

Perspectives on Conflict Management in the South Caucasus

Christoph Bilban (ed.)

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Perspectives on Conflict Management in the South Caucasus

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Conflict Management in the South Caucasus“
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Preface

Almost a year and a half passed since the planned publication of this workshop proceedings in 2019. The book needed to be postponed due to projects with a higher priority in late summer and autumn 2019.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic delayed the publication again. The armed clashes between Armenia and Azerbaijan in July 2020 and the Second Karabakh War seemed to render the volume obsolete. Armenia had to withdraw from the districts occupied in the First Karabakh War and even territory of the former Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast was lost. Furthermore Armenia has to guarantee a safe and unrestricted land route from Azerbaijan proper to the exclave of Nakhchivan. Russia replaced Armenia as the security guarantor for Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians sending 1,960 peacekeepers to control the armistice agreed upon in the declaration of 9 November 2020.

In Georgia, the situation has not improved either. On the contrary, the pandemic has further deepened the isolation of South Ossetia. In the case of Abkhazia, a positive signal was sent with pragmatic cooperation for the people's benefit during the pandemic. However, there are still no official contacts between the de facto authorities and the central government.

Comparing the workshop's contents to the current situation shows that this publication could still be a worthwhile contribution to the scholarly debate. In regards to the case of Georgia the topic of *borderisation* addressed in the workshop is persisting. The initial goodwill seen after the revolution in Armenia was insufficient. Yet, reflecting upon the prospects of 2018 may help to understand what drove the conflict towards escalation again. Hence, this workshop report is a starting point for better understanding the seemingly intractable conflicts in the South Caucasus.

Christoph Bilban,
Vienna, March 2021

Introduction

In autumn 2018, the Institute for Peace Support and Conflict Management of the National Defence Academy (IFK) organised a workshop under the title “Perspectives on Conflict Management in the South Caucasus”. In light of the political changes brought about by the Velvet Revolution in Armenia in April/May 2018 and the then-upcoming presidential elections in Georgia, as well as the tenth anniversary of the Russian-Georgian war, this event sought to clarify whether a new dynamic would follow the political changes in the peace processes of the protracted conflicts.

Six international experts followed the IFK’s invitation for the two-day workshop alongside other subject matter experts from Vienna and representatives from the Ministries of Defence and Foreign Affairs on 22-23 October 2018 in Vienna. The event took place under Chatham House Rules. The first day focused on the conflicts between Georgia and the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and Russia’s role. On the second day, discussions focused on the impact of Yerevan’s new political situation on the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh. In addition to this question, the role of the Azerbaijani exclave of Nakhchivan received special attention. Furthermore, this workshop addressed the external influences from Russia, Turkey and Iran.

This publication seeks to report on the outcomes of the workshop. Some participants also provided a conference paper or their speaking notes for publication. They complement the summary of the workshop in the first chapter.

The second chapter deals with the conflicts in Georgia and the issue of borderisation. David Matsaberidze, professor at Tbilisi State University, analyses the process of land grabbing along the Administrative Border Lines (ABL) between the territories controlled by Georgia and those claimed by Abkhazia and South Ossetia. He notes that the Georgian government remains in a position of non-engagement with the issue due to the creeping relocation of the border. On the one hand, there is a lack of interagency coordination within the central government to overcome the reactive policy towards incidents along the ABL. On the other hand,

Georgia could raise international awareness and improve its position vis-à-vis Russia by providing better information to stakeholders, Matsaberidze argues.

Meanwhile, more international attention was paid to Armenia in 2018. In chapter three, Anahit Shirinyan, a Yerevan-based analyst and formerly with Chatham House, examines the Velvet Revolution's fallout on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and Armenian-Azerbaijani relations. Despite smaller initiatives, Shirinyan notes, there is no change in the dominant narratives of both parties. Both Yerevan and Baku persist in their positions. The security dilemma that has existed since the 2016 fighting remains unresolved and the constructive ambiguity of the Madrid Principles cannot secure peace without further measures. Given both sides' continuous armament - and especially the military reinforcement in the Azerbaijani exclave of Nakhchivan - there is a risk of new escalations beyond the area of and around Nagorno-Karabakh.

In the fourth chapter, Frederic Labarre, Co-Chair of the PfP-C Study Group on Regional Security in the South Caucasus, elaborates on Russia's role in the South Caucasus today. In his speaking notes he sheds light on the strategic goals in the protracted conflicts. Labarre shows the longevity of Russian interference and the interwoven histories of conflict. He emphasises that Russia will not give up its status as a hegemonic power in the South Caucasus. Consequently, one of Moscow's priorities in Georgia is to prevent accession to NATO. In the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, Moscow sees itself as the "arbiter" and preserver of a fragile balance, which means that neither Baku nor Yerevan can achieve their maximum goals without engaging Russia. Therefore, it is clear that Russia likewise ensures the continued existence of both nations while at the same time profits from the continuation of the conflict by supplying weapons to both sides.

The closing epilogue by Eva Zeis, a visiting researcher at the Institute for Peace Support and Conflict Management, discusses the speakers' contributions against the background of the debate on liberal versus authoritarian conflict management in the South Caucasus. Her approach follows recent research on authoritarian conflict management and appends military influence on the analysis. By analysing the military presence -

whether through bases or training programmes – in the region, she also raises the question of whether the military is at all compatible with liberal conflict management.

The contributions thus provide an overview of the debates during the workshop. Notwithstanding the politically sensitive topics, it was decided to edit the submitted contributions only when necessary (e.g. correcting obvious typing or spelling errors). References to places, names, and the like remain unchanged. Original writings from authors of the different conflicting sides can significantly help understand the complex causal and emotional structures of conflicts, especially when dealing with those deeply rooted in history like in the South Caucasus. This anthology, therefore, in no way claims to provide a comprehensive and balanced perspective.

The contributions do not represent the opinion of the publisher, the Federal Ministry of Defence or the Republic of Austria. The articles exclusively reflect the views of the authors. All pieces, however, underwent a plagiarism check. Only contributions following good scientific conduct or original essays were accepted.

Finally, I would like to thank Eva Zeis, who did a tremendous job preparing and reviewing the workshop. She has further contributed to creating this anthology through her careful proofreading and her article. I am further grateful to Dana Gesselbauer and Stefan Pfalzer for taking the minutes during the workshop. A huge thank also belongs to the IFK team and especially to the head of the institute Brigadier Walter Feichtinger, who made this workshop possible in the first place.

Christoph Bilban,
Vienna, September 2019

1 Findings of the Workshop “Perspectives on Conflict Management in the South Caucasus”

Compiled by Christoph Bilban

On October 22 and 23, 2018, the Institute for Peace Support and Conflict Management at the National Defence Academy organised a workshop on the status of the South Caucasus’s peace processes. The institute gathered six international experts as speakers and invited further national and international scholars and professionals to contribute to the discussion. This paper intends to outline the main findings of the workshop split into three sections. First, there’s an assessment of the situation in the conflicts in Georgia as done on day one. The second section will discuss the influence of the Velvet revolution and foreign actors in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. In the third and final section, the overall outlook of the workshop is presented. The workshop programme is attached at the end of this paper.

1.1 Georgia: Difficult Peace with Abkhazia and South Ossetia

Over ten years after the August war of 2008, peace with both breakaway territories is out of sight. Since the armistice, both de facto-states in Abkhazia and South Ossetia started a process of *borderization* of their respective administrative border lines (ABL) with mainland Georgia. Russian forces supported the breakaway authorities in moving the ABL further into Georgian territory and enforcing these new de-facto borders with barbed wire, fences and border marks. In total, 125 settlements were lost this way. *Borderisation* between South Ossetia is more intense, as the Enguri river is a natural “border” between Abkhazia and Georgia. On the local level, these new borders have a considerable impact on the population’s everyday life. *Borderisation* impedes the freedom of movement, divides families and prohibits farmers from accessing their fields.

Besides these immediate effects on the local population, *borderisation* fits into Russia’s policy against Georgia. The process shows not only physical effects but puts Georgia’s government and citizens under constant pressure. It demoralises people and leads to a decline of trust in the

political institutions, parties and democracy. Hence, *borderisation* is a prime example of creating a “permanently operating front through the entire territory of the enemy state”¹. Russia’s presence in Abkhazia further alters the balance of forces in the Black Sea vis-à-vis the West because of Russia’s dominant position on the coastline. As some oil and gas pipelines run near the occupied territory of South Ossetia, European energy security is under threat too.

Georgian responses to *borderization* are hampered due to a lack of interagency coordination. The government shows poor efficiency in strategic communication towards all stakeholders. Georgia’s measures towards the breakaway territories follow a non-recognition policy while enabling Georgia to provide medical care and other services like in the Georgian-Abkhazian border town of Zugdidi. Tbilisi’s hopes in the incentives of visa-free travel to the EU, however, were diluted. Abkhazians and South Ossetians refuse to accept any documents issued by Georgian institutions. Besides this manifestation of mistrust and explicit wish for independence, the conflicts are also present in narratives. Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia live in different realities, which people-to-people contacts can only overcome (e.g. with “market zones” along the ABL).

Georgian domestic politics are still dominated by personalities, not parties, as the current rally for the presidential election shows. One of the main themes remains Georgia’s foreign policy alignment. For example, the most prospective candidate Salome Zurbishvili has lost popular support due to pro-Russian comments during her campaign². However, neither the President nor the Prime Minister is effectively shaping visions for peace. The Ministry for Reconciliation and Civic Equality is the driver of policy proposals for conflict settlement. From a European perspective, the EU could foster Georgia’s government initiatives towards the breakaway territories.

¹ Valery Gerasimov, ‘The Value of Science Is in the Foresight. New Challenges Demand Rethinking the Forms and Methods of Carrying out Combat Operations’, trans. Robert Coalson, *Military Review* 96, no. 1 (2016): 25.

² She won the elections in the first and second round (28 October and 28 November 2018).

One determining feature of the Georgian conflicts remains the systemic level of rivalry between “the West” and Russia. Georgia’s continued efforts to join NATO and the EU – even though there’s no real chance for accession – undermine conflict resolution. From Russia’s point of view, a Georgian accession to NATO is considered a threat to national security. Consequently, Moscow is freezing the conflict so that ethnic and border issues cannot be sorted, and therefore NATO membership would be out of reach.

The Georgian government sticks to the Geneva Talks’ international format and advocates within the international community to put pressure on Russia. Tbilisi pushes for a more assertive Western stance towards Moscow’s meddling in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and requests an international attempt to force a withdrawal of Russian troops from the ABL to establish a demilitarised zone. *Borderisation* is seen as a fundamental geopolitical game from Russia’s side, which needs more international attention and framing and requires solutions in the wider Euro-Atlantic/Eurasian zero-sum security game. Hence, any conflict resolution can only be achieved by a common international effort.

1.2 Armenia, Azerbaijan and the complex geopolitics around Nagorno-Karabakh

The situation in Armenia has not yet changed as a result of the revolution. Domestic political reasons triggered the protests. The revolution had no foreign policy dimension. However, the change of power brought one thing to light: security and democracy can coexist. In 2016, it became clear that an authoritarian head of state (and veteran of the Karabakh War) was no security guarantor. Corruption in the security sector added to the discontent among the population.

Breaking the dichotomy between security and democracy seems to be the revolution’s main achievement in spring 2018. Concerning Nagorno-Karabakh, however, no change in policy is likely to occur. Likewise, Nikol Pashinjan’s first trip on the very day after his inauguration as prime minister had been to Nagorno-Karabakh. Besides, he made four claims:

- 1) Nagorno-Karabakh should return to the negotiating table.
- 2) Azerbaijan’s leadership has no interest in a compromise.

- 3) Azerbaijan should abandon the path of militaristic rhetoric and recognise the people's right to self-determination.
- 4) He will not sign any agreement without the consent of the people.

This clear stance breaks most notably with the constructive ambiguity of recent years. At the same time, Pashinyan appears to be pursuing other constructive approaches as well. For example, on the sidelines of the 2018 Commonwealth of Independent States summit, he agreed with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev to establish a direct communication channel to reduce tensions. On a visit to Moscow, a transnational women's peace initiative was suggested. The core problem is that hardly any proposals for a solution to the conflict are coming or accepted from the Azerbaijani side. The burden of change rests on Armenia. Pashinyan himself is under pressure in Armenia and has to pay attention to public opinion. Thus, his nationalist rhetoric could be understood partly as a signal to certain parts of the population, especially the diaspora. At the same time, he does not seem interested in escalation, as he sent his son to the front for military service - an unusual move by the high and mighty.

Relations with Russia are not likely to deteriorate for the time being. The relationship since 2016 is in crisis because Armenia believes that Russia tacitly knew what was going to happen before the Azerbaijani attack. Russia's weapons deliveries to Azerbaijan are unwelcome, but Russia remains supportive of Armenia. Russia is the only influential player but would probably exchange its role as mediator in the Minsk Group for a trilateral format. However, it is not in Armenia's interest that Russia organises in parallel to the Minsk format a trilateral forum. Also, Russia is viewed critically for its role as an arms supplier to both parties.

Re-armament in the region was a prominent topic of debate in the workshop, especially regarding the Nakhchivan Autonomous Region's role. The Combined Army (former 5th Corps of the Azerbaijani Armed Forces) stationed in the exclave operates artillery systems with ranges as far as Armenia's capital Yerevan. Some participants highlighted that Azerbaijani officials have repeatedly stressed that the military reinforcement is only defensive in nature. Nakhchivan is of particular importance to Azerbaijan for two reasons: on the one hand, the region is significant in the country's history and for the narrative of defence against the idea of a "Greater Armenia"; on the other hand, its geopolitical status is determined by having

a direct border with Turkey. As a result of deepening Azerbaijani-Turkish military cooperation, rumours of Turkish troops being stationed in Nakhchivan have circulated. Baku, however, denies such plans and is strictly against foreign forces in the region. Consequently, the Russian presence in Armenia is also criticised.

Moscow and Ankara increasingly emerge as the most influential external actors in the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The third neighbour, Iran, is mainly confining to a position of non-interference. However, regional competition appears not to be a positive driver for conflict resolution in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Since Baku and Ankara concluded their Strategic Partnership and Mutual Support agreement in 2010, Azerbaijani-Turkish military cooperation has become comparable to the Russian-Armenian alliance. The agreement includes a mutual assistance obligation in the event of an attack (“using all possibilities”³). Cooperation in the field of military training has changed in quality since 2014. Joint exercises have been extended from land forces to air and special operations forces. Similarly, according to SIPRI data, Azerbaijani arms imports from Turkey have increased steadily since 2010.

Russia’s role is much more complex. As an arms supplier to both sides, Moscow benefits from the armament spiral. Simultaneously, this creates a certain degree of dependency, which Baku can skilfully exploit. However, Russia’s influence on the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh via Yerevan seems limited from Azerbaijan’s point of view. At the same time, Azerbaijan knows that a military solution in Nagorno-Karabakh is impossible without an implicit agreement with Russia. Some kind of “police role” for Russia is needed where both sides - Baku and Moscow - are, to a more or lesser extent, aligned against Armenia for different reasons. Thus, Azerbaijan could capitalise on some Russian politicians’ intentions to weaken the post-revolutionary government in Yerevan. Russian support for Armenia remains limited when it comes to the Nagorno-Karabakh region. This fact became evident in April 2016 when Russia brokered a ceasefire in Nagorno-Karabakh only after several days of fighting. Still, the Russian

³ Shahin Abbasov, ‘Azerbaijan-Turkey Military Pact Signals Impatience with Minsk Talks - Analysts’, *Eurasianet*, 18 January 2011, <https://eurasianet.org/azerbaijan-turkey-military-pact-signals-impatience-with-minsk-talks-analysts>.

presence with the Gyumri military base and the alliance in the CSTO is a security guarantor for Yerevan.

Iran could be the third player on the geopolitical field around Nagorno-Karabakh. However, Tehran's support for conflict resolution is not actively sought by either party. While Iranian-Armenian relations are good, relations with Azerbaijan are more complicated. Genuine cooperation between Baku and Teheran would have to be preceded by policy changes unacceptable to both. In particular, Baku would have to sacrifice military-technical cooperation with Israel, while Tehran would have to forego its economic relations with Armenia. While there is an Azerbaijani minority in Northern Iran, it apparently is not being exploited from the outside. For Iran, a position of non-interference proves more advantageous, which is why it will most likely not assume a significant role in conflict management in the future.

1.3 Conclusion: stuck in a “post-liberal limbo”

As one participant aptly put it, the region is stuck in a “post-liberal limbo” between liberal and authoritarian approaches to conflict management. For over 25 years, practitioners and experts tried to find solutions to the South Caucasus' conflicts. However, the essential point is that to this day, no consensus about what peace actually means exists among the parties to the conflict - whether in Georgia and the breakaway provinces or among Armenia, Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh. The status quo is usually more advantageous and stable, even if irrational. The idea of liberal peace based on democracy and a free-market economy is not productive without liberal states. Thus, until the South Caucasus' political systems are consolidated liberal democracies, no sustainable solution to the conflicts may be founded on this idea. As authoritarian, rising powers like Russia and China increasingly contest the international system and liberal norms, they also strengthen authoritarian tendencies in conflict management. The undermining of fact-based and constructive cooperation in international politics has a negative impact on international crisis and conflict management.

The example of Nagorno-Karabakh is a case in point. The Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict displays the difficulties of a fact-based conflict

management approach. Different narratives of different threat perceptions impede dialogue, while at some point, constructive ambiguity enables it. At the moment, the Madrid Principles are legitimising and furthering dialogue in the region. However, the status quo favours those fractions in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh that hold power. A sudden change of policies is thus rather unlikely.

Moreover, Russia remains a crucial factor, while its interest to change the overall situation is somewhat limited. Also, Western attention to the South Caucasus conflicts presently lacks since the world is still focused on the Ukraine crisis. In any case, international crisis and conflict management have provided tools, but the political consensus for conflict resolution must be reached among the states and actors on the ground. Too many, sometimes divergent, interests of the external mediators are haltering the peace process. Hence, the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh should be de-internationalised.

In the concluding survey conducted among the experts present at the event, they indicated a slightly positive outlook for Georgia and the conflicts with Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Above all, people-to-people contacts and domestic improvements in Georgia (consolidation of the political system and socio-economic improvements) appear to be positive drivers. The changes in the geopolitical situation and the possibilities of direct European interaction with the breakaway territories through the EU's Non-Recognition and Engagement Policy further support positive developments. However, Russia's increased military presence in the breakaway territories and the de-facto authorities' institutional shortcomings weaken efforts for conflict resolution. The Geneva Talks and the EU/OSCE Special Representative are seen as positive, while other foreign influences such as the US Georgia Train & Equip Program negatively influence the situation.

As to the future of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, participants believe it to be more likely heading towards escalation. The revolution in Armenia is considered a destabilising factor. Other factors, such as people-to-people contacts and new regional networks, have a far less positive effect on the dynamics in comparison. The measures of international crisis and conflict management within the Minsk Group framework and the temporary OSCE

observer mission in Nagorno-Karabakh cannot provide positive incentives either.

However, the deep roots of the conflicts are not influenced by day-to-day events. According to some participants, geopolitical changes would show only marginal effects even if they stir up the surface of the conflicts.

Finally, this workshop again showed that in the South Caucasus, the international community could only reduce the consequences of the conflicts on the people for the time being. The list of unresolved issues is still longer than the list of positive steps towards conflict resolution. The fragility of the states carries the risk of destabilisation in all the conflicts discussed. The EU could at least lay the foundations for further steps within the Neighbourhood Policy framework and support the states politically, economically, and socially in their consolidation. The South Caucasus deserves continued attention.

Programme of the Workshop
“**Perspectives on Conflict Management in the South Caucasus**”
October 22-23, 2018 in Vienna

October, 22

1130 Welcome by Brig Gen Walter Feichtinger

1315 Georgia: Borderization and Reconciliation

David Matsaberidze

1415 Coffee break

1430 Russia’s role in Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia

Frederic Labarre

1530 Coffee break

1600 Possible Scenarios for Conflict Resolution

Laurence Broers

October, 23

0915 The Armenian Revolution of 2018 and Possible Implications on the Armenian-Azerbaijani Conflict

Anahit Shirinyan

1015 Coffee Break

1045 Nakhchivan: International Blind Spot?

Sadi Sadiyev

1145 Nagorno-Karabakh in Geopolitical Context: Russia-Turkey-Iran and Conflict Resolution in the South Caucasus

Zaur Shiriye

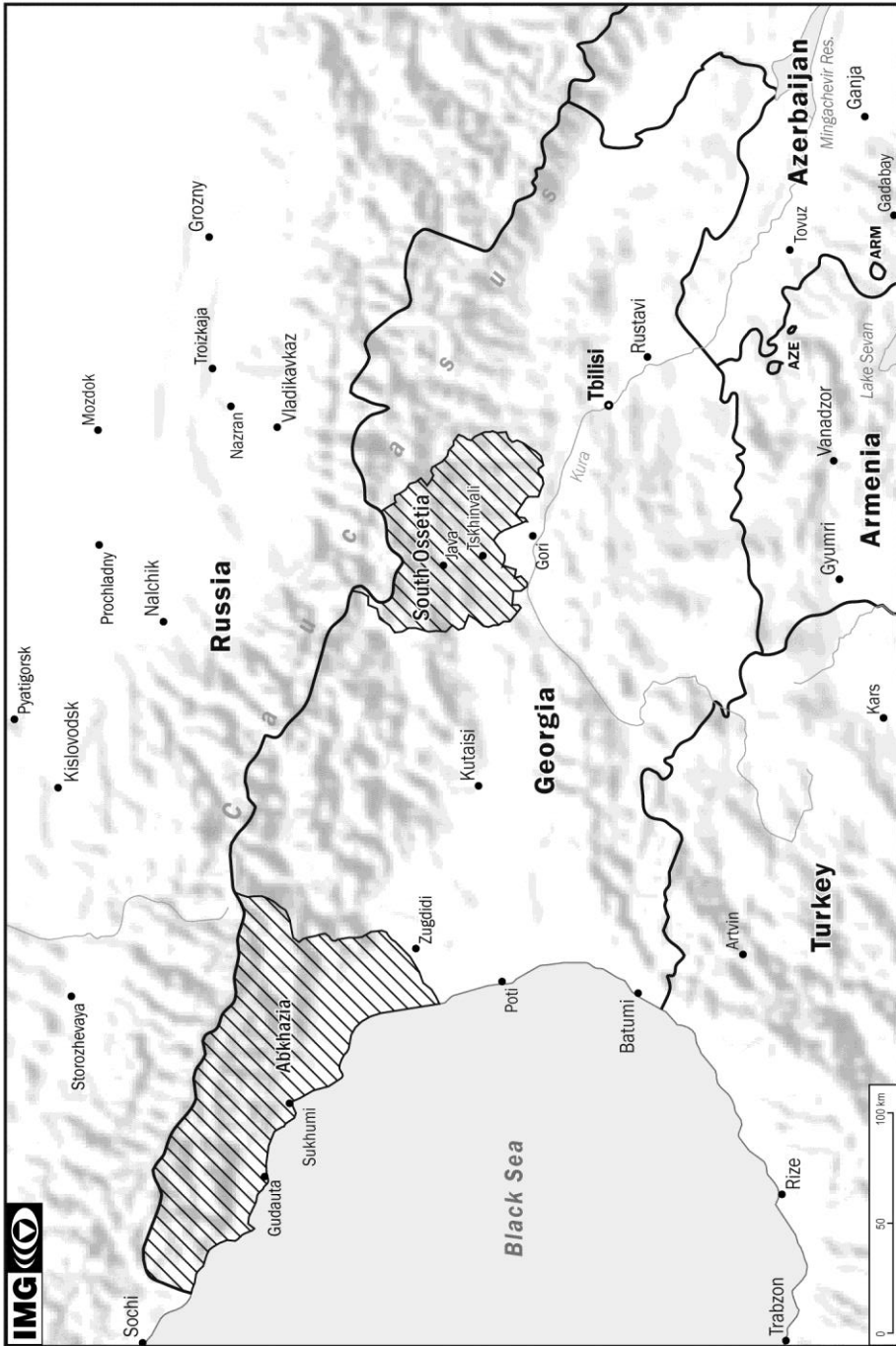
1300 Lunch

1400 Russia’s Role in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict

Frederic Labarre

1515 Coffee Break

1530 Group discussion: Outlook of Conflict Management in South Caucasus



Map 1 - Overview Georgia and the break-away territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as of October 2018.

2 Georgia: Borderization and Reconciliation

David Matsaberidze

Disclaimer: The following paper was written in January 2019.

2.1 Introduction

The paper analyzes the process of borderization launched by the Russian Federation in Georgia across the occupied-turned former separatist territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia/Tskhinvali Region after the Russian-Georgian August War of 2008. The study uncovers borderization's negative impact on the peace initiatives of the central Georgian authorities to re-integrate these regions within the internationally recognized territorial borders of Georgia. The transformation of the post-Soviet conflicts in Georgia over the Abkhazian Autonomous Republic (former Abkhazian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic) and the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast/Tskhinvali Region (former South Ossetian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Oblast) radically changed with the end of the Russian-Georgian August War of 2008, with their recognition as independent states by the Russian Federation on 26th of August 2008 on the one hand, and proclamation of these regions as occupied territories by the central authorities of Georgia in October, 2008 on the other hand. The new peace strategy of the central authorities of Georgia, the *State Strategy on Occupied Territories: Engagement through Cooperation*¹ and *Action Plan for Engagement*,² which centered on people-to-people interaction and revitalization of socio-economic relations across the administrative boundary lines (ABLs) between the occupied-turned former separatist territories, was effectively undermined by the Russian policy of borderization, which has started in 2009 and has been effectively reinforced by the *Alliance and Strategic Partnership Treaty* signed between the Russian

¹ "State Strategy on Occupied Territories: Engagement Through Cooperation," <http://www.smr.gov.ge/uploads/file/SMR-Strategy-en.pdf> (Retrieved May, 2011).

² "Action Plan for Engagement," Office of the State Minister for Reintegration, endorsed on July 6, 2010. http://www.smr.gov.ge/uploads/action_plan_en.pdf (Retrieved May, 2011).

Federation and Abkhazia (February 4, 2015) and the Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia (March 18, 2015).

Borderization: Basic Facts

- Since 2008 Georgia lost control over 125 settlements: 103 in South Ossetia and 22 in Abkhazia;
- Between 2009-2015: 840 persons detained along the ABL; with 162 incidents occurring in 2015;
- Border crossing significantly declined between 2009-2015;
- Since April 2016 – 3 out of the 5 official crossing points between Abkhazia and the rest of Georgia have been closed off;
- From 2011 to 2016 residents of Tskhinvali, crossing the ABL for medical services, increased precipitously, which has been decreasing since 2017.

Infobox 1 - Borderization: Basic Facts (author's work)

The post-Russia-Georgian August War 2008 reality and the uncommitted Six Point Agreement, signed between the President of Georgia, Mikheil Saakashvili and the President of the Russian Federation, Dmitry Medvedev, which was brokered by the President of France Nicolas Sarkozy, marked the beginning of the new challenges to the Georgian state stemming from the occupied-turned former separatist territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia/Tskhinvali Region through the Russian policy of borderization. Borderization could be defined as a *“Russia’s policy of seizing additional territories beyond the administrative borders of the former South Ossetian AO entering deeply into the Georgian territories, implemented through installation of border marks, fences and barbed-wire across the Administrative Boundary Lines (ABLs) that separate Abkhazia and South Ossetia from the rest of Georgia,”*³ which enables Moscow to exploit the weakness of the Georgian state through hampering its democratic development and challenging its independent domestic and foreign policies. The process of borderization is described as “creeping” in a literal sense because it advances in small, slow, intermittent steps. Russia’s

³ Kakachia, K., Kakhishvili, L., Larsen, J., Grigalashvili, M. Mitigating Russia’s Borderization of Georgia: A Strategy to Contain and Engage, Policy Paper, The Georgian Institute of Politics, December, p. 4.

technique stops short of a massive provocation that might otherwise compel Georgia and the West to respond. Instead, the crawling approach makes it somewhat easier for the Georgian government (or at least parts of it) and its Western partners to remain passive, occasionally complaining pro forma without effect.⁴

The process of borderization has nationwide and international implications: it undermines Georgian government in the eyes of its population, which is criticized for its “inaction;” while internationally questions the credibility of the Euro-Atlantic institutions and the pro-Western course of Georgia and poses grave challenges to country’s national security. Thus, indirectly, the process of borderization undermines the both – peace initiatives coming from Tbilisi and from the Brussels, which aim to open the Russian-occupied Abkhazia and South Ossetia/Tskhinvali Region for the wider international community for the future political regulation of relations between Tbilisi and Sokhumi/Tskhinvali; the opportunity of opening these territories to the international community is an asset for Brussels and Tbilisi, as long as in spite of their ‘international’ recognition from the side of the Russian Federation and its ‘allies’ in the Latin America, they still remain as overdependent on Moscow under strong military and economic bonds of the Kremlin.

2.2 Challenges to the Post-August Peace Initiatives of the Central Authorities of Georgia

The end of the August War and recognition of independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia/Tskhinvali Region by the Russian Federation in September, 2008 was responded by the central authorities of Georgia with the counterweight policy of non-recognition of these territories on international level and expressed through the *State Strategy on Occupied Territories: Engagement through Cooperation*⁵ (January 27, 2010)⁶ and by the

⁴ Socor, V. (2013). Russia Accelerates ‘Borderization’ in Georgia on War’s 20th Anniversary, *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Issue 19, N175, The Jamestown Foundation, October 2. <https://jamestown.org/program/russia-accelerates-borderization-in-georgia-on-wars-20th-anniversary/>

⁵ “*State Strategy on Occupied Territories: Engagement Through Cooperation*,” <http://www.smr.gov.ge/uploads/file/SMR-Strategy-en.pdf> (Retrieved May, 2011).

*Action Plan for Engagement*⁷ (July, 2010) on the local/domestic level, which are the main policy documents for the implementation of state strategy towards the occupied territories. The *State Strategy on the Occupied Territories: Engagement through Cooperation* was elaborated to reach a breakthrough in the stalemate created in the relations between Tbilisi and Sokhumi/Tskhinvali after the August War 2008. These are complex documents, elaborated by the Georgian State Ministry of Reintegration (SMR), which lay the ground for development of new relations (political, economic, cultural) with the former separatist regions, termed as occupied territories under these documents on the one hand and containing their further recognition through seeking a favorable balance in the post-August War perception of the territorial conflicts of Georgia on the other hand.

According to the state strategy, “the process of annexation of these territories should be reversed and they should be peacefully reintegrated into the Georgia’s constitutional order.”⁸ Overall, the strategy seeks to counter the isolation and division resulting from occupation by creating frameworks, incentives and mechanisms for engagement. The government of Georgia believes that this should come through the promotion of economic interaction between the communities across the dividing line(s), rehabilitation and development of infrastructure, enhancement of existing

⁶ The *State Strategy on Occupied Territories: Engagement through Cooperation* does not come on an empty basis and it builds on the previously signed agreements and resolutions of the International Organizations. It is based on the: Law on Occupied Territories, endorsed in October, 2008; Ceasefire Agreement of August, 12, 2008; the Conclusions of the September 1, 2008 meeting of the EU Council; the August 28, 2009, United Nations General Assembly resolution on “Status of IDPs and Refugees;” Resolutions of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on “The Consequences of the War Between Georgia and Russia” (#1633 (2008), #1647 (2009), #1648 (2009), #1644 (2009), #1683 (2009), “Reports on the Human Rights Situation in the Areas Affected by the Conflict in Georgia (SG/Inf(2009)7, SG/Inf(2009)9, SG/Inf(2009)15); and the November 27, 2008 report of the OSCE Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and High Commissioner for National Minorities on “Human Rights in the War-Affected Areas Following the Conflict in Georgia” (ODIHR/HCNM report) (SOURCE: “*State Strategy on Occupied Territories: Engagement through Cooperation*,” Government of Georgia, 27 January, 2010. http://smr.gov.ge/Uploads/State_Stra_7871fe5e.pdf [Retrieved December, 2018]).

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

⁸ “*State Strategy on Occupied Territories: Engagement Through Cooperation*,” <http://www.smr.gov.ge/uploads/file/SMR-Strategy-en.pdf> (Retrieved May, 2011).

mechanisms and developing new means for promotion of the basic human rights, improvement of accessibility of health care in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and promotion of freedom of movement. In addition, the engagement strategy aims to preserve cultural heritage and identity, promote the free flow of information and find a legal foundation for the implementation of the above-mentioned points;⁹ whereas the *Action Plan for Engagement* mentions: “Georgia seeks to engage with these populations, to reduce their isolation and to improve their welfare, in the interest of human and regional security.”¹⁰ As engagement with the occupied territories requires close relations with the occupying power, the government of Georgia “will continue to engage with the occupying force, within the framework of the Geneva International Talks or other potential forums, to ensure the successful implementation of the Strategy and Action Plan,”¹¹ the concluding paragraph of the document states.

For the effectiveness of engagement, the following instruments are considered:

- **Status-Neutral Liaison Mechanism:** facilitates communication between the Government of Georgia and the authorities in control in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia through Liaison Officers appointed with consent of both parties; it will be operated under the umbrella of an international humanitarian organization for the implementation of mutually approved projects and for their operation;
- **Neutral Identification Card and Travel Document:** this will enable greater access to social services and freedom of movement, and assist in employment in private and public sectors. Then word neutral refers to citizenship status;
- **Trust Fund:** will provide grants to implementing organizations operating in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia and across division lines;
- **Joint Investment Fund:** will support businesses that promote local economic development, generate employment and build commercial ties between communities on both sides of the division lines. The fund will be jointly supported by donors and businesses;
- **Cooperation Agency:** will enable and facilitate interactions across the division lines. It will be established as a legal entity of public law under the

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ “*Action Plan for Engagement*,” Office of the State Minister for Reintegration, endorsed on July 6, 2010. http://www.smr.gov.ge/uploads/action_plan_en.pdf (Retrieved May, 2011).

¹¹ Ibid, p. 14.

authority of SMR. It will act according to the policies of the government of Georgia in assisting state-funded programs.

- **Financial Institutions:** will assist in creation and maintenance of accounts, cash transfers and other legal transactions, and will contribute to the normal operation of humanitarian and development organizations and businesses present in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia;
- **Integrated Social-Economic Zone:** creates a value chain across the division line, from the supply of raw materials to production, packaging, quality control and distribution.¹²

The main principles of the above-mentioned documents, elaborated under the United National Movement government, was maintained by Georgian Dream government and its policy towards the occupied territories of Georgia was structured according to the following eight principles:

preservation and maintenance of peace; de-occupation and de-escalation vis-a-vis Russia; direct dialogue for building of trust and reconciliation between the Georgian and Abkhazian/South Ossetian communities; cooperation built on shared interests – moving towards conflict resolution through status-neutral and humanitarian formats; rehabilitation of victims of the conflict (IDP, population residing across the ABLs and on the occupied territories); offering state-services to the population of the occupied territories; extending benefits of the DCFTA and Visa-Free regime to the inhabitants of the occupied territories; securing international support and guarantees for the effective implementation of the main principles of the peace proposal.¹³

The possible effectiveness of these measures is mitigated by the *Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance Treaty between Russia and Abkhazia* (signed on September 17, 2008), the *Agreement on Joint Measures to Strengthen the Security of the National Borders of the Abkhaz Republic*, the *Agreement on a Combined Military Base* (signed on February 18, 2010) and the agreement on *Joint Customs Service*, as they block the prospects of engagement directly with the Abkhazian (and South Ossetian) communities, whereas the process of borderization comes as an effective implementation of separation and further alienation of the Georgian and South Ossetian/Abkhazian communities. The process of borderization could be considered as a tool

¹² Ibid, pp. 4-7.

¹³ Minister's Vision - Ketevan Tsikhelashvili - "Our policy of peace provides for 8 main objectives." Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civic Equality <http://smr.gov.ge/DetailsPage.aspx?ID=91>

of implementation of the main deliverables of these documents into practice: through the measures of borderization, the Russian Federation aims to, and so far, successfully achieves expansion of territories presently under occupation and exposes the weakness of the Georgian state, thus sows doubt about the credibility of the Euro-Atlantic institutions.¹⁴

The process of borderization enables the Russian Federation to fulfill its strategic long-term objectives in Georgia:

1. Relocation of the ABLs moves the Russian Armed Forces deeper into Georgia;
2. Demoralizes the Georgian society and undermines credibility of its government;
3. Creates a permanently operating front through the entirety of the enemy state” (which could be considered as an implementation of the Valery Gerasimov’s doctrine);
4. Transforms the KGB tool of the *Reflexive Control* in action: “conveying to a partner or an opponent specially prepared information to incline him to voluntarily make the predetermined decision desired by the initiator of the action,”¹⁵ which muddles Georgia’s response to the occupation.

In addition, the process of borderization feeds the Kremlin-promoted perception that Georgia is unstable, failed state:

1. Georgia’s Western allies (especially NATO) are unwilling or unable to assist in restoration of its territorial integrity, making Euro-Atlantic integration pointless;
and

¹⁴ Kakachia, K., Kakhishvili, L., Larsen, J., Grigalashvili, M. (2017). Mitigating Russia’s Borderization of Georgia: A Strategy to Contain and Engage. Policy Paper. The Georgian Institute of Politics, December.

¹⁵ See: Thomas, T. (2004). Russia’s Reflexive Control Theory and the Military, *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 17: Taylor & Francis, 2004, pp. 237–256.

2. Russia holds all the cards and therefore the Georgian government has no choice but to make concessions in the hope of regaining sovereignty over the separatist region.¹⁶

The attempts of the central authorities of Georgia to launch the people-to-people interaction between the divided communities are undermined by the outcomes of borderization as it:

1. Restricts freedom of movement;
2. Denies access to homes and farmlands;
3. Residents of the Occupied Territories are denied access to healthcare and essential public services;
4. Impedes the Euro-Atlantic integration and undermines the EU credibility to solve territorial problems;
5. Disrupts the process of reconciliation and peaceful reintegration;
6. Impedes people-to-people contact.

The continued process of borderization hinders the peace and reconciliation process by preventing residents of Abkhazia and South Ossetia/Tskhinvali Region from crossing the ABLs to enter central government-controlled territories,¹⁷ which alienates the divided Georgian and South Ossetian communities and blocks country's Euro-Atlantic integration, which is considered as one of the guarantees of peaceful restoration of Georgia's territorial integrity in a long-term perspective. Borderization, in effect, on the one hand, makes Georgia's NATO integration as a false dilemma as it erodes public confidence in the EU/NATO, as the EUMM is unable to prevent further instances of borderization and the NATO is unable to directly help Georgia to defend its sovereignty. The influence of these developments has been already reflected in the public attitudes towards the resolution of the conflicts in Georgia. The expectation that any political party in government would succeed in resolution of the conflicts over the South Ossetia and Abkhazia vanished (see figures below).

¹⁶ Cohen, A., Hamilton, R. (2011). *The Russian Military and the Georgian War: Lessons and Implications*, Strategic Studies Institute, ERAP Monograph, June.

¹⁷ Kakachia, K., Kakhishvili, L., Larsen, J., Grigalashvili, M. (2017). *Mitigating Russia's Borderization of Georgia: A Strategy to Contain and Engage*. Policy Paper. The Georgian Institute of Politics, December, p. 9

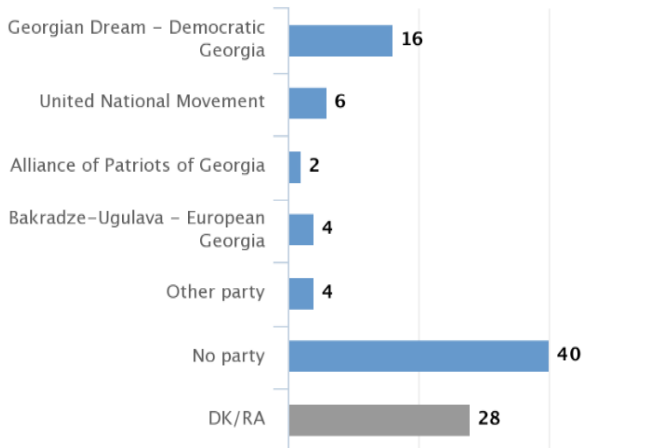


Figure 1 - Which political party do you trust most to manage the following issues? (Source: The Caucasus Research Resource Centers. “NDI Public Attitudes in Georgia, June 2017”. Retrieved through ODA - <http://caucasusbarometer.org> on December 21, 2018)

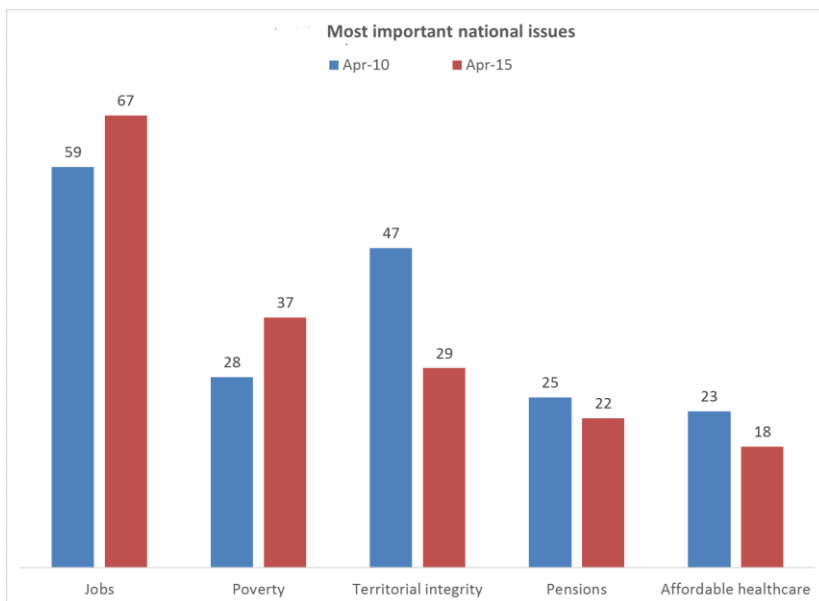


Figure 2 – Comparison of the “Most important national issues” from April 2010 and April 2015 (author’s work, Data Source: The Caucasus Research Resource Centers. “NDI Public Attitudes in Georgia, April 2015”. Retrieved through ODA - <http://caucasusbarometer.org> on October 19, 2018; National Democratic Institute. “Public attitudes towards elections in Georgia, April 2010”. Retrieved from https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/April-2010-Media-Presentation-Final_ENG.pdf on October 19, 2018).

Through the process of borderization, Russia will have a permanent military presence on Georgian territory, able to assault Tbilisi at a moment's notice. It has that capability already, but currently there's still hope that occupation can be lifted. Nevertheless, continued process of borderization and uncontrolled Russian military deployment on ground creates permanent regional instability, as war could break out at any time.¹⁸ The Russian military build-up across the ABLs increases the risk of further provocations in terms of clashes with the local residents and anti-borderization demonstrators.¹⁹ These measures have created disillusionment among the Georgian population and in the public perception the restoration of territorial integrity has become considered as an unrealistic expectation, thus in the public opinion polls it moved down to the 3rd rank, coming after jobs and poverty concerns (see the table above), which became more demandable issues from the side of the mass population to be tackled immediately and effectively by the government for the current moment.

2.3 International Implication of the Borderization Process

Russia's strategy under borderization is not aimed at Georgia only, but it also entails some negative implications for the international order: it violates the existing balance of power in the Black Sea basin and has negative implication for the broader European security order, as it undermines the principle of the inviolability of borders and fundamental principles of international law: respect for sovereignty, non-use of force, non-intervention in the internal affairs of other states. The following aspects should be considered in terms of Russia's international positioning through its actions and military presence in Georgia, in the Black Sea coastal area of Abkhazia in particular:

1. Borderization across the Abkhazia's administrative border across the Inguri River gives Russia a dominant position in the Eastern Black Sea littoral as it

¹⁸ Larsen, J. (2017). Detering Russia's Borderization of Georgia, GIP Commentary, Issue #18, September, pp. 5-6.

¹⁹ Kakachia, K., Kakhishvili, L., Larsen, J., Grigalashvili, M. (2017). Mitigating Russia's Borderization of Georgia: A Strategy to Contain and Engage. Policy Paper. The Georgian Institute of Politics, December, p. 15.

- controls over 195-km coastline and complements Russia's annexation of Crimea to expand its anti-access, area denial zone (A2/AD) in the Black Sea;
2. Russia's re-militarization of the Black Sea directly harms the interests of the NATO and EU in the region and vis-a-vis wider Asia and the Middle East;
 3. Annexation of Georgia's territories threatens the European energy security: in case of eruption of violent conflict, the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan and the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzrum oil and gas pipelines could be disrupted; in a long-term perspective borderization also impedes development of the Southern Gas Corridor, which could bring the Caspian gas to the EU market
 4. The maintenance of unresolved conflicts enables Russia to remain the dominant regional actor not only in Georgia, but in the wider Black Sea region.²⁰

The continued process of borderization gives Russia leverage over the international projects running through the South Caucasus across Georgia: it could interrupt the South Caucasus East-West Transit Corridor of freight, oil, and natural gas. The ABL across South Ossetia currently passes over the Baku-Supsa Oil Pipeline, which is an important supplement to the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline. In addition, following the most recent instance of borderization, the ABL across South Ossetia/Tskhinvali Region is now just 400 meters from the East-West Highway, Georgia's main traffic artery. If renewed conflict were to break out, that highway could be easily cut, and the country's transport system paralyzed. Even if Russia refrains from invading Georgia proper and doesn't cut off the South Caucasus East-West Corridor, its permanent occupation would give it a degree of veto power over future infrastructure developments.²¹

2.4 What the International Society and the Central Authorities of Georgia Can Do?

The process of borderization continues because the strategic calculus behind it has held true: Russia takes actions large enough to create local disruption but small enough to avoid international backlash. Borderization continues because the strategic calculus behind it has held true: Russia takes

²⁰ Kakachia, K., Kakhishvili, L., Larsen, J., Grigalashvili, M. (2017). Mitigating Russia's Borderization of Georgia: A Strategy to Contain and Engage. Policy Paper. The Georgian Institute of Politics, December, p. 15

²¹ Larsen, J. (2017). Deterring Russia's Borderization of Georgia, GIP Commentary, Issue #18, September, pp. 5-6.

actions large enough to create local disruption, but small enough to avoid international backlash.²² Until real costs are imposed on Russia, its actions are likely to continue. Considering the limited arsenal in the hands of the central authorities of Georgia, the government of Georgia must more assertively lobby support from its Western allies, especially from the U.S., which is crucial as Georgia lacks the military capability to deter borderization by itself. For its part, the U.S. must ensure that the policy imposes costs on Russia. Targeted sanctions are an option. The West should treat Russian violations of Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity like it treats similar violations against Ukraine – illegal and unacceptable. Thus, the West should increase calls to allow European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM) officials access to the occupied territories. Russia's actions should be made more transparent and more attention should be drawn to its refusal to uphold the 6 Points Agreement of 2008. The U.S. and EU should take efforts to bolster confidence in the Euro-Atlantic institutions on the one hand, while provide support for reconciliation and peaceful reintegration on the other hand. Georgia's Western allies could provide financial support for public services aimed at residents of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, as well as Internally-displaced Persons (IDPs). Therefore, Georgia's government must do more to raise the issue internationally, whereas Georgia's allies must step up and provide support when and where it's needed.²³

The US must ensure that the policy imposes costs on Russia and the EU and other IOs should put pressure on Russia to demilitarize the ABLs. Demilitarization of the ABLs will create the buffer zones which will bring day-to-day benefits to local residents on both sides and increase trust between the divided communities. An assertive Western response should coordinate anti-annexation policy through targeted sanctions and place troops and more international observers at the ABLs, which could come through the EUMMs access to the occupied territories. The international society should also undertake measures to avoid violation of the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights in number of cases, such as freedom of movement and freedom of arbitrary arrest and detention (cases

²² Ibid, pp. 6-7.

²³ Ibid, pp. 6-7.

of Otkhozoria and Tatumashvili) and advance regional data collection and inter-agency coordination.²⁴

The continued process of borderization is a tangible expression of Georgia's problems and the government can easily be criticized for its 'inaction.' Thus, the government of Georgia should devise unified government stance regarding "waves" of borderization – why it occurs when it does and what forms it takes.²⁵ The central authorities of Georgia should consolidate its efforts to contain borderization and further annexation moves in the country. Nevertheless, at present, the government of Georgia seems intimidated and confused by this situation. It has apparently bought into Moscow's logic that Georgia would be blamed for "provocation and escalation" if it protested against the Russian moves.²⁶ Realistically, the Georgian central authorities should:

1. Stick to the international formats of negotiations with Russia (The Geneva International Talks);
2. Argue for international pressure on Russia and coordinate relevant mechanisms of international law, political and diplomatic means;
3. The existing bi-lateral Abashidze-Karasini format should not by-pass the Geneva International Talks;
4. Try to launch a direct dialogue with Abkhazian and South Ossetian communities on the shared concerns and needs, which will facilitate interactions between divided communities;
5. Extend benefits of the EU cooperation mechanisms to the local population beyond the ABLs;
6. Re-activate the policy of engagement with the Abkhazian and South Ossetian communities with the support of international society;
7. Communicate the problem of borderization with the Georgian society in a more deliberate manner, so that reaction to the further incident of

²⁴ Kakachia, K., Kakhishvili, L., Larsen, J., Grigalashvili, M. (2017). Mitigating Russia's Borderization of Georgia: A Strategy to Contain and Engage, Policy Paper, The Georgian Institute of Politics, December, pp. 17-18.

²⁵ Larsen, J. (2017). Deterring Russia's Borderization of Georgia, pp. 14 <http://gip.ge/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Commentary18.pdf>

²⁶ Socor, V. (2013). Russia Accelerates 'Borderization' in Georgia on War's 20th Anniversary, *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Issue 19, The Jamestown Foundation, October 2. <https://jamestown.org/program/russia-accelerates-borderization-in-georgia-on-wars-20th-anniversary/>

borderization do not translate into outrage against the Georgian state-authorities or feed into the Kremlin narratives.²⁷

The government of Georgia has a responsibility to reassess its strategy and formulate a comprehensive plan to avoid the loss of additional territory. This may involve placing troops and more international observers near the so-called “border” on a rotating basis, so as to deter further border-marking activities. It may involve a military mobilization that makes the Kremlin to believe that if she continues further incursions into Georgia’s sovereignty, there will be consequences. If the latter option is chosen, the presence of international observers and unimpeded information-disseminating technology is imperative. These efforts could be considered as some sort of deterrent measures, although the government of Georgia should bear in mind that part of the Russian warfare strategy is to provoke distrust, disunity and chaos from within their country.²⁸

2.5 Conclusion/Recommendations

The government of Georgia has a limited arsenal at its disposal to effectively contain the continued process of borderization through its own measures only and it needs to mobilize international support to this end. It needs to avoid the transformation of particular incidents of borderization into serious clashes between the militaries of the occupant forces and the paramilitary groups of the de-facto regime in occupied Tskhinvali Region and Abkhazia. Realistically, for the current moment, the central authorities of Georgia can and should improve coordination among the governmental institutions and develop an unified state communication strategy. It should also improve practice of informing the international community regarding borderization and link borderization to the events in Ukraine and Moldova, as a shared challenge from the Russian Federation in its Near Abroad and vis-à-vis the West. Although, the government acts as if it is facing Russia one-on-one, in an international vacuum. This perception may turn into a

²⁷ Kakchia, K. (2018). How the West Should Respond to Russia’s ‘Borderization’ in Georgia, PONARS Eurasia Memo, N523, April.

²⁸ Tsereteli, G. (2015). Russia's warfare strategy and borderization in Georgia. in *The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*. Publication of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program Joint Center, August 10. <https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13254-russia-warfare-strategy-borderization-georgia.html>

self-fulfilling prophecy: “if the government passively accepts Russia’s territorial encroachments, it could be potentially dangerous line to follow, as it may invite further ‘provocation and escalation’ by Russia or through South Ossetian proxies, at any point along the yet-undemarcated occupation line.”²⁹

The government of Georgia should improve the gaps in interagency coordination within the government and fix pure strategic communication between stakeholders; it needs to elaborate effective mechanisms of the pre-emptive actions on the incidents across the ABL and avoid to follow to the challenge-response tactics.³⁰ Meantime, the government of Georgia could use various measures to reinforce the people-to-people interaction;

- Given that Abkhaz and Ossetians already receive Georgian public health-care services, the comprehensive study of this practice will help the government to fully utilize the successful aspects of the process to increase demand on the Georgian biometric passports;
- It is necessary that the benefits of the visa-free movement with the EU and the DCFTA are both discussed and implemented in the context of Georgia’s non-recognition policy and extended to the residents of the occupied territories;
- Lack and non-proper use of the STRATCOM divisions: within governmental institutions and ministries, where the STRATCOM units already exist, should be reinforced and if they have not been created yet, the new one’s should be established where they are necessary;
- Borderization is a fundamental geopolitical game from the side of Russia, providing a hard marker between respective political visions defined by either Russia or Europe and the West, thus the problem of Russia’s borderization in Georgia needs more international framing and solutions in the wider EU/European-Russian/Eurasian zero-sum security game.³¹

²⁹ Socor, V. (2013). Russia Accelerates ‘Borderization’ in Georgia on War’s 20th Anniversary, *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Issue 19, The Jamestown Foundation, October 2. <https://jamestown.org/program/russia-accelerates-borderization-in-georgia-on-wars-20th-anniversary/>

³⁰ Kakchia, K. (2018). How the West Should Respond to Russia’s ‘Borderization’ in Georgia, PONARS Eurasia Memo, N523, April.

³¹ Kakachia, K., Kakhishvili, L., Larsen, J., Grigalashvili, M. (2017). Mitigating Russia’s Borderization of Georgia: A Strategy to Contain and Engage, Policy Paper, The Georgian Institute of Politics, December, pp. 17-18.

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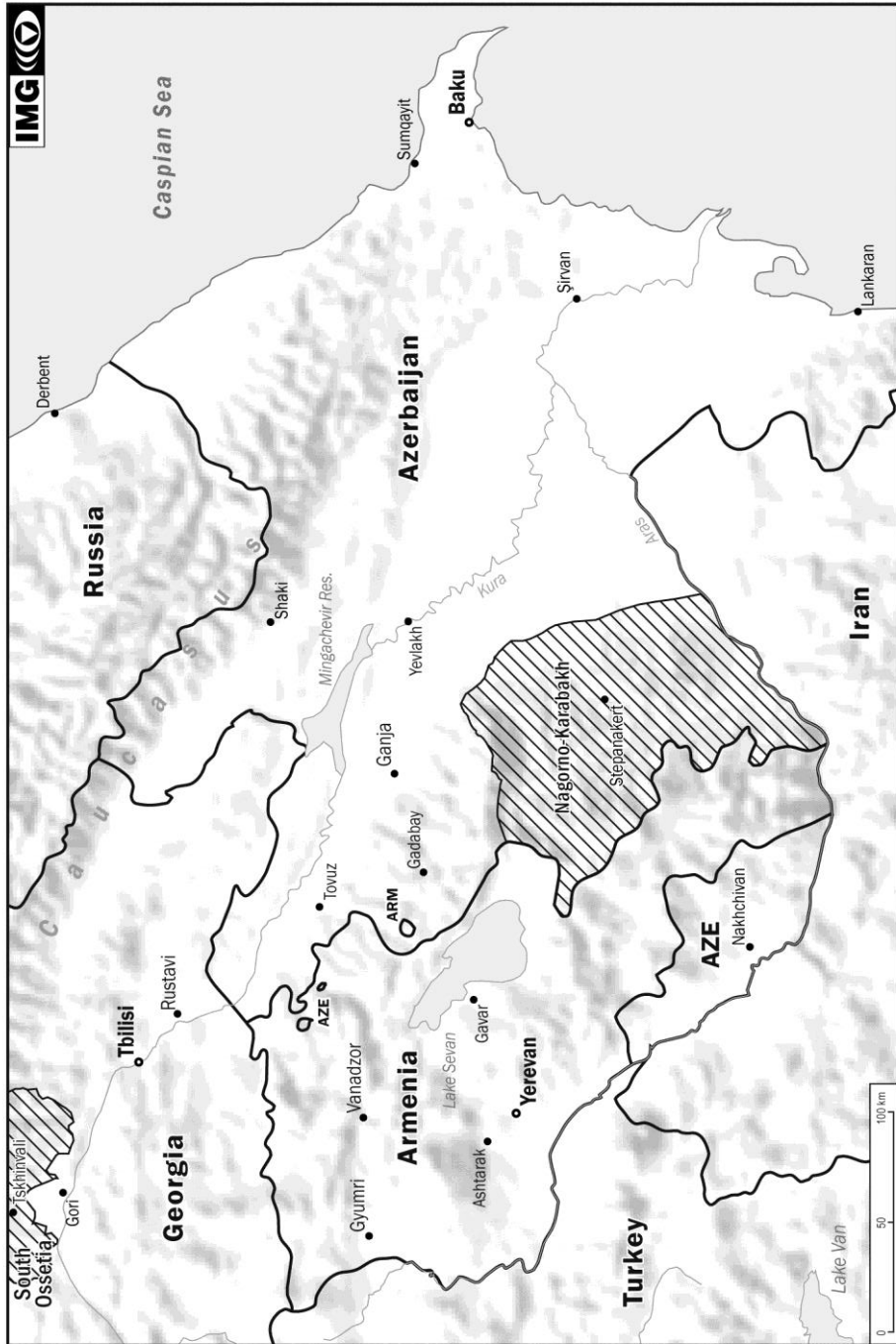
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Map 2 - Overview Armenia, Azerbaijan and the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh and the surrounding occupied districts of Azerbaijan (shaded) as of October 2018.

3 The Armenian Revolution of 2018 and Possible Implications on the Armenian-Azerbaijani Conflict

Anahit Shirinyan

Disclaimer: The following paper was written in January 2019.

3.1 Introduction

The Velvet Revolution in Armenia in April-May 2018 has raised hopes among many Caucasus-watchers that there might be prospects for breaking the stalemate in the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process and moving forward. It is true that there is an opportunity to move to a more constructive footing in Armenian-Azerbaijani interactions, but it would be ill-informed to deem the change of power in Armenia as a major trigger for progress in the peace talks. In fact, an analysis of official and unofficial discourses in Armenia and Azerbaijan in the aftermath of the Revolution points to different, and often misplaced, expectations from each other moving forward.¹ Expectations from Azerbaijan, for example, primarily rest on the anticipation that it is the Armenian side that should change its approaches, while not acknowledging the need for change on Azerbaijan's part. On the Armenian side, there are even sharper articulations of Yerevan's traditional stance: that no progress is possible unless the Karabakh Armenians' right for self-determination is recognized and Baku removes its war rhetoric.

The peace process itself is still under the shadow of the four-day war of April 2016 which has aggravated the conflict's security dilemma. An

¹ For detailed analysis, see: Anahit Shirinyan, "Karabakh Discourses in Armenia Following the Velvet Revolution", <http://caucasusedition.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Karabakh-Discourses-in-Armenia-Following-the-Velvet-Revolution-1.pdf> and Zaur Shiriyev, "Perceptions in Azerbaijan of the Impact of Revolutionary Changes in Armenia on the Nagorno-Karabakh Peace Process", <http://caucasusedition.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Perceptions-in-Azerbaijan-of-the-Impact-of-Revolutionary-Changes-in-Armenia-on-the-Nagorno-Karabakh-Peace-Process-1.pdf>, both in *Political Transitions and Conflicts in South Caucasus*, Caucasus Edition, Volume 3 Issue 2, 2018.

attempt to allay it was made with agreements reached in Vienna in May 2016 and in Geneva in October 2017, under the auspices of the OSCE Minsk Group, that implied establishment of confidence building measures and continuation of talks, but these have not been implemented.

Any new dynamics around the peace talks is yet to emerge. Armenia's Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev have not formally met yet for official talks. Their informal meeting on the sidelines of the Commonwealth of Independence States summit in Dushanbe on 28 September, however, has resulted in a gentlemen's agreement to reduce frontline tension and establish a direct line of communications between the sides.² Such channel is operational between designated officials from the two sides as of November 2018.

There is however no indication that any of the sides have changed their traditional positions. Azerbaijan has long argued for what it calls "substantive talks": Baku wants to focus on the withdrawal of Armenian forces from the territories that surround the former Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO), but does not want to discuss the issue of the status of Nagorno-Karabakh. It also resists confidence building measures including mechanisms to monitor ceasefire violations as it has used the threat of force to push the logic of the talks into a "territories in exchange for peace" formula – a departure from the once-implied "territories in exchange for status" formula. The Armenian side, on the contrary, prioritizes the status issue in the logic of Karabakh Armenians' right for self-determination. Yerevan has also been arguing as of late that there is no merit in voicing possible Armenian concessions unless Baku reciprocates.

3.2 Old positions and new discourses

Armenia's updated approaches to the conflict are traceable through several announcements that the new PM Pashinyan has made. One is that Nagorno-Karabakh should return to the negotiations table and be

² "PM Pashinyan Reveals the Initial Arrangements Reached with Ilham Aliyev in Dushanbe", Panorama.am, 29 September 2018, <https://www.panorama.am/en/news/2018/09/29/PM-Pashinyan/2011291>

represented by its own elected representatives.³ Pashinyan argues that he can only speak on behalf of Armenia, as the people of Nagorno-Karabakh do not participate in the government formation in Armenia.⁴ He has further stressed that compromise on the Armenian side is possible only after Azerbaijan ceases to employ war rhetoric and recognizes the Karabakh people's right to self-determination.⁵ Although not entirely new, these positions are more forcefully articulated by the new government.

A rather new introduction is the tendency to open up the peace process to the wider public. Traditionally, details of the talks have been the prerogative of a handful of officials from both sides, leading to public speculations as to what exactly is being discussed at the talks. But Pashinyan's approach is that the wider public should be sure there can be no secret arrangements behind closed doors. He has claimed that Armenian people will be the key decision-makers on the final solution to the conflict – presumably through a referendum – if ever there is a deal at the negotiation table that he deems as fair.⁶ Pashinyan has also developed a habit of directly reporting to the public in live video broadcasts on important matters, including his meetings with Aliyev. These people-centric approaches are based on the logic of the Velvet Revolution which brought Pashinyan to power through an expression of 'people-power'.

On the Azerbaijani side, there has been an expectation since the Velvet Revolution that the new Armenian government might be changing its traditional stance on the conflict. Such expectation is primarily based on the perception, prevalent among official and public circles in Azerbaijan, that Yerevan's approaches to the conflict were defined by the last two presidents, Robert Kocharyan and Serzh Sargsyan, being originally from

³ Nagorno-Karabakh was a party to official peace negotiations until 1997-98.

⁴ "Nikol Pashinyan Presents His Vision of Karabakh Conflict Settlement", Arka.am, 9 May 2018. http://arka.am/en/news/politics/nikol_pashinyan_presents_his_vision_of_karabakh_conflict_settlement/

⁵ "We Can Speak about Mutual Concessions Only in Case Azerbaijan Recognizes Artsakh's Right to Self-Determination – Armenian PM", Armenpress.am, 9 May 2018, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/932932.html>

⁶ "Highlights From Pashinyan's First 100 Days Speech", The Armenian Weekly, 18 August 2018, <https://armenianweekly.com/2018/08/18/highlights-of-pashinyans-first-100-days-speech/>

Nagorno-Karabakh.⁷ This belief is probably the main source of the impression that Armenia under a more liberal leader not directly connected to Nagorno-Karabakh will be keen to soften its position – without Azerbaijan having to reciprocate.⁸ This expectation, however, points to a major misperception on the motives of the Armenian position on Karabakh, overlooking the Armenian concerns on human rights that triggered the conflict back in 1988.

3.3 Russia's role

Russia continues to be the biggest arms supplier to both Armenia and Azerbaijan. At the same time, Nagorno-Karabakh is the only de facto state in the post-Soviet space where Russia does not have boots on the ground. Moscow has tried to deploy peacekeepers in the conflict zone since the early 1990s. It has traditionally held talks under its auspices with Yerevan and Baku in trilateral format – parallel to the OSCE Minsk Group format. Moscow has argued it's a supporting process, rather than a competing one.

Although Russia's role is often exaggerated, recent revelations point to the fact that worries over Moscow's pursuit of peacekeeper deployment and possibly other geostrategic stakes are not groundless. In 2015, a new Russia-initiated plan, more known in expert circles as 'Lavrov plan', was rumoured to have emerged. The initiative looked like more of a bargain between Moscow and Baku. It implied Armenian withdrawal from territories around Nagorno-Karabakh and deployment of Russian, possibly also Belorussian peacekeeping forces, in exchange for Azerbaijan entering the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Eurasian Economic Union. In December 2018, Belarus president Aleksandr Lukashenka revealed details of behind-the-door conversations on the topic,⁹ thereby confirming earlier suspicions of the existence of such a

⁷ For example, "Armenian People Got Rid of 'Karabakh Clan' - Azerbaijani MP", Trend.az, 24 April 2018, <https://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/politics/2892265.html>

⁸ "Baku Ready for Negotiations with Sensible Forces of Armenia", Turan.az, 24 April 2018, <http://www.turan.az/ext/news/2018/4/free/politics%20news/en/70871.htm?v=1>

⁹ "Belarus Leader: Armenia Resisted Russian Push for Karabakh Peacekeeping", Focus on Karabakh, USC Institute of Armenian Studies, 18 December 2018, <https://armenian.usc.edu/focus-on-karabakh/highlight/belarus-leader-2016-russia-pushed-karabakh-peacekeeping-mission-armenia-refused/>

plan.¹⁰ The plan didn't imply a comprehensive solution to the conflict, but would in practice increase both Armenia's and Azerbaijan's dependence from Russia. It remains unclear as to how exactly the initiators hoped to 'sell' the plan to Yerevan which was not getting much from the deal.

In this context, as well as because of Yerevan's unhappiness that Moscow sells arms to Baku against the spirit of the formal military alliance between Yerevan and Moscow, Armenian-Russian relations have been in a low-intensity crisis since at least April 2016. Since the Velvet Revolution, Russia has also been suspicious towards the new Armenian government, mostly comprised of younger generation of politicians with democratic credentials.¹¹ Yerevan does not aim to change Armenia's foreign policy course, but some readjustments in all directions can be observed. In relation to Russia this is being manifested in Armenia's prioritizing of respect for sovereignty and non-interference in each other's affairs. But this also means that Azerbaijan may be tempted to exploit the relative tension in Armenian-Russian relations in an attempt to garner Russia's support in the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. For example, recent speculations in Azerbaijan that the latter may be considering becoming a CSTO member¹² – even though the move wouldn't survive an Armenian veto – may be a message to Moscow that Baku is ready to bargain again.

3.4 Future prospects

In recent months the sides have tried to demonstrate some intentional gestures of goodwill. On the Armenian side, Armenia's first lady Anna Hakobyan has launched a "Women for Peace" initiative, aimed at engaging women, especially mothers of soldiers who have lost their lives in Karabakh fighting, in advocating for peace, and has called for women from

¹⁰ Davit Shahnazaryan, "A Conflict of Interests in Nagorno-Karabakh", Stratfor, 28 July 2017, <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/conflict-interests-nagorno-karabakh>

¹¹ Grigor Atanesian, "Can Armenia's Pashinyan Have an Honest Conversation With Putin? (Op-Ed)", The Moscow Times, 7 September 2018, <http://themoscowtimes.com/articles/can-armenia-pashinyan-have-an-honest-conversation-with-putin-opinion-62821>

¹² Sergei Markedonov, "Will Azerbaijan Join the 'Eurasian NATO'?", Carnegie Moscow Center, 28 August 2018, <https://carnegie.ru/commentary/77116>

Azerbaijan to join the appeal.¹³ Official Baku has so far been sceptical of the initiative, but has apparently intentionally toned down a bit its war rhetoric. The Dushanbe agreement has been holding so far with only minor incidents at the frontlines. Whether the relative calm is a tactical pause or an indication of a genuine willingness to take the process into a more constructive turf remains to be seen.

It is also unclear as to what exactly the sides will be negotiating around, as their priorities continue to differ. The so-called ‘constructive ambiguity’ installed in the Madrid Principles, basic principles for the peaceful settlement of the conflict, has not produced a result in over ten years. For a long while, it has allowed conflict management, but has ceased playing that role without additional measures to preclude a slide-down to war.

There are other unknowns, such as how the two leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan with different levels of popularity and different styles of governance will get along at the negotiations table. Past narratives have argued that the establishment of democratic governance in these countries is a necessary prerequisite to solve the conflict.

It is clear that equal level of input from both sides is needed to be able to speak of any progress in the peace process. There is also need to build trust and confidence among the official parties and the societies. Misplaced and unfulfilled expectations, on the other hand, risk leading to a new wave of escalation. Both sides possess far more sophisticated weaponry, while an active military build-up of recent years in the Nakhijevan exclave of Azerbaijan bordering south-west of Armenia risks emerging as a potential new clash-point in case of escalation.¹⁴

¹³ “Armenian PM’s Wife Signals Launch of Women For Peace Campaign in Moscow”, News.am, 28 June 2018, <https://news.am/eng/news/463477.html>

¹⁴ Eduard Abrahamyan, “Armenia and Azerbaijan’s Evolving Implicit Rivalry Over Nakhchivan”, Jamestown Foundation, 3 August 2017, <https://jamestown.org/program/armenia-and-azerbajians-evolving-implicit-rivalry-over-nakhchivan/>

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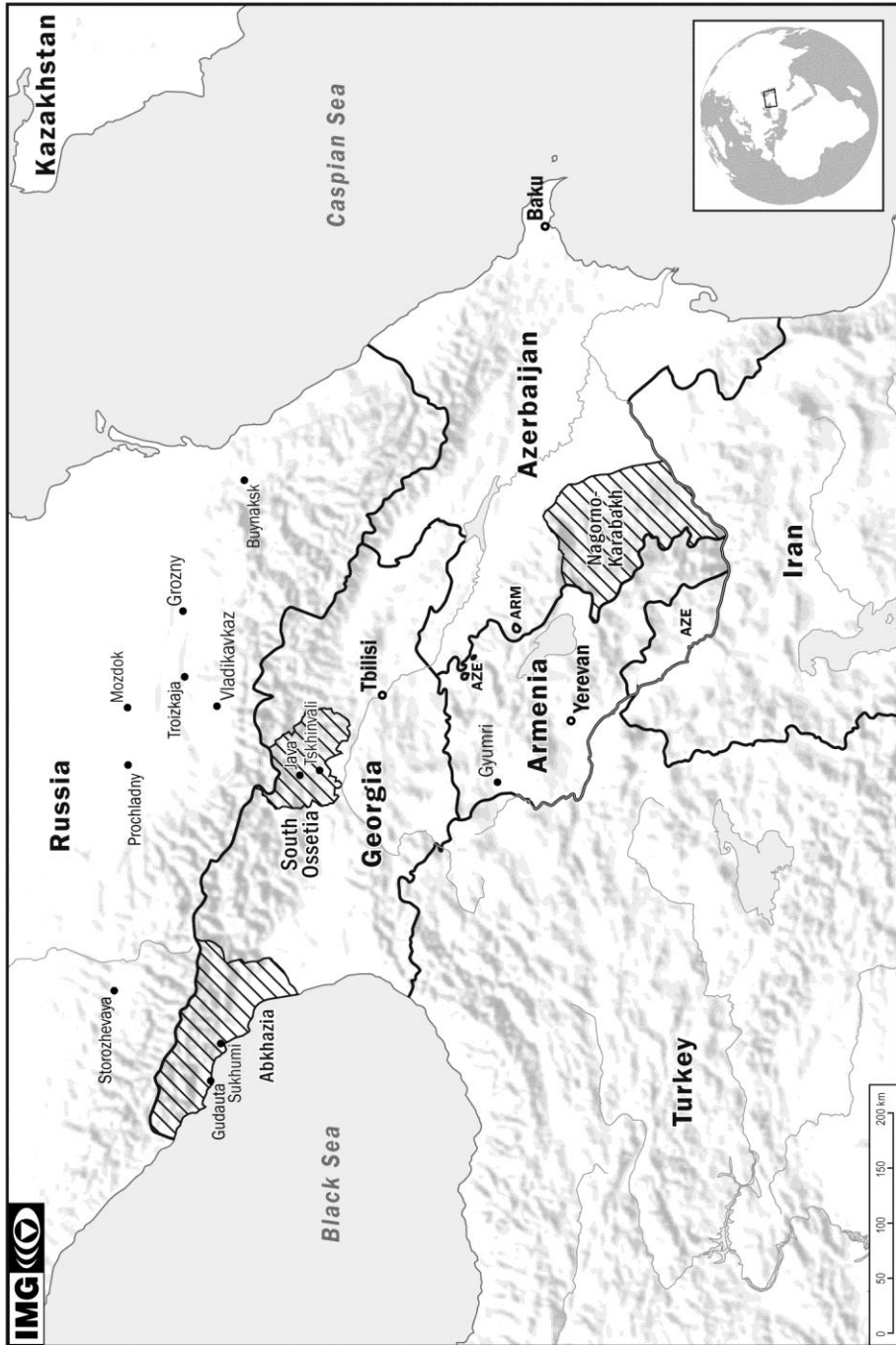
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Map 3 – Overview of the South Caucasus. Shaded: break-away regions of Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh with surrounding occupied districts as of October 2018.

4 Russia's Strategic Goals in the South Caucasus

Frederic Labarre

Disclaimer: The following speaking notes were written in October 2018.

4.1 Russia's Strategic Goals in Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia

This paper seeks to answer questions put forward for the benefit of the audience at IFK's conference on Perspectives on Conflict Management in the South Caucasus. This particular section focuses on Russian positions relative to Georgia and breakaway regions.

These questions (below) are answered in turn:

- 1) What are Russia's strategic goals in Georgia and breakaway territories?
- 2) What is Russia's perception of the Georgia-EU rapprochement?
- 3) What is Russia's perception of the EU's policy of Engagement without Recognition?
- 4) Russia's self-perceived role in Georgia

4.1.1 *Russia's strategic goals in Georgia and breakaway regions*

When evaluating this question, it is useful to ask oneself whether Russian policies are motivated by fears or desires. And these motives correspond to Western analysts' cleavages as well.

If one is an apologist of Russia, one will likely write from Russia's point of view, adopting a long historical view of Russia-Western relations. They will explain Russian behaviour based on the repeated Western-originating attacks and campaigns dating back at least 200 years. First Napoleon, then Crimea, then the First World War, then the reactionary intervention during the Civil War, then the Second World War, etc. It is those traumas that have stigmatized Russian policy-making.

Advocates of containment, on the other hand, adopt a shorter view of history and focus on how Russia has interacted with the West. Their position is impacted by the assaults given by the Soviet Union in Hungary in 1956, in Czechoslovakia in 1968, by the comfort it has given Communist sympathizers in Vietnam, by the invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, and of course, on the recent in-roads into the sovereign territories of Georgia, and lately, Ukraine.

Whether one is an apologist or an advocate of containment, however, differs little. The outcome of Russian policy in the South Caucasus would be the same either way; apologists would say that Russia has intervened in the South Caucasus to prevent NATO/EU enlargement. Advocates of containment would say that this intervention was proof of Russia's desire to re-establish its influence over the near-abroad, if not re-erect a political structure akin to the Soviet Union. In essence, the current Russia-Western dispute is about who is containing whom. The longer time is spent in such a condition, the greater the danger of people "forgetting" what they are containing "for", and the greater the danger to sink into a security dilemma.

The South Caucasus has been the victim of this clash of containments. On the one hand, powerful Western agents wanted to "save" the region from Russian aggression. On the other, Russia wanted to avoid being taken by surprise by an all-encircling NATO. A red line had to be drawn, but the deterrence was not credible, so this line was crossed.

It would be too long to develop the full evolution of Russian foreign defence and security policy here. Suffice it to say that the immediate post-Cold War period, that of Boris Yeltsin, was a ferment of indecision, brought on by what Richard Sakwa called the era of "too many cooks", where policy-making was the fruit inter-service rivalry and competition. Only the Kozyrev doctrine held fast, which merely said that Russia had a special responsibility towards the former Soviet Republics, especially in ensuring that human and political rights of Russian minorities therein be respected.

Keir Giles corroborates Sakwa's conclusions, adding that by 2009, it was the Russian National Security Council that had propelled itself to the top of the policy-making heap. The Russian strategic security concept would

therefore not only emanate but protect the objectives of the Putin circle, according to him. 2009 is, of course, an important year; it succeeds the 2008 intervention in Georgia and reflects the impact of the world financial crisis, and, at the same time, it is produced at a moment when the Russian economy has reaped the benefit of increasing commodity prices. In other words, it took some fifteen years for the Russian policy-making elite to consolidate and have the means of the country's ambitions.

Until 2009, Russia's doctrinal pronouncements had been reactive. Hence, they can be taken as signals of displeasure at Western interventionism. The 2000 National Security Strategy had been issued in answer to NATO's attack on Serbia. The 2003 document on the "Current Tasks of the Russian Armed Forces" followed the US-led invasion of Iraq. Only the 2009 National Security Strategy struck a decidedly upbeat tone after the successful invasion of Georgia the previous year. Always according to Keir Giles, the 2009 document differs from previous white papers by being less descriptive and more prescriptive. The aim of the Russian Federation, as stated in this document, *is to transform the Russian Federation into a world leading power in terms of capacity to influence world events*. Yet even that objective is intermediary.

In 2010, the Russian Military Doctrine revealed that there was a critical capability gap in the armed forces between its cyber abilities and nuclear deterrent. The Russian Federation didn't have a credible conventional deterrent to project power very far beyond its borders. In 2014, the Russian Federation flexed its muscle in order to annex Crimea and supported militia incursions into the Ukrainian Donbas. The advocates of containment – while they have clear behaviour patterns to point a finger at – do not have the evidence of a sufficient force structure to drive Russian armoured columns all the way to Kyiv, or farther for that matter. Therefore, the Russian Federation has not the means to affect the status quo, nor is it any expressly stated objective. One must return to the 2009 document to keep in mind what that is, and how it finds articulation in the 2013 Foreign Policy doctrine.

The Russian Federation's Conception of External Affairs (2013) points to a world divided by civilizational models. Like previous doctrinal documents, it comes after major international upheaval; the beginning of the Arab

Spring, the NATO attack of Libya, the defeat of the Qaddafi regime, and the beginning of the civil war in Syria.

It gives shape to a decade and a half of U.S.-Russia foreign relations experience, and to the harmonization of the armed forces and foreign and domestic security policy conceptions by fastening on specific aims of the Kremlin. First and foremost, the Kremlin aims at re-establishing the predominance of the United Nations as a regulatory body in international security, and especially the dominance of the Security Council, where it has a veto. Second, it wants to significantly contribute to the legitimacy of multilateralism and international law by resisting “arbitrary” interpretations of UN Security Council resolutions or frivolous interpretation of the Helsinki Final Act of 1975. Third, it projects for itself a regional role, where Moscow has specific responsibilities in its periphery. Finally, it views as unacceptable the penchant to intervene – militarily or otherwise, including through propaganda – in the sovereign affairs of independent States under the pretext of humanitarian intervention or the so-called “responsibility to protect” (Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013).

To this must be added the real fear of the Russian leadership of “copy-cat” revolutions, a contagion of protests and separatism spreading from the periphery to reach Moscow.

4.1.2 Russia in the South Caucasus

Russian policy in the South Caucasus must be evaluated according to the above. It must be borne in mind that when Georgia became independent, it did not, according to Jolicoeur, meet the Montevideo criteria for statehood; it didn’t control its territory, and there were still important questions with regards to the exact expanse of territory that it could be sovereign over.

Nevertheless, when Georgia’s existence became threatened by Abkhaz separatism, Moscow imposed sanctions on the separatist elements for a time. This is because Russia was reeling from the effects of Chechen separatism as well, and was grappling with other burgeoning movements as well. In short, Moscow wanted to save the house, never mind if all the furniture had been removed. This would seem inconsistent with today’s position; in a way, it is impossible to detect a progression of policy from

sanctions against separatists (tantamount to support for Georgia) to the current situation of support for Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Russia was far too busy plugging the leaks in its economy and society to actively influence affairs in separatist entities or even in neighbouring capitals until 2003. In 2003, however, things took a turn for the disquieting. The “Rose Revolution” which delivered Georgia to Mikheil Saakashvili, *enfant chéri* of the West, from the grip of “Moscow-friendly” Eduard Shevardnadze (the last foreign secretary of the USSR) sent Vladimir Putin into a panic. Even more so when Ukraine saw its own “orange” revolution. Colour revolutions became a point of concern in Russian doctrinal documentation from that point on, and Russian policy-making changed accordingly.

Russia’s position in the South Caucasus became motivated by the grievous threat of seeing Georgia “fall” to NATO/EU after the successful revolution there. Russian policymakers understood that Mr. Saakashvili’s success may eventually mean a rapprochement with Euro-Atlantic structures that could culminate with NATO membership. This potential threat was revealed as true five years later and aggravated by the threat of separatism yet again. The Russian policy and position on the matter is at the confluence of threats to territorial integrity, foreign intervention in the affairs of state by third parties (i.e. stoking revolution), fear of copy-cat revolutions, and fear of NATO/EU enlargement. In 2008, events took a turn for the worst, and only the outline is sufficient to define what Russian behaviour would be:

- a) After nine years of Western assurances – voiced through the UN and the OSCE – that Serbian territorial integrity is sacrosanct, Kosovo declares independence in February 2008.
- b) After nine years of saying that Kosovo independence would never be recognized, major NATO powers recognize Kosovo as sovereign within one month of that UDI.
- c) April 2008, NATO Summit. For the first time in its history, NATO invites the Russian leadership at its summit. There, in front of Mr. Putin, the declaration is made that Georgia and Ukraine “will one day be NATO members.”

The Membership Action Plan, which had served all previous enlargements and invitations for membership since 1999, is not extended to the two countries, but the criteria for membership are clear; no disputes with minorities, no border disputes and control over the sovereign territory.

From June onwards, the Georgian government enacts plans to retake South Ossetia by force, thereby hoping to meet those membership conditions. Since 2006, Georgia had greatly increased its defence budget by as much as 300 percent, reaching 1 billion USD a year. The result was – with the help of Russian provocation – the Russia-Georgia war of August 2008.

The consequence; Russia pulled a Kosovo in reverse, calling for the recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia from the international community. This call was met by only five countries, including Russia. Two others subsequently withdrew their recognition. This hasn't kept Russia from feeding troops and erecting structures in South Ossetia; Tskhinvali has increased in area by nearly 30 percent.

Russia is now building a base in South Ossetia, and the power there seeks to create a bit of strategic depth, pushing the border closer and closer to the Tbilisi-Gori highway. It must be noted that South Ossetia, which counts merely 24000 people, never wanted independence, but annexation to Russia, with North Ossetia. This was always denied by the Russian policy circles, ostensibly because they didn't want copy-cat annexation movements springing up elsewhere (for instance, Karelia re-joining Finland).

Similarly, while it never really supported Abkhaz independence, Russia began distributing Russian passports to retro-actively make true the promise made of protecting Russian citizens abroad. When in 2006, Saakashvili's ill-fated attempts at controlling smuggling from the Kodori valley backfired, Russia began distributing passports and building a railway to connect the Russian hinterland with Abkhazia. Clearly, this is to better move troops.

The outcome of all of this is a stern warning to NATO, as well as to would-be NATO members, that a red line had been crossed. Now, Russia

occupies both breakaway territories of Georgia, and as long as it does that, Georgia will never be able to meet the requirements of NATO enlargement. The aim here is to prevent NATO enlargement. No guarantees to Russia – after all the Western promises broken – will ever convince or compel her to leave Abkhazia and South Ossetia. What’s worse is that Georgia cannot (and it would not either) accept letting Abkhazia and South Ossetia go because this would resolve border and minority disputes at one go, which would mean that Georgia would suddenly become eligible for NATO membership – which Russia will oppose with all its strength. Therefore, Russia and Georgia are together locked in the awkward position of tolerating and even encouraging the statuslessness of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Any other move would invite Russia’s invasion of Georgia, and its subjection of Tbilisi.

4.1.3 Georgia-EU Rapprochement

This question has to be seen against the backdrop of the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union. The Eurasian Economic Union was put together to give mutual access to a regional market within the post-Soviet sphere. Georgia-EU relations can therefore be a factor of Russian jealousy because the greater the integration with EU structures, the more exclusive Georgian trade may become, and therefore out of reach of the Russian market. So this is one perspective.

The other perspective is normative. Norms of behaviour in the EU are, quite understandably, very different than elsewhere. Those norms, based on values of individual liberty, freedom of speech, or assembly, and of opinion, are unfamiliar and suspect to the post-Soviet sphere, led by Russia. Any change in norms may invite the sort of catastrophic regime change that can breed by example elsewhere. Democratic ideals spread like contagion. This is something that the Kremlin would keep a wary eye on. So, this is another factor to account for.

But when we say “rapprochement,” we have to consider; from what distance? Shevardnadze’s? Saakashvili’s? If Mr. Saakashvili is taken to be the democrat that the Western (especially US) press touts him to be, how can we explain the abuse of power of the mid-2000s? How can we explain the reckless adventure of 2008? It, therefore, follows that in Europe, and

this is borne out by Mrs. Tagliavini's report after the disastrous Russia-Georgia war, opinions of Mr. Saakashvili and his political base vary greatly. He may be seen with lukewarm affection.

Of course, this does not apply to Mr. Ivanishvili, a firm Moscow friend. So perhaps it is from that point of view which we should consider rapprochement. But in fact, trade with Russia resumed under Mr. Ivanishvili, and this did not impede rapprochement with the EU. But by then, the idea of the EU enlarging to Georgia may have withered away.

A safe conclusion to this question would be this one; Russia is only mildly worried about a perceived rapprochement because;

- a) The EU itself has far more stringent rules about accession or integration of its markets, and this is because EU members themselves are divided as to the reach of enlargement. For instance, will Italy and France welcome a country that produces wine more inexpensively than they do and which still has an excellent reputation? Would countries like the UK, or better yet Finland or Poland, welcome a country that has a reputation for being trigger happy? In any case, would countries under Moscow's thumb, like ostensibly Hungary, and maybe others, accept Georgian participation in the EU in any shape or form?
- b) Far more countries have an interest in making sure that relations with Russia remain somewhat harmonious; energy relations are a case in point, but so too is policy consistency on both sides of the equation.

It is not rapprochement that we are witnessing, but the emergence of a genuine "third way," which is neither non-alignment nor neutrality. Its features are still unclear. But Georgia can take what it can from the EU (visa-free travel) while engaging constructively with Russia, earning it soft-power kudos from all sides.

4.1.4 Russia and Engagement without Recognition

The purpose of the EU's policy of engagement without recognition was to avoid the further absorption of Abkhazia and South Ossetia into Russia. At the time, Brussels was setting up the External Action Service (EEAS) in the wake of the Lisbon Treaty, and appears to have had little time to think

through this policy. It can be surmised therefore, that the news of this approach didn't have much an impact in Russia. The policy may be a signal of the EU's preference for a federalization of Georgia.

Some analysts claim that the policy had contrary effects to what was intended and encouraged rapprochement between the breakaway regions and Russia, and away from Georgia. On the other hand, the policy would also be a reflection of the EU members' collective stance, and many would have looked askance at what Georgia had done, and so, the policy may be understood as a middle ground between offering certain privileges to regions and ethnic groups under the thumb of a ruthless overlord (much as the West had interpreted relations between separatist Kosovars and Serbia proper a decade earlier), and denying Russia the prize the EU thought it sought.

The argument here goes somewhere like this; clearly, Georgia used a too-heavy hand in dealing with its minorities, and it would be normal that their fate resembles that of Kosovo. After all, scholars of self-determination argue convincingly that in certain cases, external self-determination can be recognized when the titular power uses capricious violence against minorities. On the other hand, one could also imagine Moscow's provocation of events, and so the nominal position would seek to deny the latter territorial gains to the detriment of Tbilisi.

In the end, however, Moscow seems consistently uninterested with the political annexation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Abkhazia is adamant that it is in fact independent (if not in law), and South Ossetia, although desirous of joining Russia, is not being allowed to do that. Doing this would mean turning its back on the principle of the sanctity of territorial integrity, which it defends not only for itself but for Serbia (and Syria besides). There is little reason to believe that this EU policy would be detrimental to Russian policy in the South Caucasus.

4.1.5 Russian self-perception in the South Caucasus

Quite clearly, it perceives itself as the legitimate local hegemon, and no challenger should succeed there. It sees itself the way we see ourselves in the Balkans, I reckon!

More than that, Russia is turning the principle of “Responsibility to Protect” on its head by allowing Abkhaz and South Ossetians to receive Russian passports. By doing so, Russia can thereby claim that it is protecting citizens abroad.

It must be said that Russia’s contribution to the local economy in Abkhazia and South Ossetia has been substantial, and that this was the country’s first experiment with what we call soft-power. Russia has single-handedly rebuilt Tskhinval, not least to make it more agreeable to the troops, airmen, and FSB personnel posted there. Abkhazia has benefited from major events like the Sochi Olympics and the F1 races, in addition to autonomous direct investment from Russia.

4.2 Russia’s current role in Nagorno-Karabakh

This paper seeks to answer questions put forward for the benefit of the audience at IFK’s conference on Perspectives on Conflict Management in the South Caucasus. This particular section focuses on Russian positions relative to Nagorno-Karabakh.

These questions (below) are answered in turn:

- What is Russia’s current role in Nagorno-Karabakh?
- Would Russia intervene in case of escalation?
- Would Iran and Turkey’s cooperation over Syria affect diplomatic efforts to settle the conflict?

4.2.1 Russia’s current role in Nagorno-Karabakh

In the eyes of international law and of the international community represented by the UN, relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan began deteriorating gravely in the dying days of the USSR, in 1988. According to Thomas de Waal, the leading expert on the region, the pogrom that took place in Sumgait in February 1988 was essentially the first salvo of the quarter-century-long war between Armenia and Azerbaijan, which ensued. In Sumgait, near Baku, throngs of Azerbaijanis, angry at the local Armenian minority’s campaigning for the unification of Armenia and Nagorno-

Karabakh, attacked members of the Armenian community. The official numbers speak of some 36 dead, although some other sources speak of hundreds.

Then leader of the USSR was perceived as slow to respond. This may be due to two factors; the spirit of decentralization which conceded more responsibility to the Soviet Republics for their internal order (as opposed to Soviet federal troops), and legacy lethargy in crisis response. Gorbachev answered that any revision of internal borders had to take place according to the Soviet Constitution. The USSR was giving the rule of law a try, and it was too little too late. By then, the Armenian community especially had begun to distrust Moscow's writ. This distrust was only accentuated with the December 7, 1988, Spitak earthquake, which killed as many as 50,000 people.

This catastrophe showed the limits which the Soviet government had set itself when it came to its presence in these troubled regions. When open fighting erupted in 1992 between Armenia and Azerbaijan, an overwhelmed Moscow, now the capital of the recently separated Russian Federated Soviet Socialist Republic (that's right; we often forget that Russia separated from the USSR!), stood by the sidelines.

In essence, Russia's presence in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was made manifest mainly through the work of the UN Security Council, and the several resolutions calling for the return of territories seized by Armenia. Each of which have been ignored not only by the international community but by Russia as well. Later, the OSCE Minsk group, composed of Russia, the United States and France, along with the Armenian and Azerbaijani delegation, ineffective as it is, would represent Russia's level of interest in resolving the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh.

It would take until the mid-2000s for Russia to risk being a more enthusiastic conflict manager in Nagorno-Karabakh, but the efforts, led by Russian president Dmitri Medvedev, came to an ignominious end in 2011, after roughly a dozen meetings had taken place between belligerents.

Ever since Azerbaijan pledged to increase defence spending to overcome Armenia's total government spending, Russia has sought to maintain peace

in the region by siding with Armenia to offset Azerbaijan's growing strength, mainly by supplying arms and establishing long-term presence in Armenia through a military base. In constructivist terms, this makes sense because Russia and Armenia are both Orthodox countries, but Moscow has also maintained courteous relations with Azerbaijan, mainly because the latter can only procure armaments it needs in Russia. So in the latter dyad, there is interdependency; it's a seller's market in the arms industry, and Russia needs to cultivate the few clients it has. According to Ahmad Alili, Russia's military presence in Armenia allows Yerevan to be able to deploy more troops to Nagorno-Karabakh. This does not mean, however, that Yerevan is doing Moscow's bidding there. Moscow's policy is of "managed ambivalence"; supporting Armenia while also protecting Azerbaijan's limited aims, simultaneously and symmetrically.

The conflict of Nagorno-Karabakh doesn't loom large on the Russian scope of conflict management, save for the Lavrov proposals of 2014 and face-to-face meetings among Russian, Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders. According to a recent panel of the Atlantic Council in Washington DC, the prospect of having a peacekeeping mission to maintain stability in Nagorno-Karabakh is mitigated by the fact that, according to a "gentlemen's agreement" among OSCE Minsk group negotiators, NONE of the negotiators' countries, or neighbouring countries, would be allowed to contribute resources or finances to a Nagorno-Karabakh peacekeeping mission. This suggests that Moscow is not so keen on risking its reputation in the region with peacekeeping. Contrast this with its peacekeeping mission in Georgian breakaway territories.

This is because one of the more important aspects of Moscow's calculations have to do with energy. Energy access, energy price, and energy transportation. Baku exists as a key partner in this context, and Moscow would not want be seen as unreliable to other former Soviet Republics on which it depends for commodities. We think of course of Turkmenistan, an important gas producer, and other Central Asia countries. Ripples on the water in the South Caucasus may threaten the Kremlin's economic integration project, the Eurasian Economic Union. The attitude Moscow demonstrates, particularly since the resumption of more coercive hostilities in April 2016, is one of wait and see. It is

furthermore difficult to assess Russia's position relative to Mr. Pashinyan's election in the summer of 2018.

4.2.2 *Would Russia intervene in case of escalation?*

There are two indicators that suggest that Russia would not intervene in case of escalation. The first is the renewal of hostilities that took place in April 2016. There, an attempt by Azerbaijan to retake territories lost in the early 1990s met with a relative success, which has galvanized public opinion around Mr. Aliyev. It may be imagined that the intention of launching an attack – not on Nagorno-Karabakh itself but on the surrounding districts which belong by law to Azerbaijan – may have been to score an easy win to relieve popular pressure on the Azerbaijani presidency. Over the last few years, economic conditions in Azerbaijan have steadily deteriorated due to lower commodity output, isolation, and atrophy of several industries. This has been accompanied by renewed calls for democratization, which has been met by government pushback.

The victories of April 2016 have helped in re-orienting public opinion and solidifying the base of Mr. Aliyev's party. It is therefore not surprising that he secured another mandate as president in 2018. But those sorties have not met widespread opprobrium from Moscow. One can imagine that the Kremlin would have had some words with Mr. Aliyev about the exact reach of the operations. But the prospect of an attack could not have been hidden from Moscow's intelligence services. This would suggest that Russia would have let Azerbaijan proceed with its re-conquest plans.

More potent as an indicator is the puzzling case of Mr. Pashinyan, who successfully led a "velvet" revolution in the summer of 2018 to rob the leadership of Armenia from Serge Sargissyan, who had been in power for a decade and a half already. Normally, an outpouring of popular discontent in the streets, leading to the removal of a figure reliably friendly to the Kremlin, should have alarmed Mr. Putin, but the Russian power did not intervene. And, more remarkably, neither did the Azerbaijanis. The outcome of events in the summer of 2018 for Armenia, therefore, seem to have been a surprise to both actors. No effort to remove Mr. Pashinyan seems to have been made, and as he makes further overtures to countries

well outside the South Caucasus (as diverse as Canada and Iran), there is no indication that Russia is hatching a campaign to remove him.

There may be combinations of actions that would lead Moscow to intervene. For instance, if either of the two belligerents aimed at a status quo-altering outcome. For example, if Armenia managed to extend its control of Azerbaijani territory to include Nakhchivan, or if Azerbaijan, in trying to recapture lost territories, pushed towards Yerevan. This is because Moscow, in my view, cares for policy consistency. It would not have a problem letting Azerbaijan recuperate its lost territories, because it would solve an intractable conflict by force of arms. Upon the successful conclusion of such a campaign, one would imagine the international community coming together to sanctify this outcome as reflecting the mandates and wishes expressed by so many UN security council resolutions. But Moscow would not let Azerbaijan achieve more in the region, nor would it let Armenia decisively carve out more of Azerbaijan. Moscow doesn't want to encourage separatisms or causes for the population of any neighbouring country to go down in the streets, lest contagion spread to Moscow, and important economic advantages provided by the region be impacted, such as the vitality of the Eurasian Economic Union.

4.2.3 Would Iran and Turkey's involvement in Syria affect efforts at resolving the conflict?

When one includes Syria in the equation, one speaks of a different conflict with lots more moving parts. I have found no evidence in my readings that Nagorno-Karabakh is of any importance for Turkey or Iran. There is rather more evidence that Turkey and Azerbaijan do not see eye to eye on a number of issues. As for Iran, it is being outplayed by Turkey in the South Caucasus, the only issue of importance is the sizable Azerbaijani minority of Tabrizi living in Northern Iran.

I see the Syria issue like a form of policy pie; everyone tries to get what it wants from that conflict, but it doesn't involve Nagorno-Karabakh directly. I would need far more time to research the matter and to present it. Let me provide in lieu of an answer, a series of hypotheses about the Syria "variable."

- a) For Turkey, Syria means an increased risk of Kurdish separatism, which it fears greatly – as would Russia.
- b) Another common point between Turkey and Russia is the status of the Black Sea. Since the mid-2000s, the United States has been leveraging new NATO Allies in the Black Sea to review the Montreux Treaty giving non-littoral fleets access through the Bosphorus. Neither Russia nor Turkey (a NATO ally) want this.
- c) For Russia, both the Black Sea and the Syrian quagmire are a matter of naval bases; Sebastopol in Crimea and Tartus in the Mediterranean. In addition to this, Syria is Russia's no. 1 grain and cereal importer. Russia is protecting an important client, as well as establishing stepping stones for either its own containment or power projection.
- d) Success in Syria is about forestalling regime change as well, another Kremlin peeve.
- e) Iran also remains an important client of Russia's, especially when it comes to nuclear power. As long as there is the potential for interdependence there, Iran's influence in the conflict may be somewhat mitigated.
- f) Finally, it must not be forgotten that the status of the Caspian Sea (if not its sea BED) has recently been resolved between Russia, Azerbaijan and Iran.

I do not see any ready connections between the involvement of those actors and the two conflicts, but I am ready to be enlightened.

5 Epilogue: Liberal vs. Authoritarian Conflict Management in the South Caucasus

Eva Zeis

Disclaimer: The following paper was written in June 2019.

5.1 Introduction

The exchange at the workshop provides an interesting commentary on how current political changes in the South Caucasus might impact the peace processes in the South Caucasus. The papers in this volume give insights from various angles: David Matsaberidze (2019) examines the issue of borderization and its impact on the peace process in Georgia. Anahit Shirinyan (2019) focuses on the possible implications of the Velvet Revolution on the Armenian-Azerbaijani peace process. And finally, Frederic Labarre (2019) draws attention to the strategic goals of Russia in the South Caucasus. The conclusion to this volume will concentrate on one element that ties together many of the insights provided in the papers: the tension between liberal and authoritarian modes of conflict management.

Liberal conflict management used to be based on implementing a liberal democracy, market economy and enforcing human rights in conflict-torn countries. However, since the 1990s there has been an ongoing academic debate criticizing liberal conflict management as exporting Western political systems with little or no knowledge of local contexts. The outcome of such intervention was often criticized as being dysfunctional and implementing hollow institutions instead of building a sustainable peace order. This academic critique was partly fruitful as there is nowadays a tendency to promote “resilience” instead of “democracy” in conflict-torn countries. It seems, that major Western and international actors – such as the EU and the UN – are discarding the prominent liberal conflict management tria of liberal democracy, market economy and human rights.

Studies show, conflict-torn countries develop a short-term democratization after internationally brokered peace-agreements, which follow a liberal

conflict management style. However, there is a tendency that after a short phase (lasting between five and twenty years) of democracy, those countries are led by authoritarian regimes¹. There seems to be an international trend towards the illiberal, and as Lewis, Heathershaw and Megoran state, this trend might be caused to a certain extent by the rising role of China and Russia in the international system.² The authors provide the following definition of authoritarian conflict management:

“ACM [authoritarian conflict management] entails the prevention, de-escalation or termination of organized armed rebellion or other mass social violence such as inter-communal riots through methods that eschew genuine negotiations among parties of conflict, reject international mediation and constraints on the use of force, disregard calls to address underlying structural causes of conflict, and instead rely on instruments of state coercion and hierarchical power structures.”³

Other than liberal conflict management, that seeks to use conflict as an entry point for system transformation, authoritarian conflict management seeks to freeze the status quo and strengthen authoritarian modes of governing. One might put it very bluntly and say: Liberal conflict management seeks to exports “Western”, liberal modes of governing, whereas authoritarian conflict managements seeks to export “Eastern”, illiberal modes of governing. Both have the clear goal of ending mass-scale violence but have different approaches when it comes to the management and the aftermath of conflict.

This article argues that there is a tension between liberal and authoritarian conflict management policies in the South Caucasus. In this context, the EU is identified as an actor exercising liberal conflict management and Russia as an actor exercising authoritarian conflict management in the region. This article uses arguments presented in the articles of this volume and classify them as either liberal or authoritarian components of conflict management. The article now moves on to identifying liberal conflict management policies in the South Caucasus. It then moves on to

¹ Monica Duffy Toft, *Securing the Peace: The Durable Settlement of Civil Wars* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 63.

² David Lewis, John Heathershaw, and Nick Megoran, ‘Illiberal Peace? Authoritarian Modes of Conflict Management’, *Cooperation and Conflict* 53, no. 4 (December 2018): 489, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836718765902>.

³ Lewis, Heathershaw, and Megoran, 489.

identifying authoritarian conflict management policies in the region and finally provides possible tensions between those two approaches.

5.2 Liberal Conflict Management in the South Caucasus

As already stated, this article focuses on the EU as the main actor in the region promoting a liberal approach towards conflict management, without neglecting the fact that there are also other liberal actors, such as the UN or NATO. Liberal conflict management underwent some changes in the last years, which caused a deterioration of the prominent liberal tria of exporting liberal democracy, market economy and human rights. In the case of the EU, this is visible in the European Global Strategy⁴ – an updated security strategy of the EU. Instead of “democracy promotion”, which was mentioned in the former European security strategy of 2003, the EUGS uses the term “resilience promotion”. Although there is no unitary definition of the term “resilience”, it can be stated, that the focus on resilience in conflict management is certainly a paradigm-shift. Instead of focusing on the end goal following the prominent tria, it is a simplified approach based to strengthen the resilience – the capacity to bounce back from crisis and recover quickly – of a country. Step-by-step solutions are favored, and the “big topics” of human rights and democratic institutions are demarked as red lines by Western peace-builders, but not anymore as a pre-requisite for cooperation.

Therefore, the analysis of liberal conflict management policies in the South Caucasus will not be examined through the framework of liberal democracy, market economy and human rights, but through a simplified framework focusing on political, economic, and societal aspects of engagement.

5.2.1 Political Engagement

One of the key features of liberal conflict management are international negotiation and conflict management formats. The most relevant formats

⁴ European External Action Service, ‘Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign And Security Policy’, June 2016, https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/eugs_review_web_0.pdf.

in the region are the EU Monitoring Mission to Georgia (EUMM), the Geneva International Discussions (GID), the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanisms (IPRM) and the Minsk Group. However, rather than moving peace talks forward, meetings are often used to demonstrate activity to international observers⁵, as no substantial progress was achieved in the last years.

Focusing now specifically on the EU's political engagement in the South Caucasian conflicts, the EU's non-recognition policies should be noticed. The non-recognition policy can be generally seen as "a reflection of the EU members' collective stance"⁶. on the territorial disputes in Georgia. However, the "engagement without recognition"-approach of the EU, is not a specific to Georgia. The EU's follows the same approach in NK, but also in relation to Crimea and Sevastopol. The EU chose this approach in order to engage with conflict-torn regions while condemning violations of international law, such as the creation of de-facto states.

The political relations of the EU with Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan are being realized through the framework of the Eastern Partnership (EaP). The EaP is a framework for cooperation between the EU and post-Soviet countries. In 2017, the EaP declared the "20 deliverables for 2020" – an initiative for intensifying cooperation in four key areas: economy, governance, connectivity, and society. In the following, some examples of the EU's engagement in the region will be listed.

In Georgia, the EU is especially active in the area of legal support. It helped establishing the "Government Legal Aid Service" offering free legal assistance to over 330.000 citizens⁷. The EU has also trained legal personnel, such as judges and prosecutors. In order to improve access to government services, the EU supported the establishment of so-called "Government Community Centers" in remote areas of the country, which

⁵ 'Chapter Seven: Europe and Eurasia', *Armed Conflict Survey* 4, no. 1 (2018): 317, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23740973.2018.1482071>.

⁶ Fred Labarre, 'Russia's Strategic Goals in the South Caucasus', see chapter 4 in this volume, p. 61.

⁷ European External Action Service, 'Projects in Georgia', EEAS - European External Action Service - European Commission, 3 September 2018, https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/50014/projects-georgia_en.

offer 200 public and banking services, as well as free internet and libraries.⁸ In Azerbaijan, the EU is especially active with so-called “twinning projects”, establishing close cooperation between Azerbaijani ministries and public institutions and the public sector of EU member states. During the last 10 years, almost 50 of such projects have been realized.⁹ In Armenia, the EU is assisted with 7.5 € million to improve the electoral legislation, and with 14.8€ million to implement the government’s anticorruption and customs and border management reforms. It also assists in improving infrastructure linked to the judiciary by building and reconstructing 12 Armenian court buildings.¹⁰

5.2.2 *Economic Engagement*

In 2016, the Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) came into force, deepening the economic relations between Georgia and the EU. The EU is currently Georgia’s main trading partner having a 27% share of its total trade. There are multiple European initiatives supporting the Georgian economy, such as the EU4Business initiative providing funding, training and export, Horizon 2020 providing loans of a total of 130 € million, or the ENPARD program, which engages in modernizing the Georgian agricultural sector.¹¹ For Azerbaijan, the EU is the largest foreign investor, assisting about 13.000 companies with funding, training, and export, especially through the EU4Businesses initiative.¹² However, Azerbaijan has no DCFTA with the EU so far. For Armenia, the EU is the biggest export market with metals and diamonds being the top exports. The EU is also active with its EU4Businesses initiative in Armenia, having provided 500€

⁸ European Commission, ‘Georgia’, European Neighbourhood Policy And Enlargement Negotiations, 1 March 2019, https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/neighbourhood/countries/georgia_en.

⁹ European Commission, ‘Azerbaijan’, European Neighbourhood Policy And Enlargement Negotiations, 30 March 2019, https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/neighbourhood/countries/azerbaijan_en.

¹⁰ European Commission, ‘Armenia’, European Neighbourhood Policy And Enlargement Negotiations, 30 March 2019, https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/neighbourhood/countries/armenia_en.

¹¹ European External Action Service, ‘Projects in Georgia’.

¹² European Commission, ‘Azerbaijan’.

million of loans, supported 25.000 companies and created 2.5000 since 2009.¹³

5.2.3 *Societal Engagement*

The EU targets mobility and education in the region. Since the visa liberalization for Georgians in 2017, more than 300.000 Georgians travelled to the EU. Exchange programs are also a favored way of the EU to promote mobility. Almost 6.000 students and academic staff exchanges took place so far, whereas over 9.000 people participated in training and volunteering projects. In 2018, the EU opened the European School in Tbilisi, which provides education to students from the EaP region.¹⁴ Currently, there is no visa liberalization for Azerbaijan, however, the visa application processes were made easier, and Erasmus+ student visas are costless. Through the Erasmus+ program, almost 1.300 students and academic staff from Azerbaijan could study and teach in EU states and over 2.800 Azerbaijani citizens took part in exchanges, training, and volunteering projects.¹⁵ The same is true for Armenia, although the numbers vary a bit - 1.800 Armenian students and academic staff through Erasmus+, and 6.800 people through other exchange programs. Furthermore, over 250 schools and 1.200 teacher participated in “twinning projects”.¹⁶

5.3 **Authoritarian Conflict Management in the South Caucasus**

To examine authoritarian modes of conflict management, this article follows a framework provided by Lewis, Heathershaw and Megoran to analyse authoritarian conflict management. This framework divides authoritarian policy responses to conflict into three categories: discourse, spatial politics, and political economy. The category “discourse” covers issues of state propaganda, information control and knowledge production. The category “spatial politics” covers military and civilian modes of controlling and shaping spaces. Finally, the category “political economy” is

¹³ European Commission, ‘Armenia’.

¹⁴ European External Action Service, ‘Projects in Georgia’.

¹⁵ European Commission, ‘Azerbaijan’.

¹⁶ European Commission, ‘Armenia’.

concerned with the distribution of resources in order to produce certain political outcomes.¹⁷ The article now moves on to identifying arguments presented in this volume, that can be allocated to the above-mentioned categories.

5.3.1 Discourse

Speaking of discourse, Anahit Shirinyan's contribution to the volume, makes certainly a point in showing the impact of discourses for the conflict resolution around NK. As Shirinyan writes in her paper, a change of power in Armenia triggered by the Velvet Revolution did not automatically prompt the peace process.

A new tendency is a "people-centric approach" towards peace-making, which was stimulated by the bottom-up configuration of the Velvet Revolution. Prime Minister Pashinyan condemns secret arrangements and encourages public dialogue through being active on social media and providing video broadcasts from meetings. It seems, that the future peace process could incorporate elements of public consultation, such as a referendum. Also, the initiated "women for peace" initiative by Armenian first lady Nounch Sarkissian might indicate changes.

However, besides some new dynamics, the core of the peace talks remains untouched as narratives and positions did not change much. The peace process is still overshadowed by the four-day-war of 2016. The main positions, being Armenia arguing for a withdrawal of Azerbaijani troops from the NK surroundings and Armenia arguing for NK's right to self-determination, remain unchanged.

It seems, that a new narrative might be slowly emerging when it comes to the resolution of the conflict, but not so much over the root causes of conflict. A bottom-up perspective and a broad public consultation in the peace resolution is certainly a rather liberal informed process. However, the general discourse on the historic context and relevance of the conflict in NK is untouched by this development.

¹⁷ Lewis, Heathershaw, and Megoran, 'Illiberal Peace?', 486.

5.3.2 *Spatial Politics*

One of the key points presented in the papers of this publication is the issue of borderization, which impacts the South Caucasian peace processes in a significant way. Before summarizing the main effects of borderization on the peace process, a short theoretic evaluation of the term borderization shall be provided. The term borderization should be distinguished from the broader term of border-making or bordering, which are at times used synonymously. Whereas border-making refers to both conceptual and practical dimensions of creating borders in the widest sense, borderization refers to a given set of policies to set borders in a non-conventional way. Borders set through borderization are not recognized by the international community and do not – or only partly – follow conventions in the given region. Fencing and passport controls can be part of borderization policies but can also be more subtle through imposing trade barriers or minimizing contact opportunities between groups of people. Although borderization policies are often associated with Russian foreign policy in the near abroad, they are not limited to the Russian example. Borderization is a phenomenon occurring in places other than the post-Soviet space as well, such as Argentina¹⁸ or Sri Lanka¹⁹.

Borderization can be seen as a set of “geopolitical practices in which border-shifts and strengthening of control in contested areas take place without much international attention”²⁰. Borderization efforts often happen under the radar of international attention and most of the time in a legal grey area, which make them hard to grasp for politicians and researchers, yet still have a massive effect on the everyday life of people living in the borderland.

In this publication, borderization in South Ossetia and Abkhazia was discussed by David Matsaberidze. As explained in his paper, borderization

¹⁸ Cf. Guillermina Seri, ‘On the “Triple Frontier” and The “Borderization” of Argentina: A Tale of Zones’, in *Sovereign Lives. Power in Global Politics*, ed. Jenny Edkins, Michael J. Shapiro, and Veronique Pin-Fat, 2004, 79–100.

¹⁹ Cathrine Brun, ‘Living with Shifting Borders: Peripheralisation and the Production of Invisibility’, *Geopolitics* 24, no. 4 (8 August 2019): 878–95, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2017.1375911>.

²⁰ Brun, 879.

practices hinder the peace process in Georgia. Not only do they have nationwide implications, but also cause changes in the geopolitics of the region. De-facto changes to the Georgian border impact strategic aspects in the Black Sea region and also touch upon questions of energy security, as parts of oil and gas pipelines in the region are not under Georgian control.

Current spatial politics, as discussed in this volume, raise numerous questions about established concepts of space and borders. Traditional concepts of sovereignty, warfare, peacemaking and borders underwent drastic changes in the last century and pose serious challenges to policy- and law-makers. Practices of borderization and the emergence of de-facto states are only two of many phenomena that urge for new legal and political frameworks. Traditional approaches reach their limits and must be re-thought considering the realities on the ground.

5.3.3 Political Economy

In the case of the South Caucasus – and the post-Soviet space in general – Russia’s economic policies to influence political outcomes must be seen through the lens of economic dependency. It can be observed, that whereas the EU invests primarily in businesses and education, Russia invests in infrastructure, especially in the energy sector, and the military sector.

In Georgia, Russian companies own a great share of the country’s energy facilities. Although Georgia is seen as relatively independent from Russia in economic terms, this is certainly a phenomenon that should be taken into consideration. Azerbaijan has natural oil and gas deposits, and pipelines, that do not depend on Russia, which makes the country rather a concurrent for Russia. For Azerbaijan, Russia is the third most important trade partner, coming after the EU and Turkey. From the three South Caucasian states, Armenia has the highest economic dependency on Russia. It has no natural oil and gas deposits, as Azerbaijan does, and it has no strategic routes for transit, as Georgia does. With 29% of imports and 23% of exports, Russia is the main trading partner for Armenia²¹. As mentioned

²¹ OEC, ‘Armenia (ARM) Exports, Imports, and Trade Partners’, 2019, <https://oec.world/en/profile/country/arm>.

before, Russian investments in the region also target the security sector. This will be discussed in the following section.

5.4 Military Engagement in the Region

The military engagement of external actors in the region was neither discussed in the context of liberal conflict management, nor in the context of authoritarian conflict management, but still constitutes a crucial aspect in managing the conflicts. At this point, it is not easy to make a distinction between liberal and authoritarian military engagement, as the frameworks for analysis used in this article do not explicitly list military engagement as an analysis category. However, it is essential to cover the military aspect as well when discussing conflict management in the South Caucasus.

The military dimension of conflict management in the South Caucasus must be seen in the context of relations with Russia and NATO and not so much with the EU. From the three South Caucasian nations, only Armenia remained a member of the *Collective Security Treaty Organization* (CSTO). Georgia and Azerbaijan left the military alliance of post-Soviet states already in 1999. All three countries are part of NATO's *Partnership for Peace* (PfP) program. However, security relations with external actors undergo constant changes and are highly influenced by political events.

As a member of the CSTO, Armenia has strong defense ties with Russia, especially in terms of procurement, technical advice, and training programs. Also, the Armenian military doctrine is influenced by Russian thinking and the army's equipment is mostly of Russian origin.²² A trend towards even closer ties is indicated by a new agreement between Russia and Armenia on a defense loan of around 100 mil. USD for buying modernized arms from Russia²³. However, besides having close ties with Russia in security matters and participating in annual CSTO drills and bilateral drills with Russia on a

²² 'Chapter Five: Russia and Eurasia', *The Military Balance* 119 (2019): 184, <https://doi.org/10.1080/04597222.2019.1561031>.

²³ 'Chapter Five: Russia and Eurasia', *The Military Balance* 118 (2018): 317, <https://doi.org/10.1080/04597222.2018.1416981>.

regular basis, Armenia also takes part in NATO's individual partnership action plan²⁴.

Azerbaijan is currently in the fifth cycle of its individual partnership action plan with NATO, lasting from 2017 to 2019. The country is further working on deepening defense ties with the US, the UK, Serbia, and Belarus through military cooperation agreements. The military cooperation with Russia focuses on procurement and technical advice.²⁵ Azerbaijan does not exercise effective control of the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh (NK). NK is being supported by Armenia in political, economic, and military matters. However, it claims to be independent and the situation on the ground is not transparent. It is estimated that armored combat vehicles and artillery pieces range between 200 and 300 in number, plus a small number of helicopters. The number of troops is estimated to be about 18,000 and 20,000. Also, some of the equipment could belong to the Armenian forces.²⁶

Other than Armenia or Azerbaijan, Georgia has no defense ties with Russia. The Georgian security forces build-up in the early 1990s mirrored Western concepts. Georgia closely cooperates with the US and NATO. The long-term security cooperation with the US is based on the "Defence Readiness Program" and the "Georgia Train and Equip Program" (GTEP) in order to assist in the build-up of a professional army. Furthermore, the NATO PfP has been a cornerstone in Georgia's defense reforms from 1998 onwards.²⁷ Russian military deployments on the territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia are a major security concern for Georgia.²⁸

Currently, around 7,000 Russian troops are deployed in Georgia with two military bases in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The 7th Base is a motor-rifle

²⁴ 'Chapter Five', 2019, 184.

²⁵ 'Chapter Five', 186.

²⁶ 'Chapter Five', 186.

²⁷ 'Chapter Five', 190; Marion Kipiani, 'The Tip of the Democratisation Spear? Role and Importance of the Georgian Armed Forces in the Context of Democratisation and European Integration', in *Security, Society and the State in the Caucasus*, ed. Kevork Oskanian and Derek Averre, BASEE/Routledge Series on Russian and East European Studies (New York: Routledge, 2019), 15–16.

²⁸ 'Chapter Five', 2019, 190.

brigade equipped with T-90A tanks and BTR-82A armored personnel carriers. It is located in Gudauta and Sokhumi (Abkhazia) and is subordinate to the 49th Combined Arms Army of the Southern Military District (with its headquarters in Stavropol). The 4th Base in Tskhinvali and Java (South Ossetia) belongs to the 58th Combined Arms Army (with its headquarters in Vladikavkaz). The Base hosts a motor-rifle brigade equipped with T-72 tanks and BMP-2 infantry fighting vehicles. Moreover, around 3.300 Russian troops are present at the 102nd Base of the Russian Armed Forces in Gyumri (Armenia). The Base consists of a motor-rifle brigade with T-72 tanks and BMP-1/-2 infantry fighting vehicles, a fighter squadron of 18 MiG-29, a helicopter squadron and two air defense batteries (S-300 and SA-12).²⁹ In addition to this deployments, the 58th Combined Arms Army is stationed in the North Caucasus³⁰ and thus could easily be deployed to Georgia, as in the Russo-Georgian war of 2008.

5.5 Conclusion

The papers presented in this volume provide valuable and interesting insights into the conflict management in the region through discussing recent developments – on the political and on the strategic level. The authors not only contribute to enriching the body of literature on conflict management in the South Caucasus with contemporary insights, but also foster a debate on conceptual debates, especially in the question of borders and sovereignty.

The tensions between liberal and authoritarian modes of conflict management in the region are visible but severely underresearched. Although there is a rich body on literature of Russia's engagement in its “near abroad”, the idea of analysing its action in conflict-torn regions through the concept of authoritarian conflict management, instead of conducting a foreign policy analysis is new. Lewis, Heathershaw and Megoran (2018) can be seen as pioneers in this matter.

²⁹ ‘Chapter Five’, 209.

³⁰ ‘58-я Общевоинская Армия: Министерство Обороны Российской Федерации’, accessed 13 June 2019, <https://structure.mil.ru/structure/okruga/details.htm?id=11257@egOrganization>.

It appears that more research should be done on the different modes of military engagement. Is it possible to make a distinction between liberal and authoritarian military engagement? Isn't military engagement always authoritarian as it is a form of coercive power? Or are the underlying motives of such engagement decisive if military cooperation can be seen as liberal or authoritarian?

Certainly, more research needs to be done on identifying policies coming from external actors active in the South Caucasus. Therefore, this article not only seeks to conclude the arguments presented in this volume, but also to spark the academic debate on the different modes of conflict management in the South Caucasus.

Currently, there is no substantial progress in the peace processes in the South Caucasus. Despite recent political changes in the region – such as the Velvet Revolution in Armenia – peace processes remain stalled. However, it would be inadequate to say that there is no action at all as there are several active conflict management formats.

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Zusammenfassung

Dieser Workshop-Bericht beleuchtet den aktuellen Zustand des Internationalen Krisen- und Konfliktmanagements im Südkaukasus im Herbst 2018. Die Basis des Bandes bilden die Ergebnisse des Workshops „Perspectives on Conflict Management in the South Caucasus“ vom 27. und 28. Oktober 2018 am Institut für Friedenssicherung und Konfliktmanagement. Die politischen Veränderungen in Armenien durch die „samtene Revolution“ in Jerewan im April/Mai 2018 führten zu der Frage, welche Auswirkungen, der als „demokratisch“ beschriebene Machtwechsel auf den Konflikt um Bergkarabach mit sich bringen wird. Der zehnte Jahrestag des russisch-georgischen Krieges im August 2018 war zudem Anlass über den bisherigen Fortschritt im Friedensprozess zwischen Georgien und den beiden abtrünnigen Gebieten Abchasien und Südossetien zu reflektieren. Eine wesentliche Klammer in den Konflikten bildet Russland, weshalb auch die strategischen Ziele Moskaus im Workshop thematisiert wurden.

Der Band fasst im ersten Kapitel die Ergebnisse des Workshops zusammen. In den folgenden Kapiteln finden sich Detailbetrachtungen einiger Vortragender. David Matsaberidze analysiert die Praxis der *borderization* – einer schleichenden Grenzverschiebung entlang der administrativen Grenzlinien – in Georgien und welche Möglichkeiten zur Reaktion der georgischen Zentralregierung zum einen und internationalen Unterstützern zum anderen zur Verfügung stehen. Anahit Shirinyan beleuchtet die ersten Auswirkungen der Revolution in Armenien auf den Bergkarabach-Konflikt. Sie stellt fest, dass neben kleineren positiven Aspekten die grundlegende Rhetorik sowohl in Jerewan wie in Baku unverändert bleibt. Fred Labarre stellt in seinen Vortragsnotizen die strategischen Ziele Russland, sowohl im Hinblick auf Georgien als auch in Bezug auf Bergkarabach dar und stellt diese in einen internationalen Kontext. Abschließend analysiert Eva Zeis anhand der Beiträge und Präsentationen des Workshops die Konkurrenz von liberalen und autoritären Ansätzen des Konfliktmanagements im Südkaukasus.

Abstract

This workshop report examines the current state of international crisis and conflict management in the South Caucasus in autumn 2018. The volume is based on the results of the workshop “Perspectives on Conflict Management in the South Caucasus” held on 27 and 28 October 2018 at the Institute for Peace Support and Conflict Management in Vienna. The political changes in Armenia as a result of the “velvet revolution” in Yerevan in April/May 2018 led to the question of what impact the change of power, described as “democratic”, will have on the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. The tenth anniversary of the Russian-Georgian war in August 2008 was also an occasion to reflect on the progress made so far in the peace process between Georgia and the two breakaway territories Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Russia is an essential link in the conflicts, so Moscow’s strategic goals were also discussed in the workshop.

The first chapter of this volume summarises the results of the workshop. The following chapters contain detailed reflections by some of the speakers. David Matsaberidze analyses the practice of borderization – a creeping border shift along administrative border lines – in Georgia and what options are available to the Georgian central government on the one hand and international supporters on the other. Anahit Shirinyan looks at the initial impact of the revolution in Armenia on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. She notes that apart from minor positive aspects, the basic rhetoric remains unchanged in both Yerevan and Baku. In his lecture notes, Fred Labarre presents Russia’s strategic goals regarding Georgia and Nagorno-Karabakh and places them in an international context. Finally, Eva Zeis analyses the competition between liberal and authoritarian approaches to conflict management in the South Caucasus based on the contributions and presentations of the workshop.

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This workshop report provides a closer look at the international crisis and conflict management in the South Caucasus in autumn 2018. The book summarises the results of the workshop „Perspectives on Conflict Management in the South Caucasus“ held at the Institute for Peace Support and Conflict Management on 27 and 28 October 2018. Experts from the region elaborate on „borderization“ along the administrative borderlines between Georgia and the two breakaway territories Abkhazia and South Ossetia or the repercussions of the „velvet revolution“ in April/ May 2018 for the Armenian-Azerbaijani relations in regards to Nagorno- Karabakh. Furthermore, Russia’s role as a key external actor in the conflicts is scrutinized.

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