

Chapter 1

Introduction

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An analysis of the Georgian-Abkhaz war of 1992-93 and an assessment of the possibilities for a peace settlement has to combine a number of characteristics which do not easily fit together. It should not only present a factual account of the historic origins of the conflict but also help readers gain more insight into how Georgian and Abkhaz intellectuals describe it. The analysis should generate more understanding of these particular interpretations among readers, and should not be concerned primarily with refuting them. In both post-war communities, however, reconstructions of the past are largely based on a criticism of the interpretation made by "the opposite side". The analysis should therefore inform the reader about this inward view of the conflict to be found among Georgians and Abkhazians, including prejudices and mutual accusations. The present volume has been prepared in the conviction that a contribution to such an analysis can be made through a dialogue between Georgian and Abkhaz scholars.

First drafts of the papers collected in this volume were discussed at a conference, held in Brussels at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel on 12-14 June 1997, which was co-organized by Ghia Nodia, Yuri Anchabadze and myself. The authors have striven for an academic presentation of their views on Georgian-Abkhaz history, aiming at a personal interpretation of the reasons why fear and distrust turned into hatred and an unrestrained use of force. Their reflection on the war is largely the result of a discussion on a broader scale. They present the views prevalent among Georgian and Abkhaz public opinion on, for instance, past injustices during czarist and Soviet times, their respective national projects and the transformation of these projects as a result of the war.

The attempt to present a balanced account of the Georgian and Abkhaz perspectives does not mean that normative concepts or polemical arguments had to be avoided. Viacheslav Chirikba uses the term "aggressive integrationalism" to describe the attempt by central governments to oppose, at whatever cost - including by violent means - the right to self-determination of a minority on their territory. This phrase - even if this is not stated explicitly by the author - mirrors the term "aggressive separatism" which has been repeatedly used by Eduard Shevardnadze to describe the attempts by nationalist movements to secede from established states at any cost and without any democratic legitimization or any possible justification by international legal standards. But even when being critical, or even polemical, the authors produce an argumentation that remains open to a productive discussion. Readers will notice that the participants in this book project do not put much effort into refuting their adversaries, but concentrate rather on giving a detailed explanation of their own points of view. Readers should bear in mind that before 1997 such exchanges of views in public academic fora took place only rarely. Though sometimes the authors do not hide their disappointment that the political perspective of their own public has not been properly understood by the other side, this attitude should be regarded as positive: it means that neither side is ruling out common ground in a rational exchange of arguments. Not all intellectual links between Georgians and Abkhaz have been broken off since the war.

The objective of this academic dialogue was to present a multifaceted analysis of the war, its origins and the prospects for ending it with a settlement. The conference and book project also had practical objectives. Encounters between academics have different aims from meetings between political representatives or NGOs. Here, the dialogue was not intended to duplicate on an academic level the negotiations taking place in Moscow or Geneva, or to come up with a mutually acceptable compromise for a settlement to the conflict. Nor was it to discuss how common projects could satisfy needs that are common to both communities - the objective of NGO co-operation projects. The specific academic objectives of this book project could be subsumed under two headings: first, to promote academic co-operation between the two communities in an international framework; second, to stimulate discussion among public opinion by producing a publication intended for a wide audience in Georgia and Abkhazia. These two objectives of the organizers are quite traditional in scientific activities. As the first objective, shared by the Georgian and Abkhaz participants, implies an internationalization of their co-operation through the involvement of foreign universities and research centres, it has, however, a political dimension which is not to be found in all scientific research projects. It parallels the efforts by the Abkhaz and Georgian governments to find recognition in the international community for their own proposals for a settlement, but it differs from these efforts in being confined to an exchange of views.

Co-operation

The first objective of the conference project was co-operation. In the view of the organizers at the time of its initiation in summer 1996, a conference to discuss the first drafts for a book project and the ensuing publication had to demonstrate that practical co-operation between Georgian and Abkhaz academics was able, on a scientific level, to overcome the deadlock in the political negotiations between their governments. The conference in Brussels was not the first one in which Georgians and Abkhaz had met. There have been several conferences with the explicit aim of facilitating a dialogue between the conflicting sides. Initiatives have been taken by organizations such as the Norwegian Refugee Council and the George Mason University, and by individuals such as Paula Garb from the University of California. NGO representatives had met in Moscow in March 1996 and in Schlainingen (Austria). In 1997, the OSCE invited Georgian and Abkhazian journalists to Warsaw. In early June 1997, a conference was organized in Haarlem by Mehmet Tftfncf, with the participation of Georgian and Abkhazian scholars.^[1] The London-based NGO International Alert started with a confidence-building programme consisting of a series of six workshops, after a successful one in 1997.^[2]

The Georgian and Abkhaz governments, faced with a deadlock in the discussion on their relations and with a mutual dependence on Russia which became to a certain extent a liability for both sides, had come to understand that it would be to the advantage of both of them to develop direct political contacts, aside from the negotiations organized in Moscow by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs or those held under the auspices of the UN in Geneva. Such direct contacts did not lead to any breakthrough, but both sides continued to consider them useful and they have been supplemented in recent years by meetings between representatives of both communities at a more functional level. Officials from the security services and technical experts have met regularly in the last few years to tackle problems of common concern. In November 1997, the creation of a Co-ordination Council

institutionalized direct encounters. The UN, which was most active in setting this up, hoped that such an attempt at rapprochement would facilitate a political settlement.

Encounters and co-operation projects between academics proceed from a similar perspective. Even before the war, relations between the two national scientific communities were deeply conflictual. Of all the social science disciplines, history and linguistics were the most prominent in ideological controversies. Historians and linguists engaged in scientific disputes on the origins of the Abkhaz language and on the presence of the two nationalities in the region in previous centuries. Their arguments lent support to nationalist politicians on both sides. Meanwhile, conflicts between scientific communities were also taking place on an institutional level. The creation of a branch of Tbilisi University in Sukhum(i) in 1989 was seen as provocation and resented by the Abkhaz community.^[3] National identity and national sovereignty were the main issues in the war of 1992-93. The destruction of the Abkhaz historical archives in Sukhum(i) by Georgian troops was aimed at destroying the Abkhaz national memory. When the war came, all remaining contact between the two scientific communities was completely broken off, and this situation remained unchanged until initial contacts between the two communities could be made at a functional level.

Historians, philosophers and social scientists have no less professional interest in co-operating than engineers or other technical experts. Their involvement in ideological disputes does not hinder collaboration - on the contrary, it makes such co-operation even more urgent. For social scientists, engaging in ideological controversies is a normal part of their intellectual creativity. The quality of their research may be impaired only if they become blind to the possible consequences of their ideological involvement. But the latter will not interfere with the scientific nature of their research as long as basic methodological rules are respected, research results can be verified by colleagues and the researchers themselves remain open to the criticism of their peers. The ideological component of scientific activity will have a negative effect on the quality of the research only if one of those conditions is not met. The critique by colleagues who do not share the same ideological presuppositions is an important element in this respect. The absence of scientific criticism which did not depart from Marxist-Leninist presuppositions, for instance, led to a dogmatization of social sciences in the Soviet Union. Scientific disputes between social scientists with different ideological affinities, or who defend opposing national interests, may stimulate fruitful reflection on the new societies which have emerged with the ending of the Soviet Union.

Georgian and Abkhaz social scientists have been quite active since the war in producing scientific articles, books and leaflets analysing the origins of the conflict. These books were intended for a domestic and, to a lesser degree, an international audience. There has, however, been no opportunity for social scientists from Georgia and Abkhazia to develop their argumentation or to discuss their research results within a common framework. During the discussion of the first drafts and the preparation of the second drafts, it was interesting to see that all the authors were open to comments from all the other participants and have modified the contents of their second drafts accordingly, without, however, compromising on ideological issues which they regard as important. The factual accuracy of their descriptions, in particular, has benefited from this exchange of views.

This book primarily serves academic interests. Yet the preparation of such a book project also involves political interests, which need clarification. The relationship between academic and political motivation may, in this particular instance, seem an ambiguous one.

There are various reasons to suppose that the political dimension of such academic co-operation would predominate. First, this collaboration between Abkhaz and Georgian academics took place in a situation where every form of contact between the two communities necessarily had a strong political colouring. Second, the subject of this scientific collaboration was history and politics. Third, several authors had been, or still were, actively involved in politics. Stanislav Lakoba, for instance, was the vice-chairman of the previous parliament of Abkhazia, Viacheslav Chirikba is the official representative of Abkhazia in Western Europe and Revaz Gachechiladze is current Georgian Ambassador to Israel. Fourth, the conference was funded by a TACIS contract with the European Commission, which is actively pursuing its own interests in the Caucasus region and regards such a conference as a contribution to a political settlement of the conflict. Fifth, the Georgian and Abkhaz governments tend to see a conference like this as one means, amongst others, of attracting international attention to their conflict and enlisting support for their positions among an international audience. They may also expect political benefits from such a conference, by obtaining better information about the variety of positions defended in the other community than is usually possible during direct political negotiations.

All these factors, which could have led to a "politicization" of the discussion to the detriment of its scientific character, were taken into account in the preparation of this project. In order to avoid negative interference in the book project by particular political interests, the editors were convinced that it was sufficient to follow quite traditional academic practices in organizing the discussions at the conference. They did not think that they needed to do more than require the authors to respect the usual scientific standards when preparing the book for publication. These requirements were intended to prevent too much interference by political interests in scientific debates, but were not meant to exclude ideological commitments or prevent value judgements. Scholars should not be considered less committed than other citizens to the political conflict in which their own community is engaged. Distrust and hatred are essential factors in a conflict where those involved failed to avoid the use of military force. The presentation of this dimension of the conflict was expected to proceed according to a rational line of argument, which would be conscious of all the difficulties in reaching a "balanced", "unbiased" approach to past injustices, to the horrors of the war and to the responsibilities of political leaders and the international community.

The conference was closed to the public, but some academic experts from Western universities and research centres were invited to prepare comments on the first drafts. In order to avoid a "politicization" of the debates, in such cases some specialists in confidence-building programmes advise inviting not academic regional experts but rather experts in specific disciplines (federalism, conflict resolution etc.) who are able to take a more abstract view of the conflict. Regional specialists, indeed, tend to be biased and to share the prejudices of one of the communities involved in the conflict, whereas theoretically-minded and regionally-uninformed specialists can help to relativize the ideological issues at stake. As conference organizers, we did not stick to this rule but considered that the standard academic procedures described above were sufficient to safeguard the primarily scientific character of any such project. We invited about twenty researchers from various Western universities and research centres,^[4] who in many cases happened to have better contacts with one side than the other. The fact that they were well informed about the issues under discussion, and were sometimes to be seen defending the arguments of one party to the dispute against the arguments of the other party, was not a handicap in debating an issue as complex as the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict, but rather an advantage. The multiplicity of

perspectives allowed for a fruitful exchange of information, which would probably not have taken place if the Georgian and Abkhaz scholars had had a monopoly on concrete historic information about the conflict, and the Western participants had been forced to stick to more abstract considerations.

The complex link between academic and political interests should not only be seen from the perspective that science may become dependent on political interests. Political organizations dealing with security issues are quite eager to make use of the activities of academic institutions and other NGOs, as they present a number of advantages over traditional forms of multilateral or bilateral diplomacy. First, for a number of international organizations it is not possible to establish direct relations with the governments of "suspended states" such as Abkhazia. With the exception of regular meetings with the UN and Russia (which are mediating between the two sides in the armed conflict), and sporadic discussions of an exploratory nature between the Abkhaz government and Western diplomats or representatives of international institutions, Abkhazia remains an outcast from international diplomatic fora. The funding of co-operation activities with non-governmental organizations from Abkhazia is one possible way of avoiding, to some extent, the negative consequences of this exclusion. This does, however, involve the risk that political discussions with suspended states on ethnic and regional conflicts may become dependent on spontaneous initiatives taken (in their own interest) by academic institutions or other NGOs which are capable of attracting sufficient attention and financial support from funding organizations.

>From the perspective of political organizations dealing with security issues, there is a second advantage to academic or other types of co-operation at the level of NGOs: such forms of collaboration are based on their own time-scales - proceeding at a different pace from political negotiations - and are far less sensitive to ups and downs in the political situation. A dialogue between scholars can make progress according to their own criteria, regardless of setbacks in governmental negotiations. In the second half of 1996, for instance, a breakdown in the political negotiations between Georgia and Abkhazia - due to the preparation of parliamentary elections by the Abkhaz government without the participation of the Georgian IDPs - was only narrowly avoided. Yet these tensions between the two governments did not threaten the ongoing preparations for this conference, including the support of the Georgian and Abkhaz authorities.

Most NGOs working on Georgian-Abkhaz issues are funded by Western organizations. It is remarkable, in this respect, that the Russian authorities, which have considerable interests at stake and a strong military involvement in the Caucasus region, have up to now not sufficiently realized the opportunities that can be offered by confidence-building programmes or by scientific collaboration between academics in regions in conflict,^[5] including even the opportunity to allow a better understanding of Russian policies which - as one can read in the Georgian and Abkhaz contributions - are in need of legitimacy and acceptance.

Public Opinion

The production of a book was the main practical objective of the conference. In the case of Georgia and Abkhazia, such an activity takes on a particular connotation. Active involvement by public opinion in the discussion on the terms for a fair settlement of the conflict may be seen by some political representatives or by officials from international

organizations as superfluous, or even as a threat to steady progress in the negotiations, but in the end it is an indispensable condition of any political solution in the Caucasus. The mobilization of public opinion in the conflicts in the region has been too thorough and the struggle for power in all Caucasian countries is too bitter to allow any compromise solution in conditions where public opinion is not prepared to follow suit. The Armenian president, Levon Ter-Petrosian, learned through experience that a willingness to compromise can easily be interpreted by political adversaries as a selling-out of state interests.

The Georgian and Abkhaz leaderships are constantly on their guard against a negative reaction from their public to initiatives they are taking. The confrontational policies that the Georgian and Abkhaz governments have pursued - even after 1993, when they agreed to a cease-fire and the principle of peaceful negotiations - were framed largely on the basis of domestic political needs. Such uncompromising policies aimed to counter the anger of large parts of the population dissatisfied with the lack of concrete positive results achieved through negotiation, and their anxiety that their interests would be neglected. Both governments' fear of losing the confidence of their own rank and file may partly explain why discussions on the political status of the Abkhazian state and on a peace agreement did not make significant progress. In these conditions, it makes sense to strive for direct involvement by public opinion in the ongoing discussions between the two sides. The production of a book for both a Georgian and an Abkhaz audience may be a contribution to the dialogue between these communities - one that is not confined to political representatives, and that may be helpful in fostering more understanding in public opinion on each side of the aspirations and aims of the main political players in the other.

The concept of public opinion is used by several authors in this book. Revaz Gachechiladze equates the opinion of "the Abkhaz" or "the Georgians" with "the prevailing public opinion in the two ethnic groups". A similar use of the term "the Abkhazians" or "the Georgians" can be found in the contributions of Yuri Anchabadze or Ghia Nodia. The preference of all the authors for the concept of public opinion rather than the term "civil society", which is far more popular in academic circles, is interesting in itself. The concept of "public opinion" denotes a relatively less active form of involvement in public affairs than that implied in the concept of "civil society". The use of this term (or the use of the term "the Abkhazians" or "the Georgians" as defined by Revaz Gachechiladze) avoids difficult debates on the question as to how far there is an active (a "real") civil society in Georgia or Abkhazia. Many may doubt the significance of "civil society" in both communities, but few would question the importance of public opinion in their struggles for sovereignty and independence.

The idea for this book project was based on the observation that the search for a negotiated solution remains the very highest priority in Abkhazia and Georgia, but that the discussions on political perspectives are not taking place within a suitable framework. The discussion on alternatives to economic embargoes, to the refusal to undo ethnic cleansing or to permanent military mobilization are, in general, being held within rather than between the communities. Each side lacks information concerning the debates on political strategy taking place on the other side. What are people's views on a common state? How will the local population of Abkhazia react to the return of refugees? How does public opinion in Georgia and Abkhazia perceive the future of the Caucasus region? What is the link between national identities and regional identities? What do people feel about the creation of common Caucasian institutions? Generally, those who are shaping the discussion in public opinion themselves lack information about the intellectual perspectives to be found at the

other side of the cease-fire line. This book project aims at filling that gap. The creation of a "common state", on which the Georgian and Abkhaz governments seem to agree in very general terms, is also in need of a "common public opinion" in order to define its precise institutional content.

The authors were not writing exclusively for their own "home" public or for the anonymous readership of international scientific journals. One of the aims striven for during the preparation of this book was that the authors would bear in mind the sensitivity of the public on "the other side". The discussion of first drafts at the conference in Brussels appeared fruitful in that respect. This may explain why the polemical style, so characteristic in writing aimed at a domestic audience, was avoided. When Georgians read the contribution from Stanislav Lakoba, for instance, they will be confronted with the proposal for a Confederation to be constituted initially by Georgia, Abkhazia and Chechnya, and which would remain open for other Caucasian nations to join. In this article, the author gives a sharp critique of Georgian policies during the brief period of independence 1918-21, but he also takes into account what he perceives as the common geopolitical interests and civilizational traditions of Georgia, Chechnya and Abkhazia. He explains his preference for a confederal solution - in which all participant states would safeguard their sovereignty and would deal with one other on equal terms - by the lack of trust in federal institutions. According to his argumentation, federal institutions would inevitably lead to the oppression of the Abkhazian community. The main reason (and here the author is quoting from "Severnyi Kavkaz", a pan-Caucasian émigré journal published in Warsaw in 1934) is that "this has been the fate of all states in which small nations have united around large nations".

The reader may raise various objections or formulate further research questions concerning this proposal for a settlement of the conflict. The European experience has indeed shown that wider regional integration could have positive consequences for the federalization of previously unitary states in the European Union, such as Spain or Belgium, and for regionalization or devolution processes in non-federal countries such as Italy or the United Kingdom. The European Union itself has acquired a quasi-federal structure through limiting the sovereignty of its members, which may be interesting for regionalization processes in other areas. But is there something like a Caucasian identity which might be based on specific civilizational values like equality and independence, and which could underpin an integration process? Is integration possible without a severe limitation of the national sovereignty of states, implying the necessity to go beyond any confederal type of governance? Does the integration process in pan-European institutions or alliances with regional powers not offer a more attractive prospect to the North and South Caucasian nations - which may make all Caucasian integration processes extremely difficult? Would a confederation solve the problem of co-existence between the Georgian and Abkhaz communities in Abkhazia itself? What guarantees could a confederation offer for a peaceful resolution of conflicts between constituent members? Is it still true in the 1990s (as it was largely true in the 1930s) that unequal strength of nationalities in a federal structure is never corrected by adequate institutions and inevitably leads to the oppression of the weaker nation? Are the Catalans, the Basques and the Galicians now oppressed minorities in Spain, as they were in the 1930s? Is the German-speaking Community an oppressed minority in Belgium (it constitutes a smaller percentage of the total Belgian population (0.7%) than the Abkhaz constituted in Georgia in 1989)? Last but not least: what guarantees would such an option of a Caucasian Confederation offer for vital Russian security interests at its southern borders? Would political frameworks other than a confederation (integrative structures similar to the Nordic Council, for instance, in which both national and regional governments

are represented)^[6] not be better suited to integrating the various interests of the regions and states of the Caucasus, including Russia? Some of these issues were discussed during the June conference and some contributions to this volume give partial answers. Here, suffice it to say that the ideas of Stanislav Lakoba go beyond a defence of Abkhaz interests, and that he bases his proposal on his personal perception of common Caucasian interests.

The same concern for common interests can be found in the contribution from Revaz Gachechiladze. He does not refrain from making accusations against the Abkhaz leadership regarding past policies and their responsibility for the lack of progress in the political negotiations, but at the same time he builds the entire structure of his chapter on the thesis that the international economy only needs the goods and services that Abkhazia used to produce in Soviet times on condition that a political agreement between the Georgian and Abkhaz sides secures stability and an adequate work-force. Normal contacts with the outside world would be a prerequisite for any economic development, which could take place only after a mutually agreed political settlement. Someone defending Abkhazia's right of secession could oppose this argument with the thesis that the need for small national minorities to be integrated into a larger economic market and to be protected by strong state power may have been true in the past, but that the globalization of the world economy and the strengthening of international law has now significantly lowered the costs of independence.^[7] The number of independent countries has risen from 62 before World War I to 193 today. Of these, 35 have less than half a million people, whereas the pre-war population of Abkhazia was 537,000.^[8] Independence might render Abkhazia's access to international markets and its participation in international fora more difficult than if it were a federated state, but economic reasons would not make independence impossible. It could be asked whether Revaz Gachechiladze's arguments would be convincing to proponents of Abkhazian independence, who generally regard national freedom as far more important than the material welfare of their own population. This does not, however, challenge Revaz Gachechiladze's main thesis, which is that a political agreement is a precondition for the economic reconstruction of Abkhazia. Abkhazia will have more difficulty in joining St Vincent, Iceland, Luxemburg, Tonga, Tuvalu and Nauru in the club of micro-states - as it requires the blessing of the international community and the agreement of the Georgian government - than in joining the club of European regions, together with Ajaria - which has been a member of the Assembly of the Regions of Europe (ARE) since 1987 - and other federated states to be created in Georgia. In this case too, the academic debate on the future shape of Abkhazian statehood will eventually have to hinge on the common interests shared between Georgia and Abkhazia.

The dialogue between Georgian and Abkhaz academics should not be considered an intellectual form of negotiation between representatives of the two nationalities. None of the participants has received any political mandate to negotiate, and their contributions express individual views. Evidence for these personal perceptions can be found in the different approaches to the conflict taken by the Georgian and Abkhaz authors. First of all, the reader will find different methodological approaches presented in this book. Ghia Nodia, for instance - trained as a political philosopher - focuses his attention on how both communities have conceived their respective national projects through changing historical circumstances and how these projects collided in their struggle for emancipation. Both communities defined themselves as nations on an ethnic basis and strove for full sovereignty at the expense of other ethnic groups. This explanation of the conflict emphasizes the importance of the subjective grasp of reality by social collectives. Revaz Gachechiladze, as a social

geographer, is far more interested in analysing the common material interests of the communities which may bring them to a compromise.

Secondly, the reader will find differences between the political projects and their proposed solutions to the conflict. The Georgian participants do not necessarily all share the same views of the steps to be followed in resolving the conflict. The same may be said of the Abkhaz contributions. To take the latter as an example: as indicated above, Stanislav Lakoba regards the creation of a confederal triangle consisting of Georgia, Abkhazia and Chechnya as the starting-point for a reconciliation between Georgia and Abkhazia, whereas Viacheslav Chirikba examines a federative formula, based on the principle of internal self-determination, in which Abkhazia, Georgia, Ajaria and South Ossetia would enjoy full sovereignty on their territory but - retaining strong veto rights - would delegate functions such as border control, customs and foreign policy to common bodies. He is far more optimistic than Stanislav Lakoba about the possibility of learning lessons - from the present world experience of devolution and shared sovereignty - for putting into practice the principles of equality and self-determination for smaller nations within bigger states. He remains, however, quite careful not to go beyond the statement that "shared sovereignty" may be considered an option. The delegation of a number of functions to common bodies, while retaining strong veto rights, does not go beyond a loose confederal arrangement, where sovereignty is not shared but all powers remain under the control of the founding states.

Thirdly, the reader may also notice the approach taken by the individual authors to the question of political responsibility for the escalation of the conflict into open war. It is not the aim of this introduction to go into a detailed comparison of the positions held, but merely to explain the background to this book project and to point out some issues which may be of particular importance to the reader. But it is possible to demonstrate that the different ethical positions taken by the authors do not simply reflect their allegiance to particular official political objectives. They are based on different views of political ethics and of the moral value of concepts such as "nation" and "citizen", which transcend such communal differences.

These individually different approaches and proposals do not reflect a contradiction between moderate and radical positions. All the proposals are, indeed, to be considered as a positive intellectual contribution to political negotiations, even if, in their present form, they are unlikely to be acceptable to the other side. Each proposal expresses the same degree of loyalty to one community. The differences in the proposals indicate that there is a good deal of room in both Georgia and Abkhazia for independent political thought.

Opposing approaches to the conflict are also to be found in public opinion in Georgia and Abkhazia, as could be seen from the mixed reactions to the meeting of presidents Shevardnadze and Ardzinba in Tbilisi in August 1997. Public opinion in both states was divided over the issue of whether this meeting - taking place on the anniversary of the outbreak of war in 1992 - should or should not be regarded as a positive step towards a resolution of the conflict. The choice of this date was regarded by many Abkhaz (not without reason) as a tactless move, imposed by the Russian facilitator of the meeting without considering its symbolic significance for the civilian population. Public opinion in Georgia seems far more divided than in Abkhazia in its attitude to the negotiations. This is due first of all to the political and social marginalization of the IDPs (internally displaced persons) from Abkhazia in Georgian society. The civilian population that remained in Abkhazia is hurt in a relatively even-handed way by the ongoing economic isolation of the region while,

on the contrary, there is a sharp differentiation between the long-term interests of the Georgian IDPs and those of the rest of the Georgian population. Secondly, the refusal by the Abkhaz leadership to have any dialogue with the political representatives of the Georgian population from Abkhazia has led to a radicalization of the latter's position. Some are advocating the use of force to make the return of refugees possible, drawing an analogy between their situation and that of the PLO before it could start negotiations with the Israeli government. It remains to be seen what consequences such differentiated public attitudes and opinions will have on the negotiations. Much will depend on how the public perceives new institutional compromises. The majority of Georgians will not accept a compromise that could lead to the secession of Abkhazia, while Georgian IDPs and the other communities in Abkhazia expect far more than that. They want strong security guarantees, and may refuse any institutional compromise that they consider to be inadequate for preventing a new war sooner or later. From this perspective, the negotiations which have been going on in recent years give few grounds for optimism. Neither side has been able to propose a formula that takes into account the security needs of the other. A radical change in the attitude of both sides - as analysed in the contribution by Theo Jans - would be the first condition of success.

1. Mehmet Tütüncü, *Caucasus: War and Peace. The New World Disorder and Caucasia*, Haarlem, 1998 (the book can be ordered by email).
2. See the report by Anna Matveeva in: *Coordinating Committee for Conflict Resolution Training in Europe*, no. 5, Spring 1997, <http://www.c-r.org/cr/ccts/>.
3. See Naira Gelaschwili, *Georgien. Ein Paradies in Trümmern*, Berlin, Aufbau Verlag, 1993.
4. The conference was attended by Anthony Antoine (Vrije Universiteit Brussel), Lincoln Allison (University of Warwick), Martina Bohm (La Trobe University, Melbourne), Kevin Clements (George Mason University), Rachel Clogg (University of Oxford), Jonathan Cohen (Foundation on Inter-Ethnic Relations, The Hague), Jan de Voogd (TACIS Monitoring & Evaluation Office, Tbilisi), Theodore Hanf (Arnold Bergstr...sser Institute, Freiburg), Heidi Hiltunen (European Commission), Terrence Hopmann (Brown University), Kahka Gogoloshvili (Georgian Embassy), Ria Laenen (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven), Anna Matveeva (International Alert, London), Nino Nanava (London School of Economics), Klaus Rasmussen (University of Copenhagen), Eric Remacle (Université Libre de Bruxelles), Andrea Schmidt (Université Catholique de Louvain), David Tirr (European Commission) and Martin Schuemer (UN Volunteers).
5. In an article for *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, Alexander Iskandarian has expressed his bitterness at this lack of interest: 'Uchenye obsuzhdayut problemy Kavkaza', *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 19 November 1997.
6. See Johan Galtung, 'Some observations on the Caucasus', in: *Caucasian Regional Studies*, vol. 2, Issue 1.
7. cf. Will Kymlicka, 'Is Federalism a Viable Alternative to Secession?', in: Percy B. Lehning, *Theories of Secession*, Routledge, London and New York, 1998, pp.140-141.

8. Small but Perfectly Formed', *The Economist*, 3 January 1998.