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3. The Swiss Experience and Prospects for a Peaceful Abkhazian-Georgian Peace Settlement

1. Features of the Swiss Model

It is now the custom for Switzerland to be used almost as a textbook example of harmonious co-existence within the state of several communities differing in ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious terms. However, the fact that Switzerland is almost always cited as a successful model (Belgium and Canada are referred to less often) is evidence that the Swiss experience is unique rather than an indicator that it might be extensively applied. However, it would be an unpardonable extravagance to ignore the achievements of Swiss federalism and Swiss democracy, which have guaranteed the success and stability of that state.

Possibly the universal importance of the Swiss experience is to be found in its diversity. In other words, everyone can find something here that is of interest and value. An attempt will be made below to pick out the distinguishing features of the Swiss model which seem to the author to be most valuable.

Recognising the Value of Cultural Differences.

One of the most important reasons for the impressive results achieved by Switzerland is the fact that it has never been, and has never tried to be, a nation state, although the German-speaking population has been and continues to be a substantial majority in the country. If it had yielded to the temptation of constructing a state based on only one language, one culture and one region, Switzerland would have been hostage to a multitude of problems, as often happens in other states with a wide range of internal ethno-cultural, linguistic and religious differences. This variety sometimes becomes a source of many evils, and even leads to the disintegration of nations and states. Switzerland, on the contrary, has managed to make its weaknesses into virtues and advantages. Instead of trying to make their cultural landscape more uniform, the Swiss have learnt to

take pride in the fact that they live in a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-vocational community. Because there are no clearly defined socio-economic, linguistic or regional frontiers in the country, almost every Swiss knows from his own experience what it means to belong to a minority. This is very important in developing a culture of tolerance and pluralism.[1]

A number of researchers observe that, in contrast to the United States and Canada, it is not the aim of Switzerland to merge into a single community. Sometimes the Swiss are referred to as a "multi-cultural artificial nation". At the same time there is something that binds the citizens of this country together. Basta refers to a political community based on the political values shared by society and formulated in a process of national construction that has continued over centuries.[2]

The Democracy of Consensus

Without doubt the principles of democracy are among the values most important to Switzerland. In contrast to countries loyal to liberal-democratic principles, Switzerland has managed to devise the type of democracy most suited to its particular political and cultural features. In essence, the Swiss understanding of democracy approximates to collective rights in many respects and is based on division of political power between the German-speaking majority, which accounts for 65% of the population, and the minorities speaking French, Italian and Romansh, as well as between Protestants and Catholics. Herein lies the radical difference between Switzerland and most other federations in which, as has already been mentioned, federation serves the purpose of uniting different groups. It can be said that Switzerland counts on integration through the preservation of linguistic and cultural differences.

The fact that Switzerland manages to overcome the contradictions that have always existed between the principles of democracy and federalism is no less impressive. The clash arises from the fact that the founding formula for democracy "one man-one vote" cannot entirely guarantee the viability of a federal State in real life. Switzerland has had to depart from it, in the interests of the principle of political equality for all federal units, which differ greatly from each other in size of territory and population. The population of a canton may be more than a million or less than 20,000, which does not prevent them from having equal representation in federal bodies. In order to balance the interests of cantons and citizens, the latter are given extensive opportunities for participation in the decision-making process at all levels by way of popular initiatives and referendums.

As Lidija Basta emphasises, the Swiss view of democracy does not regard elections as a democratic activity of primary importance, because the people cannot always control their representatives by way of elections. They can do this more

effectively because they have the opportunity to influence constitutional and legislative decisions directly. In other words, the principles of representative democracy are relatively less important in a system in which power is transferred to the cantons and communes.[3]

The concepts "majority" and "minority", which cause serious difficulty in many democracies, do not have such an important role in Switzerland, where by tradition people always seek and find common ground. Swiss political tradition regards the principle of consensus as the basis of legitimacy of power. A majority decision may not suit the minority group, which will not regard it as binding. This would inevitably have cast doubt on the legitimacy of that decision; consequently it can be taken only when all interested parties agree.

Of course, there is a possibility of conflict between the principles of democracy and federalism. This may arise in particular if the results of state-wide and canton referendums do not coincide. The risk of such clashes is increasing, because the number of electoral wards in Switzerland has been increasing by 100% every 20 years (since 1930). These, apparently, are the unavoidable costs of democracy.

Three Levels of Loyalty.

Switzerland consists of 26 cantons and semi-cantons, each of which includes a different number of communes. There are about 3,000 of the latter. It is impossible to give a more accurate figure, because the number of communes is constantly growing as a result of subdivision of existing communes; consequently, half the communes have only 500 inhabitants. Although the communes are not even mentioned in the Constitution, their role in political life is so important that the Swiss federal model is sometimes referred to as commune federalism. The degree of autonomy of these communes may vary, but they have an obligatory range of rights. For example, whether to unite with another commune or to exist independently is a matter for the commune alone. The commune itself defines its government structure within the limits of cantonal legislation and retains complete freedom of action in those areas which do not come within the sphere of competence of the canton or federation. At the same time there can be no reforms of local government from above. As Wolf Linder observes, each of the 26 members of the "federal household" has his own room and can close the door whenever he wishes. Thus federalism creates a kind of horizontal segmentation enabling the various groups to live separately without disturbing each other.[4]

Such a unique feature of Switzerland as the institution of triple citizenship, which provides for federal citizenship to be conferred upon non-citizens only after they have obtained municipal (commune) citizenship and then cantonal citizenship as well, cannot be passed over without comment. It is a matter of fun-

damental importance that the Constitution of Switzerland begins with the words: "We, the people of the cantons..."; this is the basis of the reference to a special kind of decentralised, commune and cantonal loyalty, supplemented organically by loyalty to the Federation as a whole. In particular, service in the army is a vital integrating factor for the Swiss. In any case it can be said that every Swiss, whether a professor or a businessman, a waiter or a schoolteacher, regards regular military duty and training as a matter of honour for every real man.

Political Culture and Tolerance

Particular reference must be made to the nature of political culture in this country, which determines its image to a considerable degree. It is possible that political life in Switzerland may appear to some as rather sluggish, because there are no charismatic leaders or stormy political discussions. This can be explained if we bear in mind that the principles of representative democracy are not so important in this country, and power is divided between cantons and communes. What remains is the subject of constant public review through legislative and constitutional referendums and public initiatives. The importance of the latter lies in the fact that they demonstrate how the population's attitude to the government is changing.[5] Common sense and tolerance are apparent at all levels of power and in all walks of life. Gentlemen's agreements and unwritten rules are characteristic of Swiss political culture. For example, there is a political arrangement whereby the Federal Council includes two representatives of the Radical Party, two Christian Democrats, two Social Democrats and one member of the People's Party. This "magic formula" makes it possible to maintain a political balance in society.

Linder points out that the federal authorities are as respectful to the cantons as they are to foreign states. It is generally known that there has been a conflict with the Jura region, which wished to separate from the canton of Bern. Although in such cases the Constitution allows the federal authorities to use military force, to withdraw subsidies or to apply other coercive measures, this would run counter to the inviolable rule of the Swiss political elite: to refrain both from the use of force and from direct confrontation between the canton and the federal authorities. Efforts to reach a compromise helped in settling the problem, and this case now appears in all textbooks and research on Swiss federalism.

2. Georgia in Search of a New Identity

Discussions on the possibility of imitating the Swiss model on other cultural and historical soil cannot really be taken seriously. Present-day Switzerland has gone

its own way for 700 years. It has been able to find its own identity, though in the thick of European wars and revolutions and surrounded on all sides by the most influential and not always the most peace-loving states on the continent. Possibly Switzerland's greatest success lies in the fact that it has not imitated other countries.

Of course, one can try to reproduce the Swiss Constitution, and Switzerland's political institutions and system of state organisation. However, in the absence of the traditions of democracy and political culture organically characteristic of the politicians and intellectuals, and also of the ordinary citizens, of that ancient European democracy, it is highly probable that some kind of state structure will appear in which, under the banner of democracy, there will be authoritarian government, ethnocracy and the assimilation of minorities. It should be remembered in this connection that in formal terms the Soviet Union was a federal state with a fully democratic constitution which even provided for the right of secession for the union republics. In reality, however, this did not prevent it from being a unitary totalitarian state applying a policy of mass repression against its citizens and committing genocide with respect to whole nations.

Michael Lind points out that those who call upon non-democratic multinational states to adopt the Swiss or Canadian system of separation of powers as an alternative to the break-up of the country rarely describe which policy will be applied if the constitutional panaceas fail to work (which very frequently happens).[6] This must be borne in mind when considering federalisation for Georgia; this idea has become widespread among foreign politicians and experts involved in the Georgian-Abkhazian settlement process. Diplomats from countries that are friends of the UN Secretary-General on Georgia and representatives of leading global and regional organisations assume that transforming Georgia into a federal state will not only help to solve ethno-political conflicts but will also contribute to the rapid political modernisation of the country.

It is impossible not to notice certain similarities between Georgia and Switzerland; the profound differences between these two countries, which are quite natural in the context of history, political traditions and national mentality, show up even more clearly against this background. The basic difference stands out with particular clarity: whereas Switzerland has striven throughout its history to maintain ethnic and cultural variety, Georgia's aim has been to create a single ethno-nation. Nevertheless, and possibly even more so, the lessons of Switzerland might have been useful to the Georgian political elite in correcting their approaches to constructing a modern Georgian state, especially with regard to the problems of citizenship, nation and language. As yet, however, other tendencies typical of most post-totalitarian countries prevail in Georgia.

Georgia as a State for the Georgian Nation

Having been given the chance to create their own independent state for the second time this century, Georgian political and public figures did not doubt for a moment that it should be a state for the Georgian nation. In the atmosphere of euphoria following the headlong collapse of the Soviet Union and Georgia gaining its independence, the leaders of the national-liberation movements did not use the opportunity that existed at the time for involving representatives of the "non-titular" nations in the process of building the state. It was as if their aim was to prove the justice of defining nationalism as the last stage of communism, although it is also true that not one of the former Soviet republics avoided nationalism. This had particularly serious consequences for Georgia, with its considerable ethno-cultural and linguistic variety and with three autonomous entities within it. The public calls during those years to limit the birth-rate among the non-Georgian minorities or to abolish autonomy in Georgia could not fail to cause a furious reaction among the non-Georgian population, and the echoes continue to poison the atmosphere to this day. Georgia was plunged into the Georgian-Ossetian conflict, and then into civil war.

There was hope for pacification of the country with Shevardnadze's return to Tbilisi. However, the former high priests of communism, though educated in "proletarian internationalism", had no wish to give up nationalist slogans and could not do so because, having encountered a crisis of legitimacy in their own regimes they turned to another basis for "totalitarian legitimacy": national interests as a universal value.[7] Therefore attempts today to lay the entire blame for past errors on Gamsakhurdia are completely without foundation. In no way can Gamsakhurdia be regarded as appearing by chance on the Georgian political stage; he should be seen as an indicator of the state of public consciousness. The prevailing view in Abkhazia is that replacing the leaders of Georgia by no means implies a radical change of policy with regard to minorities or the "problem of Abkhazia". It is sufficient to recall that it was under Shevardnadze that the draft agreement "On the basis for relations between the Republic of Abkhazia and the Republic of Georgia" put forward by the Abkhazian side was rejected with no discussion whatever, and that the Georgian-Abkhazian negotiations at governmental level which had just begun were brought to an end by the unexpected incursion of Georgian forces into Abkhazia.

Whereas previously, in Gamsakhurdia's time, vulgar nationalism was the principal device for mobilising the masses at meetings, today it has become more respectable and has made the transition into intellectual circles in Tbilisi. The opinion of Ghia Nodia, who is fairly well known in the West and who tends to regard nationalism as useful as a " strategy for the transitional period", is instructive in this respect. Nodia is convinced that "democracy never exists without

nationalism".[8] At the same time, without denying nationalism its right to exist, I wish to point out that Georgian society apparently still fails to recognise that nationalism is not the monopoly of the ethnic majority, but inevitably encourages nationalism in national minorities, whose representatives account for about 30% of the total population in Georgia. It is easy to see what the consequences for Georgia of the continuing use of nationalism as the "cement" to build a Georgian nation will be. The Israeli philosopher Avinery asks a perfectly logical question: are national principles really in some respect absolutely superior to the generally accepted principles of liberal democracy? Furthermore, when discussing the danger of nationalism on the part of larger ethno-linguistic groups, he refers to the blindness of large nations, which see the triumph of progress in their assimilation policies and begin to see their own culture as culture in general.[9]

Clearly there is no alternative as yet to the current dominant idea of a national Georgian state that might be more attractive to the non-Georgian population of the republic, or that might make the framework of possible future relations with the de-facto separate Abkhazia and South Ossetia more realistic. Since the ethnic principle forms the basis of legitimacy of the national state, it is proposed that the representatives of minorities should see themselves as Georgians, i.e. citizens of Georgia. Such a prospect is unlikely to be received by the non-Georgian minority with enthusiasm.

In a multi-ethnic society the principle of citizenship originating in ethnicity cannot be expressed otherwise than as the dominant community principle. It is the majority in an ethno-nation that acts as the constituting force. Accordingly the dominant ethnic nation owns the territory, and consequently takes in the "others" and expects them to behave as loyal citizens.[10]

This is completely in accordance with the Bolshevik view on the right of a nation to territory, which is still current in the post-Soviet area and in Eastern Europe. It is true that this causes great confusion in the use of terms such as "nation", "nationality" and "national group". It enables some peoples, i.e. "nations" to hold territory whereas others have to be content with the status of guests, sometimes unwanted guests, in someone else's territory. Since by no means all nations deprived of the right to their own territory are prepared to resign themselves to this, ethno-territorial wars become inevitable; this was clearly apparent in the Georgian-Ossetian and Georgian-Abkhazian conflicts. The statement by A. Chikvaidze, the Georgian Foreign Minister, at the session of the UN General Assembly on 31st July 1992 regarding Georgia's admission to that organisation is worthy of attention in this respect: " There is not a single inch of non-Georgian land in Georgia, and we are determined to nip any claim to Georgian land in the bud".[11] The fact that exactly two weeks after this statement Tbilisi sent its troops into Abkhazian territory can hardly be mere coincidence.

It is not particularly difficult to refute the officially stated view of Georgia in legal terms. It is sufficient to say that, even under Stalin and Brezhnev, the Abkhazian

Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic had its own territory with its frontiers recorded in the Constitution, citizenship, a flag and other attributes of statehood. However, without going too far back into history, if we remember the period 1921-1931, Abkhazia was not an Autonomous Republic but a Soviet Socialist Republic, which had "voluntarily"[12] united with the Georgia SSR on an equal footing on the basis of a treaty of alliance. It was only in 1931 that Stalin, using his then practically unlimited power, reduced the status of Abkhazia to the level of an autonomous unit of the Georgian SSR; this caused widespread popular dissatisfaction in Abkhazia. Naturally such a decision, extremely doubtful as it was from a legal viewpoint, was never accepted by the Abkhazians as legitimate. As regards the right to territory, over the centuries the Abkhazians have seen Abkhazia as the land of the Abkhazians, irrespective of the vicissitudes of history, which sometimes contributed to the power and prosperity of the Abkhazian Realm and sometimes reduced Abkhazia to the level of a remote province of the Ottoman, or later the Russian, Empire.

There is a phenomenon which has been called "the re-writing of history". A nation convinced that its history has been interrupted by the arrival of totalitarianism attempts to win back its "undervalued property". This may take the form of replacement of monuments, street names or other gestures. Thus, Abkhazia restored the 1925 Constitution, under which its status was higher than in 1992, while Georgia restored the 1921 Constitution, under which it was an independent state. In the new historical climate there was a search for new identities throughout the post-Soviet area, as there was in Eastern Europe. As a result of the negative experience of historical contacts in the last century it is difficult to say that Georgians and Abkhazians have any unifying idea or values in common that might reconcile the interests of both sides; without this a stable peace is impossible. In this context we may refer once more to Switzerland's experience. That which is Switzerland today was once a group of almost unconnected small state-cantons, whose populations differed substantially in ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious terms. Only common values could unite people who spoke four languages and followed two different religions. It is true that there was a short period in which Switzerland tried, as Georgia is trying today, to adopt the French model of a unitary state (in 1798-1803), but then the choice was made in favour of decentralisation, extensive political autonomy and statehood for each canton, and group solidarity instead of ethno-national solidarity was chosen as the unifying idea.

Post-Totalitarian Democracy

In no sense did the end of Communist ideology mean the triumph of democracy, as many citizens of the former USSR who had longed for freedom of speech and political pluralism had naively hoped at first. At best what came to replace it

can be called "post-totalitarian democracy", and in the case of countries such as Turkmenistan it can be described more accurately as an eastern version of authoritarian government. Georgia, which readily made its choice in favour of western models, welcomed democracy as something for which Georgian society had long been prepared. According to Zurabishvili, democracy was seen in Georgia as the natural attribute of sovereignty, as a synonym for a western lifestyle, i.e. for material well-being.[13] This simplified view of democracy as government of the majority was fraught with serious danger for a multinational country with substantial cultural and religious differences such as Georgia. By seeing the democratic government as the unrestricted right of the Georgian majority to solve those problems for which the solution had previously been the prerogative of Moscow, the Georgian intelligentsia could not see that the other side of democracy is the right of a minority to protection of its interests. Instead of this came the conviction that now nothing and no-one could prevent them from making use of their numerical advantage, i.e. calling upon democracy to serve the interests of the Georgian nation.

One of the first demands by the leaders of the Georgian national movement was a call for the immediate abolition of autonomous regions in Georgia. The principal argument in support of this decision was the assertion that the autonomous regions had been created by the Bolsheviks to punish Georgia for its lack of loyalty. This opinion is still quite widely held in Georgian society, in spite of the dramatic lessons of the Georgian-Ossetian and Georgian-Abkhazian armed conflicts. Even such an experienced politician as Shevardnadze thought it possible to express this opinion in one of his newspaper interviews: "Russia and Georgia were first and second in terms of the number of autonomous regions. No republic had such a number of autonomous regions... And why autonomy, why were the Abkhazians and Ossetians given autonomy? Because they supported the Bolsheviks".[14] It must be said that this was a somewhat risky statement, if we remember that the Georgian leader is now offering the Abkhazians "the widest possible autonomy as part of a Georgian state" as one way of settling the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict.

It must be said that glasnost and democratisation have indirectly provoked conflicts that existed previously in the Soviet Union in latent form. Therefore, the issue of how democracy "works" in societies divided along ethnic lines is certainly not a matter of academic interest alone, but is becoming a key factor in the process of constructing new independent states which, in the vast majority of cases, do not have ethnically homogeneous populations. It should be noted in this connection that although the Soviet autonomous regions were to a considerable extent fictional, the communists nevertheless had their own system, developed over decades, for maintaining a national balance in the agencies of power. It is sufficient to say that representatives of minorities could claim a certain num-

ber of places in legislative bodies at all levels. It was clearly laid down in an established system which key posts could or could not be held by people of a particular nationality. For example, under no circumstances could an Abkhazian be appointed chairman of the state security committee of the Abkhazian ASSR, but to make up for it the first secretary of the Abkhazian oblast committee of the Georgian Communist Party had to be an Abkhazian, while the chairman of the Council of Ministers had to be a Georgian. As a rule, decisions on appointments were taken in Tbilisi, with the consent of Moscow. However bad this procedure might be, it operated for decades, creating a measure of stability in society, although it is clear that those joining the nomenklatura were very often not competent professionals but Party members who had demonstrated their loyalty to the system.

Everything changed with the start of the Gorbachev reforms, and in particular after the break-up of the Soviet Union. The threat that democracy would exclude national minorities from social and political life became a real one. As Thomas Fleiner observes, those who were not part of the majority were now regarded as renegades or dissidents and were excluded (as all those who were not Party members had been treated previously).[15] This was precisely the position in which Abkhazians and other small ethnic groups found themselves after the empire crumbled. Abkhazians accounted for only 2% of the total population of Georgia, and in Abkhazia itself the Abkhazian population had been reduced from 58 to 18% over the previous 60 years as a result of Tbilisi's active resettlement policy.[16] Thus, Abkhazians inevitably became a "frozen" or "permanent" minority both in Georgia and in Abkhazia itself. Therefore the boycott by the Abkhazians of the elections for the first president of Georgia, as well as of the referendum on Georgia leaving the USSR, was a completely logical response to this challenge. To offset this, Abkhazians together with Russians and Armenians participated in Gorbachev's referendum on preservation of the USSR in renewed form in Abkhazia in March 1991 and won it. The referendum was prohibited in the territory of Georgia and the vast majority of the Georgian population in Abkhazia did not participate. Thus, a crisis of legitimacy was clearly apparent.

As legal experts observe, the issue of minorities is closely linked to that of legitimacy. Legitimacy cannot be guaranteed by using the principle of a simple majority; it requires observance of the principle of consensus between majority and minority groups as an essential condition. Practical experience shows that no legal machinery for protecting the rights of minorities can compensate for the lack of legitimacy in a national state for those citizens who do not belong to the majority nation. This applies in full measure in Georgia, where loyalty to the state cannot be expressed otherwise than through loyalty to the ethno-nation, i.e. to the Georgian nation. It is not clear what the Georgian national state concept can offer minorities apart from silent acceptance of the right to domination

by Georgian culture and the Georgian language. The language law passed in Georgia which gives the Georgian language official status actually displaces the other competing languages. This naturally causes dissatisfaction in minority groups, as has already been apparent in close-knit Armenian communities as a result of an attempt to translate business correspondence into Georgian. We must agree with Yann that freedom and equality have never been freedom and equality for language groups. There cannot be several dominant language groups in a multi-ethnic state, and therefore democracy may always turn into ethnocracy.[17] To illustrate this proposition, it may be noted that in the Georgian Parliament there are no more than about 7% of representatives of a non-titular nation.

Some states, for example the United States, Spain, Belgium and others, practise positive discrimination, i.e. quotas or other machinery to protect minority rights. Switzerland has never granted special rights to any minority, because there is no need for this in a democratic decentralised federal state, in which linguistic and cultural differences are institutionalised and concepts such as a "victory" or "defeat" are practically absent from the political lexicon. As regards Georgia, however, today the state is still in the making and it is not yet completely clear which path it will choose. Enactments by the parliament, as well as certain statements and demarches by leading politicians in the country, by no means always give grounds for hope that in the foreseeable future Georgia will become a truly democratic state where human rights and minority rights rank as supreme values.

The Threat of Disintegration: Real or Imagined?

Every community lives with its own particular fears, which are clearly a constituent part of its identity. A study of fears is of considerable interest in the process of seeking ways of solving a particular problem. As regards Georgian society, fear that the country will disintegrate determines both the attitude of the political elite and the policy of the state to a considerable extent. It should be recognised that the fears are not unfounded. Georgia never was a monolithic state; it consisted of several territorial areas and ethno-territorial units with appreciable political, ethno-cultural and linguistic differences. Fairly numerous Armenian and Azeri minorities live in close-knit communities in a number of regions. The Georgian population proper accounts for about 70% of the population, and there is a view that the Georgian nation lacks consolidation and consists of various sub-ethnic groups: Adzharians, Megrelians, Svans and others. Georgia is both multi-ethnic and multi-religious, and in this sense can quite properly be compared with Switzerland. In contrast to Switzerland, however, in Georgia the principal aspiration of the "fathers of the nation" has always been

unity. Last century Ilya Chavchavadze suggested the formula "language, motherland, religion", which was revived in Gamsakhurdia's time. The latter's radicalism in particular aggravated the situation in Adzharia, where an attempt was made to baptise Adzharian Muslims by force.

Striving for excessive unity and attempting to even out ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious differences in general is fairly typical of Georgia. A number of pseudo-scientific theories have been concocted and pressed into service to support the thesis that Abkhazians are Georgians and the Abkhazian language is a dialect of Georgian. In the thirties and forties these theories almost ousted the genuinely scientific work of major scholars, including Georgian scholars. The anti-Abkhazian campaign organised by Beria involved the closing of Abkhazian schools and a prohibition on the study and use of the Abkhazian language, but after Stalin's death the situation improved somewhat. However, imperial theories did not disappear; they were merely biding their time.

At the end of the 1980s the wheel came full circle as if by magic, and many publications appeared in the Georgian communist (!) press in which Abkhazians were compared to a growth on the national body of Georgia and referred to as nothing more than "separatists" and "agents of the Kremlin". During the Georgian-Abkhazian war the enmity pent up for decades overflowed. The burning by the Georgian military of the Abkhazian State Archive and the Abkhazian Institute of Language, Literature and History and the desecration of memorials to Abkhazian writers and educators were probably of symbolic significance.

In his book "Black Sea. The Birthplace of Civilisation and Barbarism", N. Ascherson describes the concern of the Georgian intelligentsia at the existence of cultural and linguistic differences, using the Megrelians and Laz as an example, observing with surprise the "passionate involvement of Megrelian intellectuals and politicians in the campaign to prevent their language developing into a literary language".[18] Today, when the federalisation of Georgia is becoming an ever more realistic prospect, the most advanced part of the Georgian political elite is apparently prepared to accept the federal model for the state system. However, serious concern due to the above-mentioned differences can still be felt in society. A typical quotation from the Georgian draft national security concept can be given: "the existence of ethnic diversity in the country is a serious threat".[19] This attitude makes no contribution to civil peace; on the contrary, it gives minority groups the feeling that they are "rejected", and possibly pushes them into separatism. On the other hand, fear of disintegration slows down the start of decentralisation and the transformation of Georgia into a federal State. It may be recalled that the new Georgian Constitution has deferred a solution of this problem to some future time. Referring to the reluctance of the Georgian leadership to refrain from the practice of appointing regional leaders, Nodia points out that although Shevardnadze is demonstrating his readiness for democratic change,

his tolerance does not extend to territorial arrangements. Fear of losing control over the provinces prevails.[20] This is possibly why many Georgian politicians have turned their attention to France, as a unitary centralised country, not the decentralised Swiss Federation. These fears may increase as power in the regions really begins to take shape. However, it is perfectly clear that genuine federalism is impossible without decentralisation and a high degree of democracy. A federation can only be based on the mutual desire and the mutual trust of the constituents and the Centre; this will be possible only if Georgian society can free itself of the fear of the country breaking up.

3. Conclusion

Fleiner suggests that every ethnic conflict seems inevitable, and at the same time each party to the conflict can claim that it is defending its inalienable rights, depending upon which historical period is referred to.[21] Without calling this view into question we may add that the arguments used in the dispute cannot be discarded like so much waste paper. On the contrary, they need careful analysis, because there are a helpful guide to the inner fears and concerns of each party for the future of its community. Without this it is unlikely that some general idea can be formulated that will enable the warring parties to find a way to come together. During the past 120 years the Abkhazians have felt the blows of fate three times, which have brought them to a limit beyond which there is nothing. They have made enormous sacrifices in order to retain their identity. Today Abkhazia still lives under the shadow of the war with Georgia, the psychological consequences of which were particularly severe because on the other side of the front line there were neighbours and even relatives from another ethnic group, not aliens. The interweaving of ethnic and political factors makes it particularly difficult to build new bridges that would lead to some form of peaceful coexistence for Abkhazians and Georgians. In this situation an attempt to copy the Swiss model in order to build a federal State looks utopian, although before the 1992-1993 war using particular elements of it to build a Georgian-Abkhazian federal state might have suited the Abkhazian side, which was seriously concerned about its prospects of survival as an ethnic group.

Now, however, when trust between the two communities is at zero, the first requirement is to seek a solution that would give the Abkhazians guarantees that a return to the past is impossible. It is clear why today Georgia is prepared to see Abkhazia as a constituent of the Georgian federation: this would increase the level of security for the state, restoring the jurisdiction of Tbilisi over Abkhazia and, no less important, making it possible for refugees to return. However, Abkhazia, which has existed for five years as a de-facto independent state, sees no advantage

in becoming part of Georgia. Experience teaches that in this case Abkhazia's level of security would be reduced, because Tbilisi would again be fully entitled legally to use military force against Abkhazia and to impose its political will upon it as well as Georgian culture, language and spiritual values, which are very different. For these and other reasons it does not seem possible that there could be any tangible results from the negotiations, which have already lasted five years, until the following factors are taken into account:

1. Using terms such as "federation" or "autonomy" only make the peace process more difficult. While Georgia regards giving Abkhazia the status of constituent of a federation or autonomy as a major concession on its part, such a solution is unacceptable to Abkhazia after all that has happened, because it is perfectly clear that all too often the formal characteristics of federalism in non-democratic states are used as a cover for imperial ambitions. Traditional schemes and stereotypes must therefore be rejected.
2. An "identity explosion" is taking place now. According to calculations by researchers, in 1991 alone there were 640 separatist movements in the world. It is quite obvious that the world community is not prepared to respond to this challenge. Until priorities are given in some cases to the right to self-determination and in others to the principle of territorial integrity, bloody conflicts will rage in every continent. One must agree with Gottlieb, who takes the view that an international system consisting of several hundred independent territorial states cannot form a basis for global security and prosperity. The concepts of state, sovereignty and citizenship must be reviewed, having regard at the same time to the growth of the factors of globalisation and fragmentation, cosmopolitanism and nationalism.
3. Relations between Abkhazia and Georgia can be settled only if a higher level of democracy is achieved and a civil society is constructed. In circumstances in which respect for human rights is still merely a matter of words, and the centre jealously guards its power over the regions, the implementation of constitutional principles in practice cannot be guaranteed. The mutual distrust and negative experiences of Abkhazians and Georgians can be overcome only at a new and higher stage in democratic development. Consequently mediators must make greater efforts to support democratic change in Georgia and Abkhazia.
4. The "Caucasian factor" may play an important part in achieving peace between Abkhazia and Georgia. It might help to overcome the distrust between the two nations, which is one of the most serious obstacles on the road to peace. Having regard to the fact that the differences between Georgia and Abkhazia are too great (size of territory, population numbers), the involvement of nations from the North Caucasus, especially the Adygheans, who are ethnically related to the Abkhazians, as mediators and guarantors of

peace might bring the potential of the parties into balance, a vital condition for success in a peace process. In addition, Johan Galtung's idea of a Caucasian parliament or other pan-Caucasian institutions in which all the nations in the region would participate irrespective of their political status[22] seems to be a very fruitful one.

Notes

1 W. Linder, *Swiss Democracy*, London, 1994, p.25.
2 L. Basta, 'Minority and Legitimacy of a Federal State', in L. R. Basta and Thomas Fleiner (eds.), *Federalism and Multiethnic States. The Case of Switzerland*, Fribourg (Switzerland), 1996, p. 44.
3 Ibid., p. 50.
4 Linder, op. cit., p. 24.
5 B. Barber, 'Participation and Swiss Democracy in Government and Opposition', in *Journal of Comparative Politics*, Vol. 23, No. 1, Winter 1988, p. 44.
6 M. Lind, 'Problems of Nationalism', in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 73, No. 3. May-June 1994, p. 96.
7 See Th. Fleiner, L. Basta, 'Federalism, Federal State and Decentralization', in*:* Basta and Fleiner (eds.), op. cit., p. 14.
8 Gh. Nodia, 'Nationalism and Democracy', in Larry Diamond, Marc F. Plattner (eds.) *Nationalism, Ethnic Conflict, and Democracy*, Baltimore, 1994, p. 4.
9 Sh. Avinery, ibid., p. 27.
10 L. Basta, The Role of the Constitution in Central and Eastern Europe, manuscript, p. 20.
11 A. Chikvaidze, Speech at a UN General Assembly Session in New York, quoted in *Svobodnaya Gruzia*, 2 August 1992.
12 It is clear what kind of "voluntary union" there might have been at that time.
13 D. Zurabishvili, 'Shevardnadze's One-Man Democracy', in *War Report*, No. 45, September 1996, p. 30.
14 Interview given by E. Shevardnadze in *Moskovskie Novosti*, 12-19 August 1995.
15 Th. Fleiner, Legal Instruments and Procedures to Prevent and Solve Ethnic Conflicts, in Basta and Fleiner (eds.), op. cit., p. 112.
16 In the 1940s Beria, naturally with support from Stalin, implemented the mass resettlement of residents of Western Georgia in Abkhazia, often in spite of their protests.
17 E. Yann, *Democracy and Nationalism is Patriotism: Unity or Contradiction?,* manuscript, p. 18.
18 N. Ascherson, *Black Sea*, London, 1996, p. 202.
19 Georgia's national security concept (author: N. Mikeladze), in *Konflikty i peregovory*, No. 18-19, Winter-Spring 1998, Tbilisi, p. 10.
20 Gh. Nodia, 'Democracy without Democrats', in: *War Report*, No. 56, November 1997, p. 30.
21 Fleiner, 'Legal Instruments and Procedures to Prevent and Solve Ethnic Conflicts', op. cit., p. 111.
22 Johan Galtung 'Some Observations on the Caucasus, in *Caucasian Regional Studies*, Vol. 2, Issue 1, 1997 (http://poli.vub.ac.be/).