ABKHAZIA TODAY

Europe Report N°176 – 15 September 2006

International Crisis Group
WORKING TO PREVENT CONFLICT WORLDWIDE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Conflict over Abkhazia, squeezed between the Black Sea and the Caucasus mountains, has festered since the 1992-1993 fighting. Internationally recognised as part of Georgia and largely destroyed, with half the pre-war population forcibly displaced, Abkhazia is establishing the institutions of an independent state. In twelve years since the ceasefire, the sides have come no closer to a settlement despite ongoing UN-mediated negotiations.

Tensions rose in July 2006 when a forceful Georgian police operation cleaned a renegade militia out of upper Kodori Gorge, the one part of pre-war Abkhazia not controlled by the de facto government in Sukhumi. Since then Georgian-Abkhaz negotiations have been frozen. While Georgia asserts that it is committed to a peaceful resolution of the conflict, its military budget rose in 2005 at a rate higher than any other country in the world. Bellicose statements by some officials do not increase confidence. Georgia insists that the problem is Russia, whose increasingly assertive policy in the region includes support for Abkhazia.

Abkhaz seek independence, arguing that they have a democratic government, rule of law, defence capabilities, and economy worthy of a state. In the past decade they have made strides to re-establish a sense of normality. The first round of the 2004 presidential election offered voters a choice and a genuine contest. Yet disputes over the result and Moscow's intervention, including closing the border, led to a power sharing arrangement between the two top contenders. The entity's population includes Abkhaz, Armenians, Russians and ethnic Georgians. The latter, who live primarily in one district (Gali), represent at least a quarter of today's residents. But over 200,000 remain displaced in Georgia proper, unable to participate in life in their homeland.

For Georgia the unresolved conflict is an affront to its state building project, impeding the consolidation of national security, democratic institutions, economic development and regional integration. The many internally displaced persons (IDPs) impose heavy political, economic and psychological burdens. For over a decade, Tbilisi had no integration policy, relying instead on short-term, emergency solutions. Although a national integration strategy for IDPs is now being drafted, the displaced are the poorest section of Georgian society. They are disappointed by the government's failure to keep its promises of returning them to their homes, or provide a better life for them in Georgia, yet have little capacity to mobilise politically.

This report looks at the causes of conflict, conditions in Abkhazia and reforms affecting Georgian IDPs. A subsequent report will assess the negotiation and peacekeeping mechanisms, with specific recommendations on what should be done to facilitate resolution.

Tbilisi/Brussels, 15 September 2006

International Crisis Group
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ABKHAZIA TODAY

I. INTRODUCTION

Close to fifteen years after the first exchanges of fire in August 1992, the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict remains unresolved. The Abkhaz claim a right to statehood based on national self-determination. Georgia argues that the sanctity of international borders and state sovereignty guarantees it the right to control Abkhazia, whose pre-war ethnic Georgian majority was expelled during the fighting. Moreover, it sees the conflict as primarily a Russian-Georgian one, blaming Moscow for intervening in support of the Abkhaz and interfering with its territorial integrity.

Abkhazia borders the Russian Federation to the north and the Georgian region of Samegrelo to the south east. It has an area of 8,700 square km (just under Kosovo at 10,887 sq km and Cyprus at 9,240 sq km), an eighth of Georgia's territory, including nearly half its coastline. Its population is currently around 200,000, as compared to the prewar 525,000.[1] The 1992-1993 military confrontations ended with Abkhaz troops in control of most of the former Soviet Abkhazia Autonomous Republic. It caused some 8,000 deaths, 18,000 wounded and displaced approximately 240,000 from their homes.[2]

The May 1994 Moscow Agreement provided for a ceasefire and a peacekeeping force (designated the Peacekeeping Forces of the Commonwealth of Independent States, CISPKF, but in fact entirely Russian). The Geneva Peace Process, which periodically convenes the Georgian and Abkhaz sides together, has produced no new agreements bringing them closer to a comprehensive peace settlement. The security situation has deteriorated twice, in 1998 and 2001.[3] There is little contact between ethnic Georgians and Abkhaz. The displaced have returned in significant numbers only to the southernmost Gali district.[4]

Tbilisi has exercised no political, military or economic control over Abkhazia for the past thirteen years, while Abkhazia has been developing its own state institutions. The recent recognition of Montenegro's independence,[5] discussions about Kosovo's final status[6] and President Putin's statements about the need to determine universal principles for self-determination[7] have all increased Abkhaz optimism about their own prospects for recognition.[8] For most of the 1990s, Abkhaz elites were willing to discuss "common state" options and federal arrangements with Georgia. However, opinion shifted, and a 1999 referendum adopting the constitution of Abkhazia as an independent state passed with a huge majority.[9] Policy makers and popular opinion are now set on full sovereignty.[10] Political

[1] For further discussion on the population issue, see section III.A below.

[2] The most convincing analysis is "Georgia/Abkhazia: Violations of the Laws of War and Russia's Role in the Conflict", Human Rights Watch, vol.7, no.7, March 1995.

[3] The 1998 events are described below. The September 2001 violence, involving Chechen fighters with the alleged support of the Georgian ministry of interior, resulted in dozens of casualties. See Damien Helly and Giorgi Gogia, "Georgian Security and the Role of the West", in Bruno Coppieters & Robert Legvold (eds.), *Statehood and Security: Georgia after the Rose Revolution* (Cambridge, MA, 2005), p.286; and "Report of the Secretary-General Concerning the Situation in Abkhazia, Georgia", 24 October 2001, paras. 9-25.

[4] Georgians and Abkhaz use different names for locations in Abkhazia. This report follows UN usage: thus Gali rather than (Abkhaz) Gal, Sukhumi rather than Sukhum, Inguri for Ingur, and so forth.

[5] See Crisis Group Europe Briefing N°42, *Montenegro's Independence*, 30 May 2006 and Crisis Group Europe Report N°169, *Montenegro's Independence Drive*, 7 December 2005.

[6] See Crisis Group Europe Report N°161, *Kosovo: Toward Final Status*, 24 January 2005, and Crisis Group Europe Report N°170, *Kosovo: The Challenge of Transition*, 17 February 2006.

[7] In a 31 January 2006 press conference, Putin asked: "If…Kosovo should be granted full independence as a state, then why should we deny it to the Abkhaz and the South Ossetians?", in Robert Parsons, "Is Putin Looking to Impose Solutions on Frozen Conflicts?", RFE/RL, 2 February 2006. Since then he has become more explicit, including in a speech at a meeting with Russian ambassadors, 27 June 2006, available at www.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2006/06/27/2040_type82912type82913type82914_107818.shtml.

[8] Crisis Group interview, de facto Abkhazia president, Sukhumi, May 2006. The Kosovo case is, of course, very different, not least because consideration of Kosovo's status is explicitly mandated in UN Security Council Resolution 1244.

[9] The referendum has not been recognised internationally. According to the Abkhaz, 87.6 per cent of an electorate of 219,534 (itself 58.5 per cent of the pre-war electorate) took part, and 97.7 per cent approved the constitution. http://cluborlov.com/apsny/.

[10] "Abkhazia Insists on Full Independence", Caucaz.com news, 26 January 2005. In a poll cited by The Russian Centre for

and non-governmental elites agree that "the local population would never allow an Abkhaz politician to reunify Abkhazia with Georgia again".[11]

Georgia is intent on restoring its territorial integrity. It pledges to do so peacefully, while guaranteeing protection of the Abkhaz nation's interests and rights.[12] Georgians see the conflict as the biggest obstacle to their state-building project. Since coming to office in January 2004, President Saakashvili has made it clear that "Georgia's territorial integrity is the goal of my life" and pledged his utmost to reintegrate Abkhazia by 2009.[13] He has promised Georgians displaced by the conflict that they will be able to return to their homes[14] and is offering Sukhumi the "greatest possible autonomy", without the right to secession, based on the creation of a "new, joint-state model of ethnic and civil cooperation".[15]

Although the positions remain entrenched, there was some movement in negotiations on economic cooperation, security guarantees and refugee return in the first half of 2006. This report describes the environment in which negotiations are being held. It focuses on current realities in Georgia and Abkhazia for the people most affected by the conflict: Abkhazia's residents and the internally displaced (IDPs). A subsequent report will analyse the negotiations process and confidence-building initiatives and recommend how to bridge differences.

Political Information on Abkhazia's possible future status, 63.3 per cent called for independence, 30.4 per cent wanted Abkhazia to be part of the Russian Federation, 3.1 per cent favoured a Georgian-Abkhaz joint state, and only 1 per cent wanted the entity to be part of Georgia. Crisis Group interviews, de facto authorities and local NGO activists, Sukhumi, May and July 2006.

[11] Crisis Group interview, de facto vice president of Abkhazia, Sukhumi, July 2006. Crisis Group interview, director Apsny Press, Sukhumi, May 2006. Crisis Group focus group discussion, local NGOs, Sukhumi, May 2006.

[12] "Saakashvili speaks of Kodori", *Civil Georgia*, 28 July 2006. However, 63 per cent of Georgians polled in 2004 believed Abkhazia should have the same status as other regions in Georgia. "Georgian National Voter Survey," International Republican Institute (IRI), February 2004, http://www.iri.org.ge/eng/engmain.htm.

[13] He made this statement, following his inauguration, at the grave of the twelfth century king David IV, considered the first unifier of Georgia. "New leader vows to hold next inauguration in Abkhazia", *Civil Georgia*, 24 January 2004.

[14] Speech at the presentation of the "My House" project, 7 April 2006, Georgian Public TV.

[15] "Saakashvili speaks of Kodori", *Civil Georgia*, 28 July 2006

II. CAUSES OF CONFLICT

The two sides have radically different interpretations of the causes of the conflict and explanations for its intractability. While Sukhumi sees the war as an Abkhaz-Georgian dispute, Tbilisi argues that the main culprit is Russia. While making arguments regarding its "right" to independence, the Abkhaz focus on historical grievances against the Georgians. Less concerned with historical causes, Georgia says that past and current roubles are Russia's doing. The sides have yet to address grievances from the 1992-1993 war, let alone reconcile their views.[16]

A. POLITICAL AND LEGAL

The Georgians and Abkhaz use opposing principles of international law to legitimise their claims, either sanctity of international borders and state sovereignty or self-determination, respectively. The UN Security Council has repeatedly recognised Georgia's territorial integrity.[17] The international community has promoted solutions that would maintain Georgia's pre-war borders but guarantee the rights of Abkhaz to self-government inside the country.[18] As noted above, however, Russia is moving away from this consensus.[19]

[16] See Charles King, "The Benefits of Ethnic War: Understanding Eurasia's Unrecognized States", *World Politics*, vol. 53, July 2001, pp. 524-552.

[17] Most recently Resolution 1666 of 31 March 2006, which "reaffirms the commitment of all Member States to the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognized borders".

[18] The "Paper on Basic Principles for the Distribution of Competencies between Tbilisi and Sukhumi" (the "Boden document") stipulated: "Abkhazia is a sovereign entity, based on the rule of law, within the State of Georgia" (Article 2.). During a May 2006 visit to Sukhumi, the U.S. Ambassador to Georgia told his interlocutors Abkhazia's independence would "never be recognised." Crisis Group interview, NGO representatives, Sukhumi, July 2006.

[19] The comparison between Kosovo and Abkhazia is not widely accepted. See, for instance, U.S. Under Secretary for Political Affairs Nicholas Burns, "the two situations are completely opposite and we don't agree at all with this idea that somehow one is a precedent for the other", BBC interview, 5 July 2006. A lively debate about Kosovo's relevance to South Caucasus conflicts has continued. See Vladimir Socor, "Kosovo and the post soviet conflicts: no analogy means no precedent", Jamestown Foundation, 14 April 2006; Oksana Antonenko, "Not a Precedent, but an Opportunity", Russian Profile, 15 June 2006; Igor Torbakov, "Russia plays up kosovo precedent for potential application in the Caucasus", *Eurasia Insight*, 12 April 2005; Zeyno Baran, "Kosovo precedent no solution for Caucasus region", *Financial Times*, 17 May 2006; Thomas de Waal,

The Abkhaz claim the right to self-determination as a people. They maintain they are indigenous to Abkhazia and have been the victims of mass displacement and colonialisation for 150 years. In 1989 ethnic Abkhaz were only 17.8 per cent of the population of Abkhazia, ethnic Georgians 45.7 per cent.[20] They consider this minority status was a deliberate result of Georgian policies.[21] Control of their own state, they say, is all the more necessary to insure their ethnic survival.[22]

Georgians retort that a small group within the Abkhaz minority hijacked the entity at the start of the war but never represented the interest of the population at large – only that of a few clans. The war was a struggle for power between different interest groups, not peoples or nations. Georgians argue the de facto authorities who won the armed struggle have no democratic legitimacy to make political claims in the name of Abkhazia's populace. The government in exile, which represents close to half of the pre-war population, is, therefore, more legitimate than the Sukhumi authorities.[23]

Today the Abkhaz assert a right to statehood on the basis of political reality. They profess a proven ability to maintain a functioning government with a democratically elected president; a system based on the rule of law that protects the rights of minorities; an army that can defend its territory; and a growing economy that will assure the entity's sustainability. Sukhumi has begun to take steps to show that it can meet possible future commitments to the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Council of Europe. The de facto president has stated: "We understand that if we want to be recognised according to international law, we must uphold international law". The Abkhaz believe they are earning the right to sovereignty.[24]

The Georgians consider the institutions in Sukhumi illegal and that the principle of *uti possidetis* – inviolability of borders – must be respected. They reason that the Abkhaz have no right to unilateral secession (or "external self-determination"), only to "internal self-determination" (some form of autonomy within the Georgian state) and minority rights. Tbilisi accuses the Abkhaz of violating constitutional norms and relying on the use of force and Russia's assistance in their pursuit of independence. Georgians do not agree that the dispute over principles was the root cause of the war. They maintain that it would not have happened if Russia had not wanted to undermine their country's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

B. HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

Beyond the debate on political and legal principles, the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict is further driven by conflicting perceptions of history and justice. The Abkhaz argue that they never chose to be part of Georgia but were forced into the country when Soviet-era borders were defined. They accuse Georgians of discriminating against them in Soviet times, restricting their political, economic, social and cultural development.[25] Tbilisi denies this; Abkhazia was the wealthiest part of Georgia, ethnic Abkhaz always had access to high-level positions, and they had certain privileges that the Georgian population of Abkhazia did not.

1. Competing narratives

Abkhazians have close cultural and linguistic ties to some northern Caucasian ethnic groups (Abazians, Adyges, Kabardians and Cherkez). Unlike Georgians, they do not strongly identify with the Christian Orthodox faith.[26] Their language, unlike Georgian, is part of the Northwest Caucasus family.[27] They define themselves as a "people", with a distinct historical tradition, language and ancestral connection to the Abkhaz territory, self-identity and culture.[28]

Interpretations of Abkhazia's past are highly contested by the sides, each eager to prove it lived on the territory first and thus has the right to determine its future. Georgians

"Abkhazia-Georgia, Kosovo-Serbia: parallel worlds?" *Open Democracy*, 2 August 2006.

[20] *Ethnic composition of Georgia's population. Statistical Data Collection* (Tbilisi, 1991), pp. 4-5. For more on this see below.

[21] Since Abkhazia became part of the Georgian Soviet Republic the percentage of Abkhaz steadily decreased from 48.1 per cent in 1926. *The Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, quoted in Daniel Muller, "Demography: Ethno-demographic history 1886-1989" in George Hewitt (ed.), *The Abkhazians* (New York, 1998), pp.230-231.

[22] Crisis Group interviews, de facto minister of foreign affairs of Abkhazia and head, National Security Council (NSC), Sukhumi, May 2006. Crisis Group focus group discussion, local NGOs, Sukhumi, July 2006.

[23] Crisis Group interview, Georgian political expert, Ghia Nodia, Tbilisi, July 2006.

[24] Crisis Group interview, de facto president of Abkhazia and de facto minister of foreign affairs, Sukhumi, May 2006. For more on "earned sovereignty", see Paul Williams, Michael P. Scharf and James Hooper, "Resolving Sovereignty-Based Conflicts: The Emerging Approach to Earned Sovereignty", *Denver Journal of International Law*. vol 31:3, pp. 349-354; Michael P. Scharf, "Earned Sovereignty: Juridical Underpinnings", ibid, pp. 373-387.

[25] Crisis Group interviews, de facto government and NGO representatives, Sukhumi, May and July 2006.

[26] There is no predominant religious tradition. Abkhaz include Orthodox Christian, Sunni Muslims, pagans and atheists. Rachel Clogg, "Religion", in *The Abkhazians*, op. cit., p. 216.

[27] For more on the Abkhaz language, see George Hewitt, "Language", in ibid, pp.167-175.

[28] This also boosts their claims to self-determination as a "people" per the UN Charter.

and Abkhaz both consider themselves autochthonous to Abkhazia and minimise the other's historical presence. Radical Georgian historians argue that modern Abkhazians only migrated to Abkhazia from the Northern Caucasus in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[29] Abkhaz historians claim that ethnic Georgians started living in Abkhazia in significant numbers only in the twentieth century.[30] Abkhaz elites insist that centuries of independent rule motivate their claim to statehood.[31] Georgian historians believe Abkhazia has been part of Georgia since the first century before the common era.

Abkhaz consider that repeatedly throughout history, and particularly since the nineteenth century, they have been the victims of greater powers' attempts to control their territory. This was especially so after 1810, when Abkhazia joined Russia.[32] Russia revoked Abkhaz autonomy in 1864, and the Abkhaz rebelled. This provoked repression so harsh that tens of thousands fled to the Ottoman Empire in a great migration called the *Mohajirstvo*.[33] From 1918 until 1921, when the Russian Red Army annexed Georgia, Abkhaz say they were again the victims of repression, this time from the Georgian Menshevik revolutionary government.[34] They fear a repeat should they again re-integrate into the Georgian state.[35]

Abkhaz see the 1921-1931 period as the source of their modern day statehood. They say they had republic status then; the Abkhazian SSR ratified its constitution in 1925, had its own flag and emblem, and passed its own laws.[36] But in December 1921 Sukhumi signed a treaty delegating some of its powers to Georgia,[37] and the 1924 USSR Constitution (Article 15) described Abkhazia as an autonomous republic within Georgia; Abkhazia had no membership in any regional or economic international forum separate from Georgia. In 1931 Abkhazia was formally demoted to the status of an autonomous republic within Georgia.

The following decades did little to reconcile the Abkhaz. The policies of the Soviet Union's Georgian-born rulers, Stalin and Beria, further damaged inter-ethnic relations, and were perceived as forceful "Georgianisation" by Abkhaz.[38] Georgians, Russians and other ethnic groups were encouraged to move to Abkhazia, further reducing the Abkhaz proportion of the population. Abkhaz addressed Moscow with petitions and protest rallies in 1931, 1957, 1967 and 1978.[39] In 1978-1979, during the Brezhnev era, the Kremlin responded with several pro-Abkhaz affirmative actions.[40] Georgians perceived these as discriminatory and complained that by the 1980s they had few leadership positions, despite being the ethnic majority.[41] From the Georgian perspective, they cannot be blamed for misguided Soviet policies: Georgia was a country occupied by a foreign power (Soviet Russia); the fact that ethnic Georgians happened to be at its helm did not make the entire Georgian nation responsible for their errors.[42]

As *perestroika* and *glasnost* gathered momentum across the Soviet Union in the 1980s, Georgian activists failed

[29] This theory was developed by Pavle Ingorokva in the early 1950s. It has little support among Georgian academics. Giorgi Anchabadze, *Aspects of Georgian-Abkhaz Conflict* (Irvine, 2000), vol. 2, p. 26 (in Russian); Abesalom Lepsaia, ibid, vol. 9, p. 49.

[30] Stanislav Lakoba, "Abkhazia de facto or Georgia de jure?" (in Russian), Slavic Research Centre, 2001.

[31] Crisis Group interviews, de facto minister of foreign affairs of Abkhazia and head, NSC, Sukhumi, May 2006.

[32] From 1555 to 1806 Abkhazia was under Ottoman rule. While most accounts describe the rapprochement with Russia as voluntary, Abkhaz historian Stanislav Lakoba convincingly disputes this in "History: 18th Century-1917", in *The Abkhazians*, op. cit., pp. 67-88.

[33] According to an Abkhaz account, the first wave of displacement was from April to June 1867, when 20,000 settled in Turkey, followed by 50,000 in 1877. "Up to the tragic events of 1877 Abkhazia consisted almost exclusively of its indigenous Abkhazian population. In a short span of years it was converted into a territorial patchwork in terms of its ethnic makeup", ibid, p. 83.

[34] Stuart Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds: The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War* (Ithaca, 2001), pp. 88, 95.

[35] Crisis Group focus group discussion, local NGO representatives, Sukhumi, July 2006.

[36] Stanislav Lakoba, "History: 1917-1989," in *The Abkhazians*, op. cit., pp. 93-94.

[37] The Special Union Treaty between the Georgian SSR and the Abkhaz SSR was signed on 16 December 1921. Abkhazia's 1925 constitution also stated it was "united with [the] Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia on the basis of a special union-treaty".

[38] From 1933 to 1953 Abkhaz representation in local administrations was restricted, Abkhaz schools were closed and Abkhaz toponymy changed. See Lakoba, *Studies on the Political History of Abkhazia* (Sukhumi, 1990), p. 89 (in Russian).

[39] G. Zhorzholiani, S. Lekishvili, L. Toidze, E. Khoshtaria-Brosset, "Historic, Political and Legal Aspects of the Conflict in Abkhazia", (Tbilisi, 1995), pp. 38-39.

[40] For example, the Georgian-based script of the Abkhaz language (since 1933) was changed to Cyrillic; ethnic quotas were introduced for the Abkhaz "titular" group, and the University of Sukhumi was established, ibid, pp. 39-40.

[41] By 1990, although a minority, 67 per cent of government ministers and 71 per cent of regional communist party department heads were Abkhaz. Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrott (eds.), *Conflict, cleavage, and change in Central Asia and the Caucasus* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 170.

[42] Georgian scholars view Stalin and Beria as Soviet leaders who implemented repressive policies towards Georgia as well. Crisis Group interview, Georgian political expert, Ghia Nodia, Tbilisi, July 2006.

to appreciate how their yearnings for independence paralleled Abkhazia's desire for autonomy from Tbilisi. Gradually nationalists on both sides pushed ethnic Abkhaz and Georgians to make irreconcilable political demands, leading to the first armed clashes. The Russian and Armenian ethnic minorities in Abkhazia initially remained neutral but later largely sided with the Abkhaz.

2. The 1992-1993 war

In Georgia in the early 1990s, as in other former Soviet republics, radical nationalist groups, some linked to the local security services, gained substantial political influence and created an environment of intolerance. The State Program for the Georgian Language, adopted in 1989, provoked fears of "Georgianisation" among minorities. Intellectuals and Communist party leaders in Abkhazia formed Aydgylara (the National Forum), a public movement, which organised mass rallies and petitioned Moscow to restore Abkhazia's 1921-1931 status.[43]

The first blood was spilt in 1989. The spark was the creation of a branch of the Tbilisi State University in Sukhumi. The Abkhaz protested. The clashes which began in Sukhumi on 15 July spread to other parts of Abkhazia; two weeks of intermittent violence left over a dozen dead.[44]

As Tbilisi took steps to separate from the Soviet Union and return to its 1921 constitution, the Abkhaz Supreme Council declared Abkhazia's sovereignty on 25 August 1990.[45] In December, the historian Vladislav Ardzinba was elected chairman of the Abkhaz Supreme Council.[46] The March 1991 all-union referendum on preserving the Soviet Union further aggravated tensions. While most of Georgia boycotted, non-Georgians in Abkhazia overwhelmingly supported the Union Treaty.[47] Abkhaz argue that in doing so they in effect chose to leave Georgia and stay in the Soviet Union. They assert that this was allowed under Soviet law, and once the USSR disappeared, they had de jure independence.[48] Elections were held in October and December 1991 for a new Abkhaz parliament with ethnic quotas: 28 Abkhaz, 26 Georgians and eleven representatives for other ethnic minorities.

In February 1992, following the overthrow of President Gamsakhurdia, the provisional Georgian Military Council announced Georgia's return to its 1921 constitution. The Abkhaz Supreme Soviet was not satisfied that this provided clarity on Abkhazia's status, and responded by sending a draft treaty on federal or confederal relations to the Georgian State Council. It received no reply.[49] In July the Abkhaz parliament reinstated its 1925 Constitution.

The war of words soon transformed into one with guns.[50] On 14 August 1992 Georgian armed forces, commanded by Tengiz Kitovani, entered the Gali region of Abkhazia, ostensibly to rescue thirteen government hostages and secure the rail line to Russia.[51] However, the troops advanced towards Sukhumi and attacked Abkhaz government buildings.[52] Ardzinba's government, and many civilians, fled. The Abkhaz consider that by sending troops against Sukhumi, Georgia lost any moral right to custody over Abkhazia.[53]

As ceasefire agreements were repeatedly violated, both sides amassed weapons and launched air strikes.[54] From

[43] The Georgian population in Tbilisi responded to Aydgylara with large counter-demonstrations for independence and an end to ethnic discrimination by minorities.

[44] Stuart Kaufman, op. cit., pp. 102-105. Marta Weston, "Georgia on Our Minds", Report of a Fact Finding Mission to the Republic of Georgia, July 1994, p. 23. Zhorzholiani, Lekishvili, Toidze, Khoshtaria-Brosset, op. cit., p. 48.

[45] Ethnic Georgian deputies boycotted the Abkhaz Supreme Soviet session. Tbilisi declared the declaration void a few days later.

[46] Ardzinba (born in 1945) was elected de facto president without a contest in 1994 and 1999. In the last few years of his presidency he was seriously ill and made no public appearances.

[47] Close to half of Abkhazia's population boycotted in line with the rest of the republic. 52.4 per cent of those eligible voted, 98.6 per cent in favour. T. Potier, "Conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, A Legal Appraisal", *Kluwer Law International*, (London, 2001).

[48] The 3 April 1990 Soviet law on withdrawal from the USSR provided that: "The peoples of autonomous republics and autonomous formations shall retain the right to decide independently the question of staying in the USSR or in the seceding Union republic".

[49] Abkhaz analysts focus on this, arguing Sukhumi's intention, before the August 1992 violence, was not independence. See Yulia Gumba and Tamaz Ketsba, "Economic Development Prospects in Abkhazia and the Concept of Regional Cooperation", in *From War Economies to Peace Economies in the South Caucasus*, International Alert (London, 2004) p.159.

[50] Military confrontations had already occurred in South Ossetia between January 1991 and June 1992. See Crisis Group Europe Report Nº159, *Georgia: Avoiding War in South Ossetia*, 26 November 2004.

[51] Forces loyal to the ousted president Gamsakhurdia in summer 1992 kidnapped Georgian senior officials, including the then deputy prime minister, and fled to Abkhazia. The Abkhaz believe that President Eduard Shevardnadze gave Kitovani the green light not only to release the hostages but also to advance on Sukhumi and eliminate the Abkhaz threat.

[52] Human Rights Watch, op. cit.

[53] Crisis Group focus group discussion, local NGOs, Sukhumi, July 2006.

[54] Human Rights Watch, op. cit., p. 3. The first ceasefire agreement was mediated by Russia on 3 September 1992;

summer 1992 to summer 1993, Georgian troops controlled much of Abkhazia, including Sukhumi, while fighting continued, causing great civilian hardship. Russian forces provided equipment, ammunition, skills, and training to both sides, but more to the Abkhaz.[55] On 27 July 1993, Russia mediated an agreement in Sochi for a ceasefire and the phased demilitarisation of Abkhazia. However, on 16 September Abkhaz troops broke the ceasefire and opened an all-front surprise offensive from Gudauta, north of Sukhumi, with support from North Caucasus volunteers. After eleven days of intense fighting, they controlled almost all Abkhazia, with the exception of the upper gorge of the Kodori river. Most ethnic Georgians fled; Georgian authorities state – with the backing of several OSCE declarations – that this was the result of ethnic cleansing by Abkhaz forces.[56]

It is clear that during the fighting both sides committed atrocities.[57] Human Rights Watch documented that:

> Combatants both deliberately targeted and indiscriminately attacked civilians and civilian structures, killing hundreds of civilians through bombing, shelling and rocket attacks. The combination of indiscriminate attacks and targeted terrorising of the civilian population was a feature of both sides….The practice was adopted first by the Georgian side, in the second half of 1992, and later, more effectively, by the Abkhaz side. The parties terrorised and forced the enemy ethnic population to flee, or took members of the enemy population hostage … entire villages were held hostages on the basis of the ethnicity of their population.[58]

Neither Georgian nor Abkhaz authorities have investigated war crimes, crimes against humanity or serious criminal offences from the conflict. No amnesties have been declared, and almost no perpetrators of war crimes on either side have been sentenced.[59] The lack of accountability is a grievance raised by both sides. The Abkhaz in particular accuse the Georgians of collective guilt for war crimes, claiming that ethnic Georgians cannot return to Abkhazia because the population would seek revenge against them for wartime atrocities.

3. The peace agreement and peace implementation mechanisms

The May 1994 Moscow Agreement, which formally ended the military conflict, was signed under UN auspices, with Russian facilitation. As noted, it provided for a ceasefire, separation of forces and the deployment of the CISPKF.[60] These entirely Russian peacekeepers were deployed in the conflict zone in June 1994. Their mandate has never been modified. Today 1,700 monitor a strip of territory 85 km long and 24 km wide along the frontier between Abkhazia and the rest of Georgia, divided into an inner "security zone" (in which no Georgian or Abkhaz military presence is permitted) and an outer "restricted zone" (where no heavy weapons may be deployed).[61]

The agreement also provides for UN monitoring. The UN had established its observer mission (UNOMIG) at the outset of the fighting to "monitor and verify the observance" of the successive ceasefires, "observe the operation" of the CIS peacekeeping force and "contribute to conditions conducive to the safe and orderly return of refugees and displaced persons".[62] It has 121 military observers and is also responsible for facilitating the return of refugees and IDPs. The Security Council regularly extends its mandate.[63]

Negotiations between Tbilisi and Sukhumi occur within the Geneva Peace Process,[64] which is chaired by the UN,[65] facilitated by Russia, and includes observers from

further agreements were signed on 14 May 1993 and 27 July 1993.

[55] As with other wars in the former Soviet Union in the early 1990s, Russia's policy toward the parties could be politely described as multi-polar. While the foreign ministry was more sympathetic to Georgia, the defence ministry was more supportive of the Abkhaz. There is little question the Abkhaz were helped by hundreds of North Caucasus fighters and obtained Russian equipment. See Oksana Antonenko, "Frozen Uncertainty: Russia and the Conflict Over Abkhazia," in Coppetiers and Legvold, op.cit., pp. 208-217. For details on Russian assistance to the Abkhaz, see Human Rights Watch, op. cit.

[56] See the declarations from OSCE summits in Budapest (1 December, 1993), Lisbon (1 December, 1996), and Istanbul (19 November, 1999).

[57] Greg Hansen, "Displacement and Return", in "A Question of Sovereignty: The Georgia-Abkhazia Peace Process", *Accord* (7), London, 1999, p. 58.

[58] Human Rights Watch, op. cit., p. 1.

[59] Crisis Group interview, Paata Zakareishvili, Georgian analyst, Tbilisi, August 2006.

[60] "Agreement on a Ceasefire and Separation of Forces", signed in Moscow, 14 May 1994.

[61] See map at Appendix A, below.

[62] For UNOMIG's full mandate see UN Security Council Resolution 937, 21 July 1994.

[63] Most recently on 31 March 2006, through 15 October 2006, Resolution 1666.

[64] The first round of talks between the parties took place in Geneva, November-December 1993.

[65] Since 1997, the Secretary-General's special representative has been based in Tbilisi, chairing the Geneva Process and heading UNOMIG.

the OSCE[66] and the Group of Friends of the Secretary-General.[67] In 1997, a Coordinating Council and three working groups on the non-resumption of violence, the return of refugees and IDPs, and economic issues were established within the broader Geneva framework. The Coordinating Council last met in May 2006, after a gap of over five years.[68] Since then the working groups on security, and on refugees and IDPs, have only met once each. The Coordinating Council failed to reconvene in August due to the violence in upper Kodori Gorge.

Parallel to the UN framework, Russia has pursued independent initiatives. In March 2003, the Russian and then Georgian presidents – Putin and Shevardnadze – signed an agreement in Sochi establishing three working groups: on the return of refugees and IDPs, initially to the Gali district of Abkhazia; on the restoration of the direct Sochi-Tbilisi railway line via Abkhazia; and on the renovation of the Inguri power station.[69] The Geneva and Sochi Processes have certain overlaps, but UNOMIG and Georgian government officials agree that the Sochi Process is subordinate to the Geneva one.[70]

C. THE RUSSIAN FACTOR

Both sides believe that war and peace depend on external actors. "We are geopolitical hostages", an Abkhaz NGO activist told Crisis Group.[71] The conflicts in the South Caucasus are regarded as aspects of a broader rivalry for influence in the region between Russia and the U.S.

Georgia believes that the conflict is primarily about Russia's ambitions to acquire territory and retain hegemony in its "near abroad".[72] Explaining the source of the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, President Saakashvili recently stated:

> These are not ethnic conflicts. These are political conflicts imposed on us. They are linked to an attempt by post-Soviet forces, the remnants of the old Soviet imperial mentality, to seize control of at least some of the neighbouring territories – Georgia was the most attractive piece to gobble up – or, at the very least, to create problems for Georgia. In the past they succeeded in doing this.[73]

Georgian policy makers generally see the conflict as a consequence of a deliberate "divide and rule" policy designed in Moscow.[74] In addition to President Putin's statements about the definition of a universal principle on self-determination aspirations, Russia has taken other measures against Georgia, not all directly linked to Abkhazia, including water and wine import bans, closure of the main road linking the two countries and regular statements by government and media sources critical of Georgia's domestic policies.

Georgia accuses Russia of providing essential support to Abkhazia, giving it political and economic encouragement for its state building project. It considers that Russia has continued to play a negative role on the ground through involvement in negotiations mechanisms or peacekeeping. An influential Georgian parliamentarian told Crisis Group: "Russia is here just to steal our territories".[75] On 17 July 2006, the Georgian parliament passed a resolution calling on the government to "start procedures…immediately to suspend the so-called peacekeeping operations in Abkhazia" (and South Ossetia), claiming that they "represent one of the major obstacles on the way to solve these conflicts peacefully".[76]

Russia claims it is playing a humanitarian and pacifying role – if it was not present, the Abkhaz would be doomed.[77] The defence minister has described the peacekeepers as "the principal restraining force in the region".[78] In July

[66] The OSCE maintains a human rights officer in Sukhumi to promote confidence-building measures.
[67] Created in 1993, the Group includes representatives of the U.S., Germany, UK, France and Russia.
[68] The Abkhaz stopped participating in Coordinating Council meetings since the Kodori Gorge fighting in 2001. In an attempt to revive negotiations the Group of Friends created a new format in February 2003, Geneva Two, also with three working groups.
[69] "Final Statement on Meeting of the President of the Russian Federation Mr V. Putin and the President of Georgia Mr E. Shevardnadze", 7 March 2003.
[70] Crisis Group interviews, UNOMIG and the Georgian ministry for conflict resolution, April-July 2006. Security Council Resolution 1524 states that the Geneva Process is "complemented by the working groups established in Sochi".
[71] Crisis Group interview, Center for Humanitarian Programs staff, Sukhumi, July 2006.
[72] On Russia's "near abroad" strategy in Georgia see, for example, Jaba Devdariani, "Georgia and Russia: the Troubled Road to Accommodation", in Coppieters and Legvold, op. cit., pp.153-204.
[73] President's speech to the nation 16 July 2006, as translated by BBC Monitoring.
[74] U.S. based commentators tend to support this analysis. Svante Cornell and Frederick Starr, "The Caucasus: A Challenge for Europe", Silk Road Paper, Washington DC, 2006, pp. 55-56.
[75] Crisis Group interview, member, Committee on Defence and Security, Georgian parliament, Tbilisi, July 2006.
[76] Resolution of the Georgian parliament on "Peacekeeping Forces Stationed in the Conflict Zones", unofficial translation, 17 July 2006, published in *Civil Georgia* at http://www.civil.ge /eng/print.php?id=13079.
[77] Statement of Russian Duma member, NATO Parliamentary Assembly meeting, Sochi, June 2006.
[78] Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov, 14 June 2006 statement, quoted in Sergei Blagov, "Georgia: Putin to Tbilisi

2006, the Duma passed a resolution authorising Russian troops to serve anywhere in defence of Russian citizens – presumably including those who reside permanently in Abkhazia or South Ossetia. Russia also values Abkhazia's economic advantages, including its deep-sea ports and tourist resorts, the rail transit it offers to Armenia, Turkey and Georgia and its potential as a pipeline route.[79]

Abkhazia does not deny it is aided by Russia but public opinion is divided on how far this should go. Some say, "Russia is the one and only country that helped us in time of need. Our future development is dependent on Russia's goodwill. Especially since Putin came to office he has shown the courage and foresight to assist us".[80] But others fear that Russia's commitment is superficial, that Abkhazia is a pawn in a broader political game with Georgia and the U.S., and that if Georgia and Russia became allies, Moscow might "sell out" Abkhazia.[81]

Meanwhile Abkhaz and Russian observers charge that the U.S., Turkey, and several European countries are arming and training Georgia for an offensive. They consider that Georgia is acting primarily in U.S. interests and that its rapprochement with NATO and potential membership are excuses for U.S. bases in Georgia.[82]

III. LIFE IN ABKHAZIA

Although they are dependent on Russia for military and economic security, Abkhazia's leaders seek international recognition of Abkhaz statehood. They claim Abkhazia has the political, economic, defence, legal and democratic capabilities of a modern state. Any dependence on Russia is due to the nature of the unsolved conflict with Georgia, lack of international recognition and CIS economic restrictions imposed in 1996. Should these conditions be lifted, it would be able to follow in the footsteps of other newly recognised countries as an equal member of the international community.[83]

Most Georgian policy makers and analysts retort that all institutions developed in Abkhazia since the expulsion of the Georgian population are illegitimate. They scoff at the idea of an economically self-sustainable, militarily self-defensible, democratic and independent Abkhazia. Such a project, of course, would violate Georgian territorial integrity and the rights of the displaced; but Georgians also believe Moscow would never allow Abkhazia to develop independently.[84] Georgia accuses Russia of creeping annexation by providing political, diplomatic and economic support to Sukhumi, granting a large majority of Abkhaz Russian passports and Russian pensions and allowing them to use the Russian rouble as their local currency.[85]

Abkhazia de facto authorities deny any intention of joining Russia, explaining: "To Russia we proposed not associate membership, but an associate relationship between two sovereign states. Like the USA and the Marshall Islands. The Islands are part of the UN but have U.S. bases on their soil. This is what will happen eventually".[86] The current de facto authorities – elected in 2005 despite Moscow's opposition – are particularly wary of Russia's attempts to intervene in Abkhazia's internal affairs. "Our relations with Russia have to be very tight. It would be without perspective to ignore all

– Our Peacekeepers are Staying Put", *EurasiaNet*, 27 June 2006.

[79] For more on Russia's real and perceived interests in Abkhazia see Oksana Antonenko, "Frozen Uncertainty: Russia and the Conflict over Abkhazia", in Coppieters and Legvold, op. cit., pp. 205-270.

[80] Crisis Group interview, de facto presidential administration staff, Sukhumi, May 2006.

[81] Crisis Group interviews, Head of Central Elections Committee, Sukhumi, May 2006; head, Abkhaz NSC, Sukhumi, May 2006.

[82] Crisis Group interviews, Russian Duma members, Sochi, June 2006; head, Abkhaz NSC, Sukhumi, July 2006.

[83] See de facto President Bagapsh's "Plan of the Abkhaz side on Comprehensive Resolution of the Georgian-Abkhazian Conflict – Key to the Future", May 2006.

[84] Crisis Group interview, member, Committee on Defence and Security, Georgian parliament, Tbilisi, July 2006. Nicu Popescu writes that Abkhazia and other secessionist entities have "outsourced" many functions to Russia, "'Outsourcing' *de facto* Statehood: Russia and Secessionist Entities in Georgia and Moldova", CEPS Policy Brief, no.109, July 2006.

[85] "The reality is that an annexation of territory of our country is underway", quoting President Saakashvili in "Putin-Saakashvili Meeting Reveals More Disagreements, Despite Willingness to Talk", *Civil Georgia*, 14 June 2006.

[86] Crisis Group interview, de facto Abkhazia minister of foreign affairs, Sukhumi, May 2006.

their resources….But we want independence, and we do not want to lose that. Nobody can demand anything of us, not even Russia who wanted to appoint our president".[87]

A. TODAY'S INHABITANTS

Demography is a highly political issue. The Abkhaz cannot base their claims on the will of the majority on the eve of the war, because they were then a minority in Abkhazia.[88] Since 1993 the demographic structure has shifted dramatically. The Abkhaz claim today to be the majority, though some Georgian observers doubt this.[89]

Abkhazia's population is certainly much less than it was. De facto state officials like to quote a total population of 320,000, including 110,000 Abkhaz, but this sounds unrealistically high on both counts.[90] In January 2005 the electoral roll, probably a more reliable guide to the numbers of those at least of voting age, comprised 129,127 individuals, suggesting an overall population between 157,000 and 190,000.[91] In 1998 a UNDP needs assessment mission estimated the population between 180,000 and 220,000.[92] With less than half its pre-war population, vast tracts of Abkhazia, especially south of Sukhumi, feel empty and desolate. North of that city, settlements are much more populated, especially during the summer season.

1. "Citizenship" and documentation

Georgia considers all residents of Abkhazia its citizens, while they see themselves as Abkhaz citizens.[93] According to Abkhaz legislation,[94] dual citizenship is allowed for Russians and ethnic Abkhaz from other countries. Contrary to Georgian government claims, the de facto authorities state that nobody will be forced to take Abkhaz citizenship[95] and only the right to vote will be reserved for citizens.[96] But the rights and responsibilities of non-citizens (for instance, with respect to ownership of property, or entitlement to state benefits) must still be defined.[97]

Any Abkhaz who has been living abroad has the right to obtain citizenship. Abkhaz authorities estimate that some 700,000 ethnic Abkhaz and their descendants live in Turkey; others are in Syria, Jordan, Germany and Israel.[98] A law on repatriation was passed in 1993 and a committee on repatriation established. Abkhazia has nevertheless struggled to encourage many ethnic Abkhaz to return. No more than 1,000 are believed to have permanently resettled from Turkey.[99] Yet as a de facto official explained, "we need Abkhaz from the diaspora to return…it's a question of our survival. We would like 50,000 to come, and then we will not be so touchy about Georgian returnees".[100]

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[87] Ibid.

[88] The 1989 Soviet census put Abkhazia's population at 525,061: 239,872 ethnic Georgians (45.7 per cent), 93,267 ethnic Abkhaz (17.8 per cent), 76,541 ethnic Armenians (14.6 per cent), 74,914 ethnic Russians (14.3 per cent), and 40,467 others (7.6 per cent).

[89] According to a Georgian estimate, there are no more than 40,000 ethnic Abkhaz in Abkhazia and 70,000 Armenians. Crisis Group interview, analyst, Georgian ministry of defence, Tbilisi, July 2006. But the accuracy of Georgian figures is also doubtful.

[90] Crisis Group interviews, officials, Sukhumi, May 2006. It seems unlikely there are 20,000 more Abkhaz today than in 1989. A 2003 Abkhaz census found 94,597 Abkhaz (44.1 per cent), 44,869 Armenians (21 per cent), 40,443 Georgians (19 per cent), 23,420 ethnic Russians (11 per cent) and other ethnic groups representing 5 per cent of the total population of 214,016. However, many consider it unreliable because it was conducted on 14 January, the Russian "old new year", when allegedly many people where not at their usual residences. Crisis Group interview, director, Apsny Press, Sukhumi, May 2006.

[91] Crisis Group interviews, CEC head, Sukhumi, May 2006. The reliability of the voters list is not beyond question.

[92] "United Nations Needs Assessment Mission to Abkhazia, Georgia", UNDP, March 1998.

[93] See the Georgian citizenship law of 25 March 1993. "Speech Delivered by President Saakashvili at the meeting with members of the Supreme Council of Abkhazia", 10 September 2004, available at http://www.president.gov.ge/print_txt.php?id=152&l=E.

[94] In October 2005 the de facto Parliament passed a new law which defines who is eligible for citizenship, the procedure to obtain it, and the grounds for refusal. The UN has expressed concern that the law may be discriminatory, especially vis-à-vis persons of non-Abkhaz origin, including returnees.

[95] Crisis Group found no evidence to support Georgian claims that returnees are compelled on threat of expulsion to accept Abkhaz passports. For Georgian claims see Irakli Alasania, special representative of the Georgian president, statement to the UN Security Council, 26 January 2006, available at http://www.mfa.gov.ge/?lang_id=ENG.

[96] Crisis Group interview, head, NSC, Sukhumi, May 2006. The head of the Gali district told Crisis Group nobody would be forced to take the new passports but if they did not they would lose such citizenship rights as to vote and, potentially, to attend Abkhaz universities. He claimed ethnic Georgians are interested in the passports. Crisis Group interview, June 2006.

[97] Laws to regulate these questions do not yet exist. Crisis Group focus group discussion, local NGOs, Sukhumi, July 2006.

[98] Crisis Group interview, deputy head of the repatriation committee, Sukhumi, July 2006.

[99] Crisis Group interview, Ambassador of Turkey, Tbilisi, May 2006. The deputy head of the repatriation committee estimates that up to 3,000 have returned. Crisis Group interview, Sukhumi, July 2006.

[100] Crisis Group interview, official, de facto foreign ministry, Sukhumi, July 2006.

Only a few hundred people are believed to have received Abkhaz passports, primarily in Sukhumi.[101] They cannot be used for international travel as they are not issued by a recognised state authority, so serve primarily as identification documents. The de facto authorities had initially asked the UN for travel documents.[102] This required Georgian agreement, which was not forthcoming, so Abkhaz have been obtaining Russian passports, issued locally, since 2000.[103] Georgia accuses Russia of attempting to annex Abkhazia by "passportisation", while Abkhaz residents argue they have no choice but to accept the passports for travel. They are unwilling to use Georgian travel documents.[104]

The acceptance of Russian passports signifies a formal acceptance of citizenship that several Abkhaz described as "fictional". They are happy to accept the benefits Moscow offers without feeling any further obligation.[105] Russia may see it differently. Members of the Duma are making increasingly frequent statements underlining that ethnic Abkhaz with Russian passports are their citizens. In July 2006 the Russian foreign ministry warned Georgia that it would protect its citizens in Abkhazia "by all means at our disposal".[106]

The Abkhaz authorities do not permit free travel by Abkhaz to Georgia proper.[107] Permission must be applied for, with an explanation of purpose, from the de facto ministries of foreign affairs and security. One or two-day trips tend to be approved but authorisation for longer ones is difficult to obtain. NGO representatives allege that the decisions seem arbitrary.[108]

2. Georgian returns to Gali

The de facto authorities point to Gali district, the southernmost part of Abkhazia and a rich agricultural area for tea, citrus, hazelnuts and vegetables, as evidence of the intention to protect the rights of all citizens, including ethnic Georgians.[109] Before the war the district was almost entirely inhabited by ethnic Georgians.[110] It now has a significant returnee population. The de facto authorities consider that allowing this without a comprehensive peace settlement is a significant demonstration of goodwill.[111] The Georgian side does not consider the spontaneous, unorganised return as the start of an extensive and sustainable process. It says there are massive human rights violations in the district and the right to return in safety and dignity is not protected.[112] International observers agree that impediments to return include: continuing criminality; poor law enforcement; a bar on the return of former fighters; insufficient funds to reconstruct destroyed homes; uncertainty on language

[101] Crisis Group interview, official, NSC, Sukhumi, May 2006. Abkhaz passports are not yet being distributed in the Gali region. Russian passports are not easily available there, so most ethnic Georgians in Gali have Georgian or Soviet passports.

[102] Interview, de facto President Bagapsh, *Echo Moskvy*, 27 January 2005.

[103] This process accelerated after passage of the new Law on Citizenship by the Russian Duma in April 2002. Russian passports issued in Abkhazia are similar to those issued to Russian citizens abroad and do not include Russian residency registration (propiska). Crisis Group interviews, Sukhumi, May 2006.

[104] However some Georgian civil society representatives said they have assisted a few Abkhaz in obtaining Georgian passports. Crisis Group interviews, NGOs in Zugdidi and Tbilisi, April-June 2006.

[105] For example, almost no ethnic Abkhaz voted in the 2004 Russian presidential elections, pay Russian taxes or serve in the Russian military. Crisis Group focus group, local NGOs, Sukhumi, July 2006.

[106] Interview with Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov, "Don't touch russians", *Kommersant*, 20 July 2006.

[107] Gali district residents can cross to Georgia more easily but must pay 50 roubles. Customs fees are also levied on any goods they are "importing" or "exporting" from Abkhazia into/out of Georgia proper. Crisis Group interviews, Gali town, June 2006.

[108] Crisis Group interviews, representatives, international NGOs, Sukhumi, May 2006.

[109] The district's 2006 budget is 7.5 million Russian roubles ($300,000) but 30 per cent is tax revenue forwarded to the centre. The remaining 70 per cent pays salaries, pensions and administration expenses, approximately equally at the district and village levels. The budget does not include allocations from the central budget, which tend to be ad hoc, dependent on particular needs. Crisis Group interviews, head and deputy head, Gali district administration, Gali town, June 2006.

[110] In Gali, ethnic Georgians were 96 per cent of the population (total 79,688) before the war, Russians 3.1 per cent and ethnic Abkhaz 0.8 per cent. The ethnic Georgians in Gali are part of the Mingrelian sub-group with their own distinct spoken language. During the war, almost all were displaced. Local NGOs explain that return has been tolerated in Gali because its population is homogenous, most were considered to have been neutral in 1992-1993, and they are needed to cultivate the highly productive land. Crisis Group interview, local NGO representative, Sukhumi, July 2006.

[111] The de facto president of Abkhazia emphasised that many fewer Serbs have been able to return to their original homes in Kosovo than have Georgians in Abkhazia. Crisis Group interview, Sukhumi, May 2006. In Kosovo, where return is internationally facilitated, some 14,000 IDPs are registered as having returned permanently or temporarily. "Belgrade, Pristina and UN Sign Protocol on Return of Displaced People", UNHCR News Stories, 9 June 2006.

[112] For example, in January 2006, Irakli Alasania, the Georgian president's special representative, told the UN Security Council, "on a daily basis we witness severe violations of fundamental rights and direct threats to the spontaneously returned population", available at http://www.mfa.gov.ge/.

issues; and unwillingness to live under Abkhaz de facto rule.[113]

The sides have agreed that IDP return is to be implemented first in Gali, then in other parts of Abkhazia.[114] While return began in 1994, new violence in 1998 forced some 30,000-40,000 to flee a second time.[115] Yet, families soon came back, initially many commuting daily across the ceasefire line or migrating seasonally to tend fields. Today the district has an estimated population of 45,000.[116] Repossession of land and other property does not appear to pose the obstacles it does for returnees in other parts of Abkhazia (see below).[117] In its biannual Security Council resolutions, the UN urges "the Abkhaz leadership to address seriously the need for dignified return of IDPs and refugees, including their security and human rights concerns".[118] The High Commissioner for Refugees is the international lead agency assisting return, with the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC).[119]

The security situation in Gali has been notoriously poor.[120] Tbilisi criticises the Abkhaz and the CISPKF for failing to assure the local population's safety and prevent human rights abuses. The de facto authorities blame poor security primarily on Georgian "partisans", while others in the district explain that the porous "border" between Georgia and Abkhazia provides ample scope for criminals to commit crimes on one side and seek shelter on the other. Most people interviewed in Gali believe both Georgian and Abkhaz criminal networks are involved. As the prosecutor of the region explained, "criminals know no ethnic groups and no borders".[121] Criminality tends to peak during the nut and citrus harvest seasons – when people have money or produce at home.

According to several interlocutors in Gali, the security situation has improved since February 2006.[122] "Previously it seemed like something happened every day, a robbery, a killing, a murder, but in the past six months the situation has changed".[123] The Gali prosecutor traces this to better cooperation with the local population, effective information exchange with Zugdidi law enforcement and some improvement in the capabilities of the Gali police.[124] International observers consider that regular mobile road patrols and CISPKF bus escorts, increased cooperation between local police and the population and improved police capacities have all contributed to create a more secure environment.[125]

Nevertheless, understaffing and lack of resources continue to hamper local law enforcement. Few ethnic Georgians serve in local law enforcement bodies. There have been no cases of ethnic Georgians winning court cases against

[113] Crisis Group interviews, local and international NGO staff, Gali and Zugdidi, June 2006. "Report of UNDP-led Feasibility Mission to Gali District and Adjacent Areas of Abkhazia, Georgia", UNDP, April 2004, p. 23.

[114] "Statement on the Meetings of Putin, President of the Russian Federation and Shevardnadze, President of Georgia", 7 March 2003.

[115] It also destroyed some 1,500 homes and infrastructure, including some that had been recently rehabilitated with international funding. It is generally believed that in May 1998 illegal Georgian armed formations staged attacks into the Gali district. In response the Abkhaz militia launched a large sweep that drove out not only the attackers but also the returnees. Homes and infrastructure were deliberately burned and looted. "Report of the Joint Assessment Mission to the Gali District", 20-24 November 2000, UN, pp. 5, 13.

[116] These are the figures usually quoted by UNHCR and referred to by the head of the Gali district administration. They are contested by the de facto authorities, who claim at least 65,000 have returned. The figure is difficult to determine, as many IDPs shuttle between the Gali district and Georgia proper to take advantage of IDP allowances and other social services provided by the Georgian state. The sides have agreed on the need for a verification exercise with UNHCR help but have not agreed on details. Crisis Group interview, deputy head of administration, Gali district, Gali town, June 2006.

[117] Comparatively little property was seized. Returnees generally have pre-war deeds sufficient to prove and regain full ownership. Crisis Group interview, UNHCR staff, Gali, June 2006.

[118] Most recently Resolution 1666, 31 March 2006.

[119] After having lost substantial investment in assistance due to the 1998 violence, UNHCR adopted a cautious approach. In 2001 it resumed small activities but only decided in 2005 to implement a new comprehensive program. See its "Strategic Directions: Promoting Confidence Building Measures for Displaced and War Effected Persons in Abkhazia". Others assisting in return include UNDP, UNOMIG, ICRC, World Food Programme (WFP), Halo Trust, Premiere Urgence and Action Contre la Faim. The European Commission is a major donor to UNDP and UNOMIG.

[120] According to the 13 January 2006 report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Abkhazia in 2005, "the military situation in the Gali district remained generally stable but affected by violent incidents", including seventeen shootings, eight killings, six abductions and 27 armed robberies.

[121] Crisis Group interview, prosecutor, Gali District, Gali town, June 2006.

[122] The 26 June 2006 report of the UN Secretary-General states that "the security situation in Gali was generally calm". This is supported by Crisis Group interviews, NGO activists, Gali District, Gali town, June 2006.

[123] Crisis Group interview, school director, lower Gali district, June 2006.

[124] Crisis Group interview, prosecutor, Gali District, Gali town, June 2006.

[125] Crisis Group interview, international monitors, Sukhumi, July 2006.

Abkhaz.[126] To strengthen local law enforcements and help improve security, UNOMIG and the Georgian side have proposed the deployment of a civilian police mission on both sides of the ceasefire line. Since 2003 UN police have been present on the Georgian-controlled side. But de facto Abkhaz authorities oppose their deployment in Gali, because it would undermine the authority of their own political and security structures.[127]

The UN has repeatedly requested the opening of a sub-office in Gali town of its Human Rights Office in Abkhazia, Georgia (HROAG), to collect and review local human rights complaints but the Abkhaz also see this as an attempt to undermine their authority in the district. They suggest that rather then a UN office, local NGOs should be supported to open a human rights centre.[128] Domestic NGOs in Gali have warmed to the idea, but state that for such a centre to be effective, they would require strong support from local authorities, Sukhumi-based NGOs specialising in human rights and rule of law and international human rights experts.

Key officials in the district government are virtually all ethnic Abkhaz, though their support staff are ethnic Georgian.[129] Some residents feel they are discriminated against,[130] yet seventeen of eighteen heads of village administrations are ethnic Georgians.[131]

B. POWER STRUCTURES

Under Abkhazia's 1994 constitution, a president, elected with his vice president for a five-year term, heads the de facto republic. In 1994 parliament elected Vladislav Ardzinba to the presidency. He won the first direct polls on 3 October 1999 without an opponent.[132] The president appoints the heads of the twelve cabinet ministries, including a prime minister, has the power to set parliamentary elections, and to appoint and dismiss heads of executive authorities in districts and cities. At the district and village level, there are elected councils and self-appointed councils of elders.[133] None of these institutions are recognised by Georgia or the international community.

The parliament is officially called the People's Assembly. Elections to it were held in 1996 and 2001. Its 36 members are elected for five years in single-seat constituencies. At the last elections, three ethnic Armenians, three ethnic Russians, three ethnic Georgians and one Kabardin were among those elected. Even though many parliamentarians are linked to political movements and parties, they tend to vote independently.[134]

Abkhazia claims to have a democratic multi-party system in which freedom of expression is guaranteed. However, competition is mainly between ethnic Abkhaz elites, with only limited participation from other groups, and almost none from ethnic Georgians – whose three elected parliamentarians are far fewer than their estimated 45,000 population would entitle them to.[135]

1. The 2004-2005 elections and their aftermath

The contested presidential elections of 2004-2005 set a surprising new tone for Abkhaz political life.[136] Five candidates stood for office[137] and the race was close

[126] Crisis Group interview, prosecutor, Gali District, Gali town, June 2006. A local lawyer explained that any Georgian who received a favourable court ruling would be "run out of town" by the accused and his family/supporters. The police would be unable to protect him. Crisis Group interview, Gali District, Gali town, June 2006.

[127] Crisis Group interview, spokesperson, presidential administration, Sukhumi, May 2006. Abkhaz believe the Georgian side has created the security problem to discredit their authority. They believe UN police or human rights monitors are likely to cause an increase in security violations; Georgians might initiate criminal acts to show a deteriorating security situation. Crisis Group focus group discussion, local NGOs, Sukhumi, July 2006.

[128] Crisis Group focus group discussion, local NGOs, Sukhumi, July 2006; Crisis Group interviews, Abkhaz parliamentarian and NGO activists, Sukhumi, May and July 2006.

[129] The heads of the district and regional administrations and the district police, the prosecutor, etc., are ethnic Abkhaz, originally from other districts. However, in all state structures lower-level staff, including secretaries and assistants, tend to be ethnic Georgian. Much Mingrelian is heard in the halls of administration buildings, while all official communications are written in Russian. Crisis Group observations, Gali town, June 2006.

[130] Crisis Group interviews, NGO activists, Gali town, June 2006. Asked why none of his assistants or investigators were ethnic Georgian, the district prosecutor said he had looked for Georgians but found none with a valid university diploma, that is, from Sukhumi or a Russian university. Crisis Group interview, June 2006.

[131] Crisis Group interview, head of Gali district administration, Gali town, June 2006.

[132] In 1999 219,000 were on the voters list; Ardzinba won 190,013 of the 192,175 votes. Crisis Group interview, head, CEC, Sukhumi, May 2006.

[133] The head of the district administration is appointed by the de facto president from those elected to the district assembly. There is an elected village assembly, whose head is appointed by the district from among the elected members. "Report of UNDP-Led Feasibility Mission", op, cit., pp. 20-21.

[134] There are no caucuses in the parliament. Crisis Group interview, member, Abkhazia parliament, Sukhumi, May 2006.

[135] The same is true for ethnic Armenians.

[136] Neither Georgia nor any other state recognised the elections. "UN Considers Presidential Elections in Abkhazia Illegitimate", Caucasian Knot News, 1 October 2004; "OSCE Chairman Concerned at Holding of Abkhaz 'Presidential Elections'", OSCE CiO Statements, Sofia, 4 October 2004.

[137] Eight candidates initially intended to stand. Former Sukhumi mayor Nodar Khashba (representing the "Edinaya Abkhazia"

between the top two. The situation evolved dramatically as the Central Election Commission (CEC) issued contradictory results after the 3 October vote.[138] Following lengthy deliberation, it ruled on 11 October that the opposition candidate, Sergey Bagapsh, had won a first round majority,[139] but Prime Minister Raul Khajimba refused to admit defeat. As the dispute entered the courts and the parliament, supporters of Bagapsh and Khajimba took to the streets, amid talk of civil war.[140] Hours before Bagapsh's planned inauguration on 6 December, the two sides resolved the crisis by agreeing on new elections in January 2005 for which they would present a common ticket, with Bagapsh standing for president and Khajimba for vice president. Political choice was sacrificed for stability. On 12 January, according to the CEC, 75,733 of 129,127 registered voters cast ballots, with the Bagapsh-Khajimba ticket receiving 69,328 (92 per cent).[141]

Abkhaz look back on the tense election as a sign of their ability to resolve conflict within the law.[142] It is perhaps more significant that it showed Abkhazia's initial resistance – but ultimate surrender – to Moscow's interference. Observers had predicted an easy victory for Khajimba, whom the Kremlin openly backed,[143] but many were perturbed when the 30 September 2004 "independence day" celebrations in Sukhumi were openly used by Russia Duma members and singers to campaign for him.[144] Many voters backed Bagapsh because they were suspicious of Moscow. The Abkhaz were all the more shocked when Moscow continued to support Khajimba after Bagapsh was proclaimed the winner.[145] Moscow sealed the border on 1 December and opened it only after First Deputy Procurator-General Vladimir Kolesnikov and Duma Deputy Speaker Sergei Baburin brokered the 6 December compromise.[146]

The polls did demonstrate a new political diversity. Having initially concentrated on a common nationalist struggle for recognition, political elites had shown little inclination to develop alternative programs. De facto President Ardzinba, the wartime leader, was politically untouchable

movement) and the former interior minister, Aleksandr Ankvab, were rejected for failing to fulfil residency and language requirements. Valeri Arshba, then de facto vice president, withdrew. The five candidates on the ballot were: prime minister Raul Khajimba; Sergei Bagapsh, the director general of the Chernomorenergo (Black Sea Energy) firm; de facto foreign minister Sergei Shamba; former de facto prime minister Anri Jergenia; and Yakub Lakoba, the People's Party leader.

[138] According to the results released by the CEC on 4 October, Khajimba won in the first round with 52.84 per cent, while Bagapsh received 33.58 per cent. Bagapsh, however, insisted he had a majority. A day later the CEC released official preliminary results, excluding the Gali district (whose predominantly Georgian population overwhelmingly supports Bagapsh), which put Bagapsh ahead with 38,000 votes to 29,000. The turnout was estimated at 80,000 of 122,564 registered voters. Inal Khashig, "Abkhazia Election Cliff-Hanger", Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR), Caucasus Reporting Service no. 256, 6 October 2004. Khajimba demanded a rerun.

[139] The CEC on 11 October announced Bagapsh as the winner according to final results, with 43,336 out of 86,525 votes, 50.08 per cent. The chairman, Sergey Smyr, disagreed and resigned. Khajimba appealed to the Supreme Court. Former President Ardzinba criticised the decision as "illegal and absurd", made under the threats from Bagapsh's supporters.

[140] One person was killed in the clashes. "Ardzinba: 'Crawling Coup' Takes Place in Abkhazia", *Civil Georgia*, 12 October 2004; Liz Fuller, "Abkhaz Election Deadlock Continues", RFE/RL, Caucasus Report, vol. 7, no. 39, 14 October 2004; Inal Khashig, "Abkhazia Still Leaderless", IWPR, Caucasus Reporting Service, no. 260, 4 November 2004.

[141] Crisis Group interviews, head, CEC, Sukhumi, May 2006. See also Inal Khashig, "Bagapsh Wins Abkhaz Marathon", IWPR, Caucasus Reporting Service no. 270, 19 January 2005.

[142] Without the revolutionary upheavals witnessed in Tbilisi in 2003. Crisis Group interviews, NSC head, Sukhumi, May 2006.

[143] Putin met with Khajimba at the end of August 2005, and their pictures together dominated billboards. In violation of Abkhazia's election law, visiting Russian politicians campaigned for Khajimba. Vladimir Zhirinovsky, the Duma vice speaker and a leader of the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR), reportedly announced in Sukhumi that Moscow would close the border and declare a blockade if Khajimba was not elected. Crisis Group interviews in Abkhazia, May and June 2006; See also, "Russia Threatens to Blockade Abkhazia", *Civil Georgia*, 1 December 2004.

[144] Allegedly a Russian singer provoked the audience by calling out as he came on stage: "Hello, Ajara!" (Ajara is a completely different part of Georgia), Crisis Group interview, foreign journalist in attendance, October 2004. At an extraordinary parliament session on 1 October, with the candidates and campaign staff, the CEC, the prosecutor general, the acting prime minister and a Supreme Council judge, the "independence day" celebrations were condemned as a flagrant violation of sovereignty. Crisis Group interview, OSCE official, Tbilisi, May 2006.

[145] On the morning of 4 October, the Russian foreign ministry issued a statement describing the "calm and democratic nature" of the elections. Soon thereafter Ardzinba dismissed Khajimba as prime minister and named Nodar Khashba, then an employee of the Russian emergency situations ministry, as acting prime minister. Khashba said Moscow would not recognise just any winner, and the president must be a "worthy" politician. He also said that Putin had sent him to stabilise the situation until the new president was inaugurated. "Abkhazia elects new president in repeat polls", *Civil Georgia*, 11 January 2005.

[146] Local NGOs deeply involved in the process claim a mediator was needed to avoid civil war. Another, such as the UN, could have taken on the role, but only the Russians presented themselves. Crisis Group focus group discussion, local NGO representatives, Sukhumi, July 2006. For more on Russia's involvement, see Oksana Antonenko, "Frozen Uncertainty: Russia and the Conflict over Abkhazia", in Coppieters and Legvold, op. cit., pp. 258-267.

until his health seriously deteriorated in 2003. By 2004 two distinct blocks had formed. The opposition included the public movements Amtsakhara,[147] Aitaira[148] and Yedinaya Abkhazia.[149] The Akhiatsa movement spearheaded the pro-government coalition supporting Khajimba.[150] Many local observers explain Bagapsh's success as a protest vote against Ardzinba's regime, which was perceived as corrupt and passive.[151]

Bagapsh has firmly established himself as the entity's uncontested ruler, and political life has regained a certain normality. After the 6 December agreement, the parliament amended the presidency law to give the vice president responsibility for the police, defence, security and foreign policy,[152] but Khajimba has not asserted this authority.[153]

2. Armed forces

The Abkhaz have a strong defence culture, though the standing army is estimated to be only a few thousand.[154] Abkhaz explain they cannot afford a larger peacetime force but should tension rise, "every Abkhaz" will take up arms. An estimated 15,000 to 25,000 reservists and members of self-defence groups train three or four times a year.[155] They are authorised to keep registered weapons at home. The military is primarily a ground force but includes small sea and air units. Recently an anti-terrorist centre was created under the de facto ministry of interior.[156] The de facto minister of finance estimates that 35 per cent of the entity's budget is spent on the military and police.[157]

Georgian sources believe that if fighting resumed, Russia "would do everything" in support of Abkhazia.[158] They consider that it is increasingly involved in Abkhazia's military and security structures. The de facto defence minister and chief of staff are ethnic Russians, and the navy head is an ethnic Pole.[159] Authorities in Tbilisi say military exercises are controlled and financed by Russia and regularly accuse Moscow of supplying and training the armed forces.[160] The Abkhaz deny all this, saying they bought what they have on the free market.[161] They do admit to having received some five sea cutters from Russia and speedboats from the Abkhaz diaspora in Greece.[162] Georgian security analysts, however, allege that Russia is providing much more sophisticated assistance.[163]

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[147] Amtsakhara was founded in 1999 to represent former combatants in the conflict. Created to support Ardzinba, it went into opposition after its political secretary, Gari Ayba, was murdered on 9 June 2004.

[148] Aytayra (Revival), was founded in 1999 by seven important activists; it was openly in opposition to Ardzinba and aimed to reform the political system and develop clearer separation and balance of powers.

[149] Yedinnaya Abkhazia (United Abkhazia) was established on 25 March 2004, headed by Raul Mikvabia. During the 2004 elections it initially supported Shamba, later Bagapsh.

[150] The Akhiatsa political movement was created in May 2003. Its program focuses on the development of business and agriculture and implementation of reforms in education and science.

[151] Crisis Group interviews, head, NSC, Shukhumi, May 2006; and head, Apsny Press, Shukhumi, May 2006.

[152] Liz Fuller, "Waiting to Exhale in Abkhazia", RFE/RL, Caucasus Report vol.8, no.3, 21 January 2005.

[153] Crisis Group interviews, secretary, NSC, Sukhumi, May 2006; head, Apsny Press, Sukhumi, May 2006; and chairman, Abkhazia parliament, Sukhumi, May 2006.

[154] 1,500, according to International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), *The Military Balance 2005-2006* (London, 2005) p.423; but 3,000, according to Anna Matveeva and Duncan Hiscock (eds.), *The Caucasus Armed and Divided* (Saferworld, April 2003), p.106. Abkhaz officials claim only 1,000. Crisis Group interview, official, NSC, Sukhumi, May 2006.

[155] Lower figure based on Crisis Group interview, secretary, NSC, Sukhumi, May 2006. Higher figure in Matveeva and Hiscock, op. cit., April 2003, p.106. Georgian estimates of reservists are much lower, some 4,000. Crisis Group interview, analyst, Georgian ministry of defence, Tbilisi, July 2006.

[156] Some 200 are estimated to serve in this unit. Crisis Group interview, analyst, Georgian ministry of defence, Tbilisi, July 2006. The centre's aim is to combat all forms of terrorism, including, but not limited to, terrorist attacks from Georgia. Crisis Group interview, de facto minister of defence of Abkhazia, Sukhumi, July 2006.

[157] Crisis Group interview, de facto minister of finance, Sukhumi, May 2006.

[158] Crisis Group interview, analyst, Georgian ministry of defence, Tbilisi, July 2006. The same source claims the Abkhaz could resist a Georgian offensive for two to three weeks on their own but would then need Russian support.

[159] The Abkhaz de facto defence minister, Sultan Sosnaliev, is from the Kabardino-Balkaria Republic (Russian Federation); he served in the same post during the 1992-1993 conflict. The chief of staff is General Major Anatoly Zaitsev, the former deputy commander of the Trans-Baikal (Russian) Military District. The navy head Alexander Voinsky, served as deputy secretary of the Abkhaz NSC. Crisis Group interview, senior official, Georgian ministry of interior, Tbilisi, July 2006. See also, "Newspaper: Russian officers to get key Abkhazia defence posts", *Civil Georgia*, 9 February 2005.

[160] Crisis Group interview, senior official, Georgian ministry of interior, Tbilisi, July 2006.

[161] Crisis Group interview, de facto minister of defence of Abkhazia, Sukhumi, July 2006.

[162] Crisis Group interview, official, NSC, Sukhumi, May 2006; "New supplies in the army of Abkhazia", *Caucasus Press*, 6 June 2006. "Artillery guns for uncontrolled ZU-23 missiles mounted on Abkhazian speedboats", Interpressnews, 7 June 2006. Guliko Baladze, "The Abkhazs are also supplied with weapons by Greeks," *Akhali Taoba*, 29 June 2006, p.7 (in Georgian).

[163] Crisis Group interview, senior official, Georgian ministry of interior, Tbilisi, July 2006. Russian officials have been

Georgia also regularly accuses Abkhazia of forcibly recruiting returnees from the Gali region into the armed forces. Sukhumi-based authorities categorically deny this, explaining that all citizens are obliged to serve, but no one is forcibly recruited.[164] The head of the Gali district administration stated that twenty young men from the district went into the army in 2005.[165]

3. NGOs and the media

About 200 NGOs are registered in Abkhazia but only about 30 have regular programs and activities.[166] A core group of politicised civil society organisations exist, several led by intellectuals who have been activists since the nationalist movement of the late 1980s. During the elections, some 200 activists formed the League of Voters for Fair Elections to monitor and report developments. Civil society organisations have mobilised citizens around civic duties and responsibilities and helped produce new political leaders. The director of the NGO AIS (Association of Invalid Support), created to mobilise invalids and protect their interests, was elected to parliament in 2005. Groups have successfully lobbied local authorities for changes in laws and policies.[167]

Civil society activists have also become key channels of communication, information sharing and dialogue between Georgians and Abkhaz. The Abkhaz NGO activists who take part in such activities remain advocates of a democratic, plural but also independent Abkhazia.[168] In Gali, a community of young NGO activists serves as a bridge between Zugdidi and Sukhumi, Georgia and Abkhazia.

Television is the main information source. State television and radio broadcast only three to four hours a day. Two independent TV stations function in Sukhumi but lack resources. Access to Russian and Georgian TV varies across the entity. Print media (mostly weekly) is a well-developed forum for political debate. Those which tend to be close to the current government include: *Nuzhnaya Gazeta*, *Chegemskaya Pravda*, *Echo Abkhazii*, as well as the government's *Respublika Abkhazia* and *Apsny*. *Novyi Den*, a new weekly close to pro-Khajimba forces, and *Forum* tend to be critical of Bagapsh.

C. ECONOMICS AND TRADE

The economic damage from the war is estimated at $11 billion in Sukhumi, and economic restrictions imposed by the CIS on 19 January 1996 have stunted rehabilitation and development.[169] Much of southern Abkhazia remains derelict. Until 2000, men of military age were not allowed to cross the northern border into Russia, and access to Georgia was almost nonexistent; land, sea and air communications with the outside world were blocked, and import and export of goods was illegal.[170]

The situation changed when Russia began to allow greater freedom of movement across its southern border. In December 2002 rail traffic resumed between Sukhumi and Sochi. In April 2006 Russia took an additional step to liberalise travel, declaring that foreign citizens would also be authorised to cross into Abkhazia.[171] Since the end of the war, cargo tankers from Turkey have been trading informally in and out of Sukhumi.[172] Today Abkhazia is

denying any such deployment since 2003 but Georgian sources allege that the S300 air defence system is installed in the Gudauta base, which was allegedly closed in 2001 to meet Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty (CFE) commitments. Russia's deputy foreign minister stated in May 2006 that four helicopters and 130 soldiers from CISPKF are there, but no sophisticated anti-air defence system. Georgians demand international monitoring of the base. The Abkhaz chief of the general staff, Anatoly Zaitsev, also denies new armaments in Gudauta. "Georgia's breakaway Abkhazia says no Russian weapons delivery Sokhumi", *Caucasus Press*, 7 July 2006. There are rumours that Russia supplies weapons and equipment in exchange for Abkhaz land or hotels.

[164] Crisis Group interview, de facto minister of defence, Sukhumi, July 2006.

[165] Crisis Group interview, head, Gali district administration, Gali town, June 2006. International human rights observers believe any conscription problems are procedural or corruption related, rather then violent. Crisis Group interviews, Sukhumi, July 2006.

[166] Crisis Group interviews, NGO activists, Sukhumi, July 2006. The "2005 Directory of Non-Governmental/Civil Organisations of Abkhazia", published by the Open Club of NGOs with UN support, lists about 65 organisations.

[167] After the 2004-2005 elections, newly elected officials decided the respected state information agency, Apsny Press, should be closed. NGO and media activists demonstrated, and the government reversed itself. Crisis Group interview, director, Apsny Press, Sukhumi, May 2006.

[168] Communication to Crisis Group from Jonathan Cohen, Conciliation Resources.

[169] Crisis Group interviews, de facto Abkhazia ministers of finance and economy, Sukhumi, May 2006. Figures denoted in dollars ($) in this report refer to U.S. dollars.

[170] For more on the war's consequences and CIS restrictions, see Yulia Gumba and Tamaz Ketsba, op. cit., pp.159-168. During this time women carried out trade with Russia and Georgia, strengthening their role in traditional Abkhaz society.

[171] Russian government's resolution No.154 adopted in April 2006. The Georgian foreign ministry issued a sharp statement charging this violated fundamental principles of international law, and the Russian-Georgian 8 October 1993 agreement on border checkpoints. "Information for the Press", MFA of Georgia, 13 April 2006.

[172] Officially the maritime link between Turkey and Abkhazia is closed. The Turkish ambassador to Georgia was quoted as

slowly emerging from isolation, even though the economic restrictions remain in force. Resumed tourism is spearheading a tentative revival, but air and sea travel to the entity is still banned and Sukhumi's airport and seaport are closed.[173] Some Abkhaz policy makers consider an end to the economic restrictions as important as international recognition.[174] The Georgian leadership links the lifting of restrictions with breakthroughs on IDP return.[175]

1. Budget, finances and banking

Abkhazia has a small but growing budget. In 2005 state revenues were 709 million Russian roubles ($27 million) and expenses 696 million ($26.7 million).[176] The state budget for 2006 is 901 million roubles ($34 million).[177] In 2007, the de facto authorities forecast, it will be 1,200 million roubles ($46 million).[178] They deny reliance on budget deficits or external financial support or credits and claim the budget is based on locally collected revenue, including customs and taxes. In 2005 some 243 million roubles ($9.3 million) came from customs, the remainder from taxes. Customs are collected on the frontiers with Russia and Georgia and at the ports.[179]

Some 40 per cent of the budget goes to state salaries, 28 per cent to social services. Salaries range from 3,000 to 4,000 roubles ($115-$153) for the police, military and security services, to 1,500 to 2,000 roubles ($57-$77) for teachers and administrators. Abkhazia residents receive only "symbolic" pensions from Sukhumi (about $4 per month on average)[180] but get bigger pensions from the Russian state.[181] This contribution is worth $1.5 million per month to Abkhazia. Annual inflation is estimated at 10 to 12 per cent.[182]

2. Foreign assistance and investment

De facto authorities in Sukhumi do not appear to receive substantial direct budgetary support from the Russian Federation government.[183] Abkhazia does, however, get in-kind help from the Moscow municipality and the North Caucasus republics. For example, the governor of neighbouring Krasnodar Krai donated some 60 vehicles to the police. Buses were given to Sukhumi municipality by Adygean and other North Caucasus republics/municipalities. The Moscow government in June 2006 provided 200,000 tons of bitumen to assist road construction.[184] The Sukhumi-Psou road rehabilitation – at least 99 million roubles ($3.8 million) was financed by Russian sources.[185] For Georgian officials this is proof "Abkhazia is not a self-sufficient entity by any means".[186]

Until recently Abkhazia received little other international assistance.[187] All international aid goes through Tbilisi, and most is targeted at strengthening Georgian-Abkhaz ties. The European Commission is the largest donor, with projects worth some €25 million, of which €10 million

saying Turkey is ready to consider reopening it, Apsny Press, 2 June 2006. But in Tbilisi he added that Turkey supports Georgia's territorial integrity, and any such step would be taken only in agreement with it. "Tbilisi considers opening of Turkish-Abkhaz maritime link", *Civil Georgia*, 5 June 2006.

[173] Even the legal importation of medical supplies remains a problem, according to the head of office of an international NGO working on health issues. Crisis Group interview, Tbilisi, July 2006.

[174] Crisis Group interview, de facto Abkhazia presidential press secretary, Sukhumi, May 2006.

[175] Crisis Group interview, president of Georgia, Tbilisi, April 2006.

[176] "So-called parliament okays budget implementation report Sukhumi", Caucasus Press-Apsnipress, 6 June 2006. Revenues collected have increased by 10.1 per cent since 2004.

[177] There are extra budgetary funds worth approximately the same amount as the official budget, according to local NGO representatives interviewed by Crisis Group, Sukhumi, July 2006. The de facto prime minister said that for the entity's services to function effectively, a $200 million budget is needed. Crisis Group interview, Sukhumi, July 2006.

[178] Crisis Group interviews, de facto ministers of economy and finance, Sukhumi, May 2006.

[179] Turkish vessels use the port. Generally citrus is transported by land to Russia (50 million Russian roubles tax revenue in 2005) but wood, scrap metal and coal go by sea to Turkey. The tax on profit is 18 per cent, on goods and services/VAT 10 per cent, and the flat income tax is 10 per cent. Different tax levels exist for imports/exports depending on the goods. Large foreign investors get tax breaks. Crisis Group interview, de facto minister of finance, Sukhumi, May 2006.

[180] The head of the Abkhaz pension fund estimates that every month it disburses eight million Russian roubles ($320,000).

[181] Some 51,000 persons receive Abkhaz pensions and 27,000 Russian pensions. Russian pensions range from 1,200 to 1,600 Russian roubles per month ($48-$64). Crisis Group interview, Abkhaz pension fund, Sukhumi, July 2006.

[182] Crisis Group interview, de facto minister of finance, Sukhumi, May 2006.

[183] As mentioned, however, Russia gives Abkhazia $18 million per year through pension allocations – equal to more than half the annual state budget.

[184] Manana Mchedlishvili, "Moscow is surfacing the roads in Abkhazia", *Rezonansi*, 13 June 2006, p.3 (in Georgian).

[185] Crisis Group focus group discussion, local NGO activists, Sukhumi, July 2006.

[186] Crisis Group interview, high level official, Georgian ministry of interior, Tbilisi, July 2006.

[187] Apart from Abkhazia's unrecognised status, a serious concern for donors/implementing agencies is that the UN assesses the security threat in Abkhazia at level 4, similar to the West Bank. In the Gali district, UN staff travel outside the town in armoured vehicles. Several international interlocutors said this threat level no longer reflects realities. Crisis Group interviews, Sukhumi and Gali, May and June 2006.

is earmarked for rehabilitating the Inguri Hydro-Power Plant. The most ambitious EU program, which started in 2006, involves €4 million over three years to support rehabilitation and reconstruction in the conflict zone and adjoining areas and create conditions for repatriation and reintegration of IDPs and refugees. Three significant but smaller projects on the peace process and civil society development are also being implemented. In 2005 €4 million was allocated to European Commission Humanitarian Office (ECHO) projects providing the most vulnerable with food for work. In 2006 €2 million was available.[188] The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) is a much smaller player and careful not to give assistance that could be construed as supporting de facto structures.[189] The Norwegian, Swiss, Dutch, Swedish and UK governments are among the larger donors, providing funds through UN agencies and NGOs. The OSCE has funded confidence-building and civil society development.

Even though most donors are shifting from humanitarian to more sustainable rehabilitation and recovery assistance, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) continues to distribute food to nearly 9,000 people, run canteens with 2,000 beneficiaries and provide home care for some 1,000 homebound and bedridden elderly.[190]

Foreign investment is steadily increasing. The main investors are ethnic Abkhaz who made their money in Russia or Russians, who set up joint ventures.[191] Several have invested in agriculture or the nascent food processing industry. Russian investors have also signed long-term leases on several hotels and tourist complexes. The Russian mobile phone company Megaphone financed the start up of the local Aquaphone firm. Abkhaz from Turkey are also important investors. The Tkvarcheli coal mine is one of the biggest such joint ventures. Georgia regards all this investment as illegal, in clear violation of the 1996 CIS restrictions.

3. Agriculture and industry

Abkhazia is largely a rural zone of high mountains and narrow coastal plains. Most people are engaged in some form of subsistence agriculture, based on livestock, maize, and vegetable production. There are a few big farms, mainly around Gagra and Ochamchira, and minimal reliance on external inputs, machinery, fertilizer or pesticides.[192] Most agriculture and industry functions at a fraction of pre-war capacities.

Before the war traditional crops included tea, tobacco and citrus and tended to be grown in large collective farms, many now destroyed.[193] Efforts are being made to develop new crops such as corn, beans, vegetables, kiwi, khurma, grapes, and nuts, the last of which is an especially lucrative export. The de facto authorities' priority is production of high-quality export goods.[194] Food processing has yet to be developed. In 2005 a large company, "Fructova", was established to buy, package, and trade Abkhaz citrus but was unable to keep promises to growers to buy their harvest, much of which perished.[195]

Most of Abkhazia's trade is with Russia, but significant goods are also brought across from Georgia proper. Other important trading partners include Turkish businessmen, who are mainly interested in wood, coal, metal and fish. Allegedly Romania and Bulgaria exchange flour and benzene for timber.[196] External trade in 2005 was worth 3.5 billion roubles ($135 million).[197] Entrepreneurs have also been engaged in profitable export of scrap metal.

4. Tourism

A popular destination in Soviet times, Abkhazia expects tourism eventually to guarantee its economic self-sufficiency.[198] Some 800,000 tourists visited its Black Sea coast annually in the late 1980s. In the 1990's few tourists ventured to the region, but by 2005 visitors' numbers reached 110,000.[199] An estimated 500 million

[188] The European Commission's projects can be found at http://www.delgeo.cec.eu.int/en/programmes/Abkhazia.htm#A1.
[189] Crisis Group interview, USAID staff, Tbilisi, May 2006.
[190] Other international organisations that work on health and food security include Médecins Sans Frontières, Save the Children, the UN Population Fund, UNICEF and WFP.
[191] The majority of joint venture shares must be held by Abkhaz. Crisis Group interview, head, Business Women's Association, Sukhumi, July 1006.
[192] Crisis Group interview, head of mission, Première Urgence, Sukhumi, May 2006.
[193] Abkhazia's tea production, which once supplied 15 to 20 per cent of the Soviet demand, is estimated to have dropped by 80 per cent; the tobacco market has collapsed, and the crop is now rarely grown; the citrus market has survived but at a fraction of former levels. Paul Wooster, "The Agriculture Sector in Ochamchira, Tkvarcheli and Gali, Abkhazia, Georgia", short-term consultancy report for UNDP, 2004, p.7.
[194] Crisis Group interview, de facto minister of agriculture, Sukhumi, May 2006. The de facto government also supports local agriculture through credits for farmers.
[195] Crisis Group interviews, Gali and Sukhumi, June and July 2006.
[196] Crisis Group interview, de facto minister of economy, Sukhumi, May 2006.
[197] Crisis Group interview, de facto minister of finance, Sukhumi, May 2006.
[198] Crisis Group interviews, de facto ministers of economy and foreign affairs and a parliamentarian, Sukhumi, May 2006.
[199] Crisis Group interview, de facto prime minister, Sukhumi, July 2006. These numbers are much debated. Other estimates put pre-war tourists at 5 million, 2005's at 2 million. Crisis Group

roubles ($19.2 million) profit was made, and 90 million roubles ($3.5 million) was collected in tax revenue from the tourist season.[200] This was a significant increase – a few years earlier virtually no tourist risked travelling to the area. But the crumbling Soviet-era tourist infrastructure needs significant investment. So far, the de facto authorities have decided against privatising most of the tourist resources, preferring to rent them cheaply to investors – mostly Russian – who are encouraged to do reconstruction and modernisation. Eighteen functioning hotels and complexes are thus rented out.

5. Privatisation

The privatisation of businesses and housing has started only recently. What has been carried out has been without participation of former Georgian inhabitants, which is likely to make the return of IDPs and their reintegration all the more difficult. Privatisation is being undertaken in two phases. The law was passed in 2002 and so far only small items have been affected (mainly municipal property). Large privatisation (mainly republic property) of tourist complexes, factories and bigger buildings, has barely started.[201] A state program on privatisation of large buildings must still be developed. According to the head of the privatisation committee, "there is no rush to do this".[202]

Land remains state property and is leased to farmers, for 40 to 50 years with the possibility of inheritance, by district or village authorities, who explain they prefer to lease because of the limited availability of highly productive plots. Land rental cost is very low.[203]

Property rights are an extremely sensitive issue. There are allegations that Georgian IDPs are being encouraged to sell their pre-war property – through local contacts in Abkhazia – at near market prices.[204] One ethnic Georgian who lived in Sukhumi was able to regain ownership of his home through the courts in 2005 but this caused much debate.[205] In April 2006 the parliament instructed the courts to suspend all right to ownership cases of those living in Abkhazia prior to the war until a law regulating property rights is adopted.[206]

Concerns on this issue motivated President Saakashvili in February 2006 to start registration of all property in Abkhazia abandoned by IDPs. The ministry of refugees and accommodation (MRA) began implementing a 3 million GEL (Georgian Lari) ($1.69 million) three-year IDP property registration project, "My House".[207] Based on cartography and commercial satellite photos, Georgia plans to inventory all such property in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and issue special certificates to original owners, to protect property and inheritance rights. Applicants will receive certificates, which they can register with the ministry of justice. Some observers consider this exercise a waste of money.[208]

6. Social services and education

Can Abkhazia provide basic social services? A UNDP 2004 needs assessment mission to the Gali district and adjacent areas found that: "Infrastructure in this region (i.e. water, sewage, roads and electricity) is in a stage of progressive collapse…both the health care and education systems…[and] does not meet the needs of the local population".[209] The south east regions of the entity were worst affected by the fighting but it is clear that Sukhumi faces a daunting task to rehabilitate social infrastructure and pay sufficient salaries to retain professional civil servants, especially in the medical and health sectors.

For example, Abkhazia is struggling to meet its education needs. Education is supposed to be provided in Abkhaz, Russian, Armenian and Georgian language schools[210] but there is a shortage of personnel to teach in Abkhaz and Russian. Abkhaz schools teach in Abkhaz for the first four years; due to lack of appropriate teaching materials

interview, de facto minister of foreign affairs, Sukhumi, May 2006.

[200] Crisis Group interviews, de facto minister of economy and prime minister, Sukhumi, July 2006.

[201] Four tourist complexes are being privatised in Gagra, as is the Hotel Ritsa in Sukhumi.

[202] Crisis Group interview, head, privatisation committee, Sukhumi, May 2006.

[203] And regulated by the parliament. Crisis Group interview, de facto minister of agriculture, Sukhumi, May 2006.

[204] Crisis Group interview, IDP from Abkhazia, Tbilisi, July 2006.

[205] Georgian expert on Abkhazia, Paata Zaakareshvili, interviewed in Manana Mchedlishvili, "Disputes over the houses in Abkhazia have been temporary suspended", *Rezonansi*, 25 May 2006, p.5 (in Georgian).

[206] "Resolution of the National Assembly of the Republic of Abkhazia on Regulating the Housing Issues in order to Provide the Citizens of the Republic of Abkhazia with Housing", April 2006.

[207] 80,000 GEL from presidential and 120,000 GEL from government special funds have been allocated for an information campaign and technical systems. Crisis Group interview, "My House" Project Director, ministry for refugee affairs, Tbilisi, July 2006.

[208] Crisis Group interviews, Tbilisi and Zugdidi, May-June 2006.

[209] "Report of UNDP-Led Feasibility Mission", op. cit., p.v.

[210] Out of 170 schools, 61 are in Abkhaz, 60 Russian, 34 Armenian and ten Georgian; 15 are dual Russian/Abkhaz schools. Crisis Group interview, de facto minister of education, Sukhumi, July 2006.

and textbooks, Russian is the language of instruction thereafter. Russian language schools follow the curriculum of the Russian Federation, which in 2006 is donating a large number of textbooks to meet the needs of rural schools.

The language of instruction is a particularly sensitive issue in the Gali district, where in the lower part of the district during the 2005-2006 school year, ten schools taught in Georgian, according to the Georgian curriculum and with Georgian textbooks, and with teachers' salaries paid by the Georgian government. However, according to the head of the Gali district administration, from September 2006 the schools will be integrated into the Abkhaz system.[211] In Gali town 835 students are taught in two schools, one considered as Russian, the other as Abkhaz. However, in both Georgian is offered as an elective.[212] Only in lower Gali are there fully-fledged Georgian schools where all subjects are taught in Georgian.[213] The lack of qualified teachers in Abkhaz and Russian, greater in Gali then elsewhere, indicates that courses are often "informally" taught in Georgian.[214]

IV. GEORGIA'S IDP CHALLENGE

Close to a quarter million ethnic Georgians are excluded from participation in Abkhazia's political, economic and social life, since most were forcibly displaced in 1993. They are unable to return to their pre-war homes, yet unwilling or unable to integrate fully into Georgia proper. Dignified return remains a distant prospect. Many IDPs have become part of Georgia's poorest and most vulnerable,[215] with inadequate access to housing, land, employment, social services and healthcare.

As early as 1994, the Georgian and Abkhaz sides agreed to "create conditions for the voluntary, safe and dignified return…in all regions of Abkhazia". They established a quadripartite commission to implement return, which worked only for a year.[216] Today they meet in a host of forums to discuss related issues,[217] but while Abkhazia has been willing to accept return to the Gali district, its de facto authorities, backed by public opinion, remain firmly opposed to large-scale return elsewhere.[218]

IDP return is a key Georgian priority that President Saakashvili has repeatedly stated will only be achieved peacefully. As a demonstration of this commitment, the ministry of defence in 2004 apparently stopped supporting militia groups who had been waging a guerrilla struggle. In July 2006 a large operation eradicated the Monadire group, the last of the militias which had refused to disband. In doing so Tbilisi also reasserted control over the upper Kodori Gorge, the only Georgian-administered part of Abkhazia.[219]

Many IDPs were pleased with Saakashvili's frequent 2004 promises to ensure return but are now disappointed that the government has done little to improve their living conditions. After the Kodori operation, their expectations

[211] He further alleged that the main language of instruction would shift from Georgian to Russian. Crisis Group interview, head of Gali district administration, Gali town, June 2006. The de facto minister of education confirmed that the schools should be part of the Abkhaz ministry of education system but denied that there are plans to change the language of instruction. Crisis Group interview, de facto minister of education, Sukhumi, July 2006.

[212] In the "Russian" school from the 1st grade onwards, Georgian literature and language is taught for four hours per week; in the "Abkhaz" school, Georgian is offered for two hours in the 5th and 6th grades. Despite statements by Georgian government officials to the contrary, students are not barred from instruction in Georgian.

[213] Crisis Group interview, school directors and teachers, Gali School no.1 and Gali School no.2, Gali town, June 2006.

[214] The problem is compounded by the fact that most children enter schools speaking Mingrelian, with limited knowledge of Georgian and none of Russian or Abkhaz. Crisis Group interviews, parents and teachers, Gali town, June 2006.

[215] While 52 per cent of Georgia's population lives below the poverty line, "IDPs generally suffer disproportionately", UN Economic and Social Council, Commission on Human Rights, 62nd session, "Report of the Representative of the Secretary General on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons, Walter Kalin, Mission to Georgia 21-24 December 2005". E/CN.4/2006/71/Add.7, 24 March 2006, p.12.

[216] Securing the return of 311 persons, ibid., p. 8.

[217] These will be described in greater detail in a subsequent Crisis Group report, which will also explore prospects for further return of ethnic Georgians.

[218] Crisis Group interviews, Sukhumi, May and July 2006.

[219] According to the 14 May 1994 Moscow Agreement, Georgian troops must be withdrawn from the gorge. No UN monitoring of the upper Kodori has taken place since June 2003, when four UN observers on patrol and their interpreter were kidnapped.

increased again. TV public service announcements depicted their aspirations. In one a man explains:

> My father had three trees in the yard. During the war, two of them fell under the shells, one remained….It reminded my father of me. After leaving Sukhumi, he always says, I wish I could see that tree and die afterwards…Sukhumi is different for me. It is an abandoned tree, which grows there without me…when we go back and take back our children…we are the generation that can build broken bridges and contribute to cohabitation of Abkhaz and Georgians, Greeks and Jews….Sukhumi is my city, Abkhazia is my homeland, Georgia is my homeland![220]

Most IDPs are willing to live with their Abkhaz neighbours again, want Abkhazia to remain part of Georgia, but are less certain of how its government should be structured.[221]

IDPs struggle to have their political voices heard. Until recently they channelled most of their grievances through the Abkhaz government in exile. President Saakashvili in July 2006 announced that structure would be moved to Kodori Gorge, far from most IDPs and their concerns.[222] Tbilisi had already undertaken a large-scale reform of the government in exile – cleaning up corruption but also cutting staff and budget more than half. Since then IDPs have felt disempowered. Strong informal networks, particularly in the collective centres, are one of the remaining ways for them to mobilize but as these are closing, their mobilising capacities are weakening.

The Georgian government has pledged to do more to aid IDPs. It is defining a new national strategy to support their integration into the rest of society, while leaving the return option open. Under the previous government IDPs benefited from temporary assistance programs, but talk of integration was considered tantamount to treason. The Saakashvili government promises more durable solutions. Many IDPs approve, stating, "better integration here will guarantee us better integration there [in Abkhazia]".[223]

[220] TV public service announcement for "My House" project, aired daily on Georgian TV, August 2006.
[221] Crisis Group interviews, IDPs, Tbilisi and Zugdidi, May-August 2006.
[222] Some departments, such as the IDP department, are likely to work from several hubs, including Tbilisi, Kutaisi, Zugdidi and Kodori. Crisis Group interview, department head, Abkhaz government in exile, Tbilisi, August 2006.
[223] Crisis Group interviews, NGO activists, Tbilisi and Zugdidi, May-July 2006.

A. POLITICAL AND MILITARY DIMENSIONS

1. Crackdown on guerrillas

Soon after becoming president, Saakashvili reined in the armed militias formed during his predecessor's time to pressure the Abkhaz. These, as noted above, were funded by the defence ministry but operated outside its command structure. Until 2004, two paramilitary groups – the White Legion and the Forest Brothers – were active in the Zugdidi-Gali zone. Besides conducting a low-intensity guerrilla war, they were involved in criminal activities, including smuggling.[224] In February 2004 the ministry of interior detained 35 partisans and confiscated many weapons ostensibly belonging to the groups in Zugdidi. President Saakashvili openly criticized the guerrillas.[225] A senior official told Crisis Group, "We have arrested some, threatened others to stop and most importantly halted any financial assistance that the previous government was providing and thus disbanded them".[226]

Similarly in 2004-2005 the defence ministry took steps to abolish three paramilitary groups (Monadire, Svaneti, and Khevsureti) operating under its control in the Kodori Gorge. The largest, the Monadire (Hunter) battalion, had 860 men.[227] Since 2002 it gave Georgia defence capabilities in the conflict zone without deploying formal military or police forces.[228] When Minister of Defence Okruashvili officially disbanded the unit in spring 2005, Kodori locals and the Abkhaz government-in-exile were furious. The discontent grew gradually into disobedience and became an open crisis on 22 July 2006 when Emzar Kvitsiani, Monadire leader and the former representative of the Georgian president in Kodori, defiantly announced that he would not disarm. Three days later Tbilisi launched what

[224] "Khaburdzania [then Georgian minister of security] accuses 'Forest brothers' in criminal activities", *Akhali Taoba*, 24 December 2002 (in Georgian).
[225] "Mikheil Saakashvili says he needs no help from Georgian partisans", *Pravda*, 5 February 2004. Yet Abkhaz de facto officials say no guerrilla leaders were arrested; rather some were hired into local law enforcement. Crisis Group interview, de facto prime minister of Abkhazia, Sukhumi, July 2006.
[226] Crisis Group interview, senior official, ministry of interior of Georgia, Tbilisi, June 2006.
[227] Eka Gulua, "We are partisans not for Georgians, but for Russians and Abkhaz", *Rezonansi*, 17 February 2005, p.3 (in Georgian).
[228] A senior MRA official, who was involved in establishing Monadire, explained: "This is a particularly difficult region. Regular police forces were not favoured by locals there, and everybody was armed at the same time. By establishing Monadire, we tried to have some kind of a structure that could be controlled and transformed into a regular police later". Crisis Group interview, Tbilisi, July 2006. Monadire served several purposes, including offering jobs.

it called a "police operation" to disarm the paramilitaries forcefully, though Kvitsiani escaped capture.[229]

Sukhumi watched these developments, which brought well-armed troops to within 30 km of the city, with concern. The Georgian ministry of defence has been systematically increasing its capacities and its belligerent rhetoric. Even as Georgia insists it wants to resolve its conflicts peacefully, it increased its military budget more than any other country worldwide in 2005.[230] In 2006 over $341 million, 15.8 per cent of the state budget is going to the military.[231] Large showy military parades, the opening of a NATO-standard base in Senaki (western Georgia), the start of construction of another one close to Gori (eastern Georgia), and several multi-million dollar military training exercises, suggest Georgia may be preparing to respond militarily should peace talks fail. Defence Minister Okruashvili has made strong statements: "we must reunite the country, and I don't care that sceptics in Europe are concerned".[232] The renewal of U.S. support to the army through the Sustainment and Stability Operations Program (SSOP)[233] for another year and $30 million strengthens capabilities, and fuels Russian and Abkhaz fears. So do prospects of Georgia obtaining "intensified dialogue" with NATO later this year and membership several years later.[234]

2. Reforms in the government in exile

An Abkhaz government in exile has functioned in Georgia proper since 1995.[235] The structures were initially established "to trace relatives, find accommodation, benefit from humanitarian assistance and otherwise cope with displacement".[236] Ultimately they perform primarily civil registry functions. From 1995 to 2004, Tamaz Nadareishvili was the leader. Numerous institutions, with a staff of over 5,000, were created, including ministries, a military commissariat, tax authorities and a police force. In recent years the government in exile was widely perceived as "messy and corrupt",[237] but also as the political representative of the IDPs. It vigorously advocated radical policies, supporting a military solution and the partisans in the conflict zone.[238]

One of the consequences of Georgia's Rose Revolution was the appointment of Irakli Alasania[239] as chairman of the council of ministers in exile in October 2004. He rapidly embarked on fundamental reforms. In November 2004 the Council cut staff to 2,000.[240] Currently the "Government of Abkhazia" has four ministries (education and culture; economy; finance; and labour, healthcare and social issues) and seven departments.[241] The 2006 budget is some 8 million GEL ($4.5 million); of which

[229] Dmitri Avaliani and Inal Khashig, "Georgian army pursues dissident commander", IWPR, Caucasus Report Service no. 350, 27 July 2006; Liz Fuller, "The Kodori Intervention: Small victorious intervention or inconclusive show of force?", RFE/RL, Caucasus Report, vol.9, no.28, 3 August 2006; "Civilian dies, rebel warlord escapes", *Civil Georgia*, 27 July 2006.

[230] SIPRI, *Yearbook 2006: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security*, pp.231-232. Georgian analysts say the increase should be considered in the context of a previously miniscule military budget, the overall increase of governmental expenditures and the efforts to meet NATO membership standards.

[231] In 2004, $97 million (8.9 per cent of all 2004 state income) was spent on the military. In 2005 the figure was $208 million, an increase of 214 per cent, to 16 per cent of all state income. 2006 military expenditure was budgeted at $221 million in January but raised to $341 million in July (an increase of 64.8 per cent).

[232] Georgian Defence Minister Irakli Okruashvili, interview with the Rustavi-2 television station, 2 July 2006.

[233] SSOP officially began in April 2005 and is a continuation of the Georgia Train and Equip Program (GTEP), and intends to train the Georgian armed forces to deploy in Iraq as part of the coalition forces. "U.S. Army Soldiers Take the Reigns in the SSOP II Mission", U.S. Embassy in Georgia, available at http://georgia.usembassy.gov/events/2006/event20060721gssop.html.

[234] Crisis Group interviews, Russian Duma members, Sochi, June 2006; head, Abkhaz NSC, Sukhumi, July 2006.

[235] Two main bodies were set up: the council of ministers and the supreme council. The latter was made up of the 24 members elected to the Abkhaz parliament in 1991. In 2004 eight more members, who had been elected to the Georgian parliament in 1992 to represent Abkhazia, also joined. Crisis Group interview, head of the Abkhaz government in exile, June 2006.

[236] Julia Kharashvili, "Georgia: Coping by Organising. Displaced Georgians from Abkhazia", in Marc Vincent and Birgitte Refslund Sorensen (eds.), *Caught Between Borders-Response Strategies of the Internally Displaced* (London 2001), pp.234-235.

[237] Crisis Group interview, head of the Abkhaz government in exile, June 2006.

[238] "I would reiterate this again, that Abkhazia problem can be resolved only by force", interview with Tamaz Nadareishvili, prepared by Tamta Karchava, *Resonansi*, 20 November 2003, p.7.

[239] Irakli Alasania, born 1973, had been deputy minister of security and of defence and assistant secretary of the NSC before he was appointed Chairman of the government in exile in October 2004. Simultaneously, he served as the envoy of the president of Georgia at the Georgian-Abkhaz peace talks. In March 2006 he left the government in exile and in June was appointed to Georgia's ambassador at the UN, while retaining his position as presidential envoy. His successor is Malkhaz Akishbaia.

[240] Crisis Group interview, head of the Abkhaz government in exile, June 2006.

[241] Environment and natural resources; IDPs; justice; special assignments; foreign relations; information policy; and agriculture.

almost 6 million GEL is a transfer from the Georgian state budget.

In July 2006, after the Monadire operation, Saakashvili announced the institution would move to the Kodori Gorge.[242] Further structural reforms are expected before year's end. The head of the government in exile talks about transforming it into something more managerial, less political, focused on dealing with IDPs and more representational, possibly by electing the "Supreme Council".[243] However if it is actually transferred to Kodori, there is little chance it will succeed in these aims. Kodori, due to its high altitude (3,984 metres above sea level at its highest), snow and lack of paved road access, is cut off for all but air transport for seven months of the year. Electricity, phone communications, food supply and security are unreliable.[244] While the government in exile has pledged full support for the move, in private several staff express anxiety. They have been promised higher salaries and frequent rotations but there is also concern there will be further staff cuts.[245]

3. IDP political participation in mainstream Georgian politics

As IDP's political influence through the government-in-exile diminishes, their ability to express themselves through the regular political process becomes more crucial. The first countrywide local elections since the Rose Revolution provide an opportunity in October 2006 for IDPs to actively participate in political life. Recent amendments have given them the same right to vote and stand for local and parliamentary elections as other citizens.

Until 2001, IDPs were banned from voting in local government elections, as they were not considered permanent residents in their municipalities. The 2001 election code granted them the right to take part in municipal elections but they were included in supplementary voter lists, widely considered incomplete and a major source of election rigging.[246] Now, however, they are part of the standard electoral register.[247]

Currently there are no MPs in the Georgian parliament explicitly representing the IDPs. Until late 2004, Abkhazia and the IDP community were represented in the parliament by eight MPs, who had been elected in 1992. Article 127 of the 2001 election code allowed these to stay in the parliament "until the jurisdiction of Georgia is fully restored in Abkhazia and necessary conditions are established for elections of Members of the Parliament of Georgia".[248] Amendments in September 2004 abolished Article 127. Since then those seats have been vacant. IDPs do not have their own political parties, and IDP issues rarely are featured in political party programs.

Several strong, local NGOs have been created by IDPs to advocate their rights and provide assistance. In 2002 a Caucasus-wide coalition of IDP NGOs (Gringo) was set up.[249] The government in exile has a TV station that transmits weekly, a radio station, and a newspaper (the *Voice of Abkhazia*) with a very small circulation. It also maintains an information website.[250] IDPs do not formally take part in either the Geneva or Sochi processes.[251] However they are active in other contacts.[252]

B. STATE ASSISTANCE FOR IDPS

IDPs live in precarious conditions, mostly in collective centres. Until recently government programs "did very little to help displaced persons to restructure their lives and take responsibility for themselves, without placing a burden on their host communities".[253] The former government's policies focused solely on return. Saakashvili's administration pledged to reverse the slide into squalor but faces a daunting task with limited resources.[254]

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[242] Sukhumi reacted nervously to this announcement, stating it maintains the right to withdraw from the negotiations and even respond with force. "Sergey Bagapsh: Abkhaz side keeps the right to quit the negotiations", Apsny Press, 28 July 2006; "Abkhaz side assesses Tbilisi's intention to move the so called Abkhaz government-in-exile to Kodori as a step towards escalation of the conflict", Apsny Press, 28 July 2006.

[243] Crisis Group interview, head of the Abkhaz government in exile, June 2006.

[244] To help address some of these problems, the government has pledged a massive injection of rehabilitation funds to the region. "Saakashvili comments on Kodori rehabilitation", *Civil Georgia*, 15 August 2006.

[245] Crisis Group interview, Abkhaz government in exile staff, Tbilisi, August 2006.

[246] Kharashvili, Tsivtsivadze, Zhvania, et al. "Study on IDP Rights", prepared under the New Approach, Tbilisi, 2003, p.36.

[247] The MRA is to provide the list of IDPs to the Central Election Commission, based on temporary places of residence.

[248] Article 127, Election Code of Georgia.

[249] It unites more than 70 non-governmental organisations from the North and South Caucasus. Its main activities are directed to assisting the IDPs and maintaining peace and stability in the Caucasus. It has an eight-member coordinating council and a general assembly meeting. Crisis Group interview, member of coordinating council, Tbilisi, August 2006.

[250] Available at http://www.abkhazeti.info.

[251] The Abkhaz de facto authorities categorically oppose their inclusion.

[252] These will be described in a subsequent Crisis Group report.

[253] "Refugees and displaced persons in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia", Council of Europe, parliamentary assembly.

[254] The ministry of refugees and accommodation's 2006 budget was cut significantly to 29 million GEL from 62 million GEL.

The ministry of refugees and accommodation (MRA), together with relevant executive and local authorities, is responsible for granting IDP status, providing temporary living space, employment and social benefits.[255] IDPs must register annually to receive identification cards and benefits. Entitlements include a monthly allowance of 14 GEL (about $8) for those in private accommodation and 11 GEL ($6.40) for those in collective centres. The latter get an additional 17.5 GEL ($10) in Tbilisi and 11.5 GEL ($6.75) in the regions to cover utilities. Other entitlements include exemptions from land tax, state-issued certificate fees, free medical services at special healthcare facilities and free public transportation.[256]

Defining the number of IDPs in Georgia is technically difficult and politically sensitive. The government formerly tended to talk of 300,000. The Abkhaz accuse Georgia of inflating the figure, something which facilitates corruption. Soon after Saakashvili was elected president, he stated: "the current number of refugees – 260,000 – is grossly inflated" and ordered a complete recount.[257] In 2005 the MRA, with UNHCR support, registered 209,013 displaced from Abkhazia.[258] However, MRA staff say the process was flawed and the real number is 247,612.[259] President Saakashvili appears to have changed his mind, recently saying that "Georgia has enormous patience, but there are 300,000 internally displaced persons behind this patience".[260]

1. Defining a new strategy

Initially the international community took the lead in seeking more durable solutions to IDP problems. The "New Approach to IDP Assistance" program, set up in 1999 by UN agencies and donors in cooperation with the government,[261] established a fund of $1.25 million and a special UNDP unit. It sought to encourage IDPs to integrate more effectively in their host communities and set up their own businesses. However, implementation delays and other administrative obstacles caused disappointment. For many the results were not tangible enough and advocacy was insufficient. Ultimately the program was seen as just another financing mechanism for local NGOs. Funding for it has now dried up.[262]

Taking off from where the New Approach left off, the government committed to develop a national strategy by September 2006[263] that would provide IDPs "with the equal rights and freedoms that other citizens of Georgia enjoy and to considerably improve their plight by better targeting them and better meeting their needs on the basis of the coordinated and concerted efforts by the government and international community".[264] On 23 February 2006 a high level intergovernmental commission was set up, which met twice in the first half of the year and created a secretariat and working groups on accommodation, economic, social, and legal issues.[265] These have been meeting weekly or biweekly and debating concrete proposals.[266] Their policy recommendations are to be incorporated into the overall strategy, which should serve as the basis for an action plan to facilitate integration, such as an increase in the monthly financial allowances, vocational training opportunities, land plots in rural areas and alternative accommodations for those in collective

The ministry of labour, healthcare and social affairs received the difference to pay IDP allowances, but the MRA was still responsible for their distribution. Crisis Group interview, senior MRA official, Tbilisi, June 2006.

[255] It also coordinates the activities of other ministries and agencies' responses to internal displacement.

[256] For a comprehensive if somewhat outdated analysis of IDP rights, see: Kharashvili, Tsivtsivadze, Zhvania, et al., op. cit.

[257] Gocha Khundadze, "Georgia's refugee recount", IWPR, Caucasus Reporting Service, no. 229, 28 April 2004.

[258] Kalin report, op. cit., p.6. This figure also includes returnees to Gali interested to maintain IDP status for the meagre benefits the Georgian government provides.

[259] They say that it lacked a legal basis, since it was not based on a ministerial decree, and was not obligatory for all IDPs. Furthermore, the questionnaire was not complete enough to prepare a full database. Crisis Group interview, department head, ministry of refugee and accommodation, Tbillisi, June 2006.

[260] "Saakashvili speaks about situation in Kodori", *Civil Georgia*, 28 July 2006. Even adding the more than 12,000 displaced from South Ossetia, the 300,000 figure is clearly exaggerated.

[261] Primarily UNDP, UN OCHA, UNHCR, the World Bank, Switzerland's SDC and USAID.

[262] Crisis Group interviews, IDPs, Tbilisi and Zugdidi, May-August 2006; Crisis Group interview, Norwegian Refugee Council staff, June 2006. According to staff, the most positive outcomes were: development of a large network of IDP organisations, economic assistance to IDPs to improve self-reliance, compilation of a large information database and publication of ten surveys on IDP issues. Crisis Group interview, New Approach Support Unit, Tbilisi, June 2006.

[263] In December 2005, the UN Secretary-General's Representative on the Human Rights of IDPs, Walter Kalin, recommended the government design a comprehensive policy to address the displacement crisis, in close consultation with civil society and the displaced. Kalin Report, op. cit., pp.2, 18-19. The MRA wants this prepared by September so its findings can be reflected in the discussion of the 2007 state budget to begin in October. Crisis Group interview, senior official, MRA, June 2006.

[264] "National Strategy on IDPs – Roadmap, Process, Working Groups", document in process, May 2006.

[265] Each working group has members from the relevant ministries, civil society and international organisations.

[266] Crisis Group interviews, NGO and government members of different working groups, Tbilisi, August 2006.

centres.[267] The parliament will eventually need to approve the plan.

A fundamental change the MRA has already begun to promote is distinguishing between political and economic assistance. While all IDPs have the right to return to pre-war homes, not all may need economic help in the future. Those with social and economic requirements may better be aided by the ministry of labour, health and social affairs, like other vulnerable citizens. The government must decide whether it wants to continue devising and implementing a policy which defines IDPs as a separate category, benefiting from separate services. If not, further aid may be based on financial need, as part of a general poverty eradication strategy.[268] The government will look for funding to donors, who have provided substantial financial aid in the past, but since 1998 have been steadily disengaging and moving assistance to IDPs into their broader poverty reduction efforts.[269]

Some IDPs fear that integration might mean assimilation and loss of the right to return. This anxiety is often a result of their lack of awareness of their rights, especially in the regions. The ambiguity of some IDP-related laws compounds the problem. As a result, "IDPs fail to or partially fail to exercise their rights, or commit illegal acts, in order to receive something that in fact is provided by law".[270] The lack of clear-cut policy has created much uncertainty among the displaced, contributing to their marginalisation. Unless significant funds are spent on the new strategy, this risks getting worse.

2. Housing

Housing is one of the main problems for IDPs both in collective centres and private accommodation. The conditions in the former are appalling, and officials realise change is needed.[271] However, they have yet to devise clear alternatives. This has increased tensions with IDPs over the past two years.

During and immediately after the war, a majority of IDPs took refuge in emergency shelters in public buildings, former hotels, schools, kindergartens, hospitals, factories and unfinished structures.[272] These were never meant to be permanent accommodations but 106,448, nearly half of all IDPs, still live in one of the 1,683 remaining collective centres[273] where there is often inadequate access to clean water, electricity and insulation. A survey found that only 40 per cent of IDPs have access to unshared toilet facilities compared to 70 per cent of the general population.[274] IDPs in collective centres have little access to land and are not allowed to privatise their temporary premises. While IDPs can now purchase land on the open market, until 1996 they could only rent or lease.[275]

The Saakashvili administration stepped up efforts to move IDPs out of collective housing and to privatise the hotels and former tourist centres they lived in. While this made the tourist complexes available for renovation and foreign investment, IDPs did not end up with better living conditions. The government has failed to define and implement a clear policy on re-housing IDPs who previously lived in collective centres. The MRA was not even consulted when businessmen and local authorities paid $7,000 per room to evict IDPs and privatise collective centres in Tbilisi's Iveria and Ajara hotels. IDPs were not happy with the compensation scheme and some protested.[276] Only 30 per cent of those paid compensation

[267] Crisis Group interview, senior official, MRA, June 2006.
[268] Some IDPs expressed concern regarding this change, as they consider all poverty eradication programs to be temporary. Crisis Group interviews, Tbilisi, August 2006.
[269] "Georgia: IDP plight still precarious despite new leadership initiatives", Global IDP Project, 12 April 2005, p.7, available at http://www.idpproject.org. The Council of Europe parliamentary assembly called on member states to continue supporting rehabilitation in Georgia "to assist IDPs become more effectively integrated while facilitating the development of the regions in which they live", Resolution 1497(2006), point 11.1, 13 April 2006. Kalin Report, op. cit., p.18.
[270] Kharashvili, Tsivtsivadze, Zhvania, et al., op. cit., p.11.
[271] Crisis Group interview, senior MRA official, Tbilisi, June 2006.

[272] Other classifications for IDP accommodations include: collective centres, legally allocated in state owned buildings; private housing, owned by relatives or friends; rented premises; purchased apartments or houses; and illegal occupation or squatting in abandoned apartments or houses. Nana Sumbadze, George Tarkhan-Mouravi, "Working Paper on IDP Vulnerability and Economic Self-Reliance", Tbilisi, July 2003.
[273] Very little information is available about IDPs in Georgia who are in private accommodation, often with host families or in rented premises. Crisis Group interviews, Tbilisi and Zugdidi, June 2006. IDPs in private housing complain that they and their needs are ignored. As in other refugee situations, host families have frequently become as needy and destitute as those they began to assist over a decade ago.
[274] Nana Sumbadze, op. cit., p.35.
[275] For fear of losing their status, IDPs often do not register private property under their name, even though in 2003 the constitutional court ruled the law making it impossible for an IDP to acquire property without losing status unconstitutional.
[276] They claimed the right to better compensation, for example arguing that the $7,000 should be paid to each IDP family, not per room, as several families often shared one room. On 28 June 2006 police forcibly evicted a group of IDPs from two hotels in Batumi where they had lived since fleeing Abkhazia. The hotels were sold to a Kazakh developer, and the IDPs were offered $7,000. Up to 100 of them claimed this was inadequate to secure alternative housing. After being forced out, they started to walk to the Abkhaz border, allegedly with the aim of reclaiming their former homes. The Abkhaz turned them back.

managed to move to the private sector; the remainder just shifted to other collective centres.[277] In a more successful case, the government paid $10,000 per room to 183 IDP families in the Tbilisi central hospital, where substantial renovation works is underway.[278]

The new IDP integration strategy is expected to regulate accommodation not only to deal with privatisation, but also to create better conditions for those in collective centres, which will not be privatised soon.[279] Some of the options the housing working group is considering include allowing privatisation in some collective centres, allocating housing vouchers, building new social housing, rehabilitating collective centres for longer term use and government purchase of homes on the open market and distribution to IDPs.[280]

3. Social services

IDPs benefit from targeted allowances and social services but sums are miserly, and in the past were hollowed out by corruption. The Saakashvili administration has ended the worst corruption, and allowances are paid on time, but despite promises there have been no increases.[281] The monthly allowance of less than $8 does not cover an individual's monthly food needs, and food is rarely distributed by local or international agencies. Although IDP children are entitled to free education at state schools and to certain higher education benefits, access to education is poor and illiteracy is increasing.[282] Many families cannot afford textbooks, adequate clothing or shoes. A Zugdidi-based NGO estimates that the number of IDP children without access to education is as high as 20 per cent in collective centres of the Samegrelo region.[283]

According to the government in exile's healthcare ministry, there are 33 IDP-exclusive health facilities. In addition 21 larger collective centres in Samegrelo, Imereti and Tbilisi have clinics. Special medical mobile teams periodically conduct on-site screening and treatment of IDPs.[284] But IDPs are often unaware of their healthcare benefits, and quality treatment is largely inaccessible, mostly due to cost.[285] An IDP general health insurance system was abolished recently because the government wants a single strategy for all vulnerable citizens.

One of the most crucial IDP social issues is employment. Although unemployment is high – 15.7 per cent – for the general population, it is much greater, 40 per cent among IDPs in collective centres.[286] The law tasks local authorities to "assist IDPs in job placements" with consideration of their profession and qualification but 3,000 staff cuts over a few months in the exile structures have added to the unemployed.

The new IDP Action Plan should address all the areas where IDPs are most vulnerable. It will take great political will and financial resources, however, to turn around a system which has continually weakened their political, economic and social positions. Indeed, some steps the government promotes as reforms, such as those involving the government in exile and closing a number of collective centres, have further disenfranchised them.

Maya Edilashvili, "IDPs searching for new shelter", *The Georgian Times*, 5 July 2006.

[277] Crisis Group interview, senior official, MRA, June 2006.

[278] The process went relatively smoothly and ended in summer 2006. Crisis Group interview, senior official, Abkhazia government in exile, August 2006.

[279] Crisis Group interview, senior official, MRA, June 2006.

[280] Crisis Group interview, head of IDP department, Abkhazia government in exile, Tbilisi, August 2006.

[281] Crisis Group interview, IDPs, Zugdidi, May 2006; Gocha Khundadze, "Georgia's refugee recount", IWPR, Caucasus Reporting Service, no.229, 28 April 2004.

[282] The ministry of education in exile manages education institutions: four universities, two institutes, nine secondary schools, six musical schools, three painting schools, two sport schools and fifteen kindergartens. Crisis Group interview, government in exile official, Tbilisi, August 2006.

[283] Crisis Group interview, NGO activist, Zugdidi, June 2006.

[284] Akaki Zoidze, Mamuka Djibuti, "IDP Health Profile Review in Georgia", prepared under New Approach, Tbilisi, 2004, p.21.

[285] IDP health is worse than that of the general population, especially in urban areas. A leading cause of IDP morbidity appears to be psycho-neurological and cardiovascular problems, mostly associated with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Ibid., p.19.

[286] Nana Sumbadze, op. cit., p.27; "Country Report: Georgia", Economist Intelligence Unit, June 2006.

V. CONCLUSION

No peaceful solution to the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict appears imminent. For fourteen years Georgians and Abkhaz have been drifting further apart. While the Abkhaz have been establishing the institutions of an independent state with Russian support, close to half the entity's pre-war population has been living as IDPs in mainland Georgia. Tbilisi ignores indigenous developments in Abkhazia, asserting that all post-war changes are illegal and driven by Moscow, not by local decision-makers. This creates an unconstructive environment in which Georgia treats Abkhazia as a subject to be disputed with Russia, not a negotiations partner in its own right.

Abkhazia has taken significant steps to produce a sense of normality in the entity, although it remains under crippling economic restrictions and the threat of renewed conflict. 2006 has returned tourists to Sukhumi and areas farther north and seen progress in establishing security in the Gali district. But to gain the respect of Georgia and international partners Abkhazia must do much more. The 45,000 Georgian returnees to Gali are an important element in its attempt to demonstrate its democratic credentials and legitimacy as a multi-ethnic polity.

President Saakashvili has made many promises to IDPs, pledging to return them to their pre-war homes and to improve their present conditions. The reform of the government in exile has not fundamentally changed their situation. Today they have less money, fewer jobs, and less political visibility then they did before 2004. A new IDP integration strategy in the works may offer the government a chance to implement systematic change but this will require substantial funding and strong political will. For Georgia to meet IDP needs and at the same time increase its attractiveness to Abkhazia, it must become more effective in carrying out long-term confidence-building, economic development and democratisation policies. A subsequent Crisis Group report will address these issues.

Tbilisi/Brussels, 15 September 2006

APPENDIX A

THE GEORGIA-ABKHAZIA CONFLICT ZONE

APPENDIX B

GLOSSARY

AIS	Association of Invalid Support (previously known as Association of Invalids with Spinal injuries)
CEC	Central Election Commission
CISPKF	Peacekeeping Forces of the Commonwealth of Independent States
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
ECHO	European Commission Humanitarian Office
GTEP	Georgia Train and Equip Program
HROAG	Human Rights Office in Abkhazia, Georgia
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
MRA	The Ministry of Refugees and Accommodation
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SSOP	Sustainment and Stability Operations Program
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UN OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNOMIG	United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia
USAID U.S.	Agency for International Development
WFP	World Food Programme