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Resources for Crafting Sovereignties in Breakaway Abkhazia and South Ossetia:

Politics of Nationhood within the Rivalry between Russia and Georgia

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Abstract

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This thesis is aimed at analysis of nation making in Georgia's breakaway territories engaging certain aspects of foreign and domestic affairs that might be viewed as sources for crafting sovereignties in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. For this purpose, I deal with historiography and collective memory as a source of justification of secession and sovereignty, and relevant political interpretation of these discourses that have mobilizing effects in the respective societies. Demographic changes and politics of ethnic consolidation after the wars for independence in 1990s and Russian-Georgian war in 2008, and their influence on legitimacy of elites of the respective political entities, are also examined in order to gain more understanding of state building in Georgia's breakaway republics. Russia's efforts to support nation building in Abkhazia and South Ossetia through financial, human, symbolic-emotional and political investment is one more aspect brought into analysis. Overall goal for studying domestic and international resources of crafting polities in breakaway republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia is to understand how these post-war

societies construct their identities, institutions and statehood under influence of the contested geopolitical environment. This will benefit an academic approach in regional studies that will meet interests of scholars, international organizations, non-state actors and policy-makers focused on conflict transformation and resolution.

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Glossary

Abkhazia	The Republic of Abkhazia is a de-facto and partially recognized republic on the eastern coast of the Black Sea, south of the Greater Caucasus Mountains, in northwestern Georgia. It was an autonomous republic (Abkhaz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic or in short Abkhaz ASSR) within the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1931-1992.
Alania	A medieval kingdom of the Iranian Alans in the Northern Caucasus, roughly in the location of latter-day Circassia and modern North Ossetia. It existed as a kingdom since gaining independence from the Khazars in the late ninth century AD until its destruction by the Mongol invasion in 13 th century AD.
Bagrationi	A dynasty that reigned in Georgia from the Middle Ages until the early 19th century when Georgian kingdoms were annexed by the Russian Empire.
Byzantine Empire	The Eastern Roman Empire or Byzantium with a capital city in Constantinople (modern-day Istanbul, Turkey). It existed since fifth to 15 th century AD until its conquest by Ottoman Turks.
Confederation of Mountainous People of the Caucasus	Конфедерация горских народов Кавказа was a militarized political organization in Northern Caucasus, active around the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union, between 1991 and 1994. It played a decisive role in the 1992–1993 war in Abkhazia, rallying militants from the North Caucasian republics to fight Georgian armed forces.
Ethnocracy	A political structure appropriated by a dominant ethnic group (or groups) to further its interests, power and resources.

EU	The European Union (Consists of 28 member nations).
Freedom House	An independent watchdog organization dedicated to the expansion of freedom and democracy around the world.
FSB	Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation
Georgian Orthodox Church	The Georgian Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church is an autocephalous Eastern Orthodox Church in full communion with the other churches of Eastern Orthodoxy. It is Georgia's dominant religious institution.
Hittites	The Hittites were an Anatolian people who played an important role in establishing an empire centered on Hattusa in north-central Anatolia around 1600 BC.
IDFI	The Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI) is a Georgian non-governmental organization founded in 2009.
KGB	Committee for State Security, was the main security agency for the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
Khazars	A confederation of Turkic-speaking tribes that in the late sixth century AD established a major commercial empire covering the southeastern section of modern day European Russia.
NATO	The North Atlantic Treaty Organization also called the North Atlantic Alliance, is an intergovernmental military alliance between 29 North American and European countries.
North Ossetia	The Republic of North Ossetia-Alania, a federal subject of the Russian Federation.

Sarmatians	A large Iranian confederation that existed in classical antiquity, flourishing from about the fifth century BC to the fourth century AD between the Danube and the Volga rivers.
Scythians	Eurasian nomads, probably mostly using Eastern Iranian languages, inhabiting large areas in the central Eurasian steppes from about the ninth century BC up until the fourth century AD.
South Ossetia	Officially the Republic of South Ossetia—the State of Alania and referred to as Tskhinvali Region, is a disputed territory in the northern part of the internationally recognized Georgian territory. It used to be South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast in frames of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1921-1990.
Truly Orthodox Christians of Greece	An Old Calendarist Church which severed communion with the Church of Greece in 1935 over the acceptance of the Revised Julian Calendar. The adoption of the new calendar was viewed as an abrogation of the Orthodox Church's historical festal unity and a contradiction of Orthodox self-understanding by establishing common worship with non-Orthodox and furthering the goals of Ecumenism, while sacrificing festal unity among the Orthodox Churches.
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics existed since 1922 to 1991.

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CHAPTER 1. Introduction.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union sped up the process of nationalizing the territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, a process which had started even before the USSR itself was formed. In this regard, Georgian conflicts do not represent an exception, but rather can be viewed in the broader perspective of the emergence of nations in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.¹ During this period, nation making had one thing in common – a claim over the land (territory).² As in any other conflict, Georgian conflicts had a multi-actor character. There were a number of interested parties that affected the dynamics and outcomes of Georgian conflicts, including the Russian Federation, peoples of Russia's North Caucasus republics, and, to a lesser degree, the Western states³ that inspired Georgia to pursue the path of democratic development and modernization, integration into European and transatlantic structures, and opposition to Russia's ambitions to regain control over its former Caucasus dominions. The Russian Federation, as a neighboring country of Georgia, obviously was interested in defining political developments in certain ways on its peripheries, in this case in the South Caucasus, where it feared growing Western presence and influence. Viewing this aspect of conflict development from a global perspective, it becomes obvious that in the 1990s Russia reduced its role of an agenda setter for conflicts beyond its borders. It focused its interest on a few armed conflicts close to, or within, its own borders (Chechnya, Armenia-Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Tajikistan), apart from its concerns with issues in the former

¹ Suny, R.G. (2000). Provisional Stabilities: The Politics of Identities in Post-Soviet Eurasia. *International Security*, Volume 24, Number 3, Winter 1999/2000. Pg. 156.

² Crocker, C., Hampson, Fen Osler, Aall, Pamela R, & Center for International Governance Innovation, issuing body. (2015). *Managing conflict in a world adrift*. Waterloo, Ontario: Washington, DC: Center for International Governance Innovation; United States Institute of Peace Press. Pg. 11.

³ Nan, S. A. (2000). *Complementarity and Coordination of Conflict Resolution Efforts in the Conflicts over Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Transdnistria*. Retrieved on June 15, 2018 from <https://search.proquest.com/docview/304670179?accountid=14784> Pg. 85.

Yugoslavia, thus demonstrating its awareness and caution about dangers it perceived to face on its peripheries.⁴

The study of post-conflict developments in Abkhazia and South Ossetia in light of Russia's role as an agenda setter will allow us to broaden our insight into post-Soviet conflict transformation from the perspective of polity-crafting and will serve to drive scholarship beyond the ethnic-territorial dispute paradigm. Most of the studies of Abkhazia and South Ossetia put the emphasis on ethnicity, geopolitics, the issue of state recognition, and/or conflict resolution rather than nation making.⁵ One of the few exceptions is Charles King's paper (2001),⁶ which deals with this issue of nation making after the violent wars for secession in Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the 1990s. The author analyses how seceded territories of Georgia transformed into functioning de-facto states with national governments and armies under peaceful times. As in King's 2001 paper, one of the goals of this case study will be to understand how this shift from ethnic-driven conflict dynamics into politically driven nation making took place. The centrality of Russia's role and investments, financial and otherwise, will also be discussed. It is worth noting that King's analysis bypasses this aspect of nation making in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Perhaps this is due to the time when the paper was written. Relations between Georgia and Russia greatly changed after the 2003 Rose Revolution, which brought an outspokenly Western-oriented political elite into Georgian government at a time when relations between Russia and the West had also changed. In summary, all these factors influenced the subjects to be covered in this paper.

It should also be noted that the research herein will not be limited to the analysis of the effects of geopolitical factors on nation making. One more aspect of this paper will be to

⁴ Wallensteen, P. (2002). *Understanding Conflict Resolution: War, Peace, and the Global System*. London; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE Publications. Pg. 251.

⁵ Ambrosio, T., & Lange, W. (2016). The Architecture of Annexation? Russia's Bilateral Agreements with South Ossetia and Abkhazia. *Nationalities Papers*, 44(5). Pg. 675.

⁶ King Ch. (2001). The Benefits of Ethnic War: Understanding Eurasia's Unrecognized States. *World Politics*, Vol. 53, No. 4 (Jul., 2001), pp. 524-552.

understand how collective identities oriented on safeguarding from or confronting threats coming from the “outside” are applicable to Abkhazian and South Ossetian cases in the context of Georgian-Russian competition. Taking these factors into account, my hypothesis for this study may be formulated as follows:

Georgian-Russian competition over territories of post-Soviet Georgia occurred along administrative and relevant emotional-symbolic borders, drawing on divisions among three different political identities promoted by nationalistic elites (Georgian, Abkhaz, and Ossetian). The incompatibility of these ethnic-driven ideologies resulted in secessionist wars in the 1990s. It ended in the military defeat of Georgia (1990s and 2008) and the unsustainable peace imposed by Russia that eventually transformed Russia into the guarantor and protector of the independence of Georgia’s breakaway republics. This peace caused a shift from militarily mobilized ethnic communities to politics (not necessarily framed beyond ethnic boundaries) that engage the public in politics, providing an arena for forming political preferences and orientations. Meanwhile, these territories remain a cause of disputes between Georgian and secessionist elites, and between the Georgian and Russian governments. This greatly affects development of political identities and preferences in which Georgia and Russia are not mere components of these societal-political structures, but rather play decisive roles in their formulation.

Finally, it will be crucial to gain an understanding of the formation of politics that view themselves in certain categories of self-identification beyond surrounding international and regional contexts. In this regard it will be helpful to analyze how ethnicity and ethnic consolidation under and after violent conflicts that resulted in military and political victories is a foundational principle of nation making. This aspect can be illustrated through analysis of

political participation of ethnic minorities and human rights in ethnic minority (especially Georgian) districts of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Taking into account all these aspects of the dynamics of conflict development that led to the crafting of the new nations in Georgia's breakaway republics, the overarching question is how Russian-Georgian competition produced resources for state making. How this conflict transformed into a range of societal and political developments in Abkhazia and South Ossetia that did not stimulate reconciliation and instead resulted in isolation of the sides from each other, framed in concepts of sovereignty and belonging in the political space around Russia, is also part of my analysis.

CHAPTER 2. Nation Building: Historiography and Nationalism in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

In the case of Abkhazian and South Ossetian national identities, there is hardly a distinguishable demarcation line between statehood and ethnicity. This paradigm of national identities is based on a quest for finding foundations of nationality in collective narratives claiming uniqueness of history and culture shared by a group distinguished from other groups in the same geographic area by language and memory. Abkhazians, Ossetians and Georgians living southward from the Greater Caucasus mountain range interpret their culture and memories in various ways, hardly ever agreeing on most of the issues concerning their common past. Abkhaz and (South) Ossetian historiographies that developed under the Soviet Union try to find strict boundaries eliminating "Georgianness" from their relative histories and claim separate paths of development for their respective ethnic communities. That is how Proto-Hittites, Scythians, ancient Greeks and Romans, Persian-Iranians, Khazars, ancient Slavs and Russians have much greater roles in the past of Abkhazians and Ossetians than do

Georgians. The only exception is the period between the 11th and 13th centuries when, for instance, contemporary Abkhaz historians talk about the “joint kingdom” of the Abkhaz and Kartvelian (Georgian) people,⁷ whereas other periods of history are related to Khazars, Alans (Ossetians), Armenians, the Genoese Republic, Turkey and Russia.⁸ In contrast, some Ossetian historians claim that the early history of the Georgian kingdom of Kartli (from the fourth century BC to the sixth century AD) is in fact the history of the Alan (Ossetian) polity Georgianized by Georgian historiography,⁹ while later periods are marked by the constant struggle of the Ossetian people to save their national identity and land from the creeping Georgianization of Georgian kings and nobles.¹⁰

In this way, historiography of Abkhazia and South Ossetia developed a whole body of studies attempting to distance collective memories of respective communities from the former parent state by perceiving Georgia in the niche of a threat of absorption and assimilation rather than in a common space of development. Russian anthropologist Viktor Schnirelman (2003)¹¹ analyzed how Georgian, Abkhazian and Ossetian historians developed arguments to prove which ethnic group had a legitimate right to be called the lawful master of certain territories. In terms of current Abkhazian and Ossetian historiography, these myths are concentrated in discourses on ethnogenesis and language, ethno-cultural linkages with ancient cultures and other ethnicities in geographic areas surrounding relevant ethnic territories (Abkhazia and South Ossetia), history of religion, and, most importantly, relations with Georgians and Russians.

⁷ Bgaghba, O., Lakoba, S. (2007). *Istoria Abkhazii s drevneishikh vremyon do nashikh dney* (History of Abkhazia from Ancient Times till Today). Sukhum. Pg. 165.

⁸ See table of contents of the same book. Pg. 461.

⁹ Dzanayty, Kh. (2001). *Natsionalnaya doktrina Alanii* (National Doctrine of Alania). Vladikavkaz. Pg. 32.

¹⁰ Lalieva, Yu., Tskhovrebov, I. (02.09.1994). *O granitsakh Yuzhnoi Ossetii* (On Borders of South Ossetia). Yuzhnaya Ossetia newspaper.

¹¹ Schnirelman, V.A., (2003). *Vojny pamiati: mify, identichnost i politika v zakavkazie* (Memory Wars: Myths, Identity and Politics in Transcaucasia). Moscow. Akademkniga publishing house.

Contemporary Abkhaz historians argue that Abkhazian ethnogenesis is related to tribes living in the Northern Caucasus since ancient times. In terms of linguistic linkages, this connection attributes the Abkhaz language to the Abkhazo-Adigean group of languages (west Northern Caucasus family of languages) that originated from the Vainakh and Dagestani (east Northern Caucasus family of languages) group of languages, all of which form together the family of Caucasian languages.¹² This discourse about ethnogenesis and language is noteworthy for one major reason: It does not mention the possibility of the relationship of the Georgian language to the family of Caucasian languages. In the field of Soviet linguistics, there was a long established theory, elaborated by Georgian scholar Arnold Chikobava,¹³ of an Ibero-Caucasian family of languages that argued inter-connectedness of Georgian (Southern Caucasus) and Northern Caucasus languages. This theory was also a part of ethnopolitical discussions in Soviet times because Georgian scholarship in the fields of history and linguistics, especially in regard to issues of ethnogenesis in Georgia and generally in the Caucasus, was viewed as the means of Georgian hegemony over Abkhazians. Despite the fact that the theory of an Ibero-Caucasus family of languages was altered by some other Georgian and Russian scholars¹⁴ who argued that there is no linguistic linkage between Georgian and Northern Caucasus languages, Chikobava's theory should still have a place in linguistic discussions; its repudiation, or rather obliteration, has a clear political grounding serving a nationalistic agenda. Moreover, when the official historiographical narrative deals with the area of settlement of Abkhaz tribes in ancient times (first millennium BC), it includes the entire western South Caucasus (western Georgia – Colchis),¹⁵ thus excluding Georgian or

¹² Bgazhba, O., Lakoba, S. (2007). *Istoria Abkhazii s drevneishikh vremyon do nashikh dnei* (History of Abkhazia from Ancient Times till Today) Sukhum.. Pg. 9-10.

¹³ Chikobava, A. (1948). *Iberiu-kavkasiur enata dzeli urtiertobis sakitkhisativis* (On Issues of Ancient Relations of Ibero-Caucasus Languages). Tbilisi.

¹⁴ Gamkrelidze, T., Ivanov, V. (1984). *Indoeuropeiskii iazyk i indoeuropeitsi* (Indo-European Languages and Indo-Europeans). Tbilisi.

¹⁵ Gulia, D. (1951). *O moei knige "istoria Abkhazii"* (About my Book "History of Abkhazia"). Sukhumi. Pg. 9. Pg. 20

Kartvelian tribes from being among the first inhabitants of this area because, according to this argument, they moved to this area later from northeastern Asia Minor.¹⁶ The political implication of this argument is a belief in Georgian aggression and oppression of Abkhaz ethnicity from its historic lands.

In the case of Ossetian scholarship in the fields of linguistics and history, there is no division between South and North Ossetian discourses, and there is a common Ossetian or Alan discourse. The separation of the Ossetian language from Georgian is an easy task due to the claim that the Ossetian language does not belong to the family of the Caucasus languages, but rather is related to the Iranian group of the family of Indo-European languages. The issue becomes politicized when discussion begins with the presence of the Ossetian language in the context of historic time and geographic area. Ossetian historians claim that the language appeared on the southern slopes of the Greater Caucasus Mountains in the seventh century BC when Scythian-Sarmat-Alan tribes came into this area, occupied major gorges and valleys between the rivers of Liakhvi, Ksani and Aragvi, and assimilated local tribes.¹⁷ This assimilation did not become a focal point for scholarship, so a tempting postulate was to view the Ossetian language and ethnos in the framework of Aryan discourse. An explanation for the ethnonym “Alan” is that it is related to the term “Arya,” a name for the Indo-European tribes of Iran. According to Ossetian scholars, the Indo-European terms Arya and Aryana gradually transformed into Ossetian Allon and later Alan.¹⁸ This argument is one of the essential components of the nationalistic discourse in South Ossetia to claim its high ethnic status and membership in the larger family of cultures in comparison to

¹⁶ Bgazhba, O., Lakoba, S. (2007). *Istoria Abkhazii s drevneishikh vremyon do nashikh dnei* (History of Abkhazia from Ancient Times till Today). Sukhum. Pg. 14.

¹⁷ Gagloity, Yu. (1966). *Alany i voprosy etnogeneza ossetin* (Alans and Issue of Ethnogenesis of Ossetians). Tbilisi. Pg. 241.

¹⁸ Abayev, V. (1949). *Osetinskii iazyk i folklor* (Ossetian Language and Folklore). Moscow, Leningrad. Pg. 246.

Georgians who stand rather isolated and solitary in terms of having no “kinfolks” around them, thus justifying their alienation.

The history of the religious institutions of Abkhazia and Ossetia-Alania is also a matter of political myth making. Abkhaz historians argue Christianity became the only religion of Abkhazia in the sixth century, with an autonomous church and spiritual center in Pityus (Greek toponym of Bichvinta in Georgian, Pitsunda in Abkhazian and Russian). The liturgy was conducted in Greek and preaching was done in Abkhaz languages, according to these arguments.¹⁹ The introduction of the Georgian language into the spiritual sphere is attributed to later periods of medieval history when the Abkhazian kingdom was headed by the Kartvelian/Georgian dynasty of Bagrationi (from the end of the tenth century). The issue of Christianity and language, especially in regard to the Georgian language, seems to be quite problematic in historiographical narratives. Georgian historians argue that the Georgian language replaced Greek in liturgical and ecclesiastic writing beginning in the eighth century, as soon as the Abkhazian principality and later kingdom gained more autonomy from the Byzantine Empire and conducted more or less independent policies in its neighborhood. Since then, the Georgian language and script were used for epigraphic-lapidary writing and documentation.²⁰ The historiography of Christianity in Alania/Ossetia, unlike the Abkhazian narrative, is not aimed at claiming the existence of a separate church in the role of Alans in safeguarding and promoting Christianity in the Northern Caucasus that started to Islamize intensely since the sixteenth century.²¹ This narrative tends to be aimed at competing with Muslim Ingushs who claim the same territories as Northern Ossetians and caused tensions in the Prigorodnii *rayon* of Vladikavkaz. This discourse is rather silent on religious linkages of

¹⁹ Dbar, D. (2006). *Kratkii ocherk istorii Abkhazskoi pravoslavnoi tserkvi* (Short Essay on Abkhazia's Orthodox Church). Novii Afon. Pg. 5.

²⁰ Akhaladze, L. (2005). *Apkhazetis epigrafika rogorits saistorio tskharo: tomi I* (Epigraphy in Abkhazia as a Source for Historiography: Vol I). Tbilisi. Pg. 58.

²¹ Tmenov, V., Besonova, E., Gonoboblev, E. (2000). *Religioznye vozzrenia Ossetin (Istoria religii v istorii naroda)* (Religious Worldviews of Ossetians: History of Religion in History of People). Khrestomatia. Vladikavkaz.

Ossetians with Georgians, who are followers of the same Orthodox Christianity, and silent on the history of the Georgian Christian Orthodox Church. Meanwhile, Georgian historians and clerics claim that the Georgian church was present in territories and communities nowadays forming South and North Ossetia.²² In both the Abkhazian and Ossetian cases, discourse on religion, especially Christian Orthodoxy (Abkhazia has a history of Islam and a sizeable Muslim population too) has political implications because it binds the history of Christianity to the history of ethnicity and contradicts Georgian narratives of Christianity. On the one hand, by propounding competing discourses about apostles Simon Canaanite and Andrew, there is an attempt to prove which side is the more ancient follower of the religion. According to Abkhazian historiography, the two apostles came to Abkhazia to preach,²³ while according to the Ossetian side, they came to Alania,²⁴ and to Georgia in the Georgian narrative.²⁵ On the other hand, this discussion leads to the elimination of the influence of the Georgian Orthodox Church, which is viewed as a form of Georgian soft power in these breakaway republics. Moreover, these narratives lead to attempts to replace the Georgian Church with local churches. For instance, in South Ossetia, there is an eparchy of Alania established in 2005²⁶ in place of the Nikozi eparchy of the Georgian Orthodox Church. The 2005 diocese is not subordinated to the Georgian patriarch, but rather is run by the Church of Truly Orthodox Christians of Greece, a small ultra-conservative diocese. The Abkhazian case is rather different in that it has two conflicting churches, the Sukhum-Pitsunda Diocese patronized by the Russian Orthodox Church and headed by a bishop Besarion Aplia, and the

²² Tamarashvili, M. (1995). *Kartuli eklesia dasabamidan dghemde* (Georgian Church from the Beginning till Today). Edited by Aleksidze Z. and Odisheli J. Tbilisi

²³ Bgazhba, O., Lakoba, S. (2007). *Istoria Abkhazii s drevneishikh vremyon do nashikh dnei* (History of Abkhazia from Ancient Times till Today). Sukhum. Pg. 119.

²⁴ Tmenov, V., Besonova, E., Gonoboblev, E. (2000). *Religioznye vozzrenia Ossetin (Istoria religii v istorii naroda)* (Religious Worldviews of Ossetians: History of Religion in History of People). Khrestomatia. Vladikavkaz. Pg. 65.

²⁵ Tamarashvili, M. (1995). *Kartuli eklesia dasabamidan dghemde* (Georgian Church from the Beginning till Today). Edited by Aleksidze Z. and Odisheli J. Tbilisi. Pg. 16.

²⁶ Parastayev, A. (11.19.2010). 'Tserkovnaia nezavisimost' (Independence of the Church). Ekho Kavkaza. Retrieved on August 1, 2018 from <https://www.ekhokavkaza.com/a/2225116.html>

other the Sacred Mitropoly of Abkhazia headed by archimandrite Dorothey Dbar, who aims to bring autocephaly to the Abkhazian church.²⁷ In sum, discussions on the history of Christianity and religious institutions in Abkhazia and South Ossetia are part of a nationalistic agenda aimed at distancing the regions from their former parent state of Georgia and eliminating its image from a collective memory of the nationalized ethnicities of relevant breakaway republics.

One of the most important questions asked by contemporary Abkhazian and Ossetian historiography is how to determine images of external powers still present in the politics of the relevant republics. In this sense, Georgia and Russia are those external powers that are required to bear certain qualities to be represented in certain historic roles important for the current political context. Abkhazian historiography insists on a narrative of Abkhazians struggling for independence since ancient times. In this context, the first anti-Georgian political activity is pictured in a story of rivalry in the royal family of Bagratids. Kartvelian (Georgian) Bagrationi inherited the throne of the Abkhazian kingdom in the beginning of the 11th century, and this led to an inner dynastic conflict against king Bagrat IV (1027-1072) and his half-brother Demetre, who was supported by Byzantines and some noble families of Abkhazia. This rivalry was geographically located in the northern part of modern day Abkhazia, and this provides the basis for the assumption that the conflict was over the secession of Abkhazia.²⁸ This is quite a paradoxical assumption taking into account that both pretenders were from the Bagrationi family, and it still was the kingdom of Abkhazia, not Georgia, and the conflict was over who would own the title of the king of Abkhazia. This narrative gives more romanticism and inspiration to the story based on the fact that the rebel Demetre's mother was Ossetian princess Alda. The popularization of this fable in Abkhazia

²⁷ Polandov, D. (11.06.2017). Rusul-kartuli vachrobis apkhazuri tavshesafari (Abkhazian Shelter for Russian-Georgian Bargaining). Netgazeti. Retrieved on August 1, 2018 from <http://netgazeti.ge/news/231334/>

²⁸ Bgazhba, O., Lakoba, S. (2007). *Istoria Abkhazii s drevneishikh vremyon do nashikh dnei* (History of Abkhazia from Ancient Times till Today). Sukhum. Pg. 168.

led to centuries-long contradictory versions of history among Georgians, Abkhaz and Ossetians. As a result, all the feudal wars among Abkhazian, Mingrelian, Gurian and Imeretian noble families in medieval Western Georgia after the collapse of the united Georgian kingdom in the 15th century are presented as Abkhazia's struggles to gain and safeguard its independence. In this context, the most fascinating story surrounds Kelesh-bey Chachba-Shervashidze, head of the Abkhazian principality in 1780-1808, who was murdered by his pro-Turkish son Aslan-bey²⁹ on the eve of the principality's annexation by Russia. Nevertheless, this version of the story is not the only explanation for the dramatic events that led to the Russian invasion of Abkhazia. Contemporary Abkhazian historiography suggests a version of the murder in which it was committed by another son of Kelesh-bey, namely Safar-bey, a weak man manipulated by his Georgian mother-in-law, princess of Mingrelia Nino Dadiani-Bagrati, ³⁰ who encouraged Russians to invade Abkhazia and end its independence. The same kind of fiendish plot is offered in a narrative on the death of Nestor Lakoba, an old Bolshevik, head of the Abkhazian Autonomous Republic, admired by his contemporaries and today's Abkhaz people, who was allegedly poisoned by his rival Lavrentii Beria, at that time a secretary of the Communist Party of the Georgian SSR.³¹ According to this narrative, Lakoba, his family and his clan defended the independence of Abkhazia from Georgia, but Beria, who was himself from Abkhazia, plotted against them. In sum, these stories from various epochs are widely popular in Abkhazian historiography and popular culture, and create an image of conspiratorial and fiendish Georgian powers who wish to destroy Abkhazia and absorb it into Georgia.

²⁹ Dzidzaria, G. (1940). *Bor'ba za Abkhaziu v pervom desitiletii XIX veka* (Struggle for Abkhazia in the First Decade of the XIX c). Sukhumi. Pg. 16.

³⁰ Lakoba, S. (2004). *Abkhazia posle dvukh imperii. XIX-XXI vek* (Abkhazia After Two Empires. XIX-XXI c.). Moscow. Pg. 22-23.

³¹ Lakoba, S., Dbar, A. ed. (2017). *Bolshoi Terror v Abkhazii (Abkhazskaia ASSR): 1937-1938 gg.* (Great Terror in Abkhazia/Abkhazian ASSR: 1937-1938). Vol. II. Pg. 203-205.

Unlike Abkhazian memory discourses, Ossetian historiography is not built around personalities in its narratives representing Georgia, although Georgia is still depicted as an offender. Ossetian medieval society had a feudal structure with princes and kings of ethnic Ossetian origin ruling their subjects in communities on the northern side of the Greater Caucasus Mountains. Those who occupied lands in the south were subjects of ethnic Georgian nobles and fell under the rule of Georgian kings. Possibly this is the reason why the collective memories of Southern Ossetians do not include a history of Georgian offense against heroic personalities symbolizing a struggle for freedom. Therefore, the nationalistic historiographical agenda generally states that Ossetians living on the southern slopes of the Greater Caucasus Mountains were subjected to the despotic will of Georgian nobles since ancient times.³² Contrary to the memories of medieval times, the memory of the 20th century is based on numerical facts of violence committed by the Georgian nationalizing state first in the early Russian empire and then from the Soviet Union. In this respect, South Ossetian historiography nurtured and cultivated a memory of genocidal wars³³ carried out by Georgians. Later, a five-day Russian-Georgian war in August 2008 also became part of this discourse.

Russia's image in Abkhazian and Ossetian historiography and relevant nationalistic discourses is constructed differently. Abkhazians distinguish between Tsarist Russia on the one hand and the Soviet Union and contemporary Russia on the other. Early 20th century Russia is represented as a power encouraging Georgians (who gained sympathy among Russian military and nobility due to their belonging to Orthodox Christianity and having medieval chivalric history) to dominate Abkhazian lands. In this discourse, the czarist Romanovs annexed and abolished the Abkhazian principality, committed genocide in the

³² Dzugayev, K. (2016). *Na puti k vossoedineniu Ossetii* (On the Way of Reunification of Ossetia). Tskhinval-Vladikavkaz. Pg.297.

³³ Pukhayev, K. (07.28.2004). *K voprosu o genotside* (On the Issue of Genocide). Yuzhnaya Ossetia newspaper.

1860's against the Northern Caucasus tribes who were closely related to Abkhaz ethnicity, and expelled tens of thousands Muslim Abkhaz people to the Ottoman empire in 1864-1867. In contrast, the Soviet Union and contemporary Russia are perceived to have positive effects on the development of the Abkhazian nation. First of all, according to contemporary Abkhazian historiography, restoration of Abkhazia's statehood is related to the Soviets. Abkhazia joined the Soviet Union as a "Pact" Republic («Договорная» Республика) from 1922 to 1931, after which it was transformed into an Autonomous Republic under the Georgian SSR by order of Stalin.³⁴ Possibly, Stalinism and relevant purges in Abkhazia, as well as Lavrenii Beria's ambitions to eliminate the Abkhazian national intelligentsia and Georgianize the land, are the only negative aspects of the Soviet period in Abkhazian history. The Soviet Union is represented as a safeguard for Abkhazian nationhood and a protector from Georgian chauvinism.³⁵ The Russian Federation inherited this very role of protector from Georgian offenses after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Ossetian historiography, unlike Abkhazian, does not differentiate between Imperial Russia, the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation; they are all represented as saviors. Ossetian historiographical narrative is based on a sentiment of a lost kingdom of great Alania that vanished under the pressure of Tatar-Mongol invasions. Under these circumstances, the rapid Islamization of the North Caucasus threatened the very foundations of the Christian Ossetian people. From that time, according to contemporary Ossetian historians, people living on both sides of the Greater Caucasus Mountains looked for a protector and a safeguard of their race and identity. (Georgian kingdoms of late medieval times do not appear in these narratives.) Such a protector, incarnated by the Russian Empire, emerged from the north. Ossetian historians argue that Ossetian people on both sides of the Greater Caucasus

³⁴ Bgazhba, O., Lakoba, S. (2007). *Istoria Abkhazii s drevneishikh vremyon do nashikh dnei* (History of Abkhazia from Ancient Times till Today). Sukhum. Pg. 319-320

³⁵ *ibid.* Chapters 5-7.

Mountains (current North and South Ossetias) made a historic decision to join the Russian empire in 1774³⁶ (earlier than Georgians did). As a result, all the other stories related to Russia's (Tsarist Russia, the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation) engagement in Ossetian history bring only positive interpretation of its roles.

In sum, the historiographical narratives developed during the 20th century to the present create a solid grounding for nationalistic agendas justifying the claims elaborated by secessionist movements in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Discourses on the origins of the relevant ethnicities, languages spoken, and religion worshipped, and sacrifices paid in order to withstand Georgian offenders, draw clear symbolic and emotional boundaries among friends and foes. This is how room is created for political and military activities to claim and gain lands and spaces assumed to be primordially Abkhazian or Ossetian.

CHAPTER 3. Nation Making: Homogenization of Populations and Issue of Citizenship.

External historical-political and geopolitical frameworks generating conflicts in Georgia would not have a place if not for the internecine struggle among ethnic Georgian, Abkhaz and Ossetian communities laying claim to territories they populated in relevant regions of Georgia. Historiography and memory politics propagated by ethnic elites served as a political and ideological tool for legitimizing power based on primordial principles. Thus, the culturally diverse population of the Georgian SSR and later of independent Georgia accommodated antagonistic and mutually exclusive nationalistic discourses. Georgian,³⁷

³⁶ *Rezoliutsia mezhdunarodnoi nauchnoi konferentsii "osobennosti i perspektivy integratsionnykh protsessov Severnoi i Iuzhnoi Ossetii"* (Resolution of the International Academic Conference "Specificities and Prospects of Integration of North and South Ossetia"). December 12-13, 2013. Vladikavkaz. Retrieved on August 1, 2018 from http://vncran.ru/upload/docs/Res_Final.pdf

³⁷ Pavle Ingoroqva (1893-1983); Niko Berdzenishvili (1894-1965); Simon Janashia (1900-1947); etc.

Abkhaz³⁸ and Ossetian³⁹ historians assisted in producing moral-symbolic resources for transmitting beliefs of “historical truth” (Историческая истина) into the politics of consolidation and homogenization of the ethnic territories. Neither Abkhazia nor South Ossetia represented ethnically homogenous republics while they were a part of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic under the USSR. The late 1980s national independence movement in Georgia raised the issue of Georgian populations in these two regions. Thus discussions concerning history, disputes over demography, and fears of assimilation opened up a space for application of historiographical interpretations and collective memories to create hostility among neighboring ethnic communities in these regions.

The 1989 census in the USSR shows the population in the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia to be about 536,000. Among the total, Abkhaz constituted a considerable minority: 93,300 vs. a Georgian population of 239,872.⁴⁰ South Ossetia differed in terms of the balance in its ethnic composition: Out of 99,000 living in the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast, 60,351 were ethnic Ossetians (out of 164,055 Ossetians living throughout Georgia) and 28,544 were Georgians.⁴¹ In both cases, secession from Georgia was aimed at gaining the status of internationally recognized states, initially in the framework of the then existing USSR, which meant recognition from above, from Moscow, as a member republic of the Federation. However, secessionism resulted in backlashes from Georgian ethnic groups in both republics and greater nationalism in the government in Tbilisi, leading to the issue of how to consolidate each nation locally and how to deal with disturbances within their Georgian populations.

³⁸ Shalva Inal-Ipa (1916-1995); Tamara Shakryl (1926-2004); Vladislav Ardzinba (1945-2010); Stanislav Lakoba (1953-); etc.

³⁹ Vasili Abayev (1900-2001); Yurii Gagloyty (1934-); Alan Chochiev (1946-1995); etc.

⁴⁰ Boldyrev, V.A. (1989). *Itogi perepisi naselenia v EsEsEsEr. Gosudarstvennyi komitet statistiki. Informatsionno-izdatel'skii tsentr* (Results of Census in the USSR. State Committee of Statistics. Information-Publication Center).

⁴¹ Ibid.

Vladislav Ardzinba, leader of the Abkhaz secessionist movement, a prominent historian, and the first president of the non-recognized state, qualified the situation as a period “in which the Abkhaz people were undergoing annihilation... [The Georgian nationalist movement had] worked out a special program for combating the Abkhaz people and their cultural institutions.”⁴² These kinds of grievances toward each other led to an outpouring of nationalistic and extremely hostile rhetoric as well as growing militarism and eventually ethnic conflicts.

Ethnic hatred possibly was not deliberately aimed at ethnic cleansing of the Georgian population from Abkhazia and South Ossetia though secession ended up with these results. According to the census in Abkhazia, the population of the Republic greatly decreased from 1989, and amounted to 214,016 in 2003 and 243,206 in 2014. Ethnic Abkhaz numbered 94,597 in 2003 and 124,115 in 2014, while the Georgian population ranged from 40,443 in 2003 to 43,496 in 2016.⁴³ The share of Georgians in the population of Abkhazia mostly is explained by the remaining population of the Gali district that was (and still is) an exclusively Georgian region. The overall picture shows a decrease in the general population of the Republic of 321,984 from 1989 to 2003 and of 292,794 people from 1989 to 2014. The share of the Georgian population decreased by 199,429 between 1989 and 2003 and 196,376 between 1989 and 2014. Meanwhile, unofficial data shows that these changes did not contribute to the homogenization of Abkhazia in favor of the Abkhazian ethnic group. While ethnic Abkhaz are now claimed to make up 50.7% of the total population, and the Georgian

⁴² Quoted in Cotter, J. (1999). Cultural Security Dilemmas and Ethnic Conflict in Georgia. *The Journal of Conflict Studies*. Vol. XIX No. 1, spring 1999. Retrieved on March 7, 2018 from <https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/jcs/article/view/4381/5061#a46>

⁴³ *Abkhazia v tsifrakh za 2014 god* (Abkhazia in data for the year of 2014) Retrieved on March 10, 2018 from <http://ugsra.org/abkhaziya-v-tsifrakh/2014-god.php>

share has decreased to 19.3%, representatives of the Armenian minority claim that Armenians now actually outnumber the ethnic Abkhaz.⁴⁴

While massive cleansing of the Georgian population was the result of the war of 1992-1993 in Abkhazia and the outcome of the consolidated effort of the Abkhaz nationalist elite and its allies from the Russian Federation (Russian military deployed in Abkhazia, plus Cossacks and Confederation of Mountainous People of the Caucasus), ethnic conflict stemming from the secessionist movement in South Ossetia did not result in same kind of drastic demographic change until Russia's 2008 invasion. This fact illustrates a difference between these two conflicts in terms of Russia's direct engagement in making ethnic homogenization a factor in nation making. South Ossetia's population decreased by 45,562 people since 1989 and according to official data issued by the government of South Ossetia currently amounts to 53,438 (in 2015) among whom the Georgian population accounts for 3,966 people.⁴⁵ However, a comprehensive and possibly more trustworthy study by independent Russian researcher Varvara Pakhomenko, who calculated the number of school children and registered voters, offers 30,000, including around 17,000 people living in Tskhinvali. In addition to 17,000 inhabitants in the capital town, there are Russian construction workers, military and border guards.⁴⁶ If these data show the real demographic picture in South Ossetia, then they indicate a devastating depopulation of the region after the war. South Ossetia, unlike Abkhazia, is locked in the mountains of the southern slopes of the Greater Caucasus range, in the middle of Georgia. Its isolation from the rest of Georgia limits

⁴⁴ Blakkisrud, H., & Kolstø, P. (2012). Dynamics of De Facto Statehood: The South Caucasian De Facto States between Secession and Sovereignty. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 12(2). Pg. 287.

⁴⁵ *Itogi vseobshchei perepisi naselenia respubliki yuzhnaya osetia 2015 goda* (Results of the National Census in the Republic of South Ossetia for the year of 2015). Retrieved on March 10, 2018 from <http://ugostat.ru/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Itogi-perepisi-RYUO.pdf>

⁴⁶ International Crisis Group (2010). "South Ossetia: The Burden of Recognition". Report N°205. Pg. 2. Retrieved on June 26, 2018 from <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/205-south-ossetia-the-burden-of-recognition.pdf>

its economic potential, thus stimulating massive migration to the Russian Federation. The changing demographic balance in Abkhazia and South Ossetia was one of the goals of the secessionist movements that relied on myths of primordial ancestral lands produced by historiographical discourse and accommodated in collective memories.

In this context, Russia's role cannot be clearly qualified as inspirer or organizer of the ethnic homogenization of the territories. It was not directly engaged in the ethnic cleansing of the Georgian populations in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, although it did not attempt to stop the cleansing either. At the same time, it did not interfere in ongoing conflicts as a Georgian ally, but rather tried to distance itself from its alliance with the Georgian government while maintaining its partnership of equals. For instance, Russian president Boris Yeltsin signed a Treaty of Friendship with Georgia in 1994, but Russia's State Duma has never ratified it.⁴⁷ Taking this into account, Russia's engagement in nation making in Abkhazia and South Ossetia had quite a missionary background befitting historicist narratives of local nationalisms. As a protector and a safeguard from Georgian nationalism, it helped to defeat a "sworn enemy" and to withdraw a "dangerous" ethnic component, to more or less homogenize populations and to keep the Georgian state at a distance by the presence of the Russian military in both republics. These achievements are cemented in the symbolic language of the post-war societies of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, binding them even more to Russia as a benefactor. For instance, six out of 11 official national holidays in South Ossetia are related to the Georgian-Ossetian conflict,⁴⁸ while in Abkhazia six out of 14 secular national holidays are dedicated to the independence war against Georgia.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Gachechiladze, R. (2014). Geopolitics and Foreign Powers in the Modern History of Georgia: Comparing 1918-1921 and 1991-2010. In *The Making of Modern Georgia, 1918–2012: The First Georgian Republic and Its Successors*. Ed. by Stephen F. Jones. Routledge. Pg. 27.

⁴⁸ *Prazdniki yuzhnoj ossetii* (Holidays in South Ossetia) <http://www.calend.ru/holidays/southossetia/>

⁴⁹ *Gosudarstvennie prazdniki abkhazii* (Public Holidays in Abkhazia) <http://abkhazia-apsny.ru/public-holidays.html>

Another issue is how far Abkhazians and Ossetians can go in their pursuit of full-fledged sovereignty. In this regard, a very important resource as well as limitation might be the issue of citizenship. In both secessionist regions, Russia's major instrument of intervention against Georgia stemmed from the fact that Abkhazians and Ossetians predominantly hold Russian citizenship and therefore fall under the jurisdiction of the Russian Federation. This is because of the unwillingness of Abkhazians and Ossetians to accept Georgian citizenship after the collapse of the Soviet Union. This choice to distance themselves from their former parent-state resulted in their total reliance on Russia. Of course, the primary reason to accept Russian citizenship was pragmatic. In a situation where people living in these regions did not want to accept Georgian passports, the only way to overcome isolation and to get access to the outer world, which would not recognize legal documents issued by non-recognized states, was to use the passports of friendly Russia. In addition to travel and mobility possibilities, Russian citizenship was attractive in terms of getting the right to access retirement payments guaranteed by the Russian state.⁵⁰ Eventually, the number of citizens of the Russian Federation in South Ossetia and Abkhazia might equal the number of nationals of these non-recognized states. For instance, South Ossetian official statistics show that 48,138 out of 53,438 people living in the Republic have dual citizenship.⁵¹ Data does not state clearly which country had issued so many passports to citizens of South Ossetia, but it is evident that they hold Russian Federation citizenship alongside passports of internationally unrecognized South Ossetia. Abkhazian census data does not indicate dual citizenship, but it is obvious that, as in South Ossetia, most citizens likely have dual citizenship, because holding a Russian passport is the only way to travel

⁵⁰ Hille, Ch. (2010). The Recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia: A New Era in International Law in *Exploring the Caucasus in the 21st Century: Essays on Culture, History and Politics in a Dynamic Context*, edited by Françoise Companjen, et al., Amsterdam University Press. Retrieved on March 5, 2018 from <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/washington/detail.action?docID=649957> pg. 201.

⁵¹ *Itogi vseobshchei perepisi naselenia respubliki yuzhnaya osetia 2015 goda* (Results of the National Census in the Republic of South Ossetia for the year of 2015). Retrieved on March 10, 2018 from <http://ugosstat.ru/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Itogi-perepisi-RYUO.pdf>

outside Abkhazia. This situation is underpinned by articles 13 and 14 of the Russian law on citizenship adopted in May 2002 that allows Russia to grant citizenship in the Russian Federation to those aspirants who “have had USSR citizenship, and having resided and residing in the states that have formed part of the USSR, have not become citizens of these states and as a result remain stateless persons.”⁵² This regulation on citizenship of the Russian Federation is fixed in the Abkhazian-Russian September 2014 agreement on “Alliance and Strategic Partnership”. Article 13 of the treaty envisages warrants for acquisition of joint citizenship in simplified ways.⁵³

Russia’s policy of passportization in Georgia’s breakaway regions is aimed at undermining the sovereignty of its internationally recognized southern neighbor.⁵⁴ It also keeps nation making in these two non-recognized territories under its monopolized control. This result is even more inevitable because Russia does not make much effort to promote recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, leaving them to rely solely on Russia’s recognition alone. Only Nicaragua, Venezuela, Nauru and recently Syria (in May 2018), are among the many strategic allies of the Russian Federation that have recognized the independence of Georgia’s breakaway republics. Some Abkhaz experts believe Abkhazia does not need further recognition.⁵⁵

South Ossetia is an exception in this regard and might be considered an “accidental” state due to its political self-identification, manifested in the rhetoric of its leaders, and their expressed desire for unification with the North Ossetian republic of Alania in Russia’s North

⁵² Federal Law No. 62-FZ on Russian Federation Citizenship (31 May 2002 as amended 2004). Retrieved on June 29, 2018 from <http://www.legislationline.org/documents/id/4189>

⁵³ *Dogovor mezhdu Rossiskoj federatsiej i respublikoj Abkhazia o soyuznichestve I strategicheskom partniorstve* (Agreement between Russian Federation and Republic of Abkhazia on Alliance and Strategic Partnership). November 24, 2014. Retrieved on July 1, 2018 from <http://kremlin.ru/supplement/4783>

⁵⁴ Natoli, K. (2010). Weaponizing Nationality: An Analysis of Russia’s Passport Policy in Georgia. Boston University International Law Journal. Vol. 28:389. Pg. 415. Retrieved on March 10, 2018 from https://www.bu.edu/law/journals-archive/international/documents/natoli_weaponizingnationality.pdf

⁵⁵ Venediktova, N. (2011). The West’s policy of non-recognition of Abkhazia’s independence: consequences and prospects. In *The Politics of Non-Recognition in the Context of the Georgian-Abkhaz Conflict*. International Alert. Retrieved on March 5, 2018 from http://www.international-alert.org/sites/default/files/Caucasus_GeorgiaAbkhazia_PoliticsNonRecognition_EN_2010.pdf pg. 11.

Caucasus. Russia itself restricts this effort because the unification of South Ossetia with North Ossetia and its incorporation in the Russian Federation would not look like “liberation” but rather would provide easy grounds for qualifying as an act of annexation.⁵⁶ In short, Abkhazia’s and South Ossetia’s sovereignties tend to be under a threefold dependence on Russia: Maintaining a distance from Georgia and keeping withdrawn populations outside their territories; being under Russian jurisdiction and holding Russian passports so as to get access to international mobility and to the benefits of the Russian welfare system; and continuing to hold in their collective memories the image of Russia as a protector from violent conflicts along with the fear of renewal of the wars.

CHAPTER 4. Building Sovereignties and Borders: Russia and Domestic Resources.

As soon as wars ended in the 1990s, both Abkhazia and South Ossetia institutionalized their respective political systems in accordance with democratic design, introducing elective parliaments and presidents and competing party systems, and allowing operations of nongovernmental organizations and independent media. Quite another issue is the quality of performance of these institutions. As underlined by some Abkhazian political scientists,⁵⁷ Freedom House ranks Abkhazia with the same status of Partly Free country as Georgia.⁵⁸ In the same report, it ranks South Ossetia as a Not Free country.⁵⁹ Whether or not these rankings really have any relevance for non-recognized states, they are still very

⁵⁶ Companjen, F. (2010). The War in South Ossetia, August 2008: Four Perspectives. In *Exploring the Caucasus in the 21st Century: Essays on Culture, History and Politics in a Dynamic Context*. Edited by Françoise Companjen, et al., Amsterdam University Press. Retrieved on March 7, 2018 from <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/washington/detail.action?docID=649957> pg. 187.

⁵⁷ Chirikba, V. (2013). *Mezhdunarodno-pravovoj status respubliki Abkhazia* (International Legal Status of the Republic of Abkhazia). Sukhumi. Retrieved on March 5, 2018 from <http://abkhazia-pmr.org/files/books/MejdPravStatus.pdf> Pg. 7.

⁵⁸ Freedom status of Abkhazia. Freedom in the World 2018. Freedom House. Retrieved on March 12, 2018 from <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2018/abkhazia>

⁵⁹ Freedom status of South Ossetia. Freedom in the World 2018. Freedom House. Retrieved on March 12, 2018 from <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2018/south-ossetia>

important in regard to identifying if the two are performing in accordance with the expectations of the international community. In this regard, Abkhazia and South Ossetia greatly differ from each other both in terms of rankings and the efforts they put into meeting internationally acknowledged standards. Abkhazia did not transform into an ethnically homogenized polity. Abkhaz remain one of the largest communities in the Republic though their dominance is disputed by Armenians (as mentioned in chapter three), and Georgians still compose the third largest group in their ethnic enclave of the Gali district. However, political representation of these groups remains imbalanced in favor of the ethnic Abkhaz. There are 35 seats in the Abkhaz parliament divided among representatives of the major ethnic groups of the Republic as follows: 27 seats are held by ethnic Abkhaz, among whom two are members of the Abkhaz diaspora in Turkey; Russians and Armenians are given three seats each, and the Georgians in the Gali district are given two seats.⁶⁰ In contrast, South Ossetia does not base political representation on ethnocracy. Since 2008, South Ossetia has become more or less a monoethnic polity with a relatively insignificant Georgian population. Therefore, most of the 34 seats in the parliament of South Ossetia are held by ethnic Ossetians – 29 (plus four Russians and one Georgian)⁶¹. This more or less reflects the ethnic composition of the polity after the 2008 war. In both cases, the post-war demographic situation and citizenship policies are tied to ethnicity. Georgian refugees are deprived of the possibility of return. In addition, passportization has been halted for those remaining in the ethnically Georgian enclaves of Akhagori (South Ossetia) and of Gali (Abkhazia), thus limiting the possibility to develop politics based on civil rather than on ethnic principles in these regions.

⁶⁰ International Crisis Group. 2010. “Abkhazia: Deepening Dependence.” Europe Report N202. Pg. 10. Retrieved on June 26, 2018 from <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/caucasus/georgia/abkhazia-deepening-dependence>

⁶¹ *Deputatskii korpus piatovo sozyva* (MPs of the South Ossetian parliament of the 5th convocation) <http://www.parliamentso.org/node/2>

Given the ethnocratic configuration of the polities in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, politics are framed inside regional and family-tribal identities of the relevant groups. For instance, political competition in Abkhazia is assumed to be driven on the basis of membership in two major Abkhaz communities, Gudauta (northern Abkhazia) or Ochamchira (southern Abkhazia) districts (*rayon*).⁶² The major competitors in the 2009 elections, Sergey Bagapsh and Raul Khajimba, were assumed to represent this kind of division. However, elections in 2011 seemingly did not show the same trend. Alexander Ankvab, Raul Khajimba and Sergey Shamba were the major rivals for the presidency, and all three were considered to be part of the Gudauta clan even though Ankvab was originally from Sukhumi. Nevertheless, these divisions did play a role in Abkhazian politics if one takes into account the support mobilized around these candidates by regional elites and voters themselves. Alexander Ankvab's victory in the presidential elections was greatly determined by the support of Bagapsh, who became president later and whose alliances included not only Abkhazians of Ochamchira but also those Georgians of the Gali district who were issued Abkhaz passports⁶³ apparently for these purposes. There is even more evidence for the assumption of ethnic divisions in politics if one takes into account the policies conducted by Abkhaz authorities under president Khajimba against those who were charged with the passportization of Georgians; he also had Abkhaz citizenship stripped away from those Georgians who were granted it under presidents Bagapsh and Ankvab.⁶⁴ Moreover, six attempts at assassinating Alexander Ankvab and his resignation from office following mass

⁶² International Crisis Group. 2010. "Abkhazia: Deepening Dependence." Europe Report N202. Pg. 10. Retrieved on June 26, 2018 from <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/caucasus/georgia/abkhazia-deepening-dependence>

⁶³ *Beslan Arshba: galis raionshi apkhazuri pasporti 1500-mde adamianna miigho* (Beslan Arshba: about 1500 people were issued Abkhazian passports in Gali district). 04.17.2009. Radio Liberty Free Europe. <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/1610603.html>

⁶⁴ *Pasportebis sakme – galis raionis administratsiis eks-khelmdzghvaneli brali tsaekena* (The Passports Case – former head of the Gali district is charged in crime). 07.13.2016. Radio Atinati. <http://www.radioatinati.ge/regioni/article/58151-pasportebi-saqme-galis-raionis-administraciis-eqs-khelmdzghvaneli-brali-tsaeyena.html>

protests that started in the Gudauta district draw attention to the geographic division of clans that tend to be highly important in Abkhaz politics.⁶⁵

South Ossetian politics before the 2008 war were less rooted in administrative-geographically determined communities, but rather represented rivalry among powerful families having business interests tied to Russia or Georgia and professional networks, such as wrestlers who were highly popular and influential among the Ossetian public since Soviet times. This allowed both Georgia and Russia to interfere in forming political attitudes among those assuming themselves to be part of the polity. In 2001, when incumbent president Ludwig Chibirov lost the election to a wrestler named Eduard Kokoity, these factors played a decisive role. It is assumed that both candidates asked Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze for his support. Shevardnadze made his choice in favor of young Eduard Kokoity, who was recommended by the Georgian Wrestlers Association. These networks established in Soviet Georgia worked in favor of a leader who did not have a powerful clan or a business family behind him. Kokoity's victory led his rivals, Dimitry Sanakoev and the Karkusovs family, to find allies among the new Georgian elite formed by the 2003 revolution under Mikhail Saakashvili. Kokoity became dependent on Russian generals and security services operating in Tskhinvali, while his rivals allied with Georgians. Eventually, this configuration also resulted in the geographic division of South Ossetia and separation on the basis of ethnic membership. Eduard Kokoity, president of South Ossetia in 2001-2011, sought legitimacy in the areas controlled by South Ossetian militia and Russian peacekeepers and relied on the support of ethnic Ossetian communities, while his rival Dmitry Sanakoev, was deprived of the opportunity to compete with him in the seceded areas and

⁶⁵ *Apkhazuri archevnebi da akhali de-fakto prezidenti "kiserze kulpit"* (Abkhazian elections and new de-facto president with a "rope on his neck"). 08.30.2014. Netgazeti online newspaper. <http://netgazeti.ge/news/34633/>

forced to retreat with his Salvation Union party⁶⁶ to the areas with Georgian and mixed Georgian-Ossetian population controlled by Georgia. Georgian government interference in politics among rival groups led to the creation of two political entities in South Ossetia. In 2006, the Georgian government established a political entity to alter the legitimacy of the authorities in Tskhinvali. In the same year, elections for the presidency were conducted both in the de-facto republic of South Ossetia and in its Georgian-run “twin” polity soon headed by Sanakoev. Two parallel elections brought new divisions in the divided communities. The Georgian government recognized Dmitry Sanakoev as the legitimate leader of South Ossetia and invested a lot in rehabilitation of the areas under his (Georgian) control in order to show the benefits of integration with Georgia. However, this policy had opposite results. Kokoity mobilized Ossetian communities against Georgia and its allies, calling them “traitors” of Ossetia,⁶⁷ which finally caused gradual escalation of violence in the region and the 2008 war. Eliminating this rivalry changed the framing of South Ossetian politics from the Georgian issue to issues related to the efficient administration of the funds allocated by Russia. The 2011 elections revealed certain disagreements between Kokoity and his Russian Prime Minister Vadim Brovtsev whose concern was related to mismanagement of Russian aid. Eventually Kokoity had to step down and nominate an heir, Antolii Bibilov, who also gained support from Moscow.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, Bibilov lost to Alla Dzhioyeva, a former Minister of Education and an opposition leader who fiercely criticized Kokoity for corruption. The authorities have never recognized the result of these elections. Under pressure from street protests organized by Dzhioyeva’s supporters, Kokoity stepped down and new elections were

⁶⁶ Blakkisrud, H., & Kolstø, P. (2012). Dynamics of De Facto Statehood: The South Caucasian De Facto States between Secession and Sovereignty. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 12(2). Pg. 284.

⁶⁷ Crisis Group Europe Report N183 (2007). *Georgia’s South Ossetia Conflict: Make Haste Slowly*. Pg. 6. Retrieved on June 23, 2018 from <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/caucasus/georgia/georgia-s-south-ossetia-conflict-make-haste-slowly>

⁶⁸ International Crisis Group. 2010. “South Ossetia: The Burden of Recognition”. Report N°205. Pg. 10. Retrieved on June 26, 2018 from <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/205-south-ossetia-the-burden-of-recognition.pdf>

planned to take place in March 2012. However, Dzhioyeva, claiming she was the legitimate president, withdrew her candidacy and declared she would not take part in this process. Eventually, the KGB's former head Leonid Tibilov won the election⁶⁹ and appointed Dzhioyeva deputy head of the government of South Ossetia. These power games in South Ossetian politics reveal a situation in which political activity is limited to the narrow circle of influential families and numerous Russian aides of the government who set the political agenda in the region. Thus, unlike Abkhazia, where if not civic, then at least regional identities and ethnic-tribal belongings drive politics, South Ossetia is a much more fragile and vulnerable polity.

Recognizing these deep societal differences is vital to understanding the degrees of independence Abkhazia and South Ossetia wish to have not only from Georgia but also from Russia, and for explaining relevant policies assumed to be in the spheres of their sovereign discretion. Of course, it would be unfair to forget the differences in resources between Abkhazia and South Ossetia. South Ossetia, unlike Abkhazia, does not have access to the sea; its only way of being connected to the outer world (Russia) is by a mountainous highway that runs through the Roki tunnel.⁷⁰ Unlike Abkhazia, it also does not have a touristic infrastructure inherited from the Soviet past that attracts thousands of Russians to visit places of their childhood summer vacation memories. It lacks human resources for building its economy and state administration. The South Ossetian budget and politics depend 100% on Russian money and administration.⁷¹ Quite another question is whether this all means that Abkhazia enjoys more sovereignty than South Ossetia. Possibly the difference can be found in the zeal of the nationalist agendas: Abkhazian secession was oriented on establishment of a

⁶⁹ Blakkisrud, H., & Kolstø, P. (2012). Dynamics of de facto statehood: The South Caucasian de facto states between secession and sovereignty. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 12(2). Pg. 285.

⁷⁰ Ambrosio, T., & Lange, W. (2016). The Architecture of Annexation? Russia's Bilateral Agreements with South Ossetia and Abkhazia. *Nationalities Papers*, 44(5). Pg. 678.

⁷¹ Markedonov, S. (2016). *Etnopoliticheskie konflikty v abkhazii i yuzhnoj ossetii: prichiny, dinamika, uroki* (Ethno-political conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia: Reasons, Dynamics, Lessons Learnt). Retrieved on March 5, 2018 from <http://dereksiz.org/etnopoliticheskie-konflikty-v-abkhazii-i-v-yuzhnoj-ossetii-prichi.html>

state,⁷² while South Ossetian nationalism was aimed at joining North Ossetia (52.1% supported unification with North Ossetia – Alania, while 31.5% were in favor of independence) as shown by opinion polls in 1996 after the first war for secession was over.⁷³ Surveys of attitudes after the 2008 war do not show any change in these figures. As to the question of whether non-South Ossetians’ engagement in decision making over the future of the country is acceptable, nearly three quarters are positive (15.2% strongly agreed and 56.4% mostly agreed).⁷⁴ Taking into account that 90% hold positive feelings toward Russia, it is no surprise to say that Russians are welcome to take part in the governance of the South Ossetia. Considering the number of Russians serving in the government of the Republic, this becomes even more evident: Prime Minister Vadim Brovtsev,⁷⁵ a veteran of the Soviet Strategic Rocket Forces and former director of the Russian construction company Vermikulit; Minister of Defense Yuri Tanaev, previously head of an intelligence department of the Urals Military District; Russian Army Colonel Anatoly Barankevich, secretary of the South Ossetian Security Council; Russian Army Major General Vasily Lunev, former defense minister; FSB Lieutenant General Boris Attoev, chairman of the South Ossetian Committee of State Security (KGB); and a number of others, including the ministers of economic development and trade.⁷⁶

This trend of Russia’s engagement is not an abnormality or violation of any of the legal treaties concluded by the sides. The September 2014 agreement on the “Alliance and

⁷² Nilsson N. (2014). Georgia’s Conflicts: Abkhazia and South Ossetia in *Conflict, Crime, and the State in Post-communist Eurasia*. Edited by Cornell, S., and Jonsson, M. Retrieved on March 8, 2018 from <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com> pg. 116.

⁷³ Chugaenko Y. (2013). *Gruzia - yuzhnaya ossetia: istoricheskyye pervoprichiny protivostoianiya* (Georgia-South Ossetia: Historical Prerequisites of the Conflict). *Natsionalnaya akademiya upravleniya*. Kiev. Retrieved on March 5, 2018 from <http://www.kavkazoved.info/images/myfls/files/chugaenko-georgia-ossetia.pdf> Pg. 131.

⁷⁴ Gerard Toal (Gearóid Ó Tuathail) & John O’Loughlin (2013). Inside South Ossetia: a Survey of Attitudes in a *De Facto* State, *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 29:2. Pg. 155.

⁷⁵ It is believed Vadim Brovtsev was appointed by Russian Federation to supervise and prevent widespread misuse of Russian aid and funds allocated for South Ossetia.

⁷⁶ International Crisis Group. 2010. “South Ossetia: The Burden of Recognition”. Report N°205. Pg. 10. Retrieved on June 26, 2018 from <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/205-south-ossetia-the-burden-of-recognition.pdf>

Strategic Partnership” with Abkhazia and the March 2015 agreement on the “Alliance and Integration” with South Ossetia normalize this state of affairs among Russia and Georgia’s breakaway republics. Based on these two documents and 78 agreements concluded as a result between 2008 and 2015, the legal framework for Russia’s immense engagement is ensured.⁷⁷ In exchange, considering Russia’s aid to Abkhazia, it is evident that only Russian patronage makes the state functional in the region. Fifty to 60% of Abkhazia’s budget in the years after the 2008 war, in addition to payment of pensions and social benefits to citizens of Abkhazia, come from Russia. Abkhazia’s economy depends on Russia, as 90% of exports and almost 80% of consumption goods are related to the patron state.⁷⁸ Moreover, about 99% of Abkhazia’s foreign investment comes from Russia, raising fears among Abkhaz politicians that Russian businesses will gain full control of properties and assets in Abkhazia. These fears are reflected in a decision by the Abkhazian parliament to prevent sales of land and properties to non-Abkhazian citizens.⁷⁹ As noted by Abkhazian political scientist and civil society activist Manana Gurgulya:

“Russia and Abkhazia are developing cooperation on trade and the economy, as well as taking steps to unify their power [energy] and transport systems, along with their communications and telecommunications systems. Total trade turnover between the two countries is \$130 million. Between 2010 and 2012 Russia is granting Abkhazia aid of 10.8 billion rubles (approximately \$362.5 million as at January 2011), equivalent to just under three times the Republic of Abkhazia’s budget for 2010. Funds have been allocated to areas such as repair of road infrastructure, housing, development of the agricultural and food industry, health, and school repair and equipment. In 2010 Russia also gave Abkhazia a 10-year preferential loan of 700

⁷⁷ Ambrosio, T., & Lange, W. (2016). The Architecture of Annexation? Russia’s Bilateral Agreements with South Ossetia and Abkhazia. *Nationalities Papers*, 44(5). Pg. 674.

⁷⁸ International Crisis Group. 2010. “Abkhazia: Deepening Dependence.” Europe Report N202. Pg. 6-7. Retrieved on June 26, 2018 from <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/caucasus/georgia/abkhazia-deepening-dependence>

⁷⁹ German, T. (2012). “Securing the South Caucasus: Military Aspects of Russian Policy towards the Region Since 2008” in *Europe-Asia Studies* 64 (9). Pg. 1657.

million rubles (\$23.5 million) to recapitalize the National Bank of the Republic of Abkhazia.”⁸⁰

Similarly, South Ossetia received immense aid from Russia for rehabilitation projects. In 2008-2009 alone, a Republic with a population of around 30,000 people (as estimated by independent researcher Varvara Pakhomenko)⁸¹ received 8.5 billion rubles (\$275 million) for reconstruction and elimination of the damages of the war, and additionally 1 billion rubles (\$32 million) for funding private housing projects. In 2010, an additional 5.7 billion rubles (\$185 million) were allocated for infrastructure projects, including roads and the water supply.⁸² If one calculates Russian aid to South Ossetia in US Dollars for the years of 2008-2010, it amounts to \$492 million, which divided by the population, comes to \$16,400 per person. If a traditional large family (average 5-6 persons) characteristic of the region were to receive such a sum, it would benefit the average South Ossetian household quite a lot financially. However, South Ossetia is still a poor region even by the standards of the Northern Caucasus.⁸³ Corruption and misuse of funds not only in South Ossetia but also in Russia is undoubtedly a factor in the continuing poverty.

The scale and degree of Russia’s assistance to Abkhazia and South Ossetia make their elites and populations deeply reliant on Russia. When it comes to trust of the Russian leadership among populations in non-recognized states, opinion polls conducted in 2010 show that in South Ossetia, 87% of respondents trust Russia, while in Abkhazia, the level of trust is 74%. The lower trust in South Ossetia can be explained by the lower trust of Russian

⁸⁰ Gurgulya, M. (2011). Partial Recognition of Abkhazia as an Independent State: Opportunities and Challenges. In *The Politics of Non-Recognition in the Context of the Georgian-Abkhaz Conflict*. International Alert. Retrieved on March 5, 2018 from http://www.international-alert.org/sites/default/files/Caucasus_GeorgiaAbkhazia_PoliticsNonRecognition_EN_2010.pdf pg. 14

⁸¹ International Crisis Group (2010). “South Ossetia: The Burden of Recognition”. Report N°205. Pg. 2. Retrieved on June 26, 2018 from <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/205-south-ossetia-the-burden-of-recognition.pdf>

⁸² Ibid. Pg. 7.

⁸³ Ambrosio, T., & Lange, W. (2016). The Architecture of Annexation? Russia’s Bilateral Agreements with South Ossetia and Abkhazia. *Nationalities Papers*, 44(5). Pg. 678.

leadership among the Georgian population of Gali that makes up a significant part of Abkhazia's population. As for the titular ethnic group only, the ethnic Abkhaz, trust in the patron state is 87%.⁸⁴

Neither in South Ossetia nor in Abkhazia does this kind of engagement with and dependence upon the patron state cause any grievances among the general public. Moreover, public opinion polls show that people living in Georgia's breakaway republics do not feel their independence to be threatened. For instance, according to a 2010 survey, Abkhazia's population (85% of Abkhaz, 87% of Armenians and 83% of Russians) is highly optimistic about the future.⁸⁵ However, ethnic divisions lead to some divergences in public attitudes in regard to the issue of the independence of the Republic:

“While the Abkhaz support independence strongly (79 percent), Armenians are split on this decision, with 51 percent preferring to be part of the Russian Federation and 44 percent preferring independence. Similarly, Russians are also split, with 58 percent opting for independence and 38 percent for integration with Russia.”⁸⁶

Possibly the latter data might be food for thought to see room for discussing future developments in Abkhazia with prospects for its further integration into the Russian Federation. This is even more plausible if one takes into account the current ethnocratic setting of the polity which excludes proper representation of Armenian and Russian ethnic groups in the political system of Abkhazia, thus ensuring political domination of the ethnic Abkhaz and irritation within pro-Russian Armenian and resentful Georgian communities. Whether a hypothetical turn toward Georgia might occur in an unforeseeable future is very

⁸⁴ Bakke, K. M., et al. (2017). Dynamics of State-Building after War: External-Internal Relations in Eurasian De Facto States. *Political Geography*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2017.06.011> pg. 6

⁸⁵ O'Loughlin, J., Kolosov, V., Toal, G. (2011). Inside Abkhazia: Survey of Attitudes in a De Facto State. *Post-Soviet Affairs*. 27. Pg. 16.

⁸⁶ *ibid.* Pg. 32.

unlikely due to the size, marginalization, and low level of self-assurance⁸⁷ of ethnic Georgians in the Gali enclave.

Russia's leading role in both non-recognized states has popular support. And behind the scene, Russia is engaged in performing state functions on behalf of both national governments. First, it carries out functions related to establishing security and military infrastructure and their operations. On the one hand, Russia is assisting Abkhazia and South Ossetia to strengthen their law-enforcement agencies. On the other hand, Russia is entrusted with performing security functions.⁸⁸ The latter is demonstrated in the leading role of the Russian FSB (Federal Security Service) in the Sukhumi and Tskhinvali departments of the breakaway republics of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Another important aspect of Russia's engagement in building its protégé states' security and defense systems is that it keeps its own military bases in these territories. Just several weeks after the recognition of their sovereignty, Russia, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia signed the "Agreement on Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Support" on September 17, 2008. They promised, among other things, to defend each other's sovereignty, and, most importantly, to grant each other the right to construct and use military bases on their respective territories.⁸⁹ Thus, Russia has formal consent from states recognized by itself to keep military bases in two *de jure* regions of Georgia, in contrast to the OSCE Istanbul 1999 accords whereby Russia was obliged to withdraw its military bases from Gudauta (Abkhazia) and Vaziani (near Tbilisi) by the end of 2000, and from Batumi (Ajara) and Akhalkalaki (Armenian populated region of Samtskhe-

⁸⁷ Only 57% of Georgians feel themselves optimistic in Abkhazia and 48% of them supporting idea of independence while 28% preferred "hard to say" or "refuse to answer" responses (ibid. Pg. 16 and Pg. 33).

⁸⁸ Gerzedava, S. (March 2011). Abkhaz Sovereignty and Relations with Russia. In *The Politics of Non-Recognition in the Context of the Georgian-Abkhaz Conflict*. International Alert. Retrieved on March 5, 2018 from http://www.international-alert.org/sites/default/files/Caucasus_GeorgiaAbhazia_PoliticsNonRecognition_EN_2010.pdf pg. 16.

⁸⁹ Andre W. M. Gerrits & Max Bader (2016). Russian patronage over Abkhazia and South Ossetia: implications for conflict resolution, *East European Politics*, 32:3. Retrieved on March 5, 2018 from <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/21599165.2016.1166104?needAccess=true> pg. 302.

Javakheti) based on further agreements to be achieved.⁹⁰ The Russian-Abkhaz “Agreement on a Unified Russian Military Base on the Territory of the Republic of Abkhazia”, establishes a military base of Russian armed forces numbering 1,700 people to be deployed for a period of 49 years. (This agreement does not deal with the military base in Gudauta which has been there since Soviet times.) The agreement may be extended automatically for 15-year periods.⁹¹ The same provisions are proclaimed in the Russian-South Ossetian Agreement, which eventually laid the basis for the incorporation of the South Ossetian military into the Russian defense ministry in March 2017.⁹²

“In addition to the inclusion of a comprehensive list of areas of collaboration, these agreements notably provided each party with “the right to build, use, and improve ... military infrastructure and military bases” on the territory of the other. Neither South Ossetia nor Abkhazia were going to establish military bases within the Russian Federation, so what this did was effectively legitimize a long- term Russian military presence in these territories.”⁹³

This aspect of Russia’s overwhelming dominance does not raise concern among either the Abkhazian or the South Ossetian publics. As indicated in public opinion polls conducted in Abkhazia, most of the representatives of Abkhaz, Russian and Armenian ethnic groups with rates in the 80% range (unlike Georgians with a 20% approval rate) are positive toward the agreement of Abkhazia’s government on military bases.⁹⁴ These attitudes, rooted in ethnic identity and related political projects of nationhood, once more show distrust and fear

⁹⁰ Istanbul Document 1999. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. 2000. Retrieved on March 13, 2018 from <https://www.osce.org/mc/39569?download=true> Pg. 252.

⁹¹ Gerzedava, S. (March 2011). Abkhaz Sovereignty and Relations with Russia. In *The Politics of Non-Recognition in the Context of the Georgian-Abkhaz Conflict*. International Alert. Retrieved on March 5, 2018 from http://www.international-alert.org/sites/default/files/Caucasus_GeorgiaAbkhazia_PoliticsNonRecognition_EN_2010.pdf pg. 17.

⁹² *Moscow moves to absorb rebel Georgian region's military*. Reuters. March 14, 2017. Retrieved on March 13, 2018 from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-georgia-army/moscow-moves-to-absorb-rebel-georgian-regions-military-idUSKBN16L1XQ>

⁹³ Ambrosio, T., & Lange, W. (2016). The architecture of annexation? Russia’s bilateral agreements with South Ossetia and Abkhazia. *Nationalities Papers*, 44(5). Pg. 681.

⁹⁴ O’Loughlin, J., Kolossov, V., Toal, G. (2011). Inside Abkhazia: Survey of Attitudes in a De Facto State. *Post-Soviet Affairs*. 27. Pg. 31.

of Georgia as a parent state presumably planning revenge or absorption of Abkhazia. Memories of the past and of the violence of the war of 1992-1993 make Abkhazians bound to resent Georgians. The same polls show that 58% of Abkhazians and almost the same share of Armenians feel themselves unable to “forgive people of the other nations” for the violence of the war.⁹⁵ These are the grounds for Russia to be internalized in the collective narrative about past and current politics as a protector and a patron against Georgian “perpetrators”.

One more important aspect of Russia’s role in crystalizing the statehood of Abkhazia and South Ossetia is border making. The Abkhazian case in this regard is bit different from the South Ossetian experience due to the fact that its administrative border matches the natural divide created by the Inguri River. Therefore, as soon as the war ended in 1993, the Inguri became the actual and symbolic division line between the sides guarded by the Russian military under the aegis of the UN peacekeeping forces. Today, Russian soldiers represent the Russian state along the same division line. The South Ossetian case is different. There is no natural division like a river, mountain range, or gorge that would divide Georgian and Ossetian populations. Russian military and security services obviously guided from Moscow use a coercive approach to define the border between South Ossetia and surrounding Georgia. They build fences of barbed wire and divide territories based on the 1984 map of the Soviet Military General Staff, without taking into account existing communal infrastructures and neighborhood or kinship ties. Therefore, the border has divided graveyards and churches, orchards and gardens, and households, families and neighborhoods. Responsibility for securing the border resides with the Russian Federation’s Federal Security Service (FSB) rather than with the relevant institutions in Tskhinvali.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ O’Loughlin, J., Kolosov, V., Toal, G. (2011). Inside Abkhazia: Survey of Attitudes in a De Facto State. *Post-Soviet Affairs*. 27. Pg. 29.

⁹⁶ Boyle, E. (2016). Borderization in Georgia: Sovereignty Materialized. *Eurasia Border Review*. Vol. 7. Issue 1. Retrieved on March 3, 2018 from http://src-h.slav.hokudai.ac.jp/publictn/eurasia_border_review/V0171/01-Boyle.pdf Pg. 5.

Borderization and strengthening divisions creating not only physical but also cultural alienation from the rest of Georgia is also a part of the agreements on strategic partnership. Even the treaty on military partnership envisages prospects of bringing Abkhazia and South Ossetia into Russian information and cultural spheres. The agreement on joint military bases allows the Russian Federation to establish and perform its own broadcasting in these territories. Also, the agreement on cooperation in areas of public education of 2012 proposes training Abkhazian teachers in Russia with their expenses covered by the Russian Federation. In return, Abkhazia's education institutions should "support ... the study and teaching of Russian language and literature, and Russian history and culture."⁹⁷ South Ossetia was not made the same offer because it had already declared the Russian language to be a state language in the republic.

The effect of Russian enthusiasm to establish and make borders is shown in the statistics of detainment of Georgian citizens for allegedly violating the state border of Abkhazia or South Ossetia. According to a Georgian NGO, the Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI), 1,641 Georgians were detained in Abkhazia and 840 in South Ossetia in the period between 2009 and 2015.⁹⁸ The trouble is that on the one hand, local communities do not have a clear understanding of the border, and, on the other hand, the Russian military detains people beyond the borderline that has been defined and set by fences.⁹⁹ This trend of border activism seems to have two goals: On one hand, it makes Georgian communities around non-recognized Abkhazia and South Ossetia aware of demarcating lines, and, on the other hand, it raises self-esteem and confidence in the

⁹⁷ Ambrosio, T., & Lange, W. (2016). The Architecture of Annexation? Russia's Bilateral Agreements with South Ossetia and Abkhazia. *Nationalities Papers*, 44(5). Pg. 682.

⁹⁸ Georgian Citizens Detained by Russian Occupational Troops in 2015. Institute for Development of Freedom of Information. January 21, 2016. Retrieved on March 13, 2018 from <https://idfi.ge/en/georgian-citizens-detained-by-russian-occupational-troops-in-2015>

⁹⁹ Boyle, E. (2016). Borderization in Georgia: Sovereignty Materialized. *Eurasia Border Review*. Vol. 7. Issue 1. Retrieved on March 3, 2018 from http://src-h.slav.hokudai.ac.jp/publicn/eurasia_border_review/V0171/01-Boyle.pdf pg. 3.

ethnically consolidated polities in relevant territories. The latter goal leads to a dangerous trend in regard to maintaining the fragile peace because there have been cases when border guards or law-enforcement agencies commit crimes without fear of punishment. Three such cases are those of David Basharuli (missing for several months and found dead after being arrested by South Ossetian police),¹⁰⁰ Gigla Otkhozoria (killed by an Abkhaz border guard),¹⁰¹ and Archil Tatumashvili (killed by South Ossetian security services).¹⁰² These cases raise grievances on the Georgian side. Recently, the Georgian parliament permitted the government to issue sanctions against those blamed for violence against Georgian citizens in the “border zones.” The relevant list of people residing in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and of Russian citizens was named the “Otkhozoria-Tatumashvili List.”¹⁰³ In response, the union of Abkhaz veterans of the “Ariaa” war proposed that Abkhazia’s government publish a so-called “Khishba-Sigua List” named after Abkhaz law enforcement and public officials murdered in 2006-2007, in order to sanction some former and current political and military leaders of Georgia, including President Saakashvili, several former ministers of defense and interior of Georgia, and some representatives of the Georgian resistance movement of the 1990s in the Gali district.¹⁰⁴

Russian engagement in making the Abkhazia and South Ossetia states has a clear geopolitical rationale. The post-war isolation of these regions makes them overwhelmingly dependent on Russia not only in its capacity of protector, but also as a donor for nation

¹⁰⁰ Missing 19-year old boy found dead in Akhagori. *Democracy and Freedom Watch*. January 6, 2015. Retrieved on March 13, 2018 from <http://dfwatch.net/missing-19-year-old-boy-found-dead-in-akhagori-71024-32905>

¹⁰¹ Abkhazia releases border guard accused of killing Georgian man. *OC media*. 2 June 2017. Retrieved on March 13, 2018 from <http://oc-media.org/abkhazia-releases-border-guard-accused-of-killing-georgian-man/>

¹⁰² Georgia Vows to Repatriate Man Who Died In Custody in South Ossetia. Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty. Retrieved on March 13, 2018 from <https://www.rferl.org/a/georgia-man-died-in-custody-south-ossetia-repatriation/29072690.html>

¹⁰³ Georgia to Blacklist 33 Persons for Grave Human Rights Violations in Abkhazia, South Ossetia. *Civil.ge*. 06.26.2018. Retrieved on July 11, 2018 from <https://civil.ge/archives/245041>

¹⁰⁴ Gabekhadze, G. (July 16, 2018). Veterans from Occupied Abkhazia Create List of “Criminal Georgians.” *The Messenger Online*. Retrieved on July 18, 2018 from http://www.messenger.com.ge/issues/4184_july_16_2018/4184_gvanca1.html

making. Russia underscores its role not only by its policies to strengthen its military presence in the republics it recognized after the 2008 war, but also by coercive measures against Georgia which strengthen the symbolic perception that it is a patron and savior, thus feeding the sense of resentment against the former parent state and justifying the inevitability of Russian-Abkhazian and Russian-South Ossetian alliances. Nevertheless, Even so, these factors can limit the capacity of the Abkhazian and South Ossetian publics to develop resources to build states that understand modernity and democracy. The current political identity of deeply traditional and tribal-patriarchal societies is based on fear of the “aggressor” and therefore on inner divisions that marginalize the Georgian minority in ethnic enclaves of the relevant republics. Having inner “others” and “enemies at the gates” diminishes efforts to establish civil frameworks of nationhood and locks the political realm in the boundaries of ethnicity in both territories. Therefore, politics is downgraded to mere power games and a struggle to control the flow of Russian aid among family-clan structures.

CHAPTER 5. Conclusion.

Georgian nationalism that gained public support in the 1980s was meant to bring sovereignty to the nation of Georgia that would include Abkhazia and South Ossetia. However, reality proved to be quite different. Nationalism in Georgia aimed to gain independence from the Soviet Union and lessen Russian influence after the dissolution of the USSR, but it also stoked the nationalism of other ethnicities whose nationalist elites were not eager to be part of a country dominated by the Georgian ethnos. Abkhaz and South Ossetian societies had autonomous political institutions and identities distinct from those of Georgia. In the case of Abkhazia, they wished to form their own state, and in the case of South Ossetia, they wished to merge with another part of their acclaimed ancestral land, namely North Ossetia. Historiography and nationalistic discourses that developed in Soviet times nurtured and cultivated the idea of a purely Abkhazian or Ossetian state that would not be shared with Georgians. Narratives telling of the glorious past of heroic small nations oppressed by Southern

offenders, and a network of fraternal people behind the Greater Caucasus Mountains who share the same language and aspirations of freedom and solidarity with Abkhaz and Ossetian people, and self-identification with ancient defenders of Christendom, became the emotional and symbolic foundation for justifying the idea of a national state and firing up secessionist wars against Georgia.

Historiography and nationalism along with the ethnic divide in heterogeneous Abkhazia and South Ossetia crystallized political identities that were oriented against “Georgianness”. This in turn transformed into a political agenda to homogenize populations and claim the lands inside the borders of the autonomous republics under the rule of ethnic Abkhaz and Ossetians. Secessionist wars in the 1990s and the 2008 Russian-Georgian war abetted these goals. Ethnic composition of the Georgia’s breakaway republics changed in favor of politics of nationhood conducted by the secessionist elites. In this regard borderisation and citizenship policies aimed at exclusion of Georgian populations from political engagement and return back to their homes, control demography and ensure dominance of the title ethnicities.

Meanwhile, Russia that “views Caucasus as its own version of Yugoslavia”¹⁰⁵ acts as an external homeland and “motherland” for these smaller nations inside Georgia. It is a center of gravitation for these two and represents a regional hegemon able to offer them desirable benefits. The small and hardly visible territories and populations of Abkhazia and South Ossetia need Russia’s constant military and institutional assistance to protect them from any external threat, specifically, their fear of Georgian revenge or revanchist military advancement. This makes them not only dependent on Russia’s protection, but also has led them to become military platforms for Russian troops (to provide favors in return). Isolation from the “outer” world and memories of the recent violent past in which they confronted Georgian nationalism and state-consolidation policies are crucial elements in the national story-telling and political discourse that has exposed these nations to Russian-led state-formation.

¹⁰⁵ Hill, F., Jewett, P., (1994). “Back in the USSR”: Russia's Intervention in the Internal Affairs of the Former Soviet Republics and the Implications for United States Policy Toward Russia. Brookings Institution. Retrieved on June 18, 2018 from <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Back-in-the-USSR-1994.pdf> Pg. 45.

One more aspect of this Russian-led nation making that is not analyzed in this paper is the emergence of political systems that are oriented towards diverging political paths: Russia or the EU-NATO. Russia's monopolistic control over South Ossetia and Abkhazia will isolate them from the West-oriented modernization that is going on under the EU and NATO integration umbrella in Georgia. The managerial and administrative culture of the Russian state will hold down relevant cultures in these non-recognized states. Political, cultural and societal gaps will deepen even more, and Georgia's ambition to gain these territories back will be even more difficult to attain. Therefore, Georgia's only way for political development lies through continuing its EU integration policies and reforms while developing strategies to open Abkhazia and South Ossetia to the same processes, thereby bringing more likelihood for peace, as opposed to Russia's policies of creating nations behind fences.

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