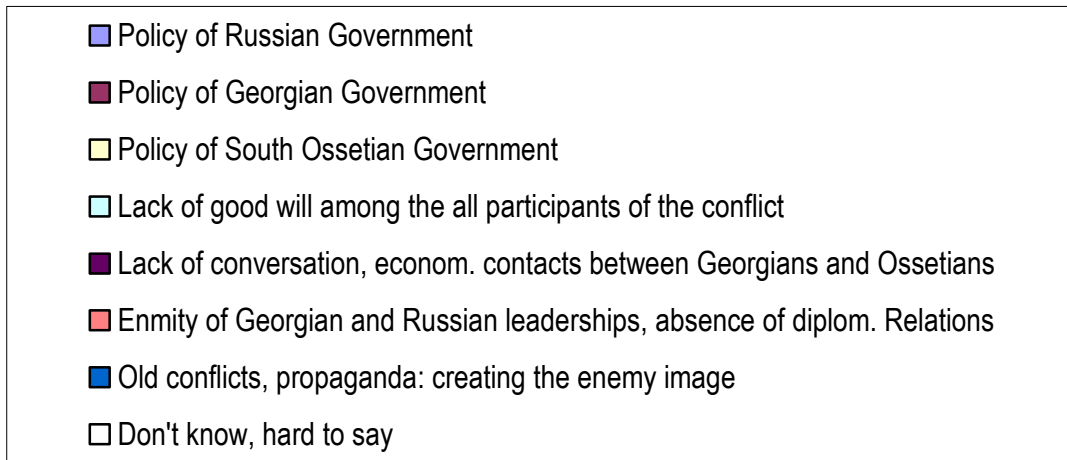


Fig. 11

What is the obstacle for restoration of confidence between Georgians and Ossetians? (according to nationality)



Ossetians

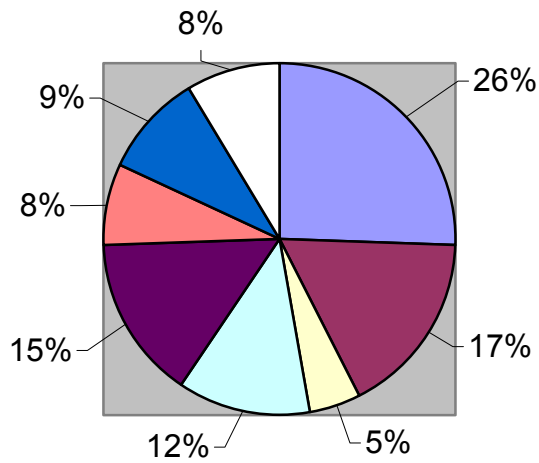


Fig. 12

Georgians

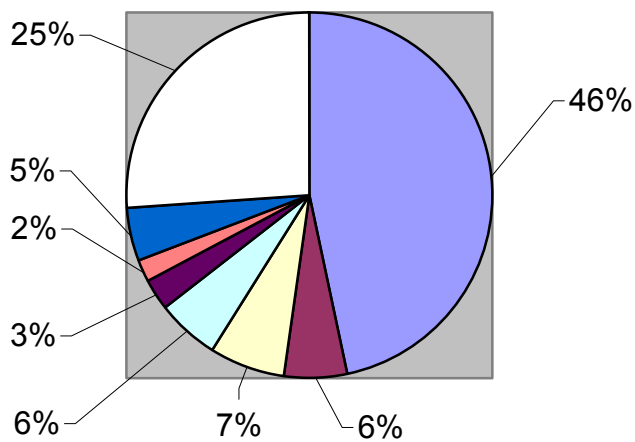


Fig. 13