Part 1

International Perspectives

Bruno Coppieters

1. Western Security Policies and the Georgian-Abkhazian Conflict

Introduction [1]

Western governments were in no hurry to establish diplomatic relations with Georgia when it declared its full secession from the Soviet Union in April 1991. This was not due to a lack of moral legitimacy in the struggle for independence by this country, whose existence as an independent state had been crushed by Soviet troops in 1921, or to a lack of legitimacy on the part of Zviad Gamsakhurdia to act as its democratically elected president. He was elected with over 86% of the votes in May 1991 in free presidential elections. The refusal of Western governments to recognise the first government of post-Soviet Georgia was due primarily to the continuing hope for a democratic reform of the Soviet federal system (expressed in declarations of support to Gorbachev in the summer of 1991) and the radical nationalist character of Gamsakhurdia's policies, which had unpredictable consequences on the domestic and international scene. On the domestic front, Gamsakhurdia and his government had raised extensive popular support through Georgia's movement for independence and by fostering a political conflict with national minorities and autonomies, primarily with the Autonomous Region of South Ossetia.[2] Such nationalist policies could not be sure of gaining the approval of Western governments. These governments were indeed in the process of rediscovering the importance of minority rights for European security, fearing violent ethnic and regional convulsions over the whole territory of the former 'socialist bloc', including the disintegration of some of the states in this region.[3]

Gamsakhurdia not only insulated his country from the international community through a policy of confrontation; he also eroded the domestic support he had gained in previous years during the struggle for independence. His authoritarianism and inability to compromise raised opposition from those who had formed his constituency in the past. Members of his own government and leaders of the two main paramilitary forces, the Mkhedrioni and the National

Guard, which were regarded at the time as the core of a future Georgian army, joined forces to overthrow the President. Gamsakhurdia was toppled from power by a military coup in the winter of 1991/92. In December 1991 he appealed for Western support and declared his readiness to see Georgia join the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), which he had categorically refused until then. The West abstained from any direct form of intervention, and the Russian president Boris Yeltsin declared before the Russian parliament that Georgia had first to settle its internal problems before such membership could be envisaged.[4] Gamsakhurdia had to flee and seek asylum in Chechnya. Eduard Shevardnadze, the former leader of the Georgian Communist Party and Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs until his resignation in December 1990, returned to Tbilisi in March 1992. The coup leaders hoped that Shevardnadze would bring them international recognition and domestic legitimacy. Western governments approved of this move, disregarding the democratic legitimacy of the former president Gamsakhurdia and their traditional pleas for respect for formal procedures in democratic societies. They hoped that Shevardnadze could put an end to the violent ethnic conflicts in his country, restore law and order, and pursue democratic and market reforms. Georgia entered the CSCE in March 1992 and became a full member of the UN in July of the same year.[5]

This chapter analyses Western policies towards Georgia, and in particular Western security policies towards the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict. Firstly, the chapter will address Georgia's military defeat in Abkhazia, which led to a reorientation of its external policies in favour of Russia. Western policies before and after the so-called 'Contract of the Century' in September 1994, where the State Oil Company of Azerbaijan (SOCAR) signed its first production-sharing agreement with a consortium of oil companies, constitutes a second focus of attention. The concept of security inherent in the Georgian and Western 'pipeline policies' will be analysed. Thirdly, the Georgian and Abkhaz security dilemmas which confront both leaderships will be described. These dilemmas confront Russian and Western policymakers with decisive choices, which constitute the fourth and last step of the analysis. As far as Western governments are concerned, their military involvement in the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict, the participation of the Western members of the 'Friends of the Secretary-General on Georgia' in the mediation efforts of the UN and the prospects for Western support — in particular from the European Union — in the post-conflict development of Abkhazia will be assessed.

Georgia's Defeat in Abkhazia 1992-1993

During the entire struggle for independence in 1989-91, public opinion and political parties in Georgia were divided between a pro-Moscow and a pro-West-

ern orientation. The choice for Moscow became apparent in the Autonomous Region of South Ossetia and in the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia, whereas a Western orientation became increasingly apparent in Georgia proper. In no other Union republic — with the exception of the Baltic republics — did expectations of Western support for its destiny run so high as in Georgia. This orientation is rooted in an age-old fear of extinction of its particular cultural identity, which has been threatened either by its southern or by its northern neighbours.[6] After Gamsakhurdia's failure to find recognition among the international community, Georgian public opinion pinned its hopes on Shevardnadze. These expectations were largely based on the idea that the person who had been perceived to have made such a significant contribution to the reunification of Germany and to the end of the Cold War could not fail to bring Georgia closer to the West. Georgia was seen as entering the European Community in the near future. After obtaining international recognition for his government, Shevardnadze strove for a policy of equilibrium between Western and Russian policies, in which the external sovereignty towards Russia had to be strengthened by closer relations to the West. The failure of these policies of equilibrium became apparent when Shevardnadze's Georgia engaged in open war with Abkhazia.[7]

In Soviet times the Abkhazian Autonomous Republic, on the Black Sea coast, was part of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic. In 1989 it had a population of 525,061, of which the relative majority of 46% consisted of Georgians (including sub-ethnic groups such as Megrelians and Svans[8]). The so-called 'titular' Abkhazian nationality, with 93,267 people, accounted for about 18% of the population. The status of 'titular' nationality, recognizing the Abkhaz rights to a 'homeland', secured them the privilege of retaining the bulk of the party and governmental positions in this autonomous republic. During the political debates preceding the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Abkhazian scholars claimed that the particular demographic situation of Abkhazia was the result of a century of Georgian colonisation ("Georgianisation"). According to the first all-Russian census of 1897, the 58,697 Abkhazians made up 55.3 % of the population, whereas the 25,875 Georgians accounted for 24.4 %. Abkhaz historians also claimed that the subordinate position of their republic to Georgia resulted from Georgian and Bolshevik policies and had not always existed in the past. In their view, Abkhazia had been independent of Georgia after the Russian Revolution of 1917. In March 1921, after the sovietisation of Georgia and Abkhazia, the Soviet Socialist Republic of Abkhazia was formed. In the Akbhaz view, in December 1921 this independent republic was forced to conclude a confederal Treaty of Union with Georgia, which lasted until 1931 when the political status of the Abkhazian republic was further downgraded from a Union republic to an autonomous republic incorporated into Georgia. According to Georgian scholars, however, Abkhazia had always been part of Georgia, being also de facto part

of Georgia during the first Georgian independent republic of 1918-1921. In their view, modern Abkhaz 'statehood' was a product of Bolshevik occupation of Georgia and Sovietisation of the region, which enabled Abkhazia to become an administrative unit within the *matryoshka* system of Soviet federation. Abkhaz scholars stressed the fact that the Soviet Georgians Stalin and Beria (a Megrelian from Abkhazia) played a prominent role in anti-Abkhaz policies. In the view of Georgian scholars, Stalin and Beria were not to be considered primarily as Georgian but as Soviet leaders, who implemented repressive policies towards the Georgian community as well.

In 1991, Gamsakhurdia had reached a provisional compromise with the Abkhaz leadership by the introduction of an electoral law whereby 28 out of 65 seats in the Abkhaz parliament would go to the Abkhaz and 26 to the Georgians. The rest of the population (37%) would receive the 11 remaining seats. After the ousting of Gamsakhurdia, the new Georgian authorities had no interest in promoting the legitimacy of this law. This agreement was strongly criticized by the Georgians as a breach of the majority rule and an "apartheid law". The breakdown of authority in Georgia, with the forces of Gamsakhurdia still controlling several Georgian districts adjacent to Abkhazia and the Georgian government lacking democratic legitimacy, created a window of opportunity for Abkhaz nationalists. They cancelled the previous agreement to share major positions in the executive with Georgian representatives and removed the Minister of the Interior (a Georgian) from his post. In July 1992, allegedly as a response to the decision of the Georgian Military Council to reinstate the old Georgian constitution of 1921, the Abkhazian Supreme Soviet reinstated Abkhazia's Constitution of 1925, which spoke about treaty relations with Georgia. Abkhazia did not declare independence, but strove for the re-establishment of equal treaty relations with Georgia in some kind of federative arrangement. The war broke out shortly thereafter.

In August 1992, Georgian troops, mainly paramilitary forces, entered Abkhazia, allegedly to free Georgian government officials kidnapped by Gamsakhurdia's forces and argued to be being held in the Gal(i) region of Abkhazia. The protection of rail communications along the coast towards Russia – where there were frequent robberies – served as a further pretext for military intervention. However, the Georgian warlords decided to march on Sukhum(i), the capital, and to occupy the whole of Abkhazia. They intended to crush any further attempt at Abkhaz secession. Shevardnadze is said not to have ordered this further move, but agreed to take full responsibility for the launching of military operations on Abkhaz territory and to legitimise further action by Georgian troops. According to some interpretations, the Georgian leader accepted this responsibility because he feared that his opposition to the warlords would lead to his being ousted from power, the installation of a military dictatorship, a new

civil war and the complete disintegration of the country. According to this view, the war with Abkhazia was the risk Shevardnadze had to take in order to retain what was left of Georgia's statehood. According to another interpretation, he wanted to settle the Abkhaz question once and for all, by force. Convinced of the military superiority of the Georgian troops, he would have hoped to crush the numerically inferior Abkhazians in a "small victorious war". The Georgian military operation failed. The Abkhaz received military support from volunteers from the Northern Caucasus and from the Russian army stationed in the autonomous republic. Due to this support, and to the low morale and military qualities of the Georgian troops, the Abkhaz were able to oust the Georgian military. From the Georgian perspective, this defeat was also due to the breakdown of a ceasefire-agreement, reached in July 1993 under Russian mediation, which had forced the Georgian troops to withdraw their heavy equipment from Abkhazia, whereas the Abkhaz side had been allowed by the Russian military to keep all their weaponry. In September 1993, Tbilisi was defeated. The major part of the Georgian civilian population fled Abkhazia. The Abkhaz side could only consolidate its military victory by changing the demographic balance in the republic through ethnic cleansing. Many Georgians who had stayed behind were killed by Abkhaz forces.

Shevardnadze spent the latter part of the war in Sukhum(i) in order to co-ordinate the military operations. He made dramatic appeals for UN intervention to stop the advance of the Abkhaz forces. He was convinced that his Western 'friends' had sufficient interests to defend in the Caucasus region to send peacekeeping forces. The UN Security Council (SC) made declarations concerning the need of a ceasefire and political negotiations between the warring parties with the aim of re-establishing Georgia's territorial integrity. However, the members of the SC were in no hurry to respond to Georgia's request for help. After the defeat of the Georgian forces, President Bill Clinton assured Shevardnadze of his "continued full support" for his leadership and for Georgia's territorial integrity. Clinton wrote in a letter that the US had started a series of nine aid flights on October 5 1993, and would send "more food, shelter, blankets and clothing next month".[9] The Georgian government, after its defeat in Abkhazia, was also seriously threatened by Gamsakhurdia's forces, which had reconsolidated their positions after having been ousted from Tbilisi. Confronted with the possibility of defeat in a new civil war, the Georgian government understood that it had greatly overestimated the Western potential for support. It agreed to enter the CIS. It also agreed to further Russian conditions, which it had refused so far, concerning Russian bases on Georgian territory. These concessions were in exchange for Russia's refraining from giving support to the disintegration process taking place in Georgia. The appearance of Russian troops had a decisive psychological effect on Gamsakhurdia's troops marching on Tbilisi and led to their defeat.

Cautious Western Policies 1994-1995

In 1994 the policies of Western states in the region had the following aims: firstly, to enhance the political stability of the region through their support for the state building process and through democratisation policies. Secondly, to favour market reforms and thirdly to enhance the sovereignty of the Transcaucasian states with respect to Russia, but avoiding an open confrontation with Moscow; Russia remained the primary focus of Western attention in the following years. Western governments were not ready to support any form of radical opposition to Russia's presence in the Transcaucasus region. They accorded a far higher priority to Russia's integration into an international co-operation framework than to attempts by other former Soviet republics to strengthen their external sovereignty by breaking all links with Moscow. These limited aims were far from sufficient to justify any significant political — let alone military — involvement in the Caucasus region.

In 1994 President Bill Clinton was careful not to provoke Russia in its Near Abroad. At that time Russia had made a strategic withdrawal from Central Europe, and had to deal with a radical transformation of its security environment on its southern borders.[10] This challenge had to be supported in positive terms. During a visit to Moscow in 1994, Clinton compared Russia's stabilising potential on its borders with the US' own policies in Panama and Grenada.[11] This prudent attitude was partly motivated by some setbacks the US had experienced before 1994 in its policies supporting Shevardnadze. The United States had started to train Georgian security officers in 1992, when there were repeated attempts to murder the Georgian president.[12] Fred Woodruff, a US official, arrived in May 1993 to organise Shevardnadze's personal security. He was murdered in the summer of 1993 in the car of the head of presidential security, reportedly by a drunken ex-soldier trying to stop the car to steal gasoline. This interpretation was supported by a confession by the accused; however, this was retracted at his trial in 1994. The accused declared then that his statements had been obtained from him under torture. The case was closed after he had been found guilty. According to some reports, however, Fred Woodruff was killed from within the vehicle. These speculations have never been supported by hard evidence, but rumours that Russian security forces had had a direct role in this murder gave support to the thesis that the United States had to be very careful in attempting to gain any firm foothold in Russia's back yard.

The prudent nature of Western policies towards Russian strategic interests in Georgia did not mean that Western governments were prepared to accept Georgia as part of a Russian sphere of influence. Russia was striving for a stronger conventional force in the Caucasus than it was entitled to under the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE), which had been signed in 1990. After the

integration of Georgia into the CIS, Western diplomats openly expressed their concern that Georgia might make too many concessions to Moscow in accepting mutual arrangements concerning the holdings of military equipment to which every Caucasian country was entitled under the CFE treaty.[13]

Under conditions of economic hardship, Georgia was not very attractive in 1994 as a consumer or investment market. After the breakdown of the Soviet planned economy, a radical de-industrialisation of the economy due to the civil war, rising energy costs, broken foreign economic links and high inflation rates left Georgia with the lowest GNP per capita of all republics of the former Soviet Union ($350 a year). The total material product (production excluding services) dropped from 100 units in 1988 by four-fifths to 20 in 1994.[14] In contrast to Russia and the Central and East European states, the republics from the periphery of the former Soviet Union lacked the basic institutions of statehood when gaining independence. In Georgia, the ethnic and civil wars and the upsurge of criminality destroyed the last remnants of order. Under such conditions it was impossible to apply any consistent economic policy. For those who were convinced that the shock therapy formula could be successful in transition economies, the political conditions for such therapy were absent in Georgia. Shock therapy requires relatively strong state institutions for the application of strict fiscal and monetary controls. Such institutions were not present in Georgia in 1994.[15] The government managed to collect only 2.4 per cent of GDP in revenue in the second half of that year. Western humanitarian support made a significant contribution to the relief of hunger and other material hardships during those years but was difficult to deliver due to the extent of disorganisation and the decay of infrastructural links.

In 1994, Georgian relations with the US were at their lowest point. Shevardnadze, on a state visit that year to the US, failed to coax a state dinner out of Clinton. He had to be satisfied with a dinner hosted by the Under-Secretary of State, Strobe Talbott. James Baker, the former US Secretary of State, who had close personal relations with Shevardnadze, failed to mobilise US investment interest in Georgia during that visit. The US administration planned a mere $70 million in assistance for that year. The European Union was more active during this period. In 1994 it implemented one of its largest ever food assistance programmes in the Transcaucasus[16]. However, it kept a low political profile, far from the role which Georgia was expecting its Western friends to play in the region.

Until 1994, the US and most EU member-states seemed to attach more importance to their political than to their economic interests in the Southern Caucasus. The United States defined its policy on the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh largely on the basis of domestic pressure from the Armenian lobby. At first France also attached more importance to Armenia than to the other Transcaucasian states, due to the Armenian Diaspora in France. Only the United

Kingdom, re-establishing the links it had with Azerbaijan before Soviet times, developed its political priorities in the Southern Caucasus in accordance with its economic interests (British Petroleum being the largest Western stakeholder in the Azerbaijan International Operating Company (AIOC).[17] In so doing, however, it risked jeopardising its relations with Armenia. Of all the Western powers, Germany — which, in contrast to Britain, had no major company interests to defend in the Caspian region — seemed to attach most importance to Georgia. It was the first Western country to post an ambassador in Tbilisi, in March 1992.

Energy interests progressively came to the fore and became a focus of attention in Western media after the signing of the "contract of the century" between some oil companies and Azerbaijan in September 1994. Central Asia and Azerbaijan started to attract many investment projects and — to a lesser extent — real capital investments. The experiences of the oil company Chevron demonstrated that the financial risk for such investments was only bearable if freedom of transit from the land-locked countries of the Caspian region could be secured. As the first major Western investor in the Kazakh Tengiz fields (contract of April 1993), Chevron had made significant capital investments but had failed to secure its export lines for oil transport – due, among other things, to opposition from Russia — and had thus incurred considerable losses. The Russian intervention in the breakaway republic of Chechnya in December 1994 was largely interpreted in the West as a Russian attempt to control the Caspian oil market, despite the fact that the preservation of Russia's territorial integrity may count as far more important than such economic concerns. Western countries all adapted their policy priorities on the basis of their interpretation of the new situation, but they did it in various ways.

The American administration redesigned its geopolitical policies in the world's largest unexplored oil region on the basis of its opposition to rogue states such as Iran, Libya or Iraq. According to the deputy US Energy Secretary Bill White, on tour in the Central Asian region in 1995, future world demand for oil should not be met by countries that were not friendly to the US — e.g. Iran or Iraq — or where new oil drilling should be avoided for ecological reasons — as in the Amazon or the Arctic — but by regions such as the Caucasus and Central Asia.[18] According to observers, a large supply of oil from the Caspian sea was seen as helpful in changing the relationship of forces between the oil-exporting and the oil-importing countries in general and between the states in the Middle East in particular.

Among the few European Union states which were present in the region, Germany was slow to understand the geopolitical importance of Azeri oil. The concentration of all diplomatic efforts on Georgia, neglecting German interests in Azerbaijan, was criticized by *Die Zeit* as being unbalanced. In May 1995, Bonn had not even opened a full diplomatic mission in Baku. The absence of a

German Ambassador to defend German business in Azerbaijan contrasted with an oversized diplomatic mission in Tbilisi, where there were few economic interests at stake.[19] Despite all the personal friendship and gratitude of the German leadership towards Shevardnadze, due to his role as Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs in the reunification of Germany, state interests dictated a more even distribution of attention towards political and economic objectives in the region.

The European Union had difficulties in developing a common political strategy in the region. In a Commission Communication "Towards a European Union strategy for relations with the Transcaucasian Republics", written in 1995, it was stated that the European Union had significant geopolitical, economic and moral interests in the region. The importance of pipeline policies in an overall European Union strategy was clearly mentioned among the policy objectives: "The EU will need to ensure that it will play a key role in the negotiations for contracts for the exploitation of the remaining huge reserves (in the Caspian region, B.C.); in determining the routing of pipelines; and in ensuring that the outcome of the debate on maritime jurisdiction over the Caspian will not prevent the successful extraction of offshore oil."[20] However, the European Union members failed to understand the importance of a co-ordinated and high-profile policy on these issues and the European Commission did not obtain authorisation from the Council for an enhanced and direct political role for the EU in the region, in the framework of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy. For instance, aid was not linked to political objectives concerning the peace talks in the OSCE or the return of refugees, as proposed by the Commission.

The reluctance of most member states of the European Union to be directly involved in the Caucasus' ethnic conflicts led to a limitation of the EU's political role. However, this does not mean that the European Union is not politically present in the region. The European Union TACIS programme, which has been developed for Central Asia, the Transcaucasus and other regions of the CIS, includes specific projects with a clear political content, insofar as energy security is to be considered as a political issue. TACIS-programmes are aiming, inter alia, at improvements in transport infrastructure (roads, railways, harbours, airports) and at diversification in Europe's energy provision, in particular oil and gas, by developing a transport network through Central Asia, the Transcaucasus and Ukraine to Western and Central Europe (creating complementary routes to the Northern pipeline route and other transport routes through Russia[21]). A specific 'Democracy Programme' is developing the democratisation of state structures using a bottom-up approach.[22] These programmes generally support regional integration initiatives and the political and economic independence (from Russia) of states in these regions.[23] Rehabilitation projects in conflict regions (for instance in the Fizuli district of Azerbaijan and of the Inguri Dam in Georgia)

also have political significance. There is an overt political role in the long term, with the preparation of Partnership and Co-operation Agreements (PCA's) which would institutionalise the 'political dialogue' between the European Union and the states of the Southern Caucasus and create a legal framework for all spheres of co-operation. The European Commission would play a prominent role in this dialogue. The PCAs, signed with the heads of states of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia in April 1996 in Luxemburg, reopened the discussion on the identity of the EU as a political presence in the region. The political dialogue was informally opened with Georgia on the expert level in 1997. The completion of the ratification process by the parliaments of the three Caucasian states, the European Parliament and the parliaments of all EU member states in 1999 created a formal framework for this dialogue with Georgia and its two neighbours, and opened up the possibility for a regional dialogue between them in a European framework.

The future enlargement of the EU will probably enhance its involvement in the Caucasus. The enlargement to Eastern and Central Europe certainly requires new transport routes for energy, independent of Russia. Countries such as Germany are particularly worried about too high a level of energy dependency in the potential new EU members on Russia. According to experts' calculations, the European Union's needs for gas (which can only increase after the decision by the German government in October 1998 on progressive dismantling of all nuclear plants) are covered until 2005, but new investments will be necessary to cover the increasing needs after 2005-2010. Such investments are taking place in Norway, Algeria, Russia and the Caspian region (among these only Norway may be regarded as politically stable).

The Western European Union (WEU) noted the strategic importance of oil and gas to European security in 1995. The document 'European Security: a Common Concept of the 27 WEU Countries', approved at the Extraordinary Council of Ministers of Western European Union in Madrid on 14 November 1995, set out the security interests in the region as follows: "Most European countries are largely dependent for their supplies of energy and raw materials on countries whose political and economic stability over the medium term cannot be taken for granted. Gas and oil are conveyed, at least in part, through pipelines crossing countries of uncertain stability. In the event of a major crisis, the disruption of those supplies is a distinct probability and maritime transport routes could be vulnerable. The flow of gas and oil to European markets through reliable pipeline and maritime routes holds great political and strategic significance. The diversification of European energy supplies may help reduce these potential risks."[24] Despite the importance of these security interests, which relate to Western Europe's far greater dependency on safe transport routes for gas and oil from the former Soviet Union than the US, the WEU limited Europe's objectives to the development of "fruitful co-operation in the polit-

ical, economic and cultural fields" with the states of the Transcaucasus. It excluded direct European security responsibilities. Security co-operation was delegated to the OSCE and NATO's Partnership for Peace programme (PFP).

At the same time that oil interests started to attract economic and political attention in the West, the Georgian leadership managed to stabilise the political and economic situation. In 1994 Georgia worked out a budgetary stabilisation plan with the IMF, which led to the procurement of credits from the IMF and the World Bank.[25] In 1995 all paramilitary groupings on which Shevardnadze's power had rested during the previous years were outlawed. A new constitution was promulgated, which gave strong presidential powers to Shevardnadze. The discussion on the constitution opened up prospects of federalisation of the country, but discussion of the form that such a process would take was postponed until after further progress in the settlement of the Abkhaz question. In 1995, the Georgian government had gained sufficient control of the budget and credit issues to introduce a new currency (the lari), which remained relatively stable until September 1998. In 1996 Georgia became the fastest growing transition economy and reached a GDP growth of 11.4 per cent, while inflation was brought down to 5.7 per cent in September 1997.[26] Trade and agriculture were the fastest growing sectors. However, the process of de-industrialisation of the country in previous years had not been reversed, with industry only representing 15 per cent of GDP in 1996. Russia's financial turmoil in 1998 confirmed the legitimacy of Georgia's 'Western' economic orientation, but there were many weak spots remaining on the Georgian economic record: high unemployment levels, widespread poverty, bureaucracy, a corrupt tax and customs service, tax evasion, non-independent courts, weak legislation concerning property rights, inefficiency of the banking sector in channelling investment funds, lack of substantive foreign investments, exports representing only 8 per cent of GDP in 1996, an accumulation of unpaid foreign debts (Georgia's debts to Ashkabad for supplies of natural gas totalling approximately $400 million in 1998 [27]) and an infrastructure in a catastrophic state. In 1998 the Economist Intelligence Unit considered the idea of an East-West transport route through Central Asia and the Caucasus as still a long way from being implemented as a trouble-free transit route due to the many tariffs and corrupt officials which freight transporters encounter in moving cargo from one country to the next, which may make the Russian route still more attractive for years to come.[28]

Pipeline Security

Since 1995 pipelines have been raising both hopes and fears concerning the future stability of Georgia. Some were expecting that both order and welfare

would be the logical consequence of oil investments: "If 'the Caspian Gold' passes through Georgia, it will be a guarantee that Caucasia will approach Switzerland in stability in the next millennium. It is rather doubtful that the big Western companies, backed by their corresponding state structures, would allow any instability in the region and miss the enormous profit to be had. Such a situation has fine prospects in store for Georgia. Thus, the West will be a powerful 'curator' of Georgia"[29] Whereas the author of these lines was seeing Switzerland as a model and Western profits as a guarantee of stability, William H. Courtney, US Ambassador to Georgia, pointed to Great Britain as model for Georgia's economic development: "A century ago, the great British economist Alfred Marshall stated that it was the transportation industry which had done the most to increase England's wealth. Now, Georgia has a similar opportunity."[30] Oil and gas pipelines were, according to this perspective, the "first step" in an overall modernisation of infrastructure, calling for billions of dollars in investment on communication and transport links.[31]

The consequences of pipeline investments may be assessed according to a best-case and also a worst-case scenario. Pipelines would, according to the worst-case perspective, lead to renewed conflicts on Georgian territory. The process of disintegration of the country that began with the struggle for Georgian independence through a combination of ethnic conflicts (South Ossetia, Abkhazia), a civil war (in which President Gamsakhurdia was overthrown) and foreign (Russian) intervention had been halted in October 1993 through the reintegration of Georgia into the CIS and the acceptance of Russian bases on Georgian territory. However, such conflicts may well be resumed in the future, due – according to this scenario — to the strategic importance of energy transport, the effects it has on the regional balance of power and the high vulnerability of the pipeline infrastructure to sabotage and blackmail. The worst-case scenario also has to take into account the possibility that Russia would deliberately foster instability in Georgia. The emergence in recent years of a bipolar structure of alliances in the Caucasus, in which Armenia has found increasing support from Russia and Iran and Azerbaijan from Turkey and the US, has presaged increased difficulties for Georgia in maintaining a correct balance between those two countries, which the Azeri and Armenian minorities in Georgia itself regard as their homeland.

The hopes and fears to be found in the previous two scenarios, even if they remain vague, largely speculative and difficult to shape by concrete analysis, are influencing the choices to be made by political and economic protagonists concerning pipelines and security arrangements. Some political protagonists, such as the US, take both hypotheses into consideration when drafting their policies. The best-case and worst-case scenarios are influencing decisions in Georgia and abroad by their capacity to mobilise opinion: a bright future for Georgia as the consequence of pipeline construction increases the domestic legitimacy of the

Georgian government. The failure of the Georgian government to design a social policy that may alleviate the problems of poverty and the lack of funds in education and the health system can thus be presented as a problem of transition towards a better future. A bright future also gives the projects of Western foreign policy-makers towards this region legitimacy in the eyes of their public opinion. The request by the US government to Congress in 1997 to increase US assistance to the countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus by 34% to $900 million was said to constitute a "prudent investment in our nation's future."[32] Worst-case thinking, likewise, has a mobilising potential: the fear of total destabilisation makes the lack of decisive progress in the negotiations with the Abkhazian and Russian governments more acceptable to the Georgian population. For the United States, anxiety that the whole region would be turned into a battleground is "another reason why conflict resolution must be Job One for U.S. policy in the region".[33]

Pipelines as such will bring no wealth to Georgia. In the summer of 1997 Georgia expected[34] to receive in future a total yearly income of $100 million (this sum may be compared with the $218 million channeled to the state budget by the tax inspectorate and the customs department during the first seven months of 1997[35] or with $272 million paid by Russia to Ukraine as transit fees for oil in 1997[36]). It remains difficult to estimate precisely the future income to be earned from transit fees in the coming years but it may help to diminish the state's budget deficit and foreign debt (Georgia will have to start paying annual interest of $200 million around the year 2000[37]). However, it should be seen as clearly only a fraction of the total capital needed for the overall development of the country.

The Georgian strategy of development is not based on the income to be earned from transit fees, but on the calculation that the pipelines will demonstrate that sufficient political stability for long-term investments has been established. It will also enhance the desired stability through greater Western political and military involvement in the region. Stability would in turn enhance further Western investments — expected to be a multiple of the sums earned as transit fees. Stability is seen both as the necessary point of departure for economic development and as its final result. The level of stability reached after the adoption of a new constitution in 1995 is surely insufficient for large investment plans. In December 1997 Japanese businessmen, for instance, were reluctant to invest in insecure regions and regarded Georgia and Armenia as too unstable for that purpose, directing their primary attention to Azerbaijan.[38] The Western focus on investing in the diversification of oil and gas export routes is surely a prudent one: even if the expectation that such investments will lead to an overall economic modernisation and growth in Georgia is not fulfilled, the money spent will in any case be beneficial for Western energy security interests.

Investments in the transportation of the Caspian region's oil to the world markets will have a causal effect on existing and emerging ethnic and regional conflicts in Georgia, and on Western involvement in those conflicts. It is, however, impossible to assess direct causal links between 'pipelines', 'conflicts' and the policies of regional and non-regional players. The discussions on 'pipelines' do not only refer to the transportation links of oil and gas, but to the whole strategy of economic development adopted by the Georgian government and also to an interlinking of the interests of Central Asia and the Caucasus, on the one hand, and of the main economic players in the world market, on the other. The Georgian expectations concerning the beneficial economic consequences of pipeline investments are based on the calculation that they will either be directly beneficial to stability or that they will lead to Western support for Georgian attempts to obtain stability. The Georgian view on the Western role in providing stability in this part of the Caucasus is largely influenced by past Western policies. The lack of involvement in the first years of independence is seen as resulting from a lack of material interests, to be superseded by an active Georgian foreign policy. Georgia has to establish links between its future development and Western energy security interests.

The interaction of 'pipelines' and 'ethnic conflicts' is part of a complex relationship between the individual strategies of a large number of economic and political players. It is not the aim of this chapter to analyse these patterns of interaction. It is more interesting to see if the idea of security inherent in the economic development strategy adopted by the Georgian government can respond to the problems that now confront it. The remainder of this chapter seeks to examine in particular how this view of security fits into Georgian-Western relations regarding the resolution of the conflict with the Abkhaz leadership. A settlement of this conflict is generally considered to be the first condition for the future stability of the country. This analysis will proceed in two stages. I will first analyse the dilemmas that Georgia and Abkhazia face in developing a conflict resolution policy. I will then describe the present Russian and Western policies. The following factors have to be taken into account with regard to Western policies: the military presence in Abkhazia; the attitude of the Western members of the Security Council towards the conflict and their marginal position in the mediation efforts; and finally the prospects for a post-conflict reconstruction programme in Abkhazia.

Georgian and Abkhaz Security Dilemmas

The principles and objectives of UN mediation in the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict can be summarised as follows: there will be no acceptance of changes of interna-

tional boundaries by force; the solution has to be freely negotiated; the settlement should be based on autonomy for Abkhazia, which would be legitimised by a referendum under international supervision once the multi-ethnic population has returned.[39] In July 1999 there was no visible progress in this direction. The two key issues in the negotiations — the future political status of Abkhazia and the return of refugees — remained unresolved. The reports of the UN Secretary-General to the Security Council on Abkhazia repeatedly stated that the international community has "spent much effort — in vain — to move the conflict towards a peaceful solution".[40]

No agreement between the conflicting parties could be reached in 1997 regarding the implementation of security guarantees — which had to be enforced with the help of the Russian peace-keeping forces — for the Georgian population which had returned to the Gal(i) district.[41] The parties could not agree on the draft "Protocol on a Georgian-Abkhaz settlement" proposed by the Russian Federation on the principles for a settlement.[42] In August 1997, Shevardnadze met the Abkhaz president Ardzinba, declaring that Georgia had decided to re-orientate its policies towards Abkhazia by developing economic links with the breakaway republic. In November 1997 a Co-ordinating Council was set up, under the chairmanship of the UN's Special Representative, within which working groups would deal with issues related to (a) the lasting non-resumption of hostilities and security problems, (b) refugees and internally displaced persons and (c) economic and social problems.[43] The constitution of this Co-ordinating Council was based on the idea that, considering all the difficulties to be solved in the short term, the issues of political status, confidence and trust could be better addressed through co-operation in areas of common interests. Economic and social co-operation would benefit the whole population of Abkhazia, which had received humanitarian help amounting to almost US$ 17.5 million in 1997.[44] Sessions of the Co-ordinating Council were held in January and March 1998. The United Nations sent a Needs Assessment Mission to Abkhazia in February 1998 under the auspices of the Georgian/Abkhaz Co-ordinating Council. The identification of economic and social priorities in the short and medium term would help in assessing the potential of post-conflict reconstruction.

This policy of co-operation created new opportunities for the peace process, but was not sufficient to create a new type of relationship between Georgia and Abkhazia. Confrontation was still a feature of their relations. The announcement by the Georgian government that Georgian border guards would take full responsibility for patrolling Georgia's maritime borders from 1 July 1998 — replacing their Russian counterparts — led to a sharp reaction from the Abkhaz side. The Sukhum(i) government announced that they would resist any Georgian attempt to patrol the waters adjacent to their territory.[45] Georgian guerrilla

units formed the 'White Legion' in 1996, which took responsibility for subversive actions on Abkhaz territory. A new unit, called the 'Forest Brothers', was formed later.[46] The Georgians accused the Abkhaz of severe repression towards the civilian population in the region. On 18 May 1998 Georgian guerrillas attacked Abkhaz militia, reputedly killing about 20 police officers. An Abkhaz counter-offensive against Georgian villages in Gal(i) resulted in dozens of deaths and the flight of about 30,000 Georgian civilians who had returned to the Gal(i) district, having fled after the 92/93 war. Abkhaz allegations that the Georgian government had given direct support to the Georgian guerrilla forces and renewed Georgian accusations of ethnic cleansing by the Abkhaz leadership made the discussions on a peace settlement more difficult than ever.

At the time these accusations may have been regarded as well-founded. Governmental support for the Georgian guerrilla forces — which does not necessarily mean full control of these forces by the Georgian government — is regarded as an 'open secret' by political observers in Georgia. The Abkhaz government-in-exile, which represents the Georgian population from Abkhazia, seemed particularly active in supporting the guerrilla forces. The Abkhaz government in Sukhum(i) has always refused to negotiate with, or even to talk to, the representatives of this government-in-exile.

However, an important change in attitude occurred in1999 regarding the return of the refugees. Until then the Abkhaz side had considered that the Georgian civilian population returning in recent years to the Gal(i) district constituted a political threat — a 'fifth column' —, which would legitimise the fact that ethnic cleansing could not be undone. The Abkhaz claimed that an overall political solution acceptable to both sides should be found before the question of refugees could be finally settled. The fact that the Abkhaz side was not active or creative in developing models to solve the problem of political status – the confederal model it proposed did not take basic Georgian security concerns into account and was generally regarded as a stepping-stone to secession — made it very vulnerable to the criticism that it was indeed building on the long-term consequences of ethnic cleansing, expecting greater Georgian willingness to compromise in the future and decreasing interest on the part of the Georgian refugees in returning. However, it declared at the beginning of 1999 that all Georgian refugees who had not been involved in war crimes and who would accept registration by the Abkhaz authorities could return to their homes in Abkhazia. This operation would start on March 1, 1999. The Abkhaz decision was made unilaterally, without agreement with the Georgian authorities on security guarantees for the Georgian population returning to their homes. The Abkhaz government refused to link the return of the refugees to security measures which would have restricted their sovereignty on their own territory. The unilateral decision on the return of refugees without institutional guarantees was seen

by Georgia as a further sign that the Abkhaz government was not ready to compromise.

It is unlikely that the attitude of confrontation characteristic of both parties to the conflict can lead to a peaceful solution in which institutional guarantees would play a significant role. A lasting peace settlement would require a totally different approach to the use of force. Both sides have repeatedly declared that they would stick to the principle of peaceful negotiations, but neither has abstained from threatening to use military force. The fact that at present the use of force is not seen by the Georgian and Abkhaz leaderships as the ultimate solution to the conflict is primarily due to their negative war experiences, where they have both failed to achieve their objectives by force. Their more moderate approach to the use of force in which the military build-up is combined with diplomatic initiatives is not based on alternative political ideas as to how ethnic conflicts should be managed. Institutional remedies are not prominent features of Georgian or Abkhaz discourses. Their approach to the use of force is not based on moral considerations either. Both sides find strong legitimate grounds for the use of force in the gross violations of human rights and war crimes committed by the other side during and after the conflict. Both sides regard the present circumstances as a severe threat to their future sovereignty and even statehood, which in their view makes the use of force against the civilian population legitimate without severe moral restraints (economic sanctions, as implemented by the CIS in January 1996, may be regarded as a specific form of the use of force against a civilian population). Both sides also believe that it is perfectly legitimate to combine military and diplomatic means in an order which is determined by their respective effectiveness in attaining particular political objectives. It is not likely that such an attitude — which makes it possible to resort to force to settle any political issue of major importance — makes any institutional compromise viable. Even if the Georgian and Abkhaz sides may agree on a vague compromise formula regarding a division of state powers, as for instance a common 'federative' state to be based on a mixture of federal (as proposed by the Georgian side) and confederal principles (as proposed by the Abkhaz side) or on a territorial division of Abkhazia (which is currently regarded as unacceptable by the Abkhaz leadership), it is difficult to imagine lasting rules for peaceful conflict resolution when restraints on the use of force are exclusively dictated by considerations of effectiveness.

For the Abkhaz leadership, a confederal framework is seen as the only acceptable option. This means that both states would remain fully sovereign (and recognised as such by the international community) and retain their present state structures. The relations between the two states would be based on an international treaty. Any form of hierarchical relation with a central government is perceived as a form of subordination and rejected. The confederal government

would retain some representative functions in a limited number of international organisations. However, this co-operation would not infringe the principle of sovereignty, as all decisions regarding joint competences should be by consensus. Institutions which would have the power to mediate in case of disagreement or common institutions which would be legitimised by a popular vote through direct elections are not provided for in the Abkhaz proposals. In such a construction, conflicts may easily lead to fresh violence. In the Abkhaz view, the exit option through secession should remain open. Secession would be facilitated by the international character of the treaty relationship and by the recognition of both federated states of the new confederation by the international community as sovereign and as subjects of international law. This confederal view is not based on a federalist ideology — which necessarily includes a far more differentiated view of sovereignty — but on an assessment of present political realities: the international community does indeed refuse to recognise any changes of borders or secession implemented by force. Russia has also put effective pressure on Abkhazia to accept the principle of a common state with Georgia, and to show some kind of flexibility in the negotiation process. Without a minimal prospect of a peaceful negotiation, the use of force would be unavoidable, which would be harmful both to Russian interests in the region and to the (small and vulnerable) Abkhaz nation. The absence of an official Abkhaz declaration of independence so far can only be explained by such 'pragmatic' considerations.

For many Abkhaz, who see the strength of political institutions primarily in terms of relationships of forces and not in legal terms, federalism does not give any guarantee to minorities not to be overruled by a majority. Federal constitutions may include a provision that any change of status of the federated units are impossible without their participation in the decision-making process or even their agreement, but the Abkhaz know from experience that constitutional provisions do not mean much in the former Soviet Union. A change of government in the centre — the Abkhaz remember very well that Gamsakhurdia had been elected with more than 86% of the votes in 1991, to be toppled from power a few months later — may lead to new armed conflicts between the centre and its minorities, where it is not possible to predict what the attitude of Russia would be. The experience of Chechnya (1994) shows very well that Western governments are generally not prepared, in similar cases, to intervene in the internal affairs of any European country or to go further than monitoring the conflict or initiating diplomatic mediation. NATO's use of force in Kosovo inaugurated a new — and highly problematic — conception of intervention in a state's internal affairs. Only international guarantees specifically designed for federations, which would guarantee the rights of a federated state against the federal government or against other federated states, could correct the incapacity of traditional institutional methods in federations to resolve armed conflicts within federal

states. Such guarantees should also make it impossible to downgrade or to abolish the political status of a federated unit. Such a type of guarantee concerning the internal structure of a state is not to be found among the traditional international guarantees that can be given by other states, by the OSCE or by the Security Council, but is in certain respects in line with the political principles on which the Dayton Agreement on Bosnia has been based.

The Abkhaz leadership is turning down most Georgian proposals for federal reform. The Georgian proposal to grant Abkhazia 'the widest known form of autonomy' is rejected by the Sukhum(i) leadership. From the Abkhaz point of view 'autonomy' is opposed to 'sovereign statehood' — a point of view which is shared by most former autonomous units in the post-Soviet space. Such a proposal should be seen as a new attempt to subordinate Abkhazia to Georgia. The Georgian proposal to give the Abkhaz president the post of speaker of a second chamber, which would have to be created in a federal framework, has little meaning for an Abkhaz leadership seeking a confederal arrangement which would secure its existence as an internationally recognised sovereign state. The proposal by Shevardnadze that a federal common state would secure full fiscal autonomy to Abkhazia[47] is a subordinate question in the Abkhaz view of state construction.

As for Georgia, the war with Abkhazia followed a war with South Ossetia and a civil war with fellow Georgians. It was defeated in its ethnic wars, and only survived its civil war as an independent state by conceding severe limitations on its sovereignty to Russia. The present leadership is not ready to take the risk that Russia might have to intervene once more as a mediator (and to send peacekeepers) in conflicts with Adjaria or with other minorities living in Georgian territory. Under present conditions, where the strength of the state structures derives from the unitary character of the state, non-centralisation may entail the risk of disintegration. Georgia is not ready to take the risk of political instability by building federal state structures in which sovereignty would be fragmented among various units (South Ossetia, Ajaria, various Georgian regions). The option of federalism would only be acceptable if this would not endanger the (still fragile) political stability in Georgia and would secure reunification with Abkhazia.

From the Georgian perspective, federalisation and national unification are seen as two sides of the political process that would re-establish political stability. This view has to be taken into account when explaining the failure of the federalisation and unification processes so far. The Georgian leadership makes no attempt to federalise the country as a first, preparatory step towards reunification. Such a radical reform regarding the political status of the ethnic minorities is unlikely to be accepted by the political establishment. From the Abkhaz perspective, this is a further proof that the Georgian community is not ready to form a common state with any other ethnic group.

In Georgia, sharing sovereignty has little meaning for a political leadership consisting exclusively of ethnic Georgians. The Georgians account for 69% of the population. This means that the remaining 31 percent of the population have practically no representation in the central government. As a point of comparison, the Flemish population is more or less 60 % of the Belgian population — 9 % less than the Georgians in Georgia — but has only half the Ministerial posts in the central government, proportional representation in the parliament and a presence in the federal administration according to a quota negotiated by the two main Belgian communities. As a further point of comparison with a democratic country where the demographic majority of a particular national community or language group does not lead to the establishment of a monopoly of power in the state, or even to a political majority by that community or language group, 64% of the Swiss population is German-speaking, whereas 19% speak French, 8% Italian and about 9% another language.[48] It is not clear if and how the Tbilisi government would accept concessions to its numerous minorities in respect of the distribution of state posts in administration and central government. It is true that there are no legal enactments limiting the representation of minorities, and the political leaderships of those minorities themselves do not always strive to participate in power structures at a central level (the exclusive use of Georgian as an official language being an important barrier to such participation), but there seem to be no serious attempts to counter these forms of cultural and political marginalisation. The absence of democratic structures at local government level — power at the district level and in small towns remains in the hands of the heads of administration appointed from above[49] almost everywhere — is not an encouraging sign of Georgian potential for reform.

Russian Choices

There has never been a clear distinction between Soviet and Russian involvement in the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict.[50] Present Russian policies are based on a common Soviet past with Georgia and Abkhazia. The conflicts between 'conservatives' and 'democrats' in the perestroïka period between the old Soviet and the new Russian elites on the question of Russian sovereignty — which came to an end in December 1991 with the dismantling of the Soviet Union — and between the executive and the legislature in the new Russian state — which was settled to the advantage of the Russian president in October 1993 — all had far-reaching consequences for Moscow's attitude towards the Southern Caucasus. Russia's present policies towards the region can be differentiated according to the particular institutional interests defended by the various players involved (including the President, Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Defence, Border Guards,

the Duma, and even one of the main 'oligarchs': Boris Berezovskii, in the role of CIS Executive Secretary). It is generally believed that the various foreign policy players on the Russian domestic scene share, despite the variety of their actual policies, common geopolitical and geo-economic interests or at least have to take these general interests into consideration when attempting to influence Russian policies. It is, therefore, possible to speak of a Russian position, even if various actors on the Russian domestic scene pursue their own particular foreign policy agendas.

Russian interests are primarily related to the importance of stability in the South Caucasus to the Northern Caucasus (stability in Dagestan being a major concern), to the proximity of Turkey — already very active in military co-operation with Georgia — and to the routing of exports for the natural resources of the Caspian Sea region. With regard to Abkhazia, the military importance of about 200 km of coastline along the Black Sea and the stationing of Russian troops have to be taken into account. From a Russian perspective, it is not easy to see whether their interests can be safeguarded more easily through the present status quo or through a peace settlement and the creation of a common Georgian/Abkhaz state.

From the Russian point of view, the present status quo has some advantages over a peace agreement. The present situation makes both sides heavily dependent upon Russia, whereas a peace settlement would strengthen Georgia's orientation towards the West. Western governments have repeatedly declared that they could not regard the Southern Caucasus as within a Russian sphere of influence. They have also made it clear that increasing investments in this region would inevitably raise their overall political and military presence. This would not be to Russia's advantage, nor would it be to Russia's advantage that the Abkhaz leadership would not have to rely so heavily on their support. Some Abkhaz political forces support the creation of a Caucasian Confederation independent of Russia and in which the peoples of the North Caucasus — with whom the Abkhaz can deal on an equal footing — are seen to play a prominent role. According to statements by Vyacheslav Mikhailov, acting Russian Minister for Nationalities and Federative Relations, in April 1998, " a serious struggle for the creation of a single Caucasus but without Russia (was) under way". In his view, the Caucasian region posed the most serious threat to Russia's territorial integrity.[51]

Stability has important implications for prospects of investment in the 'Western' oil route from Baku to Supsa, which circumscribes the Northern route to Novorossiisk. Georgian observers are pointing out that Russia derives clear advantages from maintaining instability on its southern borders. Shevardnadze himself — who had once denied the idea that Moscow had fomented ethnic strife in Georgia[52] — has made the connection between the repeated attempts on his life and the oil 'game' in the Caucasus several times.

However, Russia is finding it increasingly difficult to justify the status quo in Abkhazia. Georgia has repeatedly questioned the legitimacy of the CIS, following the inability of that organisation to resolve the problem of territorial secession in several member-states, including Moldova and Azerbaijan. It is unlikely that Georgia would accept any more fundamental form of regional integration process with Russia — one of the few options Russia has left in order to play a prominent role in world politics — as long as the CIS has not fulfilled the minimal requirements of a security organisation. From an economic perspective, there may be some advantages for Russia in a peace agreement, as this would enhance opportunities for the development of Southern Russia. The opening of rail and other communication routes through Abkhazia would increase Russian trade with Georgia and Turkey. The fact that stability in the region would also strengthen the position of other economic players should not count for much in Russia's calculations, as such an economic presence is already a fact in all countries of the Near Abroad. Stability in Abkhazia may create new opportunities for both the Western and the Northern route. The pipeline proposals for Abkhazia include a connection between the 'Western' Baku-Supsa route and the 'Northern' route to Novorossiisk. The former military port at Ochamchira in Abkhazia has been regarded as having clear advantages over Supsa as an oil terminal (access for larger tankers) and Novorossiisk (due to better weather conditions). The rehabilitation of this harbour, its transformation into an oil terminal and its linkage to new connections between both pipeline routes would, as part of a post-conflict programme, enhance the storage capability and overall flexibility of the oil transportation system.[53]

It may be concluded from the above that Russia may see some advantage in maintaining the status quo, and other advantages in strengthening Georgia's position in the negotiations, but, contrary to the assertions of many observers, the 'key to a peace settlement' is not to be found in Moscow. The main reason, therefore, is that a lasting peace settlement cannot be forced on Abkhazia, if it is to have lasting consequences. Institutional stability on federal principles would require both clear delimitations of powers and permanent compromises where such delimitation cannot be achieved. These are not to be expected if one of the parties is ready to use force or can count on outside military support in the event of political crisis or even of profound disagreement. This means that Russia's military potential to terminate the conflict or even to achieve a breakthrough in the negotiations is limited.

Abkhazia is a marginal issue for the contenders seeking to succeed Yeltsin as Russian president. Their views on foreign policy generally include a firmer stand on the defence of Russian interests in its Near Abroad, but it is difficult to know how they might interpret those interests in the particular case of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict. In these circumstances Abkhazia may speculate that it will have

more leverage in the future, which would justify a hardening of its position in the negotiations.

Western Political Choices

Western governments are pointing to their important interests in the Caspian Sea region and the need to resolve the various conflicts in the Southern Caucasus. However, strategic security interests in energy supply are not sufficient to ensure a high level of Western involvement, for instance through peace-keeping forces. After the difficult negotiations with Russia on NATO's enlargement, this kind of military presence may entail a fresh confrontation with Russia. The present Western policies in this conflict do not go beyond the presence of military observers in Abkhazia, diplomatic initiatives in the UN Security Council, humanitarian aid to the Abkhaz population and to Georgian refugees from Abkhazia, and planning of substantial financial support for a post-conflict reconstruction programme in Abkhazia.

For those who regard pipelines as a sufficient condition for security in the Caucasus region, it may be worth looking at Angola's recent history. Angola's past twenty years may indeed mirror the worst possible future for the Caucasus. This oil-rich African country has experienced twenty years of civil war that has devastated its whole economy, including its infrastructure and industrial base. This did not mean that oil companies such as Chevron (which has a substantial presence in Georgia and the Caspian region) had to fear a serious interruption in the flow of oil. Oil companies do not necessarily share the security concerns of the local population or of governments, including their own. Under the Reagan administration, which supported the UNITA rebels against the Angolan MPLA government, Chevron was allowed to produce more oil, even if half the output went to support the military efforts of the Angolan government against the rebels. Oil companies can make their own arrangements regarding the security of their business interests, independently of governmental forms of military cooperation. At the time Cuban troops sent to Angola to support socialist against imperialist forces were protecting Chevron installations against incursions by UNITA troops in the Angolan enclave of Cabinda.[54] However, oil companies operating in the Caucasus have made it clear that they have their own ways of dealing with political risks, but that they rely exclusively on governmental protection for the exploitation of the pipeline.

Algeria is another illustration of a situation in which exports of raw materials such as gas or oil are not necessarily threatened by civil wars. From an economic perspective, Algeria is seen to be divided into 'useful' and 'useless' parts. The useless part may be the scene of an enormous massacre that does not directly threat-

en West European energy interests (the European Union is largely dependent on Algerian gas). Abkhazia is likely to be in the 'useless' part of the Caucasus. Skirmishes such as those in the Gal(i) district in May 1998 may cause the flight of tens of thousands of refugees but do not constitute a direct threat to oil exports. Only serious armed conflicts — Poti and Supsa being only a few miles south of the Georgian/Abkhaz cease-fire line — may harm Western oil interests. In the case of the Georgian/Abkhaz conflict, such a risk should not be neglected.[55]

Western governments have no significant moral interests to defend in the Caucasus region. The Georgian-Abkhaz conflict does not strike a moral chord in Western public opinion, unlike in Bosnia, Chechnya and Kosovo. The resumption of armed clashes in Gal(i) in May 1998 was barely mentioned in the Western media. The flight of 30,000 civilians from the region as the consequence of these clashes is a non-issue in the West (in 1997, the World Bank refers to no less than 35 million displaced persons worldwide as a result of conflict[56]). Georgia and Abkhazia are part of the OSCE security space. The OSCE security space is an institutional reality and forms the basis for co-operation policies of international organisations such as, for instance, NATO in the framework of Partnership for Peace. However, the OSCE security space remains an abstract concept and a distant reality for a public opinion to whom Western foreign policy-makers have to justify their priorities. Western involvement in the Balkans is far easier to justify. In June 1998 one out of three applicants for the status of a political refugee in Germany came from Kosovo.[57] It is not expected that many refugees from the Gal(i) district will seek political asylum in Western Europe.

The lack of any significant Western involvement in the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict does not mean that present Western policies towards the conflict should be neglected. Three levels of intervention should be distinguished. First, there are a number of Western military observers who participate to the UN Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) in Abkhazia. A number of Western governments are actively involved in military co-operation with Georgia, which inevitably has important consequences for the balance of power in the region. Secondly, the US, Germany, the United Kingdom and France support the efforts of the UN to mediate and constitute, together with Russia, the 'Friends of the Secretary-General on Georgia'. Thirdly, Western governments and international institutions are prepared to give significant support to the economic reconstruction of Abkhazia as part of a post-conflict programme.

a) Western Military Policies in Georgia

The military presence of Western countries in the conflict zone is limited at present to the participation of military observers in UNOMIG. The relatively substan-

tial presence of EU countries is worth noticing in this respect. Out of the 109 officers present in October 1997, four were Americans and forty were from EU countries.[58] Until now Western countries have refused to support a peace-enforcement policy in the region. This type of training for Georgian troops has not been included in the co-operation initiatives with NATO countries in the context of Partnership for Peace, going against Georgian wishes in this respect. Washington has not excluded its support to a peace-keeping force that would not be limited to Russian troops (Ukraine and Turkey having already expressed interest in participating in such a force), but only on condition that a peace settlement would have been reached and that "there would be some peace to keep". The US Special Envoy to the Newly Independent States Stephen Sestanovitch declared in June 1998 that Washington did not regard peace enforcement according to a 'Bosnian model' as proposed by Georgia as a viable option.[59] The deployment of a peace-keeping force for the Black Sea basin to be created under the auspices of NATO's PfP programme, as proposed by the Turkish Deputy Chief of Staff Cevik Bir in June 1998 (basing his proposal on the model of the regional peace-keeping force for the Balkans agreed in March 1998[60]), was not seen as a good solution by Washington either.[61] Black Sea states are divided over the question of whether military security should be included in the Black Sea Co-operation. As far as Western participation in peace-keeping forces after a peace settlement is concerned, it is generally considered that no external force would be able to operate militarily in the area without a minimum of infrastructure, a development which would have far-reaching implications for Russia's security on its Southern borders.[62] It is unlikely that Western governments would accept casualties at the levels suffered by Russian troops in recent years in such a peace-keeping operation. Russian Federation peace-keeping forces have sustained some 200 casualties, including 57 killed during the period 1994 - May 1998 by politically motivated actions.[63] Western governments have never shown any enthusiasm for Georgian hints that Russian troops should be withdrawn from the cease-fire line. Open conflict between Georgian and Abkhaz forces would quite probably be resumed without the presence of peace-keeping forces[64], with no possibility of enforcing a solution on the battlefield or of replacing Russian troops by other troops.

At present NATO is not directly involved in the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict. Military co-operation between Georgia and NATO members (Turkey, Greece, the UK, the US and Germany) remains limited to quite traditional PFP activities (for instance military exercises, education programmes in military academies or support — including the gift of coastguard cutters — to the Georgian Border Guards). These activities strengthen the Georgian position in its negotiations with Russia on the future of Abkhazia, providing an alternative to the existing Georgian military co-operation with Moscow. At the meeting at CIS heads of

government level in Bishkek in October 1997, Georgia refused to sign an agreement on the training and preparation of qualified officers for the border troops, as this would allegedly diminish the possibility of training them in the US, Turkey and other NATO countries.[65] Such cooperation helped to obtain the replacement of Russian by Georgian Border Guards in patrolling the borders with Turkey and the Georgian sea borders in 1998.

The Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC), created by NATO in May 1997 to enhance PfP co-operation, provides a diplomatic forum for the Georgian government that can be used to achieve broader involvement by Western countries (not limited to the Western FOG) in Georgian security policies. Russia fears that the EAPC may marginalise the OSCE, in which it has a far stronger position, and so has no reason to support Georgia (or other CIS members faced with the problem of secession such as Moldova or Azerbaijan) in making maximum use of this diplomatic forum, dominated as it is by Western countries. Georgia is not alone in trying to involve Western military structures in the Caucasus region. During the EAPC meeting of May 1998 in Luxemburg, the Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Tofik Zulfugarov discussed — according to *Moskovskie novosti* — prospects for the deployment of a NATO peace-keeping force between Armenian and Azerbaijani forces.[66] Georgia may either strive for a closer military co-operation with Ukraine or with the so-called GUUAM countries (in addition to Georgia, consisting of Azerbaijan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan and Moldova). Both forms of co-operation would be disliked by Russia, but the first option may be regarded as more prudent, if Georgia wants to avoid new political tensions with Armenia.

b) Western Support for UN Mediation

The relationship between Russia and the UN was a tense one at first. In 1994 Russia had hoped that its troops could operate as 'blue helmets' in Abkhazia and in other regions of conflict in the former Soviet Union.[67] However, Western members of the Security Council were opposed to this way of conferring legitimacy on Russia's special security interests in its Near Abroad, but agreed to support the deployment of Russian (formally CIS) peace-keeping forces in Abkhazia. In January 1994 the Security Council mentioned the possibility of a multinational force which would not be under UN command but whose operations would be monitored by UNOMIG.[68] Such a deployment was achieved the same year.

The role of the UN as a mediator has been more limited since spring 1995, to the advantage of Russia. The failure of the Russian 'facilitator' to achieve significant progress in the negotiations or to safeguard the lives of the Georgian people who had returned to the Gal(i) district led to increased dissatisfaction in Georgia. This was expressed in numerous forms, either by Eduard Shevardnadze him-

self or by leading figures from the Georgian government and parliament. They have declared repeatedly that Georgia would look for alternatives to Russian mediation and peace-keeping. The threat that Georgia would refuse the further stationing of peace-keeping forces in Abkhazia or that the Georgian parliament would refuse to ratify agreements regarding the status of Russian military bases on Georgian soil was also repeatedly used. The Georgian president, in common with other CIS leaders, made statements expressing dissatisfaction with Russian mediation in conflicts on their territory or on the need for more effective conflict resolution mechanisms in the CIS framework. Georgian political leaders made direct threats that Georgia would not take Russian interests into account regarding a settlement with Chechnya if Russia would not take into account Georgian interests in Abkhazia.[69]

The Georgian government has taken care not to develop possible scenarios for a settlement in which Russia would be entirely excluded. In any event Western governments would refuse to replace Russia as a facilitator or in sending peace-keeping forces. In an intervention in the Security Council in January 1996, Germany considered the Russian Federation, being "best equipped to make the Abkhaz side actually listen", indispensable as a facilitator.[70] However, Western governments agreed to exert some pressure on Russia in order to achieve more tangible results. They also strove for more control over the Russian (nominally CIS) peace-keeping forces in Abkhazia. The request by the representative of the Czech Republic at the UN on 12 January 1995 that Russia should provide the Council members with briefings during informal consultations in order to provide greater transparency on CIS peace-keeping operations[71] has to be understood from this perspective. This kind of Western pressure has never led to an open conflict with Russia, which has, for instance, accepted the Czech request.

In May 1997, Eduard Shevardnadze suggested convening an international conference on Abkhazia under UN auspices, to be organised and hosted by the Russian Federation and attended by the UN, OSCE, the Friends of Georgia and other governments. Representatives of North Caucasian Republics would be given observer status.[72] Such a conference was probably not expected to yield any significant results regarding the central question of Abkhazia's political status. It was seen rather as a Georgian attempt to enhance the role of the UN and of the Friends of the Secretary-General on Georgia in the mediating process. At the Geneva meeting of November 1997, the role of the UN in the mediating process was enhanced by the creation of a Co-ordinating Council (see above). The 'Friends' were recognised as observers and obtained the right to intervene in the discussions. It was agreed that the negotiating process would proceed according to three channels of discussion (discussion on political documents in Moscow, direct talks between Georgia and Abkhazia, meetings between both parties in Geneva under the auspices of the UN).

c) 'Friends of Georgia' or 'Friends of the Secretary-General on Georgia'

Groups of 'Friends' of the UN Secretary-General consist of small groups of member states of the UN, which consult and advise the Secretary-General on specific issues, usually related to a crisis. Used for El Salvador in 1989, Haiti in 1993, Western Sahara in 1993 and Guatemala in 1994, groups of 'Friends' are seen as a tool to help ensure that international attention stays focused on a dispute and that belligerents know that the international community remains involved. It can exert pressure on the parties, provide an impartial element in the peace process, prepare and provide support for UN resolutions and help to monitor the peace process, even after withdrawal by the UN. The efficiency of this institution depends, inter alia, on the level of consensus among the members of the group.[73]

From the outset the Georgian government has mobilised support among the Western participants of the FOG in order to demonstrate to the Russian and Abkhazian governments that it had found strong backing in the international community. The Western members of the FOG also addressed certain criticisms to the Georgian side (inter alia in pressing the Georgian government not to support the use of landmines in the Gal(i) district), but agreed by and large with the role that Georgia wanted them to play. Until 1997 some Western FOG members (in particular the United States) were extremely critical of the present Abkhazian leadership, which has led to Abkhaz counter-accusations that they could not be regarded as impartial. The members of the UN Security Council and of the FOG were regarded by the Abkhaz government and public as having a partisan approach to the conflict, expressing their economically motivated interest in the stability of the region, defending a dogmatic point of view on territorial integrity and neglecting the Georgian aggression against their republic in August 1992.

This criticism is not unfounded, as far as the neglect of the Georgian use of force and intervention in Abkhazia in August 1992 is concerned. UN resolutions of the SC do not address the question of who was responsible for starting the war. The Western members of the SC refused to assess Abkhaz security needs, which led to their refusal of Georgian proposals, focusing instead on the 'stubbornness' of the Abkhaz leadership. The Final Document of the 1994 CSCE Summit in Budapest expressed its concern on Abkhaz war crimes: "(The participating States) expressed their deep concern over 'ethnic cleansing', the massive expulsion of people, predominantly Georgian, from their living areas and the deaths of large numbers of innocent civilians."[74] However, the SC avoided adopting this terminology in its resolutions, preferring to "recall" the conclusions of the Budapest summit of the CSCE regarding the situation in Abkhazia in general terms and affirming "the unacceptability of the demographic changes resulting from the conflict".[75] This formulation was considered by the Czech representative as a recognition of 'ethnic cleansing' which had however "unfortunately

been couched in an impenetrable language", as it only recalled the conclusions of the summit, without referring to its specific contents.[76]

Contrary to the SC resolutions, Western governments were explicit in their condemnation of 'ethnic cleansing'. At the SC meeting of 12 July 1996,[77] the US representative quoted the conclusions of the Budapest meeting in full. Germany condemned 'ethnic cleansing', refusing any linkage between the return of refugees to the question of the future of Abkhazia. The Irish representative at the same SC meeting, speaking on behalf of the European Union, expressed "its condemnation of the ethnically motivated killings that have occurred in the region and other related acts of violence", urging for steps to be taken "to arrest the perpetrators of such acts and bring them to justice." In this statement, also supported by Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Malta, Poland, Romania, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Iceland and Norway, the European Union deplored the obstacles which the Abkhaz had set up to prevent the early return of refugees and displaced persons and expressed its disappointment that the Abkhaz authorities did not respond to the compromise solutions put forward by the Georgian government.

The interventions by the Western SC members concerning the question of the political status of Abkhazia are silent about Abkhaz concerns. One of the few relatively positive approaches towards Abkhazia can be found in a statement by the German representative at the Security Council on 12 January 1995, in which he underlined that the Abkhaz side too has "understandable and legitimate concerns". The Abkhaz case should be listened to, but any political solution should be based on the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia.[78] At the SC meeting of 12 January 1996, the German representative praised the Georgian side for its willingness to create a federal framework and put the whole responsibility for the standstill in the negotiating process on the Abkhaz side: "Ethnic killings and the creation of an atmosphere of violence and insecurity in order to discourage the return of refugees and displaced persons are totally unacceptable to the international community. The results of so-called ethnic cleansing will not be accepted or recognised. This is the message we want to get across to the Abkhaz side." [79]

The lack of balance between the parties in conflict can first be explained by the asymmetric relationship between them. Georgia is a recognised state, whereas the Abkhazian leadership only represents one of the warring parties.[80] As a former Autonomous Republic in the framework of the Soviet state Abkhazia has no legitimate right to act as a sovereign state. In the case of a military intervention on its territory it cannot be regarded as a victim of aggression. The intervention of Georgian troops in Abkhazia in August 1992 may be criticised for moral or political reasons, but cannot under any circumstances be considered as an act of aggression under international law. Military operations of this kind belong to the

internal affairs of a country. The fact that Abkhazia was an Autonomous Republic in the Soviet federal framework and therefore had some form of statehood does not make any difference in this respect. Similar military operations — Russia against Chechnya, Serbia against Kosovo — only raise concern when they are accompanied by a 'disproportionate' use of force against the civilian population. These deeds are indeed to be regarded as serious offences against human rights. However, Western governments remain silent when such criticism is not politically opportune (as in the case of Turkey's military operations against the civilian population in Kurdistan). 'Disproportionate' force was used by Georgian troops against the civilian population in Abkhazia but was soon to be answered by similar war crimes committed by the Abkhaz side. In such a situation, Western governments were convinced that it is better to concentrate on the present situation and to find a solution to the issue of ethnic cleansing than to assess Georgian war crimes from the past.

A second factor explaining the lack of balance between the two conflicting sides may be found in the difficulties which governments have in taking a clear stand in the discussion on a federal solution for Abkhazia. There is for instance a great variety in the rights granted to ethnic minorities in Western countries, ranging from the flat refusal to acknowledge the political existence of ethnic minorities (as in France) to ethno-federal structures in which sovereignty is shared between ethnic communities (as in Belgium or Spain). Under such circumstances, governments can only formally support the efforts of other governments in their handling of the minority question, independently of the specific contents of these policies. The general indifference to the precise contents of the Georgian proposals makes it also understandable that countries which do not consider the establishment of a federal state as a solution to their own minority problems may praise the Georgian attempt to find a compromise with Abkhazia on this basis. The Chinese representative to the Security Council, for instance, supported the Georgian "constructive proposals including that of establishing a federal State and granting Abkhazia wide-ranging autonomy".[81]

Western governments have very good reasons to condemn ethnic cleansing and to refuse to recognise a government which has only been elected by a part of the population from Abkhazia. However, they ought to reconsider the importance of the events of August 1992, which led to the Georgian-Abkhaz war, to the present deadlock in the negotiations. The fact that the Georgian military intervention of August 1992 has not been condemned by the international community and that the federal proposals of Georgia do not provide solid guarantees to Akbhazia should any future Georgian government be tempted to repeat such an attempt explain to a large extent the refusal on the Abkhaz side to discuss federal options. Western governments have not taken a position on these two issues, which may, taking into consideration the harsh criticism directed at the Abkhaz

side regarding ethnic cleansing, be seen as a lack of impartiality in the conflict. The Western lack of balance, however easily explained, has made it difficult for the 'Friends of the Secretary-General on Georgia' not to be perceived as 'Friends of Georgia' and to increase their mediating role in the conflict. The Western policies do not facilitate the position of the UN to achieve a leading role in the negotiation talks either, insofar as this role presumes a strong involvement of all Security Council members on the basis of an impartial position. The fact that the Russian position is not seen as impartial either by the Abkhaz side (Russian border guards enforce an economic embargo on the border from Russia to Abkhazia, following the decision of the CIS Head of States of January 1996[82]) means that both Russia and the UN are met with great suspicion from the Akbhaz side. The Georgian mobilisation of the FOG and its pressure on Russia was apparently successful in increasing the international isolation of the Abkhaz leadership, without being particularly helpful in advancing the negotiations. It may be asked if it would not be more in Georgia's interests to develop a more coherent strategy in which all FOG members, including Russia, would be expected to support both sides in achieving a breakthrough in their difficult discussions. Such a strategy could involve the question of post-conflict reconstruction policies and of international guarantees to a federal state.

Since 1997 diplomats of the FOG, stationed in Tbilisi, have started to have more in-depth discussions with the Abkhaz leadership. They have stressed that they are not 'Friends of Georgia' but 'Friends of the Secretary-General of the UN on Georgia', a change in terminology which has also been taken into account in SC documents (which had previously used the term 'Friends of Georgia'). A further step in their attempt to build confidence on the Abkhaz side was the development of economic initiatives to be taken in the post-conflict long term.

d) The Prospect of Post-Conflict Reconstruction

In the period 1993-1997 the Georgian government attempted to force the Abkhaz leadership to move towards a compromise by applying international pressure and by isolating the region economically. Trade restrictions reduced Abkhazia's commerce to cash and barter operations. The Georgian government changed its policies in 1997, taking the view that assistance policies could run in parallel with the return of refugees. In 1997, the UNHCR was implementing a schools reconstruction programme, which would benefit the different national communities living in Abkhazia. In accordance with a resolution of the Security Council adopted on 31 July 1997[83], the UNHCR also started to register the refugees who had returned spontaneously to the Gal(i) district. The Western members of the FOG were also considering the implementation of rehabilitation programmes in

this district. EU and EBRD representatives visited the Inguri dam and power station to assist the two sides with its rehabilitation.[84]

The United Nations Need Assessment Mission to Abkhazia, created under the auspices of the Georgian/Abkhaz Co-ordinating Council, included representatives of a wide range of UN organisations (FAO, UNDP, UNICEF, WFP and the World Bank) and some bilateral aid agencies.[85] Economic activity was described as being at a virtual standstill, due to destruction during the war, the further deterioration of the infrastructure after the war, the exodus of over half the pre-war population and the economic blockade. The increases in areas of cultivated land and in rural incomes in 1997 were among the few positive elements in the analysis of what has become a subsistence agriculture. The most fruitful prospects for Georgian/Abkhaz co-operation were in energy, transport and communications. Security concerns affecting particularly the Gal(i) district were seen as seriously impeding programme implementation.

The future role of USAID in Abkhazia is accounted for in this United Nations study with an expected funding level of $5 million in 1998. The potential role of the European Union is not accounted for in this report. However, it should not be underestimated in a post-conflict situation. The European Commission has long observed the principle that assistance to the Abkhazian population could only start after a settlement on the conflict. It was careful not to play an overt political role in the conflict, which would be contrary to the wishes of Union Member states, as expressed in the Council in 1995. This does not mean that the potential role of the EC and the EU in a post-settlement situation was not taken into account by the European FOG members and even by the US. Support for Post-Conflict Reconstruction fits into the constantly expanding roles of the European Union and European Commission in the Southern Caucasus. The European Commission started with technical assistance, worked in 1994 on food aid (in which the Commission was confronted with the problem of co-ordination of transport through all states of the Transcaucasus and attempted — but failed — to secure a measure of regional co-operation in having trains bearing food-aid crossing the front lines), then made strategic use of regional programmes in agriculture, gas and pipelines in order to favour integration. In the case of Azerbaijan, it participates in the 'Fizuli project'. This project, in co-operation with the World Bank and UNDP, aims at the rehabilitation of 22 villages and the town of Goradiz in the Fizuli district in Azerbaijan, in which a population of 98,000 was living before the Nagorno-Karabakh war. It is seen by the Azeri government as a model for future post-conflict reconstruction of areas destroyed by the war and is considered by the EC as having the potential "to become the most visible and politically important EU action in Azerbaijan".[86] A reconstruction programme is also being implemented in South Ossetia.

Conclusions

Since the recognition of its independence in 1992, Georgia has joined international organisations such as the UN, the OSCE and the CIS. It has become a member of the Council of Europe, is participating in NATO's Partnership for Peace and has signed a Partnership and Co-operation Agreement with the European Union. The Georgian government has put the issue of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict at the forefront of its relations with all those organisations. There were good reasons for doing so. The lack of substantial progress in its negotiations with Abkhazia is increasing social tensions with the large refugee population and political tensions with the opposition. After the renewed breakdown of the negotiations due to armed conflicts and the flight of a large refugee population from Gal(i) in May 1998, which led to increasing public discontent with the handling of the conflict on Abkhazia, and after new tensions with the leadership of the autonomous republic of Adjaria (populated by Muslim Georgians) and with the Armenian minority of Javakheti, political observers have even restated the question — intensively discussed in the literature on failed and failing states in 1993 and 1994[87] — whether Georgia was going to fail to establish its statehood after all.

From the start the Georgian government has raised high expectations among its own population on greater involvement by Western governments in the conflict. The creation of such expectations was partly motivated by a domestic need for legitimacy, but also by the hope that Western governments would understand sooner or later that securing stability in the Caucasus was in their own interest. Various arguments have been used to mobilise Western support. The Georgian government raised the danger of 'aggressive separatism' that was likely to destabilise the whole of Europe. It also pointed to its own progress in the democratisation process and argued for the need to build up "a belt of democratic states" around Russia. A further, and far more powerful, argument was based on the need to secure the diversification of energy supplies from the Caspian region, independently of Russia and Iran.

To all these arguments Western governments have given a positive but limited response. They made it clear that they would not recognise any frontier change or secession implemented by force. They gave their support to the restoration of law and order in Georgia through the constitutional reforms of 1995 and supported its independence from Russia. They were active in financing a Western pipeline route for Caspian oil. The reorientation of Georgian policies regarding the conflict in Abkhazia in the summer of 1997 towards a more co-operative policy with the Abkhaz leadership was coupled with Western promises to support post-conflict economic and social programmes in Abkhazia. However, the Georgian government failed to receive support for military enforcement of a settle-

ment in Abkhazia. NATO does not train the Georgian armed forces for peace enforcement operations in the framework of PfP. Western military involvement remained limited to its participation to UNOMIG's military observation of the Russian peace-keeping force in Abkhazia and to the possibility of supporting peace-keeping forces after a peace settlement.

It may be concluded that Western involvement in the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict in support of Georgia has been unable to change the relationship of forces between the warring parties. Georgian attempts to mobilise Western governments to its own advantage and the lack of Western impartiality in the conflict has raised the level of distrust between Georgia and Abkhazia. Western governments have sufficient material and political interests at stake in the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict to lend significant support to both warring parties to achieve a breakthrough in their peace talks. The negotiations themselves are dealing with the extremely difficult question of how the two main national communities in this former Soviet autonomous republic, who have been at war with each other because they were unable to see the conditions of their national liberation in anything but opposing terms, may define their future in common federative structures, without constituting a deadly threat to each other's existence as a political community. Foreign involvement in these negotiations may be fruitful only provided that it is not seen as a new threat to one of the parties, a threat against which federative structures are unable to give any institutional guarantee.

Notes

[1] I would like to thank in particular Zurab Abashidze, Viacheslav Chirikba, David Darchiashvili, Kakha Gogolashvili, Edmund Herzig, George Hewitt, Neil MacFarlane, Rajan Menon, Jalil Roshandel, Gevork Ter-Gabrielian, Martin Schümer, David Tirr, Jan de Voogd and Alexei Zverev for sharing their views with me on this issue.

[2] See Ghia Nodia, 'Political Turmoil in Georgia and the Ethnic Policies of Zviad Gamsakhurdia', in: Bruno Coppieters (ed.), *Contested Borders in the Caucasus*, Brussels, VUB Press, 1996, pp. 81ff.; Aleksej Zverev en Bruno Coppieters, 'Verloren Evenwicht. Georgië tussen Rusland en het Westen', in*: Oost-Europa Verkenningen*, nr. 134, augustus 1994, pp. 38-47.

[3] Patrick Thornberry, 'Sub-National Rights and Democracy: European Perspectives', manuscript.

[4] *Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant*, 28 December 1991.

[5] See Olivier Paye and Eric Remacle, 'UN and CSCE Policies in Transcaucasia', in: Coppieters (ed.), *Contested Borders in the Caucasus*, op. cit., pp. 103-136. On the policies of international organisations in Georgia and Abkhazia, see also Edward Ozhiganov, 'The Republic of Georgia: Conflict in Abkhazia and South Ossetia', in: Alexei Arbatov, Abram Chayes, Antonia Handler Chayes, and Lara Olson (eds*.), Managing Conflict in the Former Soviet Union. Russian and American Perspectives*, Cambridge (Mass.)/London, The MIT Press, 1997, pp. 341- 400 and in Edward W. Walker, *No Peace, no War in the Caucasus. Secessionist Conflicts in Chechnya, Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh*, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Cambridge (Mass.), February 1998, pp. 11-26.

6 See Ghia Nodia, 'The Georgian Perception of the West', in: Bruno Coppieters, Alexei Zverev and Dmitri Trenin (eds.), *Commonwealth and Independence in Post-Soviet Eurasia*, London, Frank Cass, 1998, pp. 12-43.

7 See Viacheslav Chirikba, 'Georgian-Abkhazian Conflict and its Aftermath', in: Mehmet Tütüncü (ed.), *Caucasus: War and Peace. The New World Disorder and Caucasia*, Haarlem, SOTA, 1998, pp. 71-89; Alexei Zverev, 'Ethnic Conflicts in the Caucasus 1988-1994', in Coppieters (ed.), *Contested Borders in the Caucasus*, op. cit., pp. 13-71; Darrell Slider, 'Georgia', in: Glenn E. Curtis (ed.), *Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia: Country Studies*, Washington, Federal Research Division - Library of Congress, 1995, pp. 174-5; Ghia Nodia, 'The Conflict in Abkhazia: National Projects and Political Circumstances', in: Bruno Coppieters, Ghia Nodia and Yuri Anchabadze (eds.), Georgians and Abkhazians. The Search for a Peace Settlement, Sonderveröffentlichung des Bundesinstituts für Ostwissenschaftliche und Internationale Studien, Kölln, October 1998, pp. 14-48.

8 The way in which the various communities in Abkhazia should be described is a contested issue in the literature. George Hewitt, for instance, would speak of Kartvelians, not Georgians, whereas the Kartvelians would consist of Georgians, Mingrelians/Megrelians and Svans.

9 *International Herald Tribune*, October 22, 1993.

10 See Sherman Garnett, 'Russia's Illusory Ambitions', in: *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 76, No 2, March/April 1997, pp. 61-76.

11 Carolyn McGiffert Ekedahl and Melvin A. Goodman, *The Wars of Eduard Shevardnadze*, London, Hurst & Company, 1997, p. 277.

12 Ibid., pp. 275-6.

13 *Covcas Bulletin*, 22 June 1994.

14 Wolf Scott and George Tarkhan-Mouravi, Government of the Republic of Georgia/ United Nations Development Programme*, Human Development Report Georgia*, Tbilisi, Lyceum Publishing House, 1995, pp. 11-12.

15 Cfr. Vladimer Papava, 'The Georgian Economy: From 'Shock Therapy' to 'Social Promotion', in: *Communist Economies & Economic Transformation*, Vol. 8, No 2, 1996, pp. 251-267.

16 The EU's policies are not aiming at an integrative policy for the whole Caucasus, which would include Russia's Northern Caucasus, but at an integrative policy for the Southern Caucasus

17 Nuhzet Cem Orekli, 'US Caspian Foreign Policy on Energy Development', in *Turkistan-Newsletter, Business*, Vol. 98, 5 March 1998 (received on internet from kryopak@worldnet.att.net)

18 *Financial Times*, 4 May 1995.

19 Christian Schmidt-Häuer, 'Alter Reichtum, neues Wunder', *Die Zeit*, 26 May 1995.

20 *Commission Communication. Towards a European Union Strategy for Relations with the Transcaucasian Republics* (European Commission), 1995.

21 The European Commission is cautious not to present TRACECA or INOGATE as projects aiming at establishing transport routes circumventing Russia. The Georgian authorities also deny that TRACECA would exclude Russia. See *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 24 July 1998.

22 The Tacis Democracy Programme supports NGO activities. A good scientific analysis of this support is to be found in *Final Report. Evaluation of the Phare and Democracy Programme 1992-1997*, European Commission, Brussels, 1997.

23 The TACIS action programme for Georgia for 1996/97 (*Tacis 1996/97. Action Programme Georgia. 24.10.96; Contract Information Budget 1996 and 1996-1997*, published by the European Commission, December 1996) distinguishes three main areas of co-operation:

1) infrastructure development (programmes for energy efficiency, technical assistance to Georgian oil and gas sector, telecommunications)

2) private sector development (support to small enterprises, advice concerning WTO accession and compliance with GATT provisions)
3) Human resources development (support to parliament, reform of civil service, policy and legal advice)

Georgia takes also part (see *TACIS Contract Information. Budget 1996 and 1996-1997*, Brussels, 1997) in Inter-State programmes and programmes linked to TRACECA on:

- know-how transfer concerning rehabilitation, modernisation and rationalisation of inter-state oil and gas programmes in the NIS (12 MECU, together with all other CIS countries)
- Black-Sea Environmental Programme (BSEP) (2 MECU, with the participation of Georgia, Russia and Ukraine)
- direct investment in the rehabilitation and reconstruction of a bridge on the border between Georgia and Azerbaijan (2.5 MECU)
- feasibility studies for the Georgian ports of Poti and Batumi, and their links to other Black Sea, Mediterranean and North Sea ports (1.5 MECU)
- Road maintainance systems (2.5 MECU, with the participation of all TRACECA countries)

The EU is one among the main donors (next to USAID, World Bank and the EBRD) and the largest donor in the field of technical assistance and in grant finance to the New Independent States. The EU strives to co-ordinate its actions with institutions such as the World Bank in order to harmonise their policies. TACIS is primarily concerned with feasibility studies and institution building. Only a small part of the TACIS support goes to direct investment, for instance to the rebuilding of the "Red Bridge" joining Georgia and Azerbaijan. The Georgian government would like this percentage devoted to direct investments in infrastructural works to be increased. The Georgian government has only a relative influence on decision making. On TRACECA see http://www.traceca.org/tracecafr.htm

[24] I am thankful to Stephan De Spiegeleire for drawing my attention to this document.

[25] Papava, op. cit., pp. 257ff.

[26] On Georgia's economic perspectives see Simon Stone and Oliver Weeks, 'Prospects for the Georgian Economy', The Royal Institute of International Affairs, *CACP Briefing*, No 15, March 1998; 'Georgia: A Crossroads of the Free Market Frontier and Remarks by U.S. Ambassador William H. Courtney at the U.S. Trade and Investment Center", Brussels, October 7, 1996, on internet: http://www.sanet.ge/usis/usistbl/html

[27] *Turkestan Newsletter, Business*, Vol. 98, 24 September 1998 (http://www.euronet.nl/users/sota/)

[28] *Turkestan Newsletter*, *Business*, Vol. 98, 1 July 1998 (http://www.euronet.nl/users/sota/).

[29] Sandro Chaduneli, 'Oil Fever', *The Georgian Times*, May 13 1997, p. 3.

[30] 'Private Investment and the Eurasian Corridor', remarks by U.S. Ambassador William H. Courtney at the Conference on Priorities of Developing Georgia's Economy, 4 May 1996, Tbilisi, Georgia, published on line on http://www.sanet.ge/usis/speeches/speech 3.txt

[31] 'Georgia: A Crossroads of the Free Market Frontier', op. cit.

[32] 'A Farewell to Flashman: American Policy in the Caucasus and Central Asia', an Address by Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, July 21 1997.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Interview by the author with a senior official of the Georgian MFA.

[35] *The Georgian Chronicle*, July 1997, Vol. 1, No 2.

[36] Yelena Suponina, 'Russian Oil Pipeline to Bypass Ukraine', in: *Moscow News*, 2-8 July 1998.

[37] *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 27 December 1997.

[38] Igor Rotar, 'Kak vozrodit' velikii shelkovyi put'?, *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 10 December 1997.

[39] UN Document S/1994/80 (25 January 1994).
[40] UN Document S/1997/827 (28 October 1997).
[41] The UN estimated in July 1997 that up to 50,000 civilians were living in the Gal(i) district. UN Document S/1997/558 (18 July 1997).
[42] Ibid.
[43] UN Document S/1998/51 (19 January 1998).
[44] See S. Neil MacFarlane, Larry Minear, and Stephen D. Shenfield, *Armed Conflict in Georgia: A Case Study in Humanitarian Action and Peacekeeping*, Thomas J. Watson Jr. Institute for International Studies, Occasional Paper No 21, 1996, on line on http://www.brown.edu/Departments/; Joel Boutroue and Stephen Jones, *Prospect for the Return of Internally Displaced Persons and Refugees to Abkhazia. A UNHCR Review of the Situation in Georgia*, May 1997.
[45] UN Document S/1998/375/Add. 1 (13 May 1998)
[46] On the May 1998 fighting see Besik Kurtanidze, 'Guerrillas Keep on Fighting', in*: Army and Society in Georgia*, June 1998, received on internet from cipdd @access.sanet.ge
[47] *Le Monde*, 1 July 1998.
[48] Thomas Fleiner, 'Föderalistische und demokratische Institutionen und Verfahren zur Lösung ethnischer Konflikte', in: Slobodan Samardzic und Thomas Fleiner (Hrsg.), *Föderalismus und Minderheitenproblem in multiethnischen Gemeinschaften. Eine vergleichende Analyse über die Schweiz und Jugoslawien*, Publications de l'Institut du Fédéralisme, Fribourg/Suisse, 1995, p. 50.
[49] UNDP*, Human Development Report: Georgia 1997,* Tbilisi
[50] On Russian policies in Georgia and Abkhazia: Dov Lynch, *The Conflict in Abkhazia. Dilemmas in Russian 'Peacekeeping' Policy*, The Royal Institute of International Affairs, Discussion Paper 77, 1998.
[51] *Turkestan Newsletter*, Vol. 98, 15 April 1998 (http://www.euronet.nl/users/sota/)
[52] In an interview with *Nezavisimaya gazeta* on 15 October 1991 (before the coup that would topple the Georgian president Gamsakhurdia from power) he gave the following answer to the journalist asking him if he believed that the conflict in South Ossetia had been fomented by the KGB: " No, I do not believe so. I exlude this explanation. The Centre has no interest in having Georgians and Ossetes living under such conflictual relations. It has also been said concerning Nagorno-Karabakh that it was all organised by the centre. However, I was a member of that Politburo.... Perhaps we were too indecisive, surely, but I exclude the explanation that the Kremlin would have fomented the national conflicts." (The German translation of this interview has been published as: 'Eduard Schewardnadze im Gespräch mit Andrej Karaulow', *Berliner Debatte INITIAL* 2/1992, p. 70).
[53] See UNDP, *United Nations Needs Assessment Mission to Abkhazia, Georgia*, March 1998, pp. 16-17.
[54] *International Herald Tribune*, June 26, 1998.
[55] Rajan Menon, 'Treacherous Terrain: The Political and Security Dimensions of Energy Development in the Caspian Sea Zone', *NBR Analysis*, Vol. 9, No. 1, February 1998, pp. 27-28.
[56] The World Bank, *Post-Conflict Reconstruction. The Role of the World Bank*, Washington D.C., 1998, p. 15.
[57] *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 8 July 1998.
[58] UN Document S/1997/827 (28 October 1997)
[59] *RFE/RL Newsline*, Vol. 2, No 106, Part I, 4 June 1998.
[60] *Turkistan Newsletter*, Vol. 98, 27 July 1998, received on internet from sota @euronet.NL
[61] *RFE/RL Caucasus Report*, Vol. 1, No 21, 21 July 1998.

62 On Russian perception of NATO's extension in the Caucasus see *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 24 July 1998.
63 UN Document S/1998/375/Add. 1 (13 May 1998)
64 UN Document S/1997/827 (28 October 1997)
65 See *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 9 October 1997.
66 RFE/RL Newsline, Vol. 2, No 130, 9 July 1998.
67 Dmitri Danilov, 'Russia's Search for an International Mandate in Transcaucasia', in: Coppieters (ed.), *Contested Borders in the Caucasus*, op. cit., pp.137-151.
68 Olivier Paye and Eric Remacle, op. cit., p. 113.
69 Ekaterina Tesemnikova, 'Maskhadov smestil svoego polpreda v Abkhazii', *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 20 December 1997.
70 UN Document S/PV.3618 (12 January 1996).
71 Security Council 3488th Meeting, 12 January 1995, UN Document S/PV.3488
72 UN Document S/1997/558 (18 July 1997)
73 *Preventing Deadly Conflict. Final Report with Executive Summary*, Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict, Carnegie Corporation of New York, December 1997, p. 134.
74 S/1994/1435.
75 UN SC Document S/RES/1065 (12 July 1996)
76 Security Council 3535th Meeting, 12 May 1995, S/PV 3535.
77 Security Council 3680th Meeting, 12 July 1996, S/PV.3680.
78 Security Council 3488th Meeting, UN Document S/PV.3488
79 Security Council 3618th Meeting, 12 January 1996, S/PV.3618.
80 In UN language, the Abkhaz president should be referred to as the Abkhaz 'leader', the Abkhaz government as the Abkhaz 'leadership' and Abkhaz ministries as Abkhaz 'departments'.
81 Security Council 3680th Meeting, 12 July 1996, S/PV.3680.
82 UN Document, S/1996/240 (3 April 1996).
83 The Security Council "reiterates its demand that the Abkhaz side accelerate significantly the process of voluntary return of refugees and displaced persons without delay or preconditions, in particular by accepting a timetable on the basis of that proposed by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and further demands that it guarantee the safety of spontaneous returnees already in the area and regularize their status in cooperation with UNHCR and in accordance with the Quadripartite Agreement, in particular in the Gali region" SC Resolution 1124 (1997).
84 UN Document S/1997/558 (18 July 1997)
85 United Nations Needs Assessment Mission to Abkhazia, Georgia, March 1998, available on http://www.abkhazia.org
86 *TACIS Contract Information. Budget 1996 and 1996-1997*, European Commission, pp. 24-25.
87 See Uwe Halbach, "Failing States"? Nationale, staatliche und ökonomische Festigkeit der südlichen GUS-Länder (Teil 1), *Berichte des Bundesinstituts für Ostwissenschaftliche und Internationale Studien*, 20-1994.