

Georgian Security: A Latvian Perspective

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Georgian Security: Latvian Perspective

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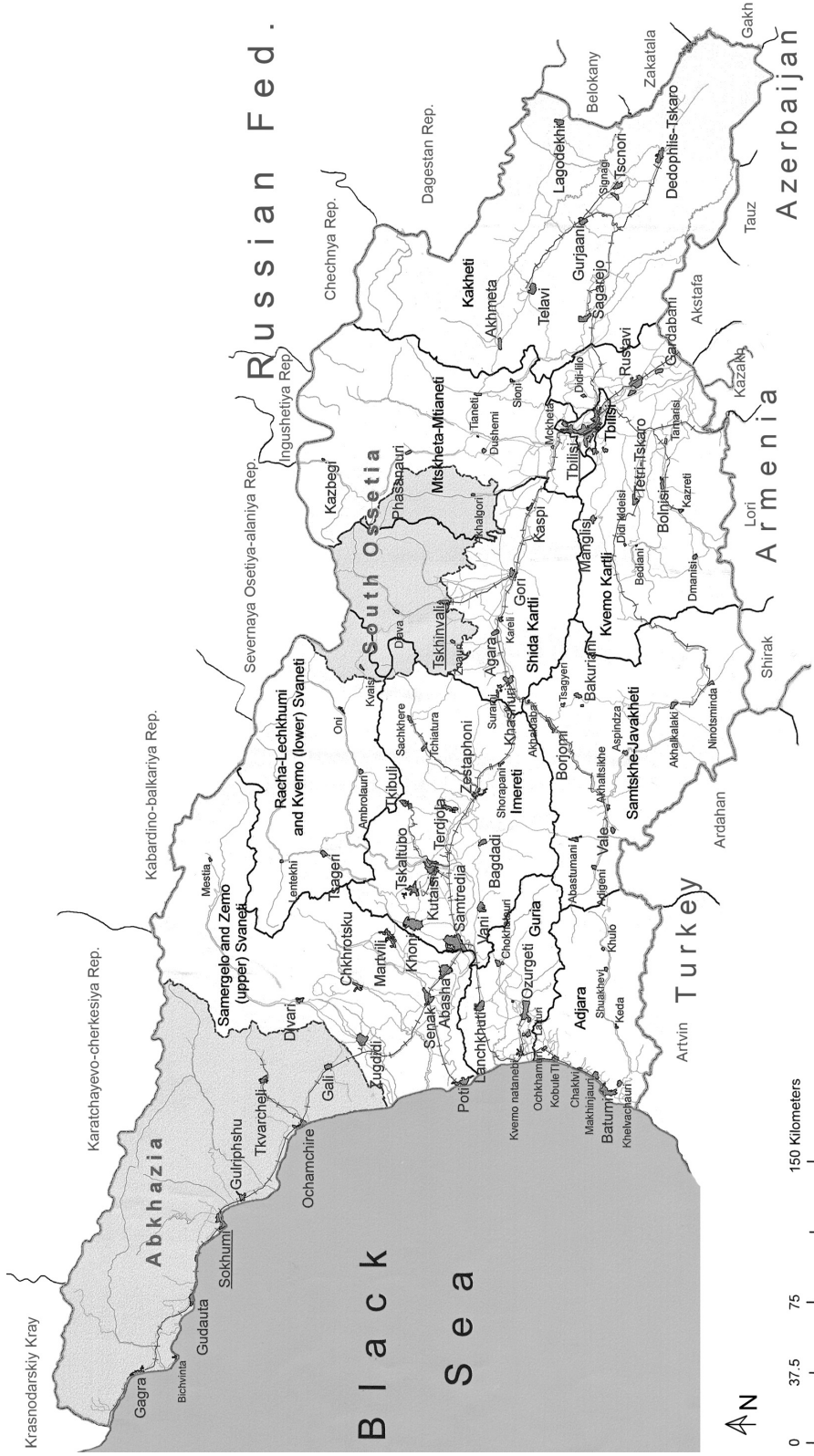
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Table of Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Map of Georgia..... | 4 |
| I. Introduction..... | 5 |
| <i>Nils Muižnieks</i> | |
| A. Latvia’s Interest in Georgian Security | 5 |
| B. The Scope of the Research..... | 6 |
| II. Georgian Security and Relations with Russia..... | 8 |
| <i>Nils Muižnieks</i> | |
| A. Russian Interests in Georgia | 8 |
| B. Russian-Georgian Relations After the Rose Revolution: From Bad to Worse..... | 11 |
| C. The Crisis of Late 2006: Russia Implements Mass Discrimination | 13 |
| D. Russia Resuscitates an Old Anti-Georgian Tactic: “Deniable” Military Attacks | 18 |
| III. Unfreezing the Frozen Conflicts: Policy Options for Georgia and the West..... | 21 |
| <i>Nils Muižnieks</i> | |
| A. What Sustains Abkhazia and South Ossetia?..... | 21 |
| B. Policy Options within Georgia Proper | 23 |
| C. Policy Options within the Breakaway Regions | 25 |
| D. Policy Options for Linking the Breakaway Areas and Georgia Proper | 26 |
| E. Policy Options at the International Level | 27 |
| G. Possible Outcomes | 28 |
| IV. Georgian Security: The Role of Corruption..... | 30 |
| <i>Dr. Rasma Karklins (Kārklīņa)</i> | |
| A. Legacies of Shevardnadze Era Corruption, and Change | 30 |
| B. Links between Corruption, Regional Conflicts, and Security | 31 |
| C. Nuclear Smuggling | 33 |
| D. Related Issues and the Role of Western Assistance..... | 34 |
| V. Conclusion..... | 36 |
| <i>Nils Muižnieks</i> | |
| Appendix 1. Comparison of different corruption indicators for Georgia..... | 38 |
| About the authors..... | 39 |



I. Introduction

Nils Muižnieks*

A. Latvia's Interest in Georgian Security

Thus far, few researchers from Latvia have sought to delve into the complexities of Georgian domestic and foreign policies.¹ The same holds true for academic efforts to identify Latvian interests in Georgia and the Southern Caucasus.² This paper seeks to build on this sparse body of literature and provide a Latvian perspective on Georgian security. Georgian security has received considerable attention from researchers in other countries, policy-makers in various European capitals and international civil servants. What can researchers from Latvia hope to add?

International affairs viewed from Latvia are very shaded by a focus on Russia. Indeed, one could argue that, until joining the European Union and NATO in 2004, Latvian foreign policy revolved primarily, if not solely around the imperative of enhancing security vis-à-vis Russia. While membership in Euroatlantic organizations has somewhat eased existential security concerns in Latvia, relations with Russia remain complicated. In a recent overview of EU relations with Russia, Latvia was placed in the category of “frosty pragmatists” (along with the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Ireland, the Netherlands, Romania, Sweden and the United Kingdom) – oriented towards business interests, but

* This research was made possible by a grant from the Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However, the authors assume sole responsibility for the views expressed therein, which should in no way be interpreted as reflecting those of the Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the Government of Latvia.

¹ This author was able to locate only three published articles. See Atis Lejiņš, “Latvija un Gruzija” [“Latvia and Georgia”], in Anna Žigure, ed., *Latvijas grāmata 2003* (Rīga: Jumava, 2003), 59–61; Atis Klimovičs, “Gruzijas ceļš, meklējot sevi” [“Georgia’s Path, Searching for Itself”], in Ilze Freiberga, ed., *Latvijas grāmata 2004* (Rīga: Jumava, 2004), 57–59; and Ivars Indāns, “Relations of Russia and Georgia: Developments and Future Prospects.” *Baltic Security & Defence Review* Vol. 9, 2007, 131–149.

² Kristīne Rudzīte, “Latvijas un Krievijas interešu krustošanās Dienvidkaukāzā” [“The Intersection of Latvian and Russian Interests in the South Caucasus”], in Žaneta Ozoliņa, ed., *Latvija-Krievija-X* (Rīga: Zinātne, 2007), 223–246; and Ivars Indāns, “Latvijas intereses NVS reģionā attīstības kontekstā” [Latvian Interests in the CIS Region in the Context of Development], in Gunda Ignatāne, ed., *Latvija un attīstības sadarbība*. (Rīga: Stratēģiskās analīzes komisija/Zinātne, 2006), 218–236.

willing to raise human rights concerns and challenge Russia on occasion.³ The Russian government, for its part, has consistently attacked Latvia in international organizations, while Latvia has been seen by the Russian public as one of the least friendly countries.⁴ It is this common experience of being on the receiving end of Russian government policy and Russian public enmity that make comparisons between Latvia and Georgia interesting.

For Latvia, it is essential to follow closely new developments in Russian domestic and foreign policy, as they can directly impinge upon Latvian security. Examining Russian relations with Georgia can provide Latvia (and others!) with crucial insight into Russian foreign policy tactics towards neighbouring countries, as well as leverage for understanding the evolution of the Russian polity. To put it in rather bleak terms, what Russia does to Georgia, it might do to Latvia as well, EU and NATO membership notwithstanding. The recent Estonian-Russian crisis over Estonia's relocation of the Bronze Soldier demonstrated that EU and NATO membership cannot protect a country from cyber-attacks, harassment of diplomats in Russia by a thuggish Russian youth movement, incitement to unrest by Russia's media, and other forms of official or unofficial intimidation from Russia.

As a member-state in NATO and the EU, the two clubs that Georgia most wants to join, Latvia also has a direct interest in acquiring a deeper understanding of Georgian affairs. Along with Estonia, Lithuania and Poland, Latvia has been one of Georgia's staunchest advocates in these and other regional and international organizations. This puts a strong burden of responsibility on representatives of Latvia to be well-informed about Georgia. At the same time, Latvia has identified Georgia as one of the core target countries for development assistance.⁵ While assistance to date has been limited in financial terms, it does render Latvia a stakeholder in Georgian affairs.

B. The Scope of the Research

In analyzing Georgian security, the focus below will be on Georgian-Russian relations, policy options for addressing the "frozen conflicts" in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and the security aspects of corruption

³ Mark Leonard and Nicu Popescu, *A Power Audit of EU-Russia Relations* (London: European Council on Foreign Relations, 2007), 43.

⁴ Nils Muižnieks, "Russian Foreign Policy Towards "Compatriots" in Latvia," in Nils Muižnieks, ed., *Latvian-Russian Relations: Domestic and International Dimensions* (Riga: LU Apgāds, 2006), 119–130.

⁵ For an overview of Latvian development assistance overall and various projects supported to date, see the relevant section of the Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs' web page: <http://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/DevelopmentCo-operation/>.

and transnational crime. Relations with Russia are absolutely critical in affecting Georgian security. At the same time, it is the Abkhaz and South Ossetian conflicts that continue to provide Russia with significant leverage within Georgia and to hinder Georgia's quest for greater security through closer integration in the EU and NATO. The issue of corruption is intimately linked with the regional conflicts, making addressing corruption an important security issue. While important issues in their own right, economic and energy security fall beyond the scope of this paper. This choice is dictated not only by available expertise in Latvia (rather, the lack thereof), but also by the lack of a significant Latvian economic stake in Georgia. In 2006 Georgia was in 44th place as an export destination for Latvia and in 65th place as a source of imports.⁶

The chronological time frame of the research is the period since the Rose Revolution in late 2003. At the same time, reference is occasionally made to policies and events prior to the Rose Revolution if they serve as important precedents or continue to shape policy choices today. Analyzing contemporary Georgia is fraught with risks, as Georgia is very much a moving target, so to speak. As this is being written (mid-December 2007), Georgia has just experienced a major domestic political crisis resulting in the organization of early elections. The crisis itself, in which a fragmented opposition mobilized thousands of people and was met by a harsh government response, may well have harmed Georgia's long-term security, as it provided ample ammunition to those within the European Union and NATO seeking to keep Georgia at arm's length. In any case, these events do not have a direct bearing on the broader issues of Georgia's relations with its large neighbour, efforts to resolve the conflicts with the breakaway regions and the long-term challenge of curbing corruption.

Several of the sections below are informed by my experience as a member of a joint European Council/European Commission assessment team that travelled to Georgia, including to South Ossetia and Abkhazia, from January 13-22, 2007. During the trip, the team met with numerous high level officials in Tbilisi, Sukhumi and Tskhinvali, as well as representatives of international and local non-governmental organizations, journalists, members of the OSCE Mission to Georgia and the United Nations Observer Mission to Georgia, and diplomats. The visit provided an invaluable opportunity to gain first-hand information through interviews and on site visits. However, the authors alone take all responsibility for the analysis below, which should in no way be interpreted as reflecting the official position of the Latvian government or the European Union.

⁶ For data on bilateral economic relations, see the relevant section of the Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs home page at <http://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/policy/bilateral-relations/4542/Georgia/>.

II. Georgian Security and Relations with Russia

Nils Muižnieks

A. Russian Interests in Georgia

In analyzing Georgian-Russian relations, it is necessary to keep in mind the power asymmetry between the two countries and Russia's vastly superior military capability, resource endowment, industrial base, population size, and land mass. Given this obvious asymmetry, a good starting point is to identify Russia's interests in Georgia, which can be analyzed at several different levels.

At the geo-strategic level, Russia's interests in Georgia are the same as those in other post-Soviet republics – to maintain its own influence and prevent inroads by other international actors (NATO, the EU, the United States, Turkey, etc.).⁷ Apart from its nuclear arsenal and permanent seat in the UN Security Council, Russia's current status as a major power in the world arena is based primarily on hydrocarbon exports and its influence in the “post-Soviet space”, and these two sources of power are often intertwined.⁸

Russia also has specific security interests in Georgia linked to the latter's geographical position. Georgia is the Caucasian country with the longest land border with Russia. Given the numerous ethnic, religious and clan-based ties between individuals and groups in Georgia and those in the North Caucasus, stability in Georgia is intimately linked to stability

⁷ For analyses of Russian policy and interests in the CIS, see, e.g., Roy Allison, “Russia and the New States of Eurasia,” in Archie Brown, ed., *Contemporary Russian Politics: A Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 443–452, Andris Spruds, “Russia's Policy Towards Europe's “New Neighbours”: in Pursuit of Partnership or Domination?”, in Atis Lejiņš, ed., *An Enlarged Europe and Its Neighbourhood Policy: the Eastern Dimension* (Riga: Latvian Institute of International Affairs, 2004), 29–46, and Irina Kobrinskaya, “The CIS in Russian Foreign Policy: Causes and Effects,” in Hannah Smith, ed., *Russia and its Foreign Policy* (Helsinki: Kikumora Publications, 2005), 77–91.

⁸ See Andris Spruds, “Krievijas enerģētikas politika post-padomju telpā: Eiropas “jaunie kaimiņi” un Baltijas valstis,” [Russian Energy Policy in the Post-Soviet Space: Europe's “New Neighbours” and the Baltic States] in Atis Lejiņš, ed., *Pastiprināta Eiropas Savienības austrumu kaimiņu politika: jautājumi un izaicinājumi* (Riga: Latvijas Ārpolitikas institūts, 2007), 35–50.

in the North Caucasus, which is of grave concern to Moscow, given the ongoing insurgency in Chechnya.⁹

Georgia's geographical position also makes it an important target in implementing Russia's broader aspirations in the region. By maintaining its influence (at a minimum) or controlling Georgia (at the maximum), Russia can hope to use Georgia to limit Turkey's inroads among Turkic speakers in the post-Soviet space, cut off energy-rich Azerbaijan from the West, maintain a link to staunch ally Armenia, and hinder the creation of a Central Asian-European energy corridor that could threaten Russia's monopolistic position.¹⁰

Russia also has military, political, and economic interests within Georgia itself. In the security realm, Russia has an interest in denying Chechen rebels the use of Georgia as a safe haven or re-supply route. Russian officials have claimed that at various times throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s up to 2,500 gunmen were present in Georgia's Pankisi Gorge.¹¹ Russia has long had its own military presence in both Georgia proper and the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. While it recently withdrew its forces and closed all bases in Georgia proper, Russia has resisted all efforts to change the peace-keeping format in the breakaway regions, where Russian troops remain under a Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) banner. Russia clearly desires to maintain this lever of influence over Georgia.

Russian policy in the breakaway regions has also generated some new political, military and economic interests, which will be discussed in greater detail below. Most ominous from the perspective of Georgian security have been Russian visa policies and the mass granting of Russian citizenship to residents of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Russian authorities have varied the visa regime with Georgia over time depending on the situation in Chechnya and the broader tenor of bilateral relations with Georgia. However, when Russia reintroduced a strict visa regime for Georgia in late 2000, it excluded Abkhazia and South Ossetia. At around the same time, Russia began to actively grant citizenship to residents of the breakaway regions. As a result, up to 80% of Abkhazia's residents are now citizens of Russia, while the total in South Ossetia may be as high

⁹ For a good recent analysis, see Neil J. Melvin, *Building Stability in the North Caucasus: Ways Forward for Russia and the European Union*, SIPRI Policy paper No. 16 (Stockholm: SIPRI, 2007).

¹⁰ Alexander Rondeli, "Russia and Georgia: Relations are Still Tense," 02.10.2006, available at <http://www.gfsis.org/pub/eng/showpub.php?detail=1&ID=115>, 3-4.

¹¹ For an official Russian view, see Aleksandr Chepurin, "Seven Subjects on Russian-Georgian Agenda," *International Affairs* Vol. 50, Issue 3 (2004), 121-137. For an otherwise informed Western overview which inexplicably uses the misnomer "Pankiski" instead of "Pankisi", see Tracey G. German, "The Pankiski Gorge: Georgia's Achille's Heel in its Relations with Russia?" *Central Asian Survey* (March 2004), 23 (1), 27-39.

as 98%!¹² Both Georgian and Western observers have condemned these policies as tantamount to “de facto” or “creeping annexation.”¹³

Russian companies and individuals have acquired many economic interests both in the breakaway regions and in Georgia proper in recent years as well. The biggest investments have been in the energy sector, metals and banking. In 2002, Itera obtained a controlling stake in Tbilgaz, a major distributor of gas in Georgia. Subsequently, Georgia’s debt led to Itera’s takeover of the strategic distribution networks at low cost. In 2003, Gazprom also entered the Georgian market.¹⁴ It was only in late 2006 and 2007 that Georgia began to lessen its dependence on Russia and to import smaller, but cheaper quantities of gas from Azerbaijan.¹⁵

In 2003, Russia’s Unified Energy Systems purchased a 75% share in Georgia’s Telasi electricity distribution company. Russia’s dominant position in the domestic electricity market was eroded in 2007, when the Czech company Energo-Pro made a major investment to gain control of 62.5% of the country’s market.¹⁶ In January 2005 Russia’s Evraz Holding won a privatization bid for the Chiatura Manganese Plant for USD 132 million, and the Russian state-owned Vneshtorgbank bought a 51% stake in United Georgian Bank.¹⁷

Russia’s efforts to maintain and defend its strategic, political and economic interests throughout the 1990s were facilitated by Georgian weakness and Western indifference. However, starting in 2002, Western interest in Georgia began to increase in the context of the struggle against global terrorism. In early 2002, in response to an alleged al-Qaeda presence in Georgia’s Pankisi Gorge, the United States began to provide substantial military assistance to the Georgian authorities.¹⁸ The Rose Revolution in late 2003 and subsequent reforms initiated by Mihail Saakashvili’s government not only strengthened Georgia politically,

¹² Data provided by representatives of international organizations and “officials” of the breakaway regions during a research trip in January 2007.

¹³ For more detail, see Per Normark, “Russian Policy Towards Georgia,” in Farian Sabahi and Daniel Warner, ed., *The OSCE and the Multiple Challenges of Transition: The Caucasus and Central Asia* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 91–106.

¹⁴ See Robert L. Larsson, *Russia’s Energy Policy: Security Dimensions and Russia’s Reliability as a Supplier* (Stockholm: Swedish Defence Research Agency, 2006), 227–235.

¹⁵ See “Gas Supply Balance Clarified,” *Civil Georgia*, published 29 December 2006 at www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=14391.

¹⁶ See “Czech Company Takes Over majority of Georgia’s Energy Market,” *Civil Georgia*, published 5 February 2007 at www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=14566.

¹⁷ *Civil Georgia* January 18–19, 2005, <http://www.civile.ge?eng/article.php?id=8830> and 8833.

¹⁸ On US involvement and its link to Georgian-Russian relations, see Jaba Devdariani, “Georgia and Russia: The Troubled Road to Accommodation,” in Bruno Coppettiers and Robert Legvold, ed., *Statehood and Security: Georgia after the Rose Revolution* (Cambridge: American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2005), 181–5.

economically and militarily, they led to much greater European interest and involvement in assisting Georgia. Domestic reform and the growing role of the West resulted in a more assertive Georgia, which was not as passive in the face of new efforts by Russia to maintain its influence.

B. Russian-Georgian Relations After the Rose Revolution: From Bad to Worse

While new Georgian President Mihail Saakashvili initially announced the intention of putting Georgian-Russian relations on a new, more pragmatic footing, his declared priorities of Euroatlantic integration and restoring Georgia's territorial integrity could not but impinge on Russia's interests. In 2004 and 2005, relations were contradictory, vacillating between quiet cooperation and optimistic declarations at one extreme and moments of extreme tension and bellicose rhetoric at the other.

One example of cooperation came in April 2004, when the Russian authorities played a constructive role in Saakashvili's effort to regain control over the Western province of Ajara, keeping nearby Russian military forces out of the fray and arranging Ajaran strongman Aslan Abashidze's evacuation to Moscow. As noted above, several major Russian-Georgian business deals were struck in early 2005, and in late May that year, after months of rancorous negotiations, Russian and Georgian Foreign Ministers reached an agreement on Russian troop withdrawal by the end of 2008.¹⁹

However, Georgian and Russian moves and countermoves in the breakaway regions in 2004 and 2005 suggested little real improvement in bilateral relations and no desire on the part of Russia to risk a repeat of the Ajaran scenario. In the summer of 2004, Georgia sought to reintegrate South Ossetia through a combination of humanitarian measures (promises of pension payments and TV broadcasts), economic pressure (closing the Ergneti market) and military action. Russia provided some military assistance to the South Ossetian side and permitted armed volunteers from Russia to enter the conflict zone. After a number of deaths and casualties, a cease fire was reached and Tbilisi backed down.²⁰

In Abkhazia, Russia actively interfered in presidential elections held in two stages (October 2, 2004 and January 12, 2005) in an attempt to assure the victory of pro-Moscow candidate Raul Khadzinba. Despite threats of economic sanctions and open lobbying from Putin and various Russian politicians, Khadzinba lost and, in a Moscow-brokered compromise,

¹⁹ Joint Declaration of the Foreign Ministers of the Russian Federation and Georgia, May 30, 2005, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/detail.php?id=10009>.

²⁰ See International Crisis Group, *Georgia: Avoiding War in South Ossetia*, Europe Report No. 159 (Tbilisi/Brussels: ICG, 26 November 2007).

became vice-president.²¹ This demonstrated not only Moscow's strong desire to maintain its influence in Abkhazia, but also the limits of that influence.

From the very beginning of 2006, tensions between Russia and Georgia grew rapidly, reaching a full-blown inter-state crisis by the fall. Almost every month witnessed a new downward turn in relations:

- In January two explosions in North Ossetia knocked out the main pipeline bringing gas from Russia to Georgia and a third explosion at a cable in Karachaevo-Cherkessia cut off a portion of Georgia's electricity supplies. Georgian authorities blamed Russia, which retorted with accusations of "hysteria and Bacchanalia".²²
- In February Russian authorities announced that they would no longer issue entry visas to Georgian nationals in retaliation for Tbilisi hampering trips by Russian servicemen stationed in Georgia.²³
- In March Russia's chief sanitation officer recommended that the Russian Customs Service ban the import of Georgian (and Moldovan) wines, claiming they did not meet Russian sanitary standards. The previous year, Georgia exported USD 60 million worth of wine, of which the Russian market accounted for 90%.²⁴
- In April Russian authorities announced that they had discovered a large quantity of low quality Georgian Borjomi mineral water on the Russian market and subsequently impounded more than 9,000 bottles of Nabeghlavi Georgian mineral water.²⁵
- In late July Georgian special forces implemented a three-day armed operation in the Upper Kodori Gorge in Abkhazia, sending a local paramilitary leader into flight and installing a new local administration led by figures from the Abkhazian government-in-exile.²⁶

²¹ For a detailed analysis, see Oksana Antonenko, "Frozen Uncertainty: Russia and the Conflict over Abkhazia," in *Statehood and Security*, 258-268.

²² See Daisy Sindelar, "Georgia: Tbilisi Accuses Moscow of Energy Sabotage," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, January 23, 2006.

²³ See "Russia Stops Issuing Entry Visas to Georgians," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, February 21, 2006.

²⁴ Robert Parsons, "Georgia: Russia Threatens to Ban Wine Imports," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, March 30, 2006.

²⁵ Robert Parsons, "Russia/Georgia: Russia Impounds Georgian Mineral Water," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, April 19, 2006.

²⁶ Richard Giragosian, "Georgia: Kodori Operation Raises NATO Questions," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, July 31, 2006.

- In early September Georgian law enforcement authorities arrested 29 supporters of former Georgian National Security Minister (1993–1995) Igor Giorgadze and accused them of planning the seizure of state power. (Giorgadze, a former KGB member, fled to Moscow in 1995 after being accused of masterminding an assassination attempt against then Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze).²⁷
- On 27 September Georgian law enforcement arrested 4 Russian military personnel, charging them with espionage.²⁸

The arrests sparked a serious crisis in relations that merits detailed attention for a number of reasons. Russia put on exhibit a whole array of new foreign policy tactics, the like of which had not been seen before. The crisis shed light on domestic Russian politics - the Russian government fanned anti-Georgian prejudice and exploited it for its own purposes. Finally, the crisis not only challenged Georgia's ability to withstand extreme pressure from its large neighbour, but also the West's willingness to stand up to Russia.

C. The Crisis of Late 2006: Russia Implements Mass Discrimination

At the end of September 2006, at the behest of Russian president Vladimir Putin, a range of Russian state institutions (the Federal Migration Service, the tax authorities, the food safety and veterinary service, law enforcement agencies, etc.) began to implement a coordinated campaign against Russian inhabitants of Georgian origin and Georgian citizens in Russia. This campaign, including the deportation of residents of Georgian origin from Russia, marked the first instance since the Yugoslav wars when the government of a European country grossly and systematically implemented ethnic discrimination. Here, the analysis focuses on the campaign itself, reactions within Russia and the international community, as well as the consequences of the campaign.

In accordance with information in the Russian media, on 1 October 2006 Russian President Vladimir Putin convoked a meeting of the National Security Council to discuss the option of implementing a special forces operation to release the imprisoned Russian military personnel.²⁹ When Georgia announced its intention to hand over the arrested Russian

²⁷ See "13 Charged with Plotting Coup in Georgia," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, September 7, 2006.

²⁸ See "4 Russian Officers Arrested, Charged with Espionage," *Civil Georgia*, 27 September 2007, at <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=13658>.

²⁹ See "SShA vmeshivaiutsia v konflikt RF s Gruziiyey", 3 October 2006 at www.newsru.com.

military officers to the OSCE, the military action was cancelled, but the Russian leadership decided to go ahead with other measures against Georgia. One part of the campaign was the organization of special, previously unannounced maritime manoeuvres in the Black Sea and putting Russian forces in North Ossetia on a state of high alert.³⁰ Another part of the campaign was a blockade during which money transfers from Russia to Georgia were halted, as were all postal, airline, automobile, sea and railway transport between Russia and Georgia.³¹

At the same time, the Russian authorities actively sought out Georgian citizens and Russian citizens of Georgian origin within Russia. There is no consensus figure on the number of Georgians within Russia and estimates range from a low of 400,000 to a high of as many as 1.5 million (including citizens of Russia, citizens of Georgia, “legal guest workers”, and “illegal guest workers”). According to an official of the Federal Migration Service, in 2005 a total of 321,000 persons from Georgia arrived in Russia for various reasons (work, family visits, etc.).³² Georgians in Russia became hostages of bilateral Russian-Georgian relations and targets of a campaign of ethnic discrimination.

Discrimination took place in a number of realms: through changes in migration policy, by checks on “Georgian businesses”, in a struggle against “Georgian criminality”, etc.³³ In early October, the Federal Migration Service created a special “Georgian section” tasked with checking inhabitants of Georgian origin “to verify the goals of their presence in Russia”.³⁴ In organizing the campaign, the migration authorities cooperated with a host of other state and local agencies (the militsiya/police, the agency for combating violations in the consumer market, the tax inspectorate, the fire safety authority, and others).

In accordance with a Federal Migration Service activity report in the author’s possession, by 23 October 2006, more than 4000 “Georgian enterprises” were checked, more than 4600 Georgians were charged with administrative violations, thousands of Georgian immigration requests, residency permits and instances of obtaining citizenship of Russia were verified.³⁵

³⁰ Interviews by the author with Georgian security officials in Tbilisi in January 2007.

³¹ See “*Vstaet strana ogromnaya*”, 3 October 2006, at www.kommersant.ru, which details these measures and provides the official pretexts for them.

³² Cited in the analysis by the Russian human rights group “Memorial” in “*Antigruzinskaya kompaniya v Rossii: Diskriminatsiya po etnicheskomu priznaku (konets sentabrya-oktyabr 2006. g.)*” at www.memo.ru/hr/hr/discrim/georgia.html.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ See “*Migratsionnaya sluzhba Rossii sozdala Gruziskiy otdel*” 5 October 2006, at www.lenta.ru.

³⁵ The activity report bears the heading “*UIK FMS Rossii, Obzornaya spravka (po sostyaniyu na 23 oktyabrya 2006. g. 08.00 chas)*”, n.d. According to the report,

A particularly odious method of searching for Georgians was the militsiya's practice of requesting schools to submit lists of ethnic Georgian pupils, their birth dates, addresses, home telephones, parents' names.³⁶ Ignoring all procedural guarantees and often, the fact that the documents of those detained were completely in order, Russia began to deport Georgians to Georgia. Several detained persons died due to a lack of medical attention. According to data in the aforementioned report, by 23 October 868 citizens of Georgia were expelled from Russia. In mid-January 2007 various sources in Georgia reported to the author that the total number of those deported in 2006 was about 4000 persons.

According to an unidentified Kremlin source cited by the Russian newspaper *Komersant*, the campaign was "not so much an answer to the arrest of Russia's military personnel, as much as a reaction to Georgian foreign policy in general".³⁷ The well-known Russian political scientist Dmitry Trenin has written that Russia's goals in the campaign were as follows: (immediate) to prevent possible military conflict in South Ossetia and Abkhazia; (medium term) to undermine support among the inhabitants of Georgia for Saakashvili's government; and (long-term) to hinder Georgia's path to NATO and return it to Russia's sphere of influence.³⁸ While it is difficult to detect a clear link between Russia's campaign and the conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, the other two goals seem credible.

The ban on financial transfers, the deportations and persecution of Georgians working in Russia served both economic and political goals – to weaken the Georgian economy and along with it, Saakashvili's government. According to estimates by the Georgian National Bank, in 2006 around USD 365 million was transferred from Russia to Georgia, which was 66.8% of all foreign currency transfers that year.³⁹ Russian

from 29 September through 23 October the Russian authorities conducted checks in 4396 enterprises "which hired foreign workers, including citizens of Georgia" and shut down 57 organizations. 4615 Georgian citizens were "called to account", the courts took 2204 decisions regarding administrative expulsion from Russia. Filling out documents of Georgian citizens was suspended: for obtaining citizenship of the Russian Federation – 1961; for invitations – 3890; for temporary residence permits – 3658, for residence permits – 2209.

³⁶ The author has a copy of one such request signed by Moscow Militsiya officer A.V. Komarov, as well as a copy of a response from Director A.S. Engel' of Moscow Secondary General Education School No. 169, in which the director reports that the school does not keep records of children by ethnicity.

³⁷ Cited in, "*SShA vmeshivautsya v konflikt RF s Gruzije*", 3 October 2006, at www.newsru.com

³⁸ <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=18786&prog=zru>.

³⁹ See *The Messenger*, January 15, 2007, p. 3.

sources regularly mention much larger sums, with estimates ranging as high as USD 2 billion per year!⁴⁰

In initiating the campaign against Georgia and Georgians, the Kremlin could count on the support of a significant segment of Russian public opinion. According to sociological survey data, in 2005 inhabitants of Russia placed Georgia among the “least friendly” neighbouring countries (even “less friendly” were the three Baltic states).⁴¹ In mid-October 2006 the Levada centre in Russia organized a survey in Russia in which 61% of all respondents agreed with the evaluation of Defense Minister Sergey Ivanov that Georgia was a “bandit country”; in Moscow and St. Petersburg the total was 78%. 40% supported an economic blockade, 37% supported the expulsion of illegal Georgian immigrants.⁴² The organizer of the survey Valery Fyodorov commented on the results thus: “Russians perceive Georgia as a small, but dangerous pro-Western regime which seeks to taunt Russia”.⁴³ To summarise, the Putin regime could use existing anti-Georgian sentiment in Russian society and manipulate this enemy image in an effort to strengthen its legitimacy.

Despite prevailing public opinion, certain circles in Russia opposed the campaign. In October and November 2006, a number of Russian human rights organizations in Moscow (*Memorial*, the Movement for Human Rights, the Council of the Social Chamber) and St. Petersburg (the opposition movement named after Pyotr Alexeev, the movement “No to Diktat!”, the organization “St. Peterburgers against idiocy”), cultural representatives (the actors Liya Ahedzhakova, Inna Churikova, Sergey Yurski, the singer Yelena Kamburova, etc.) and political parties (Yabloko, the Union of Right Forces) took stands against the campaign and the deportations.⁴⁴ The Moscow-based radio station *Echo Moskvy* even launched a campaign urging people to wear badges saying “I am Georgian.”⁴⁵ But such courageous individuals and organizations had little impact on the broader tone of debate in Russian society.

The initial international reaction to Russia’s anti-Georgian campaign was muted, to say the least. The United States State Department spokesman said that Washington was “disappointed” with Russia’s

⁴⁰ See, e.g., “Russia Says Georgian Sanctions Will Continue”, *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 3 October 2006.

⁴¹ See Stephen White, “Russia and ‘Europe’: The Public Dimension,” in Roy Allison, Margot Light and Stephen White, eds., *Putin’s Russia and the Enlarged Europe* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2006), 143.

⁴² See N. Popov, “Naznachennyi vrag,” *Vserossiiskiy tsentr izucheniya obshchestvennogo mneniya*, at <http://wciom.ru/arkhiv/tematicheskii-arkhiv/item/single/3436.html>.

⁴³ *Lenta.ru* 11 October 2006, <http://lenta.ru/news/10/11/opros/index.htm>.

⁴⁴ See <http://xeno.sova-center.ru/45A2A1E/811EDC5> and <http://www.hro.org/actions/nazi/2006/10/16-1.php?printv=1>.

⁴⁵ See “*Echo Moskvy* Radio Launches ‘I am Georgian’ Campaign,” *Civil Georgia*, 7 October 2006, at www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=13820.

moves.⁴⁶ On 13 October 2006 the UN Security Council completely ignored the campaign and adopted a resolution on Abkhazia in which it criticised Georgia for the July 2006 armed action in the Kodori Gorge and recognised the “important role” of the CIS Peacekeeping forces.⁴⁷ As opposed to the UN, European organizations were more critical towards Russia. The Council of the European Union expressed “serious concern” about Russia’s measures against Georgia and appealed to Russia to “not implement measures aimed at Georgians in the Russian Federation”.⁴⁸ On 26 October the European Parliament adopted a resolution inviting the Russian authorities to “immediately halt all repressive action and harassment and all accusations aimed against ethnic Georgians living in Russia.”⁴⁹

On 5 December Council of Europe Secretary General Terry Davis issued a statement regarding the death of a Georgian being deported from Russia, expressing his “concern” about the growth in the number of deportees, concluding that “regular inhabitants should not pay the prices for differences of opinion between governments”.⁵⁰ The sharpest opinion was issued by the Council of Europe’s European Commission against Racism and Tolerance (ECRI), which on 15 December expressed its “deep concern” about “detentions, deportations, which sometimes result in death, and information about incidents of harassment” against Georgians and citizens of Georgia in Russia, indicating that these were carried out by “certain government institutions”.⁵¹ Such an announcement has no precedent in the history of ECRI.

What was the result of Russia’s campaign? Saakashvili’s political party won a resounding victory in the local elections in October 2006, taking 34 of 37 seats in Tbilisi alone.⁵² In early 2007 Georgian analysts had concluded that the crisis with Russia had strengthened Saakashvili’s position. The blockade forced Georgia to lessen its economic and energy dependence on Russia and to seek new energy suppliers (e.g., Azerbaijan) and export markets (e.g., for wine). In the midst of the crisis, NATO held a summit which offered closer cooperation to Georgia. At the same

⁴⁶ “U.S.’ Disappointed’ with Russia’s Sanctions on Georgia,” *Civil Georgia*, 4 October 2006, at www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=13760.

⁴⁷ Resolution 1716 (2006), 13 October 2006, see <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N06/570/52/PDF/N0657052.pdf?OpenElement>

⁴⁸ See http://www.mfa.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=30&info_id=2501.

⁴⁹ See http://www.mfa.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=30&info_id=2565.

⁵⁰ See <https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=1070895&BackColorInternet=F5CA75&BackColorIntranet=F5CA75&BackColorLogged=A9BACE>.

⁵¹ [https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=PR796\(2006\)&Sector=secDC&Language=la nEnglish&Ver=original&BackColorInternet=F5CA75&BackColorIntranet=F5CA75&BackColorLogged=A9BACE](https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=PR796(2006)&Sector=secDC&Language=la nEnglish&Ver=original&BackColorInternet=F5CA75&BackColorIntranet=F5CA75&BackColorLogged=A9BACE)

⁵² “Ruling Party Sweeps Polls in Tbilisi,” *Civil Georgia*, 6 October 2006, at www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=13809.

time, in mid-November Georgia signed a European Neighbourhood Policy Action Plan with the European Union. In January 2007 a high level European Commission/European Council Mission visited Georgia seeking to intensify the EU role in conflict resolution in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Russian influence in Georgia has undoubtedly decreased not only in the economic field, but also in the political, diplomatic and military realms. It became impossible for Russia to portray itself as a neutral mediator and guarantor of regional stability in Georgia's conflicts with its regions. State sponsored ethnic discrimination against Georgians, not long after the murders of Litvinenko and Politkovskaya, continued to undermine Russia's image in the eyes of international human rights organizations and the Western media. No precise sociological survey data are available, but the head of the Georgian Gallup polling organization has claimed that the crisis accelerated the two-year long decline in the popularity of Putin and Russia in the eyes of Georgians and strengthened the conviction of many in Georgia about the necessity of continuing integration into Euroatlantic structures.⁵³

The analysis above suggests that Russia's leadership acted in a surprisingly emotional, irrational way and even harmed its own interests. The fact that such a campaign can take place in contemporary Russia points to a very dangerous trend in Russian politics, as such campaigns can be targeted at various groups – Jews, Balts, dark-skinned inhabitants, etc. In manipulating public prejudices to attain other domestic and foreign policy goals, Russia's government not only strengthens intolerance in society, it risks losing control over the process, thereby opening the way to true Nazism in Russia.

D. Russia Resuscitates an Old Anti-Georgian Tactic: "Deniable" Military Attacks

In 2007, the Russian authorities unveiled a new tactic for intimidating Georgia: engaging in direct, but limited military action on Georgian soil, then denying their involvement or blaming Georgia itself. In reality, the tactic is not new, as Russia has used it on numerous occasions in the past, as will be noted below. At this writing (December 2007), at least two major incidents have taken place in recent months, the first, a helicopter gunship attack in March 2007, the second, a missile drop in August 2007. Below, I provide some brief information about the attacks and note other precedents before suggesting their implications for the evolving nature of Georgian-Russian relations and Georgian security.

⁵³ See the interview with Merab Pachulia at http://www.gorbi.com/store/en/20061006_170445.PDF

During the night of March 11–12, 2007, several helicopters entered Georgia’s air space in the Upper Kodori Valley from Russia’s Karachaevo-Cherkessia region, and launched projectiles against local government buildings. Nobody was injured in the attack. All the available evidence pointed in Russia’s direction – eyewitnesses saw Russian-made helicopters, the anti-tank missile debris was of recent Russian manufacture, neither Georgia nor Abkhazia have the kind of helicopters involved in the attacks, and only Russia is capable of flying helicopters across mountain terrain at night. While Russia denied involvement, it did not cooperate fully with UN investigators, failing to provide air traffic control records and ignoring requests to help trace serial numbers on munitions fragments.⁵⁴

On August 6, 2007, a second incident took place near the South Ossetian conflict zone, when unidentified aircraft dropped a large air-to-surface missile near a newly upgraded Georgian military radar station. Again, nobody was injured. Again, all the available evidence pointed in Russia’s direction. Two groups of independent experts commissioned by European and American governments subsequently concluded that the the military aircraft and explosive device were of types not possessed by Georgia, that they had entered Georgian air space from Russia and fired the device. Again, Russia denied involvement, suggesting that the Georgians themselves were responsible.⁵⁵

Interestingly, these incidents suggest a replay of previous Russian practice going back to the early 1990s. In February 1993 Russian aircraft bombed Georgian positions in Abkhazia, then attempted to blame Georgia itself, until the Georgian forces downed a Russian plane in March 1993.⁵⁶ During Russia’s second military campaign in Chechnya, Russia violated Georgian airspace numerous times from 1999 through 2002, bombing Georgian territory adjacent to Chechnya, then suggesting that the Georgians themselves had conducted the bombings.⁵⁷

The attacks in 1993 and from 1999 through 2002 both served a military purpose. In the first instance, the goal was to assist Abkhaz

⁵⁴ For the official UN report dated 11 July 2007, see “Joint Fact-Finding group Report on the Rocket Firing Incident in the upper Kodori valley on 11 March 2007,” available at www.unomig.org/data/other/JFFFG_report_final_110707_English.pdf. For comments, analysis and additional information, see David J. Smith, “Russia’s Attack on Georgia: The U.N. Report,” *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Analyst*, July 11, 2007, available at www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/4655; Vladimir Socor, “When Stability is Uncomfortable: Air Attack on the Upper Kodori Valley,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, March 20, 2007, available at www.jamestown.org/edm/php?article_id=23720.

⁵⁵ For an excellent compilation of documents, see Svante E. Cornell, David J. Smith and S. Frederick Starr, *The August 2007 Bombing Incident in Georgia: Implications for the Euro-Atlantic Region*, Silk Road Paper, (Washington, D.C./Stockholm: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, Silk Road Studies Program, October 2007).

⁵⁶ See *Ibid.*, p. 6, and Antonenko, “Frozen Uncertainty,” 214.

⁵⁷ See Devdariani, “Georgia and Russia,” 184.

forces, in the second, to eliminate Chechen positions in Georgia. The recent incidents, involving no casualties and limited, if any property damage, serve no military purpose. Thus, they appear to serve as political messages aimed at both the Georgian government and the West. To the Georgians, the incursions signal Russia's ability and willingness to ratchet up the stakes in bilateral relations, to use military, not just political and economic means or holding Georgians in Russia as hostages. Insofar as the incidents took place in or near the conflict regions, the additional message appears to be that any Georgian steps to undermine Russian influence there will be met with military resistance. The incidents evoked confusion and disbelief in the West, where no government, regional or international organization responded vigorously or clearly pointed the finger at Russia. Not only was Russia uncooperative, Kremlin officials regularly lied and spread disinformation. The weak Western response seemed to confirm the stance of Kremlin officials, which appeared to be "We can do whatever we want here and get away with it." This bodes poorly for Georgian security.

III. Unfreezing the Frozen Conflicts: Policy Options for Georgia and the West

Nils Muiznieks

A. What Sustains Abkhazia and South Ossetia?

The “frozen conflicts” provide Russia with critical leverage for pursuing its interests in Georgia, and the lack of a resolution is a core obstacle to Georgia’s Euroatlantic aspirations. Thus, helping Georgia address the conflicts in an effective way is absolutely essential for enhancing Georgia’s security. In designing measures to assist Georgia in addressing the Abkhazian and South Ossetian conflicts, it is necessary to examine the reasons the conflicts have remained “frozen” so long and the underlying factors sustaining the breakaway regions. This accomplished, it will be possible to specify desirable policy initiatives by Georgia and friendly external actors, such as the European Union. The concluding section examines recent developments facilitating the “unfreezing” of the conflicts and outlines possible outcomes.

In a recent comparative study, Pal Kolsto examined a number of breakaway regions and identified five circumstances that have sustained their quasi-independence:

1. **Weakness of the parent state** not only in military terms, but also in political, institutional and economic terms;
2. **Military power** of the breakaway region (alone or in conjunction with that of an external patron) sufficient to deter or defeat the parent state;
3. Strength and support of an **external patron**, open or tacit, diplomatic, military, political and economic;
4. Inconsistent, tepid **engagement by the international community** (often, deployment of peace-keepers that serve as de facto border guard units for the breakaway regions, allowing them to engage in nation-building and other activities);
5. Success in **nation-building** of the breakaway region by creating a common identity (drawing on the memory of a civil war, cultivating the image of the external enemy, engaging in ethnic cleansing) and providing security and welfare services.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Pal Kolsto, “The Sustainability and Future of Unrecognized Quasi-States,” *Journal of Peace Research* Vol. 43, No. 6 (2006), 723–740.

In the Georgian case, there is a scholarly consensus that throughout the 1990s Georgia was not only a weak state, but a “failing” or “failed state.” Under Shevardnadze Georgia was not only unable to exert full control over many parts of its territory, it could not effectively collect taxes, provide many services and was corrupt from top to bottom.⁵⁹ The Abkhaz and South Ossetian militaries have involved a significant segment of the local population and, in crisis situations, can rely on the assistance of forces from Russia, the external patron. With the assistance of Russia and the protective shield of CIS (Russian) peacekeepers, Abkhazia (to a greater extent) and South Ossetia (to a much lesser extent) have engaged in nation-building.⁶⁰ Until the Rose Revolution, the involvement of the international community was weak and inconsistent, being limited primarily to observer missions organized by the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), where Russia can veto any more assertive involvement.⁶¹

While the situation has changed since the Rose Revolution and Georgia’s more active quest for Euroatlantic integration, enhancing Georgian security requires avoiding measures contributing to the sustainability of the breakaway regions. In other, similar contexts, action to undermine the sustainability of breakaway areas has often been taken as a precursor to their forcible reintegration or partition. In the Georgian case, the international community has limited the range of policy options by insisting that any “resolution” be peaceful and maintain Georgia’s territorial integrity. Thus, undermining the sustainability of Abkhazia and South Ossetia can only be considered insofar as it does not contradict peaceful conflict resolution. At the same time, steps should be taken to prepare all sides for coexistence within a common, democratic state. With these caveats in mind, it is possible to explore various policy options and evaluate their possible effectiveness.

⁵⁹ For recent analyses stressing corruption, see Jonathan Wheatley, *Georgia from National Awakening to Rose Revolution: Delayed Transition in the Former Soviet Union* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005); and Christoph Stefes, *Understanding Post-Soviet Transitions: Corruption, Collusion and Clientelism* (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2006).

⁶⁰ Abkhazia has a functioning customs service, its own passports (which are not recognized by the international community), and some domestic industry (tourism, agriculture, building materials). South Ossetia has none of the above.

⁶¹ See, e.g., Victor-Yves Ghebali, “The OSCE Mission to Georgia (1992-2004): The failing art of half-hearted measures.” *Helsinki Monitor* 2004, No. 3, 280-292; Jean-Michel Lacombe, “The OSCE Mission to Georgia: Mandate and Activities,” in Sabahi and Warner, eds., *The OSCE and the Multiple Challenges of Transition*, 161-8; Natalie Sabanadze, “International Involvement in the South Caucasus,” *ECMI Working Paper #15* (Flensburg: European Centre for Minority Issues, 2002): 1-58, available at http://www.ecmi.de/download/working_paper_15.pdf; and Susan Stewart, “The Role of the United Nations in the Georgian-Abkhazian Conflict,” *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issue in Europe*, Issue 2, 2003, available at http://www.ecmi.de/jemie/download/Stewart_SC_final.pdf.

In the case at hand, there are four possible arenas of policy-making: 1) within Georgia proper, 2) within the breakaway areas, 3) between the breakaway areas and Georgia proper, and 4) at the international level. Given the analysis above, policy action within Georgia proper must focus on strengthening the Georgian state and sending the appropriate signals to the breakaway areas (e.g., undermining the enemy image). Within the breakaway areas, policy must avoid aiding the de facto authorities in nation-building, consolidating military power or providing welfare, but must lay the groundwork for future reintegration through the provision of basic security, rehabilitation and democratization. Policy with regard to relations between the breakaway areas and Georgia proper must focus on setting the groundwork for coexistence within a common state by re-establishing links between the communities, administrations and territories at all levels. Policy in the international arena must aim at eroding the support of the external patron, in this case Russia, intensifying the engagement of the international community, and changing peace-keeping practices that unintentionally assist the breakaway areas.

B. Policy Options within Georgia Proper

Here, it will be taken as a given that strengthening Georgian state institutions overall is an important goal deserving the support of the European Union and other external actors. In the present context, a particular focus should be on:

1. strengthening those institutions that deal with the conflicts (e.g., the Ministry of Conflict Resolution);
2. promoting policies within Georgia that would undermine enemy images within the breakaway regions (e.g., regarding internally displaced persons (IDPs), history, federalism, regional, linguistic and religious minorities); and
3. communicating such policies to the populations and leaderships of the breakaway regions.

Regarding the Ministry of Conflict Resolution, the European Union and other Western actors could support capacity-building through technical assistance (e.g., funding external advisors), projects (e.g., official and unofficial dialogue events, joint visits to EU agencies or other conflict areas), and communication strategies (e.g., developing a web-page in the Georgian, Abkhaz, Ossetian, Russian languages with a documentary history of peace proposals, etc.). However, the work of the Ministry of Conflict Resolution alone will be ineffective if other state agencies send different, contradictory messages. Thus, it is essential that all ministries speak with one voice.

Though Georgia has a Ministry of Civil Integration, it does not yet have a minority integration strategy.⁶² The European Union and other Western actors can help Georgia send the right signals to the breakaway regions about their possible position in a unified state by helping Georgia develop integration policy. Under the Netherlands Presidency of the European Council, the European Union developed “Common Basic Principles on Immigrant Integration.”⁶³ In distilled form, the principles call for ensuring that the entire population has knowledge of the national language to ensure equal opportunities, promoting common democratic values, and adjusting state institutions to reflect diversity in society.

Promoting knowledge of the state language as a second language must be accompanied by measures to support the maintenance and development of minority languages and cultures, lest integration policy become assimilation policy. Thus, concrete policy initiatives might involve developing and implementing a strategy to teach Georgian as a second language (e.g., conducting research on needs, drafting textbooks, preparing teacher trainers). At the same time, the government should support efforts to preserve and develop minority languages and cultures through the financial support of a line ministry (e.g., Civil Integration or Culture) or a special project administration agency (e.g., an integration fund). In other contexts, the EU has provided co-funding for projects. Adjusting state institutions entails implementing anti-discrimination policy and promoting minority participation in decision-making (e.g., through minority recruitment, advisory bodies, special voting provisions, decentralization). Here, the expertise of the EU’s Fundamental Rights Agency or the Council of Europe’s European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance or Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities could be used.

Insofar as the de facto authorities in the breakaway regions rely on the civil war and enemy image of Georgia as a legitimizing experience, Georgia can undermine the breakaway regions by unilaterally coming to terms with its past. This would entail punishing war criminals, rewriting history books, and acknowledging past mistakes. Only if crimes are acknowledged can trust be built that they will not be repeated. Of course, ideally, such a process of coming to terms with the past would involve the breakaway regions themselves (see below).

With regard to Abkhazia and IDPs within Georgia, the Abkhaz clearly fear that the return of all IDPs would not only change the demographic balance in the region, but also affect electoral outcomes. Many IDPs live

⁶² For an early effort, see Guram Svanidze, “Concept On the Policy Regarding the Protection and Integration of Persons Belonging to National Minorities in Georgia”, ECMI Georgia Occasional Paper #2 (Flensburg: ECMI, 2006).

⁶³ See Jan Niessen and Mary Ann Kate, *From Principles to Practice: The Common Basic Principles on Integration and the Handbook Conclusions* (Brussels: MPG, 2007).

in horrendous conditions in Georgia proper. While the IDPs clearly have a right to return and reclaim their property, all will not do so, regardless of the extent to which the conflict is “unfrozen.” Georgia could ease Abkhaz fears by acknowledging this fact. For its part, the EU can assist in IDP/refugee integration in Georgia.

All measures within Georgia proper meant to build confidence with the breakaway regions will be ineffective if accurate information is not received on these measures within the breakaway regions themselves. Thus, the European Union should include a communications component to any such assistance in Georgia proper; generate printed, audio and video materials in Russian, Abkhaz and Ossetian, and promote their transmission to the breakaway regions.

C. Policy Options within the Breakaway Regions

As noted above, the European Union should work within the breakaway regions so as not to assist the de facto administrations in strengthening their legitimacy, military power or ability to provide welfare services, but should promote basic security, rehabilitation and democratization. While similar, the needs and possibilities in Abkhazia and South Ossetia often differ.

In both regions, the EU should fund de-mining activities carried out by international NGOs. In Abkhazia, the de-mining project is the largest single employer in the region with up to 550 persons involved during the summer.⁶⁴ As de-mining could be concluded by 2008, one problem will be the subsequent lack of employment of the de-miners. One possibility that should be explored is using trained Abkhaz de-miners in South Ossetia, where de-mining has not yet begun. In addition, training in small business and income generation projects for the de-miners should be supported. In South Ossetia, the onset of de-mining can only begin when the conflicting sides agree to stop laying mines and ensure the security of de-miners. This means that contact with the Sanokoev parallel authority in South Ossetia must be initiated.

While the de facto authorities in South Ossetia and Abkhazia are likely to react in a sensitive manner to any EU contacts with the parallel authorities, such contacts are a practical necessity and useful in terms of the analysis above. There can be no justification for the EU to avoid supporting security building, rehabilitation, and democratisation projects in areas controlled by the parallel authorities. Moreover, supporting them erodes the legitimacy of the de facto authorities. This effect would be heightened if the parallel authorities were to outcompete the de facto

⁶⁴ Interviews conducted with international organizations and activists from the Halo Trust in Abkhazia, January 2007.

authorities in terms of providing basic security, economic development, and democratic governance. In the medium-term, the EU should also promote contacts and cooperation between the parallel and de facto authorities. In Abkhazia, projects involving Menghrelians from Gali and Abkhaz/Russians/Armenians from other areas should be supported, as several local interlocutors suggested that such dialogue prepares the way for and may even be a surrogate for Georgian-Abkhaz dialogue.⁶⁵

In all areas of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the EU should support civil society and independent media, though this will be much easier in the former than in the latter. The same holds true for small and medium enterprise development, training in business skills, and income generation projects, all of which could not only strengthen the basis for civil society, but also create a “peace constituency.” In both regions, the EU should support the rehabilitation of basic infrastructure, giving priority to that which in some way links the breakaway regions to Georgia proper.

D. Policy Options for Linking the Breakaway Areas and Georgia Proper

As noted above, the EU should support all manner of links between the populations, administrations, economies and territories of the breakaway regions and Georgia proper. Such links will not only build confidence, they will undermine the legitimacy of the de facto authorities, erode dependence of the regions on Russia and prepare all sides for future coexistence within a unified state.

The EU should continue to support all efforts at civil society and media dialogue between partners in the breakaway regions and Georgia proper. Priority should be given to projects involving schoolchildren and students in bilateral or multilateral (Caucasus or Europe-wide) cooperation projects, study visits, summer camps. As noted above, the EU should support any unilateral efforts by Georgia to come to terms with its past. At the same time, the EU should prod the breakaway regions and Tbilisi to create bilateral history or truth and reconciliation commissions with the assistance of an international NGO or government with experience in creating such commissions.

A serious problem appears to be the lack of any economic integration between the breakaway regions and Georgia proper, a problem exacerbated by the closure of the Eregneti market. This not only increases the influence of the external patron state (Russia), it also forces autarky on the breakaway regions. The lack of any possibility for legal commerce and the persistence of illegal commerce will also hinder Georgia’s integration with the European Union’s economic space and slow visa facilitation.

⁶⁵ Interviews with local and international NGOs in Abkhazia, January 2007.

Thus, it is very important to explore avenues for legalizing trade between the breakaway regions and Georgia proper either by installing customs checkpoints within Georgia or reaching an agreement with Russia for some sort of joint arrangement on the border between the breakaway regions and Russia (see below).

Beginning de-mining in South Ossetia will require some sort of open or tacit security cooperation between different sides in the conflict there. At the same time, the EU should support all manner of police and border guard cooperation, exchanges, joint data base creation, and training.

E. Policy Options at the International Level

As noted above, the sustainability of the breakaway regions is strengthened by the support of the external patron Russia, by weak international involvement in conflict resolution and by the protective wall of peace-keepers. While a peace-keeping presence is clearly needed, it is clear that CIS peace-keepers cannot be considered impartial, especially after the recent tensions between Russia and Georgia. The North Ossetian battalion is composed almost solely of South Ossetians, and it is the largest single employer in South Ossetia.⁶⁶ Thus, the current peace-keeping format directly enables the survival of the South Ossetian de facto authorities by providing for the livelihood of a significant number of local residents. Given the above, the EU should support Georgia in its efforts to replace CIS peacekeepers with UN or other peacekeepers.

The EU should also support Georgia in its stand within the World Trade Organization (WTO), where Georgia has made its support for Russia's entry conditional on Russia agreeing to have all trade between Russia and Georgia take place through legal border crossing points. If Russia can be made to implement this position, this would not only weaken Russia's influence in the breakaway regions, but also lay the groundwork for more intense customs and border cooperation between the regions and Georgia proper.

The EU should actively seek out incentives for Russia to change its support for the breakaway regions by identifying various Russian interests in maintaining the status quo. For example, if one of the reasons the Russian military is reluctant to withdraw from Abkhazia is access for military officers and their families to cheap sea side vacation quarters, perhaps the Russians could be promised a long-term concession for purely civilian purposes. The same holds true for access to Abkhazia's ports for commercial purposes. If Russia has real concerns about instability and/or possible infiltration of terrorists near the border with Chechnya, some kind of a mixed Russian/international presence should be foreseen there.

⁶⁶ Interviews with OSCE officials stationed in South Ossetia, January 2007.

Examining possibilities for further international involvement in resolving the conflicts by actors other than the EU falls beyond the scope of this paper, but should be pursued, as all EU member states are members of the OSCE and most are in NATO. The United States, Turkey, and Azerbaijan (as a rapidly growing regional power friendly to Georgia) should be consulted as well.

G. Possible Outcomes

The maintenance of the status quo is unlikely in the medium-term because a number of new elements have disturbed the long-frozen equilibrium in Georgia. Despite the persistence of serious problems and backsliding in some areas, post-Rose Revolution Georgia is no longer a failed state and is steadily strengthening on various dimensions. The relative military position of Georgia vis-à-vis the breakaway regions has improved with the growth in Western assistance and considerable budget allocations to the defence sector. Georgia has refused to sanction continuation of the current formats of international involvement in the conflict. At the same time, the engagement of the international community, in particular that of NATO and the EU, has intensified. Georgia has challenged the nation-building activities of both breakaway regions by supporting parallel authorities in Upper Kodori Valley in Abkhazia and in parts of South Ossetia, thereby undermining the claims of the de facto authorities to represent the local populations. Only the support of Russia, the external patron, has remained largely unchanged.

In his comparative study, Kolsto identifies several possible ends to quasi-states: military reabsorption into the parent state (e.g., as in Katanga in 1965, Biafra in 1970 and Krajina in 1995); inclusion into the parent state as a separate entity (e.g., Chechnya, Republika Srpska); full independence (e.g., Kosovo?); or inclusion into the external patron state.⁶⁷ Independence for the breakaway regions is highly unlikely, given the international bias in favour of maintaining territorial integrity and the high likelihood that South Ossetia and Abkhazia would be failed states. Military reabsorption seems highly unlikely in the case of Abkhazia, but possible with regard to South Ossetia. A military resolution with Abkhazia would likely be a bloodbath, since the de facto authorities appear to have some local support, hatred of Georgia seems widespread, and, outside of Gali, Georgians and Abkhaz live very separated. The South Ossetian de facto authorities, on the other hand, appear to have much less popular support both in terms of depth and geographical scope, many villages are mixed, and resentment towards Georgia and Georgians appear less deep-seated. That leaves federalism or inclusion into Russia.

⁶⁷ Kolsto, "The Sustainability and Future of Unrecognized Quasi-States," 734–8.

The likelihood of inclusion into Russia is difficult to gauge. On the one hand, there are no contemporary precedents of a peace-time annexation. On the other hand, much depends on how Russia decides to use the Kosovo “precedent.” Russia would likely encounter little resistance to absorption from the local population in South Ossetia, but much greater resistance in Abkhazia. At the same time, such an annexation would lead to severe tensions between Russia and the West. Whether Russia would be willing to risk such tension and isolation will be dependent on the general direction of Russian political development.

Finally, inclusion of Abkhazia and/or South Ossetia as separate federal entities within Georgia is possible in the medium term if change continues on all the various dimensions mentioned above – Georgia continues strengthening as a state, the relative military power of the breakaway regions continues to decline, engagement of the international community intensifies, and nation-building in the breakaway regions is halted or reversed. While necessary, these changes are insufficient to resolve the conflicts in the absence of Russia’s constructive engagement or, at a minimum, extreme passivity.

IV. Georgian Security: The Role of Corruption

Dr. Rasma Karklins (Kārklīņa)

A. Legacies of Shevardnadze Era Corruption, and Change

Scholars and international organizations increasingly recognize that corruption not only is a serious impediment to the political and economic development of individual countries, but also to international security. Georgia is a prime example to illustrate this point.

Georgia's political leaders who came to power after the Rose revolution in 2003 inherited numerous problems from the old regime, many of them linked to corruption. According to a country report written by Freedom House "corruption was omnipresent in every segment of the society including government, the judiciary, law enforcement, utility companies, the educational system, and health institutions. Organized crime's influence on politics and the economy was paramount and growing."⁶⁸ Another analysis of the era up to 2003 finds that corruption in Georgia was both systemic and anarchic and had led to economic stagnation and political instability.⁶⁹ Such a legacy is difficult to overcome and will remain a challenge for years to come.

Since coming to power Georgia's President Saakashvili has prioritized the fight against corruption, with some success. He has established a number of anti-corruption bodies and many crucial laws have been passed. The creation of an entirely new traffic police in 2004 has led to a dramatic decrease in corruption in this sphere, as is recognized even by the most fervent government critics. However, as is true for other post-communist countries, institutions and laws alone do not make a real difference, there has to be effective implementation.⁷⁰ Thus procurement laws meet international standards, but enforcement has been weak, as, for example, outlined in a report on the Defence Ministry which cited many instances when large quantities of military supplies were not

⁶⁸ "Country Report – Georgia," *Countries at the Crossroads 2006*, available at www.freedomhouse.org/modules/publications/ce/.

⁶⁹ Stefes, *Understanding Post-Soviet Transitions*.

⁷⁰ Rasma Karklins, *The System Made Me Do It: Corruption in Post-Communist Societies* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2005).

bought in competitive bidding. In reaction to this revelation, the ministry decided to post all open tenders on its website.⁷¹

In June 2005 Georgia's government adopted the National Anticorruption Strategy and Action Plan. These documents focus on efficiency and transparency in the civil service, strengthening the offices of General Inspectorates, simplifying mechanisms for issuing licenses and permits, and instituting reforms in law enforcement bodies such as creating a witness protection system. There are laws requiring financial disclosure and disallowing conflicts of interest. Various steps have been taken to implement the Action Plan and Strategy, but critics have claimed that they are based on insufficiently thorough research of existing practices and the root causes of corruption.⁷²

In July 2006 the World Bank reported that Georgia underwent the largest reduction in corruption among all countries in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union from 2002 to 2005, with the most recognizable progress occurring in the tax and customs sectors.⁷³ Despite these various anti-corruption successes and efforts, international corruption indexes still gave Georgia a poor ranking in 2006, with, for example, the Transparency International Corruption Index giving it only 2.8 points as compared to Latvia's 4.2 and Estonia's 6.7.⁷⁴ However, as Table 1 illustrates (appendix), not all indices show an improvement for Georgia: the Transparency International and the World Bank Index show improvement, but the index compiled by Freedom House does not.

B. Links between Corruption, Regional Conflicts, and Security

While corruption per se undermines good governance and a country's capacity to deal with lawlessness, several studies show direct links between corruption and threats to the security of Georgia and the international community. Among the civilian population of the breakaway regions of Georgia as well as neighboring territories there is an extremely high proliferation of small arms. People have armed themselves because they have felt insecure due to ethnic strife, activities of criminal groups, and

⁷¹ *Countries at the Crossroads 2006*, op.cit. See also Zaal Anjaparidze, "Corruption Compromises Georgian Armed Forces," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 1/112, October 2004.

⁷² "Country Report – Georgia," *Countries at the Crossroads 2006*, available <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=140&edition=7&ccrcountry=114§ion=73&ccrpage=31>.

⁷³ <http://www.globalintegrity.org/reports/2006/georgia/index.cfm>

⁷⁴ www.transparency.org.

the porous internal and international borders marked by smuggling of all sorts, including arms smuggling.⁷⁵

An extensive study based on field research between July 2004 and July 2005 concludes that Georgia as well as Abkhazia and South Ossetia “have adjusted to the persistent threat of renewed violence and corruption has become embedded in the existing institutional, legal, cultural and economic context.”⁷⁶ It also argues that there is a connection between corruption and the frozen state formation conflicts. While for many individuals in the region corruption is a coping strategy and a way to survive in a complex environment, there are groups of people for whom corruption is a proactive strategy and who profit from chaos and lawlessness. Among the latter the core consists of criminal networks, especially those trading in weapons and drugs.

There are several ways in which corruption and lack of progress in conflict transformation reinforce each other. For one, personal agendas to control economic assets are said to have contributed to the initiation of the armed conflicts and the “losers” of Georgia’s anti-corruption campaign could try to promote future conflicts in order to strengthen their position.⁷⁷ In addition, corrupt officials “grow fat off smuggling.”⁷⁸ Corruption in Georgia remains systemic, and involves local security sectors, customs services, local governments and peacekeeping units. The risk of violence provides an incentive for individual bribery to avoid the draft or dangerous assignments.⁷⁹

Corruption and various criminal activities linked to it have an international dimension that deserves closer scrutiny. Respondents from Georgia and Abkhazia interviewed in 2005 perceived the Russian peacekeeping forces in Abkhazia and South Ossetia as links in a chain of corruption, especially in connection with the transportation of goods through the territories where they were based. Some believe that profits from corruption also make the peacekeepers less interested in a resolution of the conflicts. In what amounts to a vicious circle, corruption leads to

⁷⁵ See, e.g., Tamara Pataraiia and Ghia Nodia, eds., *SALW Proliferation and Its Impact on Social and Political Life in Kvemo Kartli* (Tbilisi: Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy, and Development, 2004), available at http://www.cipdd.org/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=40&info_id=74.

⁷⁶ Natalia Mirimanova and Diana Klein, eds. *Corruption and Conflict in the South Caucasus*, International Alert, (January 2006), 4.

⁷⁷ Achim Wennmann, *Renewed Armed Conflict in Georgia? Options for Peace Policy in a New Phase of Conflict Resolution* (Geneva: Program for the Study of International Organization(s), Occasional Paper 3/2006, entire. The author mentions the 15 000 police officers fired in 2003 as well as segments of the armed forces who profited from conflict, pages 54–55.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 33, also 27.

governmental institutions losing legitimacy in the eyes of the citizenry and this undermines efforts at conflict resolution and state building.⁸⁰

C. Nuclear Smuggling

There have been several reports that the insecure borders of Georgia and its separatist regions have been a route for the smuggling of nuclear materials. BBC News Europe has reported that the authorities in Georgia in summer 2006 foiled an attempt by a Russian man in Tbilisi to sell a quantity of highly enriched uranium. The man was detained in a sting operation involving US agents; he was carrying 100g (3.5oz) of uranium, but had offered to get more. The man was able to transport the material in a plastic bag in his pocket, because uranium has a low level of radioactive emission. Experts at the US Department of Energy examined the sample and concluded that it was powerful enough to fuel part of a nuclear weapon.

The case has raised concerns about militants gaining access to nuclear material, particularly in conflict zones in the former Soviet Union where the rule of law is weak and corruption is widespread. According to Georgia's Minister of Interior, Georgia became aware of the smuggling plot while investigating crime in the breakaway republics of South Ossetia and Abkhazia; he also stated that Russia failed to co-operate over the case.⁸¹

In follow-up information in March 2007 Georgian Interior Ministry spokesperson Shota Utiashvili stated that while Georgian undercover agents had started their sting operation in Tskhinvali, capital of South Ossetia, the enriched uranium actually entered Georgia through a border checkpoint near Kazbegi, a remote mountain town in eastern Georgia. Already, however, the arrest appears to have accelerated efforts to secure Georgia's borders. On February 2, 2007 the US and Georgia signed an agreement to fight nuclear smuggling by providing assistance for border surveillance, enhancing ties with the international community on nuclear forensics and reinforcing the work of the Georgian Nuclear Regulation Agency. The first American delegation to come to Georgia to explore ways of improving the country's defenses against nuclear smuggling arrived in mid-September 2006.

Other international programmes also exist. The United Nation's International Atomic Energy Agency has supplied handheld radiation detectors and installed vehicle and pedestrian monitors to detect nuclear or radioactive material entering the Black Sea port city of Poti, an official at the agency's headquarters in Vienna said. The National Security

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 33 and 44.

⁸¹ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/em/fr/-/2/hi/europe/6297713.stm>

Council has also worked with the European Commission to increase border guards' salaries and upgrade communication systems to facilitate information exchanges between security agencies.⁸²

The incident reported in summer 2006 supports earlier reports by scholars of the Transnational Crime and Corruption Center (TRACCC) at American University that the threat to nuclear materials in Russia is real, that “criminals are actually moving these materials”, and that there is a market for them among terrorist groups who may be interested in manufacturing dirty bombs. The director of TRACCC, Professor Shelley, also stated that criminal groups traffic such materials through established transit networks in the South Caucasus. She argued that “a number of factors make the South Caucasus an appealing route for smugglers, including: proximity to western states, lack of state control in separatists regions, high rates of poverty that drive many people into illicit activities, and inexperienced and corrupt law enforcement.”⁸³ Her subsequent research has led her to think that although the Turkish authorities manage to seize a large portion of nuclear material that is smuggled through their country, a significant portion is reaching terrorist groups in Southern Europe.⁸⁴ If so, this clearly is of interest to the international community and demonstrates that it cannot isolate itself from events in Georgia.

D. Related Issues and the Role of Western Assistance

Corruption in Georgia affects numerous other policy areas, including those of special interest to the international community, such as human trafficking, money laundering, and other international economic crimes. Unfortunately there are indications that the significant foreign aid that is poured into the region also tempts people to engage in corruption and that international agencies either close their eyes to it or even participate. Even if this is untrue, locally there is a perception that international organizations are implicated in corruption networks, “because of their comparatively high salaries, frequent incompetence and their apparent tolerance of corruption in the societies in which they work.”⁸⁵

⁸² Molly Corso “Georgia: Uranium Smuggling Highlights Border Security Concerns, *Eurasia Insight*, March 8, 2007 available at <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav030107a.shtml>.

⁸³ “The Links Between Organized Crime and Terrorism in Eurasian Nuclear Smuggling,” *Kennan Institute Meeting Report*, vol. 23, no. 7, 2006.

⁸⁴ Personal communication, Washington D.C., February, 2007.

⁸⁵ Mirimanova and Klein, 33, also 27.

Annually, thousands of Georgians become victims of human traffickers. It is a lucrative business “involving both professional criminals and high-level state officials.”⁸⁶

According to some reports counterfeit money smuggled from South Ossetia into Georgia includes some extremely well made 100 USD bills with distribution channels to Iraq, Israel and the US. Other detailed research reports outline complicated financial schemes involving money laundering, tax evasion, offshore business, and foreign aid.⁸⁷ All these issues underline the importance of international monitoring and carefully thought-out assistance.

⁸⁶ Giorgi Glonti, “Human Trafficking: Concept, Classification, and Questions of Legislative Regulation,” in Sami Nevala and Kauko Aromaa, eds. “Organised Crime, Trafficking, Drugs: Selected Papers presented at the Annual Conference of the European Society of Criminology, Helsinki, 2003” (Helsinki: European Institute for Crime Prevention and Control, Publ.no.42, 2004), 71.

⁸⁷ See the website of the Caucasus Office of the Transnational Crime and Corruption Center (Traccc) of American University, Washington, D.C. <http://www.traccc.cdn.ge/>.

V. Conclusion

Nils Muižnieks

The aforementioned analysis gives serious cause for concern regarding Georgian security. Regarding Georgian-Russian relations, seen from the perspective of Latvia, recent trends are quite worrying, as Russia has demonstrated a willingness to use very nasty tactics against a neighbouring country. The arsenal includes threatening military manoeuvres and outright military attacks, blockades (economic, transport, communication, etc.), and most ominously, mass discrimination against Russian citizens of Georgian origin and Georgian citizens in Russian. It should be noted that some 30,000 Latvians live in Russia, and one cannot exclude the possibility that they could become hostages of government organized discrimination in the event of a future crisis in relations between Russia and Latvia. The politically motivated Russian boycott of Georgian wine, mineral water and other agricultural products suggest that over-dependence on the Russian market can be quite risky, a lesson that Latvia first learned in 1998, but that merits repeating again and again.

The analysis of policy options for “unfreezing” the “frozen conflicts” suggests the existence of a wide range of measures that could be taken to undermine the sustainability of the de facto regimes in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. However, no solution will be possible without the extreme passivity or constructive engagement of Russia. This seems unlikely, given the growing assertion of Russian foreign policy and flagging Russian interest in contributing to the efficacy of international organizations that restrict its decision-making autonomy in any way (e.g., the OSCE, Council of Europe) or joining organizations (e.g., the WTO) that could limit its room for manoeuvre in any way. In other words, policy options for the West will probably narrow in the future, and it seems prudent to work on the assumption of active obstruction or even sabotage from the Russian Federation.

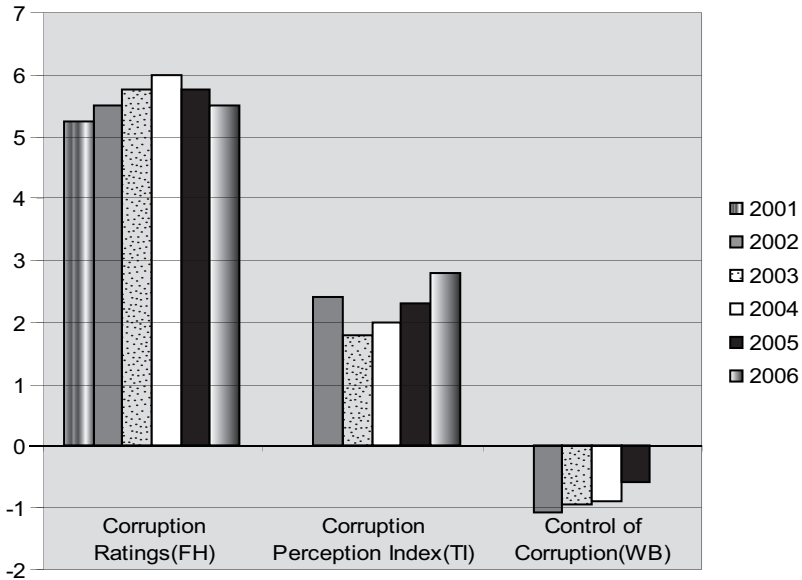
Rasma Karklins’ analysis suggests that anti-corruption efforts can contribute to conflict resolution in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Even if many Western governments are leery of a higher profile Western involvement in conflict resolution, the West has a strong interest in assisting Georgia in its efforts to combat human trafficking, smuggling in nuclear materials, and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. Latvia’s own difficult experience and modest successes in combating corruption and crafting social integration policy to reach out to alienated minorities might prove very useful to Georgia and could serve as a focus

for future development assistance. At the very least, Georgia could learn from Latvia's many mistakes in these policy areas.

The tepid Western response to both the mass discrimination campaign within Russia and the military incursions reflect a strong wariness on the part of most European governments and all European organizations to challenge Russia when its behaviour grossly transgresses civilized norms. This, in turn, could well encourage Russian bad behaviour, while convincing the Georgian authorities that their own restraint has not paid off. From Latvia's perspective, a Russia that acts with impunity against its neighbours is a dangerous prospect. At the same time, a Georgia that responds to Russian provocations with its own shows of force will create very thorny policy dilemmas for the European Union and NATO. Thus, caution in confronting Russia when it violates international norms in its Georgia policy might avoid tensions in the short-term, but lead to much graver problems in the medium and long term.

Appendix I

Comparison of different corruption indicators for Georgia



Sources: World Bank, Transparency International and Freedom House.

The Corruption Ratings (Freedom House) for each country are based on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 representing the highest and 7 the lowest level of democratic progress.

The Corruption Perception Index (Transparency International) I registered on a scale from 10 (highly clean) and 0 (highly corrupt).

The Control of Corruption Indicator (World Bank) ranges on a scale from -2.5 to +2.5, with higher values corresponding to better government.

About the authors

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Rasma Kārklīņa is Professor of Political Science at the University of Illinois at Chicago and visiting professor at the University of Latvia. Her most recent book is *The System Made Me Do It: Corruption in Post-Communist Societies* (2005). Her first book *Ethnic Relations in the USSR* won the Ralph E. Bunche award of the American Political Science Association for "the best book in political science on cultural pluralism." She has published widely on comparative ethnopolitics, transitions to democracy and corruption.

Georgian Security: A Latvian Perspective
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