

**A FRESH PERCEPTION OF THE LOCAL
AND NATIONAL POLICIES IN 1918–2008: MAKING
GEORGIA KNOWN IN THE WORLD**

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ABSTRACT: Today, the (Western) geopolitics dominant in the decade following the Cold War must consider the rivalling (Eastern) geopolitics. The present article deals with the use of the military bases situated abroad to support separatism in neighbouring countries. In the relations between Abkhazia, Southern Ossetia, Georgia and Russia in 1989–2008, special attention is paid to the periods of political standstill when the war was continued as the war of statements conducted by representative bodies in which even the UN Security Council came to be included. The article also focuses on the change of geopolitical visions of Georgia following the Rose Revolution or the waning of the myths of Shevardnadze and Russia's foreign policy intentions.

KEYWORDS: Georgia, withdrawal of foreign troops, separatism, war of words

AS WE KNOW, it is impossible to predict revolutions, much like their accompanying effects on the regional and global level. The Rose Revolution in Georgia in November 2003 immediately felt like a breath of fresh air in the whole international political arena that had somewhat stalled for a while due to the intermission between the accession talks with NATO and the EU (completed in December 2002) and the actual accession itself (May 2004). As the US had come to the firm conclusion to attack Iraq, in the period from September 2002 to March

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2003 NATO applicant countries could do little more than obediently accept the US understanding of how to ensure the security of her soldiers and give the green light to the intervention. It was launched in March 2003, at the moment when the European Commission surprised, as minimum East Europeans, with the Europe Neighbourhood plan leaving Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia outside the plan as “they are not situated in Europe” (Commission 2003a: 4). More stranger was the linking of South Caucasian and two Arab countries as even in 2005 the EC considered the country reports of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Egypt and Lebanon together and also made recommendations “for all five of these countries” (Commission 2003b: 7). This ignorance of realities (it was soon disclosed that an invasion of Iraq was based on false information) was broken by the revolution in Georgia, in which the *status quo* should have been ensured by the UN Secretary-General’s Group of Friends of Georgia established in 1994 by great powers: France, Germany, Russia, UK and the US. The new independent policy of Georgia changed the political agenda of the world, first of all bringing about the topic of the withdrawal of Russian military bases from Georgia and Moldova, and also – to the great surprise of West Europe – further EU and NATO expansion.

The bold tactics of the leaders of the Georgian revolution also changed the former geopolitical thinking, as the state from the unseen background intruded into the playground of major geostrategic players. Already in 1997 the classic theorist of geopolitics Zbigniew Brzezinski distinguished between five Eurasian geostrategic players and five geopolitical pivots — Ukraine, Azerbaijan, South Korea, Turkey and Iran (Brzezinski 1997: 56). Soon after the Rose Revolution, it became clear that Georgia assumed the leading position in South Caucasus instead of Azerbaijan.

According to Brzezinski, the importance of the geopolitical pivot is not “derived from their power and motivation but rather from their sensitive location and from the consequences of their potentially vulnerable condition for the behaviour of geostrategic players”. Considering Georgia’s vulnerability at the time (and also today), motivation seemed to dominate as the West had not heard such firm desire to join the Euro-Atlantic structures as coming from Georgia in 2003–2005 for a long time. The effect was enhanced by the fact that the civilised world had not witnessed revolutions for a long time and the Rose Revolution was thus greeted with positive sentiments. President Saakashvili’s prompt decision to rely on the US and NATO soon confirmed the validity of Brzezinski’s second postulate — the location of the pivot “gives them a special role in either defining

access to important areas or in denying resources to a significant player”, as well as the third postulate – “in some cases a geopolitical pivot may act as a defensive shield for a vital state or even a region”, respectively, in relation to and against Russia.

The painful loss of territories in the war and the mistakes made in the domestic policy led to Saakashvili’s loss of power in 2012–2013, however, the new Georgian leaders have continued the chosen course in the foreign policy in its once attained role as a geopolitical pivot.

Below we will concentrate on the reasons why Georgia’s breakthrough into the big politics should not be considered a surprise at all and how the struggle for the withdrawal of foreign troops – the main problem of overcoming separatism – was conducted.

The twentieth century began and ended with the fall of empires, in a way that the successor state troops left the newly independent territories. The exception in the given processes came to be the successor state of the Soviet empire – the Russian Federation (the same was done by Serbia after the fall of Red Yugoslavia) which only withdrew its forces from some of the occupied or forcefully incorporated territories and left them in others. It should have been clear from the logic of the course of events to the other leaders of world politics who were involved in the departure of Soviet forces from Eastern European countries in 1990–1991, and from Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and eventually from Poland and Germany in 1991–1994, that the given process must continue also in other former states of USSR (after the respective demand).

The paradox is that while widely discussed withdrawal of Russian forces from the Baltic countries was executed without any major conflicts despite delays and hindrances, then at the time in Moldova and Georgia there were violent conflicts and minor civil wars between the separatists and the central government, all of which included the participation of Russian military troops. The best known among these include the involvement of the Russian 14th Guards Army in military action in Transnistria (Moldova) in 1992, the stationing of the Russian Airborne Regiment in Gudauta in August 1992, where it provided aid and shelter to the Abkhazian government, the rescue of Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze from Sukhumi by the Russian special forces in September 1993.

The abovementioned and other events have repeatedly been discussed in the UN Security Council and international organisations, however, never considering the presence and withdrawal of the Russian forces as a problem. As the

fighting ceased, there were no discussions of ‘The Withdrawal of Russian Forces’ on international political forums for several years until it emerged in the OSCE Istanbul summit in 1999 as a clearly formulated demand to close the Russian military bases in Georgia and Moldova.

The given decisions were influenced by another invasion of Russian forces (August 1999) and (another) war in Chechnya, however, the immediate support expressed by the Kremlin to the US administration following the 9/11 attacks in 2001 came to form a thoroughly different US–Russian partnership, and thus also a new attitude to foreign military bases, which US needed to carry out its military operations in Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003), and which Russia helped to find in Central Asia. It is no coincidence that in boon for Russian involvement in the US war against terror, Europe came to adopt the conflict theory concept – ‘frozen conflict’ – in referring to the problem areas influenced by the presence of Russian forces/bases – Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistria. The Russian-aided separatists used endless discussions of ‘frozen conflicts’ to conceal the establishment of puppet states – there were referendums, regular presidential and parliamentary elections, which in 2006 already followed the multiparty system.

Understandably, Georgia and Moldova could not accept such developments, however, in order to take decisive steps, they needed new leaders and new politics. Such a breakthrough came in 2003 with the Rose Revolution in Georgia and the question of the withdrawal of Russian forces was once again at issue.

Despite the counteraction by the Kremlin, the new Georgian leaders clearly achieved success at the beginning – the Russian forces indeed left, and even before the prescribed deadline, the so-called rest of Georgia, but not from Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The price for Tbilisi’s success was the sudden tension in the Georgia–Russia relations, which made the great Western powers finally think of the need to resolve at least one of the ‘frozen conflicts’. Unfortunately, the so-called Steinmeier’s plan on Abkhazia turned out to be more like an ambiguous provocation rather than an interlude smoothing the tensions. The attempt of the Georgian government to continue the process to retake South Ossetia – as it had been done by Russia in Chechnya – turned out to be a severe miscalculation, the price of which include the supposedly independent Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and the Russian military bases and border service established in the Georgian territory on contractual basis.

THE PRELUDE TO THE CONFLICTS IN SOUTH OSSETIA AND ABKHAZIA

Georgia, which in early 13th century was still a unified state, came to disintegrate into rival feudal states aided by foreign invaders that also determined its gradual subjugation/conquest by the Russian Empire in 17th–19th century. As to the areas of our current interest, South Ossetia was incorporated into Russia in 1774 (as a part of Ossetia, the successor state of the former kingdom Alania forming a major centre in North Caucasus); according to the notion held in North and South Ossetia, it was a unified country divided into provinces until the Bolshevik revolution in October 1917, and there was no state border between them until 1922 (Konflikty 2008: 211). Abkhazia was incorporated into Russia in 1810. The local inhabitants participated in Shamil's uprising (1834–1864) and paid the price for it either by giving their life or being exiled to the Turkish Empire. The rebellious nature of those who remained was said to be so fierce that for more than 30 years (1877–1907) the state authorities referred to them as “the guilty people” (in Russian *vinovnoye naseleniye*), which only tsar Nicholas II came to remove on Stolypin's recommendation (Lakoba 2004: 12–13).

During the First World War Abkhazia preceded Georgia in announcing its independence, which was declared respectively on 11 May 1918 in Batumi and 26 May 1918 in Tbilisi. At the time, the first of the two cities was controlled by the Turkish forces, and the government formed in the other soon placed themselves under the protection of the Turkish ally Germany. Thus it was no surprise that Abkhazia immediately announced being part of the Mountainous Republic of the Northern Caucasus, which was established after the fall of the Russian Tsarist Empire based on the constitution of Shamil of 1847 and joined together Abkhazia, Adygea, Karachay-Cherkessia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Ingushetia, Chechnya and Ossetia in 1918–1919. On the map presented to the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 also South Ossetia has been included as a member of the Mountainous Republic (Lakoba 2004: 56).

However, prior to the independence of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, the states were all members of the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic (22 April 1918–26 May 1918), the formation and dissolution of which was similarly influenced by Germany and Turkey. At the end of 1918, the foreign influence in the local geopolitics was taken over by the British, whose withdrawal from Georgia in July 1920 signalled that London and Paris acknowledge Southern

Caucasus to be Russia's area of interest and some months later the Red Army took all three countries back under Moscow's power.

The events in South and North Caucasus in 1917–1920 did not differ from the developments in Finland, Baltic countries and Poland – the concept of nation states was to set in a situation marked by war and recurrent periods of military occupation. In the new situation Abkhazia agreed to the state of autonomy within Georgia on 20 March 1919, however, as Georgia did not ratify the act, the changing conditions gave rise to the independent Abkhazian SSR (31 March 1921–17 February 1922), becoming then the fourth member in the Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic (1922–1931) in order to degrade into Abkhaz ASSR within Georgian SSR in 1931. (Transcaucasian SFSR continued with three members until 1936, then dissolving into three). During the given period of independence, on 1 April 1925 they adopted the constitution of SSR Abkhazia proclaiming large-scale sovereignty (right to leave both USSR and Transcaucasian SFSR) which also forms the basis for the present independence.

According to the constitution, Abkhazia and Georgia were joined by a “special contract of alliance” (in Russian: *osobyi soyuznyi dogovor*), with its interpretation – are we equal or not – soon forming the juridical basis for the new dissolution. One theory claimed that the man behind the (somewhat obscure) 1925 Abkhazian constitution was Leon Trotsky (treating his health in the area) struggling to diminish Stalin's power (Lakoba: 88–89).

Standing up to Stalin's plans was followed by severe repressions for Abkhazia and several waves of population transfer (incl. Georgians). Nevertheless, the natives retained their partisan spirit and during the peaks of various political crises (1957, 1967, 1978) the lawfully valid slogans demanding separation from Georgia and incorporation into Krasnodar Krai emerged again and again, i.e. separatism lived on. The central administration of the USSR excluded any such swaps, however, with the fall of the Red empire the situation changed.

By the will of fate, Georgia came to be governed by the most radical leaders of the whole Soviet Union, who announced the Georgian independence on 9 April 1991. Moscow quickly came to support Abkhazian separatism, which did not exclude – considering global and geopolitical interests – the temporary conjunctural support to the Georgian central government in its conflicts with Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Moscow's opportunities to quibble have always been enhanced by the minority status of Abkhazians within the population and thus they can realize their power by relying on others. In the South Ossetian population, the Ossetians form a clear majority (2/3), however, differently from

Abkhazia which is open to the sea, South Ossetia is located in the valley of the Caucasus mountain range separated from North Ossetia by the Roki pass and the tunnel which – in case of poor relations with Georgia – is the only access to the rest of the world. Considering the given simple truths, there is logic in Abkhazian independence, the idea of gaining and retaining independence in South Ossetia was most probably held until the very last minute only by the separatist leaders. Nevertheless, history has numerous surprises in store.

ABKHAZIA BEGAN AND OSSETIA HAD THE WAR

All began lawfully in Abkhazia, albeit somewhat unconventionally for many – the demand for independence was announced in a public mass meeting. Restoring tradition banned in Soviet time, the Abkhaz national front (in Abkhaz *Aydyglylara*) organised a mass gathering with 3000 honourable people on 18 March 1989 in the town of Lykhny, during which independence was demanded and the respective documents were signed by the authorities present. And immediately ‘the small empire syndrome’ emerged – while demanding and establishing independence for themselves, the Georgians were not willing to grant it to other small nations inhabiting so-called ‘their territory’: the Abkhaz meeting was answered by Georgian mass meetings in Sukhumi and then in Tbilisi, where they began by accusing the Abkhazians and – as the latter were defended by the USSR central authorities – continued by demanding more power for Georgia which resulted in the local Soviet detachment attacking the protesters (Tbilisi Massacre, 9 April 1989). The bloodsheds in Tbilisi and Sukhumi (16 July 1989) have left their mark in the Georgian memory forever, however, it must be added in terms of chronology that for the next 18 months, the initiators, i.e. Abkhazians, preferred decision-making in selected authoritative organs rather than street politics. On 25 August 1990 the Abkhaz Supreme Soviet adopted *The Declaration of State Sovereignty of SSR Abkhazia*, in which the central authorities of USSR were asked to base their recognition on the Abkhaz declaration of independence from 31 March 1921.

According to the present victorious concept, the Menshevik-led Democratic Republic of Georgia organised genocide in the Bolshevik-controlled South Ossetia in 1918–1920, whereas the Red Georgia turned the strategically significant area into an autonomous oblast on 20 April 1922. During the democratic waves in the Soviet empire and led by the local national front (in Ossetian: Ademon

Nykgas, est. in 1988, leader A. Chochiyev), the autonomous oblast was declared an autonomous republic on 10 November 1989, to which the Georgians alerted by events in Abkhazia had a fiery reaction – the joint march on the South Ossetian capital Tskhinvali organised by the Georgian nationalists (Z. Gamsakhurdia) and communists (D. Gumbaridze) could have been stopped only by the USSR security forces and a new dispatch of Soviet troops arrived in January 1990. Influenced by the national front, the Soviet South Ossetian Democratic Republic was announced on 20 September 1990, with the Supreme Soviet elections set for 9 December. The given step was too much for the newly established Georgian nationalist leaders led by Gamsakhurdia, who abolished both decisions on 11 December 1990, renamed South Ossetia (in essence degraded) as the Shida Kartli province in Georgia and declared an emergency situation in the area. The Georgian Emergency Situation Act provided that the USSR Interior Ministry forces could be used and were to be guided by the legal acts and other normative regulations – it must be stated that at the given time it was Georgia who turned for help to the foreign forces in the country.

Now the South Ossetian leaders clearly began their collusion with the President of the Soviet Union M. Gorbachev: by agreeing to hold (with Abkhazia) a referendum on 17 March 1991 (which the Baltic states and Georgia ignored), the South Ossetian leaders asked for further complementary forces. In Kazbegi, on 23 March 1991, Gamsakhurdia met the Boris Yeltsin, who at the time was competing with Gorbachev, to discuss the agreement between Georgia and Russia and the situation in South Ossetia. According to the published report, they both demanded the withdrawal of Soviet troops from South Ossetia (Konflikty 2008: 246), which lets us presume that the democratic Russia was willing to renounce the extension of the empire – paraphrasing Lenin – in only one isolated case. Unfortunately, history did not allow us to witness what it would have been like.

The South Ossetian elite soon played a new card – the assembly of the South Ossetian all level deputies, held on 4 May 1991, re-established its status of an autonomous oblast to show their willingness to play by Gorbachev's rules and to ask the Supreme Soviet of USSR to grant South Ossetia the right to sign the treaty of the Union of Sovereign States (Konflikty 2008: 198–200). After the August Coup, they already had staked on Yeltsin – the convened Supreme Soviet of South Ossetia once again restored the Soviet Republic of South Ossetia, which asked the Supreme Soviet of the Russian SFSR to be reunited with Russia while also restored as unified Ossetia (Konflikty 2008: 203). Gamsakhurdia answered with

his famous decree from 2 December 1991 saying that the USSR interior forces and Soviet military units had no lawful basis for their presence in Shida Kartli (=South Ossetia), that they form the main factor in destabilising the situation, accusing them of a crime against the Republic of Georgia, and demanding their withdrawal from Shida Kartli (Konflikty 2008: 52–53). Although Gamsakhurdia's decree cautiously mentions only one (Georgian) province, the message to the foreign military forces was clear. They were, however, lucky as Gamsakhurdia's time as the Georgian leader was soon over.

Following the official disintegration of the USSR, South Ossetia was once again declared independent on 21 December 1991, and the establishment of its military forces and the National Guard was announced. On 29 May 1992 the South Ossetian Supreme Soviet adopted the act of declaration of independence, which began with the accusation of the Republic of Georgia of conducting genocide in 1989–1992 and ended in the declaration of the independent state of South Ossetia (Konflikty 2008: 210–211). After such obvious steps, it was considered tactically reasonable by E. Shevardnadze, who had once again come to power in Georgia (previously in 1972–1985), to put an end to fighting in South Ossetia, as the development in Abkhazia – somewhat more important region for Georgia – had reached a point of crisis.

On 24 June 1992 in Dagomys (near Sochi), Yeltsin and Shevardnadze signed *The Agreement on the Principles of Settlement of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict* in which Russia agreed to withdraw two military units from Tskhinvali region “in order to secure demilitarization of the conflict region and to rule out the possibility of involvement of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation in the conflict” (Konflikty 2008: 253) – a promise that was immediately forgotten.

On the other hand, the given agreement does not include – as opposed to later agreements on Abkhazia – a single word on the Georgian unity and mediators in addition to the four parties of the conflict – Georgia, Russia and the two Ossetias. Based on the agreement between the affiliates, in three weeks the 500-strong armed units of Russia, Georgia and local authorities took their position at the agreed locations in South Ossetia to secure peace and order.

The tension between South Ossetian and Georgian relations continued, but to compare to Abkhazia the events in South Ossetia in general remained at the background until 2004. The South Ossetian National Front lost its influence in 1992–1993, and in 2001 the power went over to people directly related to Russian military forces and the power structure whose main slogan included the unification with North Ossetia, more specifically with Russia.

The given events in South Ossetia never reached the agenda of the UN Security Council (altogether 36 resolutions related to Abkhazia were adopted there in 1993–2008) or any other major international organisations. Similarly, it was not a joint venture in the name of the Commonwealth of Independent States as it was in the case of Abkhazia. The given events remained strictly the internal affair between Georgia, Russia and the elite of South Ossetia supported by Russia. (Having sent volunteers at first, North Ossetia later took part in the work of the Joint Control Commission). The rest of the world was happy with the information passed on South Ossetia by the representative of the OSCE mission residing in Tbilisi who began the visits to the region on 6 November 1992. The local OSCE office in Tshinvali was opened on 22 April 1997, which also meant numerous, though unsuccessful, meetings between the experts. It was partly due to the fact that most of them, including the South Ossetian authorities, waited for the first solution in Abkhazia. On the other hand, it was due to the apparent underestimation of the South Ossetian conflict which came to have different forms. For instance, the 860-page collection *Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States. Documents, Data, and Analysis* by Z. Brzezinski and P. Sullivan discusses separately the conflicts in Chechnya, Georgia-Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh, Moldova/Transnistria and Tajikistan (Russia 1997: 559–662), but not the one between Georgia and South Ossetia. And if the eminent US political strategist saw no reason to highlight the events, then...

It is reasonable to assume that the conscious or unconscious ignorance of the world about the South Ossetian conflict determined its development into a battleground in August 2008 – as nobody showed any interest, it was easy to attempt domination (with impunity) before the intervention by others. Thus, in comparing South Ossetia and Abkhazia, we may state that the outbreak of a war is more imminent at places where there are fewer – and not more – parties involved.

WAR AND WORD PLAY IN ABKHAZIA AND THE UNITED NATIONS

While in the struggle for South Ossetia there were direct demands for the withdrawal and retention of Soviet/Russian forces, the elite of Abkhazian separatists often hid their ideas between the lines. After the disintegration of the USSR, new pragmatic decisions were made. On 29 December 1991, the Presidium

of the Supreme Soviet of Abkhazia announced – without naming the former owner state – that “the military bases, institutions, border and internal troops, naval forces are situated in the Abkhazian territory according to the will and constitution of the Abkhazian nation. Their further presence in Abkhazia will be entirely in the competence of the Supreme Soviet of Abkhazia and will be solved in keeping with political agreements and legal norms” (Konflikty 2008: 129–130).

The exemplary juridical preparation of the Abkhaz was revealed once again when after overthrowing Gamsakhurdia, the Military Council annulled the constitution of Georgian SSR from 1978, which somehow was still in force, and restored the constitution from 21 February 1921, adopted hastily during the last days of the Democratic Republic of Georgia. Taking advantage of the (first) armed conflicts (partly in Abkhazian territory) between the supporters of President Gamsakhurdia and Shevardnadze, the Supreme Soviet of Abkhazia declared their sovereignty restored on 23 July 1992, annulled the constitution of Abkhazian SSR from 1978, and restored the constitution from 1925 which, as mentioned above, declared their equality to Georgia. The given decision opened the gates to war.

The highpoint of Moscow’s hypocrisy during the war could be the participation of the forces of the Confederation of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus, established in Sukhumi in August 1989 (until November 1991 as the Assembly of MPC), on the Abkhaz side, the demonstration of which culminated in a flashy military parade (greeted by President Musa Shanibov and Commander-in-Chief Chechen warlord Shamil Basayev) in Gudauta, i.e. the temporary residence of the Abkhazian government and the (permanent residence of the) Russian garrison, on 20 October 1992.

The Georgian leaders were for a long silent about the role of Russian troops in military activities, finally, on 25 December 1992, Shevardnadze informed the UN Secretary-General of the “trains equipped with arms and ammunition arriving unhindered from Russia into the conflict zone”, and of “the participation of the Russian forces based in Abkhazia on the Abkhaz extremists’ side” (Konflikty 2008: 75–76). The Supreme Soviet of Georgia now declared the action taken by Russian forces as “aggression against Georgia” and demanded the government’s plan for the withdrawal of Russian forces by the end of 1995.

It was succeeded in the final act (9 April 1993) of the government delegation talks held in Sochi (led by Georgian Prime Minister T. Sigua and Russian Minister of Defence P. Grachyov) that according to prior agreements “Russian forces will be withdrawn to the territory of the Russian Federation by 31 December

1995” (Konflikty 2008: 269–271). Abkhazia was referred to in the act on several occasions, however, it was not mentioned as part of Georgian territory. In addition, “Russian-Abkhazian talks” are mentioned, and it is stated at the end of the act that no agreement was reached on the presence of Russian troops in Gudauta. Thus it seems that the times of Russian withdrawal determined in the middle of the act only applied to Georgian territory, disregarding Abkhazia and South Ossetia (also the latter being mentioned as a conflict zone). In other words – the Russian policy to leave the forces in Abkhazia and South Ossetia had been decided already then.

By the time, the situation in Abkhazia had reached the UN Security Council agenda and the first respective resolution 849 (1993) was adopted on 9 July 1993. In 1993–1994 the UN Security Council adopted 10 resolutions regarding Abkhazia. Already the first one of these noted the UN Secretary General’s (Boutros Boutros-Ghali from Egypt) efforts to include the Russian Federation. Russia was hereby named as ‘facilitator’ (in resolutions in French *faciliteur*, in Spanish *facilitadora*, in Russian the phrase *sodeistvuyuschaya storona* translates as ‘the facilitating party’, which considering the dominance of the Russian language in the conflict area meant that the documents used disorienting terms to designate and enhance the role of Russia, which must have been known in the governments of the great powers) (UN Security Council 1993). The dominance of the Russian diplomatic vocabulary is thus all the more striking.

Russia was hailed with the title of ‘facilitator’ in all UN Security Council resolutions related to Georgia until the August events in 2008 (the last Security Council resolution 1808 dates from 15 April 2008), i.e. for altogether 15 years a highly disorienting image – which in reality marked the opposite – was conveyed to the world. But that was not all – since the Security Council resolution 1096 (30 January 1997), i.e. for 11 years the resolutions included a word combination with even more diverse message: “... the support of... the Russian Federation as the facilitator and the group of Friends of the Secretary-General on Georgia”.

FOG – Friends of the Secretary-General on Georgia was formed by Russia, the USA, United Kingdom, France and Germany in 1994 in order to solve the Abkhazian and South Ossetian conflicts. The setting up of Groups of Friends had started at the end of the Cold War to help to solve conflicts in the Third World (Whitfield 2007: 149), but the FOG clearly differed from the rest by its members – only great powers – and mission. All four democratic powers had the motivation to make amends for the past to the Georgian people and, on the

other hand, support the man who had assisted in the German reunification and finding solutions to the issues in Afghanistan, Nicaragua, Angola, Ethiopia, to mention only a few of situations similar to that in Georgia (Alatalu 2013: 109). From the Western perspective, Georgia marked the easternmost key position where to draw the eastern border of NATO and the European Union. Although the most important step in this respect shall be taken only in 10 years' time, it may be considered symbolic that Germany, where the Soviet troops had left only in 1994, was quick to rush into solving a similar situation in Georgia. Or more precisely, taking part in the "march" geostrategy to use the EU geostrategy models introduced by William Walters in 2004. However, the location turned out to reflect another model – the "colonial frontier", and the dominating power who "assumes the right to define what is appropriate and just" (Walters 2004: 684–688), happened to be Russia. So much for the theoretical models of foreign policy which may occasionally facilitate case studies, but the contrary result gives no explanation as to why France, Germany, UK and the US came to Georgia's assistance in the first place. They certainly did not come to lose, however, it became evident first 9 years later that the man getting their support stood for stagnation, and then 14 years later that Russia had used the FOG only to outmanoeuvre the Western states.

As Russia did it in connection with the Georgia-Abkhazia talks held in Geneva on 17–19 November 1997, when the members of the FOG started to determine their mandate. At first, it was agreed that "they are not parties" (*ne yavlyayutsya stronami*), however, the final result in Russian was striking – according to clause 1 Russia was *storona*/facilitator in the internal conflict in Georgia, but according to clause 3 – as a FOG member, *ne storona*/not a party (Konflikty 2008: 397).

The Security Council resolutions quite often mention the (Collective) Peacekeeping Forces of the Commonwealth of Independent States, which in reality stood for Russian units, in other words – Russia came to be mentioned altogether three times and always as a positive facilitator? Long did Moscow try to get its forces a peacekeeping mandate, however, it was only the request – "The participation of Russian military contingent in the UN peacekeeping forces" (Konflikty 2008: 319) signed by Georgia, Abkhazia, UN, Russia and OSCE on 4 April 1994 – that was accompanied by practical results. As the West was clearly delaying the appointment of UN observers in Abkhazia, the CIS Heads of State Council made an ultimatum-like statement: in case the UN does not promptly begin the peacekeeping operation, they themselves will be ready to take their

peacekeeping forces into the conflict zone (Konflikty 2008: 336). And so it also happened – the UN and OSCE representatives did not participate in the next talks held in Moscow, on 14 May 1994 the Georgian and Abkhazian representatives signed the agreement formalising the establishment of CIS peacekeeping forces, and on 15 May the Chairman of the Abkhazian Supreme Soviet and on 16 May the head of state of the Republic of Georgia turned to the CIS Heads of State Council with the request to send CIS peacekeeping forces to Abkhazia. It was realized on 21 June 1994. On the same day, the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs A. Kozyrev considered it important to inform the UN Secretary-General that the so-called advance troop of the forces was “immediately formed from the Russian forces already based in Abkhazia” (Konflikty 2008: 284). Although there was objection in the UN to the peacekeeping in the neighbouring country, (SIPRI 1994: 203) UN Security Council controlled by the world’s great powers issued its resolution 934 (30 June 1994) with praises to the “arrival” of CIS peacekeeping forces in Abkhazia.

Although on 20 March 1992 Moscow had collected signatures from its allies to form collective CIS peacekeeping forces, the formation itself was met with resistance – during the summit in Moscow on 21 October 1994 only Tajikistan had agreed to send its motorized rifle division to the collective forces (Konflikty 2008: 355). The document on the peacekeeping mission in South Ossetia, drafted promptly after the success in Abkhazia, stated straightforwardly that “the relative stability in the conflict zone can be guaranteed only by the Russian peacekeeping battalion”, and it was signed on 6 December 1994 by Russia, Georgia, North Ossetia, South Ossetia and the OSCE representatives (Konflikty 2008: 289–290).

The trumps in the game to retain the forces in Abkhazia were given to Russia by Shevardnadze himself, who after the escape from Sukhumi (September 1993) was faced with a new/old adversary in the form of the supporters of the former president Zviad Gamsakhurdia (Zviadists) in their attempt to reclaim power. At the same time, in September–October in Moscow Shevardnadze’s former ally Yeltsin found himself on the verge of falling when the conflicts escalating from the Supreme Soviet had to be suppressed with the armed forces. There were several supporters of Abkhazian separatism on the losing side and thus it was decided by Shevardnadze to play his cards suddenly on Yeltsin and Russia. His visit to Moscow and meetings with Yeltsin yielded a surprising solution – on 8 October 1993 Georgia’s affiliation with the Commonwealth of Independent States was announced although Shevardnadze had once again firmly excluded it only a few

days earlier. The given application came into force on 3 December 1993 and the affiliation was ratified by the Georgian parliament on 1 March 1994.

As the stakes were high, Yeltsin came on 3 February 1994 to sign the Good-neighbourly relations and cooperation agreement in Tbilisi. It declared that the parties of the agreement will not join military affiliations that are directed against the other party. The main problem for Russians was the definition of status of national minorities, and it was announced during the discussions that the ratification of the agreement in State Duma will be considered only after the solution of the conflicts in Abkhazia. It was a bitter message for the Georgian Supreme Soviet, who nevertheless ratified the agreement on 17 January 1996 after heated discussions.

Shevardnadze formalised the presence of Russian troops by signing the military base lease agreement with the Russian Prime Minister Chernomyrdin in Tbilisi, 15 September 1995, allowing Moscow to deploy 15 000 men into four bases – in Vaziani (near Tbilisi), Batumi, Gudauta and Akhalkalaki for 25 years. Also the given agreement was formed without the knowledge of parliament, and... the Georgian Supreme Soviet did not even come to ratify the agreement, sending their leader a significant message at a significant moment.

Meanwhile Shevardnadze had also initiated an oppositional process by approaching the USA (NATO) and the European Union, without attracting any attention at first. It was only understandable as the West had shown no inclination to, so to speak, come to Georgia. And the very next day came a reply to Shevardnadze's clearly provocative statement: "If the West does not like Russia's return to its former colonies, let the West suggest an alternative" (New York Times 1994) – at the press conference US President Bill Clinton excluded the possibility of sending the US troops to Georgia under the UN flag.

Three weeks later, on 23 April 1994, Georgia affiliated with the NATO Partnership for Peace programme – a step that nowadays is considered the beginning of Georgia's politics to NATO. As known, Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia joined the PfP earlier, in January–February 1994, but quite soon – by 31 August 1994 – Russia also completed withdrawal its troops from there. The situation in Georgia was the opposite – the number of Russian troops in Georgia had grown into a 15000–20000-strong force. And all in a perfectly legal form – based on either bilateral agreements (Georgia–Russia), or agreements under the UN auspices and OSCE observation.

The given course of action was primarily dependent on one person – Eduard Shevardnadze – whom the West preferred to see not as the firm-handed

Communist Party leader of Soviet Georgia, but as the clever Minister of Foreign Affairs of USSR and one of the foremen of Gorbachev's perestroika. His return to power in Georgia was only possible due to his supporters from the Soviet times (whose nomenclature Shevardnadze had influenced), as they were afraid of democracy, panicked by Gamsakhurdia's radicalism and thus saw Shevardnadze as the restorer of general order. Similarly, they expected him to normalise the relations with the Russian elite who considered him as one of their own.

It may be stated that in significant situations Shevardnadze thought on the level and in the interest of Moscow rather than Tbilisi, when considering, for instance, the explanations given in connection to the decision to join CIS – having used force against his opposition, in order to secure the Western support, Yeltsin needed the former Minister of Foreign Affairs of USSR more than Shevardnadze needed Yeltsin and CIS (Russia: 236–237, 586). It may have been the cunning of a fox (as Shevardnadze had been called) that may be confirmed by his analogous sudden outburst to back Putin in 2003 (Lakoba 2004: 129–131), when Shevardnadze was once again on the verge of falling, which eventually did also happen. However, in reality Shevardnadze could outwit neither of the Russian presidents and his relations with Moscow's elite structures led to a situation where the West turned their back on him.

THE AID OF WORLD GEOPOLITICS

To the surprise of many, the fate of Russian forces in Georgia came to be dependent on the radical shifts in the global geopolitics and in the functioning of international agreements. As the solution to the problem depended on Russia, Georgia managed to make use of the last low point in the Russian political influence, in the time of the most extensive spread of democracy in Europe (1997–2004), when in addition to the above, the world politics was dominated by the US and thus the orientation to the latter was clearly beneficial. Even in case the subject was the state of Georgia with a negative (post-Communist) reputation and a leader such as the political gambler Shevardnadze.

The year 1997 has primarily come to be known as the year when NATO and the EU began their extension to the east. As both NATO and the EU signed separate agreements with Russia and Ukraine, for the first time the West had to deal with not one but two major competing countries, from which Ukraine clearly wished for closer partnership with the rest of Europe. It is important to stress

that ever since mid-1990s (after the partial withdrawal of occupation forces from Eastern Europe!) the democratisation of world and regional politics was largely expressed in the fact that reconciliations and new geopolitical shifts emerged in public and literally before the eyes of a large number of states (GUAM or the political union of Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Moldova was set up at the Council of Europe meeting, etc.). In the given significant period, the participation in European/Eurasian summits did not depend on the degree of democracy at home (G.W. Bush's administration reinstated the boycotts). The clear democratic dominance of the participants gave the governments with weaker democracy or under strong external internal pressure the certainty needed for forming alliances to disengage from the dictate of authoritarian great powers and move forward on the road of democracy and market economy.

The Ukrainian change of position on the geopolitical map gave a realistic content to the contract of the century, signed on 20 September 1994 by Azerbaijan and eleven Western companies, to transport oil to Europe past Russia.

All thus abruptly enhanced the independence of the countries bordering the Black Sea which were adopting western values, also their role in big politics, and thus Georgia did not want to miss their second chance in history to tie them to the West.

On the first occasion the relations had remained unformed primarily due to the attitude of United Kingdom and France. This time, the USA marked a considerably stronger force whose entrance and action in Georgia was clearly marked by the loss of long-time bridgehead (1953–1979) in the neighbouring Iran which had become one of the major operational bases for radical Islamists. Thus, it was only logical in the US strategic interests to turn their attention to South Caucasus and stake on Georgia. Due to the presence of Russian forces (those in Armenia were qualified as a presence of Russian interests), it immediately stood for a conflict with the Kremlin. The new initiative to withdraw the foreign forces came from Georgia, however, it naturally could not be the case that Shevardnadze who had invited the Russian forces himself now suddenly decided that the Russian bases are no longer needed and began demanding their withdrawal – such a sudden turn could only result from a newly-formed alliance with the USA.

As already mentioned above, the landing of the EU, NATO and the USA in Georgia was relatively unnoticed, however, proceeded consistently. In April 1996, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan signed a partnership and cooperation agreement with the European Union, in July 1996, Georgia applied for the

membership of the Council of Europe, in July 1997, Shevardnadze participated in the NATO summit in Madrid, in July 1997, Tbilisi was visited by the NATO Secretary General J. Solana, and in March 1998, Georgia and the USA signed a security and military agreement. Also the idea of the so-called Southern Energy Corridor was gradually forming – on 29 October 1998 an agreement was signed with participation of the US Secretary of Energy in Ankara, and on 19 November 1999 the contract to build oil pipeline in Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan. In both cases Georgia was represented by president Shevardnadze and the final decision on BTC was made during the OSCE summit in Istanbul. Meanwhile, in April 1999, prior to NATO summit in Washington (participated also by E. Shevardnadze), it was announced of the withdrawal of Georgia, Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan from the CIS Collective Security Treaty (the involvement had been determined in the bases agreement from 15 October 1995).

In November 1999, two different summits were held in Istanbul. The OSCE Summit Declaration (19 November 1999) included Russia's promise to 54 states to withdraw "Russian troops from the Moldovan territory by the end of 2002" (which was never fulfilled). Meanwhile, the annex of the *Final Act of the Conference of the State Parties to the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe* was signed by the representatives of 30 states and included the Russian-Georgian joint statement from 17 November 1999, in which Russia agreed to disband and withdraw the "Russian military bases" at Vaziani and Gudauta, and at the repair facilities in Tbilisi, by 1 July 2001 (Final Act 1999).

Typically of the Russian diplomacy, also extortion was resorted to – immediately prior to the summit in Istanbul, there were presidential elections and referendum held in Abkhazia (3 October), culminating in the adoption of the act of state independence of the Republic of Abkhazia on 12 October in 1999. The given act confirmed the validity of the constitution of Abkhazia adopted on 26 November 1994, however, the act itself did not contain any reference to the statement made with the named constitution regarding the possibilities of the federal state of Abkhazia-Georgia (Konflikty 2008: 175–176, 360) – the separatists had taken their project onto a new level. As could have been presumed, the Istanbul summit declared the referendum and election held in Abkhazia "unacceptable and illegitimate".

NON-PERFORMANCE OF ISTANBUL AGREEMENTS AND NEW BEGINNING

On 26 June 2001, the Russian authorities informed the CFE states of the withdrawal of their forces from the basis in Vaziani, which was immediately entered by Georgian armed forces. In reality, it remained the only point in the Istanbul agreement to be performed by Russia, and although on 19 July 2001 they announced of the withdrawal of forces from Gudauta (adding that it now houses the “rehabilitation centre for the peacekeepers”), neither Georgia nor OSCE were allowed to verify the statement.

It is difficult to say how seriously the Western leaders had taken Moscow’s readiness to fulfil the promises given in Istanbul (the bases were not of relevant value and after the closing Russia would still have been present with their so-called peacekeepers), however, due to NATO’s plans of extending to the east, Russia was prepared for a long war of position and the retention of the bases provided a good opportunity for that. Having evaluated its role in the war against terrorism initiated by the USA, Moscow openly wished to be treated equally to the USA, and achieved it. A typical feature in the Abkhazia-related UN Security Council resolutions 1287, 1311, 1339, 1364, 1393, 1427, 1462, 1494, 1524, 1615, 1666 (January 2000–March 2006) is the inclusion of the phrase “considering the decisions in Istanbul”, but not once is their non-performance mentioned. If the final document of the NATO summit in 2002 hoped for the “swift fulfilment” of the (non-performed) commitments of Istanbul, then the meetings in 2004 and 2006 merely wished for the performance of the “remaining commitments” agreed upon in Istanbul. A typical feature in the statements was the recall of the non-commitment to the Istanbul agreement without mentioning the non-performing party.

Nevertheless, “the withdrawal of forces” came to be heard on the international arena and now a lot came to depend on Georgia’s own developments. With a hindsight, it has been mentioned that during Shevardnadze’s period the Georgian parliament only adopted three resolutions to demand the withdrawal of Russian forces (2 October 1996, 18 July 2001, 26 August 2002). Considering also a few other resolutions targeted against the Russian forces (attempt to tax the property in their use, appeal to the president to veto Russia’s membership in WTO, which was later annulled, etc.), we have a sufficient overview of the level of democracy in Georgia at the time – all the resolutions demanded action from the head of state, as the majority of the parliament were members of the Union

of Citizens of Georgia based on the fidelity to the leader. The seasoning added by the small opposition was tolerated until needed.

Before that, on 18 December 2000, Eduard Shevardnadze had used an international conference in Tbilisi to declare that in 3–4 years Georgia will be a member of NATO.

The following events in Georgia were strongly influenced by Russia's new war in Chechnya. The use of the Pankisi and Kodori Gorges in the Georgian territory by the Chechen fighters caused several conflicts between Russia and Georgia, in which Georgia had only one option after both Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs I. Ivanov (15 February 2002: Osama bin Laden hides in Pankisi Gorge) and US Secretary of State C. Powell (in the UN on 5 February 2003: al-Zarqawi men hide in Pankisi valley) had mentioned the links between Chechen fighters and Al-Qaeda: in April–May 2002 there were US Special Operation Forces in Georgia to train Georgians for the war against terrorism.

Despite of that, in 2002–2003 there were numerous inconsistencies in Georgia, which somehow left the further development of the state undetermined. Thus, in 2002, the new ambassador R. Miles declared the democratic change of president in Georgia in 2005 as his main mission, although it was already clear that the authorities with the Soviet background (N. Nazarbayev, etc.) preferred not to leave power structures. On 7 March 2003 there was an unexpected meeting between V. Putin, E. Shevardnadze and Abkhazian prime minister G. Gaguliya in Sochi. The mandate of the Russian peacekeepers was extended by six months until the given meeting, now however, Putin agreed with Shevardnadze that the peacekeepers would remain until one of the parties demand their withdrawal. On 15 August 2003 in Tbilisi, the head of the Russian energy networks A. Chubais announced that Gazprom had signed a 25-year cooperation agreement with Georgia and that the company RAO EES led by him has bought 75% of the shares of the US company AES operating in Georgia – the given acquisition in 1998 for 25 million dollars had been the first major US investment in Georgia. The given unexpected (re)turn in the economic policy was marked by comments such as “No need for the 11th Red Army again [reference to the occupation of Georgia in 1921] – its work will be done by Gazprom” (Lakoba 2004: 128–130).

Also the well-known Rose Revolution on 23 November 2003 provided plenty to think about, as the first foreign partner of the new and old authorities was the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Igor Ivanov, who arrived hastily in Tbilisi and 5 days later already had a meeting with the Adjarian, Abkhazian and South

Ossetian separatist leaders. A week later (5 December) Tbilisi was visited by US Secretary of Defence Rumsfelt on his way from Azerbaijan, calling for Russia to close its bases in Georgia. Rumsfelt knew very well that exactly that particular message was expected of him – it was clear that the leader of the Rose Revolution, graduate of Columbia University Mikheil Saakashvili, was ready to play his cards on the US support in taking Georgia to NATO and the EU. This, however, was not possible with Russian bases in the Georgian territory, which was also mentioned in Saakashvili's first speech as the president.

The discussion of the foreign bases by the Georgian revolution leaders was in clear contrast to the new models adopted by Western capitals in their relations with Russia: the deadlines established in Istanbul in 1999 remained the last ones (although the time of withdrawal of forces from Moldova was extended by a year – 31 December 2003) and the above-mentioned play with terminology began. At the same time, it was attempted to, so to speak, calm the Georgians and convince them to accept the reality à la “see, Germany waited for 42 years for its unification”. One of the cornerstones of the US foreign policy Ronald D. Asmus makes an apt remark on in his recent book is that Georgian public seemed to care more for regaining the lost territories than many Western observers wanted to believe (2010: 74). As there was no mutual (will for) understanding, even the US administration's Georgian policy grew increasingly more cautious. Characteristic of that could be G. Bush's speech at the central square of Tbilisi on 10 May 2005 in which he recalled the violence used on Georgians by the Soviet army at the selfsame spot in 1989, but failed to mention Russian military bases in favour of reaching “peaceful unity” in the “sovereign and free Georgia”.

The new Georgian parliament elected in the flow of the revolution was not as restricted as those during Shevardnadze's time and did not restrain themselves in the issues of foreign forces. Everybody understood that in the occupied areas time worked on behalf of the separatists and Russia. After Tbilisi, the revolution was repeated also in Adjara on 5 May 2004, where separatism has been historically less marked but nevertheless based on the Russian naval base. Moscow's prompt reaction was once again expressed in the Foreign Minister I. Ivanov's hasty arrival at the territory and departure with the overthrown leader of the Adjarian regime. From that point onwards, there was even talk of a third and fourth Rose Revolution, with reference to the submission of Abkhazia and South Ossetia to the central government. Quicker results were expected from South Ossetia, however, the events in Tbilisi and Batumi discouraged the separatist leaders, and Russia was immediately present with its assistance: in July 2004

began another arrival of ‘volunteers’ from all over Russia in South Ossetia and the Russian State Duma announced that their aim is to defend the safety of the citizens of the Russian Federation.

TBILISI HAS ITS WAY AND GEORGIA... LOSES

Giving a speech at the UN General Assembly on 21 September 2004, Saakashvili called the closing of Russian bases the “touchstone” of the “present solution to the transition to democracy”, assuring that there will be no new military bases in Georgia. Russia must have made some conclusions from the changes in Tbilisi, because before they had tried to keep the bases for 15, then 14 and eventually 13 years, and now they only asked for 8 more years (until 2008), and instead of 500 million dollars for the expenses of the resettlement of the armed forces, they now asked for 250 million dollars. In the resolution adopted on 10 March 2005, the Georgian parliament stated that Russia had only partially performed the agreements signed in Istanbul as there was still a 300-strong unit in Gudauta. The war technology from Tbilisi, however, had been taken to Batumi and Akhalkalaki. With reference to Moscow’s avoidance of the settlement of the issue in negotiations, the parliament demanded the government to close Russian bases not later than 1 January 2006, i.e. three years earlier than Moscow would have been willing to do it unless a new schedule for the withdrawal had been agreed upon before 15 May 2005. It was added that Saakashvili’s participation in celebrations of the 60th anniversary of the Allied victory on 9 May in Moscow depended on the negotiations of the withdrawal of foreign forces. As Moscow declined from answer by date, Saakashvili did not participate in this solemn (especially for Russia) ceremony, but surprisingly quite soon, on 30 May 2005, there were talks between the Georgian and Russian Ministers of Foreign Affairs in Moscow in which it was agreed that the Russian base in Akhalkalaki will be closed no later than the end of 2007, the headquarters in Batumi and Tbilisi in 2008.

Saakashvili’s tactics baffled everyone, including the EU and the US leaders. But at the same time, Georgia had found firm allies. The immense popularity of the Rose Revolution and the inability/unwillingness of the FOG to solve the problems closely related to one of its members led to the establishment of the New Group of Friends of Georgia (NFOG) on 4 February 2005, including (Russia’s neighbours) Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, with later affiliation by the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Ukraine and Sweden.

The foundation of an alternative group was an unprecedented step in post-Cold War relations between the East and the West, between the great powers and all others. The parallel co-existence of NFOG and FOG was, and still is, one of the most curious phenomena in the post-Cold War international relations. As the more recent group consciously selected the name of the previous one by emphasising merely the new aspect, it may be considered both an opposition and a challenge. It was the conscious and principled opposition by the small and medium-sized states against five great powers, or rather against their agreement policy heedless of values and the interests of smaller countries, which was the result of permanent compromises between four democratic powers and the authoritarian Russia. The latter openly sought the restoration of her previous influence in world affairs (Alatalu 2012: 193).

Georgia's tactics was simple – president Saakashvili and the government made every effort to internationalise the topic of withdrawal of troops and discuss it everywhere (during his visit to the White House on 5 July 2006, Saakashvili made futile attempts to include the problem in the G8 summit agenda), and openly discussed – after the rejection of the offer of autonomy – the establishment of the so-called counter-government in Abkhazia (on 29 July 2006 in Kodori Gorge) and South Ossetia (10 May 2005), which clearly showed that the Georgian authorities believed in the reunification of their homeland.

On 11 October 2005, on 15 February and 18 July 2006, the Georgian parliament adopted three new 'withdrawal' resolutions demanding, among others, replacement of Russian peacekeepers in South Ossetia by international police forces. While introducing the last resolution, the Speaker of the parliament N. Burdjanadze considered it important to draw attention to the possibility of a dangerous precedent – in the given area Russia attempted to be simultaneously both neutral and "defend Russian citizens".

In September 2006, the Georgia–Russia relations deteriorated once again due to incidents in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, however, it all culminated with the arrest of Russian spies in Tbilisi. The given event angered the Russian elite to such an extent that the Minister of Defence Sergei Ivanov declared (29 September 2006) Georgia a "bandit state" and the commander-in-chief Vladimir Putin gave (11 October) an order for "withdrawal before the prescribed time" from Tbilisi (by 31 December 2006) and confirmed premature withdrawal also from Akhalkalaki and Batumi. It was realized on 13 November 2007.

Saakashvili's team and the Georgian nation had clearly achieved a political victory. And even prematurely. On the other hand, it was difficult to celebrate,

as having brewed for more than a year, the conflict with the opposition had eventually (7 November) culminated in a conflict between protesters and security forces and the establishment of state of emergency. The cost of the victory in foreign policy was the loss in internal politics. Saakashvili began to improve his position with manoeuvres with the elections, however, the steps taken in the foreign policy by others came to mark the fate of Saakashvili and Georgia in the events of the following year (2008).

The most influential of these is US president Bush's failure in providing Georgia and Ukraine the plan of action for NATO membership during the summit in Bucharest in April 2008. Moscow immediately saw its chance, as for at least three years Kremlin had claimed that proclamation of the independence of Kosovo – opposed by Russia – may be answered by similar decisions in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Both Condoleezza Rice and Saakashvili heard it from Putin. Saakashvili returned from his meeting with Putin in February 2008 in firm belief that there would be war (Asmus 2010: 74, 75, 144). Prior to the Bucharest meeting, Moscow announced, and twelve days after the Bucharest meeting established, direct official contacts with both Abkhazia and South Ossetia. On 30 May, the railway troops notoriously marched into Abkhazia until August. The Western reaction to the event was – according to Saakashvili – the first statement by the USA, France, United Kingdom and Germany denouncing Russian activities within the FOG. Despite public radicalism, Saakashvili made a secret attempt (dated from 21 June–3 July) to agree with Russia on division of Abkhazia, which was rejected by Kremlin (Asmus 2010: 140). As Germany was the official coordinator of the FOG, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Walter Steinmeier made a surprise visit to Georgia and Abkhazia (13–18 July) together with a 3-stage solution plan for the Abkhazian conflict, which, however, proved to be unsuccessful. In his book Ronald Asmus describes the astonishment of American policymakers as they later read the memcons of the meeting between Bush and Putin in Sochi, soon after NATO summit in Bucharest – Putin's threats against Georgia were answered by the US president's silence? “Was it a sign that the United States would not strongly oppose a Russian move against Georgia?”, Asmus asks (2010: 140). At the same time, there is the well-known story from history of the Korean syndrome, according to which the Korean war began as US president H. Truman for some reason had left out South Korea from the list of US supported countries, and therefore North Korea presumed that their neighbour had been left on their own and thus began the assault.

In any case, one was immediately reminded of the syndrome when acts of war broke out in the seemingly forgotten South Ossetia (Alatalu 2012: 202) Also when browsing back the article, it is not difficult to be convinced that in 1989–2008 there was considerably less strife in the name of South Ossetia than Abkhazia. Even if the western powers had made a public sign of being interested (only) in Abkhazia, it would have been logical enough to deduce that the fate of South Ossetia will rather be the concern of Georgia. At one point Tbilisi did decide to risk by using force there and fell into a trap. Considering the prior events, one cannot help but think that long before the August war things had already been planned so that the possible clash should – if it ever was to – take place far away in the mountains and not in the potential paradise of holiday-making businessmen. On 4 July 2007, situated nearby Abkhazia Sochi was announced as the location of the Olympic Games – an event that raised the value of Abkhazia even as a nest of separatism. Its value is also confirmed by the fact that Abkhazia began military action against Georgia only after the course of the war had been determined (10 August 2008).

As we know, the August war, in which Georgia's two main aims were to achieve control over its whole territory and oust the last contingent of the occupation forces hindering the named control, ended with Georgia's defeat. The resolution adopted in Georgian parliament on 28 August 2008 declared the Russian forces, including the so-called peacekeepers in the Georgian territory, as "military occupation units", whereas the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia and the autonomous region of South Ossetia were declared as "territories occupied" by the Russian Federation. Harsh and precise words. Although even the supporters of the resolution may have not had much hope that the given areas could ever again be part of Georgia.

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