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Russia's role in the official peace process in South Ossetia

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Abstract. The aim of this article is to analyse the role of Russia in the transformation of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict and analyse this important period in the history of the Caucasus, where Georgia and its secessionist region of South Ossetia have been trying to find a peaceful solution to their post-war situation. Major milestones of the official peace process are set in the context of Russian-Georgian relations. We then proceed to the analysis of the internal changes within the Russian Federation at the turn of the millennium and try to find a connection between this internal transformation of Russia and the transformation of the conflict in South Ossetia. The most important factors behind the more assertive approach by the Russian Federation towards Georgia in the last decade are considered: internal centralisation of power and economic growth of the Russian Federation, the reinforcement of the importance of the South Caucasus as part of the geopolitical discourse within the Russian Federation, the deterioration in Russian-Georgian relations, and the suppression of the fear of the spill-over effect since the end of Second Chechen War.

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1. Introduction

This year marks twenty-two years since the fall of the Soviet Union as well as the bipolar organisation of the world, forming for more than four decades not only the foreign policy concept of individual powers and the mass psychology of several generations of their peoples, but also the maintenance of fragile ceasefires among ethnic groups in many areas of the socialist world. On the basis of the Constitution of the *Union of Soviet Socialist Republics* (USSR), international recognition was guaranteed to fifteen Soviet republics, encompassing formal sovereignty and so the right to secede. Problematic in this respect proved to be the fact that the administrative system of the USSR had several levels, ranging from Soviet republics to autonomous republics, regions and districts, and the right to secede was guaranteed only at the highest level. Amid the growing belief in universal nationalism, fulfilling an ideological vacuum arising in connection with the decline of socialism, many smaller nationalities within the Soviet Union began to demand, at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s, the right to a higher degree of autonomy or even secession, which were guaranteed to citizens of the federal republics.

Due to the fact that the autonomous entities had been established on the ethno-linguistic principle, which guaranteed titular nationalities a considerable degree of privileges, the newly emerging states had to deal with the problem of how to maintain their territorial integrity while guaranteeing extensive rights to their ethnic minorities stemming from the period of the USSR. The highly heterogeneous ethnic and religious structure of the population, supported by many historical grievances and a number of autonomous entities, led to the situation, that disintegration of the USSR has been the most problematic in the area of South Caucasus (Fig. 1). After the collapse of the USSR and the

emergence of an independent Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, this region became the scene of a number of armed conflicts, some of which were secessionist in character. One of them, the conflict in South Ossetia, forms a topic of our study.

While during the first decade after the war that took place in South Ossetia in the early 1990s, there was a great deal of discussion in the peace process between Tbilisi on the one hand and Tskhinval(i) (1) on the other, regarding various versions of symmetrical and asymmetrical federations (cf., e.g., Coppetersn et al., 2003), i.e. possibilities for a peaceful solution that would respect the right of the Ossetians to sovereignty while also taking into account the principle of the territorial integrity of the Georgian state. The war in South Ossetia in August 2008 utterly transformed the geopolitical map not only of the South Caucasus, but also of the entire post-Soviet space.

In August 2013, the fifth anniversary of the five-day war in South Ossetia was commemorated. Although this anniversary was marked by bitterness at the thought of the considerable human and material losses inflicted on the Ossetian nation during the war, South Ossetia anticipated lively celebrations, as the inhabitants of the war-torn population, decimated by a mass exodus from the troubled region, had received formal recognition of their independence by the Russian Federation and subsequently several other countries in 2008, after almost twenty years of effort. But in Georgia, the night of the 7th and 8th of August 2008 is annually remembered as another in a series of national tragedies that have afflicted this South Caucasian republic in the last two decades.

The conflict in question is basically a dispute between two national communities over the existence of their respective nationhood projects. On the one side are the Ossetians, who, after the devastating war of 1991-1992, acquired de facto control of about half the territory of South Ossetia, declared

their sovereignty and independence from Georgia, and so far have received recognition from five United Nations member states (Russia, Venezuela, Nic-

aragua, Nauru and Tuvalu). On the other side are the Georgians, who still consider South Ossetia to be an integral part of Georgia.



Fig. 1. Map of the South Caucasus with disputed areas of unresolved conflicts

Source: Fall, 2006: 199

There are also indirect players in addition to these direct ones which have significant impact on the dynamics of the conflict, the most important of which are Russia, EU, USA, Turkey, Iran, and Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). In the case of the Russian Federation, there is a considerable divergence of views on whether to classify it as a direct or indirect player, but no one questions the fact that Russia is heavily involved in South Ossetia. Russia's policy towards the conflict in South Ossetia has always been multi-dimension-

al and it should be added that it was not always homogeneous and underwent significant changes over time. In addition to political aspects, it also included economic, military, security, and humanitarian dimensions. The official statements of the Kremlin had expressed no direct support for any of the warring parties until 2008. That changed after the August war in South Ossetia, when Russia recognised South Ossetia as an independent state. The act of international recognition of South Ossetia has gone hand-in-hand with significant mil-

itary and economic assistance from the Russian Federation, which gives this de facto state a strong position in the strictly negative negotiations with Tbilisi on the return of refugees and resolving their political status in any form of autonomy or federation within the vertical distribution of power between Tskhinval(i) on the one hand and Tbilisi on the other. In recent years, South Ossetian politicians have been saying that any negotiations with Georgia must be based on the recognition of their independence, but Georgia flatly refuses this, because it continues to consider this region to be an integral part of its sovereign territory currently occupied by Russia (Georgian Law on Occupied Territories). It is obvious that the official peace process on stabilising relations between Tbilisi and Tskhinval(i) is at an impasse.

2. Research materials and methods

The aim of our study is to explore an important part of the regional history, when Georgia and its secessionist region of South Ossetia attempted to find a peaceful solution to their post-war situation, and to analyse the role of Russia in the transformation of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict. Due to the fact that the official peace process has been completely stuck at this impasse since 2008 and the views of both main conflicting parties remain the same, this article is primarily devoted to the development of the peace process in the years 1992–2008, a period when the Georgian and South Ossetian politicians at least periodically sought to find a compromise to their post-war situation. Although we understand peace initiatives to be a multi-layered process and consider initiatives of the so-called ‘track two diplomacy’ (2) to be a very important part of the peace process, we will concentrate our study only on ‘track one diplomacy’. These activities could be characterised as methods and initiatives in the peace process, which is being conducted by government representatives of the conflicting parties, their career diplomats or other important official representatives of Georgia and South Ossetia, as well as by representatives of international organisations and other significant players in the peace process, representing official positions of their governments or interna-

tional organisations (Davidson, Montville, 1981; Reimann, 2005).

From the methodological point of view, this is an intrinsic case study. We conducted an analysis of Russia’s role in the conflict transformation in South Ossetia using the process analysis method (Stake, 1995). The primary sources are official documents relating to the peace process in South Ossetia, which are supplemented by professional literature from the transformation of the separatist conflicts in the Caucasus and the public statements of Russian, South Ossetian, and Georgian politicians on this issue. The text is structured as follows: first we describe milestones in the official peace process in South Ossetia, which is put into the context of the development of Russian-Georgian relations, and then we proceed to the analysis of internal changes within the Russian Federation at the turn of the millennium, which we see as crucial in demonstrating the dynamics of the peace process. Then we try to find a connection between this inner transformation of Russia and the conflict transformation in South Ossetia.

3. The course and outcome of the conflict in South Ossetia

South Ossetia is a secessionist region in the northern part of Georgia. It borders Russian North Ossetia and occupies an area of 3,900 km². According to the last Soviet census of 1989, there were 99,700 inhabitants in South Ossetia, of which 65,000 were Ossetians (3), 26,000 Georgians and the rest minorities from among Russians, Armenians, and several smaller nations of the Caucasus (ICG Europe Report No. 159). The armed phase of the war lasted from January 1991 to June 1992 and resulted in thousands of deaths, hundreds of missing persons and large movements of the population. The number of refugees due to the war in South Ossetia differs from source to source. The lowest estimate is 40,000 refugees, whereas the highest estimates reach up to 100,000 displaced persons (4), most of whom were Ossetian nationals who headed to North Ossetia. About 10,000 Georgians left South Ossetia for Georgia and 5,000 people are so-called internally displaced persons inside South Ossetia.

The war ended on 23 June 1992 with the Sochi Agreement. The main points of the agreement established a ceasefire on 28 June 1992, the creation of a Joint Control Commission composed of representatives of Russia, Georgia, South Ossetia, North Ossetia and representatives of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which was to ensure peace in the region. The aim was to create conditions for the return of refugees (Agreement on Principles of Settlement of the Georgian – Ossetian Conflict). Many dwellings and basic transport and service infrastructures in the country had been severely devastated. According to the Russian-Georgian intergovernmental agreement on economic recovery in the Georgian-Ossetian conflict zone on 14 September 1993, war damages amounted to 34.2 billion Russian roubles (about 260 million USD).

After the war, South Ossetia became a *de facto* state, by which we mean a state entity that actually exists – it has a certain population, an administrative apparatus that is able to exercise supreme legislative, executive, and judicial power (internal sovereignty), and it has more or less well-defined boundaries. What it largely lacks is external sovereignty, i.e. the ability to build relationships with other countries, and international recognition of its independence (Kolossoff, O’Loughlin, 1998; Pegg, 1998; Kolstø, 2006).

4. Official peace process in South Ossetia

In the case of the separatist conflict in South Ossetia, OSCE was among the first mediators. At the end of 1992, the long-term mission of this organisation in Georgia was established, primarily for the purpose of mediating a peace treaty in the South Ossetian conflict. Although OSCE did not participate in the preparation and course of the negotiations, which in the summer of 1992 resulted in a ceasefire in the form of the Dagomys Agreement between Tbilisi, Moscow, and Tskhinval(i), it was charged in subsequent years with monitoring the activities of the Joint Control Commission on the initiative of the Georgian side. It strove for the presence of international observers in the area as a means of offsetting, at least partially, Russian dominance in the peace activities.

The purpose of the negotiations conducted since 1994 has been to find a compromise that, on the one hand, respects the sometimes changing demands of Tskhinval(i), which demanded either full independence or unification with a part of the Russian Federation, North Ossetia, meaning joining Russia in fact, and takes into account on the other the demand by Tbilisi to maintain the territorial integrity of the Georgian state. In 1995–1996 negotiations between Tbilisi and Tskhinval(i) intensified through the mediation of OSCE and Moscow. In May 1996, both sides signed the Memorandum of Measures in the Russian capital to ensure security and strengthen mutual trust, with Eduard Shevardnadze and the president of the unrecognised South Ossetian Republic Ludwig Chibirov pledging, among other things, to refrain from threats of violence while attempting to settle their disputes and to take significant steps towards the gradual demilitarisation of the region (South Ossetian Joint Control Commission Official Site, 1996). Some progress in relations between the opposing parties was the gradual cease of using alternative terms to refer to South Ossetia (Shida Kartli or Samachablo), which, in accordance with Georgian historiographical tradition, would challenge Ossetian claims to the area.

Negotiations at the highest level were often accompanied by the spontaneous return of Georgian families to villages in South Ossetia. Their return was often subject to the forced recognition of the South Ossetian constitution. A positive factor was undoubtedly the fact that Tbilisi did not apply a blockade against South Ossetia; because of its favourable location between the Russian North Caucasus and the countries of the South Caucasus, this region was convenient for smuggling, mainly cheap alcohol into Russia and petrol into Georgia. According to many witnesses, even units of the Joint Control Commission were actively involved in this lucrative business, especially officers of the Russian peace contingent (Socor, 2006). Individual points of the agreement should be specified in the coming years. Despite a number of promising signals, talks on establishing a status acceptable to both parties ended in failure. Tbilisi insisted on the South Ossetians dropping their demand for special relations with North Ossetia, which the South Ossetians naturally did not want to give up. According to Tbilisi, this step could, under certain circumstances, pre-

pare the ground for challenging the territorial integrity of Georgia. The closest breakthrough agreement reached by the two parties occurred in Baden, Austria (July 2000), whereby a draft intermediary document was approved. This presupposed the recognition of the territorial integrity of Georgia and the acceptance of specific links between South Ossetia and North Ossetia-Alania as part of the Russian Federation; two, [the recognition] of attributes of the future status of North Ossetia; and three, the mechanism of international guarantees (Annual Report 2000 on OSCE Activities). The agreement of Tbilisi on the future establishment of special links between Vladikavkaz and Tskhinval(i), as well as the presence of Russian troops in the area during the coming years, was considered a major concession by the Georgian side, which was meant to encourage a South Ossetian-Georgian settlement on the eve of the presidential elections in Georgia and to reinforce Shevardnadze's prospects for re-election (ICG Europe Report No. 159).

Presidential elections took place in South Ossetia at the end of 2001, and in place of moderate Ludwig Chibirov, who was considered a 'puppet of Tbilisi' by those South Ossetians seeking full independence, power was seized by Eduard Kokoity (Kokoyev), a South Ossetian businessman from Russia with close ties to Moscow and senior Russian generals. He quickly proclaimed that unification with North Ossetia and reintegration with Russia is the top priority of Tskhinval(i). Three years later Mikhail Saakashvili, for whom a unified Georgia represented a government priority, came to power in Tbilisi. One of the first steps of Saakashvili's government was campaign on Batumi in the spring of 2004, where events played out precisely according to Tbilisi's scenario. As a result, local strongman Aslan Abashidze, whose power was primarily based on the presence of the Russian military base in Adjara, was forced into exile in Moscow. The successful recovery of Adjara was received with enthusiasm in Georgia. The next step should have been the long-desired restoration of South Ossetia and then Abkhazia.

After the events in Adjara, a change occurred in the Georgian attitude towards South Ossetia. Saakashvili began to publicly present proposals for the 'restoration' of South Ossetia and the establishment of autonomy with the widest possible rights and

extensive economic privileges in the perspective of a federal and prosperous Georgia (Lynch, 2006: 39). This rhetoric was also supported by concrete measures, which were aimed at applying economic pressure on South Ossetia. Already in the second half of May 2004, Tbilisi strengthened checkpoints at the administrative border with South Ossetia. The reason for this step was to prevent smuggling, which formed the basis of the South Ossetian economy. The political pressure on Tskhinval(i) was ratcheted up in parallel with economic pressure. Strengthening Georgian armed forces in the region, however, immediately wrung a diplomatic protest out of Moscow and resulted in the intensive armament of Ossetians. Tskhinval(i) flatly refused the peace initiative of Tbilisi. The then commander of the Russian contingent Vyacheslav Nabzdorov called the actions of the Georgian Party a 'dangerous provocation that may have unpredictable consequences' (Eurasia.net, 1 June 2004). Tempers flared as with any typical escalation, which here included building up the armed forces at both sides, intensifying the 'diplomatic war', and mutual shelling, which claimed the lives of several civilians and soldiers on both sides of the not-so-clearly defined front lines.

During the confrontation, Tskhinval(i) and Moscow were creating a common front against Tbilisi. Moscow immediately strengthened its South Ossetian peace contingent with forty armoured vehicles and other heavy weapons, according to the Russian generals in line with the agreement concluded with Tbilisi in advance. Several hundred volunteers from Russian North Ossetia and Abkhazia, as well as Russian Cossacks, headed for the South Ossetian capital. In an effort to prevent the supply of unsanctioned military equipment, fuel, and ammunition, as well as militants from Russia, Georgia urged OSCE to send observers to the Roki tunnel that connects North and South Ossetia (News.ru, 31 July 2004). Moscow and Tskhinval(i), however, accused the Georgian government of concentrating 3000 armed Georgians in Georgian villages near Tskhinval(i). This number was supplied by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, whose office then sharply criticised provocative actions of the Georgian side, which may 'trigger off uncontrollable violence in South Ossetia' (RIA Novosti, 11 July 2004).

Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili was hardly in the background and in a speech to grad-

uates of the National Military Academy he pointed to certain forces in the Russian political establishment having an interest in the disintegration of Georgia, and warned the public of extensive foreign aggression. About possible Russian intervention, he said, 'Our opponents are not Ossetians or Abkhazians ... I do not wish that anyone draw Russia into an armed confrontation with Georgia, but we must be ready for anything. Our enemy is not 100–150 youths in Tskhinval(i)... Our enemy is the external force that can invade Georgia to stop its integration into NATO, stop the removal of foreign troops from Georgia, halt the economic progress and prosperity of every Georgian citizen.' (Benediktov, 2004).

During this period of crisis in mid-2004, Moscow became strongly involved and reinforced its peace contingent in South Ossetia, despite protests from Tbilisi, with those forty armoured vehicles and other heavy weapons. The crisis culminated in the summer of that year, when, after a series of killings and abductions, Georgian troops acted and confiscated 160 unguided missiles of the Russian peace contingent. The Ossetians then counterattacked, disarming and imprisoning 50 Georgian peacekeepers, whose peaceful status they questioned. According to Georgian sources, a total of 16 Georgian soldiers and an equal number of South Ossetian militants and their reinforcements from the north were killed during the armed clashes around Tskhinval(i) that August (Civil.ge, 17 August 2004). Ulrike Gruska puts the number killed in 2004 at thirty and the number of wounded at eighty (Gruska, 2005: 38). At the moment of highest tension, however, the terms of an interim agreement were successfully negotiated with the return of weapons and soldiers. In November 2004, an agreement on demilitarising the conflict zone was signed in Sochi, Russia, but this did not prevent a similar situation from being repeated in the summer of the following year. Cases of less intense shelling by both sides in the area were reported between 2006 and 2007.

Important event for the peace process was a referendum on the independence of South Ossetia, which took place in November 2006. South Ossetian information indicates that 95 % of the 55,000 registered voters took part in the elections, 99 % of whom backed the independence of South Ossetia from Georgia. It was held concurrently with presidential elections that saw Eduard Kokoity be-

come the president of South Ossetia with 96 % of the votes (Regnum.ru, 13 November 2006). Georgians announced elections and a referendum in parallel. Pro-Georgian Dmitry Sanakoyev was elected governor of South Ossetia among ethnic Georgians in South Ossetia (and Georgian refugees), while the referendum approved of support for the territorial integrity of Georgia. The years 2004–2006 were a watershed in the peace process in South Ossetia, and Georgian–South Ossetian relations have gradually worsened since then.

The situation came to a head in 2008, when both Russian and Georgian sides started accusing each other of preparing for war. In July 2008 the Ossetian chief of police was killed, and Dmitry Sanakoyev wounded and armed clashes became ever more frequent. In August 2008, these clashes escalated into heavy fighting. On 7 August the Georgians launched a massive bombardment of the Tskhinval(i) metropolis. The next day Russia sent its forces into South Ossetia, which forced the Georgians out of South Ossetia during the course of three days. The war was ended with a six-point plan presented by French President Sarkozy, whose country held the presidency of the EU at the time. This plan called for the immediate end of all military action, the withdrawal of all troops to the positions they held before the conflict began, and the opening of discussions on the future status of South Ossetia (Civil Georgia 12 August 2008). This proposal was accepted by the Ossetians and Georgians, although it should be noted that the Russian side did not abide by the agreement and its units were not withdrawn from Georgian territory until October 2008. As a result of the bombing of Tskhinval(i), 2,000 Ossetian civilians were killed. The Georgian government says that during the conflict nearly two hundred Georgian civilians lost their lives. According to the UN, approximately 30,000 refugees headed towards Russia, another 15,000 fled into the interior of Georgia (Nichol, 2008). The greater part of those who fled to Russia returned to South Ossetia after the war. The war was followed by Russian recognition of South Ossetia, which has become highly dependent on Russia. Russian influence on conflict transformation in South Ossetia, which we consider to be quite decisive for the development of the peace process, will be presented in the next section.

5. Russian influence on conflict transformation in South Ossetia during the 1990s

Before 1991, all major events in the Caucasus were controlled directly from the Kremlin. Even after the collapse of the USSR, Moscow continued to remain the centre of power, with strong political and economic influence on the policy of the three newly created Transcaucasian republics, but with one significant difference. After more than a hundred years of hegemony, Russia was no longer the only power regulating the political, economic and social life in the South Caucasus region, and its influence had to confront not only the governments of independent countries formed following the collapse of the USSR, but also other major players at this time, which were primarily the USA, EU, Turkey, Iran, and OSCE (Hoch, 2010). Despite this, Russia played a variety of roles in the case of South Ossetia in the 1990s. Based on the peace agreements signed by representatives of Tbilisi and Tskhinval(i), Moscow was given the role of mediator in peace talks between Georgians and Ossetians. CIS peacekeepers, consisting mostly of Russian soldiers, guarded the border between South Ossetia and Georgia. A supporting but nevertheless significant role was keeping a watchful eye over the national interests of the Russian Federation, where the unsettled political status of South Ossetia remained one of the key ways for Russia to influence Georgian policy, as part of its smaller geopolitical influence, and in the broader context of the entire South Caucasus region.

After a brief period of Euro-Atlantic idealism at the beginning of Boris Yeltsin's government, Russian foreign policy in late 1992 began to be dominated by tendencies to emphasise the need for maintaining ailing Russian hegemony in the post-Soviet space. One of the most important tasks of Russian foreign policy included regulating armed conflicts throughout the post-Soviet space, preventing their expansion into Russia, and protecting the rights of Russian-speaking populations outside of RF (Roeder, 1997: 227). Seen in this light, the conflict in South Ossetia became a security threat for Russia, which could lead to a 'spill-over effect' in the North Caucasus. The principles of Russian foreign policy in

March 1993 fully reflected the attitude of Russia on its 'near abroad'. The rhetoric of the president and minister of defence and foreign affairs indicated that the entire post-Soviet space would be perceived as Russian's sphere of influence, and called for the re-integration of newly formed independent post-Soviet republics into a structure where Russia would be allowed to continue to play its historic role (Lough, 1993: 53-60). It was a clear attempt by Russia to prevent a political and power vacuum in the South Caucasus, which could be exploited by neighbouring countries, as well as by the USA and the EU. An obvious example of the gradual return from the policy of 'Westernism' was the categorical requirement of Moscow to have full control over peace-keeping operations that took place on the territory of the former USSR (5). At the same time, however, the policy of potentially providing open support for separatism in Georgia presented the Kremlin elites with a difficult dilemma. Both South Ossetia and Abkhazia originally had the status of autonomous entities within Georgia, just like Chechnya and Tatarstan, which threatened to declare their independence from the newly created Russian Federation. By providing official support for the political independence of Sukhumi and Tskhinval(i), Russia's political and economic elite would be giving their blessings to growing separatist tendencies within their own territory.

A characteristic feature of Russian foreign policy towards South Ossetia during the first half of the 1990s consisted, therefore, of considerable inconsistency between the political declarations of leading officials, who used every possible occasion to speak out on the observance of strict neutrality and the principle of the territorial integrity of Georgia, and on *realpolitik*, which oscillated from relative neutrality to *de facto* support for separatists. It is from this period that there arose the popular belief in Georgia that the war was not conducted with Ossetia, but with Russia, and South Ossetia was only the means with which to implement its expansive power politics. The genesis of the relations between Tbilisi and Moscow occurred mainly at the beginning of the 1990s in an extraordinarily dynamic and complicated environment. The strongly nationalistic policies under the government of Zviad Gamsachurdia were replaced in Georgia by the reality of civil war and absolute decentralisation of power af-

ter the return of Eduard Shevardnadze. Especially during the key years 1991-1993, it was not possible to speak of a clear, rational, and centrally conceived foreign policy in Georgia. The same can be said in the case of Russia, where in the first few months after the failed coup d'état by conservative forces in August 1991. As the Russian Federation was being born, a major change in personnel occurred in the organs responsible for the development and effective implementation of foreign policy, followed by the collapse of the entire administration, controlled for decades by the Communist Party. Also, President Yeltsin was faced with a number of serious internal political and economic problems, considerably limiting his interest in foreign policy during this time. The result was the absence of a clear foreign concept towards war-torn Georgia (Malcolm, Pravda, 1996). These events led to a situation where the commanding officers of Russian bases on Georgian territory were able to arbitrarily intervene in the conflict. Not surprisingly, it was at the turn of 1991-1992 when an impressive number of weapons, including heavy equipment, were discovered in the hands of the two fighting parties (Demetriou, 2002: 9-10). Rather than a long-term plan prepared by the Kremlin, it is possible to find behind these events the initiative of Russian commanders to promote separatism against a regime that was anxious to close 'their' bases, or officers who saw the chance in the chaos to sell off part of their equipment and therefore earn some extra money for an uncertain future. Moreover, the foreign policy of Russia under Minister of Foreign Affairs, Andrei Vladimirovich Kozyrev, was still very liberal and pro-Western at that time.

In May 1992, the hawks again appeared on the scene and triggered a political offensive against Kozyrev and his liberal tendencies. By the end of summer, the Foreign Ministry began to definitely lose its footing and the Army initiated its own military and foreign policy operations, not only in Georgia but also in many other post-Soviet countries, including Moldova and Tajikistan. In this context, the turn of 1992 and 1993 can be described as the period when the short era of liberal foreign policy in Russia, which never got the opportunity to fully develop amidst the general degradation and chaos, was over. The control of the articulation and implementation of the foreign policy of the Russian

Federation fell again, to a certain extent, into the hands of security forces. At the beginning of 1993, Russian foreign policy began to take on a realistic character again, where developments in Georgia proved to be crucial for Russia in terms of its rediscovered need to maintain powerful influence in the Caucasus region. The roots of these fundamental foreign policy changes, therefore, need to be searched for in the changing internal political and power situation in Russia, when Yeltsin was striving to stay in power following the catastrophic collapse of the economy and a sharp decline in his popularity. He broke with his liberal colleagues and became increasingly surrounded by people with conservative backgrounds.

If the development of the conflict in South Ossetia is placed in the context of Russian internal political relations, it is clear that Georgia's loss of control over the secessionist regions came in handy for Moscow. The nationalist discourse of the first Georgian President Zviad Gamsachurdia and his successor Eduard Shevardnadze pulled Georgia further away from the orbit of the Russian sphere of influence. The unsettled conflict in South Ossetia, the intensification of fighting in Abkhazia and the outbreak of mass pro-Gamsachurdia uprisings in western Georgia, culminating in civil war in September-November 1993, led Shevardnadze to seek cooperation with Moscow. Yeltsin answered Shevardnadze's request for Russian help by saying that as long as Georgia remained outside of the *Commonwealth of Independent States* (CIS) and would not allow Russian troops to remain on its territory, Russia would not solve its internal problems (Cornell, 2001: 173). As the unrest from the civil war crept closer to Tbilisi, the problem was so serious that the acceptance of the Russian ultimatum appeared to be the only way out of an otherwise hopeless situation. Following the signing of the agreement on Russian troops remaining in Georgia (9 October 1993) and the agreement on accession of Georgia to CIS (20 October 1993), Moscow quickly intervened in late October and early November 1993 and helped Shevardnadze to suppress the revolt in western Georgia in only fourteen days (Kopeček, 2010: 103).

Despite these events, it cannot be claimed that Russia expressed consistent support of secessionist entities throughout the 1990s in an unofficial capacity. Around the mid-1990s the Kremlin replaced

its unofficial support for separatists with efforts to achieve greater rapprochement with Georgia. This can be explained by two factors. First, there was the First Chechen War in 1994-1996, resulting in de facto Chechen independence and disrupting the territorial integrity of Russia, which threatened to escalate into problems in other regions of the North Caucasus. And secondly, Georgia joined CIS in 1994 and accepted Russian military garrisons on Georgian soil on the basis of a Collective Security Treaty (CST). In return for this rapprochement in relations with Russia, Georgia expected the Kremlin to support Georgian efforts to recover control over South Ossetia. Under these conditions, the potential for Russia to continue to support the separatist movements in the South Caucasus was significantly reduced.

For the Russians, the suspension of aid to South Ossetia was the rational outcome of a situation where Russia maintained its position as the mediator of the conflict and at the same time kept the door open for influence in South Ossetia while keeping Georgia's foreign policy from becoming too pro-Western. Another possible explanation for the inconsistency of complete Russian support for South Ossetia, or for helping Georgia to restore its territorial integrity, was a lack of unity among the centres of power in the Russian Federation. This inconsistency stemmed not only from the breadth of the role that Russia assumed in the case of South Ossetia, but mainly from the fact that in Russia during the 1990s there was far from any one centre of power. The major centres of power in relation to the Georgian secessionist entities included the Office of President of the Russian Federation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Defence, the secretariats of the political parties represented in the Duma, and the regional elites of individual entities in the Russian Federation (RF). Influential lobby groups connected to individual members of the government also played an important role. Among the most significant were the oil and gas giants Lukoil, Transneft, and Gazprom. Russian policy in the region could not, therefore, be determined by only official state policy, but also by the policies of the largest companies and other powerful groups, which often had contradictory interests and would lead to the above-mentioned heterogeneity of Russian policy towards the South Caucasus bubbling to the surface.

6. Turnaround in Russian foreign policy towards Georgia with the onset of Vladimir Putin

The rise to power of Vladimir Putin, who in 1999 changed his post of the Federal Security Service (FSB) head to become the Prime Minister of the Russian Federation, ended the existence of multiple centres of power within the Russian Federation in relation to the South Caucasus. The role of the Duma, the Army, and regional elites was diminished while powerful decision-making mechanisms became more centralised under the control of the President and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The coherent and unified picture of Russian foreign policy towards the South Caucasus was also connected to a more assertive Russian attitude towards Georgia. This turnaround was qualified by a number of factors.

The first factor was the above-mentioned political centralisation which took place at all levels in Russia after Putin assumed power. First, the power of oligarchs Boris Berezovsky, Vladimir Gusinsky, and Mikhail Khodorkovsky, who possessed enormous economic and political influence during the 1990s, and who also represented a serious obstacle to the centralisation of power in the hands of the president, was effectively broken. Putin also managed to push through the centralisation of the Russian federal system and thus weakened existing local centres of power, creating seven Federal Districts headed by the appointed representatives of the president. The centralisation of power was finally topped off with the crushing victory of the United Russia party in parliamentary elections in 2003. Through the parties controlling the State Duma, the last impediment preventing Putin from creating a centralised authoritarian regime in the country fell away. An authoritarian government which does not feel threatened in domestic politics is much more confident in promoting its foreign policy. President Putin and the state apparatus appointed by him acquired almost unquestioned superiority in Russia at the expense of democratic pluralism. Popescu (2006) presents the interesting paradox that the state apparatus tried to look very fragile on the outside while at the same time significantly strengthening its position. The then head of the Office of the President

Dmitry Medvedev said in April 2005 that Russia as a state would disappear if they were unable to consolidate the elites (Expert, 4 April 2005). By systematically building up the image of a fragile Russia, faced with the existential threat of Islamic terrorists and West-inspired revolutions, officials managed to concentrate virtually all the power into their hands (Popescu, 2006: 6).

The political centralisation went hand in hand with a significant improvement in the Russian economy. During 1991-1999 Russia experienced a decline in its GDP by 30%. In the following decade, Russian economy started to show stable economic growth, with real GDP in the first decade of the 21st century growing at an average annual rate of 6.9% (Cooper, 2009). The major inflow of cash was in particular the result of high oil and gas prices, which represent the backbone of Russian economy. Despite the fact that this factor clearly increased Moscow's material and financial capacity to promote its assertive foreign policy, there is no automatically direct correlation between the high price of raw materials and expansionist foreign policy. However, when the official documents and statements of Russian officials in the Kremlin at the beginning of the new millennium are analysed, it seems that in this case, a link between the increased output of the Russian economy as a result of the increase in world oil and natural gas prices and the growth in the foreign policy assertiveness of the Russian Federation can actually be made. The Russian Foreign Policy Concept of 2000 says that Russia's ability to face the challenges of foreign policy is limited due to limited resources for the support of Russian foreign policy, leading to difficulty in advancing the economic interests of the RF abroad. The same concept also declares that the highest priority of Russian foreign policy is to create favourable external conditions for the sustainable economic development of Russia (The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, 2000). Four years later, Vladimir Putin said that 'economic growth, political stability and strengthening the state have a favourable impact on the international position of Russia' (Vladimir Putin's annual address to the Federal Assembly, 26 May 2004). And in 2005, the rhetoric of President Vladimir Putin took on even more self-assurance when he said: 'It is certain that Russia should continue its civilizing mission on the Eurasian continent' (Vladimir

Putin's annual address to the Federal Assembly, 25 April 2005). The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation of 2008 continued in the trend for greater involvement in foreign policy and the promotion of interests in the near abroad. 'Russia will strive to build strong positions of authority in the world community that best meet the interests of the Russian Federation as one of influential centers in the modern world, and which are necessary for the growth of its political, economic, intellectual and spiritual potential' (The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, 2008). The same document explicitly mentioned relationship to NATO enlarged to include new members of the post-Soviet space. 'Russia maintains its negative attitude towards the expansion of NATO, notably to the plans of admitting Ukraine and Georgia to the membership in the alliance, as well as to bringing the NATO military infrastructure closer to the Russian borders on the whole, which violates the principle of equal security, leads to new dividing lines in Europe and runs counter to the tasks of increasing the effectiveness of joint work in search for responses to real challenges of our time' (The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, 2008).

The third factor leading to a more assertive Russian policy towards Georgia was the need for the Kremlin to strengthen its influence over the South Caucasus for fear the USA and the EU would gain greater influence in the region. Since the second half of the 1990s, the USA and the EU have begun to vigorously promote their economic interests in this area (Hoch, 2011: 75-77). In 1994, a major oil contract was signed between Azerbaijan and ten major Western oil companies for exploring the Azerbaijani sector of the Caspian Sea. The agreement also included the building of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, which would be used to export Azerbaijan oil to the EU and the USA. In 1998, the US National Security Strategy argued for the full integration of certain areas of CIS into Western economic and political structures (Clinton, 1998: 37-40). CST and CIS member countries did not integrate their foreign and security policy, which lead Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Uzbekistan to withdraw from the collective security treaty in 1999. In this context, it is necessary to approach Transcaucasia as part of the strategically larger, very important Caucasus-Central Asia macroregion. If Central

Asia were to become a potential competitor to Russia as an alternative supplier of oil and especially of natural gas to the West, it would have to possess a network of oil and gas pipelines bypassing Russian territory. From the supply side, the key country for the east-west corridor in the South Caucasus appears to be Azerbaijan, possessing, among others, the Shah Deniz oil field with the potential to independently supply Nabucco in the early stages of putting it into service. Azerbaijan, finding long-term stability outside the Russian orbit of power, could also potentially act as a bridge across the Caspian Sea en route from the Central Asian oil fields to European markets. Central Asian gas and oil, however, has to cross one of two final countries on the way to Europe – Armenia or Georgia. However, Armenia is long-term politically, militarily, and economically dependent on Moscow. Due to the continuing conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, the construction of any gas pipeline from Azerbaijan, which would make Armenia a transit country and therefore contribute to its state budget, is unthinkable. In this situation, where Azerbaijan has been independent of Russia, Georgia becomes the key country in the matter of exporting raw material from Central Asia. The construction of the BTE gas pipeline and BTC oil pipeline from Azerbaijan to Turkey are the first steps towards creating an alternative oil and gas pipeline corridor to Europe. Georgia's pro-Western orientation, supplemented by Nabucco project represent a potential economic threat for Moscow, enabling the penetration of competition into the European markets for oil and natural gas (Norling, 2007).

We consider the fourth factor in the more assertive approach of Russia towards Georgia to be the significant deterioration in Russian-Georgian relations after the outbreak of the Second Chechen War. The Georgians gave Chechen fleeing war zones in the Pankisi valley the refugee status and consequently the Kremlin accused Shevardnadze of supporting Chechen terrorism and of unwillingness to restore order in the Pankisi valley (New York Times, 12 September 2002). It was precisely from the Pankisi valley where supposedly in July 2002 a group of Chechen rebels from the Georgian side attacked a squad of Russian border guards, killing eight of them in the attack. In response to this act, Russian airplanes bombed the valley on the Georgian side

of the border in August 2002, which killed at least one civilian. The events of the summer of 2002 provoked a sharp diplomatic conflict between Moscow and Tbilisi (Kleveman, 2003: 35-36). The first wave of cooling in relations between Moscow and Tbilisi had already occurred in late 1999 and early 2000, when, in our view, the Russian charge of supporting Chechen terrorists was only representative of the gradual cooling of relations between Russia and Georgia. We rather see the real reason in the growing pro-Western leaning of Georgia. Negotiations over the above-mentioned Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline were in full swing in 1999, as well as other forms of economic cooperation between Georgia and the EU countries and the USA. In 1994, Georgia joined NATO's Partnership for Peace, signed an Individual Partnership Plan in 1996, and in 1998 Georgia opened a permanent diplomatic mission and embassy to NATO. Georgian leaders tried to use greater cooperation with the West as a way to balance the influence of Russia, which in the second half of the 1990s it considered the main cause of instability in the region (Devdariani, 2005: 167-73). In 1999, Georgia instigated pressure for the withdrawal of Russian military garrisons from the country at a meeting of representatives of OSCE in Istanbul. The question of their removal was mentioned in the media and on the floor of the Georgian Parliament as back as in 1995. Despite the agreement between the political leaders of Georgia and Russia in Istanbul in 1999, where Russia committed to remove its bases in Vaziani, Gudauta, Batumi, and Akhalkalaki, the process of evacuating Russian troops did not take place for a long time. Until the arrival of Mikhail Saakashvili's administration, the only base closed was Vaziani. Discussions about a timetable for the transfer of the remaining three bases were stuck at a standstill for several years. While after the fall of the Berlin Wall Russian troops were removed from Eastern Europe within two years, the Russian scenarios for withdrawing from Georgia are looking at eleven years, which smacked of an obvious attempt to maintain influence in Georgia up until an alternative solution is found (Civil Georgia, 30 January 2003).

The fifth important factor can be identified as the suppression of Chechen separatism. While Russia was preoccupied in the 1990s with the fear of instability from Georgia's de facto states spreading to

the North Caucasus, that fear disappeared after the Second Chechen War. It ended in 2000 with the defeat of Chechen political separatism and the establishment of direct Russian control of Chechnya. In June 2000, Vladimir Putin appointed Ahmad Kadyrov as the interim head of a pro-Moscow government, and three years later the Constitution of the Republic of Chechnya, which guaranteed Chechnya a high degree of autonomy, was approved, but it was tightly bound to the Russian administrative system, especially in the person of Ahmad Kadyrov and later his son Ramzan. Chechen rebels still continue to pose a certain security risk for the internal stability of the Russian Federation, but the government and president of Chechnya have since significantly grown and support the administration of the ruling Putin-Medvedev duo. The Chechen factor that forced at least neutral relations between Russia and Georgia during the nineties had lost its importance (6).

7. Impacts of changes in Russian-Georgian relations and internal changes in the Russian Federation on conflict transformation in South Ossetia

The consequences of the five factors above, namely the political centralisation within the Russian Federation, economic growth, the involvement of the West in the South Caucasus, the deterioration in Russian-Georgian relations, and the suppression of threats of Chechen separatism, has led to ever more significant changes in the Russian approach to South Ossetia since 2000. Russia officially ended its isolationist policy towards this *de facto* state, opened its borders, and introduced visas for Georgians, while there is no visa programme for Ossetians.

Since the citizens of South Ossetia reject Georgian sovereignty, which means they are not citizens of any country, Moscow justified its position of granting Russian citizenship *en masse* to the inhabitants of this *de facto* state as a humanitarian gesture, the aim of which was to enable economic activity associated with travel by people who would otherwise be unable to travel abroad (Socor, 2002). In the background of this step is the obvious Krem-

lin effort to strengthen Russian influence in South Ossetia. Now that more than 90% of the population of South Ossetia are citizens of the Russian Federation, Russia has the legal basis for politically intervening in the affairs of South Ossetia, and Moscow at that time did not dispute this fact in any way. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov took this line in 2006 when he said: 'In relation to the citizens of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, we will defend the rights of our citizens by all means at our disposal. I would not recommend anyone to threaten the life and dignity of our citizens' (Echo of Moscow, 20 July 2006).

Russia offers a considerable degree of political and diplomatic support to the political representatives of South Ossetia and often acts as the only bridge between them and Western institutions. Most summits devoted to issues of security, political status, and economic relations take place in Moscow, while the leaders of South Ossetia were accepted at the highest levels of state long before Russian recognition of the independence of this *de facto* state. The shift in the position of Moscow in relation to Tskhinval(i) is also reflected in the official terminology, and since 2005 the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has referred to the politicians of this *de facto* state as president, prime minister and ministers, something which the Georgian political representation has often protested against (e.g. Regnum.ru, 20 September 2005). The moment the title 'de facto' disappeared from the designation of official representatives of the secessionist republics can be described as the informal recognition of the secessionist entities by the Kremlin. Russian officials also take part in public holidays in the unrecognised entities and in their military parades. One of the most important examples was the official attendance of major Russian political leaders during a military parade on South Ossetian Independence Day in Tskhinval(i) on 20 September 2005. This parade was attended by members of the State Duma, mostly representatives of the ruling party, as well as several representatives of the RF government and local governments of autonomous entities of the RF (Civil Georgia, 21 September 2005). The attendance of a large number of official representatives of the Russian Federation at such events can be seen as a gesture of unequivocal support for secessionist regions, negating Russia's declared role as a mediator

in the peace process and peace broker in the region. The meeting of RF officials with representatives of the government in South Ossetia was more than a friendly visit, and the Georgian side was not informed about any of them in advance (7). This political and diplomatic support is reflected in statements made by South Ossetian politicians, who have started to more and more gravitate towards their northern neighbour. When in July 2005 Georgian President Saakashvili announced a new peace plan for South Ossetia, offering South Ossetia broad autonomy that consisted of demilitarisation, economic reconstruction, and a political settlement for its status, the South Ossetian side immediately swept this proposal off the table. The president of South Ossetia Eduard Kokoity issued a statement in October 2005, where he said: 'We South Ossetians are citizens of Russia' (CEDR, 7 October 2005). Moreover, most of the population of South Ossetia had a Russian passport at that time and regularly voted in Russian parliamentary and presidential elections. Before the Russian presidential elections in 2004, a poster proclaiming 'Putin is our president' could be seen on every street corner in South Ossetia.

Russia has not confined its support for the interests of South Ossetia to the political and diplomatic arena. Also significant is its support for security and economic cooperation, which has gained in importance since 2005, and after Russian recognition of its independence is highly visible. South Ossetia is so dependent on Russia for its economy and security that it is debatable whether it is still considered as a *de facto* state with internal sovereignty, or whether its position makes it closer to a puppet state (more on this topic: Pegg, 1998: 35-36). Many basic economic indicators such as inflation and GDP per capita are kept secret by the local authorities, but some things about the dependency of South Ossetia on Russia can be derived from data on its direct budget support, which was first published in 2010. The state budget of South Ossetia in 2010 was 4.3 billion roubles (140 million USD), but only 2.4 million USD were collected in taxes in South Ossetia (ICG Report N°205: 4). Direct budget support came to 98.7% of the South Ossetian budget. In 2011 and 2012 the direct budget support of South Ossetia was 2.537 billion roubles. In 2013 the inflow of Russian funds into South Ossetia is expected to fall to 1.68 billion roubles (Georgia Times,

21 October 2011). Russia has provided large sums of aid to help South Ossetia recover from the destruction wrought by the August War, about 28,000 USD per person according to the Russian Deputy Minister of Regional Development (Kolossova, O'Loughlin, 2011). The ICG estimated the figure at 840 million USD in the two years since the war (ICG Europe Report No. 205: i).

Another aspect of Russian economic aid are payments made to the approximately 20,000 pensioners of South Ossetia. Since 2006, a branch of the Russian Pension Fund has been located in Tskhinval(i). If we add to this the fact that Russia fully funds the police, state security forces and Russian businessmen, and politicians and members of the military and secret services account for more than half of the members of the government (8), it is clear that Russian support for South Ossetia is absolutely necessary for maintaining at least a limited form of independent existence.

These facts were completely reflected at the end of 2011 and beginning of 2012 after the second round of presidential election in South Ossetia. The victor was Alla Dzhioeva, the former minister of education in the cabinet of President Eduard Kokoity, who introduced a series of reforms in this position with the goal of bringing the education system of South Ossetia closer to the Russian school system. Although she was a supporter of the union of North and South Ossetia in the Russian Federation, she was not the favourite of the Kremlin. Putin's garniture decided to officially bless the nomination of Anatoly Bibilov, a Russian and later South Ossetian officer, serving since 2008 in the post of minister for emergency situations. Shortly before the elections, none other than then President Medvedev flew in to wish him success. It is therefore not surprising that the victory of Alla Dzhioeva in the second round of the presidential election was not just an embarrassment for the Kremlin, but could indirectly indicate the resistance of ordinary South Ossetians against the Kremlin meddling in the internal political affairs of South Ossetia, or at least signal considerable political independence of the breakaway region and its elites from the bidding of the Kremlin. South Ossetian authorities supported by Moscow responded immediately by nullifying the election on charges that Alla Dzhioeva's team committed large-scale electoral fraud. New elections

with Dzhioeva banned from running were scheduled for March 2012. When the winner of the election still decided to undergo official inauguration in February, she was arrested and beaten in prison and had to be hospitalised and forcibly kept in the hospital until the March elections (Dzutsev, 2012). The events of February 2012 showed the true limits of South Ossetian independence under Russian auspices. Even though this provoked a wave of indignation and resistance in Ossetian society, key supporters of Alla Dzhioeva were sentenced to several years in the FSB prison in Vladikavkaz despite the fact that the presidential chair in Tskhinval(i) was occupied by the Kremlin's candidate, the former head of the local KGB Leonid Tibilov. In this context, the most publicised case was that of political analyst Soslan Kokoev, who in an interview with Radio Liberty News in December 2011 said that the result of the intensive intervention in the internal political affairs of South Ossetia was that the fiercely loyal Ossetians started to hate Russia, and if this trend continued, they would begin to fix their eyes rather on the West. And so Kokoev was later accused by FSB of possessing narcotics and illegal arms, which is a popular method used in the North Caucasus republics (Tsiklauri, 2012). Kokoev's relatives claim that this major supporter of Dzhioeva was infected with hepatitis in prison but has been long denied the necessary medical care (Georgia Times, 23 July 2012). We therefore consider Russian influence to be quite decisive not only for the development of the peace process in South Ossetia, but also for internal and foreign political developments of this de facto state.

8. Conclusions

In general, the two main objectives of de facto states can be considered keeping their de facto independence and striving to gain international recognition. To achieve these objectives, the support of external actors are very important. At present, South Ossetia is very isolated by the international community. This isolation forces this unrecognised state to rely on a patron state to protect its interests. In the case of South Ossetia, this is Russia, which a few years before recognising the independence of South Ossetia

gave passports to its inhabitants, paid out local pensions and made significant contributions to its state budget. And most importantly, it provided security guarantees that came to be fully felt in August 2008, when Russia did not hesitate to demonstrate its support for separatists by sending its own armies into conflict with Georgia. Political, diplomatic, military and economic assistance from the patron state are very closely linked together and constitute a major guarantee for South Ossetia's security and the opportunity to keep the economy and social system at an acceptable level. In return for the necessary economic and political support from Russia, politicians are loyal to its interests, which reduces the real decision-making capacity of local politicians and their desire to look at all the options for a common solution to the conflict with Georgia.

While during the nineties and at the turn of the millennia Russia was on the defensive and trying to preserve, rather than expand, the remnants of its influence in the South Caucasus, political centralisation, increased economic revenue from oil, and the end of the Second Chechen War allowed it to act more assertively towards not only Georgia, but generally to other countries in the near abroad. Dmitry Trenin of the Carnegie Moscow Think-Tank Centre argues that: 'The Russian leadership came to the conclusion that the withdrawal has ended, and it is time to counter-attack... it is time to re-establish a great power and that the CIS is the space where Russian economic, political, and informational dominance should be established' (Popescu, 2006: 7).

This approach is reflected in conflict transformation in South Ossetia, where Russia is not an independent arbiter, but is pursuing objectives that primarily serve its own interests. From this perspective, Russia is satisfied with having the conflict in deep freeze and with limited recognition of South Ossetia. This way, Moscow maintains economic and political influence throughout the region and keeps applying pressure for its military to remain in the area. The failure to resolve the conflict and the current geopolitical situation has, moreover, precluded any possibility of Georgia joining NATO in the near future and restricted any greater integration with the West. Russian influence in this conflict transformation is leading to the gradual strengthening of a separatist regime on the one hand, and the weak-

ening of the mother country on the other. By doing this, Russia is not only creating an environment where any solution to the conflict is virtually impossible, but is also unattractive for the government of South Ossetia. Russian support for South Ossetia has allowed this *de facto* state over the past twenty years to survive integration pressures from Georgia, whose territorial integrity was moreover supported by the international community. It has actually allowed to move more and more away from Georgia in its developmental trajectories and to become more and more closer to Russia.

Notes

- (1) Ossetians call their capital Tskhinval. Georgians give the traditional Georgian suffix 'i' to it. In an effort to avoid the designation of taking one side or the other, we designate the capital of South Ossetia in our text with a neutral variant Tskhinval(i).
- (2) Informal activities parallel with official diplomatic negotiations, which are usually implemented by the private or non-profit sector. They are usually manifested by organising informal seminars leading to peace-building and mutual trust between the conflicting parties (Azar, Burton 1986; Galtung, 1996).
- (3) Ossetians were not concentrated only in their autonomous republic, but the greater part of them (98,000) were scattered across other regions of Georgia.
- (4) The lower figure is based on data from UNHCR (estimations as of 1998). According to UNHCR Tbilisi, 30,000 Ossetians from Georgia proper registered in North Ossetia as refugees, while 10,000 from South Ossetia became 'de facto refugees' in North Ossetia. Officials of UNHCR Vladikavkaz consider that in 1995 there were some 55,000 persons in North Ossetia displaced by the Georgian-South Ossetian conflict. The 100,000 figure is used by North Ossetia officials (ICG Europe Report No. 159, pp. 5)
- (5) For example, when the UN tried to deploy an armed contingent of peacekeepers in Abkhazia, the original mandate of the units, which should be fully equipped with competencies and military equipment (UN Security Council Resolution No. 858/1993), had to be under Russian pressure amended by Resolution No. 881/1993, which meant sending an observer mission only to monitor events in Abkhazia and the activities of CIS peacekeeping units. Russia expressed its reluctance to have a foreign military contingent in the 'near abroad', by which it would lose its privileged position in this area.
- (6) Even after the pacification of Chechnya, the failure to resolve the conflicts in Georgia continues to create conditions for insurgency on the territory of Russia. There is Dagestan in particular, and in recent years the regions of the once stable and modernised Northwest Caucasus, inhabited mainly by ethnic Adyghe, find themselves spiralling into destabilisation. Georgia dealt Russia a political blow when in May 2011 it officially recognised the genocide of the Adyghe nation by the Russian Empire in the 19th century. This action provoked an even greater response among Adyghe elites, demanding a similar act of recognising genocide by the Russian Federation. The Federation, however, cannot afford to do so, since such an act would later be used to recover some of the territory originally inhabited by Adyghe tribes. The unwillingness to accept these demands, however, increases dissatisfaction among the Adyghe ethnic groups who make up part of the population of the Northwest Caucasus. After the pacification of Chechnya in 2001, when the rest of the North Caucasus still showed no signs of future destabilisation, this factor did, however, play its role to a significant degree.
- (7) To name but few examples of this type of 'high-level' meetings, the following cases are noteworthy: meetings of the *de facto* President Kokoity with President Vladimir Putin of the Russian Federation (two occasions reported) and with the following figures: Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs – Sergey Lavrov; Moscow City Mayor – Yuri Lujkov; Vice-speakers of the Russian State Duma – Vladimir Jirinovski and Sergey Baburin; Chairman of the Committee of International Affairs of the State Duma-Konstantin Kosachev; Chairman of the Committee of CIS Matters and Contacts with the Emigrant of State Duma – Andrey Kokoshin; Chairman of the

Communist party of Russia – MP Genady Ziuganov; Chairman of the Russian political party ‘Rodina’ (Family) – MP Dimitry Rogozin; Deputy Chairman of the Russian political party ‘Rodina’ – MP Aleksey Mitrofanov; Leaders of the North Caucasus republics: Teimuraz Mamsurov (North Ossetia – Alania, Russia) Mustapha Batdiev (Karachai-Cherkess, Russia), Arsen Kanokov (Kabardino-Balkaria, Russia) and Alu Alkhanov (Chechnia, Russia); Governor of the Krasnodar Oblast – Aleksander Tkachov; Leaders of Cossack organizations operating in Russia, including the high military Cossack leader Viktor Lododatski. Beside these ad hoc visits/meetings mentioned above, Dimitry Medoev is present in Moscow as the South Ossetia’s permanent representative in the Russian Federation. Finally, Mr. Kokoity and other proxy leaders hold joint press-conferences in Russia, and Mr. Kokoity himself is a frequent guest of official circles in Russia (Government of Georgia 2008: Interview with Heidi Tagliavini).

- (8) The major figures in South Ossetia, who held important positions in the Russian state administration and subsequently served or are still serving in important political positions in South Ossetia include Defence Minister Anatoly Barankevich, head of the security committee Anatoly Iavoroi, Prime Minister Aslanbek Bulatsev, Chairman of the office of the president of South Ossetia Alexandr Bolshakov, Defence Minister Yuri Tanaev, Interior Minister Mikhail Mindzaiev, etc.

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