



South Caucasus:
Regional and International
Conflict Resolution

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Acronyms and abbreviations

BSEC	Black Sea Economic Co-operation (zone)
CEPS	Centre for European Policy Studies
CFE	Conventional Forces in Europe (treaty)
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CORE	Centre for OSCE Research
CSCE	Conference for Security and Co-operation in Europe
ECSC	European Coal and Steel Community
EU	European Union
HCNM	High Commission on National Minorities (OSCE)
IDP	internally displaced person
INOGATE	Interstate Oil and Gas Transmission to Europe
JPKF	Joint Peace-keeping Force
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
ODIHR	Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE)
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PCA	Partnership and Co-operation Agreement
South Caucasus	the region consisting of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia
Tchetvërtka	Russia and the three countries of the South Caucasus
TRACECA	Transport Corridor Europe Caucasus Asia
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission on Refugees
UNOMIG	United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

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Annexes

The Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue is an international organisation based in Geneva, Switzerland. The Centre is an independent and impartial organization dedicated to the alleviation of human suffering in armed conflict. By helping parties to a conflict speak to each other, the Centre works to reconcile their differences. It also seeks to strengthen humanitarian norms and values in regions where conflict persists.

The Centre coordinates negotiations between parties whose actions may otherwise cause unnecessary suffering to civilians. It also convenes meetings on challenging humanitarian issues, links people who can influence thinking on those issues in a global context and promotes efforts to design more effective operational approaches to humanitarian assistance.

The Centre's interest in the Caucasus began in April 27, 2000, when it organised an expert consultation. This consultation brought together a small group of 20 experts to look at factors of instability in the region and to examine possible strategies to promote stability in the Caucasus. A summary report of the meeting, as well as more general information about the Centre's work, can be found on the Centre's web site at www.hdcentre.org.

In late 2000, the then-Personal Representative of the Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE suggested that the Centre produce a publication about regional conflict resolution initiatives in the South Caucasus. This publication is a compilation of articles by various authors and reflects a range of opinions about different conflict resolution approaches and propositions. The opinions expressed in this document are those of the authors and are not necessarily shared by the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue.

Introduction

*Ambassador Heidi Tagliavini,
Former Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office*

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, hopes for peaceful transformation were not realised in the Caucasus. The region remains conflict-torn in Chechnya, the most dramatic example, but also in Nagorno-Karabakh, Ossetia and Abkhazia. For more than a decade, international and non-governmental organisations have been involved in dealing with the bloody and violent consequences of the historical and political legacy of many parts of the region. This report attempts to illuminate the complexities of some developments in the South Caucasus during the last ten to fifteen years.

As the personal representative for the Caucasus of the Austrian Chairman-in-Office of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), I was concerned with the discreet conflicts in the region. However, my mandate also included the search for regional initiatives and the evaluation of their feasibility. Although questioned by many political actors, a regional approach seems particularly appropriate given the specific historical, geographical and cultural context common to the entire Caucasus region.

This provided an opportunity to initiate and promote activities beyond the somewhat narrow central framework of the OSCE. In April 2000, we organised with the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue in Geneva a seminar on strategies to promote stability in the Caucasus. This seminar was the beginning of a series of studies on specific regional aspects, as published by the OSCE in *The Caucasus – Defence of the Future*¹ in which over 20 authors from the region reflect on the future of their home, the Caucasus, and demonstrate their commitment as citizens and intellectuals.

South Caucasus: Regional and International Conflict Resolution is a collection of concise studies about individual conflicts (with emphasis on the conflicts in Georgia), as well as of the problems of the Caucasus as a whole. It aims to answer three questions:

1. What regional initiatives exist in the South Caucuses, and how feasible are they?
2. What can international organisations such as the UN (in the conflict in Abkhazia) and the OSCE (in the conflict in South Ossetia) achieve?
3. Why is it that, despite considerable effort, these conflicts are not being resolved?

¹ *Caucasus – Defence of the Future, 24 Authors in Search of Peace*, edited by the OSCE-representative on freedom of the media, Freimut Duve, and Heidi Tagliavini, FOLIO Verlag Wien, Bozen, 2001.

The report begins with a study by *Aude Merlin*, Researcher at the University of Clérmont-Ferrand, France (Chapter 1). She analyses various regional initiatives that were developed in the Caucasus and in European research institutions. At a time when the idea of regional stability pacts emerges in the Balkans, it is tempting simply to transplant these initiatives to the Caucasus. The author presents an overview of existing regional initiatives, and then assesses their feasibility; she also looks at the OSCE and its appropriateness in the implementation of such initiatives. The author concludes that stability in the Caucasus cannot be achieved while there is no substantial progress in the resolution of several conflicts, in particular Nagorno-Karabakh. She also concludes that similarities within the region – in the form of shared problems as much as common opportunities – could present an opportunity for the development of the region as a whole.

In his study of the role of the United Nations in Abkhazia and Georgia (Chapter 2), the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General and Head of the UN Observer Mission (UNOMIG), German diplomat *Dieter Boden* outlines the recent history of the conflict in Abkhazia. He also details the commitment of the UN, mandated to observe the agreed-upon ceasefire and to promote the peace process, together with other UN Security Council actors. He analyses the obstacles in this path, and the opportunities for positive developments and concrete progress.

Randolf Oberschmidt examines (in Chapter 3) the specific role of the OSCE, from the point of view of the Organisation, and assesses the strengths and weaknesses of its mandate in the South Caucasus. Using the example of the OSCE mission in Georgia, he illustrates the range of its activities, from mediating the conflict in South Ossetia, to the military mandate of monitoring the border between Chechnya and Georgia, as well as economic and environmental activities. He makes recommendations for the possible future role of the OSCE in a regional approach to strengthening security in the South Caucasus.

Hans-Georg Heinrich, Professor of Political Science and former member of the OSCE Mission in Georgia, addresses the possibilities limits and constraints in the search for peace in South Ossetia (Chapter 4). This is an attempt to illustrate why a relatively limited conflict cannot be solved despite the efforts of the OSCE. Professor Heinrich shows how the objective and historical factors of the conflict are overridden by the personal interests of individuals or groups, and by economic problems, which thwart efforts to resolve the conflict. He contends that leaving the conflict unresolved increases the risk that the status quo develops into the preferred alternative for a number of involved parties.

Finally, Chapter 5 is an analysis of cultural and psychological factors by *George Nizharadze*, Georgian psychologist and sociologist. He focuses in particular on specific differences between ethnic groups, which underline all aspects of life in the South Caucasus. As shown in the Georgian–Abkhaz case, such factors can easily be exploited for nationalistic goals, and many efforts to resolve conflicts break down precisely over such psychological dynamics, especially when they are not acknowledged and addressed. G. Nizharadze’s contribution could be useful to peace brokers worldwide: understanding the mentality of warring parties is an important prerequisite for mediators, but also for the parties themselves as it is often the emotional factors which prevent progress in conflict resolution.

Together, the complementary perspectives of the contributors offer a comprehensive overview of the state of affairs in the Caucasus, and especially in Georgia. This report is an effort to understand this complex region: an understanding that could be useful for the visitor and in particular the mediator entering this world.

1 Regional initiatives for the South Caucasus

Aude Merlin

Researcher at the University of Clérmont-Ferrand, France

Background

Since the end of the 1980s, the region of the southern Caucasus has experienced great political instability and a difficult economic situation. Since the three new states of the southern Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia) gained independence in 1991, continuous instability has resulted from the outbreak of armed conflicts, still currently unresolved¹. Such conflicts are often linked to declarations of independence or autonomy by ethnic groups, and the ensuing rise in nationalism and regionalism, or to internal power struggles. In addition, the region faces both the problems typically associated with a period of democratic transition and also those difficulties specific to the area – the ethnic mosaic, the overlapping of several religions and unequally distributed resources.

The current challenges are to:

- allow the creation of democratic states which integrate their minorities and respect their rights;
- prevent the resumption of ‘frozen’ conflicts by finding lasting solutions acceptable to all parties, and to prevent the outbreak of new conflicts; and
- ensure the economic prosperity of these states, the resources of which are real, if unequal.

Having adopted differing foreign policies since independence, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia have recently shown certain signs of rapprochement. Other political actors within the South Caucasus have supported pronouncements of national leaders in this direction, and also those from outside states that have an economic or political interest in the region. During 1999 and 2000, the declaration and formulation of projects intended to implement a stability pact have been ever more frequent. Although certain declarations seem to present differences, there does seem to be a renewed desire for regional co-operation.

The expression ‘stability pact’ recurs, although sometimes apparently with reference more to a determination to solve the region’s problems in a co-ordinated² and global manner than to the willingness to conclude a pact in the form of a contract or alliance.

- Do all the leaders who have evoked the idea of such a project share a common understanding of it?
- In the past, the conflicting parties stood too far apart³ for foreign assistance to be effective in helping to resolve the conflicts, but has this now changed?
- Would one or several targeted actions by the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in the region be more fruitful?

¹ The Caucasus is the region of the former USSR which has experienced the most armed conflict since the break-up of the Soviet state: the Ossetian-Ingush conflict in 1992; the particularly violent conflict in Chechnya; the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis which began in 1988; South Ossetia and Abkhazia in Georgia.

² Telephone conversation with Mr VY Ghebali, OSCE specialist, Geneva, 28 August 2000.

³ VY Ghebali, ‘L’OSCE et l’ONU face aux conflits du Caucase’ (‘The OSCE and the UN faced with the conflicts in the Caucasus’), in MR Djalili, *Le Caucase Post-Soviétique: la Transition dans le Conflit (The Post-Soviet Caucasus: Transition in Conflict)*, Brussels-Bruylant, 1995.

- Should the regional and global approach be given preference, rather than the 'case-by-case' approaches that prevailed during the early years of independence?

Convergence of views and regional integration

At first glance, recent declarations in the southern Caucasus appear to indicate convergence and certain elements of compatibility. The simple fact that the declarations on regional stability followed each other reasonably quickly from mid-1999 to mid-2000, and that a certain enthusiasm in the declarations succeeded in conquering initial doubts, reveals the existence of a shared idea. The Georgian president renewed his calls for guarantees for the stability of the region as early as 1996, but it was only in 1999 that the other leaders of the region echoed his appeals in order to move towards the definition and implementation of guarantees of stability. Looking closely at the chronology, however, the speech of Turkish President Demirel, made in January 2000 and given intense media coverage, eclipsed certain earlier declarations on this theme⁴. Only following the Turkish declaration⁵ did the leaders of the region develop a discourse of co-operation centred on regional stability. In the previous two years (1998 and 1999), the speeches and proposals took much more varied lines.

Contradictions that could be overcome

A series of declarations emanates from the states forming the Baku-Tbilisi-Ankara triangle, a triangle of entente consolidated both by the Turkic identity shared by Azerbaijan and Turkey, and by the desire of Georgia to maintain good relations with its neighbours to the east and west. Georgia's interests are linked to the economic advantage to be gained from transporting Caspian oil through Georgia, the hope for a rapprochement with NATO and the desire for a union capable of acting as a shield against the perceived tendency of Russia to reactivate its imperialistic designs on its 'near abroad'. Tbilisi considers that Moscow has revealed this tendency through its flagrant support for internal separatism (of South Ossetia and Abkhazia) in Georgia – the effect of which was a rapid weakening of Georgian power and independence, pushing the country back into the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), of which Georgia had refused to become a member at the beginning of the 1990s.

Russia and Armenia, historical allies⁶, reacted rather coldly to these first propositions of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ankara alliance on a more or less symmetrical basis. Igor Ivanov, Russian Foreign Minister, immediately asked his Turkish counterpart in Ankara⁷ for an explanation and warned that, even though the idea was not without merit, it would be unthinkable not to include Russia in the discussion. Moreover, he felt that it would be premature for Russia to assume a position on such a project. Ara Papian, spokesperson for the Armenian Foreign Minister, underlined that no stability pact in the southern Caucasus would be possible without the normalisation of relations between Armenia and Turkey and the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Gradually, the initial Russian⁸ and Armenian wrath lessened as a re-appropriation of the project began to settle in

⁴ See table.

⁵ The context in which these declarations were made was renewal of war with Chechnya, and change in the political direction in Moscow – a crucial moment for the South Caucasian states to remind Western leaders that their problems remained unsolved and possibly also to call for their help if the region was weakened by the policies of the Kremlin.

⁶ For Armenia this alliance is motivated by the desire and need for support in terms of security in a region where the country feels historically threatened by its Ottoman neighbour. See Claire Mouradian, 'La question du Haut-Karabakh historique' (the Nagorno-Karabakh issue – a history), in *Caucase: Axes Anciens, Nouveaux Enjeux* (Caucasus: Old Axes, New Stakes), Nouveaux Mondes, CRES, Geneva, 1998, pp. 59–65.

⁷ 'Russia asks Turkey for information on pact', *Itar-Tass*, 19 January 2000.

⁸ See the declaration by Ilya Klebanov, 29 February 2000, 'Russia warms to Turkish Caucasus Stability Proposal' (and see table).

the minds of the diplomatic leaders of these two states. In January 2000, President Demirel did not specify the exhaustive list of member states that he considered should participate in the alliance; this added to the annoyance of Armenia, which was not directly solicited.

Subsequent propositions emerged, but never during a concerted round table with all the actors present. These were geographically variable propositions, often expressed within the framework of bilateral meetings.

Geographically variable propositions

A series of propositions for agreements on regional stability appeared in a variety of forms, differing as much in the number of members envisaged as in the mandates and functions with which the pact would be endowed. The views expressed regarding a stability pact were mainly the result of diplomatic, economic and geopolitical positions and stakes as seen by each state.

The notion of stability has often been invoked in the speeches of Caucasian politicians, although not always in the context of the process of actively creating stability: it has more often been an element of dissuasion or even threat. Where a political or diplomatic initiative is seen as weakening one of the states, it is thus described as damaging the stability of the region⁹. Reference to the risks of destabilisation in the southern Caucasus is therefore used as a weapon of negotiation. This game of ‘questions and answers’ – with initiatives proposed by one party and then criticised as destabilising by another – continued over a relatively long period, and no clear proposals emerged on which to base a stability pact¹⁰. It is possible to discern a vague desire to favour peace and political stability in order to facilitate economic development and the construction of a new security zone where the presence or hegemony of neighbouring powers would be lessened. The smallest possible common denominator would seem to suggest grounds for a possible entente. What are these grounds?

Possible grounds for entente

As the speeches moved forward falteringly, the idea of a stability pact was constructed *en route* with no real plan. Three phases of this construction can be identified. First, there were declarations going off ‘every which way’ with no general dialogue, but also the appearance of a spontaneous expression of undefined projects for stability pacts. This period saw hostile reactions, especially from Armenia and Russia (between Spring 1999 and early 2000). The second phase was centred on the search for a common denominator, which offered the advantages of a consensual starting point for a subsequent dialogue covering several sectors. The third phase was characterised by taking stock and falling back on traditional alliances. The main unifying themes, recurrent in the declarations, are the desire for security, the desire to live in peace, and sustainable economic development. Issues of security and economy are discussed below in more detail.

⁹ See the declaration of 11 February 2000 by Ara Papian, spokesman of the Armenian Foreign Ministry, shortly after Demirel’s proposal (and see table).

¹⁰ See Michael Emerson, ‘Approaches to the stabilisation of the Caucasus, the future after the second Chechnya conflict’, *Caucasian Regional Studies*, Vol. 5, Issues 1 and 2, 2000.

Security

The pursuit of security is a central theme in the declarations. Each state in the region is preoccupied with its own security and this is a result of both the imperial and Soviet eras and is, of course, amplified by the existence of unresolved conflicts¹¹. The situation is further complicated by the unequal distribution of military forces in the states of the southern Caucasus and in Turkey. Turkey, a NATO member state, accommodates American military bases, and Azerbaijan, the only state in the Caucasus not to have Russian bases on its territory, apart from one anti-aircraft base, calls increasingly for the installation of NATO bases. Georgia and Armenia find themselves in a different situation: both have important Russian military bases on their territory. An agreement to withdraw the four Russian military bases established in Georgia (in Vaziani, Karakalpaki, Gudauta and Vatul) was signed in November 1999 during the OSCE summit in Istanbul¹² within the framework of the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) treaty. The Russian bases in Armenia are more numerous and Armenia has no desire to lose them. During the initial withdrawal manoeuvres of the Russian bases in Abkhazia, Abkhazian demonstrators took to the streets to ask for these bases to remain in place. The question of security indeed arises at all levels, and Abkhazian supporters of independence felt that the presence of Russian military forces was a guarantee against Georgian forces¹³.

Concerns for security have been found to transcend traditional antagonisms¹⁴. For example, in November 1999¹⁵, the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan both argued for the establishment of a co-ordinated security system to protect the two states. Calling for the urgent creation of a 'regional or sub-regional security system' revealed the void created by the withdrawal of Azerbaijan and Georgia from the collective security pact of the CIS.

Economy

Even more than security, the economy is often cited as a stabilising element for the southern Caucasus, and economic development is frequently presented as a goal. A precondition for this, however, is political stability, crucial for any investment and particularly foreign investment. As the economic indicators of the three southern Caucasian states have shown a decline since the break-up of the USSR¹⁶, the need for investment is one of the striking common traits of the three economies. Armenia is the poorest country, with the fewest resources, and has been greatly weakened since the imposition of an economic blockade by Azerbaijan. Nevertheless, its

¹¹ For example, in the case of the Nagorno-Karabakh the negotiations are deadlocked on the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan contested by Armenia, which indeed occupies one fifth of Azerbaijan's territory. When the co-presidents of the Minsk group then suggested that the Nagorno-Karabakh belong to a common state, Azerbaijan refused the idea, which it saw as a move towards parity between Baku and Stepanakert.

In the case of Abkhazia, the Georgian central power subjects any negotiations to a precondition of the return of 300,000 Georgian refugees who were forced to leave Abkhazia. Before the return of the refugees, the Abkhazian powers however demand the recognition of Abkhazia's independence.

¹² 'Joint statement of the Russian Federation and Georgia', Istanbul, 17 November 1999, in *CEPS, A New Deal for the Caucasus*, Appendix D, p. 51, 21 April 2000.

¹³ See E Batuev, 'Abkhazia opposes the withdrawal of Russian troops', *Turkistan Newsletter*, 21 August 2000.

¹⁴ Bruno Coppieters develops this idea in *A Regional Security System for the Caucasus*, Free University, Brussels, p. 2

¹⁵ See table and appendix.

¹⁶ For an initial evaluation of the phase, see the three studies on Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia in *Courrier des pays de l'Est*, No. 417, March 1997. For a recent picture, see S Celac, M Emerson, *A New Deal for the Caucasus*, Appendix A: 'Background on the economies of the Caucasus', pp. 38–40.

neighbours in the Caucasus have not experienced a particularly high degree of economic stability either, and the absence of investment is a great deficiency in all countries in the region. In this context, Turkey, with economic growth that has reached 5 per cent per year, and a volume of trade with Russia far surpassing the economic exchanges with the Caucasian states, has taken on the role of leader. Turkey was central to the creation of the Black Sea Economic Co-operation zone in 1992, which includes 11 different states¹⁷, and also acts as a political forum for the region.

On 10 June 1999, the Iranian Foreign Minister, Kamal Kharazi, made a call for stronger co-operation in several domains, including the economy. On 17 November 1999 in Istanbul, President Demirel of Turkey suggested increasing the economic co-operation of the Black Sea area; in his call for the implementation of a stability pact on 15 January 2000, he mentioned the economic aspect as one important element of the pact. Armenian President Kocharian, in a speech of 29 March 2000 before the Georgian parliament, stressed the economic dimension of the pact to be created. Finally, the analyst Grigorian repeated the necessity of opening a minimum of trade links between Armenia and Turkey.

The absence of a declaration from the Azerbaijan authorities regarding the economic question is the result of a different logic. President Aliev, who asserted that the presence of oilfields off the Caspian coast of Azerbaijan would be the basis of a future 'El Dorado' in his country, negotiated directly with Western heads of state regarding investment projects and the redistribution of potential revenues from the exploitation of the Caspian oil. A skilful diplomat, he made his grandest declarations and signed exploitation agreements during visits abroad, thus giving them high media coverage. From the 'contract of the century', signed in 1994, to the more recent projects for the construction of a section of the oil pipeline to the Turkish coast at Ceyhan, President Aliev continued to carry out direct negotiations with oil company consortiums including American, English, French, Norwegian and Russian companies¹⁸. He thus focuses his declarations relating to a stability pact on issues of regional security rather than economic development.

Nevertheless, beyond these points of convergence, it is possible to see the resurgence of certain incompatibilities linked to strong historical tendencies in the region. Incompatibilities are discussed below.

¹⁷ The 11 countries are: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Moldova, Rumania, Russia, Turkey, and Ukraine.

¹⁸ Interview, 6 September 2000, with Alexandre HUET, expert with the Société Générale in financing of oil exploitation in the CIS, and author of the article: 'Les enjeux énergétiques de la Caspienne ou l'émergence d'une nouvelle géoéconomie des flux' ('Energy stakes in the Caspian or the emergence of a new geo-economy of flows'), May 2000, 13 pages, unpublished.

Incompatibilities between states

The incompatibilities or divergences between states can be grouped into four types. First, there are different views about the membership associated with or integrated into the pact to be constructed. Certain initially vague declarations, such as the first declaration of President Demirel, avoid specifying the exact identity of the members of the pact. Secondly, there are incompatibilities concerning the definition of ‘stability pact’. Thirdly, security remains a divisive issue, despite references to consensus on the subject. Finally, hostility from sub-state political leaders towards central power structures is at the heart of the stability issue, and the leaders of sub-state entities have not been involved in discussions of stability pacts. This seems, however, not to preoccupy the state leaders.

Incompatibilities with regard to pact members

Analysing all the declarations calling for a pact of stability, it is still difficult to discern the choice of a single overall direction. The first proclamations of a pact, or the need for one, were either vague with respect to the members or relatively broad. At first, automatic exclusions were not expressed, but there was a subsequent proliferation of polygonal systems varying from one declaration to another. Comparing only the declarations of the Spokesman of the Armenian Foreign Minister Ara Papian, Armenian President Robert Kocharian, Georgian Foreign Minister Menagharisvili, Turkish President Demirel, and Azerbaijan Foreign Minister V Guliev, no two pacts envisaged include exactly the same members¹⁹. The chronological succession of the declarations does show that, little by little, the projects have converged with respect to membership.

Incompatibilities with regard to the nature and function of the pact

In general, concrete propositions are absent from the proposals, which deal rather with general directions. No declaration specifies the means and instruments adequate for achieving stability²⁰. The Greek project of a defence agreement with Armenia and Iran ‘in the name of stability and peace in the region’²¹, shows that the terms ‘stability’ and ‘security’ do not necessarily have the same meaning throughout the region and beyond. It is also in the name of stability that the Russian Foreign Minister tends to include the southern Caucasus states in Russia’s fight against terrorism. Equally, the creation of the Tchetchvërka (Russia and the three states of the Caucasus) by President Putin underlines yet again Russia’s ambition to control the evolution of such a pact. Thus, each state concerned imagines a pact that addresses the greatest security issue confronting it. This glaring contradiction between each individual state’s security interests and a truly regional approach to security remains a significant stumbling block.

¹⁹ See table and appendix.

²⁰ Such instruments could include, for example, the withdrawal of the occupation troops, the return of the refugees to the place of their permanent housing, the fight against economic crime, the definition of status acceptable to and accepted by the secessionist parties, the consolidation of democracy and the strengthening of the rule of law, the development of means of controlling the power at the heart of institutional mechanisms and opposition powers in the civil society.

²¹ See table and appendix.

Security seen through the lens of traditional alliances

Even though it is the object of consensus (in theory at least), the issue of security is very sensitive in the region, and the traditional alliances remain firm and steadfast. The renewal of the bilateral agreements on military support by Russia and Greece for Armenia on the one hand, and by Turkey for Azerbaijan on the other, as well as Georgia's progressive move towards the NATO defence system²², mark the fact that each state in this region remains highly preoccupied by questions of its own security. Following the cautious enthusiasm for regional security systems, it is notable that most countries nevertheless hold firmly to their system of traditional alliances.

The role played by secessionist entities

The official meetings between heads of state at which ideas around a stability pact are discussed leave no space for secessionist leaders to express their opinions. Those who discuss pacts and alliances are leaders of internationally recognised states that are members of the UN and OSCE. For those leaders, the principle of inviolability of existing borders is at the heart of statehood, while precisely these borders are being contested by the separatist entities. The secessionist leaders thus have no interest in a regional security system that is based on the inviolability of borders. Security agreements sought by secessionist entities are more traditional military alliances reinforcing their immediate war goals rather than a long-term security system for times of peace. Some regional initiatives by secessionist movements, such as the Abkhaz call for the rebuilding of the Confederation of Caucasian Peoples, have a military objective and cannot be assimilated with a genuine desire for regional stability²³. In this situation, and given the important role played by the many conflicts in the region, there seems to be little chance for the realisation of stability as long as the conflicts remain simply frozen rather than resolved²⁴.

The essential precondition for stability is the resolution of the armed conflicts in the region, and a stability pact should indeed put the resolution of these problems into a global perspective. A regional stability pact taking this dimension into consideration would also imply that certain bilateral conflicts could not be solved without outside involvement, or at least the support of neighbouring states. Another approach favours the co-ordinated resolution of the different conflicts, or even the possibility of one conflict being solved, which would then help to promote the resolution of the others²⁵. In any case, regional stability cannot be developed if the sub-regional sources of instability continue to prevent the consolidation of the states. Conversely, it could be argued that to begin by introducing other factors to promote stability in the region could have a positive effect on the resolution of the conflicts.

²² Through its strategic partnership within the NATO Partnership for Peace programme.

²³ The Confederation of Caucasian Peoples indeed supported the Abkhaz secessionists with fighters and materials. Bruno Coppieters argues convincingly that the Abkhazian search for alliances has a primary goal that is not stability but the reinforcement of status, international recognition and independence – the modification of the balance of power in favour of Abkhazia (op. cit., note 14 above).

²⁴ And as VY Ghebali explains, the secessionist parties have indeed nothing to gain from a stability pact. For them, time is an ally and they remain blocked in a wait-and-see situation which is not without use to them. (Opinion voiced at the seminar 'OSCE Cluster of Competence', Geneva, 14 September 2000.)

²⁵ President Aliiev defended this 'virtuous domino theory' in a speech in Washington, on 11 September 2000. See Andrew F Tully, 'Azerbaijan: President says Nagorno-Karabakh Key to Caucasus Stability', RFE/RL, Washington, 12 September 2000.

Thus, in the face of any proclamation calling for stability in the region, the resolution of the conflicts is prerequisite to any regional consolidation. Attempting to promote consolidation without resolving conflicts would be to risk running into bilateral hostilities that could foil any regional stabilisation before it gets off the ground. Could the participation of persons foreign to these conflicts, and even from outside the region, contribute to regional stabilisation? This is discussed below.

The views of neighbouring states

Situated at the crossroads of several empires, the Caucasus have had to compromise with their neighbours throughout history. When the states of the Caucasus were formed, their people reconciled themselves to making use of the alliances open to them. The break-up of the USSR in 1991 instigated a total geopolitical and geo-economic restructuring of the region, and the levers of influence and action were activated at several levels. The discovery of offshore oilfields in the Caspian Sea in 1994 created sudden increased interest from both the United States and certain states in Europe. A new zone of influence also opened up for Turkey, which has close cultural and historical links with the region. Iran tried to draw economic advantage from this 'reshaping', and attempted to alleviate the diplomatic isolation imposed upon it. The European Union saw a zone where it could act as a political force and as a conflict-solver. The ethnic factor has also pulled neighbouring states into the re-melting, as numerous ethno-linguistic groups are scattered geographically over two different political entities. Thus, a stability pact, if it were concluded, could not exclude such states as Russia, Iran and Turkey. Moreover, the United States and the European Union would not fail to be interested in the region and take part in the organisation of the pact, or even compete for leadership.

Russia: a neighbour struggling to retain influence

In 1993, two years after the fall of the USSR and the creation of the three independent states of the southern Caucasus, Russia made a conspicuous comeback in the Caucasus region. From 1992, in its theoretical form, the notion of 'near abroad' and of a 'natural zone of influence' appeared in Russian rhetoric. Indeed, Russia has at its disposal many means of exerting pressure on the southern Caucasian states²⁶. The stationing of Russian military bases is one such means. With respect to military security, Azerbaijan has a greater degree of autonomy than Georgia does as there are no Russian military bases in Azerbaijan²⁷ (except for one anti-aircraft base), which has renewed its appeals for the installation of NATO bases. The argument developed by Russia, according to which Azerbaijan is harbouring Chechen soldiers, is used to support the justification of an increased Russian presence in the region²⁸. From September 1999, the date of the Russian intervention in Chechnya, but before the 'cascade of declarations' on stability in the Caucasus, Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov, during his tour of the southern Caucasus, forcefully indicated that Russia should be party to a stability pact, should there be one.

As the OSCE was solicited, particularly in the Demirel proposal, to play a role in this pact, and Russia is a member of the OSCE, it is obvious that any form of OSCE action in the southern Caucasus cannot afford to isolate Russia. The situation was all the more delicate because the adoption, at the OSCE summit in Istanbul, November 1999, of the OSCE Charter on European

²⁶ From 1992, the policy of supporting the secessionists and weakening the two Caucasian states that had chosen to shift away from Russia (Azerbaijan and Georgia) bore the expected fruits: these two states realised that they had to 'manoeuvre' gently and ceaselessly in order to avert Russian influence.

²⁷ In 1991–1992, Azerbaijan refused the installation of Russian military bases and, parallel to this, did not allow the Russian Federation to take away from the former Soviet arsenals located in Azerbaijan more than 35 helicopters and other aerial equipment. See 'The Army and Society in Georgia', Center for Civil-Military Relations and Security Studies, Caucasian Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development, www.lib.berkeley.edu.

²⁸ 'Nuzny li cecenskie boieviki v Karabahe?', *Nezavisimaa Gazeta*, 28 August 2000.

Security marked a strengthening by the OSCE of its autonomy in relation to Russia. Indeed, of the three demands made by Russia concerning the amendments to the Charter, not one was satisfied²⁹.

Analysts frequently ask whether it is more beneficial for Russia to favour stability or instability in the Caucasus. Until now, it would seem that the second option has been favoured. Any Russian voices in favour of stability in the Caucasus since 1991 have been in the minority and have been smothered by those of the military-industrial complex. The increase in political weight of the other great neighbour of the Caucasus, Turkey, also casts a shadow on Russia's plan to remain present in the region. Russia now finds itself in economic and political competition with Turkey.

Turkey: from cultural rediscovery to diplomacy and security

Traditionally in a position close to that of the West, and useful to NATO during the Cold War, Turkey is beginning to assert itself as one of the powers in the southern Caucasus region. Strongly supported by the United States, for whom it is the bridgehead in the region, Turkey is the essential link in an economic Washington-Ankara-Tbilisi-Baku axis, especially for the construction of the western section of the proposed Baku-Ceyhan oil pipeline³⁰, and forms part of an emerging security axis composed of the same members.

Maintaining excellent relations with Shevardnadze's Georgia, despite the large Abkhazian community in Turkey, and with Azerbaijan since 1991³¹ (although relations with Armenia are strained), Turkey now faces two regional rivals, Russia and Iran.

The repeated appeals of President Demirel for the establishment of a stability pact are probably driven by two preoccupations: firstly, political stability is necessary for the viability of economic investments in the region; and secondly, the Caucasus represents the only route open to Turkey for the reconstruction of the Silk Road, and Azerbaijan is Turkey's gateway to Central Asia. From the perspective of restoring links, beyond cultural ones, with the Turkish-speaking republics of Central Asia³², Turkey requires a solid connection between these two zones³³. In its duel with Iran to re-conquer the Caucasian area, Turkey is favoured although Iran can by no means be ignored.

Iran: tentative approaches but a real presence

The position of Iran in the region is more flexible and pragmatic than indicated by the external image projected by its policies. Concerned with not being pushed aside by the traditional American line, the Iranian authorities have looked for several different methods of acquiring a position that is, if not indispensable, certainly worthy of interest to its neighbours. Iran's position within a Tehran-Yerevan-Athens axis (since 12 July 1999, a tripartite alliance has existed between

²⁹ Russia wanted a systematic rationalisation of the structures of the OSCE on the basis of a formal distinction between 'principal organs' and 'specific institutions', complete respect of consensus in order to make position-taking by 'consensus minus one' impossible, and the institutionalisation of an organ established for the purposes of negotiation of the Charter. See VY Ghebali, 'La Charte de l'OSCE sur la sécurité européenne' ('The OSCE Charter on European Security'), *Défense Nationale*, February 2000, pp. 45-55.

³⁰ The eastern section was re-opened for the stretch from Baku to Soupsa, inaugurated 17 April 1999.

³¹ The recent visit of the new Turkish President to Baku, his first visit abroad, shows continuity with the orientations assumed by President Demirel when he asserted that the Caucasus had become Turkey's second priority zone for foreign relations, after Cyprus.

³² See O Verdeil, M Avrillier, A Merlin, 'Turkey and the Turkish-speaking republics of the former USSR', a study of economic, cultural and security links, 1997.

³³ See 'Turkey', *Géopolitique*, April 2000.

these three states³⁴, and regular meetings have taken place since 1995/96) does not prevent pragmatic and opportunist diplomacy, constrained by the presence on Iranian territory of a large Azerbaijani minority³⁵. The military and security partnership linking Iran to Armenia and Greece is no obstacle to Iran's excellent relations with Russia³⁶.

Understanding that the construction of the north–south oil pipeline through Iran (a less expensive and more direct solution, but strongly rejected by the Americans) was not going to materialise, the Iranian authorities have nonetheless not abandoned hope for substantial revenue from the exploitation of oil and gas in the Caspian Sea. Close bilateral relations are maintained with the Caspian republics, including Azerbaijan, despite the regular tensions in the two countries' relations³⁷. Due to its 'equidistant' relations with Armenia and Azerbaijan, Iran has periodically been able to participate in, and even instigate, negotiations to settle local differences. Tehran has indeed played the role of mediator in the Nagorno-Karabakh negotiations³⁸. Iran's desire not to be excluded from a project to develop a stability pact in the Caucasus is manifest³⁹. In the main, its role depends, and will continue to do so, on the space left to it in the region, not only by the United States but also by Turkey, seen by Iran as a rival since 1991. Turkey possesses certain trump cards that Iran does not have: the possibility of reactivating the patchwork identity in the region, and strong American support. This reinforces the impression that stability in the Caucasus depends greatly on American orientations.

The United States: the exercise of realpolitik

The United States appeared on the diplomatic scene in the Caucasus at the moment of the signing of the 'contract of the century' in 1994, when an oil consortium planned massive investments in the region. Since then, American declarations on the question are the reflection of a double approach. On the one hand, the Caspian having become a region of strategic interest to the United States, no negotiations about the exploitation and transportation of the oil could take place without the involvement of the US. On the other hand, Turkey's NATO membership and the renewed tension between Russia and the West means that the Caucasus, a region bordering Turkey and in which two out of the three states (Georgia and Azerbaijan) are drawing noticeably closer to the West and to NATO, is becoming more and more interesting to the United States. Thus, Madeleine Albright suggested in the spring of 1999 the creation of a Caucasian forum for co-operation. She implied however that this forum could not be implemented without the 'patronage' of the United States, the European Union and the international financial institutions⁴⁰.

³⁴ See table and appendix.

³⁵ There are more Azeris in Iran than in Azerbaijan: they constitute 20 per cent of the Irani population. The Iranian powers are continuously on the alert for any irredentist project that threatens to emanate from this minority.

³⁶ Recently, it seems that the Iranian authorities somewhat reduced their support for Russian policy in the Caucasus. After following Russia in excluding the idea of any participation 'foreign to the region' (United States, EU) in a stability pact, Iran now intends to assert itself as a brake on Russian imperialism and favour the European and American presence in the hypothesis of a stability pact: 'Caucasus Stability Pact: Iran Counters Russian Expansion', 25 May 2000, www.stratfor.com.

³⁷ 'Azerbaijan-Iranian Relations', Far Centre, <http://scf.usc.edu/~baguirov/azeri>, 1996; Azerbaijan blows hot and cold with the United States, evoking the choice of the 'Iranian route' for the oil and gas, 'Azerbaijan re-examines Iranian Relations', Stratfor Commentary, 19 January 2000, www.stratfor.com.

³⁸ A Ramezanzadeh, 'Iran's Role as Mediator in the Nagorno-Karabakh Crisis', in B Coppieters (ed.), *Contested Borders in the Caucasus*, Vubpress, 1996, p. 205.

³⁹ 'Iran asserts itself in the Caucasus', www.stratfor.com, 20 May 2000.

⁴⁰ See table and appendix.

Europe: the search for a role through economics

The European presence in the southern Caucasus has, until recently, taken two forms. Since the admission of the states of the southern Caucasus into the OSCE in 1992, the missions implemented were an initial contact between the Caucasus and Europe, signifying the concern of Europeans to contribute to solving the conflicts in the region before the European Union, lacking unity on foreign policy, could intervene in a clear and unanimous manner. The other aspect of the European presence was the participation of oil companies in the signatory consortiums of the 1994 'contract of the century'. Today, the European presence is more visible in the Caucasus, even if it continues to proceed hesitantly and if, on occasion, policy differs between European states.

In 1999, the European Union Council of Ministers established a 'platform for co-operation between the BSEC (Black Sea Economic Co-operation zone) and the European Union', a project approved by the Council of Foreign Ministers of the BSEC⁴¹. Reciprocally the BSEC, a relatively active and coherent regional association, envisaged and prepared projects of co-operation with the European Union.

In July 1999, the three Partnership and Co-operation Agreements (PCAs) signed in 1996 between the European Union and the three Caucasian states came into effect. By means of EU support for construction and economic development projects, these agreements aim to establish regional economic co-operation between the three states. Subsequently they seek to grant greater importance to the implementation of the rule of law and the solution to the conflicts, shifting the budgetary lines allocated to nutrition and humanitarian aid towards more political and economic functions. Two of the main projects already implemented concern the development and modernisation of the transport and oil-related infrastructure. These are the 'Transport Corridor Europe Caucasus Asia' (TRACECA) and 'Interstate Oil and Gas Transmission to Europe' (INOGATE) projects. TRACECA is the older of the two projects, created in 1993, intended to improve and complete a system of transport axes other than the Russian system. INOGATE, started in 1996, takes a clear option on facilitating the transport of oil from the Caspian towards Europe, and co-operating with the states of the region producing or transporting natural resources.

The first initiatives taken in the Caucasus by the European Union were economic. The political and conflict-solving initiatives, on a wider European scale, were for a long time left to the OSCE.

⁴¹ Remarks by Edouard Shevardnadze, President of Georgia, at the Informal Summit of the Black Sea Economic Co-operation zone, Istanbul, 17 November 1999, www.georgia-gateway.

The way ahead

A new deal for the Caucasus: the CEPS research project

Falling into step with the declarations of the stability pacts, and wishing to apply a formula already elaborated for the Balkans, an independent research centre, the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS), drafted a stability pact project in April 2000 entitled 'A New Deal for the Caucasus'⁴², completed in September by a supplementary note⁴³. Extremely detailed, and banking on a significant foreign financial investment, this project is based on different models, stressing the role of the European Union and the total re-formation of the organisation of the region through the creation of a supra-state political structure, the 'Southern Caucasus Community'. The authors recommend that the initial activity be concentrated on a common economic project, similar to the formation of the ECSC (European Coal and Steel Community) in 1951.

The expression 'Southern Caucasus Community' is used as a description of the structure to be created, including: the solving and prevention of conflicts, regional integration, a system of regional security and the development of links between this new structure and the surrounding organisations and states. Although this Southern Caucasus Community is to be created on the initiative of the three states of the southern Caucasus, the pact itself implies that three political actors from outside the region, Russia, the United States and the European Union, would intervene in the form of a trilateral response to the appeals of the Caucasian leaders. The programme of this pact tackles all the inescapable problems still not resolved.

The domains corresponding to the three domains of the OSCE – human, security, economic – are carefully examined. The dimension that seems to be the most solicited by the CEPS project is that of security. Plans include the implementation by the OSCE of a system of regional security, the support of co-operation in security matters and the control of the limitation of arms⁴⁴. The OSCE, whilst being the vector for the policies of its 55 members, is not associated with or attached to either NATO or the CIS. It therefore ought to profit from this singular situation, which should allow it to reduce the opposition existing between NATO and the CIS at this time when the Caucasus is precisely the theatre of antagonism in terms of security. Peacekeeping operations are also solicited in order to maintain the ceasefire agreements.

The supplementary note comes back to two key elements: the solving of the conflicts and the role of Russia in the region. The pressing need to solve the conflicts as a prerequisite to the establishment of any links stabilising the region is reiterated. Suggestions to enable the southern Caucasus region to climb out of the crisis it has been suffering for more than ten years include the:

- formation of peacekeeping forces under the auspices of the OSCE;
- presence of OSCE observers on the states' borders (as there are on the border between Chechnya and Georgia);
- forming of frontier guards to guarantee the security and proper progress of the withdrawal of the Armenian troops occupying Azerbaijan;
- fight against corruption;
- search for a viable status for Abkhazia, Southern Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh; and

⁴² S Celac, M Emerson (Chairmen), 'A New Deal for the Caucasus', a consultative document of the CEPS Task Force for the Caucasus, Working Document 144, April 2000, 60 pages.

⁴³ M Emerson, N Tocci, E Prokhorova, 'A Stability Pact for the Caucasus in Theory and Practice – a supplementary note', 21 September 2000, 30 pages.

⁴⁴ Within the framework of the CFE (Conventional Forces in Europe) treaty.

- creation of a flexible and original structure in the region that is operational, non-paralysing and with a variable geography⁴⁵.

In order to resolve the question of status and address the calls for independence in the sub-state entities, a 'pact' is seen as the only viable alternative to independence or to a confederate or federal solution.

Nevertheless, two facts must be recalled: no pact has yet been signed by the states concerned⁴⁶ and, for the moment, the political experts within Caucasus government circles have drafted no project. A study, made by American experts close to Georgian President Shevardnadze, concluded that Georgia needed to withdraw from the CIS and clearly shift towards NATO in order to guarantee its security⁴⁷. In the entourages of the Azerbaijani and Armenian presidents, no information concerning any active work on a stability pact is available for the moment. As the need to solve the conflicts would seem to be the priority, it seems appropriate, while awaiting more concrete proposals from the leaders of the Caucasus region, to consider a well-targeted OSCE action.

What options are open to the OSCE?

In relation to the CEPS project, the OSCE would seem to be the organisation best placed to establish a dialogue and support the development of a programme of stabilisation in the southern Caucasus. The OSCE includes not only the three Caucasian states but also Turkey, Russia, the United States and most European countries. The two OSCE keywords, security and co-operation, are frequently employed in the declarations on projects for stability pacts, which accord a significant role to the OSCE⁴⁸. Uniquely, in 1975, the OSCE integrated states on both sides of the Iron Curtain, and it now has ever more refined tools at its disposal. The presence of long-term OSCE missions throughout the southern Caucasus would indicate that the organisation is quite well accepted by the states in the region.

The OSCE does not have the financial means to allow it to undertake large-scale operations such as the implementation of a Marshall Plan on the scale of the whole region⁴⁹. However, it does have numerous tools for dialogue at its disposal, which are regularly refined, most recently at the Istanbul summit in November 1999. The OSCE could identify tools likely to be useful to the southern Caucasus, but it is difficult to consider a large-scale role for the OSCE for two reasons: first, the financial reasons mentioned above; and second, experience has shown that the OSCE can play a role of support, assistance, monitoring and aid in negotiations, but cannot be the leader of a project involving states. In the case of the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe, the OSCE supports a project drafted, financed and implemented by the EU. In the case of the southern Caucasus, the unresolved conflicts still impede regional stability and only genuine peace agreements could move the situation forward. Such peace agreements, however, depend on

⁴⁵ See table.

⁴⁶ N Tocci and M Emerson presented the CEPS project in the capital cities of the Caucasus: one of the most recent presentations took place in Yerevan, 26–28 September 2000.

⁴⁷ Interview with Silvia Serrano, doctoral student, specialist on Georgia, 12 September 2000, Report to the National Security Council of the Republic of Georgia, General Sir Gary Johnson, April 1999 (the study comes from the International Security Advisory Board group.)

⁴⁸ See 'A New Deal for the Caucasus', the declarations of the southern Caucasian statesmen.

⁴⁹ See the 'Report by Lord Chilworth on the human dimension of the OSCE: principles, mechanisms and implementation, Brussels, North Atlantic Assembly, 1994, 1', underlined by VY Ghebali, *The OSCE in post-communist Europe, 1990–1996*, Bruylant, Brussels, 1996, p. 741.

political will and firm choices on the part of the political leaders of all conflicting parties. Could the OSCE have more influence on this major obstacle?

Prevention of potential conflicts

The prevention of conflicts should always be the subject of attention from the OSCE, particularly with regard to new, latent conflicts such as those of Adjara and of Djavakhetia. Moreover, the possibility of neighbouring states manipulating political instability in order to weaken the Caucasian states and to strengthen their own role as arbitrator must not be ruled out. The impartiality and autonomy of the OSCE missions is therefore particularly necessary to fight against these tendencies.

With respect to frozen conflicts, before examining the prevention of new conflicts, concrete political agreements, accompanied by assistance with the withdrawal of troops and the exchange of prisoners, are crucial.

Political agreements, constitutional reform and the consolidation of states

In several contexts, the OSCE has endeavoured to carry out mediation or monitoring of negotiations. Despite some initial success, none of the conflicts was permanently settled. In the South Caucasus, mediation efforts are to be accompanied by preparatory studies on constitutional reforms and research into original, yet viable, solutions to the issue of status for separatist entities. Support, in the form of training, seminars or the development of constitutional models, could defuse certain tensions and re-establish dialogue on the search for a compromise. Support for the development of civil society, and in particular the encouragement of civil-society structures where they already exist (such as in Georgia, for instance⁵⁰) is an important contribution to the construction of modern states – in which the force of law ought to rival the law of force.

The OSCE recognises the inviolability of the states' borders as established after the break-up of the USSR. It is, however, important that the projects for modifying borders are not abandoned altogether, certain borderlines being the arbitrary result of the Soviet period. In this context, the creation of new forms of states, such as the confederation project in Georgia⁵¹ or the project to create a federation covering the whole of the Caucasus⁵², have been invoked by various specialists. The OSCE has put forward the idea of a common state for the Nagorno-Karabakh, which would respect the principles of territorial integrity and the inviolability of borders, an equal status for the different ethnic communities and the application of non-hierarchical relations between the federalised states with respect to domestic policy. However, this proposal is strongly rejected by Azerbaijan.

The BSEC has shown some interest in political and constitutional matters. This organisation could become a useful primary contact for co-operation with the OSCE⁵³.

⁵⁰ See A Matveeva, 'NGOs in the Caucasus', London, 1999.

⁵¹ T Gordadze, C Mouradian, 'Etats et nations en Transcaucasie' ('States and nations in Transcaucasia'), Problèmes politiques et sociaux, La documentation française, Paris, September 1999.

⁵² See the proposition of Lioudmila Harutiunian of a six-member confederation (Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Karabakh) quoted by Johan Galtung, 'Some observations on the Caucasus', *Caucasian Regional Studies*, vol. 2, issue 1, 1997.

⁵³ 'Security – Fragile Statehood', see the remarks by A Rondeli at the Tbilisi Conference, 13–14 April 1999.

Return of refugees, and the limitation of tensions

One of the major obstacles to the stabilisation of the region lies in the presence of roughly 900,000 refugees and displaced persons throughout the southern Caucasus. They contribute to political instability and constitute a very fragile and reactionary anti-authority force. During the armed conflicts, there were considerable flows of people in various directions: Georgian refugees leaving Abkhazia for central Georgia in 1992–1993; Ossete refugees moving from South Ossetia to North Ossetia; during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict massive population movements occurred towards the areas controlled by Azerbaijan and, to a lesser extent, to Armenia.

The return to southern Ossetia of the Ossete refugees was orchestrated jointly by the OSCE and the UNHCR together with the four camps implicated in the conflict: Russia, Georgia, South Ossetia and North Ossetia⁵⁴. In all other cases the two main obstacles to the return of the refugees are the absence of an agreement recognised by all parties involved and the subsequent lack of security guarantees for the returned populations. The refugees and forced migrants are frequently kept ‘hostage’ as a means of exerting pressure in negotiations. The role of the UNHCR is crucial in this domain, and assisting the return of refugees in this region is clearly within its mandate.

Room for negotiation

In order to act effectively in the southern Caucasus, the OSCE needs to be genuinely accepted in the region and must not be considered either as an intrusion, or as a vector, even involuntary, of the domination of the zone by one power aiming to use its actions as a lever. In this matter, the role and presence of Russia in the southern Caucasus must be delicately balanced. The history of relations between Russia and the OSCE demonstrates the difficulty of finding this balance, and its fragility⁵⁵. The assertion of the OSCE’s autonomy in the region, and the fulfilment of its mandate in one, two or three of its dimensions might, on occasion, prove impossible. How can too strong a rivalry between Russia and the OSCE be avoided? What can be done to avoid action by the OSCE being stifled by Russia? In a 1998 speech, the Russian Foreign Minister, Igor Ivanov, supported the development of the efficiency of the OSCE and it seems that Russia made several attempts to attribute to the OSCE the role of a security organisation capable of opposing NATO⁵⁶. This hypothesis would eradicate any possible role for the OSCE in the stabilisation of the Caucasus. What actions could the OSCE undertake to be able to implement effective actions and avoid being blocked?

⁵⁴ See J Zapater, ‘Réfugiés et migrants forcés en Azerbaïdjan’ (‘Refugees and forced migrants in Azerbaijan’), CEMOTI, 1995.

⁵⁵ See Heather Hurlburt, ‘Russia, the OSCE and European Security Architecture’, Conference of International Studies in Chicago, February 1995; A de Tinguy, ‘The CIS and the international organisations: does a Euro-Atlantic community exist?’, *Courrier des pays de l’Est*, March/April 1995 and VY Ghebali, *The OSCE in Post-Communist Europe, 1990–1996*, IHEI, Bruylant, Brussels, 1996, p. 741, VY Ghebali, ‘L’ONU et l’OSCE face aux conflits du Caucase’ (‘The UN and the OSCE faced with the conflicts in the Caucasus’, in MR Djalili, *Le Caucase Post-Soviétique; La Transition dans le Conflit (The Post-Soviet Caucasus; Transition in Conflict)*, Bruylant, 1995, VY Ghebali, ‘La Charte de l’OSCE sur la sécurité européenne’ (‘The OSCE Charter on European Security’), *Défense nationale*, February 2000, pp. 45–55.

⁵⁶ See VY Ghebali, ‘La Charte de l’OSCE sur la sécurité européenne’ (‘The OSCE Charter on European Security’), *Défense nationale*, February 2000, pp. 45–55.

What action can be envisaged?

Past experience suggests that the OSCE is most likely to be effective in implementing more limited projects, aiming to restore dialogue on the basis of common values. It would seem that the participation of the OSCE in re-establishing dialogue does not necessarily have to focus on mediation at the highest level between governments. Paragraph 44 of the Istanbul Charter commits governments to strengthen the role of the OSCE in activities supporting the civil police forces. These forces are to be used particularly to prevent further conflicts. Support for the fight against small-arms transfers and corruption, as well as training, could have encouraging results. The development of civil society and the consolidation of state structures also seem to be favoured over high-level mediation. The implementation of 'mixed' policies in the conflict zones could have positive mid- and long-term effects.

Support for the ever more influential BSEC, which has worked for several years on regional reconciliation within the framework of more intensive economic and political integration, would seem to be an interesting lever. In general, the support and consolidation of existing regional structures initiated by the states of the Caucasus seems more likely to be fruitful than does the creation of new structures, which could be in danger of becoming 'empty shells'⁵⁷.

⁵⁷ VY Gheballi, AFRI, No. 1, 2000.

Conclusions

Three main conclusions can be drawn regarding the declarations and projects for work on a stability pact in the southern Caucasus.

First, no form of stability can be achieved without a concrete and viable solution to the armed conflicts, including:

1. sustainable ceasefire agreements;
2. a solution to the question of the definition of the status of secessionist entities and the degree of autonomy they are to be given within the framework of shared competencies with the central state;
3. a permanent solution allowing the return of refugees under fully respected security guarantees;
4. the fight against corruption and arms availability to curtail the means of violence and to facilitate the economic development of politically stabilised states.

The conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, which, unlike other conflicts in the region, directly opposes two independent states whose leaders regularly run into fundamental disagreement during negotiations⁵⁸, seems still to be the main obstacle to regional stabilisation.

Secondly, a stability pact would have more chance to develop if it integrated existing regional structures, vectors of a form of concerted and effective regional co-operation. In this respect, the integration of the Black Sea Economic Co-operation zone would seem particularly interesting. Similarly, in order to involve both state and sub-state actors in a regional approach, it would be easier to deal with thorny questions collectively; bilateral approaches are more conducive to blockages. Mediation at all levels can defuse existing bilateral tensions, and certain problems found in the three states can be tackled by a common approach such as the establishment of the rule of law, and action against crime and corruption.

Thirdly, the OSCE can only support work to develop a stability pact initiated and decided by leaders of the region, and progress is unlikely before the leaders themselves have drafted a project. The positions assumed by most political leaders, particularly on the issues at stake in the conflict areas, do not indicate real progress. Therefore, more impact can be achieved through preparatory actions to enable the development of a future pact:

1. supervision mechanisms for elections;
2. support for institutional reforms;
3. the consolidation of borders;
4. action against smuggling and economic crime;
5. education with respect to human rights.

In essence, it seems that the southern Caucasus is not ready for a comprehensive stability pact. The past ten years of armed conflict still weigh too heavily on the region. The OSCE could however help to prepare the ground for progress through consolidation of existing supra-national structures, support for projects strengthening civil society and police forces, and consolidation of state institutions.

2 The Role of the United Nations in the Settlement of the Conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia

⁵⁸ See VA Tadevosian, 'Kotcharian and Aliev tread political tightrope', Institute for War and Peace Reporting, Caucasus Reporting Service, No. 49, 15 September 2000.

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Background

In the Soviet days Abkhazia was an Autonomous Republic within the Socialist Soviet Republic of Georgia. Its strategic geographical location and its natural beauty (often called ‘paradise on the Black Sea Coast’) made it the preferred holiday destination for both the Soviet leadership and the general public. It was, in those days, one of the most prosperous regions of the Soviet Union. The pre-war population of Abkhazia—some 525,000 persons—consisted of 47 per cent ethnic Georgians and about 18 per cent ethnic Abkhaz; the other two most numerous groups were Armenians and Russians.

For centuries, Georgians and Abkhaz have been living in peaceful coexistence. Both ethnic groups are autochthonous to the Caucasus, but they differ in language, culture, customs and traditions. Their relations have not always been free from friction and antagonisms. During Soviet rule, changing nationality policies—which alternately granted Georgians and Abkhaz preferential access to political power and economic resources—resulted in a zero-sum game between the two groups. Encouraged by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the nationalist rhetoric of the Georgian regime of then-President Zviad Gamsakhurdia, the Abkhaz leadership made a bid for independence in the early 1990s.

On 14 August 1992, Georgian troops, led by then-Defence Minister Tengiz Kitovani, marched into Abkhazia following the order to protect a strategic railway connection, but occupied Sukhumi, the capital of Abkhazia, instead. This triggered large-scale hostilities. During the course of the fighting, much of which was highly localized in nature, at least half of the population of Abkhazia was displaced to other parts of Georgia and abroad. In September 1993, the Abkhaz side won the war—not without help from outside—by taking back Sukhumi and driving the remaining Georgian forces across the Inguri River out of Abkhazia. The war left towns and villages in ruins; approximately 11,000 people were killed and the population was left behind in a state of trauma and despair. The former Autonomous Republic declared its independence and remains under the *de facto* control of the Abkhaz side and its leader, Vladislav Ardzinba.

Shortly after the cessation of hostilities, the United Nations and the Russian Federation initiated steps towards a cease-fire agreement. This was achieved, with the signing of the “Agreement on a cease-fire and separation of forces”, on 14 May 1994. The Moscow Agreement, as it is commonly known, placed restrictions on the presence of military personnel and equipment of the two forces in the newly established Security Zone and Restricted Weapons Zone, which are located along both sides of the cease-fire line. It also included provisions for the establishment of a peacekeeping force that would be tasked with verifying compliance with the Agreement, in particular maintaining the cease-fire. This document was intended to lay the foundation stone for a comprehensive political settlement, which, however, has not yet been achieved.

United Nations Involvement

The United Nations' involvement in post-war Abkhazia is directed towards achieving the following two goals: maintaining the cease-fire on the ground and helping to bring about a comprehensive political settlement of the conflict.

The United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG)

UNOMIG consists of unarmed military observers, who monitor and verify compliance with the Moscow Agreement by both parties. Established on the basis of UN Security Council Resolution 858 of 24 August 1993, the Mission's strength currently stands at 103 military observers from 22 different countries.

UNOMIG operates independently from the peacekeeping force of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS PKF), but keeps close contact with them. The CIS PKF is currently composed of some 1700 officers and soldiers from one single contributing country, the Russian Federation. In accordance with its mandate—as stipulated in the Moscow Agreement—the force aims at maintaining the cease-fire by observing compliance with the Agreement. To this effect, the Russian peacekeepers maintain stationary checkpoints along both sides of the cease-fire line.

UNOMIG maintains mission headquarters in Sukhumi and sector headquarters in Zugdidi and Gali, located on the Georgian and Abkhaz side of the cease-fire line respectively. Daily patrols are carried out in both sectors, including visits to stationary checkpoints in Zugdidi and in Gali, as well as to CIS PKF checkpoints in both sectors. Patrol teams also liaise with the local administration and with local residents. UNOMIG's primary tools for ensuring compliance with the Agreement are observation and patrolling, reporting and investigation, and close and continuous contact at all levels with both sides and with the CIS PKF.

The Situation on the Ground

Both sides continue to observe the cease-fire agreement, but violations do occur. A major exception to this rule, however, were the hostilities which erupted in May 1998 in the southernmost part of Abkhazia—the Gali District—where the vast majority of residents are ethnic Georgians. Following a series of provocations by Georgian armed illegal formations, the Abkhaz militia launched a sweep operation and drove out not only the armed groups but also tens of thousands of local residents who had returned spontaneously over the course of several years.

Up until today, the situation remains tense and unstable, although a gradual improvement in the overall security situation could have been observed since 2000. This is due, in part, to the implementation of concrete provisions of a number of security agreements reached during bilateral meetings held under the auspices of the UN. Despite these positive signs, more than sixty people were killed in incidents on the ground in 2000. A matter of continuous concern is the flare-up of local-level abductions for ransom or in retaliation for earlier abductions. In some of these cases, the UN has facilitated the exchange of detainees after which the situation returned to normal. Another major problem is the activity of uncontrolled armed groups who engage in acts of violence in the zone of conflict. In addition, criminal activity is rampant and actors of both sides of the cease-fire line are involved in these illegal deals, which are increasingly well organised and ambitious in scope. Law enforcement agencies are currently unable to competently redress this situation and official cooperation between the two sides is too fragile to serve as a basis for effective and concerted action.

Meanwhile, the process of spontaneous return to the Gali District by Georgian former residents (before the war they amounted to 97 per cent of the population) has revived and expanded. Despite the lack of security conditions, decent infrastructure and a political solution that would clarify the returnees' status, people are driven back by the poor living conditions for displaced persons elsewhere in Georgia. At the same time, they are attracted by the fertile soil in Gali that can be cultivated for personal and commercial use. Current estimates suggest that up to 60,000 people have taken up more or less permanent residence in the district. Both conflict parties exploit the situation to their own benefit and are willing to support—albeit under conditions which do not coincide—the return of these people to the Gali District.

The UN, for its part, understands that its credibility as a peace negotiator is linked to conceiving an adequate response to this *de facto* return. For this reason, in November 2000 a joint assessment mission to the Gali District was carried out under the aegis of the UN, in close co-operation with the OSCE and with the participation of representatives of other intergovernmental organizations, such as the European Union and the Council of Europe. The purpose of the mission was to evaluate conditions relevant to the safe, secure and dignified return of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) and put forth proposals for the improvement of the situation for those who have already returned. The final report of this mission has been submitted to the sides and discussions on the practical implementation of a set of recommendations are ongoing.

The Peace Process

The Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Georgia (SRSG) is the chairman of the ongoing peace process which is aimed at finding a comprehensive political settlement for the conflict in Abkhazia. UN efforts to bring about such a solution are firmly based on the following principles:

- 1) Results should be achieved by peaceful means only;
- 2) Georgia's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity should be respected; and
- 3) The right of refugees and IDPs to a safe, secure, dignified and voluntary return to their places of previous permanent residence in Abkhazia should be guaranteed.

Following the Moscow Agreement, parallel negotiation efforts were initiated by the United Nations and the Russian Federation with the purpose of brokering a political agreement between the two conflicting sides. During a meeting in Geneva in November 1997 these separate tracks were brought under the umbrella of the UN. The Russian Federation, the Group of the Friends of the Secretary General (France, its co-ordinator; Germany; the Russian Federation; the United Kingdom; and the United States)—which meets regularly in Tbilisi and in New York—and the OSCE have joined these efforts. This process has since been known as the “Geneva Peace Process.”

Within the Geneva Peace Process, a mechanism for regular contact between the two sides was established. Its key body is the Coordinating Council, which alternately convenes in Tbilisi and Sukhumi and brings together delegations from both sides at prime-ministerial level. During 2000, this institution was reinvigorated; three Coordinating Council meetings were held, each of which produced a protocol on important matters related to the peace process. The Council is not authorised to deal with the political status issue directly; on the other hand, under its aegis three working groups resumed operations to address I) security issues; II) refugees and IDPs; and III) economic and social issues respectively. A step-by-step resolution of practical matters in these

areas will create the necessary favourable climate in which a comprehensive political settlement can be worked out.

Based on a provision contained in the Concluding Statement of the Geneva meeting in November 1997, efforts were made to elaborate and implement confidence-building measures. Indeed, the war did not only destroy the social tissue and economic infrastructure, it also produced deeply ingrained hatreds and enemy perceptions about the other party. A far-reaching process of reconciliation is therefore of paramount importance. Confidence-building measures are designed to work towards this goal by re-establishing and strengthening contacts at all levels of society and making the 'imagined' borderline easier to cross. Three meetings on confidence-building measures have been held so far, in Athens in October 1998, in Istanbul in June 1999 and, at the invitation of the Government of Ukraine, in Yalta in March 2001. Agreement was reached on a series of concrete measures in various fields and their implementation is currently being worked out.

The protection of human rights is another critical element in the work of the mission and in the peace process in general. Experience has shown that human rights monitoring can play a crucial role in containing conflict and establishing the trust necessary among opposing sides to engage in constructive dialogue. Guided by this wisdom, the UN Human Rights Office in Abkhazia (UNHROAG) has been functioning as an integral part of UNOMIG in Sukhumi since 1997. The OSCE participates in the human right activities in Abkhazia by seconding one staff person to the Office. Its day-to-day work includes a broad spectrum of activities: visiting inmates in prisons to assess their conditions; capacity building among local NGOs; monitoring trials; conducting training seminars on human rights issues for law enforcement bodies. Voices have been raised against the activities of UNHROAG by both the Georgian and Abkhaz side. Such criticisms, however, could be interpreted as a clear demonstration of the fact that the Office is fulfilling a very necessary role in this area.

The peace process would remain incomplete if the parties were not constantly reminded about its ultimate goal, i.e. a comprehensive political settlement of the conflict, in particular the definition of the status of Abkhazia within the state of Georgia. Keeping in mind its mandate as stipulated in UN Security Council Resolutions on this matter, the SRSG is working towards this goal and co-operates closely with the Friends of the Secretary-General to elaborate a co-ordinated draft paper on a possible distribution of competences between Tbilisi and Sukhumi. It is designed as a framework document, which will serve as a basis for meaningful negotiations, once it is presented to the two sides. To date, the Abkhaz side refuses to sit down at the negotiating table, insisting that the status issue has already been decisively resolved following the adoption of the Constitution of Abkhazia in 1994, and the presidential elections, referendum and Act on State Independence of 1999. The international community clearly does not share this position.

On the other hand, the Abkhaz side is very much interested in discussing its state-legal relationship with Georgia and takes advantage of the opportunity to present its case in favor of Abkhaz independence. It argues that all legal relations between the two entities had been severed on the basis of the "Declaration on Measures for a Political Settlement of the Georgian-Abkhaz Conflict", which was signed by both parties on 4 April 1994. Consequently, the Abkhaz side is ready to discuss the establishment of relations between Tbilisi and Sukhumi *de novo* only, based on the principle of equality between the sides and possibly following the 'confederation' model. The Georgian side is not opposed to participating in a discussion on the interrelationship with Abkhazia, but based on the assumption that constitutional relations with Abkhazia were never

severed, it insists that the point of departure must be that Abkhazia is “within the state of Georgia.” The UN fully subscribes to this premise. Many times Georgia has offered the ‘widest possible autonomy’ to Abkhazia and is willing to discuss any formulations that fit into the overall framework. In this context, a seminar took place in Pitsunda in February 2001 under the aegis of the Council of Europe and with close participation of the UN, addressing state-legal aspects of the conflict settlement. A follow-up seminar is scheduled to take place in mid-July 2001 in Tbilisi.

Assessment

Almost eight years after the furies of war have subsided in Abkhazia, there is a widespread sentiment that the conflict is ‘frozen’. This term, however, is applied too broadly to be meaningful: it is correct to say that any outbreak of renewed hostilities has been successfully prevented. On the other hand, this phrase fails to reflect the growing contacts between the two sides at many levels, including the highest political level. For example, both sides regularly meet at prime-minister level within the framework of the Coordinating Council, and Georgian President Edward Shevardnadze and Abkhaz leader Vladislav Ardzinba directly exchange views during telephone conversations. Moreover, an increasing number of journalists and representatives of civil society travel between Tbilisi and Sukhumi to meet their counterparts during seminars, conferences and workshops on topics of direct relevance to the conflict.

Some observers have claimed that the UN is incapable of providing the sort of leadership that is required to achieve tangible results. Yet, let us not ignore that UNOMIG—in partnership with the CIS PKF—continues to play a decisive role in preventing the renewal of large-scale hostilities. At the political level, after more than seven years of dedicated work the UN should be given credit for the fact that it has provided both sides with the necessary framework within which a full settlement can be reached. Concerted efforts to this effect will continue. Finally, one should not forget that the responsibility for finding a comprehensive solution eventually rests with the two sides. Their leaders should summon the necessary political will and readiness to make compromises, which will undoubtedly be required, and their societies should be prepared to reach a broad consensus on the compromise solution found.

Of equal significance, in this context, is the continuous support of the international community, of Russia, and in particular of the Friends of the Secretary-General. The establishment of a true rule-of-law-based society in Georgia is essential for the lasting success of any peace agreement, and relevant efforts in support of this goal by the Council of Europe, among others, are greatly appreciated. But, in the end, it is cardinal that both sides engage in constructive and meaningful talks on the status issue—the Abkhaz side has yet to demonstrate the necessary flexibility and political vision to bring this about. Unless there is a willingness to start negotiations on the basis of the draft document, which envisages a future for Abkhazia within the state of Georgia, the whole peace process might be jeopardized once more.

3 Georgia and regional stability: an OSCE perspective¹

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Introduction

The issue of stability in Georgia and the South Caucasus is of utmost importance to the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). Romania, the Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE for 2001, the Secretary General of the OSCE and many others have highlighted the fact that for the OSCE the Caucasus has geo-strategic, political and cultural significance as a link between Europe and Asia. Therefore the intensification of relations between the OSCE and the region is essential if the process of stabilisation and peace in the entire region is to be successful.

This chapter looks first at the concept of stability within the framework of the OSCE, and then outlines the work of the OSCE in Georgia. Thirdly, prospects for a regional approach towards the Caucasus are elaborated, and the Chapter concludes by summing up options for the role of the OSCE in the future strengthening of regional security in the South Caucasus.

¹ This paper is based on, among other sources, interviews and discussions that the author conducted with academicians, representatives of the OSCE, permanent delegations to the OSCE, and a research trip to Georgia in the autumn of 2000.

The concept of stability within the framework of the OSCE

There can be no peace and stability without security. This – in a very abbreviated form – is the essential principle of the OSCE, and has been for the 25 years of its existence. Originally the Conference for Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), the organisation helped to overcome difficulties arising from the partitioning of Europe during the Cold War. From its very beginning, the CSCE has understood security in a broad sense: security has an important military dimension, but would be incomplete without political, human, economic and ecological dimensions. This understanding which was reflected in the Charter for European Security, adopted at the Istanbul Summit in November 1999, states:

We [the participating States] will build our relations in conformity with the concept of common and comprehensive security, guided by equal partnership, solidarity and transparency. The security of each participating State is inseparably linked to that of all others. We will address the human, economic, political and military dimensions of security as an integral whole².

Strengths and limitations of the OSCE

The OSCE has certain strengths, which can be employed in order to follow this comprehensive approach in general and for the Caucasus specifically, but also some limitations.

Primary OSCE strengths include the following.

- The OSCE is the only existing pan-European organisation addressing security and which includes the USA, one of the main players in this region.
- The Organisation's focus is not only in the area of international security but also in intra-state conflict resolution, democracy building, and maintaining the rule of law within all participating states.
- OSCE commitments, laid down in the Helsinki Final Act of 1975, the Paris Charter of 1990, and the Istanbul Charter of 1999, have set a high political standard which has influenced the behaviour of governments, both in the field of international politics and also internally, especially in terms of human and minority rights.
- The OSCE's comprehensive approach aims to develop a collective security identity, which requires gradually mitigating profound social differences and improving political and economic integration in the participating states. It is a lesson learned from the European Union (EU) that stable peace will emerge only if stable democracies, the rule of law, functioning market economies and a high level of mutually beneficial interdependence are in place.
- The Organisation has efficient instruments for prevention of violent conflict, early warning and conflict rehabilitation, including the High Commissioner on National Minorities, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and the Field Missions. The ability to respond adequately and in a timely manner to conflicts has been improved recently by the reorganisation of the OSCE Secretariat and the creation of REACT and an Operation Centre.

On the other hand, the OSCE has certain limitations that need to be taken into account in order to avoid raising false expectations.

² <http://www.osce.org/docs/english/1990-1999/summits/istachart99e.htm>.

- The commitments and resolutions of the organisation have some political weight, but they do not have a binding legal character and cannot be enforced.
- All main decisions depend on the consensus of all participating States, which can cause some OSCE decisions to appear vague, or compromising.
- The OSCE has only limited financial resources available to carry out its comprehensive tasks.
- The OSCE has only weak parliamentary legitimacy, and is not well known to the general public.
- Because of its traditional inter-state focus, the Organisation has had to learn how to address current security challenges adequately. These are increasingly found within state boundaries or are cross-national.
- Although non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have become more involved in the work of the OSCE in recent years, the legitimacy of the Organisation for ‘non-state actors’ must be improved.

Considering these strengths and limitations together, it could be said that the OSCE is only as strong as its participating States want it to be. Overall, however, the OSCE has the potential to contribute to conflict prevention and conflict resolution, and to economic and social transformation. Such a comprehensive approach, based on the rule of law, is a prerequisite for peace and stability in the OSCE area as a whole and in Georgia in particular.

Activities of the OSCE in Georgia

The OSCE Mission to Georgia was established in December 1992 in response to armed conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, with headquarters in Tbilisi. The main objective of the Mission is to promote negotiations aiming at the peaceful political settlement of the conflicts.

In South Ossetia, where the OSCE maintains a field office in Tskhinvali, the Mission works with the parties to the conflict and the international community at Vienna on ways of defining the political status of South Ossetia within Georgia; monitors the tripartite peacekeeping forces in the region; liaises with the Joint Control Commission; and collects information on the military situation. During a visit to the region in September 2000 the then Personal Representative of the Chairman-in-Office for the Caucasus, the Head of the OSCE Mission in Georgia, and a representative from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, held consultations with representatives from Georgia, South Ossetia and also North Ossetia in the Russian Federation on the follow-up of the negotiation process, including the issues of guarantees for future agreements. It seems that a possible solution of the conflict in South Ossetia could be achieved in the very near future. The most important matter still to be resolved is the question of security guarantees.

The OSCE stands ready to assist in this regard, but it is the parties to the conflict who must come to an agreement. If an agreement can be concluded soon, it is very important that the OSCE and other international organisations remain involved in this issue in the future. There is considerable work remaining, to: uphold security, facilitate the return of refugees and internally displaced persons, deal with property restitution and economic rehabilitation of the region and assist in the building of a civil society based on human rights and the rule of law. Unfortunately the introduction of a visa regime between Russia and Georgia, with the exemption of residents in the regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, has negatively affected the peace process.

In Abkhazia, the parties to the conflict and the mediators are unfortunately still far from finding a solution, although the OSCE Mission in Georgia supports the United Nations peace-making efforts. This also involves looking at ways of accommodating the aspirations of the Abkhazians while maintaining the territorial integrity of Georgia. Moreover, any solution must include the right of refugees and internally displaced persons to return to their homes. The OSCE involvement here is rather limited but nevertheless important. By appointing an officer to the United Nations Human Rights Office in Sukhumi, the OSCE has been able to play an active role in promoting compliance with human-rights standards in Abkhazia. The OSCE is also ready to contribute to the establishment of a Human Rights Office in the Gali district. Such an Office could help both the Georgian and Abkhazian sides in diffusing tension. Since a solution of the Abkhaz conflict is not imminent, the OSCE could at least, in close co-operation with the UN, concentrate on confidence-building measures between the two sides, especially in creating more and better links between the Abkhaz and Georgian societies.

The war in Chechnya has also necessitated the creation of another task for the OSCE Mission to Georgia. In December 1999, in response to a request from the government of Georgia, the OSCE Permanent Council expanded the mandate of the Mission to include observation of movements on the border between the Chechen Republic of the Russian Federation and

Georgia. By providing detailed information on the traffic and events around the border, the OSCE has been able to defuse possible tensions, thus showing its ability to engage in early warning and quick reaction. The extension of the mandate of the border-monitoring mission to the part of the Georgian border with Ingushetia (Russian Federation) is currently under discussion, whereas an extension to the border with Daghestan seems to be more than the OSCE could deliver. In the future one might also think of assisting relief agencies in providing help to the refugees from Chechnya. It will also be important to monitor the very fragile situation in the border region, especially in the Pankisi gorge, in order to prevent further conflicts and threats to security.

In relation to Georgia as a whole, the Mission's mandate is to promote respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and to assist the development of legal and democratic institutions and processes. It is clear that the Mission cannot work on all of these issues in a comprehensive manner because of its limited resources. Many initiatives and projects are undertaken in close co-operation and/or co-ordination with other international organisations, and increasingly with local NGOs. The work with NGOs especially should be supported further in future, because such organisations can be a key factor in building civil societies.

In the field of human rights, the OSCE Mission can rely on the activities and assistance of other OSCE institutions such as the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the High Commissioner on National Minorities, the Office of the Representative on Freedom of the Media and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights is especially active in Georgia. Examples of projects include:

- observation of elections and the review of election-related legislation;
- a civic diplomacy project, to increase contacts and foster a sustainable dialogue between civic groups from conflict areas and their counterparts in the rest of Georgia;
- public awareness projects on spreading information about human rights; and
- women's leadership training and NGO coalition building, in order to support women's NGOs.

Despite these OSCE activities in Georgia, there has been no real breakthrough to date in settling the Abkhaz and South Ossetian conflicts. The task of building a democratic civil society in the whole of Georgia, based on the rule of law and human rights, and including sustainable economic development, is also not completed. Key elements to improve effectiveness include: better co-ordination and co-operation, effective use of limited human and material resources, and a coherent and comprehensive overall strategy.

The decisive factor however remains the participating State itself. After all, the responsibility for building a civil society in Georgia lies with Georgia. And there will be no stable civil society without the rule of law. Only if there are functioning courts and law-enforcement agencies, only if corruption is eliminated, will the people of Georgia have faith and trust in the legislative, executive and judicial branches. The recent initiatives of the president and the parliament of Georgia against corruption illustrate that these views are shared.

Lack of faith and trust, resulting in fear, are one of the reasons why there has been no resolution to separatist conflicts such as the one in Abkhazia. Any peaceful and sustainable solution of these conflicts has to include a division of responsibilities between the centre and the region, while maintaining the territorial integrity of the country. In terms of political science such arrangements are called federalism or autonomy. The main problem of any such

arrangement on the territory of the former Soviet Union seems to lie in historical legacy of federalism and autonomy in the region.

The Soviet model showed how the exercise of autonomy could be dissociated from the exercise of internal self-determination in such a way that autonomy became a substitute for real political power, which was located elsewhere. Out of this experience, the strength of political institutions is primarily seen in terms of relationships of forces and not in legal terms. Therefore separatists strive for the creation of sovereign states, instead of for internal self-determination within existing states. This mistrust of legal arrangements will not be overcome without considerable persuasion over time. The international community, including scholars and practitioners, can assist in this task, but the central governments can also do a lot by establishing functioning local governments, based on democratic structures, which have real competencies and can represent the will of the population at the local and central levels.

In this regard the OSCE must also devote some attention to recent developments in Javakhetia (and other regions as well), where the conflict between local and central authorities could escalate and turn into a national conflict between the Armenian minority and the Georgian-dominated centre. The OSCE, like any other outside actor, is in a very delicate situation here. On one hand, it cannot ignore the (basically economic) problems in this region, and must ensure that these problems do not become the basis for a violent conflict. On the other hand, the OSCE has to be very cautious in order to avoid upgrading the conflict by devoting too much attention to the conflicting parties. The main focus of any involvement has to be conflict prevention rather than post-conflict rehabilitation. Since such risks exist throughout the region, it is also worth looking for ways to tackle these problems within a broader regional framework.

The OSCE and a regional approach for the South Caucasus

The three countries comprising the region of the South Caucasus – Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia – have many aspects in common:

- the historical legacy of the Soviet Union;
- unresolved territorial disputes;
- the difficult challenge of building democratic civil societies with independent media and a functioning justice system based on the rule of law;
- important economic disparities and social polarisation;
- the geo-strategic implications of possible routes for oil transportation; and, above all,
- national and regional concerns regarding security.

All this justifies taking a regional approach to international involvement in the South Caucasus. Since the heads of states of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia have raised the question of regional stability on the margins of the Istanbul Summit, the regional approach is definitely on the political agenda.

Regional approaches or strategies are not unknown to the OSCE. In March 2000 the Permanent Council of the OSCE adopted a Regional Strategy for South-East Europe. For Central Asia, several initiatives, seminars and projects exist in order to address regional problems. In the South Caucasus however, the OSCE lacks a comprehensive strategy for the region. Some elements exist nevertheless. The decision to establish OSCE offices in Yerevan (July 1999) and Baku (November 1999) sends a clear signal that the OSCE wants to further its presence and activities in the region. The offices are mandated to assist Armenia and Azerbaijan to comply with OSCE standards and commitments and to contribute to the building of a civil society. More and more projects and seminars of the OSCE take a regional approach to existing problems, for example the Workshop on Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in the Southern Caucasus, which took place in Tbilisi in May 2000, to promote international standards on IDPs, and their application by governments and NGOs. Seminars of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, among other OSCE activities, also take a regional approach.

The following, and concluding, part of this chapter outlines what the OSCE can and cannot do in order to strengthen regional security in the South Caucasus, bearing in mind that any regional strategy can only support, but not substitute, efforts at country level. The countries, and especially the parliaments, in the region could contribute to this process by co-ordinating their efforts and by concentrating on concrete cross-border initiatives.

Recommendations for a possible OSCE role in strengthening regional security

General principles

- The OSCE should develop a comprehensive and inter-dimensional policy on region-wide and cross-border issues in the South Caucasus, embracing the human, military, economic and ecological dimensions of security.
- The policy must draw on lessons learned and best practices. The countries in the region, NGOs and external think-tanks can provide valuable expertise in this regard.
- The OSCE Permanent Council could set up a working group to explore the possibilities and limits for such a regional approach.
- The OSCE field operations in the region should actively and closely communicate, co-operate, share experience and expertise with each other, and also develop common activities within their mandates.
- Close co-operation is needed with other international organisations, including sub-regional organisations, on the basis of the Platform for Co-operative Security. Among other things, this calls for avoidance of duplication of tasks and a focus on the added value each organisation can provide.
- Should the OSCE decide to develop a formal regional strategy or regional approach for the South Caucasus, it will be necessary to present concrete projects in order to achieve concrete results.
- To replace the institution of the Personal Representative of the Chairman-in-Office for the Caucasus, there could be an OSCE Project Co-ordinator for the Caucasus with the task of co-ordinating the efforts of the different OSCE institutions and liaising with other relevant international and non-governmental organisations.

The human dimension

- The main OSCE Institutions for the Human Dimension (ODIHR, HCNM, Representative on the Freedom of the Media) should co-ordinate their efforts in order to make their already existing projects and initiatives mutually reinforcing.
- Internal displacement is a particular concern in the Caucasus and should therefore be addressed from a regional perspective. The findings of the OSCE Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting on Migration and Internal Displacement (September 2000) could form a starting point.
- The OSCE must assist countries in the region in implementing their OSCE commitments and obligations under international law. In this context, it will be especially important to support initiatives directed at enhancing good governance and strengthening local administrations. The Council of Europe could be the lead agency for this purpose.
- The rule of law remains one of the most important principles for democratic development throughout the region. Corruption and trafficking in human beings are key issues, which ideally should be dealt with regionally.
- Civic diplomacy projects, which involve civil society actors from all parts of the region, are an important contribution to the task of solving the ‘frozen conflicts’.

The military dimension

- It is of utmost importance to support ongoing regional efforts in arms control, as well as in building confidence and security as tools for crisis prevention. For instance, military inspections under the Vienna Document could form part of co-ordinated efforts in conflict prevention in regions where the security situation is deteriorating.
- The OSCE, in conjunction with other international organisations, can support appropriate mechanisms, arrangements and initiatives of (sub) regional co-operation.
- One of the key-elements for any solution of the ‘frozen conflicts’ is the question of security guarantees. A seminar for the South Caucasus on security issues (with a formula which would allow the participation of the de-facto authorities of the separatist entities) could be a starting point.

Economic and ecological dimensions

- The OSCE must put more emphasis on economic and ecological development in its activities in the fields of crisis prevention and post-conflict rehabilitation.
- Because of its limited financial and organisational capacities in this field, the OSCE must focus on informing other donor agencies about target regions and issues where economic development can significantly contribute to conflict prevention and to post-conflict rehabilitation.
- Financial aid to all parties to the conflict must be based on the principle of conditionality: no development programmes without progress in other fields.

Conclusion

There are limits to what the OSCE can attempt, defined by two basic principles. Firstly, the OSCE cannot take the lead in the economic dimension of regional security, but it can co-operate in this regard, for instance with the EU. Secondly, the OSCE, like every other international organisation, is dependent on the efforts of the countries in the region that must play a proactive role in this process. Any regional strategy must be under the local ownership of the region and its people.

The tasks before the OSCE are tremendous. They include problems framed so far in terms of 19th-century concepts of borders and independence, whereas borders will be of decreasing relevance in the Europe of the 21st century. Overcoming such problems will be possible only if efforts are combined in order to contribute to peace and stability and to prosperity for the people in the region. Without such action, the South Caucasus could become a permanent source of conflict and instability, with unpredictable consequences for the whole region and for all of central Europe as well.

4 South Ossetia: a ‘frozen’ conflict

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Introduction

This chapter analyses the OSCE-driven process of attempted peace-making in South Ossetia. Rather than trying to put the blame for its failure on any side, it tries to identify factors of inhibition and constraint as well as the available scope for action. The analysis begins with the perceptions of the major actors, and tries to identify and reconstruct their strategies. Successful negotiators have to address available and realistic options, and must heed the constraints of the sides to a conflict. Underestimating subtle points of sensitivity may be a necessity in certain situations, but is apt to put brakes on the peace process in the long run, by generating unacceptable proposals.

The formal mechanism of the peace-settlement process – Joint Control Commission meetings, experts’ meetings and meetings of political delegations – has played an important role in the stabilisation of the situation³. However, the reduction of the peace settlement process to formal meetings and the adoption of mere political declarations have contributed to the present stalemate. The background realities eclipsed in formal negotiations have to be recognised as a salient element of the situation in which the actors take their decisions and which shapes their strategies and perceptions. These issues have to be addressed openly by the parties to the conflict and by mediators alike.

³ Major OSCE inputs in recent years were the inclusion of the EU in the formal peace settlement mechanism, and the arms decommissioning programme.

Perceptions held by four key parties

The general perceptions of the conflicting parties of each other and of third parties tend to simplify the set of players into either 'good' or 'bad'. This does not apply to the relationship between individual negotiators, which is the result of close face-to-face contacts and therefore highly pragmatic and complex.

Ossetian views

The Ossetians regard Russia as their only reliable partner in the area, and distrust the Georgian negotiators and officials. Despite the assurances of the Georgians that they would contribute to economic rehabilitation in South Ossetia⁴, the Ossetians believe that the real Georgian intention for South Ossetia equates to a policy of economic devastation. The Georgians are also accused of trying to eliminate the Joint Peacekeeping Force (JPKF) and, consequently, Russian military protection. In the absence of Russian military forces, the Ossetians fear that Georgians could take their capital Tskhinvali. It is even suggested that Georgia might ask NATO to intervene on its behalf. There is genuine fear of a Georgian attack on South Ossetia.

South Ossetia views the OSCE as biased in favour of the Georgian cause. Their diplomatic politeness notwithstanding, negotiators make plain their belief that the OSCE mediation and facilitation is unfair and cannot result in a balanced compromise. However, they have to accept that the OSCE represents the international community.

President Dzasokhov of North Ossetia takes a distinct position in the conflict. His perception is probably the most balanced and impartial, although he is a staunch defender of Ossetian national interests and a critic of the slow pace of rehabilitation promised by Moscow. Nevertheless, the president clearly realises that Ossetia is within the Russian sphere of interest, and that it has no other choice than to heed the Russian Federation's strategic interests. He accuses Georgia of letting the South Ossetian economy decay deliberately to the point that return to Georgia would seem a salvation rather than the shameful defeat it would now appear to be. The North Ossetian leader is nevertheless accepted as a fair and honest mediator by the Georgians, in the first line, because he does advocate South Ossetian reintegration into Georgia. President Dzasokhov also fully accepts the OSCE as a facilitator.

Georgian views

The Georgian side sees the genesis of the conflict in a Russian plot against Georgia, arising from mistakes committed by Georgia's first president Zviad Gamsakhurdia. The Georgian negotiators are wary and suspicious about the real intentions of the South Ossetian leaders. Accusations are often heard that the Ossetians are trying to ruin the Georgian economy by failing to stop the illegal trade over the 'Road' (the main North-South passage over the Caucasus mountains from Russia), through North Ossetia, through the Roki Tunnel into Georgia, through South Ossetia. When South Ossetian heavy weapons are at issue, Georgian

⁴ According to official statements, more than 14 M GEL (\$US 7 M) have been transferred from the Georgian state budget to Tskhinvali region up to 1998 for reinvestment and reconstruction. Georgian authorities claim that during the year 1998 alone, a total of 1 million GEL (\$US 500,000) was spent on the reconstruction of 45 houses in Pris and Mamisaantubani (*Skartvelos Respublika*, 5 September 1998).

interlocutors sometimes envisage an imminent Ossetian attack on Georgia. This makes sense only against the background of lingering anxieties about a feared Russian attack.

Russian views

The Russians usually follow the South Ossetian line, but insist that they are not responsible for the conflict but had to start a military intervention in order to establish law and order. The Russians' biggest fear is the idea of a NATO deployment in the area, which they want to avoid at any cost. Their apprehensions are fuelled by the conspicuous Georgian drive to achieve full NATO membership, and they claim to have evidence that NATO shows sympathy for the Georgian advances and is preparing a full takeover in the area. The fact that the US has thrown its weight behind the Georgian bid to get rid of the Russian military bases on the Georgian territory as soon as possible reinforces this perception. Armenia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia are defined as allies, while Georgia is seen as an unreliable, unstable entity, which is a source of trouble, especially in the context of the war in Chechnya.

The OSCE is seen as a necessary evil, a paper tiger that cracks down on Russia concerning the Chechen situation, and sides with the Georgians too often. As a member state, the Russian Federation is nevertheless co-operative, although Moscow's preferred international forum is the UN, where Russia has much greater procedural weight because of its permanent-member status in the Security Council.

OSCE views

The OSCE has traditionally and consistently taken a pro-Georgian stance, which has been largely justified by the importance of upholding the principle of territorial integrity of a member state. In contrast to the UN, the OSCE lacks institutionalised leadership roles, which could provide consistent policies to bridge the watershed between the annual chairmanships. It is therefore difficult to speak of common OSCE perceptions and strategies other than the principles enshrined in OSCE declarations.

The OSCE follows a set of rules and standards of diplomatic conduct that can paralyse the organisation and prevent necessary action from the start. An instructive example is the fate of the draft resolution for the meeting of foreign ministers on 27–28 November 2000, from which the entire section concerning the Caucasus has been deleted because of a lack of consensus on such delicate political issues as the introduction of the visa regime between Russia and Georgia, the assessment of the situation in Chechnya, and the Georgian preoccupation with alleged or real ethnic cleansing in Abkhazia. The shared understanding of the international community about territorial sovereignty is reinforced by the strategic importance of Georgia for influential OSCE players such as the US and Germany. This causes difficulties for the OSCE in the role of facilitator and mediator, since it is rejected in the role by the South Ossetians and viewed suspiciously by the Russians.

Strategies and negotiation styles

South Ossetia

The South Ossetian bid for independence must be understood in the context of a more realistic goal: to be integrated into the Russian economic and cultural space. The calls for the 'unity of the Ossetian people' also must be interpreted in the light of North Ossetia's own difficulties. North Ossetian ritualistic assertions of the bonds between the two Ossetias are not necessarily the expression of their readiness to support their Southern cousins at all costs.

South Ossetia's main arguments are to be found in the economic sphere. There has been no recovery since the end of open hostilities; on the contrary, the industrial infrastructure that survived the war has completely decayed by now. The Ossetian insistence on economic rehabilitation is based on a legitimate need. In the absence of major capital infusions, the South Ossetian leadership depends on the Road as its only source of income. All proposals intending to eliminate or reduce this income, or entailing such a result, are therefore rejected under various pretexts.

Georgia

Georgia's hard-won independence led to the breakaway of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, whose leaders felt threatened by the Georgian attempt to redistribute, in favour of the central authorities, budgets and administrative positions hitherto held by local elites. The conflicts in both regions were styled into ethnic and even religious disputes, although, especially in the Ossetian case, the cultural differences are minimal and there is a high percentage of ethnically mixed families. The recent leadership has renounced the strategy of a purely military solution as pursued by the first Georgian President Zviad Gamsakhurdia, although it maintains some of the earlier measures as bargaining points, for example the official name ('Tskhinvali Region') for South Ossetia.

The main Georgian strategy seems to be to rely on the international community for political, material and military support. Reflecting strong nationalistic feelings under President Gamsakhurdia, Georgia tried to shed Russian influence. The new Georgian leadership under President Shevardnadze then realised that it had to take Russian strategic interests into account and tried to strike a bargain with Moscow, suggesting to trade the return of Abkhazia under Georgian control for the entry of Georgia into the CIS and the acceptance of the Russian military presence in Georgia. Russia did not agree to this trade and Georgia began to look for Western protection.

Within the OSCE, Georgia is backed by a powerful lobby headed by the United States and by Germany. Germany owes loyalty to President Shevardnadze and has considerable involvement in the Georgian economy. The US has directly and indirectly already invested hundreds of millions of dollars into Georgia's ailing economy because of US strategic interests in the Caucasian transport corridor.

Given this context, the Georgian strategy in South Ossetia appears logical. Georgia refuses to invest in the economic rehabilitation of the region, claiming that it has no money to do so, and appealing to international donors instead. The most that Georgia is ready to offer South Ossetia is 'the broadest possible autonomy', which is understood to mean cultural rights and a

say in local administration. The South Ossetians would have no influence on the distribution of financial resources and, at least officially, have been offered no direct share in the income derived from the Road. There are reports of Georgian attempts to prevent larger-scale business investment from which the South Ossetian economy would profit as a whole⁵. The tacit strategy then is to prevent economic recovery until the South Ossetians rethink their position.

Militarily, the Georgians are convinced that South Ossetia will be easily overpowered by them, once the Russians have left. Their strategy, therefore, is first to dilute Russian military presence by an internationalisation of the JPKF, and then to provoke a Russian pull-out by replacing the present model with an international peacekeeping contingent composed of representatives of Georgia-friendly states.

Russian Federation

The dissolution of the Soviet Union also shattered its rather well-defined and consistent regional strategy. Today, Russian policy in the region appears inconsistent. The most conspicuous example is that the Russian Federation consistently confirms the territorial integrity of Georgia, but also uses the Abkhazian and Ossetian *de facto* independence for political leverage on Georgia. Nevertheless, the Russian Federation is the single most important player in South Ossetia.

Russia's major interests in the South Caucasus are to discourage NATO influence and to control the oil transport routes. Russia has therefore tried to ensure a presence in the area, using various means, ranging from maintaining military bases⁶ and peacekeeping forces in the zones of crisis to more or less open political threats and pressure. Russian military presence in South Ossetia is realised through the Russian contingent of the JPKF, which is subordinated to the 58th Army in the North Caucasus. Although the JPKF consists of Russian, South Ossetian and Georgian components, the Georgian and South Ossetian detachments are badly equipped and play a more or less nominal role: the Russians control the JPKF

The Chechen situation also plays a role in Russia's policy towards Georgia. Indeed, Moscow has asked Georgia to tolerate the use of Georgian border territory for military operations against the Chechen insurgents and to clear the Pankisi valley from Chechen fighters, who frequently use the area as a hideaway⁷. The Georgians declined and invited the OSCE to deploy a border-monitoring mission along the Chechen section of the Russian–Georgian

⁵ For example, it took years for the Georgian/South Ossetian mineral water company 'Bagiati' to obtain the necessary clearance to market its brand in Georgia. Investments by international donor organisations such as the EU Platforms for South Ossetia are usually supported as they accompany unique possibilities for enrichment.

⁶ The issue of the bases was not settled at the OSCE Istanbul Summit of November 1999, when the revised CFE treaty was signed. The Russian reading of the treaty diverges radically from the Georgian interpretation. While the tank-repair facility in Vaziani will be evacuated, the airstrip is, according to the Russian proposals, to be used jointly by Georgian and Russian forces. The Gudauta base, which according to the wording of the treaty is to be dissolved by July 2001, should, according to the Russian proposals, be handed over to the CIS Peacekeeping Forces to serve as an R&R facility. There is no firm date for the dissolution of the two other bases (Akhalkalaki and Batumi). Batumi could serve as the new location of the radar facility that controls the entire Black Sea area.

⁷ Moscow's decision of December 2000 to introduce a visa regime for Georgian citizens (with the exception of Abkhaz and South Ossetian residents) is the most recent attempt to pressure Georgia towards concessions in this area.

border. However, the OSCE mandate for this (to “observe movements on foot or on vehicles...across the border” and report on them) is very limited.

The eventual signing of the Economic Rehabilitation Agreement on 23 December 2000 can be interpreted as a sign of Russia’s willingness to compromise and to contribute to the peace settlement. The agreement is a declaration of intent to rehabilitate South Ossetia’s economy, although no firm financial obligations of either side are specified. (Russia delivers energy to Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and presents the bill to the Georgians. The signing of the Economic Agreement was delayed for three years because of the Russian demand to make Georgia liable for costs of electricity supplied by Russia to South Ossetia.)

It appears that all sides regard the status quo in South Ossetia as a less than ideal solution, but as something better than a compromise that violates vital interests.

Negotiation styles and practice

Both Georgian and South Ossetian studies on the recent conflict usually take a historical approach, and different periods in the troubled relationship of the two ethnic groups are frequently invoked during negotiations. The Ossetian side claims that the Ossetian people have settled in Ossetia since times immemorial and therefore have a legitimate claim to its territory⁸. The second argument states that the Ossetians have been victims of Georgian aggression twice in the 20th century and that the Ossetians had legitimate grievances that made them seek Russian support⁹. The Georgian interpretation of history features Georgians as the ‘agents of Christian civilisation’ destined to fight the ‘Eastern/Islamic barbarians’¹⁰, which, at times and somewhat illogically, can be replaced by the ‘Russian/Communist threat’.

The emphasis given to historical argument can be explained by cultural factors: Yet, there is also a pragmatic explanation: Ossetian insistence on a formal Georgian acceptance of the responsibility for the conflict could produce a legal entitlement for indemnity claims.

⁸ The most plausible hypothesis about the time of the main immigration flow of ethnic Ossetians to today’s South Ossetian territory maintains that in the 13th and 14th centuries the powerful Kingdom of Ossetia in the plains of the North Caucasus was destroyed by the Mongols under Temur Leng. As a result, thousands of Ossetians crossed the Caucasus to the South to seek refuge. (Sovietskaia Ossetia November 1988, *Literaturuli Sakartvelo*, 9 December 1988, p.10).

⁹ According to Georgian sources, in a friendship treaty between the Republic of Georgia and Russia (7 May 1920) South Ossetia was definitely recognised by Russia as integral part of Georgia under the name Tiflis Gubernia. South Ossetia however did not agree to be kept within the territorial framework of Georgia and declared independence as a Soviet Republic on 8 June 1920. When the Georgian army crushed the South Ossetian move, Russia issued a note of protest, considering the military action as intervention into the internal affairs of the SSR of South Ossetia.

¹⁰ “In order to spread its religion, language and culture, the Georgian State built churches in the Northern Caucasus, making Georgian inscriptions on their walls. The purpose of this was to georgianise some of the peoples inhabiting the Caucasian Mountains. The Ossetians came under strong Georgian influence.” Mariam Lordkipanidze, *Essays on Georgian History*, Tbilisi ‘Metsniereba’ 1994, pp.129–130); see also Zviad Gamsakhurdia, *The Spiritual Mission of Georgia*, Ganatleba, Tbilisi 1991, pp.17–18: “Essentially, Georgian Christianity may be said to be militant Christianity. It is a Christianity of knights, fighters, and it may be said also that Georgia was a single spiritual Order of St. George, and it was perceived as such by the Crusaders and by foreign visitors of the country, this leading to the establishment of the designation Georgia, which of course comes from the pagan period.”

The case of the EU platform

Since 1999 the European Union has established itself as the major player in the peace-settlement process. While the impact of political negotiations under OSCE auspices is questionable, the large-scale EU rehabilitation programs or ‘platforms’ (of up to EURO 3 million annually) have the potential to facilitate *rapprochement* between Georgia and South Ossetia.

The 1999 EU platform was a cleverly conceived document that in effect proposed a political bargain. The platform offers EU liability for Ossetian payment defaults for electricity supply from the Enguri power station, and support for the rehabilitation of the railway link between Gori and Tskhinvali as well as that of the Tskhinvali gas supply system. As a result, the Georgian Enguri power station would receive payment in cash and a further step towards the re-integration of the economies would be taken. The proceeds from the energy supplies to South Ossetia were to be invested in the Enguri power plant, Tskhinvali would have a stable electricity supply and Georgian banks would have to open subsidiaries in Tskhinvali. The platform was finally signed in July 2000, although its impact on the political process is doubtful since the South Ossetians seem reluctant to ‘trade their independence for electricity’.

The ‘Baden process’

The major event of the Vienna/Baden meeting¹¹ was originally launched to encourage expert groups of both sides to finish the draft of a document hoped to form the basis of a future peace accord. After multiple and lengthy debates, the negotiations on guarantees for a future peace agreement ended in an impasse, since the Georgian side insisted on an internationalisation of the peacekeeping force, while the South Ossetians considered the JPKF to be the only acceptable military guarantor. Thus the question of the future status of South Ossetia, and the nature of its relationship with Georgia, was hardly discussed at all. Whether the Vienna/Baden process was the ‘psychological breakthrough’ it was sometimes claimed to be is a matter of interpretation. However, it became clear at this point that the major problems concerning South Ossetia could not be resolved by conventional means (including conventional warfare).

¹¹ A detailed account of this meeting from the Russian perspective can be found in VF Grunin, Yuzhnaya Osetiya-10 let respublike, www.newstime.ru, 13 December 2000.

The mechanism of peace prevention

A resolution of the South Ossetian conflict does not depend on only the will and the effort of individual players. It is conditioned by the interplay of factors that act on the level of larger, collective perceptions, strategies and structures. The following factors may be identified as obstacles to progress on a peace settlement:

Economic interests

More or less legitimate economic interests are probably one of the most important aspects of the conflict, and of the difficulty of its resolution. As mentioned above, the economic value of South Ossetia lies in its position on the 'Road' across the mountains. Illegal imports along the Road cause a huge loss to the Georgian state budget. Numerous attempts by the Georgian Ministry of Finance to diminish the losses caused by the Georgian–Ossetian shadow economy have failed under the impact of powerful trade interests. The main goods brought from Russia are fuels and cereals, which are sold on the Falloy market in Ergneti village in the neutral zone, considered the largest duty-free market in the Caucasus. Citrus fruits from Georgia go in the opposite direction.

Apart from the proceeds from the duty-free sales, the South Ossetians also levy a road toll in tandem with the authorities of those Georgian villages through which the Road snakes its way up to the Roki pass. The profits from illegal trade are estimated at \$US 60–70 million per year. It seems highly improbable that illegal trade of such magnitude is carried out without the participation of authorities in Tskhinvali and Tbilisi. Therefore, information to the effect that leading executives of the state security structures in both cities are actively involved is highly credible. As described in the UN Human Development Report for Georgia, “clans in control of importing goods such as cigarettes and oil (among others) often possess a sophisticated structure for distribution. Smuggling is rampant and deals and bribes to customs officials are common currency”¹².

Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that the status quo seems more desirable and profitable than a return to democratic and legal structures. In addition, South Ossetia would be the losing partner if it were to reintegrate with Georgia, as it sees no prospects for economic recovery, nor any advantage to orderly administration. This preference for the status quo could be changed only if the South Ossetian economy becomes less dependent on the Road.

Russian interests

Russia's willingness to solve the South Ossetian conflict is dependent on Georgia's willingness to heed Russian strategic interests in the area. As outlined above, Russia has used various channels to pressure Georgia to be more responsive to Russian demands: introduction of the visa regime is only the most recent example. Other means to increase pressure on Georgia centre on debt restructuring and energy supplies.

¹² UNDP, *Human Development Report Georgia 2000*, Tbilisi 2000, p.70.

Ossetian internal politics

The Ossetian bid for independence – or unification with Russia – is the only common denominator between the conflicting elites in Tskhinvali, and diminishes the struggle for power among Ossetian political contenders.

Mutual distrust

The relationship between South Ossetia and Georgia is one of mutual distrust. The South Ossetians have observed Georgian unwillingness to engage in economic rehabilitation and the non-delivery of promises because of incompetence and corruption; and the Georgians have an equally long list of complaints.

Lack of concrete progress on the ground

Despite grassroots co-operation across ethnic boundaries, the many chances to improve the relationship on the ground have failed to produce tangible results for the population. One example is the return of refugees and IDPs: despite internationally sponsored resettlement programmes, the return of Ossetians and Georgian refugees and IDPs has been slow. Aid resources, such as building materials for the reconstruction of houses, have not always reached the intended beneficiaries.

Another example of thwarted progress is the attempt at joint law enforcement. Ground-rules for co-operation between law enforcement agencies are outlined in the Java Protocol (1999) and the Gori Protocol (2000). Both documents spell out the principle that convicted criminals should serve their sentences in the prison facilities of the areas in which they were arrested. This rule has the objective of eliminating the practice of both sides of exchange detainees and then releasing them immediately after extradition. Since the Gori Protocol has been signed by the South Ossetians under the proviso of upholding the residence principle (sentences to be served in the place of residence), the outlook for progress in this area is bleak.

Benefits for negotiators

For both Georgians and South Ossetians, travelling abroad is a source of prestige and personal benefits. The donor organisations in most cases provide *per diem* payments or other benefits. In addition, travelling to Europe or North America is also an opportunity to enjoy an environment free of electricity cuts, heating failures and supply difficulties. The fact that Georgian and South Ossetian negotiators have been together for numerous formal and informal meetings has led to certain camaraderie and a kind of corporate identity of the core group. Civic-diplomacy projects have relatively limited potential: they can intensify contacts among professionals from both sides but cannot surmount essential opposition. Even the very skilfully designed and executed programme of the CMG (Harvard Conflict Management Group) is in danger from the '*per diem* culture'.

Prospects for conflict settlement

There are several, interlinked factors that might, at some point and against the odds, promote a resolution of the conflict in South Ossetia: political fatigue, democratisation and authoritarianism (as detailed in the following paragraphs). Which combination of these factors could be conducive to a solution? If re-integration into Georgia and some form of independence (a Russian protectorate of sorts) are accepted as the most likely outcomes, the fatigue factor, combined with the advent of a new political generation, could produce progress towards peace. As mentioned above in this chapter, the dispute between South Ossetia and Georgia may be a 'frozen' conflict, but it has a tendency to thaw in winter, when Tskhinvali is in need of Georgian energy.

Political fatigue

There is widespread political fatigue and disengagement among both Georgian and South Ossetian people. Observers have related this phenomenon to the lasting impact of the Soviet system, or to the effects of distant historical events. The lack of rule of law, and the absence of a civil society able to articulate individual and critical positions reinforce the populations' passive attitude. Intensive and costly attempts made by various international organisations in recent years to foster civil society in Georgia and South Ossetia have led to the paradoxical effect of local NGOs reproducing the clannish structures of the society to the detriment of an open networking process.

As a result, the belief of Georgians and Ossetians in political efficacy is low; politics is viewed as a game played by a select circle, and a major goal in life is to 'beat the system'. Civic behaviour such as paying taxes or generally abiding the law is perceived as foolishness at best and as a betrayal of family at worst. Similar disenchantment has also permeated the politically active elites, which profit from the system that tries to ensure their loyalty by including them in the system of rampant corruption and providing them with material perks, privileges and prestige.

Almost a decade of unfulfilled hopes has frustrated the South Ossetian elites and general public alike, who openly express their dismay and fatigue with the peace-settlement process. The more that their leaders try to persuade them to back their strategies, the more they are estranged from them. In contrast to the political declarations, a majority of Georgians and South Ossetians do not have strong opinions about the eventual state of 'the Republic of South Ossetia' or 'Tskhinvali Region'. Shared business interests are the most powerful factor of reintegration.

Democratisation

In both Georgia and South Ossetia, political elites compete openly for power. They may not prefer democratic tools to win and to wield power, but they use elections among other methods. ODIHR has rated the Georgian parliamentary and presidential elections as 'fairly free' despite some outrageous manipulations. The elections produced the result that they were expected to generate by the ruling groups: a solid majority in parliament for the pro-presidential party. In South Ossetia, parliamentary elections created an awkward situation. The majority leader, Stanislav Kochiev, implemented investigation committees looking into privatisation and other deals profiting the ruling elite. Over the long-term, however,

democratic procedures could promote political forces that, in response to widespread political fatigue, prefer pragmatic solutions to ideological purity.

Authoritarianism

For a resolution of the South Ossetian conflict, authoritarianism can, somewhat paradoxically, be an asset. Georgian and Ossetian interlocutors share the view that the final solution of a political breakthrough can be achieved only at the political pinnacles, between the two presidents. However, this is dependent upon both presidents accepting a compromise. Most importantly, self-similarity in politics promotes empathy, a shared understanding of standards of conduct, contexts and rules. Two authoritarian presidents may be able to discuss common fundamental issues more readily than Western mediators socialised in democratic societies with their strict rules of political correctness, high standards of political and economic accountability and traditions of liberal and rational discourse.

Recommendations for action

If South Ossetia is to return to control by Georgia¹³, the strategies of all partners to the peace-settlement process have to be reshaped. The international community could concentrate on the following tasks.

- Trust-building has to focus on guaranteeing unimpeded and unreduced money transfer to the Ossetian destinations of aid programmes and projects. Intra- and inter-agency supervision by independent organisations is absolutely imperative.
- Projects should focus on the creation of jobs outside the Road.
- Georgia should be advised to lower the high tariffs and excises in order to make corruption less profitable.
- Access could be considered for South Ossetia to international fora such as the OSCE Permanent Council. This would improve the position of the OSCE as mediator, and create a more realistic perception of the outer world among the isolated South Ossetians.

¹³ Other scenarios are anathema to the international community, but not to scientists. See Birch, 1995 (listed in the bibliography below), p. 183. The proposals of the Harvard Conflict Management Group Dialogue Project (1996) also deviate significantly from the OSCE line (see <http://www.cmgonline.org/caucasus/dialogue.html>).

5 Some psychological factors of the Georgian–Abkhazian conflict

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In any conflict there are at least two sides involved, and it is rare for any one side to be completely in the right, and the other to be completely and fully to blame. As a rule, both sides have weak points, but the rivals make every effort to exaggerate the faults of the opposing side and to minimise the significance of their own. In contrast, a much more constructive situation can be created when the sides assess each other relatively objectively, not fearing to admit their own mistakes and thus try to resolve the conflict, peacefully, and in a way acceptable to each other. But this rarely happens.

This is true of all conflicts, including those that over the past decade have exerted such heavy pressure on the people of Georgia. These conflicts are characterised by many factors, political, economic, historical, and so on. Psychological aspects also have a place in this list, and include mutual stereotypes, feelings and emotions, which can prompt one side or the other side to carry out hostile acts. This chapter attempts to analyse the profound psychological and cultural factors that have played a serious role in igniting the Georgian–Abkhazian conflict, creating mutual distrust, hate and the ‘image of an enemy’.

Georgian ethnocentrism

In sociology, the concept of ethnocentrism implies that the representatives of a given culture tend to use values and criteria accepted in their own circles to evaluate the representatives of other nations. For example, it often happens that a certain item is part of the diet of one nation, but is not used as food by other peoples, or even evokes revulsion; this may give rise to a humorous nickname for the neighbours (such as ‘frogs’, or ‘macaroni-eaters’) and may be considered an undeniable sign of the superiority of one’s own nation. Plenty of intercultural differences can, of course, be found in other spheres and each one of them can be used as a basis for ethnocentric stereotypes. Ultimately, ethnocentrism may be regarded as a defence mechanism, by which individuals raise their self-esteem by idealising the characteristics of one of their own main identifiers (of their own nation) and by belittling the corresponding characteristics of other nations.

A greater or lesser degree of ethnocentrism is characteristic of all ethnic groups, albeit in different forms. In some nations it is the custom to emphasise the great antiquity of the group, or pre-eminence in a particular field; others look for compatriots among the close relatives of outstanding world figures; in a third group the feeling of one’s own uniqueness and ‘greatness’ grows out of control and turns into hatred of other nations, if only temporarily.

Ethnocentrism is fully and clearly expressed among the Georgians in an idiosyncratic but not unique way. A Georgian has no particular difficulty in admitting that other nations (especially big and powerful ones) are more powerful, richer, more industrious, even cleverer, but nevertheless feels that all non-Georgians lack something essential, the ‘zest’ of an understanding of life (which is hard to express in words), and this places members of other ethnic groups on a lower plane. In relationships with any foreigner, this defines a non-aggressive, rather benevolent but at the same time ironic and supercilious attitude. In this sense, Georgian ethnocentrism reveals a similarity with the English one, despite the huge difference between the two cultures –in England they say (or at least, they used to say): ‘It’s not his fault he wasn’t born English’.

It must be noted that Georgian ethnocentrism has played a defining and positive role historically – in enabling the preservation of the national sense of identity, and in having defined among powerful nations (Turks, Iranians, Russians) an ambivalent but nevertheless respectful attitude towards the Georgians.

However, Georgian defensive superciliousness manifests itself also in relations with small nations, including those on and next to Georgian territory. And it is here that the dark aspects of such a situation clearly emerge. The attitude described may not represent a threat to the representative of a large ethnic group, in terms of national identity and self-esteem, but this is different for the representative of a small ethnic group. The demonstration of dominance, even if non-aggressive, is a direct threat to identity, and may express itself at first as irritation, and then may, as a result of propaganda from interested powers, turn into hatred. The development of inter-ethnic relations against such a background is not doomed – there are many examples of national minorities living in Georgia, (e.g. the Kurds) who have excellent relations with the Georgians. However, relations with the Abkhazians went exactly according to the scenario described; this can be explained in terms of the ‘psychological status’ of the Abkhazian people.

Abkhazian enmity

The declaration by the Soviet Union of itself as the ‘most progressive’ form of state in the world brought with it serious obligations. In terms of nationality, it meant that the ethnic groups that constituted the USSR had to be equally ‘socialist’ and ‘progressive’ even though they were at very different stages of development. The introduction of ‘civilising elements’ (such as state structures, education and healthcare systems, methods of production and so on) was therefore started on the scale of the whole state, which included pre-industrial cultures. This is exactly what happened to the Abkhazians, with one additional feature: in Abkhazia a fashionable health spa was constructed. It was the dream of every person living in the USSR to come here, including representatives of the elite of the ‘civilising’ nationality – the Russians.

This led to an inadequate growth in self-esteem; gradually the conviction developed that the only obstacle in the way of the ‘great Abkhazian people’ acquiring their rightful status was Georgia and the Georgians. Firstly, the Georgian majority living in Abkhazia included very powerful competitors to the Abkhazians in the sphere of ‘exploiting’ the tourists. Secondly, Abkhazia was for administrative purposes part of Georgia, so in the Abkhazian consciousness, Georgians and Abkhazians, in relation to Russia, were perceived at least as equivalent entities. This was of course an illusion. The concept of the ‘complexity of a culture’ is based on the idea that: the greater the number of social groups, institutions, specialities, the greater the degree of variation in public opinion (in Abkhazia for example, unlike Georgia, even the rudiments of dissident thought were unimaginable), and the more complex the culture. In this respect there was precisely the same relationship between the Abkhazians and the Georgians as there was between the Georgians and the Russians.

It was not easy to suppress this situation, expressed verbally, and then as printed Abkhazian propaganda, in the face of support from Russia and superciliousness from Georgia. The legend grew that it was the childhood dream of every Georgian to annihilate all Abkhazians. Stalin and Beria were declared to be the executors of this malicious plan (the question never arose of why these very same activists did not resort to the measures which they had applied without hesitation in dealing with the Crimean Tatars, the Chechens, Ingushetians, Turk-Meskhetians and other nationalities).

Today Abkhazia is unique as an apologist for Soviet structure and thought – including emphasis on conformity of thought, constant cultivation of the image of an enemy, complete pre-eminence of politics and ideology over economics and human rights, rigid monitoring of information and foreign travel. It is not easy to destroy such an authoritarian regime, but it will be necessary if Georgians and Abkhazians are to find a common language. In turn, many ideas dominant in the Georgian mentality and way of life are in no way conducive to serious work towards resolving the conflict. Such limiting characteristics include a lack of thought on the part of the state, ethnocentrism, a desire for revenge in some parts of society, and Georgians inability to admit their own share of blame for the conflict (‘It’s all Russia’s fault’).

The possible application of conflict-resolution theory

As the Georgian–Abkhazian conflict has many causes, so it follows that work towards its resolution must be carried out along several lines, including political and psychological. Although some progress has been evident on both sides, the conflict is now practically frozen. Politicians from the two sides meet from time to time; UN and OSCE missions show a limited amount of activity, but there are no noticeable changes overall.

Economic ties between Georgia and Abkhazia are limited to smuggling. Within the framework of some international programmes, Georgian–Abkhazian meetings have been organised between representatives of NGOs and even combatants. Between successive meetings, there is a clear softening of participants’ attitudes. However, national diplomacy has so far failed to bring about any changes in public opinion – political rhetoric and ideology dominate. The impression is being created that certain influential forces have an interest in maintaining the status quo, and that on the opposing sides there is insufficient desire and know-how to find ways to bridge the gaps.

Meanwhile, over the past decades the theory of conflict resolution has developed into a separate field of knowledge. Textbooks are published, courses of lectures are run, and practical work is carried out. While there are undoubted successes of the new approach in resolving interpersonal and organisational conflicts, the situation with regard to inter-ethnic conflicts is more complicated. There are only a few examples of the theory of conflict resolution being successfully applied in this sphere (South Africa, Israel and Egypt).

Could the Georgian–Abkhazian conflict be used in some way as a ‘laboratory’ for the full-scale application of modern conflict-resolution methods, under the aegis of an authoritative international organisation? Such an initiative would face many difficulties, in the first instance of a political and financial nature. But does not the value of experience to be gained outweigh all expenses?

Appendix

The Mandate of the OSCE-Mission to Georgia in reference to the Georgian–Ossetian conflict has been defined as follows:

1. facilitate the creation of a broader political framework in which a political settlement can be achieved on the basis of CSCE (now OSCE) principles and commitments
2. intensify discussions with all parties to the conflict, including through the organization of roundtables, in order to identify and seek to eliminate sources of tension and extend political reconciliation throughout the area of conflict
3. make recommendations regarding the early convening of an international conference under CSCE auspices and with the participation of the United Nations, aimed at the resolution of the conflict, including the definition of the political status of Southern Ossetia
4. in pursuit of the monitoring role concerning the joint peacekeeping forces, establish appropriate forms of contact with the military commander of the forces within the overall context of the CSCE negotiating efforts, gather information on the military situation, investigate violations of the existing ceasefire and call local commanders' attention to possible political implications of specific military actions
5. be actively involved in the reconvened Joint Control Commission to facilitate co-operation with and among the parties concerned
6. establish contact with local authorities and representatives of the population and maintain a visible CSCE presence throughout the area

(for further information see: www.osce.org/georgia/mandate.htm)

The original text of the Joint Statement of Russia and Georgia, signed on 17 November 1999 in Istanbul, reads as follows:

1. *The Russian side undertakes to reduce, by no later than 31 Dec 2000 the levels of its TLE located within the territory of Georgia in such a way that they will not exceed 153 tanks, 241 ACVs and 140 artillery systems.*
2. *No later than 31 December 2000 the Russian side will withdraw (dispose of) the TLE located at the Russian military bases at Vaziani and Gudauta and at the repair facilities in Tbilisi.
The Russian military bases at Gudauta and Vaziani will be disbanded and withdrawn by 1 July 2001. The issue of the utilization, including the joint utilization, of the military facilities and infrastructure of the disbanded Russian military bases remaining at those locations will be resolved within the same time-frame.*
3. *The Georgian Side undertakes to grant to the Russian Side the right to basic temporary deployment of its TLE at facilities of the Russian military bases at Batumi and Akhalkalaki.*
4. *The Georgian Side will facilitate the creation of the conditions necessary for reducing and withdrawing the Russian forces. In this connection, the two sides note the readiness of OSCE participating States to provide financial support for this process.*
5. *During the year 2000 the two Sides will complete negotiations regarding the duration and modalities of the functioning of the Russian military bases at Batumi and Akhalkalaki and the Russian military facilities within the territory of Georgia.*

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OSCE Mission to Georgia can be found at: <http://www.osce.org/georgia/index.php3>

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