

COMMENTS FROM THE EDITORS

We, as editors of this volume, have gathered this set of articles in order to provide a range of materials for discussion of the Costs of Conflict in the Georgian-South Ossetian context. From the theoretical perspective, Costs of Conflict can be assessed in many ways, drawing on many different scholarly approaches. The loss of human life is a measure of one of the gravest types of destruction caused by war. When we see the numbers of dead after a war, it is clear that irreversible destruction has changed families who lost loved ones. Another measure is migration. Populations uprooted by fighting or the threat of violence may never return. Or, significant efforts will be required to ease repatriation for those that wish to return once the fighting has ended. These humanitarian measures of death and migration provide a stark picture of the immediate human costs of conflict.

However, as we look at the August 2008 war, and the previous fighting in 1989 and the early 1990s, we see that there are other costs to conflict, too, even beyond the tragic loss of life and the uprooted families. For example, other human costs include the social costs such as widespread trauma, lost educational opportunities, and barriers to visiting relatives, funerals, weddings, and graves. And, there are institutional costs, such as the realignment of financial and political systems. Finally, there are significant financial costs, such as lost business, access to land, workplaces, reconstruction needs, and lower levels of investment in conflict zones.

Of course, conflicts also bring some form of benefit, to a few of those involved. Theory tells us that certain criminal forces can operate effectively in areas where the instability of war and post-war uncertainties provide opportunities. Furthermore, politicians can mobilize support by pointing fingers at external enemies. Other countries may provide aid to conflict victims, in the form of state financial, security, or political support. And, one group may see a benefit where others see a cost; wars can lead to new arrangements that are perceived by some as reinforcing security and by others as undermining security.

In this collection, we have gathered articles that reflect a broad range of approaches to considering the cost of conflict. The articles also reflect a broad range of perspectives on Georgian-South Ossetian relations. Some authors write with a pro-Ossetian perspective. Some write with a pro-Georgian perspective. And, the volume also includes western and Russian perspectives.

All the authors study the cost of conflict with an intention to learn from the past. It is our sincere hope that by considering the various aspects of costs of conflict from very different perspectives, we can learn how to better address the ongoing costs and prevent future fighting and destruction, both in this specific context and, perhaps to some extent, in other conflicts worldwide, too.

We believe that the very different, sometimes diametrically opposed, interpretations of events, and treatments and understandings of what at first glance seem to be obvious factual chronologies of events is itself actually one cost of conflict that societies have incurred. As editors, we feel that the main strength of this publication lies in its inclusion of widely different and sometimes incompatible points of view on many points regarding the Georgian-South Ossetian context. Together, these points of view give a fuller picture of the Georgian-South Ossetian context. For this reason, the geographic terminology used by authors was not edited, nor were any edits made to the factual representations authors included in their articles. Each of us editors has our own individual views on terminology, facts, and the interpretation of events, but we were careful not to edit away any of the author's own individual views.

The volume begins with a review of institutional costs (and benefits) in the Georgian-South Ossetian

context. Dina Alborova's "Institutional Cost of the Georgian-South Ossetian Conflict: Transformation of Political Institutions in South Ossetia" examines stages of institutionalization of political life in South Ossetia, noting ongoing challenges of the current stage of integrating security structures with Russia while developing other institutions in the context of partial recognition. Giorgi Kanashvili's "Conflicts and Government Institutions of Georgia: Time for Reconsideration?" critiques the Georgian institutional responses to the conflict and offers suggestions for more constructive ways forward. Together, these articles provide insights on the direct effects of conflict and war on the institutions that directly affect our lives.

Next, we turn to considering the human costs of the conflict. Medea Turashvili's "Cost of Conflicts in Georgia and Obstacles to its Development" presents the conflict as a lose-lose conflict, at least from the perspective of the human costs, but offers some hope that these human costs will be addressed in the future. Svetlana Valieva's "Understanding the impact of armed conflict in South Ossetia on its social capital and networks" focuses on the social fabric and its tears and repairs since the war, examining the human costs in light of social network theory. These two approaches acknowledge that we are social beings, and our human costs of war include the loss of our social structures.

Economic costs are considered by Vakhtang Charaia and Fatima Dzhoieva. Charaia's "The Financial Side of the Conflict: Case of the Georgian-Ossetian Conflict" includes a Strengths-Weaknesses-Opportunities-Threats (SWOT) analysis for both the Georgian and South Ossetian economies, and considers future prospects for the economies. Dzhoieva's "Cost of Conflict: An Economic Aspect" focuses on the South Ossetian economy exclusively, but considers it in the context of the Russian economy and prospects for developing the economy in the near future. By considering the economic costs in these ways, the question arises: what will it take to award both Georgians and South Ossetians with a peace dividend?

The volume then turns to consider three international views of the costs of the Georgian-South Ossetian conflict. Together, Freizer and Pakhomenko present a review of Europe's and Russia's shifts during and after the 2008 war, highlighting shifts in policy that include shifts in the European-Russian relationship. Sergey Markedonov presents a Russian perspective that considers the costs of stability, a core Russian concern, and asks how Russia can both normalize relations with Georgia while also supporting South Ossetia. Cory Welt presents an American perspective that questions whether the August 2008 war might be seen as a prelude to the 2014 events around Crimea, thus expanding the potential geopolitical costs under consideration.

We have constructed this as a unique volume that brings diverse perspectives together. Throughout the collection, there are reflections from laypeople on their personal costs of the conflict. These stories remind us that it is not only the larger context that matters, but also the fate of each individual, too. The editors have not interfered in the content of any article or story. Rather, we present these diverse views as written by the authors, in hopes that readers will find the diversity of perspectives useful in increasing understanding. While we editors may disagree with authors and with each other about many issues, we agree that we respect each other's rights to hold different perspectives.

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