

TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY AND IDENTITY WITHIN THE REPUBLIC OF GEORGIA:
A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY OF AJARIA, ABKHAZIA AND SOUTH OSSETIA

BY

KATHRYN BUTTERWORTH

THESIS

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Adviser:

Professor Carol Skalnik-Leff

Abstract

The presence of de-facto independent entities infringe on Georgia's traditional perception of its territorial integrity and importantly, inhibit the consolidation of its democracy. Imperative to an understanding of the Abkhazian and South Ossetian 'frozen conflicts' necessitates an understanding of regional histories, domestic politics, international involvement, territorial claims and the composition of ethnic identities. Further, examination of the reasons why the Autonomous Republic of Ajaria did not transition to a separatist region, as did Abkhazia and South Ossetia, provides a useful analytical marker from which one can discern the complexities of Georgia's situation. Using Barbara Walter's work regarding reputation building as a framework for examination of the political dimension of separatist conflicts as well as Monica Toft's work on the territorial aspect of conflict provides the theoretical anchor for this research. It is a result of differences on all analytical fronts that the current political status of Ajaria as an Autonomous Republic within the Republic of Georgia is ultimately subject and accountable to the Georgian government. Likewise, the de-facto independent condition of both Abkhazia and South Ossetia results from disparity regarding its history, geographic location, territorial resources and domestic politics. Currently, Georgia aims to join the security paradigm constructed by NATO and the United States, as well as reaping the benefits of eventual membership in the European Union. In response to a Georgian trajectory now oriented toward Europe, Russia is resolved to serve as the guarantor of Abkhazian and South Ossetian independence as well as their further integration into Russia's political sphere via the signing of substantive bi-lateral agreements. Thus, Abkhazia and South Ossetia are at the epicenter of the fight for regional hegemony and the balance of power in South Caucasus.

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INTRODUCTION

CHALLENGES TO GEORGIAN STATENESS

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, many newly independent states struggled with democratic transition. Aside from tumultuous economic problems, some post-Soviet states were also home to multiple ethnic minorities who laid claim to the same territory as the newly sovereign state. This was and is the case between Azerbaijan and Armenia regarding Nagorno-Karabakh. This stateness problem also pertains to Georgia regarding its separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Stateness, defined by Stepan and Linz, is essentially the incongruence of "...the territorial boundaries of the political community's state and profound differences as to who has the right of citizenship in that state..."¹ As a sovereign state in 1918 to 1921 and after 1991, Georgia had challenges to its stateness.

This paper seeks to explore endogenous and external forces influencing the maintenance or loss of territorial integrity in the Republic of Georgia, ultimately attempting to identify the conditions which allowed Georgia to maintain its territorial integrity with regard to Ajaria but sustain losses concerning Abkhazia and South Ossetia. It will examine the political, economic and social conditions within Ajaria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in order to better understand their respective trajectories.

In order to contextualize this research project, I draw on theoretical frames developed by Barbara Walter and Monica Toft, and will explore five dimensions of Georgia's post-independence conflict. First, the historical dimension provides a logical map to the evolution of the relationship of Ajaria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia to the Georgian state and to how the

¹ Juan Jose Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Transition and Consolidation*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 16.

conflicts, that at times were contemporaneous to one another, played out in the course of history. Second, the nature of the domestic political situation in these territories. What are the characteristics of each sub-system, how do they differ or compare to one another? What are the mechanisms sustaining the current government framework? What is the nature and degree of comparability between grievances among all three? The third dimension encompasses the international influence in the three regions, particularly during times of a surge in conflict. What role did supranational organizations such as the OSCE and the European Union, as well as the United States and Russia play in determining the course of these conflicts? Fourth, the geographic and territorial dimension and the concordant socio-economic components are equally as important. For instance, what is the nature of cross-border kin relationships regarding South and North Ossetia? Are there strategic and economic assets that render certain regions more pertinent? The fifth dimension will focus on the constitution of ethnic identities in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Ajaria and Georgia with the intent of examining how the conception of these identities played out in policymaking in the Soviet and Post-Soviet periods.

Theory: Reputation Building and Indivisibility of Territory

The framing for this project draws on several theoretical perspectives. Barbara F. Walter's conceptualization of state calculation of reputation when facing multiple ethnic challengers is particularly relevant to the case of Georgia.² Walter notes that reputation building is logical if there is potential for future irredentist or separatist movements.³ Reputation building is premised on an economic model put forth by Reinhard Selten. The "chain store paradox" essentially holds

² Barbara F. Walter, *Reputation and Civil War: Why Separatist Conflicts Are So Violent*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 3-5.

³ Ibid. 24

that given the threat of a price war in one location, potential competitors will not enter into a market in that or any other locations dominated by an established store.⁴ The threat or engagement in price war will discourage potential competitors. Walter uses this model to diagram conflict situations in order to understand the relationships between a government and ethnic groups making separatist appeals.⁵ Walter argues that governments will take into account current interests when considering compromise but will equally account for the effect a decision will have on other potential challengers.⁶ Walter also notes that just as governments are actively forward thinking, so too are ethnic groups who have the capacity to make separatist appeals. A government willing to negotiate once gives encouragement that it might be willing to negotiate again.⁷ A domino effect is exactly what multi-ethnic states like Georgia want to avoid and why it is advantageous to engage in reputation building. As separatist regions, Abkhazia and South Ossetia not only infringe on Georgia's territorial integrity but also ensure its frailty as a democracy.

Donald Horowitz uses a variation of Lewis Coser's definition and posits that conflict "...is a struggle in which the aim is to gain objectives and simultaneously to neutralize, injure, or otherwise eliminate rivals."⁸ However, the multifarious influences, that stretch in both breadth and depth, render settling on a theory somewhat cumbersome. As Horowitz notes in his book *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, theories of modernization concerning ethnicity, as well as theories which most prominently emphasize the juxtaposition of the forces of modernity with those of the

⁴ Library of Economics and Liberty. "The Concise Encyclopedia of Economics: Reinhard Selten." Accessed December 16, 2014. <http://www.econlib.org/library/Enc/bios/Selten.html>.

⁵ Walter, Barbara F. "Building Reputation: Why Governments Fight Some Separatists but Not Others." *American Journal of Political Science* 50 (2006): 314, <http://www.jstor.org.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/stable/3694275>.

⁶ Ibid. 313

⁷ Walter, Barbara F. *Reputation and Civil War: Why Separatist Conflicts Are So Violent*. 27

⁸ Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 95.

past, maintain that modernizing forces create an antagonistic environment that can serve as an incubator for ethnic violence. Horowitz notes that while modernizing forces can and often do influence ethnic conflict, as a theory it falls short in explaining the impetus of those who are not in the elite class.⁹ He substantiates his case by highlighting that "...ethnic conflict (and so much ethnic conflict that has gone as far as civil war) has occurred in some of the least modernized areas of the world: Chad, Ethiopia, the Southern Sudan, Mauritania, the mountainous areas of Iraq, Northeast India, the periphery of Burma, and Papua New Guinea."¹⁰ One might add South Ossetia and possibly Abkhazia, though to a lesser degree, to such a list.

Additionally, the paper will draw from Monica Toft's argument in *The Geography of Ethnic Violence* in order to adequately address the geographic and territorial dimensions of challenge to the state. Importantly, Toft proposes a theory regarding the indivisibility of territory as it is conceived in the mind of both the ethnic group making separatist appeals for the territory on which it resides, and the state that perceives this claim as a threat to its territorial integrity and thus inseparable.¹¹

Several components of her framework offer useful analytic tools. First, one of the conditions which allows for claims of self-determination stems directly from regional clustering of an ethnic group within a state, particularly if appeals for self determination are accompanied by historical claims to that territory.¹² Unsurprisingly, she finds a positive correlation between the length of time an ethnic group has resided in a region and the propensity for violence.¹³

⁹ Ibid. 102.

¹⁰ Ibid. 102-103.

¹¹ Monica Duffy Toft, *The Geography of Ethnic Violence: Identity, Interests, and the Indivisibility of Territory*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 18-19.

¹²Ibid., 19.

¹³Ibid., 43.

These conditions for violence are exacerbated if there is evidence of historical animosity and grievance.

Second, Toft emphasizes that states and ethnic groups relate to territory differently despite the fact that both consider territory critical to their survival. Ethnic groups perceive land as an integral part of their identity, whereas states view the delineation of political borders as essential to territorial integrity and thus sovereignty-the authority and control over the state.¹⁴ Thus, multi-national states serve as a prime indication that a government is less willing to negotiate.¹⁵ Put another way, Walter offers a hypothesis in a similar vein as Toft when outlining her theory on reputation building. As Walter states “the greater the number of potential future challenges, the greater the value associated with deterrence is likely to be, and the more likely the government is to fight.”¹⁶ Notably, Walter includes caveats to the extent that governments will elect to engage in reputation building. For example, how many realizable threats are possible from minority groups, if the land occupied by minority groups is of value-either geo-strategically or in regard to constructed or natural resources, and finally if the government can afford to fight various minority groups. As Walter concludes, the more cost incurred in a fight for valuable territory, the more advantageous it will be for a government to engage in reputation building.¹⁷

Finally, Toft points to the location and quantity of resources considered strategic or valuable, concerning those both natural and constructed is important insofar as it allows for increased mobilization previous to or during conflict. However, the quantity and value of

¹⁴ Ibid., 19-20.

¹⁵ Ibid., 43.

¹⁶ Walter, Barbara F, *Reputation and Civil War: Why Separatist Conflicts Are So Violent*. 24.

¹⁷ Ibid.

resources is not a key *motivator* in violence.¹⁸ Indeed, Toft's findings indicate higher levels of violence on territory *lacking* strategic resources, defined in this instance "...as minerals, dams and river systems, pasture and farmlands, industries, and strategically important locales (for example, mountain passes or heights)."¹⁹ The following discussion concerning the separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as well as the Autonomous Republic of Ajaria will be analyzed within this framework.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 42.

CHAPTER 1

THE HISTORICAL DIMENSION OF TERRITORIAL CONFLICTS

An historical assessment of Georgian territorial development gives ample warning of its post-independence stateness challenges in the 1990s, accenting both discontinuities and grievances. External actors and internal challenges repeatedly reconfigured Georgia's relationship to the three regions.

Of considerable importance is the fact that Georgia itself was historically contested territory. Annexed by the tsarist empire in 1801, Georgia briefly regained independence from 1918 to 1921 following the empire's collapse, until it was absorbed by the Soviet Union.²⁰ A periodically fractious Soviet Republic, it was one of the early republics seeking to secede from the Soviet Union.

Historically, Georgia's sub-national regions were equally contested. Each of the challengers to Georgian stateness was and is distinguishable in some or all of its identity components from ethnic Georgians. Both South Ossetians and Abkhazians are ethnically distinct from Georgians, and while Russian is widespread, maintain their respective native languages, both of which are dissimilar to Georgian and each other. Indeed, the Abkhaz language is North Caucasian while the Ossetian language falls within the Iranian language group.²¹ At the same time, the territory on which each resides has historically been in demographic flux. As Hille shows in her book *State Building and Conflict Resolution in the Caucasus*, from 1897 to 1939

²⁰ Stephen Jones, *Georgia: A Political History since Independence*. (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2013), 43.

²¹ Julie A. George, *The Politics of Ethnic Separatism in Russia and Georgia*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 97-98.

the native Abkhazian population went from constituting the majority of the population to one that was overwhelmingly outnumbered by Russians and Georgians.²²

The territorial status of all three groups oscillated over time, and none of them were consistently part of Georgia in the modern period. Only under the aegis of the Soviet Union in 1936 would the demarcation of the boundaries currently claimed by Georgia come into effect. South Ossetia transferred from Tbilisi's administration to that of the Russian Empire in 1801.²³ Abkhazia was incorporated into the Russian Empire in 1810 as a Principality with a native prince, and maintained that status until 1864 when it came under direct Russian rule.²⁴

Crucial insight into Georgia's ongoing stateness problem is afforded by the Russian Civil War (1918-1922) that followed the onset of Communist rule. This interregnum war profoundly influenced the movements for independence in both South Ossetia and Abkhazia in the context of hostility between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks, the latter of which predominated in Georgia and the surrounding areas.²⁵ Ultimately the Bolsheviks took power and the Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic was created in November of 1921, comprised of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan.²⁶ However, ambitions for autonomy on behalf of sizable numbers of Abkhaz and South Ossetians existed prior to the formation of an independent Georgian state.²⁷ Indeed, discussions were underway during the Russian Civil War

²² Charlotte Mathilde Louis Hille, *State Building and Conflict Resolution in the Caucasus*. 114. (Leiden: Brill Publishers, 2010), [10.1163/ej.9789004179011.i-350](https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004179011.i-350).

²³Ibid., 110.

²⁴ Ibid.,113

²⁵Cory Welt, "A Fateful Moment: Ethnic Autonomy and Revolutionary Violence in the Democratic Republic of Georgia (1918-21)," in *The Making of Modern Georgia 1918-2012: The First Georgian Republic and its Successors*. Stephen Jones (ed.) (New York: Routledge, 2014), 208.

²⁶ Hille, Charlotte Mathilde Louis, *State Building and Conflict Resolution in the Caucasus*, 209.

²⁷ Cory Welt, "A Fateful Moment: Ethnic Autonomy and Revolutionary Violence in the Democratic Republic of Georgia (1918-21)," in *The Making of Modern Georgia 1918-2012: The First Georgian Republic and its Successors*. Stephen Jones (ed.), 205-206.

for autonomy regarding both.²⁸ In South Ossetia, this met a devastating end. After revolutionary violence in South Ossetia in May of 1920, Georgia employed its military force which resulted in ethnic cleansing.²⁹ The discussion for autonomy was more protracted for Abkhazia. The Abkhazian People's Council sought Georgian support for a new independent state.³⁰ Part of this support was to appeal to Georgian forces to consolidate authority for a new Abkhazian state by suppressing minority factions.³¹ Georgia did not want Abkhazian sovereignty and thus did not acquiesce. Still, Abkhazia faced unrest and the need for stability necessitated incorporation into the Georgian state.³² However, characteristically, Abkhazia is more akin to the North Caucasus both ethno-linguistically and because of its historical political trajectory under direct Russian rule.³³ Concordant with its previous orientation, the political attitude of Abkhazians fell even more in line with the North Caucasus and Russia as opposed to assuming a South Caucasian identity.³⁴ Moreover, South Ossetia has cross border kin in North Ossetia and currently maintains greater ethnic homogeneity than Abkhazia, in part due to the porous border.

During the period of Georgian independence, which coincided with the Russian Civil War, South Ossetians also raised aspirations to join North Ossetians in a united political administration. However, the establishment of the Soviet Union brought a reconfiguration of territorial boundaries rendering South and North Ossetia separate territories and making South Ossetia an Autonomous Oblast within the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic.³⁵ In 1921,

²⁸Ibid., 206.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., 214.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Derluguian, Georgi., "The Forgotten Abkhazia: Anatomy of Post-Socialist Ethnic War." Northwestern University Policy Memo (PONARS, 2000). http://csis.org/files/media/isis/pubs/pm_0163.pdf, 2.

³⁴ Cory Welt, "A Fateful Moment: Ethnic Autonomy and Revolutionary Violence in the Democratic Republic of Georgia (1918-21)," in *The Making of Modern Georgia 1918-2012: The First Georgian Republic and its Successors*. Stephen Jones (ed.), 211.

³⁵ Hille, Charlotte Mathilde Louis, *State Building and Conflict Resolution in the Caucasus*, 112.

Abkhazia was made a Soviet Socialist Republic (independent from and equal in republican status to Georgia). However, in 1936 the Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic was disbanded and Abkhazia's status was reduced to an Autonomous Oblast within Georgia, thus losing its independence from Georgia. It was only then that all three challengers were incorporated into the Georgia that would become independent in 1991.

The historical trajectory of Ajaria assumed a different path. Ajaria was appropriated in 1878, as a result of the Berlin Conference, by the Russian Empire after being under the auspices of the Ottoman Empire for three centuries.³⁶ As Pelkmans notes "Georgian became less important in the course of the nineteenth century. In the 1870s it was spoken only at home, and the men predominately spoke Turkish in public."³⁷ Then effectively under Russia's control, many Ajarians left for Turkey which in turn confused many in the Georgian elite who perceived the Ajarians as Georgian.³⁸ However, religious identity was integral to daily life for the majority of Ajarians, and now under a different power whose state religion was Orthodox, many feared either discrimination or suppression of Islam.³⁹ Indeed, during WWI sympathies largely remained with the Ottoman Turks and not Russia or Georgia.⁴⁰ Given the history it is unsurprising that Ajaria did not favor Georgian independence in 1918.⁴¹ Throughout the Soviet period, Ajaria was an ASSR (*Avtonomnaia Sovetskaia Sotsialisticheskaia Respublika*) within the

³⁶ Mathijs Pelkmans, *Defending the Border: Identity, Religion, and Modernity in the Republic of Georgia*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 95.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 97.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 98.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 98-100.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁴¹ "Ajarians: Historical Context." World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples, accessed December 4, 2014, <http://www.minorityrights.org/1947/georgia/ajarians.html>.

Soviet Republic of Georgia. Additionally, unlike Abkhazian or Ossetians, Ajarians did not classify as an ethnic minority despite difference in religion.⁴²

Ajaria borders Turkey across the Black Sea. This geographic position continues to offer opportunities that are unavailable to South Ossetia, such as ports, trade, and oil refineries.⁴³ Historically, Batumi is an essential port along the Black Sea, and in addition to trade, it is home to a number of oil refineries and pipelines. Indeed, today the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline traverses Georgia by way of Tbilisi for international export.⁴⁴ There is an additional pipeline which terminates in Batumi. Due to its strategic location and resources, the Russian Empire first became invested in the region in the late 1900s.⁴⁵ In fact, the Russian military maintained a base in Batumi until 2007.⁴⁶ Ajaria did not endure conflict with the collapse of the Soviet Union, as did South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Under Toft's criteria this is logical. There are no ethnic minority groups in Ajaria and as mentioned it has maintained a healthy economy due to its commodities and position on the Black Sea. Further, because Ajarians conceptualize their identity as Georgian, they also perceive of the land in much the same regard. The autonomy that Ajarians have in governing and civil functions, it is not an ethno- geographic distinction. However, as noted above, it is codified in law that Ajaria is subject to the Georgian government.

⁴² Monica Duffy Toft, "Multinationality, Regions and State Building: The Failed Transition in Georgia," in *Ethnicity and Territory in the Former Soviet Union: Regions in Conflict*, eds. James Hughes and Gwendolyn Sasse, (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2002), 128.

⁴³ British Broadcasting Company, "Regions and Territories: Ajaria," last updated 22 November 2011, accessed December 3, 2014, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/country_profiles/3520322.stm.

⁴⁴ "Azerbaijan," U.S. Energy Information Administration, accessed December 13, 2014, <http://www.eia.gov/countries/cab.cfm?fips=aj>.

⁴⁵ Toft, Monica Duffy, "Multinationality, Regions and State Building: The Failed Transition in Georgia," in *Ethnicity and Territory in the Former Soviet Union: Regions in Conflict*, eds. James Hughes and Gwendolyn Sasse, 127.

⁴⁶ British Broadcasting Company, "Regions and Territories: Ajaria," last updated, 22 November 2011, accessed December 3, 2014, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/country_profiles/3520322.stm.

Indeed, the impetus for conflict in Ajaria in 2004 was regional rather than ethnic or religious.⁴⁷ The particularities of the contention between Batumi and Tbilisi in 2004 will be analyzed in more detail in later sections.

The historical trajectories of Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Ajaria assumed different, though not dissimilar, orientations that have considerably influenced each of their situations at present. For example, all three regions were subject to the imperializing forces of the Russian Empire. However, any economic consolidation of resources accompanied by a building of infrastructure which resulted from Russian imperialization profited Abkhazia and Ajaria primarily, and to a lesser extent, South Ossetia. For its part, South Ossetia serves as the intermediary connecting Russia by way of the Georgian Military Road which was finished in 1863 by the Russian military and stretches from Vladikavkaz in Ingushetia to Tbilisi.⁴⁸ The nature of Russia's actions in each region was very much determined by how each could be exploited. Toft's framework maintains that the deprivation of resources in a given area directly correlates to a rise in violence. This theory appears to fit the cases of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, albeit from opposite ends in regard to the amount of resources. South Ossetia lacks the strategic resources that Toft illustrates, and for its part, South Ossetia was the first to descend into violence in the pre and post Soviet period. As George notes, while both wars were brutal and destructive, part of the willingness on the part of the Abkhazians to negotiate derives from not wanting any further destruction of their infrastructure which was heavily dismantled by

⁴⁷ "Ajarians: Historical Context," World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples, accessed December 4, 2014, <http://www.minorityrights.org/1947/georgia/ajarians.html>.

⁴⁸"Military Road. Fortress in the Dariel Ravine , Caucasus , Russia," World Digital Library, last updated February 4, 2015, <http://www.wdl.org/en/item/4219/>.

fighting during the war.⁴⁹ The lack of resources in South Ossetia rendered it little aid in terms of building lucrative infrastructure.

However, as mentioned above, Abkhazia and South Ossetia were part of the Russian empire from 1801 in the case of South Ossetia and Abkhazia in 1810 as a principality. They would remain part of the Russian Empire until its fall. Ajaria did not come under Russian rule until 1878 after being influenced by the Ottoman Empire, as noted above. Historically, Russian administration in Abkhazia and South Ossetia lends itself as precedent for current involvement. Russia is able to act as the guarantor of the currently de facto states of Abkhazia and South Ossetia but is simultaneously protecting its geostrategic pursuits directly south of its border. Further, the Abkhaz and South Ossetians are both North Caucasian peoples, of which the latter has cross border kin in Russia proper (in the North Ossetia- Alania Autonomous Okrug). Despite Ajarians being a part of the Ottoman Empire for centuries, Ajarians are considered ethnically Georgian and thus South Caucasian.

Additionally, the population shifts over time varied greatly between the three regions. Part of Toft's framework posits that population clustering regarding ethnic groups, directly affects the potential for violence. This can be substantiated in the case of Abkhazia (in which 97% of ethnic Abkhazians resided in Abkhazia in 1989) but not South Ossetia which did not have significant ethnic clustering in that same year, as only 39% of South Ossetians were living in South Ossetia and yet both situations turned violent.⁵⁰ Additionally, South Ossetia experienced violence and ethnic cleansing during the Russian Civil War (in 1920), as it pursued greater autonomy together with Abkhazia. Abkhazia experienced internal unrest at the same

⁴⁹ George, Julie A, *The Politics of Ethnic Separatism in Russia and Georgia*, 123.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.

time but managed to avoid violence on the scale of South Ossetia. At this point it is important to ask the following: to what extent are the respective histories of the regions congruent with Monica Toft's theoretical framework put forth in the theory section of this project? This turbulent and violent time created the modern day grievances and antagonisms which follow Toft's prescription. Mainly that the likelihood and degree of violence increases if there is an extant combination in which an ethnic group has historical claims to the land while simultaneously claiming grievances against another ethnic group.⁵¹ The history of these regions cannot be ignored when attempting to analyze the current state of affairs due to history having great bearing on the different regional orientations. Ajaria is currently much more stable than Abkhazia and South Ossetia because it did not descend into conflict and war after the fall of the Soviet Union and subsequent Georgian independence. Indeed its history of relative economic prosperity, in comparison to Abkhazia and South Ossetia, also greatly contributes to its current stability. Additionally, while Ajaria did witness population shifts, it did not experience the mass migration that took place in Abkhazia and South Ossetia during the wars of the early 1990s. Throughout Ajaria's history, it maintained ethnic homogeneity even when under Ottoman control and this homogeneity is especially the case when compared to Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Further, Ajaria harbors few significant grievances against Tbilisi. In this regard, South Ossetia and Abkhazia differ.

The following chapter offers a discussion on Soviet ethno-federalism and the ways in which this policy influenced the three regions, their relationship to one another and to Tbilisi, both during the Soviet period and post independence. It will explain, as several scholars in the field have already done, that the dynamic web of relationships between the players is indeed

⁵¹ Toft, Monica Duffy, *The Geography of Ethnic Violence*, 43.

partly responsible for independence appeals after Soviet collapse. Not least because the laws that Moscow codified protected minority rights, even if not consistently practiced. The chapter will also explain why such a policy was implemented under a system which appeared inherently antagonistic to difference.

CHAPTER 2

SOVIET ETHNO-FEDERALISM

It would be remiss to exclude the discourse of Soviet ethno-federalism from this project because ethno-federalism aided the creation of separatist Abkhazia and South Ossetia for reasons that will be discussed below. As Grigoryan notes, Communist ideology is an enemy of nationalism and so the question of this propulsion towards a federalist structure, which inherently grants a modicum of flexibility in governance, must be analyzed.

Due to the multi-ethnic composition of the Soviet Union and the necessity to make Soviet ideology available to all, it was necessary to translate into the vernacular. However, as Grigoryan notes further, the most influential reason for ethno-federalism was that "[t]hey had to find a way to deal with an already unleashed monster-the mobilized nationalisms, or the simmering nationalist discontent, that would have led to new mobilizations if preemptive concessions were not made."⁵² In other words, it is the condition of pre-existing nationalities at the inception of the Soviet project which rendered ethno-federalism appealing despite the counterintuitive nature of ethno-federalism to communist ideology. The political mechanisms established with autonomous republics and regions, and their development over time meant that such institutions were in place at the time of the drive for independence.⁵³ Additionally, under Soviet rule, theoretically though not always in practice, minority rights were elevated, sometimes to the extent that their representation in governing bodies was disproportionate to the percentage of the population belonging to a particular minority. In Abkhazia, despite enduring repressive

⁵²Arman Grigoryan, "Ethnofederalism, Separatism and Conflict: What Have We Learned from the Soviet and Yugoslav Experiences?" *International Political Science Review*, 5 (2012): 524, accessed December 14, 2014, <http://www.jstor.org.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/stable/23353157>.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 522.

measures in the Stalinist period and to a lesser degree under Khrushchev, by 1989 Abkhazians held more seats in the Abkhaz parliament than ethnic Georgians despite Georgians constituting a majority in Abkhazia.⁵⁴ This fact in particular fostered animosity on behalf of ethnic Georgians who were clustered in the Gali region of Abkhazia until the 1992 war forced many Georgians to flee. Policies of minority elevation, though inconsistently practiced, made belonging to a certain ethnic identity valuable, in terms of political and social capital.⁵⁵

This degree of minority protection disintegrated along with the Soviet Union. This condition coincided with a resurgence of nationalism that was simultaneous with calls for independence on behalf of the Republics. In the case of Georgia, the acting government (though that term is used loosely) resurrected its constitution from its brief period of independence from 1918-1921, which did not allow for autonomous administrative units.⁵⁶ Thus, the administrative units and governing mechanisms that existed for most of the 20th century, were threatened by the restoration of a sovereign Georgian state.

The next chapter will detail identity evolution in the Soviet period. It will discuss the identity formation of Ajaria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia; explaining the vulnerability of minorities regarding their relationship to Tbilisi as well as Moscow, and the degree of difference and comparison among the three regions. It will also outline the extent to which minority rights were at times severely repressed and at other times elevated. Additionally, there is a brief discussion in regard to how the federalist structure influenced the negotiating power of regions holding different statuses.

⁵⁴ Irakly Areshidze, *Democracy and Autocracy in Eurasia: Georgia in Transition*. (East Lansing: Michigan State Press, 2007), 27.

⁵⁵ Grigoryan, "Ethnofederalism, Separatism and Conflict: What Have We Learned from the Soviet and Yugoslav Experiences," 522.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 529.

CHAPTER 3

IDENTITY EVOLUTION IN THE SOVIET PERIOD

Prior to 1922, which saw its incorporation into the Soviet Union as an Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, Ajarians were predominately Muslim but not classified as a distinct ethnic group until the 1926 Soviet census. In the 1939 Soviet census, the Ajar distinction was abandoned.⁵⁷ Still, even the brief labeling of an identity left a portion of the population conceptualizing their identity as Ajar, not Georgian.⁵⁸ However, Soviet policy in the 1920s involved religious suppression and was followed by reaffirmation of the autonomy of the Georgian Orthodox Church, that resulted in Ajaria's population identifying as overwhelmingly Christian Orthodox at present.⁵⁹ Importantly, unlike Abkhazians and South Ossetians, Ajarians are ethnically Georgian and due to assimilation policies in the Soviet period, most conceptualize their ethnic identity as Georgian.⁶⁰ At the same time, it is important to mention a degree of ambiguity present when referring to Ajarian identity. Much of this ambiguity stems from the unique history of Ajaria in regard to it being heavily influenced by the Ottoman Empire. As noted previously, during the 19th century the Ottoman Turks established military outposts in Ajaria; Ajaria even allied with the Ottomans during the Crimean War, in which it was fighting Georgians and Russians.⁶¹ Moreover, the few students from elite families were educated in Turkey. This in turn influenced political, social and economic development of the region to one

⁵⁷ Monica Duffy Toft, "Multinationality, Regions and State Building: The Failed Transition in Georgia," in *Ethnicity and Territory in the Former Soviet Union: Regions in Conflict*, eds. James Hughes and Gwendolyn Sasse, 128.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ British Broadcasting Company, "Regions and Territories: Ajaria," last updated 22 November 2011, accessed December 13, 2014, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/country_profiles/3520322.stm.

⁶⁰ Monica Duffy Toft, "Multinationality, Regions and State Building: The Failed Transition in Georgia," in *Ethnicity and Territory in the Former Soviet Union: Regions in Conflict*, eds. James Hughes and Gwendolyn Sasse, 128.

⁶¹ Thomas Hoch and Vincenc Kopecek, "Transforming Identity of Ajarian Population (Why the 1991-2004 Conflict Did Not Assume Armed Character)," 5 (2011) *Annual of Language & Politics And Politics of Identity*, 6-7.

more affiliated with Turkey.⁶² However, as the power of the Ottoman Empire waned, so did its influence over its periphery. The power dynamics significantly altered with the Treaty of Berlin in 1878, which as noted above, forced the Ottoman Empire to cede Ajaria to the Russian Empire. As Hoch and Kopecek note, the Berlin Treaty also contained a clause remnant from the Treaty of San Stefano which stipulated that Ajarian Muslims leave for Turkey.⁶³ This was followed by an influx of Christians from the Kakheti region of Georgia, ultimately resulting in a change of demographics to one that was substantially Orthodox Christian.⁶⁴ To this day, a major tenet of Georgian nationalism is Georgian Orthodoxy. Ajaria was situated at the center of a geopolitical power struggle in the age of great empires, to a greater extent than Abkhazia and South Ossetia due to the involvement of the Ottoman Empire. In fact, for most of its existence Ajaria extended into Northeastern Turkey. It was not until the Treaty of Versailles, which dismantled the Ottoman Empire, that the current borders of Ajaria came into effect.⁶⁵ Indeed, though Ajaria historically came under the jurisdiction of multiple entities, it never made separatist claims. For instance, as noted above, Ajarians identify as ethnic Georgian. It was a result of the dominance of Islam, not language, at the time of its absorption into the Soviet Union that rendered it an Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic within Georgia.⁶⁶ Ajarians speak the same language, albeit a different dialect, and at present predominately identify as Georgian Christian Orthodox.⁶⁷ The current ethnographic make up of Ajaria is consistent with other Georgian subgroups such as Svans and Mingrelians. Ajaria's history took a very different course than those of Abkhazia and

⁶² Ibid., 7.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 8.

⁶⁶ Monica Duffy Toft, Monica Duffy Toft, "Multinationality, Regions and State Building: The Failed Transition in Georgia," in *Ethnicity and Territory in the Former Soviet Union: Regions in Conflict*, eds. James Hughes and Gwendolyn Sasse, 128.

⁶⁷ British Broadcasting Company, "Regions and Territories: Ajaria," last updated, 22 November 2011, accessed December 3, 2014, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/country_profiles/3520322.stm.

South Ossetia. Additionally, and insofar as precedents are concerned, Ajaria did not have a history of independence or of initiating irredentist appeals. Excepting religion, it also faced less repression during the Soviet period due to approximation in language. Thus many aspects of Georgian chauvinism did not parallel the profound and divisive effects in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Particularly because the Georgian Language State Program focused on mandating Georgian as the official language of anything connected to the state. As Jones rightly notes, Georgians "...believe, like most former Soviet citizens, in the concept of linguistic nationality. Political boundaries should reflect linguistic ones, and the dominant linguistic nation within the state should determine language policy."⁶⁸ In contrast to Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Ajarian ethnic identity is more solidly Georgian, despite religious differences, which are substantially less influential now than they were in the 19th century. These particularities will be brought into sharp relief in the following section in which the political trajectories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia are shown to be very different in the wake of Georgian independence in 1991.

During the Soviet period from 1937 to 1953, South Ossetians and Abkhazians endured ethnically charged discrimination policies. Pursuant with Georgian policy, ethnic minorities in Georgia underwent deportation. This included Laz, Greeks, Khemshins, Meskhetian Turks, and Kurds.⁶⁹ Ethnic Georgians settled in their stead, eventually relegating native Abkhazians to a small minority. Ethnic homogenization assumed a different yet deleterious orientation toward Abkhazians. It became illegal to teach the Ossetian and Abkhaz languages and hence all school

⁶⁸ Jones, Stephen, *Georgia: A Political History since Independence*, 48.

⁶⁹ "State-Legal Relations between Abkhazia and Georgia," Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization, last updated, December 31, 2002, <http://unpo.org/article/715>.

instruction was relayed in Georgian and administered under Georgian institutions.⁷⁰

Additionally, Georgian academics wrote and propagated the falsity that Abkhazians were an extension of the Kartvelian family and thus Georgian.⁷¹ The Abkhaz alphabet shifted from one premised on Cyrillic script, which was then followed by Latin, to one derived from the Georgian alphabet. This effectively neutralized the capability to produce and consume media and literary culture in native Abkhaz. Further, the official language of public records was mandated to be in Georgian despite the fact that more than half of the population, which included Russians and Armenians, were illiterate in the Georgian language.⁷² As a consequence of these policies, many Russians and Armenians left in the early 1950s because it became impossible to sustain their livelihood.⁷³ Conditions slightly improved under Khrushchev in the 1950s with a series of policies targeted to raise the quotas of Abkhazians enrolled in university and celebrate the culture, much to the dismay of Georgians living within Abkhazia.⁷⁴ However, this did not last and in the coming decades, as late as 1977, conditions prompted prominent Abkhazians to appeal to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in order to seek unification with the Soviet Union.⁷⁵ After decades of Georgian intolerance, the population of native Abkhaz residing in Abkhazia registered at less than one fifth.⁷⁶ Perestroika ushered in

⁷⁰ Monica Duffy Toft, "Multinationality, Regions and State Building: The Failed Transition in Georgia," in *Ethnicity and Territory in the Former Soviet Union: Regions in Conflict*, eds. James Hughes and Gwendolyn Sasse, 131.

⁷¹ Ibid.

* In the late 10th century, current day Abkhazia was absorbed into the Kingdom of Western Georgia, which also included Svaneti, Imereti, Guria and Samegrelo. This fact is frequently used in Georgian claims that Abkhazia has traditionally been an integral part of the Georgian state and thus should remain so.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Derluguian, Georgi, "The Forgotten Abkhazia: Anatomy of Post-Socialist Ethnic War," 4.

⁷⁵ Paul B. Rich, (ed). *Crisis in the Caucasus: Russia, Georgia, and the West*, (New York: Routledge, 2013). https://books.google.com/books?id=GdzdAAAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false, 14.

⁷⁶ British Broadcasting Company, "Abkhazia Profile-Overview," last updated 16 March 2015, accessed April 10, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-18175030>.

previously suppressed freedoms but many were restricted to Georgians, as the establishment of new institutions created no place for ethnic minorities.⁷⁷ Of the three regions, South Ossetia was more underdeveloped throughout the Soviet period. As an Autonomous Oblast, it was situated below both Ajaria and Abkhazia (both having ASSR status) and thus held less negotiating power.⁷⁸

The primary objective of this chapter was to emphasize and illustrate how identity evolution in the Soviet period was particularistic within each region. Further, it is notable that population shifts regarding deportations of Georgia's minorities and intermigration irritated preexisting tensions. Further, regional status afforded Ajaria and Abkhazia more opportunity to negotiate with Moscow and to some extent Tbilisi, as they maintained more jurisdiction over their regional administrations, particularly under Gorbachev. The following chapter will identify how the disparities in identity formation shaped Abkhazian and South Ossetian claims for autonomy in 1991. It will then turn to the violence that ensued initially in South Ossetia and later in Abkhazia as well as the involvement on behalf of the Georgian government, Russia, the United States, EU and international institutions.

⁷⁷ Marc Weller, Barbara Metzger and Niall Johnson, *Settling Self-Determination Disputes: Complex Power-Sharing in Theory and Practice*, (Leiden: BRILL, 2008), 349.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

*Soviet hierarchical structure dictated more legal and negotiating rights to certain status classifications. For example, Autonomous Oblasts held the least power. Autonomous Regions were usually granted to large minorities but were still subject to the Soviet Republics (such as Georgia). The Republics maintained control over both AOs and ASSRs but were subject to directives from Moscow.

CHAPTER 4

POST-SOVIET POLICY IN GEORGIA

This chapter will describe the feebleness of the Georgian state at the time of independence and how in the fight for Georgian sovereignty this weakness led to policies which were detrimental to its territorial integrity and plunged the Georgian state into war. Further, it will detail the conflicts and their irresolution; the nature of which prevents Georgia from becoming a consolidated state.

At the time of the Soviet collapse, the strength of the Georgian Republic was faltering to the extent that it lacked any kind of substantive influence over Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Ajaria.⁷⁹ As George notes in *The Politics of Ethnic Separatism in Russia and Georgia*, "[t]he inability of the state and disinterest of the government in building political institutions addressing territorial fragmentation meant that bi-lateral negotiations such as those between Tatarstan and the Russian government would be difficult to conduct."⁸⁰ After Georgia declared independence in March of 1991, South Ossetia appealed for an upgrade in status as an Autonomous Republic but was categorically rejected.⁸¹ A newly independent Georgia was not in favor of any action that would weaken its new sovereign authority.⁸² Anxieties were further exacerbated on the eve of elections for a new parliament when the Supreme Soviet decreed that it would only allow nation-wide parties to run; regional parties were barred.⁸³ This prompted the refusal on behalf of the South Ossetian Popular Front to accept the validity of the elections and in turn it held a

⁷⁹ George, Julie A, *The Politics of Ethnic Separatism in Russia and Georgia*, 96.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁸¹"Georgia: Avoiding War in South Ossetia." International Crisis Group, last updated November 26 2004, <http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/UNTC/UNPAN019224.pdf>, 3.

⁸² Weller, Marc, Metzger, Barbara and Johnson, Niall, *Settling Self-Determination Disputes: Complex Power-Sharing in Theory and Practice*, 349.

⁸³ "Georgia: Avoiding War in South Ossetia," International Crisis Group, November 26, 2004, <http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/UNTC/UNPAN019224.pdf>, 3.

separate election. Zviad Gamsakhurdia, the newly elected leader of the Round Table bloc, and first president of an independent Georgia, not only nullified that election but also South Ossetia's status as Autonomous Oblast.⁸⁴

Gamsakhurdia's nationalist fervor and policies came at the expense of minorities. Interestingly, Gamsakhurdia was initially more amenable to negotiations regarding Abkhazia than South Ossetia because he "believed in a romantic ethnic theory that the Abkhaz, along with the Chechens, were "real" Caucasians, just like the Georgians."⁸⁵ Gamsakhurdia was a prominent member of the Georgian movement for independence. Incidentally, and not without pressure from the KGB, he instigated the fracture in the Georgian independence movement.⁸⁶ He emerged as the leader who would bring Georgia its independence from the Soviet Union and unlike his successor Eduard Shevardnadze, Moscow understood that Gamsakhurdia was positioned to do so and took actions to ensure that Tbilisi would remain in the Russian sphere of influence.⁸⁷ Areshidze argues that for this reason, Moscow exploited separatist sentiments first in South Ossetia and then later in Abkhazia in order to combat the nationalist and populist policies propagated by Gamsakhurdia in particular.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Irakly Areshidze, *Democracy and Autocracy in Eurasia: Georgia in Transition*, (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2007), 22.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 26.

⁸⁷ Shevardnadze was the First Secretary of the Georgian Communist party from 1972 to 1985 who was then returned after Gamsakhurdia's ouster and remained in power until the 2003 Rose Revolution which eventually brought Mikheil Saakashvili to power. Nino Burjanadze served as President during the interim of Shevardnadze stepping down and Saakashvili winning the 2004 election. Saakashvili remained president for two terms. His last term ended in 2013.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 20-21.

Conflict in South Ossetia and Abkhazia

Conflict broke out in South Ossetia in 1989 and lasted until July 1992, resulting in over 1,000 casualties and 60,000 internally displaced persons.⁸⁹ During the conflict, ethnic Georgians in the conflict region relocated to core parts of Georgia and many Ossetians joined their kin across the border in North Ossetia.⁹⁰ This caused a shift in the ethnographic balance in favor of South Ossetians who now constituted more than half of the population within South Ossetia.⁹¹ At present, the distribution is overwhelmingly South Ossetian with Georgians comprising not more than a third of the total population.⁹² That same year, the South Ossetians held a referendum deciding whether to reunite with Russia and more than 99% voted for reunification.⁹³

Likewise, tension between Georgians and Abkhazians gained momentum in 1989 as the division between Georgian calls for complete independence from the Soviet Union and Abkhaz wishes to remain grew louder.⁹⁴ This manifested itself in public institutions such as Sukhumi University in the Abkhaz capital. Georgian instructors separated from the university and their Russian and Abkhazian counterparts, set up an offshoot of Tbilisi State University and subsequently incurred the ire of Abkhazians, leaving 16 dead.⁹⁵ Georgia denounced the Soviet Union in November of 1989 and the following year announced its sovereignty. In turn Abkhazia

⁸⁹ Weller, Marc, Metzger, Barbara and Johnson, Niall, *Settling Self-Determination Disputes: Complex Power-Sharing in Theory and Practice*, 350.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid., 351.

⁹² British Broadcasting Company, "South Ossetia Profile-Overview," last updated, 12 March 2015, accessed December 4, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-18269210>.

⁹³ A.G. Areshev and V.A. Zakharov, *Priznanie Nezavisimosti: Iuzhnoi Osetii i Abkhazii Istoriia, Politika, Pravo*. Moskva: MGIMO-Universitet, 2008), 87.

⁹⁴ Alexandros Petersen, "The 1992-93 Georgia-Abkhazia War: A Forgotten Conflict," *Caucasian Review of International Affairs* 4 (2008): 193, accessed April 24, 2015, <http://cria-online.org/Journal/5/THE%201992-93%20GEORGIA-ABKHAZIA%20WAR.pdf>.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

declared itself a sovereign entity within the Soviet Union.⁹⁶ The Supreme Soviet in Abkhazia came under the leadership of Vladislav Ardzinba who called for separate Abkhaz elections and further entrenched hostility between Sukhumi and the Gamsakhurdia government.⁹⁷ At this time, Ardzinba was already in negotiations with the Soviets for military support. This engendered a temporary compromise in which representation within parliament in Sukhumi was premised on a fixed number of seats; 28 Abkhaz and 26 Georgian.⁹⁸

A change of Georgian leadership then intervened in the conflict. By the end of 1991, Gamsakhurdia lost favor with the Georgian National Guard and after a coup he was forced to flee. Subsequently Shevardnadze assumed leadership.⁹⁹ However, Shevardnadze did not have immediate control over the Georgian government or indeed certain regions. The Mkhedrioni, a force personally established by Gamsakhurdia for mobilization in South Ossetia (alongside the National Guard) returned from Tskhinvali to Tbilisi and fought against forces still loyal to Gamsakhurdia.¹⁰⁰ As Areshidze notes, the Russian military provided materiel in support of the coup and simultaneously urged Gamsakhurdia to hold his position, thereby contributing to the chaos.¹⁰¹ However, after reaching the conclusion that he could not remain in Tbilisi, Gamsakhurdia escaped to Grozny where he planned to regroup. However his further attempts to win back his position failed and he passed away at the end of 1993.¹⁰²

In 1992 the Abkhaz parliament disbanded and calls for independence reinvigorated. This developed into war by the summer and heavy fighting continued until 1993, killing 10,000 and

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 194.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Areshidze, Irakly, *Democracy and Autocracy in Eurasia: Georgia in Transition*, 23-25.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 25.

* Indeed, Gamsakhurdia would lead a rebellion against Shevardnadze in September 1993 but to avail. That same year, December 31, he killed himself.

¹⁰² Ibid., 25.

wounding 8,000.¹⁰³ Notably, Russia was involved in both wars to varying degrees, however its program in the region vacillated from one of withdrawal to one of chauvinism.¹⁰⁴ The ambiguous nature of Russia's foreign policy toward Georgia and its separatist regions originated from discontinuity of orientations that Moscow's own post soviet policy assumed. For example, President Yeltsin vocally supported Georgian sovereignty at the same time that some in the Duma supported the separatist path embarked upon by Abkhazia and South Ossetia.¹⁰⁵ As put forth by Beat Kernén and Matthew Sussex, Russian policy in the 1990s, and particularly after peace was made at Sochi in 1993, could be argued as one of containment which "...reflected classic geostrategic objectives, linked to the domestically rooted fear of spillover, as well as to the external fact that the breakaway regions welcomed the Russian presence on their territory as a guarantee of their security."¹⁰⁶ In this sense, it could be argued that Russia and Georgia share a mutual goal of maintaining or protecting territorial integrity but their respective methods to realize those goals are diametrically opposed to each other. Notably, after Shevardnadze was removed from power and succeeded by Mikheil Saakashvili, Georgian advances for a fully integrated democratic state became more stalwart in character than under the previous administration. Most importantly, aside from reunification of Abkhazia and South Ossetia with Georgia proper, Saakashvili decisively oriented Georgia to the West, in regard to NATO, the EU and other Western institutions and security paradigms. Further, the former President sought to reclaim and advance Georgia's energy capacity, specifically pipelines, and finally, to work

¹⁰³ Ibid., 188.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 197.

¹⁰⁵ Sussex, Matthew (ed.), *Conflict in the Former USSR*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 96. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511980565>.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p.96.

toward a freer state economy.¹⁰⁷ Much of this required a genuine effort to combat the network of corruption which tentacles seemed boundless. Not only within the government or the police force but also regarding South Ossetia and the Ergneti Market, which was subsequently shut down by Saakashvili after he assumed leadership. In fact, closing the Ergneti Market exacerbated tensions, as it served as a life source for many impoverished living in South Ossetia, Georgians and Ossetians alike.¹⁰⁸ As George notes, Saakashvili's closure of the Ergneti Market in 2004 ultimately engendered more support for Eduard Kokoity, the president of the de facto South Ossetian government.¹⁰⁹

During the wars in Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the early 1990s, the international institutions (particularly, the OSCE, United Nations) implemented measures to resolve violence. In South Ossetia, in June of 1992, an arbitration agreement was signed in Sochi, Russia between then Russian President Boris Yeltsin and former Georgian leader Eduard Shevardnadze. Under the agreement, a Joint Control Commission was instituted with participants from Russia, Georgia, North and South Ossetia and the OSCE.¹¹⁰ As well as providing a mandate for Russian, Ossetian and Georgian troops to police the former conflict zone, the measures outlined in this framework would

...supervise the observance of the agreement, draft and implement conflict settlement measures, promote dialogue and political settlement, devise and carry out measures to facilitate refugee and IDP return, solve problems related to economic reconstruction in the zone of conflict, and monitor human rights.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ David J. Smith, "The Saakashvili Administration's Reaction to Russian Policies Before the 2008 War," in *The Guns of August 2008: Russia's War in Georgia*, eds. Svante E. Cornell and S. Frederick Starr, (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2009), 122-123.

¹⁰⁸ George, Julie A, *The Politics of Ethnic Separatism in Russia and Georgia*, 179-180.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ "Georgia: Avoiding War in South Ossetia." International Crisis Group, November 26 2004. <http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/UNTC/UNPAN019224.pdf>, 4.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 4.

In Abkhazia, the United Nations, in congress with the OSCE (at that time CSCE) conducted negotiations and authorized peacekeeping monitors in zones of conflict. Two ceasefire agreements disintegrated prior to the ceasefire in May of 1994. This agreement provided peacekeepers from the Commonwealth of Independent States with a mandate, under the guidance of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG), to enforce the ceasefire.¹¹² The war in Abkhazia not only resulted in mass casualties and internally displaced persons but extensive violations of human rights by both the Abkhaz and Georgian forces.¹¹³ The UNOMIG mandate was renewed until 2009 when it was terminated due to failure of agreement among members of the Security Council.¹¹⁴ Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s the OSCE, European Union and Council of Europe, as well as smaller institutions, remained engaged in Abkhazia and South Ossetia in order to help stabilize and continue negotiations.¹¹⁵ Additionally an OSCE Mission was established in Tbilisi to implement democratic institutions and practices.¹¹⁶

In the immediate aftermath of Georgia's independence the authoritarian elements of governance that the state adopted and implemented towards its minorities, especially under Gamsakhurdia's leadership drove a fragile state government further into chaos and led to war. The consequences of which hardened grievances and placed Russian forces in zones of conflict in order to monitor the environment. After the violent wars of the early 1990s, the conflicts were left frozen and seemingly intractable. The hardening of grievances combined with the destruction

¹¹² "Georgia-UNOMIG-Background," United Nations, accessed December 7, 2014, <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/past/unomig/background.html>.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ "UNOMIG," United Nations, accessed December 13, 2014, <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/past/unomig/index.html>.

¹¹⁵ "Survey of OSCE Field Operations," Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, May 7, 2013, Accessed December 13, 2014, <http://www.osce.org/secretariat/74783?download=true79-80>.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 80.

of infrastructure, devastated economies and presence of Russian troops helped set the conditions leading to the war in 2008.

The next chapter will address Georgian state policy in Ajaria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Particularly paying attention to Tbilisi's reassertion of control over Ajaria and attempts by the Georgian government to bring Abkhazia and South Ossetia back under Tbilisi's influence.

CHAPTER 5

GEORGIAN POLICY TOWARD AJARIA, SOUTH OSSETIA AND ABKHAZIA IN THE 21st CENTURY

It was the 2003 Rose Revolution, which overthrew Eduard Shevardnadze, that enabled Mikheil Saakashvili to win presidential elections. Saakashvili declared his intent from the outset "to restore Georgia's territorial integrity, to establish control over Abkhazia and South Ossetia."¹¹⁷ As a consequence of this objective, Saakashvili's policies reignited what had previously been frozen conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. As mentioned, one of the main objectives Saakashvili sought for Georgia was full democratization. However, with three separate entities, and each with their own de facto governments, the task was not easy.

Saakashvili dealt with Ajaria and its long-time corrupt leader Aslan Abashidze, who was politically close to Shevardnadze. As such Shevardnadze allowed him to ignore Ajaria's obligations as part of the Georgian state, such as paying Tbilisi various taxes, particularly those connected to trade.¹¹⁸ Saakashvili was unwilling to accept this *modus vivendi*. The political climate was very tenuous and contributed to the outbreak of the Ajarian conflict in 2004. Notably, it resulted from a power struggle between Saakashvili and Abashidze and unlike Abkhazia and South Ossetia was unrelated to irredentism.¹¹⁹ Yet, it was fueled by the need for Tbilisi to regain control of the government in Ajaria. Abashidze did not recognize Saakashvili's authority and proclaimed a state of emergency.¹²⁰ The militia force under Abashidze mobilized

¹¹⁷ Bertil Nygren, *The Rebuilding of Greater Russia: Putin's Foreign Policy Toward the CIS Countries*, (New York: Routledge, 2008), 122.

¹¹⁸ Julie A. George, "Minority Political Inclusion in Mikheil Saakashvili's Georgia," *Europe-Asia Studies* 60 (2008): 1160, accessed February 10, 2015. [10.1080/09668130802230697](https://doi.org/10.1080/09668130802230697).

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 123.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 122.

and dismantled the bridges linking Ajaria to Georgia proper.¹²¹ After mass demonstrations in Batumi, Abashidze fled to Moscow with the aid of the previous Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov.¹²² With Abashidze and his contemporaries effectively neutralized, Saakashvili brought Ajaria further into Tbilisi's orbit. This is most transparent in the Law of the Autonomous Republic of Ajara On Structure, Authorities, And Rules for Activities of Government of the Autonomous Republic of Ajara in which article two states:

[t]he structure, authority, and procedure of the Government activity shall be determined by the Constitutional Law of Georgia "On Status of the Autonomous Republic of Ajara", proper legal acts of Georgia, normative acts by President of Georgia, the Constitution of the Autonomous Republic of Ajara, the present law, and other appropriate legal acts.¹²³

Saakashvili was praised for his deft and swift handling of the crisis. However, as is rightly noted in the literature, his success was predicated on the distinctive particularities of Ajaria.¹²⁴

Protracted conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia continue to prove more difficult if not impenetrable.¹²⁵ Saakashvili's plan for Ajaria contained fewer snares than that for Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The core problem was that his program consisted of conflicting aspirations. On the one hand, he wanted to delegate more policy making powers to the separatist regions in order to bring them back into the fold. On the other, he strategically called on Georgian nationalism in order to appeal to Georgians. This effectively threatened Abkhazia and South Ossetia who saw the government's simultaneous investment in the Georgian military a great cause for concern.¹²⁶

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid., 123.

¹²³ "Law on Government," Government of the Autonomous Republic of Ajaria, accessed December 14, 2014, <http://www.ajara.gov.ge/eng/?page=law>.

¹²⁵ "Saakashvili's Ajara Success: Repeatable Elsewhere in Georgia?" International Crisis Group: Europe Briefing, Tbilisi/Brussels, 18 August, 2004, accessed December 14, 2014, http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/files/europe/040818_saakashvili_ajara_success_repeatable_elsewhere_in_georgia.pdf, 1.

¹²⁶ George, Julie A., "Minority Political Inclusion in Georgia," 1155, 1163.

Additionally, Saakashvili proposed renovating infrastructure in Abkhazia, namely the railroad traversing its territory and connecting Georgia to Russia. However, this was met with distrust by both the de facto Abkhazian government and Georgia for similar reasons. The Abkhazians a functioning railroad as giving too much power to Georgia and some within the Georgian government believed the railroad would give even more regional leverage to Russia.¹²⁷

Abkhazia was in the midst of an election dispute which was later solved when Sergei Bagapsh became president and his contender Vice President in 2005. In an October 2004 issue of *Novoe Vremia (Armenia)*, Bagapsh was interviewed in the lead up to Abkhazian elections:

"Why do they accuse you of a pro-Georgian orientation?"

"Pro Russian, they call people, which for all my life I was in Moscow six times. We all worked very long in Moscow, we have children who learn in Moscow, we are all citizens of Russia..."

(Почему вас обвиняют в прогрузинской ориентации?

Прорусским» называют человека, который за всю свою жизнь шесть раз был в Москве. Мы все проработали в Москве очень долго, у нас дети учатся в Москве, мы все граждане России...) ¹²⁸

This may be seen as representative of the prevailing attitude, at the very least on behalf of the Abkhazian leadership, in the sense that Russia is a state with which Abkhazia does not want to cut ties. Additionally, in November of 2010 Bagapsh was very open about the nature of relations with Saakashvili,

We do not believe any of Saakashvili's words and we are not engaging in dialogue with the fascist regime in Tbilisi. After Saakashvili's exit Abkhazia will be prepared to lead a dialogue with Georgia, but only as a dialogue between two independent states. Any other dialogue is not possible. We all still understand Saakashvili's promise to not attack South Ossetia and Abkhazia in the run up to the barbarous aggression in August of 2008. That is why we do not believe his words.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 1163.

¹²⁸ Nezavisimaia Gazeta, "Sergeĭ Bagapsh: My idem menedzherami na piat' let," *Novoe Vremia Armenia*, October, 14, 2004, accessed February 9, 2015, <http://dlib.eastview.com/browse/doc/7638591>.

(Мы не верим никаким словам Саакашвили и никогда не вступим в диалог с фашистским режимом Тбилиси. Абхазия после ухода Саакашвили готова будет вести диалог с Грузией, но только как диалог между двумя независимыми государствами. Никакого другого диалога быть не может. Мы все еще помним обещания Саакашвили не нападать на Южную Осетию и Абхазию в преддверии варварской агрессии в августе 2008 года. Поэтому мы не верим его словам.)¹²⁹

At the same time, Saakashvili also sought incentives to entice South Ossetia to rejoin Georgia proper. In 2005, Saakashvili set forth a broad but somewhat opaque plan for South Ossetia in which it would be granted increased autonomy regarding the administration of South Ossetian politics, while also having membership in Georgian governing structures. In contrast to Abkhazia, the South Ossetians would also be granted reparations from the war in the early 1990s. Additionally, this plan included a commitment to more cultural rights that had traditionally been suppressed, including the right to use one's native language and more control over regional education.¹³⁰ However, the potentially positive impact of these initiatives was impeded by Saakashvili's war on corruption, which effectively stripped one of the few money generating prospects of the South Ossetians, by forcing the closure of the Ergneti Market, a black market hub in near Tskhinvali.¹³¹ This measure also proved counter-productive because it hurt Saakashvili by garnering more support for Eduard Kokoity and emboldened South Ossetia's strident stance towards Georgia. Saakashvili's actions were perceived by Abkhazia and South Ossetia as one more in a string of burgeoning Georgian state power, especially in light of Tbilisi

¹²⁹ Apsny Press, "Sergei Bagapsh: "My ne verim nikakim slovam Saakashvili i nikogda ne vstupim v dialog s fashistskim rezhimom Tbilisi." 25 November 2010, accessed April 10, 2015, http://www.apsnypress.info/news/sergey-bagapsh-my-ne-verim-nikakim-slovam-saakashvili-i-nikogda-ne-vstupim-v-dialog-s-fashistskim-re/?sphrase_id=2307.

¹³⁰ Julie A. George, "Minority Political Inclusion in Georgia," 1163.

¹³¹ "Georgia: Avoiding War in South Ossetia," International Crisis Group: Europe Report No. 159. 26 November 2004, accessed March 14, 2015, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/europe/south-caucasus/georgia/159-georgia-avoiding-war-in-south-ossetia.aspx>.

reclaiming more control over Ajaria.¹³² Ultimately, his policies did more to aggravate an already tense situation antecedent to the 2008 war.

Russian-Georgian Relations and the August 2008 War

In early 2008 Kosovo declared independence, an act that was subsequently condemned by Russia, on the basis that the precedent would allow a pretext for Abkhazia and South Ossetia to do the same.

However, the Russian government did not act on its rhetoric leading up to Kosovar independence.¹³³ In fact, initially there was a thaw in Russian-Georgian relations. About a year earlier, Georgia underwent domestic turmoil when Saakashvili's government violently suppressed peaceful protests. This in turn prompted an immediate and unfavorable response from Western states and institutions which had hitherto seen the Tbilisi government as a progressive and democratic institution.¹³⁴ In order to re-establish democratic legitimacy, Saakashvili held elections and was re-elected in early 2008. It was after this that relations between Tbilisi and Moscow appeared to be thawing, as the former conceded that the latter had a part it "...could play in the conflict resolution processes in Abkhazia and South Ossetia."¹³⁵ However, this springtime of relations was short lived. In the early days of March, the Georgian government decided that the Joint Control Commission, established after the South Ossetian war in the early 1990s, was ineffective and consequently removed itself from the JCC negotiation

¹³²Ibid.

¹³³ Johanna Popjanevski, "From Sukhumi to Tskhinvali: The Path to War in Georgia," in *The Guns of August 2008 Russia's War in Georgia*, eds. Svante E. Cornell and S. Frederick Starr, (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2009), 143.

¹³⁴ "Georgia: Sliding towards Authoritarianism? Executive Summary and Recommendations," International Crisis Group: Europe Report No.189, 19 December 2007, accessed April 25, 2015, http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/europe/189_georgia_sliding_towards_authoritarianism_i.

¹³⁵ Popjanevski, Johanna, "From Sukhumi to Tskhinvali: The Path to War in Georgia," in *The Guns of August 2008 Russia's War in Georgia*, 144.

framework.¹³⁶ In response, the Russian government resumed full trade with Abkhazia for the first time since 1996. It did so with full knowledge that the Georgian government would oppose such a move.¹³⁷ In the following months, an increasing number of Russian troops transferred to Abkhazia in order to mend infrastructure such as railroads which Russia believed came under the jurisdiction of the JCC mandate in Abkhazia. However, Russia simultaneously shipped more defense materiel to the region. In addition, the Russian government publicized its decision to officially recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia. These events fostered fear and protestation from Tbilisi and to an extent, the West.¹³⁸ In June of 2008, *Civil Georgia* quoted NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer saying that the presence of Russian troops "...is clearly in contravention of Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, which NATO strongly supports. These forces should be withdrawn, and both Russia and Georgia should engage quickly in a high-level and open dialogue to de-escalate tensions."¹³⁹ This reprimand was preceded by an EU parliament vote in favor of a resolution that called on Russia to remove its military force from Abkhazia as well as a reform of the current JCC framework due to Russia's clear lack of impartiality.¹⁴⁰ Russia continued its mobilization while holding to its justification of offering humanitarian aid. However, sporadic bombing which left several dead in South Ossetia further exacerbated tensions and the area of escalation spread from Abkhazia to South

¹³⁶ At the time of Georgia's abdication from the JCC, participants included North and South Ossetia as well as Russia. It's mandate was to oversee the Joint Peacekeeping Forces (JPKF) after Georgia's war with South Ossetia in the early 1990s. Tbilisi called for international institutions, namely the European Union and OSCE to have complete membership in the new JCC framework that they proposed. In addition, the proposal would also eliminate North Ossetia as a member.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 144.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 146.

¹³⁹ Civil Georgia, "NATO tells Russia to Withdraw Railway Forces from Abkhazia," Civil Georgia, 4 June 2008, accessed March 15, 2015, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=18463&search=>.

¹⁴⁰ Civil Georgia, "EU Parliament Says Russian Peacekeeping Should be Replaced," Civil Georgia, 5 June 2008, accessed March 15, 2015, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=18473&search=>.

Ossetia in a matter of weeks.¹⁴¹ Despite attempts at reconciliation, all of which failed, the Georgian government transferred more troops on the afternoon of August 7th.¹⁴² As Popjanevski notes, additional troops also came from the North Caucasus Military District by way of North Ossetia.¹⁴³ On the morning of August 8th, Russia launched its invasion from its strongholds in South Ossetia and bombed as far as the outskirts of Tbilisi. On August 10th, Georgia officially asked for a cease-fire with Russia, which was not only ignored but actually appeared to encourage the Russian advance to an even greater extent. Indeed, Russia overtook Zugdidi, Senaki and Gori, the last of which lies about 82 km from Tbilisi.¹⁴⁴ Russia attacked Georgia's economic infrastructure as well, especially its trade outlets on the Black Sea. Efforts for conflict resolution were gravely eroded when Russia recognized the sovereignty of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in August of 2008. Immediately following, Russia occupied these regions in the context of liberation from an oppressive Georgia, or the pretext of liberation depending on individual inclinations.¹⁴⁵ David Smith proposes in his chapter 'The Saakashvili Administration's Reaction to Russian Policies' that Russia wanted to circumvent the possibility of Georgian membership in NATO, in order to protect its geopolitical interests.¹⁴⁶ Russia continues to disrupt Georgia's intentions to join the Western security paradigm by supporting Abkhazia and South Ossetia in their aspirations for independence, thus ensuring that the Georgian Republic is an unconsolidated

¹⁴¹ Popjanevski, Johanna, "From Sukhumi to Tskhinvali: The Path to War in Georgia," in *The Guns of August 2008 Russia's War in Georgia*, 148-149.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 150.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 151.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 152-153.

¹⁴⁵ Farhadian, Issac William., 'Crossing Georgia: An Analysis of the Russia-Georgia War of 2008.' Accessed December 6, 2014, <https://www.csustan.edu/sites/default/files/honors/documents/journals/crossings/Farhadian.pdf>, 8.

¹⁴⁶ Smith, David J., "The Saakashvili Administration's Reaction to Russian Policies before the 2008 War," in *The Guns of August 2008 Russia's War in Georgia*, 126.

democracy which also harbors extensive security threats and consequently unable to meet NATO criteria.

The next section will provide analysis on Russian involvement in Abkhazia and South Ossetia from the wars of the 1990s to the present. However, it is important to note that just as Russia's actions have damaged the stability of the Georgian state, the simultaneous vacillation on behalf of supranational institutions, to the extent of integration into the Western security paradigm that it is willing to allow Georgia, ultimately benefits Moscow. German Chancellor Angela Merkel noted in April of 2008 and again in 2014 before the NATO Summit in Wales that while Georgia has made recognizable progress, it is still not ready for a Membership Action Plan to be implemented.¹⁴⁷ In such a seemingly intractable situation, a MAP arguably could provide a stabilizing force. In other words, it would be advantageous for Georgian security but not NATO. Indeed the mandate for the OSCE Mission in Tbilisi which had been in place since 1992 was not renewed.¹⁴⁸ Additionally, the next section will outline the role of supranational institutions and the United States in Georgian affairs. It will argue, as the literature does, the geostrategic importance of Georgia in the balance of power between Russia and the United States, in particular.

¹⁴⁷Civil Georgia, "Merkel Sees No MAP for Georgia at NATO Summit in Wales," 2 June 2014, accessed April 13, 2015, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=27301> and

Civil Georgia, "No Map for Georgia Now," 2 April 2008, accessed April 13, 2015, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=17508>.

¹⁴⁸"OSCE Mission to Georgia (closed) Overview," Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, accessed December 13, 2014, <http://www.osce.org/georgia-closed/43383>.

CHAPTER 6

INTERNATIONAL INVOLVEMENT: THE ROLE OF RUSSIA, THE U.S. AND SUPRANATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Russian forces were involved to a limited extent in the wars of the early 1990s and constituted part of the peacekeeping forces in the conflict zones after the ceasefire agreements and so remained at the time of the 2008 war. Russia's involvement in this war and its recognition of an independent Abkhazia and South Ossetia firmly pitted it against Georgia and the International Community. Further, what Georgia perceives as a resurgence of Russian hegemony and thus its interest in re-appropriating its "near abroad" will only continue to provoke Tbilisi.¹⁴⁹ The Abkhazians and South Ossetians viewed the invading Russian forces as liberators from Saakashvili's Georgia, which remained intent to retain both regions as part of a sovereign Georgia. Indeed, NPR reported from South Ossetia that President Eduard Kokoity of South Ossetia declared shortly after the Russian occupation that

Russia had saved the South Ossetians from genocide during Georgia's attempt to retake its breakaway province earlier this month. He called Georgia's government a bloodthirsty fascist regime, and blamed its ally, the United States, for taking part in the Georgian attack. Then he said he'd appeal to Moscow to recognize South Ossetia's independence.¹⁵⁰

However, Russian forces pushed further into Georgia proper to the town of Gori which lies roughly 81km from Tbilisi. The five day war ended under ceasefires arbitrated by the European Union and signed the 12th of August and 8th of September.¹⁵¹ It resulted in 850 deaths and

¹⁴⁹ Farhadian, Issac William, "Crossing Georgia: An Analysis of the Russia-Georgia War of 2008," Accessed December 6, 2014, <https://www.csustan.edu/sites/default/files/honors/documents/journals/crossings/Farhadian.pdf>, 1.

¹⁵⁰ Gregory Feifer, "South Ossetians Rally for Joining Russia," National Public Radio, August 22, 2008, accessed December 13, 2014, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=93866203>.

¹⁵¹ Council of the European Union, "Presentation of the Report of the Independent International Fact Finding Mission in Georgia," Brussels, 30 September, 2009, accessed December, 16, 2014, http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/er/110370.pdf.

thousands of wounded as well as forcing thousands to flee their homes, the majority from South Ossetia.¹⁵² A significant aspect of the contention over Russia's actions in August of 2008 is whether or not the actions can be taken at face value or whether there are ulterior motives. Notably, the South Caucasus are of importance to both the U.S. and Russia because the fate of this region will shift the balance of power in the region. For this reason, Russia's intervention on behalf of the Abkhazians and South Ossetians also maintains the current state of affairs, as a divided and tumultuous Georgian state prevents it from being fully accepted by Western institutions, thus keeping Georgia in limbo. Additionally, as Bruno Coppieters concludes there is no single defined and unified bloc conducting and setting up negotiation frameworks for Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Thus Russia's support for Abkhazia and South Ossetia on the one hand, and U.N. support for Georgia's position on the other prolongs and may perhaps worsen these partially frozen conflicts.¹⁵³ As Coppieters notes, "The main conclusion that can be drawn from this overview of failed UN mediation activities is that the UN and Russia are competing for a leading mediating role in the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict."¹⁵⁴

Notably, there is a more recent precedent for Abkhazian and South Ossetian reliance on Russia. Throughout the 1990s both regions needed Russia to maintain a modicum of economic and political well being, in addition to providing security guarantees. Indeed, the ruble has been widely used and is an accepted form of currency in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The International Fact Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia found that Georgia initiated the 2008 attack on South Ossetia and that the South Ossetian response was legal within the bounds

¹⁵² Farhadian, Issac William, "Crossing Georgia: An Analysis of the Russia-Georgia War of 2008," 8.

¹⁵³ Bruno Coppieters, "The Georgian-Abkhaz Conflict" in *Europeanization and Conflict Resolution-Case Studies from the European Periphery*, ed. Bruno Coppieters et al. (Gent: Academia Press, 2004), 209.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

of international law.¹⁵⁵ At the same time, it was also noted that South Ossetian actions, excepting defense, against Georgian civilians were illegal under International Human Rights Law.¹⁵⁶ Moreover, the report concluded that while Georgia initiated the conflict, Russia countered with an unnecessary degree of force which ultimately infringed international law.¹⁵⁷ In the wake of the 2008 war the European Union established a Monitoring Mission to Georgia in order to:

- to ensure that there is no return to hostilities;
- to facilitate the resumption of a safe and normal life for the local communities living on both sides of the Administrative Boundary Lines (ABL) with Abkhazia and South Ossetia;
- to build confidence among the conflict parties;
- to inform EU policy in Georgia and the wider region.¹⁵⁸

The EUMM is authorized to operate throughout the entire Georgian territory. The West understands this to mean Abkhazia and South Ossetia, however, both states have refused the EUMM. In December of 2014, the mandate was continued for two more years with a €18.3 million budget.¹⁵⁹

Currently the governments of Abkhazia and South Ossetia are recognized and guaranteed by Russia. The structure of the Abkhazian government, concomitant to its 1994 constitution, is a representative democracy. It asserts its right to exist as a sovereign state unequivocally stating "[t]he bearer of sovereignty and the only source of authority in the Republic of Abkhazia shall be

¹⁵⁵ Farhadian, Issac William, "Crossing Georgia: An Analysis of the Russia-Georgia War of 2008," 8.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 9.

¹⁵⁸ European Union Monitoring Mission in Georgia, "European Union: External Action: Our Mandate," accessed December, 14 2014, http://www.eumm.eu/en/about_eumm/mandate.

¹⁵⁹ Council of the European Union, "EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia Extended for Two Years," Brussels, 16 December 2014, accessed December 14, 2014, http://consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/146309.pdf.

its people - the citizens of the Republic of Abkhazia."¹⁶⁰ It retains the right to enter into interstate agreements and international treaties and ownership of its natural resources.¹⁶¹ Additionally, Abkhaz is the official state language, with Russian recognized as an official second. It was declared independent in 1999 and Russia has since eased conditions under which Abkhazians can acquire Russian passports, as a result many Abkhazians hold dual Russian citizenship.¹⁶² Abkhazia is of geostrategic value whereas South Ossetia, other than the Russian Military Highway leading into Georgia proper, is desolate by comparison. Among Abkhazia's resources are coal, timber, and hydroelectric power.¹⁶³ Abkhazia also offers another outlet to the Black Sea and with it, possibly more valuable commodities. It entered an agreement with Russia's Rosneft in 2009 allowing the latter to explore for natural gas and oil.¹⁶⁴ However, it is notable that a shadow economy, levels of corruption, and nepotism remain prevalent.¹⁶⁵ Together, with South Ossetia the two exist in a liminal space and despite the promulgation of state constitutions, the joint fate is undecided. The following two sections will discuss the current institutional mechanisms in both the Republic of Georgia and the Autonomous Republic of Ajaria as well as the mechanisms sustaining de-facto governance in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

¹⁶⁰ Apsny Press, "Constitution of the Republic of Abkhazia," accessed December 15, 2014, <http://apsnypress.info/en/constitution>.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² British Broadcasting Company, "Regions and Territories: Abkhazia," last updated 12 March 2012, accessed December 15, 2014, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3261059.stm>.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Radio Free Europe: Caucasus Report, "Rosneft, Abkhazia Sign Agreement on Oil, Gas Reserves," last updated May 27 2009, accessed December 16, 2014, http://www.rferl.org/content/Rosneft_Abkhazia_Sign_Agreement_On_Oil_Gas_Reserves/1740756.html.

¹⁶⁵ Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, "Fighting Corruption in Transition Economies: Georgia 2005," July 2005, accessed December 16, 2014, http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/governance/fighting-corruption-in-transition-economies-georgia-2005_9789264010789-en, 196. [10.1787/19901461](https://doi.org/10.1787/19901461).

CHAPTER 7

THE DEVELOPMENT OF POLITICAL MECHANISMS IN THE GEORGIAN REPUBLIC
AND THE AUTONOMOUS REPUBLIC OF AJARIA

It is necessary to define the political mechanisms operative in Georgia and the Autonomous Republic of Ajaria. The political mechanisms are the institutions which work in tandem in order to provide effective and efficient function of the state. Like many other post-Soviet states, Georgia had to establish its political trajectory following its independence in 1991. There were extant institutional mechanisms in place at the time of independence that carried over from the Soviet period as well as a model for a constitution which harkened back to its independence in 1921. A brief overview regarding the nature of Georgian politics is essential to understanding its current political trajectory. Additionally, a deeper knowledge of Georgian politics helps to dismantle a common binary that perceives Russia as an aggressor and Georgia as a victim in the battle for Abkhazia and South Ossetia. By providing insight into how Georgian politics developed post 1991 and how policies were either deleterious or apathetic to the needs of the separatist regions, it will allow for a deeper understanding of how Georgian politics currently affect the state's interactions with the separatist regions.

The chaotic and at times corrupt development of Georgian politics is a reasonable expectation for a government previously entrenched in the Soviet system. After the removal of Gamsakhurdia from power, Shevardnadze returned and an election was held. However, not all regions, such as Abkhazia voted and furthermore the election was nominal because Eduard Shevardnadze had no competition.¹⁶⁶ At a time when Tbilisi was ardent to maintain control over Abkhazia, it excluded an Abkhaz voice in Georgian politics. Later, Shevardnadze devised a coalition in the Citizens Union of Georgia which consisted of academics, communists,

¹⁶⁶ Areshidze, Irakly, *Democracy and Autocracy in Eurasia: Georgia in Transition*, 34.

nomenklatura (whom Shevardnadze needed in order to sustain his position as head of state) and also the Green Party. Along with a degree of political plurality there was also an opposition party called the National Democratic Party led by Gia Chanturia, whose stature provided a voice to a weak opposition until he was murdered in 1994.¹⁶⁷ The Georgian government was still not in a position to command attention from the separatist regions, especially with its government in such a precarious state. At the same time it is only fair to note that Georgia was on its way to developing a democratic system after two wars and three years post-independence. In 1995, Georgia's parliament was holding discussions on the best way to formulate a new constitution. Much of the arguments concerned what type of governing system Georgia should adopt. The contention was mainly between a presidential or parliamentary governing institution. One of the key problems with the negotiations was the lack of consideration on behalf of the politicians for their constituents' wants and needs combined with a zeal to ensure that the political system they adopted would provide them the most power.¹⁶⁸ Ultimately a parliamentary system was adopted which had enough power to make substantive decisions. It was directly representative of the people and could not be disbanded by the president or have its mandate revoked before the next appointed elections. The parliament was granted the power of the purse as well as the power to approve ministers.¹⁶⁹ As Areshidze notes, the Georgian government under the new constitution did not meet the expectations of a democratic government, however it was sturdy enough to provide some check on the executive branch as well as granting significant, albeit few powers, to the legislative and judiciary.¹⁷⁰ In 1995, Shevardnadze was elected president and the party he created, Citizens Union of Georgia (CUG) won a fair number of seats in parliament. At the time

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 35, 41.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 37.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 39.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

of the 1995 elections, an Ajarian party, Revival was aligned with Shevardnadze and the CUG. In actuality the primary goal of Revival was to protect Aslan Abashidze's rule in Ajaria. Though Abashidze was not making claims for independence, he maintained virtual control over Ajaria and used his close relationship with Shevardnadze to this end.¹⁷¹ In 1995, Zurab Zhvania became speaker in parliament. In the following years Zhvania positioned himself closely with Shevardnadze and used his influence to channel foreign aid to organizations of which he approved such as the UN Association of Georgia, Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy, and Development and the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association among others.¹⁷² Conversely, this meant that organizations of which Zhvania did not approve, did not receive external funds. Zhvania eventually amassed enough to power and influence to the extent that he was able to manipulate Shevardnadze into fulfilling his aspirations and the President came under the control of Zhvania. During this time corruption became evermore commonplace almost out of necessity as it was incredibly difficult to be successful in private business ventures due to obstructions created by the government. Indeed, Georgia implemented a VAT which became so cost prohibitive for many businesses that they simply did not implement it.¹⁷³ Notably however, the economy was growing at a fair pace by the late 1990s, not least due to its acceptance of massive amounts of foreign aid. Both the legislative and possibly also the presidential elections (which returned the incumbent Shevardnadze to the post) were manipulated.¹⁷⁴ By the turn of the millennium, the Georgian business elite consisted of individuals who built their businesses from the ground up. The government enacted policies in the 1990s that were antagonistic to a liberal

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 41.

¹⁷² Ibid., 42.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 44-45

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 49.

market, and thus business.¹⁷⁵ However, this business class still became prominent contenders on the political scene in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Members of this class were appointed to chair institutions that would advance free market reforms.¹⁷⁶ They soon ran into opposition in the parliament from the CUG. The man leading representation of the CUG at that time was Mikheil Saakashvili.

Mikheil Saakashvili: His Rise and Fall in Georgian Politics

Zhvania and Saakashvili were still backing Shevardnadze and the CUG. Part of this support manifested itself in attacking the business elite who were pressing the issue of market reform. As Areshidze notes, "Zhvania's team called the businessmen traitors and declared that they were endangering Georgia's stability and democracy, which they claimed only Shevardnadze and the CUG could provide."¹⁷⁷ Meanwhile, Zhvania engineered the fraud that took place in the 1999 and 2000 elections.¹⁷⁸ By the summer of 2001 Saakashvili was prepared to part ways with Shevardnadze, the man who helped build Saakashvili's political career. He wanted to appear to the public as taking a firm stance against corruption. Though this was mostly for appearances as Saakashvili, by virtue of being politically tied to Shevardnadze during his career rise, was implicit in the very corruption he was condemning.¹⁷⁹ Saakashvili's next move was to create his own party, the United National Movement, a party that later allied itself with others and became Saakashvili's party when he won the presidential election in 2004 and again in 2008.¹⁸⁰ It has

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 52.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 54.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 59.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 56-57.

¹⁸⁰ Tom Lansford, ed. *Political Handbook of the World 2015*, (Thousand Oaks: CQ Press, 2015), 519-520. https://books.google.com/books?id=PdWTBwAAQBAJ&pg=PA286&lpg=PA286&dq=Political+Handbook+of+the+World,+google&source=bl&ots=1PHozi2avd&sig=1_OscjlahqgOhEE57MX-4b4jW3A&hl=en&sa=X&ei=Lhc8VY6tL8W2sAXowoCoBg&ved=0CEoQ6AEwDA#v=onepage&q=Political%20Handbook%20of%20the%20World%2C%20google&f=false

been well documented that Saakashvili was very deft at public relations, both domestically and in his courtship of western institutions and states, the U.S. especially. Domestically, Saakashvili relied on a combination of nationalism and populism in order to win and maintain popular support, a tactic employed by Gamsakhurdia from the very outset. Abroad, the president touted the liberal reforms advanced by his camp and the further creation of democratic institutions.¹⁸¹ As De Waal notes, though Saakashvili's government made great strides in curbing corruption, it did so in a manner that was less democratic than his rhetoric would have the West believe.¹⁸² As late as 2012, in a meeting with President Obama at the White House, Obama affirmed the progress that Georgia made regarding "institution building", "rule of law" and the forthcoming "free and fair elections."¹⁸³ The irony lies in that Saakashvili himself would soon be due to stand trial for numerous charges including misuse of funds, impeding the rule of law and engaging in extralegal measures to thwart opposition.¹⁸⁴ In December of 2014, Giorgi Badashvili made clear his intentions to appeal to Interpol to place Saakashvili on its wanted list.¹⁸⁵

Margvelashvili's appeals to Abkhazia and South Ossetia

During Saakashvili's time as president he managed to amend the constitution by shifting more power to the Prime Minister from the position of president.¹⁸⁶ These changes took effect when Giorgi Margvelashvili acceded to the presidency in November of 2013 after being elected in October. Margvelashvili belongs to Georgian Dream, Prime Minister Ivanishvili's political party

¹⁸¹ Thomas De Waal, "So long Saakashvili: The Presidency That Lived by Spin--And Died by It," October 29, 2013, accessed March 27, 2015, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/140227/thomas-de-waal/so-long-saakashvili>.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ "President Obama's Bilateral Meeting with President Saakashvili of Georgia." YouTube video, 6:15, posted by "The White House," January 30, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XL_3OjrZu1E.

¹⁸⁴ Civil Georgia, "Chief Prosecutor Vows All Efforts to Have Interpol 'Red Notice' for Saakashvili," 29 December 2014, accessed March 27, 2015, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=27946>.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ The Guardian, "Georgia Elects Oligarch PM Bidzina Ivanishvili's Candidate as President," 28 October 2013, accessed March 28, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/oct/28/georgia-elects-ivanishvili-margvelashvili-saakashvili>.

that surpassed Saakashvili's United National Movement in the 2012 parliamentary contest.¹⁸⁷

There are several points worth quoting directly from Margvelashvili's State of the Nation

Address in February of 2014 regarding both Abkhazia and South Ossetia as well as direct appeal to Russia.

I would like to address our Abkhazian and Ossetian compatriots with the words I pronounced presenting my pre-election program: We offer you to live in the European, free, developed, democratic and peaceful state, which will be the guarantee of well-being, protection of ethnic, religious and cultural identity of its each citizen and the immunity of their political rights. I also want to address the leaders of the de-facto regimes on our occupied territories: do not act against the vital interests of your people and do not try to create new obstacles between the peoples, who are linked with common statehood for many centuries. Our unity was violated due to many mistakes and by rough interference of other parties that costed [sic] for us the blood of our peoples. The identity and self-cognition of Abkhazian and Ossetian people is in jeopardy today. The strongest warrant for the protection of these principles is in our unity and co-habitation. Therefore, if the future of Abkhazians, Ossetians and all the peoples living on these territories is the least precious for you, don't leave them in isolation!¹⁸⁸

Margvelashvili makes clear in this excerpt that the Georgian political elite are approaching the political situation in the de-facto states with condescension and misunderstanding. This is illustrated by his appeal to the leaders of these regions in asserting that they misunderstand the will of people. Georgia has unequivocally chosen a European orientation but in the process is overlooking the inconvenient truth that Abkhazia and South Ossetia may not want the same. In Margvelashvili's March 2015 address to the Georgian parliament he stated, "Now, when the world is situated in the process of a search for a new order, not only do we need Europe, but

¹⁸⁷ Ibid. and, The President of Georgia Giorgi Margvelashvili, "Biography," Accessed March 28, 2015, <https://www.president.gov.ge/en/President/Biography>.

¹⁸⁸The President of Georgia: Giorgi Margvelashvili, "Documents," February 21, 2014, accessed March 28, 2015, <https://www.president.gov.ge/en/PressOffice/Documents?8674>.

Europe and the west need a developed, democratic Georgia." (Теперь, когда мир находится в процессе поиска нового порядка, не только нам нужна Европы, но и Европе и западу нужна развитая, демократическая Грузия.)¹⁸⁹

Indeed, as will be discussed later in this section, both Abkhazia and South Ossetia have both entered into agreements that deepens Russian involvement, not limit it. Continuing on, President Margvelashvili also addressed Russia saying that Georgia intends to become a liberal democratic state that will determine its own course and that

This is understood by our neighbors, this is understood by the progressive part of the mankind. Alongside with our partners we try our best to convince Russian Federation leadership in this. We try to show them that by creating obstacles to Georgia none of the problems of Russia will be solved. And even may be, on the contrary... We try to show them that secure, economically strong, stable Georgia, which has made its European and Euro-Atlantic choice, does not mean an Alliance against any other country. We are building a peaceful and democratic country that aims kind neighborly relations based only on the protection of our sovereignty and territorial integrity – only by respect to these values. With such rational approach, we have changed the aggressive rhetoric of the previous government that had not brought to any positive effect.¹⁹⁰

In November of 2014, Russia signed a treaty with Abkhazia which stipulated "...closer bilateral cooperation in the social, economic, humanitarian, foreign policy, defence and security areas, while preserving Abkhazia's state sovereignty."¹⁹¹ Russia officially recognized the independence of both Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the aftermath of the August 2008 war and has since pursued to build and strengthen relations with both de-facto governments. In February

¹⁸⁹ Civil Georgia: Ezhednevnye novosti onlaĭn, "Vystuplenie prezidenta Margvelashvili v parlamente," 31 March 2013, accessed April 7, 2015, <http://www.civil.ge/rus/article.php?id=27020&search=>.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹The Russian Government: Government Decisions, "Submitting a proposal to sign the Russia-Abkhazia Treaty on a Bilateral Alliance and Strategic Partnership to the Russian President," 21 November 2014, accessed March 28, 2015, <http://government.ru/en/docs/15760/>.

of 2015 Russia entered into an agreement with South Ossetia. The second clause of the first article of the agreement states the following:

2. The Russian Federation will in every possible way assist in the development of international relations with the Republic of South Ossetia, including widening the circle of official recognition of its state, and creating conditions for entry of South Ossetia in international organizations and associations, including in creating on initiative and (or) by the assistance of the Russian Federation.

2. Российская Федерация будет всемерно способствовать развитию международных связей Республики Южная Осетия, включая расширение круга официально признавших ее государств, и созданию условий для вступления Республики Южная Осетия в международные организации и объединения, в том числе в созданные по инициативе и (или) при содействии Российской Федерации.¹⁹²

Georgia responded by unequivocally condemning both moves. Indeed, Russia's agreement with Abkhazia compelled Georgians to protest on the streets of Tbilisi.¹⁹³ It also prompted Saakashvili to criticize the current government by not taking a more aggressive stance against Russia.¹⁹⁴ The Georgian government reoriented its trajectory in how it will approach Russia. Indeed, as is evident from Margvelashvili's address, the government has mollified its tone compared to the government led by the United National Movement and Saakashvili. The Political mechanisms structuring the Georgian government have shifted immensely since the Rose Revolution and as recently as 2013. Previous to 2013 the power to construct a government was manifested solely in the Presidency and was not required to be subject to review by the

¹⁹² Pravitel'stvo Rossii, *Pravitel'stvo Rossiiskoi Federatsii postanovlenie ot 23 Fevralia 2015 g. N.158*. Moskva, 23 February 2015, accessed March 28, 2015, <http://ips.pravo.gov.ru/?searchres=&bpas=cd00000&textpres=&sort=7&a6=102000066&a3=&a7type=4&a7from=&a7to=&input-date=&a8=&a8type=2&a1=%DE%E6%ED%E0%FF+%CE%F1%E5%F2%E8%FF>.

¹⁹³ British Broadcasting Company, "Georgians Protest against Russia-Abkhazian Agreement," last updated, 15 November 2014, accessed March 28, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-30071915>.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

Parliament.¹⁹⁵ The development of political mechanisms in Ajaria paralleled those in Tbilisi to some extent especially because Abashidze relied on Shevardnadze's backing for his political survival. Ajaria, did not begin to have developed democratic structures until Abashidze was ousted in 2004 and relations between Tbilisi and Batumi were overhauled. The next section will primarily focus on the structure of the Ajarian government and its current operation in relation to the Georgian government.

Political Mechanisms in Ajaria

As mentioned above, Ajaria was controlled by Aslan Abashidze from 1991 until 2004 when the political regime in Tbilisi changed. His political ties to Shevardnadze enabled Abashidze to maintain power and a great degree of autonomy in political, economic and social policy. The regional conflict in Ajaria in 2004 resulted from Saakashvili's successful attempt to depose Abashidze and his corrupt regime and in turn establish Tbilisi's control. The mechanisms for governance in Ajaria changed drastically post Abashidze. In July of 2004, the 'Law of the Autonomous Republic of Ajara On Structure, Authorities, And Rules for Activities of Government of the Autonomous Republic of Ajara' was established. This reestablished national control by granting the president of Georgia the power of approval regarding members of the Supreme Council of the Autonomous Republic of Ajara within in ten days of its formation.¹⁹⁶ Additionally the law makes clear that "... [t]he Government shall be in the composition of the executive power system of Georgia."¹⁹⁷ Ajaria is currently governed by the Supreme Council

¹⁹⁵ Patrick Ventrell, U.S. Department of State Press Statement, "Approval of Georgian Constitutional Amendment," March 25, 2013, accessed March 29, 2015, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2013/03/206658.htm>.

¹⁹⁶Government of Autonomous Republic of Adjara Citizen's Portal, "Law of the Autonomous Republic of Ajara On Structure, Authorities, And Rules for Activities of Government of the Autonomous Republic of Ajara," 29 July 2004, accessed March 27, 2015, <http://www.adjara.gov.ge/EngPage.aspx?pid=1425#.VRYH6eFO28A>.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

which is elected every four years as well as having both an executive and judicial branch, as well as being vested with the authority to devise its budget.¹⁹⁸ The system is federalized to the degree that it maintains local governing institutions responsible to the government in Batumi, its seat of government. In turn, Batumi is ultimately responsible to and governed by Tbilisi. The current Chairman of Government is Archil Khabadze whose work experience largely consists of bank administration. The government's ministries are Education, Culture and Sport, Labour, Health and Social Care as well as Agriculture and Finance and Economy. The administrative composition of Ajaria is worth noting in comparison to that of Abkhazia and South Ossetia regarding the current state of affairs in those regions. As will be discussed in the next section, the structures which exist in Ajaria are absent, to varying degrees, in the de-facto separatist regions. Both Abkhazia and South Ossetia have de-facto governing institutions but they are inhibited by resources, particularly in South Ossetia's case, and are institutionally anemic.

Mechanisms Sustaining De-facto Governance: An Analysis of Abkhazia and South Ossetia

There were institutions in place in Abkhazia and South Ossetia at the time of Georgia's independence from the Soviet Union. However weak these institutions were in comparison to those in Tbilisi, the governments in Sukhumi and Tskhinvali had a modicum of experience with government. Due to the wars in the 1990s, these institutions had little space to develop. Indeed, the struggle with Tbilisi over the degree of autonomy these regions would have combined with chauvinistic rhetoric emanating from Tbilisi eventually pushed Abkhazia and South Ossetia to officially declare independence in 1999 and 2008, respectively. As is well known, both de-facto governments were recognized by Moscow in addition to few smaller nations, but there was, and

¹⁹⁸ Government of Autonomous Republic of Adjara Citizens Portal, "About Adjara," accessed March 27, 2015, <http://www.adjara.gov.ge/EngPage.aspx?pid=1427#.VRYLleFO28A>.

is no broad recognition of Abkhazian and South Ossetian independence. Despite this fragile political position, institutions in the de-facto republics are supported by Russia. The institutions in Abkhazia and South Ossetia vary greatly, as do the resources each possesses for supporting the maintenance of their governments. The economy of Abkhazia is significantly more advanced than that of South Ossetia. In large part, this is due to the natural resources Abkhazia has at its discretion and its coast on the Black Sea. South Ossetia is landlocked and its agrarian economy largely relies on the informal market, a significant portion of which disappeared when Saakashvili's government closed the Ergneti market near Tskhinvali. Since the death of President Sergei Bagapsh in 2011, the Abkhazian government has experienced some disarray. At present, the current government in Sukhumi consists of a president, prime minister and parliament as well as a cabinet. The position of prime minister is selected by the president. However, after this appointment there is little accountability.¹⁹⁹ Indeed, one of the objectives of the recently elected President, Raul Khajimba, is to amend the constitution in order to create a mechanism for accountability within the government. Khajimba won the election by a very small margin and has faced criticisms from the opposition that his talk of democracy is merely rhetoric as he is dismissive of the opposition.²⁰⁰ Indeed, he led a coup against the former president, Aleksandr Ankvab for the very same reasons. Khajimba noted his primary objectives in his first speech as President, noting that unifying the nation, building the state and engaging in reform as well as engaging in new agreements with Russia regarding the relationship between governments.²⁰¹ At

¹⁹⁹Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, "Elected by a Hair, New Abkhaz Leader Faces Herculean Tasks," August 26, 2014, accessed March 29, 2015, <http://www.rferl.org/content/caucasus-report-abkhazia-khajimba/26550800.html>.

²⁰⁰Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, "New Abkhaz Leader Accused of Failing to Deliver on Election Promises," January 6, 2015, accessed March 29, 2015, <http://www.rferl.org/content/new-abkhaz-leader-election-promises-/26779335.html>.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

the end of November 2014, Khajimba and President Putin signed an agreement "On Union Relations And Strategic Partnership" which outlined measures for further integration. However, the deal did not go without debate in Abkhaz parliament and indeed the language of this document was edited after calls for changes by the Abkhaz government, including President Khajimba.²⁰² This is noteworthy because Abkhazia perceives its position of one that has some power to negotiate. In stark contrast, it is very clear that the government in South Ossetia does not carry the same negotiating power with Russia. This was illustrated at the end of 2013 in a visit by Vladislav Surkov who told the government that South Ossetia would not be able to join the CIS Customs Union until it "laying phone lines and asphaltting the streets."²⁰³ This in large part due to the fact that Tskhinvali failed to use Russian aid to rebuild infrastructure that was destroyed or maimed in the August 2008 war. Not only did Eduard Kokoity's government fail to use it, but it embezzled the majority of funds. It was for this reason, in addition to the poor state of the economy that the President of South Ossetia, Leonid Tibilov, disbanded the government at the beginning of 2014.²⁰⁴ The rebuilding of infrastructure is one of the primary objectives and obstacles with which the government is reconciling. Part of the problem lies with certain ministers who either will not work together or are placing more emphasis on establishing their political parties.²⁰⁵ It follows from this that those in the public who have remained in South Ossetia have become resigned to the poor state of their government.

²⁰²Apsny press, "Raul' Khadzhimba: 'U Abkhazii net inogo soiuznika, krome Rossii, i my ne imeem prava diskreditirovat' ideiu rasshireniia i uglubleniia nashego sotrudnichestva po razlichnym napravleniiam," 22 October, 2014, accessed March 29, 2015, <http://apsny.ru/news/?ID=12046>.

²⁰³ Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, "Is South Ossetia Heading for a New Political Crisis?" January 28, 2014, accessed March 29, 2015, <http://www.rferl.org/content/ossetia-politics-georgia-/25244899.html>.

²⁰⁴Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

CONCLUSION

One of the main objectives of this project was to identify reasons explaining why Abkhazia and South Ossetia separated from Georgia but not Ajaria, especially given that Ajaria endured the longest foreign occupation among the three regions. It is at this juncture that questions and perceptions of ethnic identity are most prevalent. Unlike Abkhazia or South Ossetia, Ajarians perceive the Georgian state not as a separate entity but one of which they are a part. The Abkhaz and South Ossetian governments continue to seek a sovereign identity recognized by the international community. Currently, Russia is the only powerful guarantor backing claims of sovereignty, despite maintaining geo-strategic interests for doing so. Importantly, the governments of Abkhazia and South Ossetia are not in a position to fight for sovereignty. Though Abkhazia has more resources than South Ossetia, both do not have the military base to fight for independence and so must rely on Russia. The current geo-strategic political situation dictates that both Abkhazia and South Ossetia seek sovereign states recognized by the international community, but cannot do so and are thus caught betwixt political powers. Toft's theory regarding the indivisibility of territory is helpful in explaining the current condition of the Georgian state. The land is integral to the realization of objectives pursued both by Georgia and, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Compared to the state, ethnic groups often perceive territory as an inherent part of their identity, whereas states understand land in terms of territorial integrity and having a politically consolidated state. Abkhazia and South Ossetia as well as the Georgian state are all reliant on the same territory for which they are fighting to realize their objectives. The longevity of Georgia as a political unit is directly dependent on the maintenance of its territorial integrity, just as the fate of Abkhazian and South Ossetian independence rests in their ability to maintain control of their current land claims.

Thus the stateness problem continues to plague Georgia. The Russian response to Abkhazia and South Ossetia has only further served to complicate conflicts which are easily rekindled. Additionally, the roles of the European Union, Council of Europe, OSCE and the United Nations have largely been peacekeeping and democracy building. In June of 2014, Georgia signed an Association Agreement with the EU. This firmly signaled to Moscow that Tbilisi was orienting westward, at least under the current administration. Still, Georgia's territorial integrity is very ambiguous, but it is clear that to the extent Abkhazia and South Ossetia have Russia's guarantee, complete democratic consolidation of Georgia will be evasive. The question is whether Russia is truly acting as a champion for the rights of Abkhazians and South Ossetians or if its ulterior motive is to prevent Georgia from becoming a consolidated democracy aligned with the West. Yet, Russia's motives may comprise both scenarios. It is true that a stable Georgia would potentially be very strategic for the U.S. and other western operations in which they are involved. In fact, the U.S. military held training exercises in 2008, shortly before but unrelated to the August 2008 War. Moreover, events in the region should not be analyzed in isolation from world events. It is clear by Russia's actions in Crimea that it is exacerbating conflict in order to manipulate potential outcomes to its advantage. In many ways, Russia still conceptualizes its security as a zero-sum game. If states, like Ukraine and Georgia orient and indeed become fully fledged members of a European and U.S. driven security paradigm, it is perceived as a loss and thus a threat to Russian security. This is perhaps in part an explanation for Russia's instigation in its near abroad.

However, it is equally as useful to strip away the international dimension in analysis of the two separatist regions in order to understand the behavior of the Georgian government towards Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Ajaria since its independence in 1991. Rather

significantly the negative character of Georgian policy towards its minorities provided much of the impetus for Abkhazian and South Ossetian independence. This negativity was partly due to the populist nature of domestic politics which often contained nationalist appeals and threatened all of Georgia's minorities. Gamsakhurdia's reactive policies and rhetoric further alienated and disenfranchised Abkhazia, and South Ossetia especially, driving both regions to conclude that the best way to protect their rights and identity was through independence. Though Shevardnadze was less divisive than his predecessor, he nevertheless failed to reestablish the Georgian borders of 1918-1921. After Shevardnadze was forced to leave office following the Rose Revolution, Mikheil Saakashvili employed the same populist rhetoric of Gamsakhurdia. This signaled to both Abkhazia and South Ossetia that Georgia would not allow independence.

The theory of reputation building, as put forth by Barbara Walter can explain this unwillingness to allow independence for Abkhazia and South Ossetia. As previously mentioned there are additional ethnicities with neighboring states that could potentially make claims for independence if they perceived Abkhazia and South Ossetia successful in doing so, namely Armenia and Azerbaijan. Moreover, despite that Ajaria is considered ethnically Georgian, success of independence movements could make Ajaria less inhibited in the future to separate were it to find its economic and political relationship with Tbilisi cumbersome, as Abashidze did from 1991 to 2004. Thus, it is advantageous for the Georgian state to engage in reputation building by remaining firm in its refusal of independence for any region and maintaining the ability to support that position, politically and militarily. This is one of the key reasons why financial assistance from the U.S. and EU has consistently been a priority of Tbilisi, since Saakashvili's government and beyond.

The Georgian state is substantially less fragile than it was throughout the 1990s, not least because of its partnership with Western institutions which has garnered financial and political support, and also placed Georgia's separatist regions on the West's radar, especially after the 2008 war. The international dimension is naturally a composite of powerful interests, which at times are in direct conflict with one another. One of Russia's priorities following the end of the Soviet Union was to maintain some influence over its near abroad with the newly independent republics. The Commonwealth of Independent States provided an ideal forum by which this objective could be realized. Indeed, Georgia joined in 1993. Though Russian policy towards Abkhazia and South Ossetia was for much the 1990s aligned with Georgia, it quickly reoriented as it perceived the further encroachment of the west on its near abroad. Especially after Shevardnadze left office, Moscow no longer had a Georgian head of state whom it could trust would be conservative. Thus, much of Russian policy can be seen as a reaction to western involvement in the South Caucasus, and in Ukraine for that matter. Finally, Russia's support of Abkhazian and South Ossetian independence encourages instability in Russia and prolongs its status as liability; a liability that not all western institutions are keen to fully embrace.

It is notable that western involvement in the region seeks to stabilize the balance of power and increases its regional influence via financial assistance and political agreements with Georgia. Russia employs these same methods to promote its influence in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. It is notable that no strict binary exists in which Russia is the clear aggressor and the U.S. acts as a purely positive influence. Though Russia's role is antagonistic in some ways and its motives for supporting Abkhazian and South Ossetian independence are not entirely benevolent, it acts from self interest, as do all states and institutions. The aspirations of Abkhazia and South Ossetia are exploited by Russia and disregarded by the West because those respective policies

prove to be the most advantageous. The antagonism between Russia and the West has only facilitated the economic and political stagnancy in the separatist regions while adding to the frustrations stoking the ongoing potential for violent conflict, ultimately working against Georgia's aspirations for territorial integrity and a consolidated democracy.

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