

Chapter 10

Conclusions by the editors

Bruno Coppieters

It is not a usual practice for an editor to conclude his book by pointing to its intellectual limits. Such a critique is made in reviews or by other authors in their own publications. A commercial publisher would probably not be delighted to have to sell a book in which the editors highlight what that book has failed to offer. Our book project, however, was regarded as a first step towards long-term co-operation between Georgian and Abkhaz academics in an international setting. We also had to see what kind of knowledge was lacking in the analysis of the conflict and in its proposed remedies. In the following, I will point out what I personally consider to be the main shortcomings of our common experience. According to the European scientific tradition, knowledge of such limits is a prerequisite for overcoming them.

The Lack of Institutional Models

One of the most striking aspects of the ongoing negotiations is that both sides are extremely precise in their wording when formulating mutual accusations, but rather vague when it comes to describing their own views on the functioning of common state institutions and, in particular, on security guarantees for the two communities. Unfortunately, the contributions to this volume have failed to overcome this limitation. The authors have tried to develop a positive approach to a compromise solution, but remain quite general on the subject of institutional arrangements. The Georgian contributions focus on the geopolitical conditions for a peace settlement and avoid the concretization of federal-type alternatives to the unitary state altogether. The Abkhaz proposals, in particular those of Stanislav Lakoba and Viacheslav Chirikba, are more helpful in this respect. In this book, the contrast between the readiness of the Abkhaz participants to take up the question of political status in practical terms and the relative reluctance of the Georgians to go beyond a general analysis of this question is quite interesting - especially if we are to parallel this contrast with the ongoing negotiation process. In recent years, the Abkhaz side has been criticized for not discussing the question of political status in a positive way. This criticism presupposed that a confederal arrangement that gives no guarantee to the Georgian side regarding the rights of the Georgian IDPs or the threat of secession could not be considered a concrete proposal. However, the fact that the Georgian political leadership has been declaring since 1995 that it is ready in principle to discuss more or less radical forms of federalization does not mean that this issue was prominent in intellectual

debates in Georgia at the time the contributions to this book were being prepared - as is quite obvious in the contributions from the Georgian side.

Readers of this book will have the chance to familiarize themselves with Abkhaz perspectives on a common state. But in the institutional arrangements proposed they may have great difficulty in finding any clear delimitation of powers which would make lasting coexistence possible. None of the authors has tried to depict the consequences of a conflict of interests in the institutional framework they are proposing. It is difficult, in the proposals of Stanislav Lakoba or Viacheslav Chirikba, to see how a severe conflict of interests between the units of the federation or confederations could be solved without inevitably leading to a break-up of the proposed federative institutions and the re-establishment of de facto independence for the various units.

This failure to give practical consideration to the institutional reforms to be implemented is no doubt due to the participants' lack of particular expertise in this field. The conference and book project were conceived as a first exchange of views on various aspects the conflict. The editors did not single out any one particular aspect of the conflict as being the most important. From this perspective, it should be explained that federalism and confederalism were not expected to constitute major topics of the contributions. The lack of analysis of institutional forms of ethnic conflict management, however, indicates a more difficult problem, as I have already stated above. The decision by the Georgian leadership - to strive for the reunification of Georgia with Abkhazia through federalization - was taken during the debates on a new constitution in 1995, and did not receive substantial intellectual support from the scientific community. Such a gap - between the insight of the leadership that federalization is the last resort for re-establishing political stability after the failure of all other options, on one hand, and the lack of federal expertise, on the other - should not be seen as an absolute barrier to federal reforms in Georgia. Every federation has its own unique experience in the process of federalization and has to produce its own expertise while actually undergoing this process. At first, constitutional and legal expertise will be called for. Other scientific disciplines (economics, finance, political science) will follow. In Spain and Belgium, a whole generation of experts were trained on the spot, during the debates on the implementation of federal institutions and in preparing constitutional drafts.

The interest in the mechanisms of federative systems is, however, further hindered by the fact that Georgians and Abkhazians attach greater importance to geopolitics than to state reforms. This was not the case in Spain and Belgium when discussions on federalization were taking place in those countries. This overriding interest in geopolitics can be explained by the history of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict itself. After the forcible incorporation of Georgia and Abkhazia into the Soviet Union in 1921, relations between the two communities became part of 'domestic' Soviet policies. During the struggle for sovereignty by the Georgians and Abkhazians at the end of the 1980s, and even after the break-up of the Soviet Union, it became extremely difficult to distinguish the 'international'

dimension of the conflict from the 'domestic' power struggle taking place either in Moscow or in Tbilisi. The resignation of Eduard Shevardnadze as Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs in December 1990 was partly due to his differences with Gorbachev over the handling of the Tbilisi massacre in April 1989.^[1] Shevardnadze also expressed his complaints about Gorbachev's passivity in the face of attacks on his foreign and defence policies from conservative military elements. Three years later, Shevardnadze (who had since become the leader of an independent Georgia), voiced a similar criticism of Yeltsin's unwillingness to halt the support of his (former Soviet and now Russian) troops to the Abkhaz side. The intermingling of domestic with international conflicts in Abkhazia, Georgia and Russia became even clearer after the retreat of Georgian forces from Abkhazia in October 1993. Shevardnadze was entirely dependent on Russian military support in order to crush the last attempt by former President Gamsakhurdia to regain power in Tbilisi. Russian support in the Georgian civil war was a trade-off for Georgia's entering the CIS and Russia's being allowed to station troops on Georgian territory. During the 1992-93 war, Abkhazia had benefited from the direct support of members of the Russian parliament. The Russian parliament and president may have shared similar views concerning the threat of secession in the Northern Caucasus and the need for a strong Russian presence in the Southern Caucasus, but they were involved in a severe conflict with each other on domestic policies. In October 1993, shortly after the Abkhaz military victory, Yeltsin ordered his troops to expel his adversaries by force from the parliament building in Moscow. With the arrest of vice-president Rutskoi and other opposition leaders in the parliament, Abkhazia lost significant leverage in Moscow.

If we were to describe the whole period 1989-1993 in more general terms, it would also be difficult to draw clear boundaries between domestic and international politics. This period included, simultaneously, the secession of Georgia from the Soviet Union, the breaking-up of the Soviet Union by Russia's secession, a fully fledged civil war in Georgia against a democratically elected president, the crushing of the parliamentary opposition in Russia with military support and the de facto secessions by Chechnya from Russia and by Abkhazia from Georgia. It is possible to analyse Georgian-Soviet, Russo-Soviet, Georgian-Russian, Chechen-Russian and Georgian-Abkhaz relations both as domestic and as international relations.

The fact that the events of the war did not make it possible to disentangle domestic from international politics largely explains why the present Russian, Georgian and Abkhazian political elites, which have all been part of the same Soviet elite, are unable to make a clear distinction between the external and internal dimensions of sovereignty or of the conditions for state stability. This is highly problematic when proposals for a settlement have to be formulated. When Eduard Shevardnadze argues in favour of applying the "Bosnian model" to Abkhazia, he is referring to the enforcement by the international community of Security Council resolutions, not to the domestic model of polyethnic coexistence implied

in the Dayton agreement. His view of the Bosnian model is based on the recent experiences of the UN and NATO in the former Yugoslavia, and legitimizes the possible use of force. The use of this model serves domestic purposes by creating the hope that the international community may solve the conflict by enforcing some kind of order. It also aims to exert pressure on the Russian mediator in the conflict. In discussions in Western diplomatic circles - where a profound knowledge of Abkhazian problems can hardly be expected - it is particularly useful to speak in terms of a more familiar model in order to point out the need for resolute action.

The significance of the Bosnian model has not been well thought out. Shevardnadze's description of the exemplary character of intervention in Bosnia overlooks the huge difficulties of undoing ethnic cleansing there or securing the continued existence of the Bosnian state. The creation of new ethnic enclaves and state entities or the increasing take-over of direct responsibilities by representatives of international security institutions (in April 1998, for instance, the OSCE appointed its own administrator to govern Srebrenica)¹² is not reflected upon. The main criticism that may be levelled at Georgia's view of the "Bosnian model" is that it is not based on a clear view of how the "Georgian-Abkhaz model" of federal relations would prevent political instability and the outbreak of fresh violent conflicts. Nor does the propagandistic use of the Bosnian model take into account the political conditions for Western/international intervention that were present in Bosnia and are lacking in Abkhazia (Bosnia was not in Russia's back garden, whereas Abkhazia is considered to belong to Russia's sphere of influence; Western public opinion exerted tremendous pressure in favour of military intervention in Bosnia and the stationing of some 30,000 troops there, whereas it is not at all concerned about the conflict over Abkhazia).

According to the Georgian approach, the guarantees they would obtain through foreign support for the enforcement of any model of ethnic coexistence that respected the territorial integrity of Georgia are more important than the guarantees for stability that are inherent in the functioning of the model itself. The consequences of such an approach are well analysed in the contribution by Yuri Anchabadze when he describes the Georgian attitude to the Russo-Chechen war. Shevardnadze had supported the position of the Russian government (including its bombing of the civilian population of Grozny) and declared that he would grant Abkhazia the same powers as Russia granted Chechnya. After the military defeat of the Russian forces, Chechnya has been offered (and has refused) powers going far beyond what Georgia - which has to take into account the interests of its refugee population - is prepared to grant to Abkhazia. The main lesson to be learnt from this experience is that it is not only unrealistic but also counter-productive to hope that a co-ordination of Georgian policies with those of other regional powers or international institutions can be a substitute for well-thought-out blue-prints for a federal-type arrangement for Abkhazia. The Georgian leadership, in replacing its former reference to Chechnya by a new one to Bosnia, has apparently learnt the wrong lesson from this experience.

A lack of vision in thinking about the concrete form a common state could take is also characteristic of the Abkhaz leadership. The question of security and political guarantees for the Georgian population of Abkhazia does not appear to be well thought-out. The Abkhaz leadership is focusing its attention far more on the geopolitical factors that may influence their negotiating position than on blue-prints for state structures in which sovereignty would be shared. By refusing any direct discussion on the question of political status, or any dialogue with the political representatives of the Georgian population from Abkhazia, the Abkhaz leadership is expressing this thought in a no less radical form than the Georgians with their use of the "Bosnian model".

This lack of a creative vision of the domestic conditions for a peace settlement should not simply be explained away by a lack of political commitment or an inability to compromise. The criticism that has repeatedly been made of both parties by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs - that the lack of progress in the negotiations is due to their inability to make substantial compromises - is quite accurate, but it does not go to the heart of the matter. Georgia and Abkhazia are in fact confronted by a security dilemma to which it seems initially that federative solutions may not necessarily produce a stable outcome. Georgia and Abkhazia have been going through a war which has brought both of them to the brink of total disintegration. Both are incapable of winning a new war without strong foreign support, while such a war would have disastrous effects on their economies and, even in the event of a military victory, would not necessarily achieve the objectives they are aiming at. The consequences of a compromise solution are, however, no easier to assess. There are indeed high risks involved for both sides in the creation of common state structures. A direct consequence of a confederal relationship with Abkhazia would be a radicalization of the positions of South Ossetia and Ajaria. The Georgian leadership has therefore flatly refused to consider it as an option in the negotiations. It is also extremely difficult for the Georgian government to calculate the repercussions of a federalization of its state structures on its relations with South Ossetia or Ajaria. Even very limited federalization creates its own dynamics, which - non-centralization being a basic characteristic of federalism - may not remain under the complete control of the present government. This is probably one of the reasons why no serious attempts have been made to develop any form of shared sovereignty with other regions or other ethnic communities in Georgia. The Abkhaz government has similar difficulty in predicting the political consequences of the return of refugees to Abkhazia and the creation of new state structures in which the present leadership would have to share power.

The primary normative function of any state is to protect its citizens. Up to now, neither the Georgian nor the Abkhaz state has fulfilled this function in the post-Soviet period. When its troops entered Abkhazia in August 1992, the Georgian state presented a threat to the Abkhazian community. After the war, it enforced an economic embargo against a civilian population which it claimed to represent. The Abkhaz state was neither

able nor willing to overcome the situation of ethnic cleansing by providing security guarantees for Georgian refugees returning to Abkhazia. Georgia and Abkhazia can only cease to represent a threat for each other if they are ready to take major risks in setting up a common state. It is far from certain whether the two leaderships will be able, in the near future, to overcome their fear of destabilization. The intensification of economic and other forms of co-operation links, which has been taking place since November 1997, is a necessary but insufficient condition for creating the trust necessary for overcoming such fear and engaging in a risky form of political co-operation. The support of foreign governments to one side of the conflict or the other only exacerbates existing fears. Under these conditions, it would make sense not to raise false expectations among Georgian public opinion or to exacerbate the fears of the Abkhaz public by using the "Bosnian model", but instead to concentrate the political discussions on domestic conditions for stability in a process of political transformation. As both sides have to overcome similar fears, there is not much point in taking a stand for or against one party in the conflict.

The above position is a personal one. The other authors writing in this book would not necessarily share my views on the difficulties for the Georgian and Abkhaz leadership in going beyond the present stage in the negotiations. But some of the Georgian and Abkhaz contributions do point in the same direction. The fact that both sides rely far too heavily on foreign (Russian or Western) support to strengthen their own positions, for instance, is criticized by Gia Tarkhan-Mouravi. During the conference, it was also said that the lack of productive discussions on concrete state forms was partly due to a lack of knowledge among the public regarding (con)federal experiences. It was therefore decided that a second conference in Brussels should concentrate on assessing the significance of such experiences for Georgian-Abkhaz relations, and that the proceedings of this conference would be made accessible to a wide audience in Georgia and Abkhazia. The conference was held in November 1997 and the proceedings are at present being prepared for publication.

A Limited Dialogue

The Georgian-Abkhaz conflict does not affect merely the Georgian and Abkhaz communities. The Russian, Armenian, Greek and other communities in Abkhazia have also been drawn into it. One of the major limitations of the present Georgian-Abkhaz collaboration - and apparently of many other diplomatic and NGO initiatives taken in the region - is their exclusive focus on the two communities which were directly opposed to each other during the war. The present Abkhaz government includes some non-Abkhaz ministers, but the non-Abkhaz communities do not participate as such in the negotiations. The non-Georgian population of Georgia is virtually not represented in the Georgian political establishment, and the questions of the future political status of South Ossetia and Ajaria are dealt with as separate negotiation issues by the Tbilisi government, in order to avoid any interference between one conflict and another.

The fact that it was impossible to include in this conference academics from among the Georgian refugee population in Abkhazia is most unfortunate. It can easily be explained by the fact that it would have been difficult to organize a dialogue between Georgian and Abkhaz academics from Abkhazia in a situation where the Abkhaz government is refusing any form of dialogue with the political representatives of the refugee population. It could also be said that a conference which aims at initiating long-term co-operation first had to overcome strong mutual suspicion by Georgians from Georgia and Abkhazians from Abkhazia before widening the dialogue to include other participants. A dialogue between all communities from Abkhazia is a prerequisite for any peace settlement. The hurdles facing such a dialogue are in principle no greater than those overcome in Northern Ireland, in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or between the South African apartheid regime and the ANC. There are probably also some areas of common interest between the Georgian and Abkhaz communities in Abkhazia, which are now obscured by mutual acts and accusations of terrorism, but which may resurface once a dialogue is in place. For a time, the Georgian community in Abkhazia will remain dependent on the Tbilisi government in order to secure its political and property rights but, once these rights have been secured, it will find that as regards the economic future of the region it has more in common with the other communities in Abkhazia than with Georgia proper. This is especially true if we take a long-term perspective, as is necessary when speaking of national interests. This statement may be challenged - but it would surely be worthwhile to do so at an academic conference with the participation of all communities from Abkhazia.

Ghia Nodia

This volume is a mixture of an academic and a political exercise. Intellectuals do not usually like to be portrayed as representatives of nations or ethnic groups: in their capacity as intellectuals, they prefer to be regarded as staying aloof from communal allegiances. An academic conference where the participants are divided into two ethnically defined and equal "sides" plus "neutral" outsiders may be considered a contradiction in terms.

It is also true, however, that intellectuals play a conspicuous role in many conflicts like the one discussed in this book. In particular, the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict is sometimes viewed as one started by historians and philologists. It would be naive to believe that once scholars sort things out among themselves there will be no more room for fighting: academics are less important now than they used to be before the war (except for those who have become political leaders), and in general they are probably better at messing things up than sorting them out. But when politicians find themselves in a stalemate (as is the case in the conflict under

consideration), it is only natural to expect intellectuals at least to make an attempt to explore alternative routes.

This volume may therefore be assessed from two viewpoints. First, it is an effort to describe and understand the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict from different perspectives. As such, it is to my knowledge the only one so far, and hence doomed to be the best. Readers may like or dislike the purely academic qualities of this or that paper, but the volume will probably become a must for those who want to understand the Abkhazian conflict. But as I said, there was also an important practical side: that of "exploring alternative routes". Here, assessments will probably be more mixed. Anyone who thought that solving the conflict needed only open-mindedness and honest intellectual effort will probably be disappointed. In the part devoted to future solutions, all participants were much more general and cautious than in describing the causes of and background to the conflict. The most specific proposal - that of Stanislav Lakoba to create a Georgian-Abkhaz-Chechen confederation - can hardly be considered a ground for realistic discussion, as it would entail an open conflict between Georgia and Russia. There was no breakthrough, no brave new vision that intellectuals can bring home to brandish at their respective governments and societies.

But if the objective complexity of the situation is taken into account, then the results may be seen in a different light. For all the difficulties of the situation, which could make a person quite pessimistic about the prospects for its resolution (and I believe the articles in this volume show this complexity quite well), the participants did agree on an important issue - that a viable final solution has to be sought along the lines of federalism. In this, I share the general optimism expressed at the end of Chirikba's article. To be sure, this optimism should not be exaggerated either: words like "federation" or "confederation" have been routinely used by representatives of the parties to the conflict as symbols rather than concepts, and Bruno Coppieters is absolutely right in saying that serious public discussion on their substance is lacking in both Georgian and Abkhaz societies. This was obvious during the conference as well. But that is exactly the point: the substance of specific options needs to be explored and discussed, and who are supposed to be the first do this, if not academics? An understanding of the necessity to go into the details of federal projects was probably the major outcome of the conference - and provided an idea for another project. On behalf of the Georgian participants, I can say that we came away from the conference a little bit more optimistic than when we arrived at it.

Events on the ground since the conference was held have fuelled the arguments of both optimists and pessimists. On the one hand, in August 1997 in Tbilisi there was a meeting between Ardzinba and Shevardnadze which caused a sensation, but did not bring too many tangible results. It was important, though, that the sides agreed not to use military means (however little agreements like this tend to be honoured in the Caucasus), and that the meeting was followed by a number of visits which explored

the possibility of economic co-operation - a whole new development which had not taken place before. On the other hand, guerrilla fighting intensified in the southern part of Abkhazia, and May 1998 saw a major outbreak of violence which raised fears of a new, fully-fledged war. The Georgian government dissociates itself from Georgian armed groups and may even ostensibly condemn their actions, but it is also an open secret that it does provide help to at least some of the guerrilla groups. Most importantly, the guerrilla movement is legitimate in the eyes of the Georgian public, which has been disappointed by years of fruitless negotiations, and there is pressure on the government to support the guerrilla movement openly (as the exiled government of Abkhazia does). This does not mean that there is public support for a large-scale new war, but it is assumed that the Sukhumi government should get a clear message that it cannot simply get away with ethnic cleansing. This is obviously a dangerous development - bitterness caused by new deaths may reduce the willingness to compromise even more, and guerrilla groups may eventually become a destabilizing force in Georgia proper.

This leads one to think that, even though we wish otherwise, the final settlement in Abkhazia is probably a long-term project and should be treated as such. As a result, meetings like the one which gave birth to this book are even more important. The unwillingness of bad politicians or the vested interests of particular groups are not the major obstacle to lasting peace. Illusions about oneself and others, lack of information, being unaccustomed to facing difficult problems and tough choices are much more important - and take more time to overcome. In that sense, any joint attempt to explore honestly the problems and choices that are there, besides having an academic value, has significance as a step towards peace.

Yuri Anchabadze

The conference "Georgians and Abkhazians: The Search for a Settlement and the Role of the International Community" has become an appreciable landmark in the nascent scientific dialogue between Georgian and Abkhazian researchers on the problems associated with the war of 1992-1993 and its consequences - extremely painful and serious for both parties - and on the search for ways to resolve this conflict. The need for such a dialogue had already been felt for a long time. Meanwhile, previous sporadic attempts to establish contact had ended in failure, since the diametrically opposed positions of the participants, based on their emotional and personalized perceptions of recent tragic events, have become a serious obstacle to constructive academic dialogue and discussion.

The conference, held in June 1997 in Brussels at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel, has become a testimony to the new situation that has been evolving. An intensive three days of work has shown that the period of

emotional attacks and sweeping accusations, to which both parties were so frequently prone in the recent past, is already behind them. The particular political circumstances on which the position of many authors writing about the Abkhaz-Georgian conflict was based has lost relevance. Nowadays, scientists both in Tbilisi and in Sukhum are trying to comprehend objectively the origins of and reasons for the tragic opposition between Georgia and Abkhazia, and to present their own vision offering possible ways out of the situation as it stands.

The presentations made at the conference and the discussions that followed them have shown that the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict is being divested of its burden of mythological notions, which have until recently been an integral part of political science treatises and publications on this topic. In any case, legends about the Christian-Islamic underpinnings of Georgian-Abkhazian antagonism, about the "genetic" Abkhaz adherence to Communist ideology and the Soviets, about 300,000 Georgian refugees expecting repatriation, etc., were not at issue at the conference. Attention focused instead on the real situation in the region, on the complex problems that actually had engendered the conflict or become a consequence of it, and that now represent a fundamental obstacle to achieving a peace settlement.

At the same time, it is clear that the parties do not always adequately understand the specific features of the political, social and ideological processes taking place in the opposite "camp". Thus our Georgian colleagues obviously do not take into account the impact of the post-war syndrome on people of all walks of life in Abkhazia and, in particular, on the moral attitude and psychological state of the population of the republic when it comes to possible contacts and forms of mutual relations with Georgia and the Georgians. An inaccurate negative estimation of Russia's role in the genesis of the Abkhaz-Georgian conflict, in the events of the war and at the present stage of peace settlement, was also expressed. On the other hand, the critical interpretation by the Georgian participants of the position and actions of the Tbilisi leadership, which had aggravated a deterioration in Georgian-Abkhazian relationships and contributed to the unleashing of hostilities in August 1992, was in many respects unexpected by the Abkhazian representatives. Such appraisals were perceived by the Abkhazian side as a new phenomenon among both scientists and the general public in Georgia.

Nevertheless, discussions were quite heated. As was to be expected, the basic scientific problem posed at the conference proved to be a source of considerable debate. A consensus on the issues raised in the search for agreement between the parties has not yet been found. The divergence between the positions of the conference participants is far greater and deeper than the areas where convergence was reached. In the process, the specific approaches to this question adopted by the Georgian and Abkhazian conference participants have come to light.

The position of the Georgian scholars is that agreement should be sought in the context of the territorial integrity of the former Georgian SSR.

Among the arguments cited are not only the fact that Georgia has been internationally recognized as an independent state in its Soviet borders - although for the Georgian participants this is obviously the most essential circumstance - but also reasons of a geopolitical, economic and historical nature, adduced to support the unification of Georgia and Abkhazia within the framework of a single state. In its polity, this state would replicate a certain variation on the model of relationships between Tbilisi and Sukhum from the period of the Soviet regime.

The Abkhazian participants preferred to examine other settlement models. In their opinion, overcoming the deep-seated mistrust which the parties now feel towards each other would be an important step in the direction of concord. This should be promoted by the institution of new, non-traditional forms of relationships (for Stanislav Lakoba for example, a Caucasian confederation), within the framework of which the Abkhazian representatives are inclined to envisage the future peace settlement of the Abkhaz-Georgian conflict.

At the conference, the question of the role of the international community in achieving an Abkhazian-Georgian agreement was raised for the first time. The conference has shown that in this case, too, the positions of the parties do not wholly coincide. The Georgian participants had a rather high estimation of the peace-making potential of the world community, and considered that Russia's unsuccessful mediation could be replaced, or at least complemented, by more active participation by Western countries in the process of political settlement. The statements by the Abkhaz representatives were not so optimistic. In their opinion, a more active role by the West might endanger the existing geopolitical balance in the region, an occurrence that would not be conducive to the positive development of the peace-making process.

At the same time, the conference papers have shown complete unanimity on the question of the need to attract Western theoretical thinking to address scientifically the complex problems associated with the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict, and, on a broader scale, the relationship between Georgia and Abkhazia from both a historical and a modern perspective. Research should also concentrate on analysing the European experience of federalization and community-building, the particular features of the development of local regionalism, and the positive and negative aspects to the history of constructing the common European home. From this point of view, it is difficult to overestimate the importance of the presentations contributed by the European participants and the discussions they sparked off. It is also extremely important that a study of the moral aspects of the situation - focusing, in particular, on the war and its consequences - was entered on the list of problems to do with the Abkhaz-Georgian conflict that were discussed at the conference.

In conclusion, it is to be hoped that the publication of the conference proceedings will not only serve the purposes of research on the various problems of Abkhazian-Georgian relations, but will also become an

important step on the way towards mutual understanding between the scientific communities of Georgia and Abkhazia, whose joint efforts can help in the search for peace and concord in the region.

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