

# Georgian conflicts - South Ossetia

Mgr. Zinaida Shevchuk



# South Ossetia



- According to the 1989 census: 100,000 out of 160,000 Ossetians lived not in Georgia's South Ossetia Autonomous Region, but in other parts of Georgia.

In South Ossetia: 65,000 – 66.2% Ossetians

Georgian: 29 000 – 29%.

**Language:** Indo-European group and is distinctly related to Iranian (Farsi) but uses the Cyrillic alphabet with Ossetian modifications.

**Religious:** Ossetians and Georgians basically share

# South Ossetia



- Ossetian mythology: Ossetians first Iranian people to reach the Caucasus region.
- The ancient Scythians in North Caucasus 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E.
- Alan kingdom in the 7<sup>th</sup> century.
- Migration in the 13<sup>th</sup> century after the Mongol invasion.
- Ossetians who invaded Georgia in the 13<sup>th</sup> century were expelled in the 14<sup>th</sup> – so the current settlement of Ossetians in Georgia (Inner Kartli), dates to 17<sup>th</sup>/18<sup>th</sup> century – making the Ossetians newcomers in Georgia.

# South Ossetia



- “South Ossetia” – Bolshevik’s invention from 19<sup>th</sup> century – referring to an area that was the heartland of eastern Georgia for centuries.
- Unlike Abkhazia, Ossetians – little evidence of hostility toward ethnic rivals.
- Ossetians outside South Ossetia – Georgianized linguistically.
- Ossetians hostility in 1980s was primarily a reaction against the chauvinistic tendencies of Georgian nationalism.



# South Ossetia

- January 1989 **Ademon Nykhas** (Popular Shrineo - the South Ossetian Popular Front – Alan Chochiev.
- In the spring of 1989, the leader of Ademon Nykhas, Alan Chochiev, published an open letter, declaring his groups support for the Abkhazian campaign against the opening of a Georgian branch of Tbilisi university in Sukhumi, Abkhazia.
- Ademon Nykhas – secession from Georgia and dominance over local Goergians
- - while Georgian nationalists – abolish South Ossetia's name and autonomy.

# Mobilization in South Ossetia

- First clashes between Ossetians and Georgians in South Ossetia 26 May, the anniversary of the declaration of Georgian independence in 1918 clashes between irregular groups of Georgians (encouraged by Zviad Gamsakhurdia).
- - at first it seemed an isolated incident.
- - however, in July, during the clashes over Abkhazia State University:
  - - rumors that Ossetians were aiding the Abkhaz in Sukhumi,
  - - rumors, that armed Georgians were headed for South Ossetia.

# Mobilization in South Ossetia

- South Ossetias Communist Party leader Anatolii Chekhoev – denounces the demands of Ademon Nykhas for union with North Ossetia
- Georgian press denounced the rumors about plans for ethnic conflict.
- Ilia Chavchavadze Society issued appeals for nonviolence and “the fraternal brotherhood of nations.”

# Mobilization in South Ossetia

- In August 1989, the Supreme Council of Georgia put forward a *State program on the Georgian Language*.
- This program involved not only increased use of the Georgian language, but also, for example, a Georgian language test for entry into higher education, programs for the promotion of Georgian history, the institutionalisation of previously unofficial Georgian national holidays, creation of republican military units comprising only Georgians, and the resettlement of Georgians in areas dominated by minorities.



# Mobilization in South Ossetia

- In September 1989, Ademon Nykhas - protesting that the Georgian language programme was antidemocratic and discriminatory – since Ossetians lacked working language of Georgian.
- Georgian language street signs in South Ossetia were defaced
- Slogans for Ossetian unification became increasingly common.

# Mobilization in South Ossetia

- In November – a petition was sent to the Georgian Supreme Soviet demanding the status of autonomous republic for South Ossetia.
- Georgian response: remove South Ossetian party chief Chekhoev from office.
- Two days later, Georgian claim of the right of veto USSR laws and of the right to secede – both considered threatening by Ossetians.

# Mobilization in South Ossetia

- November 23, 1989, thousands of Georgians led by Gamsakhurdia piled into busses to hold a rally in Tskhinvali.
- The aim was to show “we are brothers”
- But, a counter-rally of Ossetians and the presence of some Interior Ministry troops stopped the busses - Georgians returned home. Accusing each other in “atrocities”

# Mobilization in South Ossetia

- In August 1990 Georgian Supreme Soviet passed an election law for the elections scheduled for October 28.
- Provision barring the participation of the Abkhazian Popular Front *Aidgylara* and the South Ossetian movement *Ademon Nykhas*.
- 4% minimum needed for representation in parliament.
- Gamsakhurdia's victory
- Tengiz Sigua – premier
- Tengiz Kitovani – commander of the Georgian National Guard.

# Mobilization in South Ossetia

- The next month, National Congress – extremist opposition – backed by Mkhedrioni led by Jaba Ioseliani – a warlord, ex-convict- against the new government.
- The trio of Sigua, Kitovani, and Ioseliani – decisive importance in Gamsakhurdia's and Georgia's future.

# Armed conflict in South Ossetia

- **On 20 September 1990**, the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast declared independence as the “South Ossetian Democratic Soviet Republic.”
- In response to this and as a manifestation of their independence from Tbilisi, the South Ossetians held elections to their parliament in December 9, 1990. According to Ossetian sources, 72% of the population of the republic took part in the election, which exceeds the percentage of the Ossetian population. The Georgian response was swift. Within days the Georgian Supreme Council cancelled the results of the election and voted to abolish the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast as a separate administrative unit within the Republic of Georgia.

# Armed conflict in South Ossetia

- December 11, South Ossetian legislature voted to subordinate the region directly to Moscow – independent of Georgia.
- December 12, Georgia imposed a state of emergency on Tshkinvali.

# Armed conflict in South Ossetia

- Adamia's Merav Kostava Society and the Gamsakhurdia "Society of the White George" – mobilized early February 1991 – total blockage of Tskhinvali.
- - blew up the a cliff block the road to North Ossetia and sniped at construction crews, while blockading all other roads and cutting off all electricity and most natural gas supplies to the city.



# Armed conflict in South Ossetia

- “They (Ossetians) have no right to a state here in Georgia. They are national minority. Their homeland is North Ossetia ... Here they are newcomers.”
- Gamsakhurdia claims to abolish Ossetian autonomy



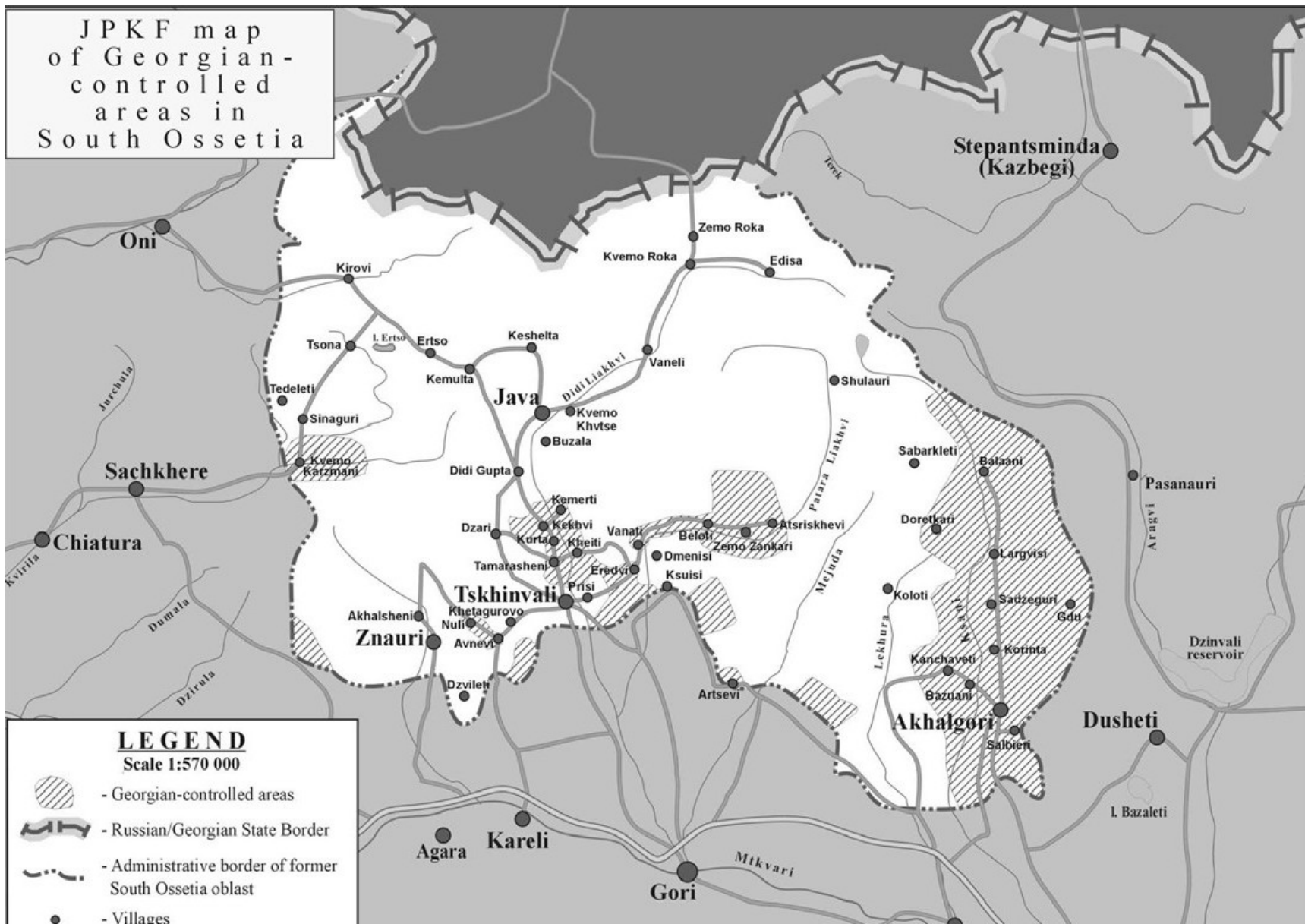
# South Ossetia war

- 1,000 people died.
- 100,000 ethnic Ossetians fled from South Ossetia and Georgia proper, mainly into North Ossetia.
- 23,000 Georgian fled from SO\
- The flow of refugees into North Ossetia aggravated the tense ethnic situation and played a significant role in the Ossetian-Ingush conflict.

# South Ossetia





- On 24 June 1992, in the Russian city of Sochi, Russian and Georgian leaders, Boris Yeltsin and Eduard Shevardnadze signed ceasefire agreement.
- The Sochi Agreement also set up the Joint Control Commission (JCC), a Joint peacekeeping Forces Group (JPKF) quadrilateral body with Georgian, Russian, North and South Ossetian representatives, plus participation from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.
- Also Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)
- In 1996 the parties signed a Memorandum to Enhance Security and Confidence Building Measures and agreed to step-by-step demilitarization of the zone of conflict and reduction of the number of JPKF frontier posts and guards.

JPKF map  
of Georgian-  
controlled  
areas in  
South Ossetia



**LEGEND**

Scale 1:570 000

-  - Georgian-controlled areas
-  - Russian/Georgian State Border
-  - Administrative border of former South Ossetia oblast
-  - Villages

# Pattern of the conflict

## **First phase: late Soviet (Glasnost) period**

Strong nationalist mobilization, accommodated by Republic Communist Party

Strong minority counter mobilization;

Ethnic conflict likely

(Soviet intervention likely)

## **Second phase: Soviet Collapse**

Democratic regime, with more nationalist government,

Ethnic conflict likely

Escalation likely to be immediate,

diffusion to “related” neighbors unlikely

# Pattern of the conflict

- Ethnic minorities were more likely to feel threatened by stronger reform nationalist movements.
- 1. lose out from political, economic and cultural transition. Privileged position in government – imperiled by the transition to democracy and a market economy. And, they often faced language laws that would require them to supplement their existing Russian competence with some fluency in the titular ethnic language.

# Pattern of the conflict

- 2. Institutional transitions would be used as a levers of active discrimination – imperiling political rights, economic opportunities and cultural identities.
- Confronted with strong countermobilization by ethnic minorities.
- Minority self-determination demands more or less mirrored those of the titular ethnic group in the Republic as a whole.

# Conclusion

- The Soviet thaw unleashed a strong Georgian nationalist movement, and simultaneous minority countermovements.
- Soviet forces made an early attack on nationalist demonstrators in Tbilisi, and local Soviet troops openly supported and armed Abkhaz and Ossetian paramilitaries.
- Fighting stopped once the Abkhaz and South Ossetians had achieved their goals of winning de facto statelets.
- Political settlement is unlikely – no Georgian leader will recognize the independence of separatist regions.



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WjIHk-x4vtI>