Fractured Identity: Russian Aggression and Challenges to Georgia's Territorial Integrity in Abkhazia and South Ossetia's Collective Memory

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Georgia on the Verge of Conflict

"In the USSR, Georgians were not permitted a national football team, but they dreamed of it. When the chance came, Georgians found they had missed out on the training: they had neither the team skills, nor the means, nor the leadership to build it."[1] Stephen Jones, an expert in the history and politics of the South Caucasus, describes in these words the state of Georgian identity after the collapse of the Soviet Union, when the Georgian people discovered that the idea of a great past was a myth, and the reality was much harsher than they had imagined.

Georgia has always been a multicultural country at the crossroads of Asia and Europe, so it is no coincidence that people of many different ethnicities have coexisted here relatively peacefully.

The Abkhazian people have been living in the territory of Abkhazia since the 8th century as a result of the unification of sub-ethnic units and they have made a significant contribution to the formation of a unified Georgia. The issue of Abkhazia's inclusion as part of a united Georgia was never questioned until the 19th century. It was in the 19th century that the Russian Empire began a series of attempts to weaken Georgian-Abkhazian cultural and historical unity. The first obvious step towards this was the creation of the Abkhazian script based on the Russian alphabet, whose creator Pyotr Uslar admitted that the purpose was to remove Abkhazians from the Georgian cultural world and integrate them into the Russian one instead.[2] Despite the efforts of the Russian Empire, and later the Soviet Union, as well as the political mistakes made by the representatives of both sides, Abkhazia has always been an organic part of the unified Georgian ethno-cultural and political space.

In the case of South Ossetia, the situation is different - Ossetians have lived in Georgia, in the territory of Shida Kartli, since the 13th century, although economic and, naturally, political ties with the peoples of the North Caucasus were constantly limited by geographical factors. The term South Ossetia first appeared in the early 19th century, in documents of the Russian Empire. This has parallels with how it referred to other Georgian sub-ethnic groups such as the Megrelians, Imerelians and Kakhelians and counted them separately in later censuses, which was a constituent part of the divide *et impera* policy. The term "South Ossetia", as a designation for an administrative territorial formation with defined borders, originated in 1922, when the South Ossetian Autonomous Region of the Georgian SSR was established. In the collective memory of the Ossetians, the first significant confrontation with the Georgian side appears in 1918-20 when the Menshevik government suppressed the Bolshevik uprisings in the Shida Kartli region. Later, they referred to these events as "genocide", but only based on memories and unconfirmed reports. Rather, the First Democratic Republic of Georgia prevented coups attempts not only by Ossetian Bolshevik groups, but by Georgian and other nationalities as well, which were orchestrated by Russian Bolsheviks. Consequently, as in the case of Abkhazia, the South Ossetian conflict has been artificially fueled by Russia and also facilitated by the unpreparedness of the Georgian political elite in the late 1980s and early 1990s.[3]

Despite the steps taken towards de-Sovietisation, the actions of the Georgian government at that time were often criticized, such as in the electoral law enacted in 1990, which excluded ethnic minority parties from the electoral process. According to this legislation, parties "whose activity does not extend over Georgia's entire territory"

Georgian regions under Russian occupation.
Source: https://agenda.ge/uploads/files/press-scanner/scanner-06-21.jpg, acceessed 30 September 2024.

were restricted in their participation. This led to a boycott by Abkhazian (Aidgilara) and Ossetian (Adamon Nykhas) political groups, thereby exacerbating the prevailing discord and discontent.[4]

A similar divide is reflected in attitudes towards symbolic figures, such as Georgia's first President Zviad Gamsakhurdia (who was de facto leader from 26 May 1991 to 6 January 1992). Many Georgians view Gamsakhurdia as a national hero and near-martyr fighting for independence, but for Abkhazians he is often seen as an ultra-nationalist who revived the theory of Pavle Ingorokva and referred to Abkhazians as "guests on the territory of Georgia".[5][6] For Ossetians, the first president of Georgia is seen as a figure whose rhetoric led to bloodshed and ethnic conflict in South Ossetia in the early 1990s.[7] These instances once again show us the disparity in perceptions of the past among Georgians, Ossetians, and Abkhazians, emphasising the need for great caution when expressing opinions or taking positions on these sensitive issues.

Naturally, it is untenable to absolve any of the three parties from responsibility for inciting ethnic conflicts and later instigating two bloody wars, one in South Ossetia in 1991-92 and the other in Abkhazia in 1992-93, which claimed several thousand lives. However, it would be naive to attribute the problem solely to nascent Georgian nationalism, or to Ossetian and Abkhazian separatism. The primary issue lies with their shared northern neighbor, whose influence is evident at every step of these ethnic conflicts. On 10 July 1956, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) adopted a decree in which it criticised the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia for its inappropriate reaction to the mistakes of Lavrentiy Beria, a Georgian national and former head of the NKVD.[8] The document stated that for years, the rights of Abkhazians had been violated and their national interests neglected by the most influential Georgians – such as Beria but also Joseph Stalin, the leader of the Soviet Union from 1924 until his death in 1953. The adoption of this decree was immediately followed by an outcry in Abkhazian society. In August 1956, the President of the Council of Ministers of Abkhazia and other Party officials criticized Tbilisi, after the new leader of the Soviet Union, Nikita Khrushchev, delivered the "Secret Speech" at the 20th Communist Party Congress on 25 February 1956, which denounced Stalin's purges and ushered in a less repressive era in the Soviet Union.[9] Khruschev's speech caused days of protests and rioting in Tbilisi, which ended with a Soviet army crackdown on 9 March 1956.[10]

The protest by Abkhaz politicians, which fully fitted the paradigm of the era and was based on Stalin and Beria's "Georgianness", was also used

as a weapon of confrontation with the Georgian SSR but did not develop in any significant way – the situation in the region still remained under the control of two centers: Tbilisi and Moscow. However, in the 1980s, with the collapse of the USSR nearing, in parallel with the gradual withdrawal of its constituent republics from strict central control, the antagonism reached its peak, ultimately culminating in a war in 1992-93.

In the case of the South Ossetia conflict, the situation presented similar traits, symbolised by the completion of the Roki tunnel in 1984. The official goals of this project were to connect the people of North Ossetia (Russian SFSR) and South Ossetia (Georgian SSR) for mutual economic benefits, but there were obviously political and military objectives too and it was opposed by the communist leaders of Georgia for decades. However, in the end, Moscow prevailed, and subsequently, the tunnel played a fatal role in the history of Georgia and served Russia's strategic goals in the region.[11]

In 1989, alienation between ethnic Georgians and Ossetians began to intensify. It became evident that South Ossetia was embarking on a path similar to Abkhazia, seeking separation from Georgia, which was itself fighting for independence from the Soviet Union. It aimed for unity with North Ossetia. On November 10, 1989, under pressure from the Adamon Nykhas group and in response to the "Georgian Language State Program Project", a session of the Council of People's Deputies of the South Ossetian Autonomous District was held. During this session, issues regarding declaring the Ossetian language the state language and changing the status of the South Ossetian Autonomous District were discussed. In response, on November 23, 1989, between 15,000 and 30,000 demonstrators were organised and transported to stage a protest in Tskhinvali, the capital of the South Ossetian Autonomous District. Upon their arrival, the demonstrators faced resistance from Soviet security forces, resulting in clashes. In response to this demonstration, the leadership of the separatist Adamon Nykhas group initiated the establishment of the first militias in South Ossetia.[12] In the early 1990s, still newly independent Georgia was not sufficiently prepared to adequately deal with the tensions aggravated by Russia in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The government's rhetoric only exacerbated the existing situation, and the separatist regions did not show willingness for a peaceful solution to the problem either. Unfortunately, the political culture was weak and there was a lack of readiness in the country. At that moment, war seemed inevitable, and eventually, it happened.

Evolution of Collective Memory: Perspectives from Abkhazia

As mentioned briefly earlier, detailing the course of the actual conflict is not the primary objective of this essay, given its numerous prior accounts.[13] This paper aims to summarise the dimensions of collective memory—the prevailing perceptions within Georgian, Ossetian, and Abkhazian societies—concerning the war, subsequent post-war developments, and Russia's role in these events.

In the Abkhazian collective memory, the perception of opponents and allies in the ethnic conflict is contradictory. According to the Abkhazian academic Stanislav Lakoba, when Georgian armed forces entered Abkhazia in August 1992, a significant number of tanks and military helicopters were under the command of Russian servicemen from the Transcaucasian Military District (ZakVO). Lakoba attributes this observation to an agreement signed in Sochi (also known as Dagomys) on 24 June 1992 by the Head of the State Council of Georgia, Eduard Shevardnadze, and the President of Russia, Boris Yeltsin, ostensibly marking the end of both the Georgian–Ossetian and Georgian–Abkhazian conflicts. Lakoba contends that, from his perspective, the "invasion of Abkhazia" was arranged during this meeting.[14] However, Lakoba's opinion is paradoxical as he identifies the Confederation of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus as an ally and saviour during a difficult moment. Notably, this so-called confederation, unrecognised by Moscow, aligned itself with the Abkhaz early in the conflict. In reality, this organisation functioned as a puppet in the hands of the Russian Federation, a fact later substantiated by several events.[15]

Lakoba also points to the Enguri railway bridge explosion on the morning of August 14, 1992, attributing the act to Russian intelligence services, as noted in his work.[16] This incident stands out as one of the crucial episodes during the initial phase of the conflict. While Lakoba does not explicitly state it, such an assessment implies an acknowledgement of Russia's role as a catalyst in the Abkhazian-Georgian conflict. Another distinctive part of the collective memory of the Abkhazians, which counters the narrative of Russia as "saviour", is the

period from 1859 to 1920, when Russia forcibly relocated about 2.5 million inhabitants from the Caucasus, including Abkhazians.[17] This process of deportation, known as the Muhajir Movement or Mohajirstvo (Мохаджирство), orchestrated by the Russian Empire against the indigenous population on ethnic and religious grounds, had severe negative consequences. It significantly undermined the lives and demographic composition of Abkhazians and other Caucasian peoples.[18] It is thus from this period that the ethnic Abkhaz proportion of the native population of Abkhazia started to decline and this process holds immense symbolic meaning for the Abkhaz.[19] Consequently, the collective memory of this forced relocation continues to hinder relations between Abkhazians and Russians.

The perspectives of both the Georgian and Abkhaz sides regarding their respective communist pasts are intriguing. In Georgia, the prevailing narrative attributes the problems in Abkhazia and South Ossetia to the Soviet Union, pointing specifically to the creation of autonomous entities in these regions as the root cause.[20] Conversely, in the Abkhazian collective memory, the Soviet Union is associated with the loss of independence, primarily attributed to the policies and actions of high-ranking ethnically Georgian communists, such as Stalin and Beria.[21] Initially, Abkhazia was recognised as an independent entity within the USSR but with a special status, designated as a "treaty republic" with Georgia. However, in 1931, the republic was placed under the authority of the Georgian SSR as an autonomous republic.

The most effective approach to gauge the present-day perception of Russia in the collective memory of the Abkhazian people is to examine the history textbooks used in Abkhazian schools to educate the youth. Published in 2015, one of these books coincided with the Russian Federation officially recognising Abkhazia as an independent state and establishing diplomatic relations. Despite portraying Georgia as an aggressive state during the Abkhazian war and its aftermath, the narrative refrains from adopting Russia's portrayal of itself as a "saviour", which is noteworthy.[22] Furthermore, the book acknowledges the blockade of 1994-99, a period that the former so-called Minister of Foreign Affairs of the self-proclaimed republic, Viacheslav Chirikba, directly attributes to Russia.[[23]][[24]] Although Lakoba and historian Oleg Bgazhba do not explicitly name the perpetrator of the blockade, the mere mention of this fact carries significant weight. Expressions of gratitude towards Russia are only evident in one section, notably when describing the events of the August 2008 war. The narrative suggests that, seemingly at the behest of the Abkhaz nation, Russia recognised their independence. Interestingly, this is the sole section of the textbook where Russia is portrayed as the defender and saviour of Abkhazia.[25]

The Abkhazians' perspective on their own territory and Russia's interests within it is intriguing. At the end of 2023, the self-proclaimed government of Abkhazia's decision to lease the Bichvinta (Pitsunda) complex to Russia for 50 years sparked a significant protest in the heart of Sokhumi.[26] Abkhazians had already expressed their discontent about this issue in 2022.[27] A survey conducted in 2011 among Abkhazia's population revealed that 80% of the ethnically Abkhaz respondents supported independence, while approximately 19% preferred joining Russia. Considering that in 2011, when the survey took place, Russia was perceived as the savior of the Abkhazian people from Georgian aggression, it is plausible to assume that even fewer people today support integration with Russia.[28]

In summarising the Abkhazian people's collective memory regarding the war and Russia, it is evident that Russia's role in the 1992-93 conflict has been perceived differently over time. Initially seen as a supporter of Georgia, this perception transformed, and Russia later came to be seen as a peacemaker. Over the subsequent two decades, there has been a shift, with Russia now being regarded as the guarantor of Abkhazia's independence, although territorial integration is not discussed. In contrast, the attitude towards the Georgian state remains unchanged. In Abkhazian memory, Georgia is still perceived as the aggressor. This perception is not only reflected in textbooks but also has an impact on real life situations, such as negatively affecting the living conditions of the Georgian population in the Gali municipality.[29]

Evolution of Collective Memory: Perspectives from South Ossetia

In South Ossetia, the current situation differs significantly, possibly due to unique circumstances or factors specific to that region. While in Abkhazia the attitude towards Russia is somewhat mixed, South Ossetia presents a radically different picture.

The Gali district in occupied Abkhazia, where the majority of the population is Georgian. Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/c/cd/United_Nation_Abkhazia_small.PNG, accessed 30 September 2024.

This stark contrast can be attributed to the region's complete economic dependence on Russian finances, as South Ossetia has no alternative sources of income.[30] According to the same research, 90% of the respondents in South Ossetia expressed a positive attitude towards Russians, while over 60% displayed a negative attitude towards Georgians.[31]

In 2021, a study was conducted to examine the perceptions and memories of young people residing in occupied South Ossetia and Georgia regarding each other. Through in-depth interviews, the research revealed several notable findings. Among young Georgians, the understanding of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict is predominantly shaped by narratives shared within their families and social circles. On the other hand, young Ossetians receive additional information about the conflict through schools and universities. Despite being more confident in discussing the conflict's background, development, and participants, their discourse is frequently marked by contradictions, stemming from reliance on unverified narratives. Interestingly, young Georgians express a preference for a scenario where South Ossetia is integrated into Georgia, although they are less optimistic about its feasibility. In contrast young Ossetians, while seeking sovereignty, also contemplate aligning with Russia as a means of ensuring security.[32]

In the case of South Ossetia, historical revisionism plays a prominent role. The historical narratives disseminated across mainstream books and textbooks, such as the so-called *History of South Ossetia*, are entirely constructed on Russian-centric and therefore false reasoning. The Kremlin is constantly trying to connect the histories of North Ossetia and South Ossetia, establishing yet another mechanism of influence on Georgia. After the 2008 Russo-Georgia war, Russian Prime minister and de-facto leader, Vladimir Putin, asserted in an interview with CNN that, back in the mid-18th century (specifically 1745-47), Ossetia was "the first to become part of the Russian Empire". He also offered the listeners an extensive, politically motivated discourse on the history of Georgia.[33] This statement was a complete falsification of history, since there was in fact no territorial unit under the name of 'Ossetia' during that period. Putin repeated an almost identical narrative in 2019.[34] In that year, there was a political crisis in Georgia when Duma member, and supporter of Abkhasian independence, Sergei Gavrilov visited Russia to give a speech at the Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy (IAO)[35]. Additionally, Putin labelled the suppression of Bolshevik uprisings from 1918-1920 by the Democratic Republic of Georgia as "genocide", which was a clear example of historical revisionism. The issue of recognising "the genocide of South Ossetians by Georgia in 1920" is periodically raised in the State Duma of Russia, though the issue has never materialised into an actual legal document or initiative. Instead, Russia employs it as political leverage against Georgia.[36] At first glance, true and critically reviewed historical narratives regarding the Ossetian conflict are virtually non-existent, making all existing narratives the object of Russian historical revisionism. One reason for this is that not only independence, but even the question of autonomy of South Ossetia was never on the agenda until the 1920s. The historical validation of "South Ossetia" was served by Putin's aforementioned revisionist rhetoric, and at the time, this idea was also behind the construction of the Roki tunnel. Taking all this into account, it is natural and understandable that we do not find anti-Russian attitudes in the collective memory of the South Osset-

ian population because in the case of both conflicts (1991-92 and 2008) and in historical (re)writing, the Russian Federation is portrayed as their main supporter. Of course, we should also mention the role of the National Liberation Movement of Georgia and its leader, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, in further aggravating the tension in South Ossetia, which led to the perception of the Georgian side as the "aggressor" in the collective imagination of the Ossetian population, which grew up on Soviet narratives.[37]

While the surrender of independence is not seriously contemplated in the case of Abkhazia, a markedly different situation has emerged in the politics of South Ossetia. Following the 2008 war, Russia became revered as Ossetia's saviour, with the former so-called president of South Ossetia, Anatoly Bibilov, even proposing a referendum on the union of South Ossetia with North Ossetia (itself part of the Russian Federation). However, this decision was indefinitely suspended at the behest of the Russian side.[38] It is likely that Russia avoided creating a new centre of tension in the Caucasus at a time when it was already fighting the war in Ukraine but it may choose to leverage this option at a later date.

In contrast to Abkhazia, the role of Russia in the collective memory of the South Ossetian population has significantly expanded over the past decades. Even today, Russia is perceived as the sole protector and saviour from the aggression of the Georgian state, serving as the only guarantor of independence. The presence of a Russian military base in the region is deemed critically important from both a public peace and economic standpoint.

Conclusion

The aftermath of the conflicts, marked by heightened tensions and evolving geopolitical landscapes, has instigated shifts in the perception of Russia among local populations. These changes have not only influenced their political choices but have also led to a reconfiguration of their historical narratives. Research reveals that the perception of the Abkhazian people of the ethnic conflict and Georgia remains unchanged, as they still consider themselves victims of Georgian aggression. However, there has been a change in the perception of Russia's role over the past decades. The glorification of Russia as a saviour is no longer evident in school textbooks or in various academic works. Despite the significance of Russian military bases on the territory of Abkhazia for the local population, the issue of territorial integration is not actively discussed, and even small territorial concessions are viewed critically.[39]

From the Georgian perspective, the situation in South Ossetia has worsened over the past decades, while in the collective memory of the Ossetian population, Russia has maintained its image as the saviour during the wars of the 1990s and 2008. Unlike Abkhazia, where public diplomacy is facilitated by the frequent traffic of Georgians living there and the portions of the territory controlled by the Georgian state, South Ossetia lacks a comparable situation.[40] While there are high-profile individuals among the Abkhazians critical of the Russian Federation, no such signs of criticism are evident in South Ossetia. The issue of joining the occupied region to Russia remains a looming threat for the Georgian state, akin to a sword of Damocles.

In conclusion, this study has strived to offer an analysis of the evolving perceptions of Georgians and Russians over the past decades among the Russian-occupied regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Departing from the prevailing focus on divergent historical narratives between Georgia and the breakaway regions in existing studies, this research redirects attention to the pivotal role of Russia in these conflicts and its consequential impact on the collective memory of the Abkhaz and South Ossetian populations.

Timeline

— 1859-1920 – Mohajirstvo - the forced expulsion of several thousand Abkhaz people, mainly to the Ottoman Empire
— 1921-1922 – Russian Bolshevik occupation and Sovietizing of Georgia
— 31 March 1921 – Creation of the Socialist Soviet Republic of Abkhazia as a as a “treaty republic” with Georgian SSR
— 1922 – Creation of the South Ossetian Autonomous District
— 19 February 1931 – Abolition of the Abkhazian SSR and replacement with the Abkhaz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic within the Georgian SSR
— 25 February 1956 – Khrushchev’s secret speech on the cult of personality and its consequences
— 1984 – Completion of the Roki tunnel
— 18 March 1989 - Lykhny gathering and appeal in Abkhazian Autonomous Republic in favor of independence of Abkhazia with the restoration of the status of the Federal Republic
— 23 November 1989 - Protests in Tskhinvali, South Ossetian AD
— 9 April 1989 – The Anti-Soviet, pro-independence demonstration was crushed by the Soviet Army, resulting in 21 deaths and hundreds of injuries
— 9 April 1991 - The Supreme Council of the Republic of Georgia proclaimed Georgian sovereignty and independence from the Soviet Union
— 1991-1993 - First South Ossetian War
— 1992-1993 - War in Abkhazia
— 2008 – August War

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Footnotes

1 Jones, Stephen F. 2012. Georgia: A Political History Since Independence. London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd. p. 14.
2 Анчабадзе, Зураб, (1976), Очерки этнической истории абхазского народа, p. 96.
3 Zürcher, Christoph, (2007), The Post-Soviet Wars: Rebellion, Ethnic Conflict, and Nationhood in the Caucasus. New York and London: New York University Press. p.119.
4 In November 1988, the "Georgian Language State Program Project" was published, which provided for the protection of the constitutional status of the Georgian language in the entire territory of the Georgian SSR, including the territory of the Abkhazian SSR and the South Ossetian Autonomous District. Two political groups, the Abkhazian party Aidgilara and the Ossetian party Adamon Nykhas, were founded shortly afterwards. In Georgia, both parties are considered instigators of separatism, but in occupied Abkhazia and South Ossetia, they are viewed as national liberation movements. See Jones, op. cit., p. 49
5 Pavle Ingorokva (1893–1983) was a Georgian scholar who significantly expanded the ideas of historian Dimitri Bakradze (1826-1890). Bakradze proposed that the Abkhaz were settlers from the North Caucasus rather than indigenous inhabitants of Abkhazia.
6 Lakoba, Stanislav, (2001), Abkhazia - de facto or Georgia - de jure? Sapporo: Slavic Research Center, Hokkaido University, p. 4.
7 Chigoev, Merab, (2011), Some aspects of solving the problems of refugees and internally displaced persons in the context of Georgian-Ossetian relations. In Georgian-Ossetian Conflict: Searching for a Peaceful Solution, Edited by Susan Allen Nan, Fairfax: School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, George Mason University; Center for Information Technology: Intellectual Resources, p. 39-59.
8 Lavrentiy Beria (1899-1953) – Influential Soviet leader, state security administrator, chief of the Soviet security apparatus, and chief of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD). In this context, and afterward, Abkhazians blamed him for the "Georgianisation" of the region and the various targeted mass repressions of Abkhaz elites. On the other hand, Beria was responsible for the purges throughout Georgia as well.
9 Kemoklidze, Nino, (2016), Georgian-Abkhaz relations in the post-Stalinist era. In Georgia After Stalin: Nationalism and Soviet power, Edited by Timothy K. Blauvelt and Jeremy Smith, 129-145. Abingdon: Routledge. pp. 130-131.
10 See: Blauvelt, Timothy K. and Smith, Jeremy, Georgia after Stalin: Nationalism and Soviet power, "Routledge", 2018.
11 Joshua Keating. Georgians curse 'tunnel of misfortune'. Foreign Policy. 2008.08.19. https://foreignpolicy.com/2008/08/19/georgians-curse-tunnel-of-misfortune/, accessed 30 May 2024.
12 Zürcher, Christoph, op. cit. pp. 124-125.
13 For example, Studies in History of Present-Day Abkhazia. Part II. 1917-1993 (2007) by Zurab Papaskiri; Also Conflict in the Caucasus: Georgia, Abkhazia, and the Russian shadow by Svetlana Chervonnaya etc.
14 Lakoba, op. cit., pp. 35-37.
15 Human Rights Watch, (1995), Violations of the Laws of War and Russia's Role in the Conflict. Vol. 7. New York: Human Rights Watch. https://www.hrw.org/reports/pdfs/g/georgia/georgia953.pdf, accessed 30 May 2024, p. 43.
16 Lakoba, op. cit., p. 38.
17 Coene, Frederik, (2010), The Caucasus: An Introduction. London and New York: Routledge. p. 127.
18 On the Mohajirstvo see Vatcharadze, Anton, and Kldiashvili, Giorgi. 2022. Mohajirstvo of Abkhazians. Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI). http://historyproject.ge/ge/archivememoryresearch/article/470/?cat_id=40, accessed 30 May 2024.
19 Kemoklidze, Nino, (2013), Identity and Violence: Cases in Georgia, thesis submitted to the University of Birmingham for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. p. 137.
20 Kighuradze, Nino, Revaz Gachechiladze, and Giorgi Sanikidze, (2012), History. Textbook for 12 grade. Tbilisi: Bakur Sulakauri Publishing.
21 Chirikba, Viacheslav A., (1998), The Georgian-Abkhazian Conflict: In Search for Ways Out. In Georgians and Abkhazians: the search for peace, by Bruno Coppieters, Ghia Nodia and Yuri Anchabadze (Eds.), Köln: Bundesinstitut für ostwissenschaftliche und international, p. 45-56.
22 Bgazhba, Oleg, and Stanislav Lakoba, (2015), History of Abkhazia: Since Ancient Times to the Present Day. Textbook for 10–11 grades. Sokhumi: Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Abkhazia. pp. 404-405.
23 Since South Ossetia and Abkhazia, located in the occupied territories of Georgia, are unrecognised republics, "so-called" is used before all official names (position, institution, etc.)
24 Chirikba, op.cit., p. 56.
25 Bgazhba and Lakoba, op.cit., pp. 421-422.
26 Radio Liberty. (2023),Abkhazia OKs Handing State Resort Over To Russia, Triggering Protests. https://www.rferl.org/a/georgia-abkhazia-state-resort-russia-/32749083.html, accessed 30 May 2024.
27 The Bichvinta complex is a protected area located in Abkhazia. This nature reserve encompasses diverse ecosystems, including forests, wetlands, and coastal areas along the Black Sea coast. Additionally, several sanatoriums and houses built during the Soviet Union era are located there. The area covers approximately 186 hectares. Allegedly, the Russian Federation plans to build luxury hotels and other properties there.
O'Loughlin, John, Vladimir Kolossov, and Gerard Toal, (2011), Inside Abkhazia: Survey of Attitudes in a De Facto State. Post-Soviet Affairs 27 (1), p. 24.
28 O'Loughlin, John, Vladimir Kolossov, and Gerard Toal, (2011), Inside Abkhazia: Survey of Attitudes in a De Facto State. Post-Soviet Affairs 27 (1), p. 24.
29 Gali Municipality is an administrative territorial entity of the Georgian Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia, bordering the de facto boundary. In Gali, the majority of the population is ethnically Georgian and their access to rights has dramatically worsened in recent years. On social attitudes in occupied Abkhazia see O'Loughlin, John, Vladimir Kolossov, and Gerard Toal, (2011), Inside Abkhazia: Survey of Attitudes in a De Facto State. Post-Soviet Affairs 27 (1), pp. 1-36.
30 The development of military infrastructure is facilitated by local labor engagement in construction, with subsequent employment opportunities within the established military bases. Citizens enjoy unrestricted mobility across Russian cities for employment prospects. An alliance agreement, incorporating state-funded initiatives and private investor participation, further supports infrastructure development. Trade and economic

activities primarily revolve around the procurement of manufactured agricultural goods and shipping operations.

31 Toal, Gerard, and O'Loughlin, John, (2013), Inside South Ossetia: a survey of attitudes in a de facto state. Post-Soviet Affairs 29 (2), pp. 136-172.

32 Chankvetadze, Natia, (2021), Perceptions of Georgian and Ossetian Youth and Their Memories of the Conflict. Tbilisi: Indigo.

33 CNN interview with Vladimir Putin, (2008), https://edition.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/europe/08/29/putin.transcript/, accessed 30 May 2024.

34 Tass News Agency, (2019), Putin says no need to impose sanctions on Tbilisi, cites respect for Georgian people. July 9. https://tass.com/world/1067728?fbclid=IwAR1EL4LR9dI_Rc5gMNPjcztIBYOqDPowxeanrOKXwApr4T3lgPQ, accessed 30 May 2024.

35 Jam News, (2019), Who is the Russian Orthodox communist who provoked protests in Tbilisi? 21.09.2019. https://jam-news.net/who-is-the-russian-orthodox-communist-who-provoked-protests-in-tbilisi/, accessed 18 October 2024.

36 Civil.ge. Russian State Duma to Mull over Recognition of "South Ossetians' Genocide". 01/08/2019. https://civil.ge/archives/315447, accessed 30 May 2024.

37 Zürcher, Christoph, op. cit. pp.124-126.

38 Radio Liberty. Suspended so-called Referendum - Kremlin's message was well understood in Tskhinvali. 31.05.2022. https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/31876999.html, accessed 30 May 2024.

39 O'Loughlin, John, Vladimir Kolossov, and Gerard Toal. 2011. Inside Abkhazia: Survey of Attitudes in a De Facto State. Post-Soviet Affairs 27 (1), p. 19.

40 From 1993 to the 2008 war, the only territory controlled by Tbilisi in occupied Abkhazia was the Kodori gorge. Georgia officially renamed the gorge in Upper Abkhazia in 2006, when an operation was conducted there and a Georgian paramilitary group was abolished. The then government of Georgia moved the Tbilisi-based Government of Abkhazia-in-exile to the region which would function as a temporary administrative center of Abkhazia. After the August 2008 war, control over the valley was completely transferred to the Abkhazian side.