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Conflict over Abkhazia – To Be Continued?

DAVID MATSABERIDZE*

Ivane Javakhsivili Tbilisi State University, Georgia

Abstract: This paper analyzes the potential for maintaining the post-August War 2008 status quo in Abkhazia and explores possible transformation scenarios of the existing situation. The present study will attempt to investigate the remaining seeds of prospective conflict, as the current reality might contain some potential for the eruption of violence; namely: the construction of the Sochi Olympic complex which irritates Georgians and Circassians as well as portion of Abkhazians; the North Caucasian new policy line, initiated and followed by the central Georgian authorities; and Georgia's recognition of the Russian Genocide of Circassians in the 19th century, which should become leverage against the Russian Federation in the wider Caucasus region. All of these aspects make up the present security dilemma in the region. It is interesting to see whether changes in the Abkhazian-Georgian and Abkhazian-Russian relations could be expected in the foreseeable future.

Keywords: Georgia, Russia, August War, Sochi Olympic Games, North Caucasian Policy, Security

Introduction

The paper analyzes the potential for maintaining the post-August 2008 *status quo* in Abkhazia (Georgia) and endeavors to construct transformation trajectories of the existing situation. To this end, the study will try to address the following questions: What are the prospects of reaching a breakthrough in the stalemate around Abkhazia in favor of Georgia, be it in the short term or long term future? To what extent will the Russian Federation manage to secure its post-August War gains in the region – primarily within Abkhazia? It should be stressed from the very beginning that the offered formulation of the problem is quite ambiguous, since the formulation at the title's end is: *To be continued?* At a glance, it suggests that the conflict is over and that no change could be expected in the region, while on the other hand it signals that there is a potential for a renewal of conflict in the future. For example, the existing situation might deteriorate as a result of the construction of the Sochi Olympic complex, which entails the influx of labor force from the adjacent territories of the Russian Federation; this will ultimately lead to a change in the demographic balance of the region, and not in favor of ethnic Abkhazians; the notion of hosting the Olympic Games irritates some North Caucasian ethnic groups, primarily the Circassians, as the Sochi Olympic complex is constructed in the area where the Russian Genocide of Circassians occurred in the 19th century. And, last but not

* *davidmatsaberidze@yahoo.com*

least, the North Caucasian new policy line initiated and followed by the central Georgian authorities¹ which should have become an instrument of leverage against the Russian policy in the wider Caucasus region brings troubles to the Russian Federation.

The paper will argue that the existing situation has been created as a result of multiple trends comprised of the Russian policy in the region of North Caucasus, preparations for the Sochi Olympic Games, and the Georgian new policy line towards the North Caucasus in general, making up the security dilemma in the region. In order to prove (or deny) the possibility of eruption of violence at some point in the future, the research will draw on the public opinion survey² conducted in Abkhazia in 2010: it is interesting to see what can be inferred on its basis and if changes in the Abkhazian-Georgian and Abkhazian-Russian relations could be expected in the foreseeable future. The research will refer to the qualitative analysis and build on the existing policy papers to explore the potential mode of mutual Georgian-Abkhazian and Abkhazian-Russian, as well as Georgian-Russian relations after the August War of 2008. To this end, this study compares the main inferences of policy analysts and the results of the public opinion survey conducted in Abkhazia.

The paper will explore the conflict over Abkhazia, as the main efforts of the central Georgian authorities were dedicated to the resolution of the conflict over Abkhazia and peace initiatives were drafted primarily for the Abkhazian case; it was widely believed in the central government of Georgia [president Saakashvili's government] that the settlement of the conflict in Abkhazia would ultimately entail the resolution of the conflict in the South Ossetia/Tskhinvali region. That is the complete take-over of Abkhazia by the Russian Federation together with the South Ossetia/Tskinvali region after the Russian-Georgian War of 2008.

Results of the Survey Conducted in Abkhazia in 2010: What do They Tell Us?

A recent study conducted in the territory of Abkhazia by O'Loughlin and his colleagues is helpful in terms of estimation of the potential for the eruption of conflict in Abkhazia and for the assessment of prospect of the post-August peace package offered by the central authorities in Tbilisi.³ The survey results demonstrate that Abkhazians will not compromise on independence gained after the August War of 2008 and that the sovereignty of Abkhazia should be accepted by the central Georgian authorities as a new reality in the region. Analyzing the interviews and the survey fieldwork conducted in Abkhazia, the authors concluded that "the overwhelming majority of the Abkhazian population

1 The policy was elaborated and followed by the government of President Mikheil Saakashvili. The incumbent PM Bidzina Ivashvili openly declares the normalization of Georgia's relations with the Russian Federation as its primary political goal, thus it is doubtful whether the North Caucasian policy of Saakashvili's government will be kept in the future or not.

2 O'Loughlin, Kolossov, and Toal 2011.

3 See: O'Loughlin, et al. 2011.

finds the economic situation in their republic better than in Georgia.⁴ Nevertheless, the authors question the validity of this perception, as most of the inhabitants of Abkhazia are unable to travel to the rest of Georgia and thus cannot accurately assess the existing reality on the opposite bank of the River Enguri which separates Abkhazia from the rest of Georgia. The lack of interest of Abkhazian population in the economic initiatives of Tbilisi is determined by the existing belief that they are better off than the inhabitants in the rest of Georgia. They equally frequently mention, however, that the residents of the Gali district⁵ hold the opposite assumption.⁶ This fact could be explained by the existence of an information vacuum in Abkhazia which is covered solely by Russian TV broadcasts; although in Gali district, which borders on the remaining Georgian territories, Georgian information sources are available through the satellite broadcasting of the Georgian TV channels.

According to this survey, the return of refugees and IDPs to Abkhazia does not seem plausible. The local inhabitants are not ready to receive refugees⁷ as a part of the wider international recognition of Abkhazia. In this respect, it should be mentioned that “over 80 percent of ethnic Abkhazians and Armenians are against the return of refugees, as are 70 percent of Russians, whereas 18.5 percent of Georgians demonstrated the same attitude.⁸ Abkhazian Georgians answered YES (37 percent) while 33.8 percent found it difficult to define their position on the refugee issue.⁹ In parallel to these figures, according to the survey, 79 percent of Abkhazians support independence, whereas 51 percent of Armenians prefer to be a part of Russia and 44 percent prefer independence. Similarly, 58 percent of the Russians prefer independence and 38 percent support integration with Russia.¹⁰

4 Ibid, 19.

5 Gali district is the neighboring area to the rest of Georgia on the Abkhazian bank of the River Enguri, populated mainly by ethnic Georgians. After the end of military activities in 1992-93, ethnic Georgians remained in the Gali region and have been residing with ethnic Abkhazians more or less peacefully in everyday life.

6 O’Loughlin, et al. 2011, 19.

7 The return of refugees who fled the war of 1992-93 back to Abkhazia is problematic in demographic terms. Before the war of 1992-93, ethnic Abkhazians made up 17 percent of the population in the region, whereas Georgians comprised 46 percent. As a result of the war 300,000 ethnic Georgians, alongside with other ethnic minorities – Greeks and Armenians – left the region. Thus, the resettlement of ethnic Georgians back to Abkhazia will change the demographic picture in favor of Georgians. Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that numerically, Abkhazians are currently still a minority in the region, occupying the second position after ethnic Armenians.

8 There might be an explanation of this fact: the survey covered the ethnic Georgians who remained in Abkhazia after the war of 1992-93 and still reside there, as they are members of mixed families. There are surnames which sound Georgian, but are in fact Abkhazian as a result of the transformation of surnames within the framework of the Soviet nationality policy, e.g. the family name Nachkhepia could be either Georgian or Abkhazian.

9 O’Loughlin, et al. 2011, 29.

10 This is the case with ethnic Russians living in Abkhazia. Their motivation might be property issues and economic interests in the region, which will be more secured in case of separation from Russia. This will affect the migration from Russia to Abkhazia.

Thus, it is not surprising that only a tiny minority of Abkhazians (19 percent) supports the idea of complete integration with Russia.¹¹ Summing up their survey conducted in Abkhazia, the authors concluded that Abkhazians feel optimistic about their future and are happy with their partially recognized independent status. That is, according to the great majority of the local inhabitants, their republic is ready for a full-scale integration into the international community.

The ambivalent position of Abkhazians between full independence (Ardzinba),¹² reconnection with Georgia in one form or another (constitutional projects and models of the future relations with Georgia offered by Shamba, Lakoba and Chirikba) and almost radical rejection of unification with the Russian Federation¹³ makes it impossible to formulate any radical proposition of the future desires and attitudes of Abkhazians *vis-à-vis* the Georgians, Russians and their own future. O’Loughlin et al. argue that “the issue of growing dependence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia on the Russian Federation predates August War of 2008, with Russian-Abkhaz relations warming slowly but consistently over the two presidencies of Vladimir Putin (2000-2008).”¹⁴ Two years after the August War of 2008, assessing the Georgian state strategy on reintegration of Abkhazia [and the South Ossetia/Tskhinvali region] as positive, Phillips argued that Abkhazia “will engage if engagement does not undermine their goal to gain greater global recognition as an independent and sovereign state.”¹⁵

O’Loughlin, Kolossov and Toal argue that on September 15, 2009 “the Russian and *de facto* Abkhazian authorities signed a military cooperation treaty that enables the Russian military to use, build and upgrade military infrastructure and bases in Abkhazia.”¹⁶ That is to say that even if the Russian military involvement was either hidden or constrained through the force of international agreements, before and after the August War, Russia openly followed the path of total militarization of the region. This fact gives Russia a free hand over Abkhazia and considerably limits the potential of waging the independent policy line *vis-a-vis* Tbilisi from the side of Sokhumi.

It is noteworthy that after the Rose Revolution of Georgia (November 2003), the militarization of Georgia’s separatist territories – Abkhazia and South Ossetia – continued apace. “The strong facilities in Ochamchire and Gali bases were designed for military

11 Ibid, 31-32.

12 Vladislav Ardzinba, Sergei Shamba, Stanislav Lakoba and Viacheslav Chirikba were ex-communist officials and active members of the Abkhazian national movement *Aidigilara* during the late 1980s and in the early 1990s. They have been occupying various positions at different times in the *de-facto* government of Abkhazia during and after the war of 1992-93.

13 O’Loughlin, et al. 2011.

14 Ibid, 6.

15 Phillips, 2010.

16 O’Loughlin, et al. 2011, 6.

equipment, armament, and fuel for 100 000 people.”¹⁷ The Russian arms deliveries to the conflict regions of Georgia exceeded total military capacities of Georgia proper, and the breakaway regions owned twice the military equipment possessed by Georgia.¹⁸ The military capabilities of Abkhazia were increased by: “three “Buk” anti-aircraft complexes, fourteen additional D-30 self-propelled cannons, ten 122mm BM-30 multi-rocket launchers, 20 anti-tank cannons, 120 anti-tank rockets, two helicopters and 180 Russian technical specialists to service the equipment. Besides this, Moscow increased its troops in Abkhazia from 1,997 to 2,542 servicemen.¹⁹ According to Popjanevski, on May 31, 2008 the Russian Ministry of Defense announced the deployment of an additional 400 military personnel to Abkhazia with the task of repairing the railway infrastructure between Sokhumi and Ochamchire.²⁰ Asmus cites certain Georgian informants who claimed that the Georgian state agencies observed “the shipment of a large number of BMP/BTR armored vehicles, D-30 type howitzers, SA-11 BUK antiaircraft systems, BM-21 GRAD rocket systems and ZSU02304 Shilka antiaircraft systems to Abkhazia by the late spring 2008.”²¹

All in all, considering the developments around Abkhazia and South Ossetia since the August War of 2008, O’Loughlin et al. conclude that the process led to an inevitable consequence: “marginalization and diminishment of politics and public sentiment in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia: these regions are constituted externally, first and foremost, as strategic objects.”²² Thus, according to the results of the survey, due to the strong Russian military presence in the region, no breakthrough in or around the conflict could be expected in the foreseeable future.

The Sochi Olympic Complex: Irritating Abkhazians?

Abkhazia’s close proximity to the Sochi region, where preparations for the 2014 Winter Olympics are underway without respect for private property rights and the observance of environmental considerations, has raised serious concerns. Generally, news about criminal lawlessness and raids in Russia mean that the population of Abkhazia is very concerned about the arrival of large sums of Russian private money. Therefore, the majority of the population supports a legislative ban on the sale of land in general, and the sale of property to foreign nationals in particular.²³ In order to avoid intensification of the conflict around Abkhazia in the period up to and during the 2014 Winter Olympic Games

17 Illarionov 2009, 59.

18 Ibid, 60.

19 Ibid, 69.

20 Popjanevski 2009, 146.

21 Asmus 2010, 166.

22 O’Loughlin, et al. 2011, 4.

23 Venediktova 2010.

in Sochi, it would be expedient to adopt a political document in advance²⁴ that would determine the extent and type of involvement of Abkhazia in the Olympic project. This document should be developed only on the basis of consensus between all the sides and with actors engaged in the conflict around Abkhazia.²⁵ This kind of vision by Abkhazians is quite surprising for most international experts, as their reports describe mutually beneficial business arrangements for Abkhazia and Russia, like tourism, agro-industries, preparation for the 2014 Sochi Olympics and point out all of them as an opportunity for economic cooperation.²⁶

Preparations for the 2014 Winter Olympic Games in Sochi is supported, through use of potential benefits of Abkhazia, by the “Black Sea Resorts and Family Entertainment Centers” which will build and operate a hotel and a gaming and recreational facility on site. As part of its cruise and tourism package, Black Sea Resorts will also develop facilities in Western Georgia and in Russia proper that could be used for the Sochi Olympics. With bridges and infrastructure facilitating contact between the Georgians and Abkhaz, tea plantations in Gali could be restored with a tea collection and processing center on the east bank of the river Enguri. The same model could be explored by other agro-industries, fostering contact between Georgians and Abkhazians (e.g. hazelnuts, tomatoes, citrus fruits, apples).²⁷

Meantime, the construction of the Sochi Olympic Complex is no longer viewed as a factor of further irritation in the region because of the potential investments and economic growth expected in Abkhazia as a result of the influx of a great number of tourists and economic resources during the construction process itself²⁸ which might lead to the eruption of a new wave of conflict, but rather as an opportunity for future cooperation between the central Georgian authorities and the secessionist Abkhazian elites. The preconditions for this sort of cooperation are created by the *Georgian State Strategy on Occupied Territories: Engagement through Cooperation*.²⁹ For the settlement of the conflict, the Strategy introduces certain legal mechanisms for the rapprochement of belligerent sides and, to this end, creates institutional areas for future collaboration:

- *Status-Neutral Liaison Mechanism*: Facilitates communication between the Government of Georgia and the authorities that are in control in Abkhazia [and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia] through Liaison Officers appointed with the consent of both parties; it will be operated under the umbrella of an international

24 The document should be signed between the Russian Federation and Abkhazia.

25 Venediktova 2010, 35.

26 Phillips 2010, 4.

27 Ibid, 5.

28 The unemployment rate happens to be rather high in Abkhazia and most of the inhabitants travel to the neighboring Russian city of Adleri [and Sochi] in search of employment opportunities.

29 “*State Strategy on Occupied Territories: Engagement through Cooperation*,” Office of the State Minister for Reintegration, endorsed on January 27, 2010 <http://www.smr.gov.ge/docs/doc204.pdf>

humanitarian organization for the implementation of mutually approved projects and their operation;

- *Neutral Identification Card and Travel Document*: This will enable greater access to social services and freedom of movement, and assist with employment in private and public sectors. The term ‘neutral’ refers to the citizenship status;
- *TrustFund*: It will provide grants to implementing organizations operating in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia and across division lines;
- *Joint Investment Fund*: It will support businesses that promote local economic development, generate employment, and build commercial ties between the communities on both sides of the division lines. The fund will be jointly supported by donors and businesses;
- *Cooperation Agency*: It will enable and facilitate interactions across the division lines. It will be established as a legal entity of public law under the authority of SMR. It will act according to the policies of the government of Georgia in assisting state-funded programs.
- *Financial Institutions*: It will allow set-up and maintenance of accounts, cash transfers and other legal transactions, and will assist with the normal operation of humanitarian and development organizations and businesses present in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia;
- *Integrated Social-Economic Zone*: Creates a value chain across the division line, from the supply of raw materials to production, packaging, quality control and distribution.³⁰

The document mentions that these aspects do not form a definitive list and that the above-mentioned spheres are designated as possible areas of future cooperation. They interact with each-other, serve multiple goals and fit into various program areas. These instruments provide new opportunities of shared institutional interaction within a single state for Sokhumi and Tbilisi.

Georgia’s North Caucasian Policy

Initiative of the Georgian government regarding the implementation of the Caucasian House³¹ Project was started with establishing firm contacts with Northern Caucasus. The new North Caucasian policy line was justified by the necessity to break the negative image of Georgia that exists among the population of the North Caucasus. With this objective,

30 “*Action Plan for Engagement*,” Office of the State Minister for Reintegration, endorsed on July 6, 2010, pp. 4-7. http://www.smr.gov.ge/uploads/action_plan_en.pdf (Retrieved May 2011).

31 The idea of the Caucasian House was perceived by the President of independent Georgia as a chance to dispose of the post-Soviet imperial Russia (ZviadGamsakhurdia), an opportunity to solve the aftermath conflicts (Eduard Shevardnadze) and as a platform for Russian containment (Mikheil-Saakashvili). Still, its realization has been always problematic due to complex links between the political, economic and cultural aspects in their various incarnations.

a special working group comprised of Georgian parliamentarians was created in order to establish friendly relations with colleagues from North Caucasian parliaments.³² As the member of Georgian Parliament Nugzar Tsiklauri stressed: “Direct contacts with North Caucasian republics will be launched, bypassing the authorities of the Russian Federation; this will be a revival of past historical links.”³³ Following a special resolution of the Parliament of Georgia, during his annual State of the Nation address on February 28, 2012 President Mikheil Saakashvili voiced the initiative regarding the removal of visa requirements for the citizens of Russian Federation visiting Georgia. This initiative was promptly put into practice when, on the following day, the President signed a decree paving the way for Russians to come and stay in Georgia for 90 days without an entry stamp in their passports.³⁴ The new policy documents stress that the visa-free regime will be effective for the citizens of the Russian Federation who reside in Chechnya, Adigya, Ingushetia, North Ossetia, Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachay-Cherkessia.

In the meantime, the government of Georgia invested significant resources in the restoration of broadcasting by a Russian-language TV channel, Kanal PIK (“First Caucasus News”), targeting Russia’s Caucasian republics and seeking to “correct” the negative image of Georgia presented by Russian news channels.³⁵ The North Caucasus is not an objective in Georgia’s policy but rather an instrument to advance its foreign policy agenda, claims Khelashvili, the researcher from Georgia.³⁶ According to him, firstly, Saakashvili neglected the difference in the regional reach of the two powers, which gave Russia an advantage over the United States in exercising its military and economic power in its immediate vicinity. Secondly, Saakashvili underestimated the dangers of irritating Russia, even under the circumstances of the latter’s weakness *vis-à-vis* the United States.³⁷

Russians were not happy with the actions of the central Georgian authorities under Saakashvili. The initiative was not received well in Russia. Member of the Russian Duma, Sergei Abeltsev, considers the initiative on unilateral removal of visa requirements for the Russian citizens, and particularly for those residing in the North Caucasian republics of the Russian Federation, an attempt to destabilize the Caucasus: “...there is a strong administrative-governmental subordination in Russia; no one will launch negotiations with Saakashvili. As Putin does not recognize Saakashvili, and therefore does not recognize the President of Ingushetia either, President of Chechnya will make a deal with him.”³⁸ Still, Russia should be wary of the initiative: Asker Sokht, head of the regional societal organization [NGO] Adige Khasa of Kabardino-Balkaria (based in Krasnodar

32 The group consisted of MPs Mikheil Tskitishvili (head of the group), Levan Vepkhvazde, Gia Tortladze, Rusudan Kervalishvili, Shota Malashkhia, Khatuna Ochiauri and Nugzar Tsiklauri.

33 Newspaper *Sakharvelos Respublika*, February 20, 2010.

34 Abulashvili 2010.

35 Khelashvili 2011.

36 Ibid, 3.

37 Ibid, 4.

38 Newspaper *Rezonansi*, February 20, 2010.

Kray), argues that “it is evident that influence of Georgia in the region [North Caucasus] gradually increases and it will entail some unpredicted consequences.”³⁹ Ilia Soobtsokov, President of the Republic of Cherkessia, argues that “unresolved problems of the North Caucasian peoples will make Georgia attractive for them, bringing an additional opportunity for the Russian Federation to push its interests in the Caucasus region. The great game is not over yet.”⁴⁰

Russian politicians predict that the initiative of Saakashvili will fail due to a number of unresolved problems in the region. The North Caucasus is facing a real threat of eruption of war between its different segments, whereas Moscow has been opposing attempts of unification of the Caucasus. A Russian dissident, Valeria Novodvorskaya, claims that the US and the EU should support the initiative of Saakashvili, “as without the western support the idea will not get off the ground.”⁴¹ Representative of the Foreign Ministry of Russia, Aleksandre Lukashevich, however, declares that cooperation in the region could be achieved through endorsement of a new reality, i.e. through acknowledgment of independence of the Republic of Abkhazia and the Republic of South Ossetia as equal members of international society. Thus, the success of the project will depend on the capability of Georgia to accept the new reality. It is clear that Russia does have some cards against the initiative of Saakashvili regarding the pan-Caucasian union, insisting that Abkhazia and South Ossetia become equal members of the union; Georgian authorities should therefore think of antidotes to the negative blow of Russia. Meantime, severe opposition of Russia to regional cooperation within the framework of pan-Caucasian initiative, under terms and conditions proposed by the Georgian central authorities, renders its realization almost impossible.

Recognition of Circassian Genocide

Circassian civic organizations⁴² from a number of countries submitted requests to the European Parliament to recognize the Circassian genocide of the 19th century. Subsequently, in 2011, they submitted a similar request to Georgia. On May 20, 2011, the Georgian Parliament officially recognized the Circassian genocide, committed by the Tsarist Empire in the 19th century (in 1860–1870, in the Western Caucasus). The Circassian issue is also particularly sensitive because 2014 marks the 150th anniversary of the tragedy, and the Winter Olympics in Sochi are to be held not only in the same year

39 International Society Talks on the Creation of the Unites States of the Caucasus. Posted on 17:39 13.04.2011 <http://www.regnum.ru/news/1394475.html> [Retrieved May 2012].

40 Opinion: The Influence of Georgia on the North Caucasus is Rising, Posted on 11:08 12.10.2010 <http://www.regnum.ru/news/1335057.html> [Retrieved May 2012].

41 Turkey Plans to Create Union with Georgian and Azerbaijan. Posted on 18:20 03.08.2010 <http://www.regnum.ru/news/1311467.html>. [Retrieved May 2012].

42 Adygean societal organizations existing and “operating” in different countries. Adyghes are also known as Circassians or Cherkess, therefore I am alternating the terms Adygeans and Circassians throughout the text.

but at the very places where the Circassians were annihilated and from which they were deported.⁴³

The Abkhaz face certain difficulties in positioning themselves on this historical issue, since they received substantial support from the Circassians during the War that was fought over Abkhazia in 1992-1993. In October 1997, the Abkhaz Parliament passed a resolution which opens as follows: '...The mass murder and deportation of the Abkhaz (Abaza) to the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century should be recognized as genocide, the gravest crime against humanity.' Thus, the Abkhaz need to balance between their Circassian cousins and their only patron – Russia.⁴⁴ Abkhazians believe that with this policy Georgia is trying to secure the support of peoples of the North Caucasus and systematically erode Russian sovereignty in its North Caucasian republics; this process may drive a wedge between the Abkhazians and the peoples of the North Caucasus in general, and their Kabardinian and Circassian cousins in particular. Thus, the Georgian administration believes that recovering the lost territory could be an entirely reasonable prospect. Indeed, this is how the strategy pursued by Georgia is being perceived by Sukhum.⁴⁵

The mere act of recognizing the genocide has already achieved some results for Tbilisi. The cooling down of the relations between the Abkhazians and Circassians is visible. The Abkhazians cannot understand the Circassians' jubilation over Georgia's action, since Abkhazia sees Georgia as its principal enemy; the Circassians cannot understand why the administration in Tbilisi should recognize the genocide while their Abkhaz counterparts remain silent and do not respond to this issue.⁴⁶ The Abkhazians are seeking to find a middle ground; therefore they are referring to the resolution passed by the Abkhaz parliament in 1997 'On the deportation of the Abkhaz-Abaza in the 19th century.' This resolution recognized the mass murder and deportation of the Abkhaz-Abaza⁴⁷ to the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century as severe crime against humanity.⁴⁸ Thus, the central Georgian authorities are trying to isolate the Abkhazians with their kin ethnic groups of the North Caucasus and to limit their choice between Russia and Georgia.

43 Khaindrava 2011, 2.

44 Ibid, 2.

45 Khashig 2011, 2.

46 Ibid.

47 These two names are used interchangeably (<http://www.unpo.org/article/2767>). Together with Abkhaz and Adyg (Circassians) the Abazins who lived in the Northern Caucasus were deported in the 19th century.

48 Khashig 2011, 2.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it could be argued that there are some potential irritant factors in the region that might lead to the eruption of conflict, but the strong presence of the Russian military forces in the region (see above the military buildup in figures) makes it unlikely that the central Georgian authorities will try to use force in order to change the post-August War *status quo*. The figures on Russian military build-up in Georgia demonstrate the rise of Russian military involvement not only in Abkhazia, but in the wider Caucasus region as well. Meantime, it is equally dubious that any government of Georgia will ever accept the independence of Abkhazia [and South Ossetia], as such a decision will ultimately lead to its oust from office; although, currently, soft mechanisms are used by the Georgian authorities for re-integration of these territories [Abkhazia and South Ossetia] into the framework of Georgia. The success of North Caucasian policy line of Saakashvili is unlikely, although it could bring some positive results for Tbilisi in long-term future. And, last but not least, after the emergence of the opposition political union *Georgian Dream* as the winner of the Georgian parliamentary elections of October, 2012, and in the face of presidential elections in 2013, the future of above-mentioned policy lines and, subsequently, the transformation trajectory of the post-August War reality in Georgia will be difficult to predict until the conflict resolution policy of the new government is not openly staged.⁴⁹

49 The new Minister for Reintegration Affairs, Paata Zakareishvili, so far spoke of the necessity for the activation of public diplomacy for the resolution of conflicts. The new PM Bidzina Ivanishvili appointed Zurab Abashidze as his special representative in the arrangement of the Georgian-Russian relations.

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