

Introduction (1)

Within the Soviet federal framework, Georgia constituted a union republic and Abkhazia an autonomous republic which was part of the Georgian Union Republic. In the Georgian view, the establishment of independent statehood in 1991 would inevitably strengthen the unity and territorial integrity of the country. Sovereignty, in this case, meant preserving the subordinate position of Abkhazia and the other autonomous entities within the Georgian State. In the case of South Ossetia, the Georgian authorities even abolished its status as an autonomous region. In the Abkhazian view, on the other hand, the disintegration of the Soviet State entitled not only union republics but also autonomous republics to attain sovereign statehood. Sovereignty in this case meant that the Abkhazian people would be able to exercise their right to self-determination on an equal footing with the Georgian people and that, despite their minority position among the population of Abkhazia,(2) they would acquire a dominant position in the Abkhazian State. The conflict between the Georgian and Abkhazian communities within Abkhazia culminated in August 1992 in an armed confrontation, when Georgian troops entered Abkhazian territory. In 1993, the war resulted in the defeat of the Georgian authorities, the fleeing of about 200,000 Georgian refugees from the region and the *de facto* secession of Abkhazia. A cease-fire agreement between the parties was enforced by CIS (in practice, Russian) peace-keeping troops, and has been monitored since then by UN military observers.

The negotiations between the parties that have taken place since 1993 have not produced any results that are considered satisfactory by both parties. Abkhazia refuses to accept any arrangement that would re-establish a subordinate position for it within the Georgian State, while Georgia rejects any kind of agreement that could be regarded either as a stepping-stone to the *de iure* secession of Abkhazia or as a threat to Georgia's territorial integrity and the political future of the Georgian population in Abkhazia.

The United Nations Security Council has repeatedly expressed its deep concern about the continued failure of the conflicting parties in the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict to make any substantial progress towards a political settlement. Mediation efforts by the UN and Russia have led to some improvement in relations between the Georgian and Abkhazian governments, with the creation of a "co-ordinating council" at the end of 1997. Co-operation projects are being developed for the benefit of the civilian population of both communities. The renewal of armed hostilities in May 1998, however, jeopardised the efforts made by the mediators to produce a settlement. The question of political status remains the main stumbling-block to further progress in negotiations. Each party mistrusts the long-term intentions of the other, which makes it extremely difficult to agree on institutional arrangements for securing the return of the refugees or for creating a "Common State". The population of both communities feel directly threatened by the actions of the authorities on the other side. Abkhazia has found itself isolated on the international scene, suffering severe economic and social consequences from the blockade imposed by Georgia and Russia. For Georgia, which has been struggling with the economic and social costs of the transition to a market economy, the problem of refugees is a pressing one. The decision by the Abkhazian authorities to allow the Georgian refugees to return to their homes, starting on 1 March 1999, marked a significant change in their policies. In the past, they had regarded a mass return of refugees to Abkhazia as a threat to its security (the danger of a "fifth column"), and one which would be unacceptable without overall agreement on a political settlement. By allowing the return of the refugees, without any bilateral agreement on their security guarantees, they were trying to avoid being accused of ethnic cleansing and were hoping to find an accommodation with the refugees who would agree to return under those circumstances. The Abkhazian authorities wanted to reach such an accommodation without any interference from the Georgian authorities in what they saw as their internal affairs. The lack of a political agreement, however, makes it difficult to give long-term guarantees to the Georgian population of Abkhazia, and new eruptions of violent clashes remain possible.

In these difficult circumstances, the importance of academic co-operation between researchers from the two conflicting communities, on both the causes of the conflict and possible political solutions to it,

should not be overlooked.⁽³⁾ A first academic conference on the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict was organised at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel in June 1997, with the participation of Georgian and Abkhazian scholars and with financial support from the European Commission. Its proceedings were published in Russian and English.⁽⁴⁾ The participants agreed to discuss concrete federal mechanisms and institutions existing in Europe at a second conference, which took place in November of the same year. The main purpose of this conference was to enable Abkhazian and Georgian researchers, senior officials and politicians to discuss the relevance to their conflict of practical experience in the regulation of ethnic conflicts that has been gained in other parts of Europe. Experts on federalism and on the management of ethnic and regional conflict from the European Union, Switzerland and Russia presented some of the mechanisms for conflict regulation. The participants discussed the great variety of federal forms in which self-rule and shared rule can be constitutionally regulated in multi-ethnic societies. Most of the contributions to this volume were written after the conference, and take into account the discussions that took place there. The production of such a book in Russian and English is intended to contribute to a dialogue between the two communities – one which is not confined to scholars or political representatives from the two communities, but would involve a broader readership. The first chapter of the book, on Western security policies towards Georgia and Abkhazia, therefore includes an analysis of the historical roots of the conflict, written for readers who may not be familiar with the region.

There is no uniform way of setting up institutions to manage ethnic conflict. Each understanding of nationhood is based on a specific way of linking the universal concept of sovereignty to a particular interpretation of a people's history. The contributors to this book are well aware of the difficulty of applying their knowledge of comparative federalism. Every single author here stresses that it is not their intention to recommend that institutions originating under specific historical circumstances should be introduced without adaptation in the Georgian/Abkhazian case. Nonetheless, their contributions also demonstrate that one country's experience with a particular mechanism may be very relevant to constitutional reforms in another country – which does not mean, however, that it is possible to find "models" that can claim universal validity. An analysis of the effectiveness or otherwise of particular mechanisms invariably leads on to a more global analysis of the historical context in which these mechanisms were developed. An analysis of the foreign policy powers of the German Länder, or centre-periphery relations in Russia, will inevitably lead to an assessment of the specific historical traditions of these countries. This does not mean that federal institutions, mechanisms and procedures are exclusively linked to particular historical traditions, or that they should not be seen as relevant to a Georgian-Abkhazian peace settlement. On the contrary, both the ideas and principles behind them, and their practical consequences, have to be taken into account when political choices are being made in the Georgian-Abkhazian case.

The leaders of Georgia and Abkhazia have repeatedly stated that they intend to adopt institutional arrangements with the most advanced forms of self-rule and shared sovereignty. These declarations have been taken into account by the co-editors of this book when presenting models and mechanisms for multiethnic coexistence. We have not confined our discussion to federal States where – as in Switzerland – there is a basic consensus on preserving the political status quo. We have extended the field of analysis to models of States in which such a consensus does not exist, and which are not seen as being free from ethnic conflict, but where conflictual relations (such as, for instance, those concerning Brussels in Belgium or Tatarstan in Russia) remain contained within institutional arrangements. Truly federal experiences have been selected – truly federal in the sense that they are based not only on the principle of self-rule for the federated units, but also on the principle that national communities should share sovereignty. In this sense, the co-editors have been receptive to the critique of the particular content and meaning with which the concept of "autonomy" has been invested thanks to the Soviet federal experience. The Soviet model showed how the exercise of "autonomy" could be dissociated from the exercise of "sovereignty" in such a way that autonomy became a substitute for real political power, which was located elsewhere. In the Soviet tradition, the centralisation of power by the Communist Party in Moscow actually went hand in hand with the granting of subordinated forms of "autonomy" to national minorities and certain political privileges to their leaderships.

It is only by linking autonomy or self-rule to the question of sovereignty that it may be possible to address the claim of the Abkhazians to sovereign statehood, in accordance with their view of the specific traditions of their statehood. Sharing sovereignty with the Georgian and other national communities would also meet the demand of the Georgian leadership to have the territorial integrity of the State respected, in accordance with its view of the historical unity of the Georgian and Abkhazian peoples. The concept of shared sovereignty takes into account the fact that, in Georgia, the Georgians as an ethnic group constitute only one nationality among others. The fact that they constitute the largest majority of the population (nearly 70%) does not preclude the necessity – as demonstrated in the contributions from Tinatin Kidasheli and Natella Akaba – for them to search for appropriate forms of power-sharing with other nationalities. In that respect, the principle of shared sovereignty differs from the idea that forms of autonomy are "to be granted" by the centre, and also from the idea that Georgia or Abkhazia would each keep their full sovereignty in a Common State, where all decisions have to be taken by consensus and in which neither of the parties may limit the exercise of sovereignty by the other. Shared sovereignty in this sense requires a more complex form of political cohabitation, as is demonstrated in the contributions on concrete experiences of federal practice elsewhere.

Western experiences in political or cultural autonomy – in the Åland Islands in Finland, for example⁽⁵⁾ – should not, however, be dismissed simply because of the negative connotations this concept took on in Soviet times. These experiences are indeed relevant to the search for a political settlement for Georgia and Abkhazia. As Viacheslav Chirikba writes in his chapter, legal limitations on the right of domicile in the Åland Islands – a notable exception in the European Union to the general principle of the free circulation of persons – could be an interesting mechanism for controlling migration in Abkhazia. The right of domicile in the Åland Islands is possessed by all children whose father or mother have possessed such a right. Finnish citizens may be given the right of domicile if they have lived there for five years and have adequate knowledge of Swedish.⁽⁶⁾ In that respect, the differences between multilingual Abkhazia and the monolingual Åland Islands would have to be taken into consideration, if this way of limiting the right to immigration for the population of the same State were introduced in Abkhazia: the official teaching language in the Åland Islands is exclusively Swedish, whereas Abkhazia, with its long history of accommodating different nationalities, has traditionally offered education in Abkhazian, Georgian, Armenian and Russian.

It may be difficult, in the Caucasus in general and in the Georgian-Abkhazian case in particular, to reach a consensus on lasting integrative political agreements. The co-editing of such a book by Georgian and Abkhazian scholars proves, however, that it is not too difficult to develop a co-operative academic framework in that region. Outsiders to the conflict can help by acting as the scientific facilitators of such co-operation. Thomas Fleiner from the Institute of Federalism in the University of Fribourg invited the Abkhazian and Georgian co-editors of this book to his home town, to familiarise themselves with the relations between the French-speaking and German-speaking communities of the Kanton/Canton of Freiburg/Fribourg. Here, traditions of cohabitation affect, amongst other things, the use of languages in administrative affairs, educational policies, and the organisation of the court system. This visit took place in March 1998, and reports by the travellers, Natella Akaba and David Darchiashvili, have been included in this book.

Akaba and Darchiashvili agree that any institutional solution to the dispute must be able to rule out the subordination or exclusion of an ethnic minority by the majority. They stress that the stability of the Swiss federal model is largely due to a historically unique political culture in which political leaders generally avoid speaking in terms of "majorities" and "minorities". Although such an attitude is not often observed in other federal structures, conflictual relations may be regulated by other means. Strong veto rights and coalition governments are among the mechanisms that can secure equal protection for ethnic minorities. From a federalist perspective, the State should be seen not as an instrument for the self-fulfilment of a particular ethnic group but – and this is one of the principal lessons of the Swiss example – as a guarantor of equal protection and liberty. Akaba points out that the Swiss example shows that the existence of a community which consists of a large majority of the population (64% of the Swiss population is German-speaking) does not prevent active political participation by the other communities, with equal rights. She

criticizes the fact that the non-Georgian population is virtually not represented in the Georgian political establishment, which does not make the latter an attractive partner. The question of whether a State should be the State of a so-called "titular nation", which gives its name to the entire country, is raised in the two Abkhazian contributions, in the context of a name for a common State and its citizens. Switzerland is held up as a good example of how an ethnically neutral name can be used. This point is also mentioned in some of the other contributions. It remains to be seen to what extent the democratisation of Abkhazian political structures – which would permit the return of the Georgian refugees to their homes and protect their full citizenship rights – would go beyond the Soviet tradition of ethno-federalism, in which a particular nation (the "titular" nation) was granted exclusive political privileges. The attempt by the political leadership of Tatarstan to forge a nation out of a multinational community – analysed in this volume by Alexei Zverev – is particularly interesting in this respect.

Russian federalism has peculiar characteristics which are relevant to the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict, and not only in relation to their shared czarist and Soviet past. Russian federalism is based partly on national areas (like Belgium or Spain) and partly on areas without any ethnic significance (like Germany or the USA). This type of asymmetrical federalism is discussed in most projects on the federalisation of Georgia or on the constitution of a Common State. The existence of treaty relations between the centre and the periphery gives Russian federalism some specific features, which are extensively analysed in the contribution from Nikolay Petrov and Alexei Zverev, and which are of particular importance for a future peace agreement between Georgia and Abkhazia. Neither Georgians nor Abkhazians hold Russian federalism in high esteem – they are too well aware of the many weaknesses of the present federal institutions in Russia. The Russian Federation is, however, the only one of the Soviet Union's successor States to have seriously attempted to rebuild its statehood and nationhood with the help of the federalist idea. As Zverev demonstrates in his paper, Russia, which was built up through centuries of imperial expansion, has no alternative to federalism if it wants to preserve a unified framework using democratic means, despite its regional and ethnic diversity. In assessing the chances of success for a federalist strategy in Georgia and Abkhazia, it is of primary importance to analyse the difficulty of achieving such unity through federalism.

The main issue in the discussions between Georgians and Abkhazians is probably the principle of equality between ethnic communities. The Abkhazian political leadership favours a confederal solution, in which Abkhazians and Georgians would retain sovereign State structures. This, in their view, would be the most viable solution to the difficult question of co-existence. As they see it, a confederation would further guarantee the international recognition of Abkhazia as a sovereign State and a subject in international law, thereby avoiding the problems attached to setting up the complicated joint decision-making procedures or common legislative bodies required by federations. A confederation would be based on the principle of consensus between the two parties, and would not involve any limitation on Abkhazian sovereignty. It is often stressed, on the Abkhazian side, that all concrete experiences of federalism in Europe may therefore have only a limited value for Abkhazia. In the Georgian view, on the other hand, a federation would guarantee the territorial integrity and unity of the State, acknowledge the right to autonomy of the Abkhazian people and preserve the right of the central government to be recognised as the state's representative on the international scene. From the Georgian perspective, the modern world provides plenty of examples of arrangements that could be appropriate in the Georgian-Abkhazian case. In the debate between the two parties, the lack of present-day experiences of confederal governance is taken by some as an argument against the viability of this type of federal practice. In her contribution, Xiaokun Song argues that the idea of a confederation should not be understood as a negative utopia. It may be regarded as a kind of State structure which has proven in the past to be capable of integrating sovereign State units successfully, for example in the Netherlands or Switzerland. Its relevance, however, is not confined to the past. In the present day, the integration process that has led to the creation of the European Union shows a number of similarities with confederal types of governance.

The distinction between a confederation and a federation is real and should not be underestimated, but it should be understood that the differences between them have lost much of their edge since the Dutch and Swiss forms of confederations disappeared. Both types of federal States may, to a different degree, give

substantial guarantees concerning basic principles and rights which are felt by the conflicting parties to be important – such as the principle of equality between the national communities, the right of self-determination or the principle of territorial integrity. Two contributions to this volume discuss the alternative between confederation and federation in the Georgian-Abkhazian context. Uwe Leonardy, in his chapter on "Treaty-Making Powers and Foreign Relations of Federated Entities", rejects the possibility of considering confederations as stable State structures. They should be seen only as transitory forms of statehood, leading either to a breaking up of the confederation into its constituent States or to the creation of a stronger unit through a federal arrangement. His presentation on the foreign policies of federated States shows, however, that the principles of federalism tend to be applied in progressively more radical forms. In federal States, traditional monopolies of central government are being eroded in favour of greater self-rule and shared sovereignty. Sub-central units are gradually claiming more rights in their conduct of independent foreign policies. They also tend to claim more rights in making international treaties. This trend has been observed in Belgium and Canada, for example. From this perspective, the concern for equality emphasised by the Abkhazians is apparent in existing federal arrangements.

Viacheslav Chirikba, who represents the Abkhazian authorities in Western Europe, acknowledges that Abkhazia has so far failed to gain recognition on the international scene as an independent State. Nor – owing to the present opposition from the Georgian side – does he consider it realistic to insist on a confederal arrangement. He proposes a kind of federative arrangement with both federal and confederal features (a combination of "confederal principles in its internal structure with federal principles in what concerns its international political and legal status"), and in which the principles of equality and non-intervention in internal affairs between the federated States are respected. He carefully selects different institutional mechanisms from States that have implemented either a federal model (like Belgium, as a result of a regionalisation process) or a model of autonomy (like Finland, as regards the Åland Islands). Using these mechanisms, he drafts a proposal for a Common State which comes quite close to the official Abkhazian view without being fully confederal. Unlike a confederation, in which the constituent States remain recognised as fully sovereign on the international scene, the "Common State" would – in Chirikba's model – retain some exclusive powers and preserve the territorial integrity of the former Georgian SSR within its borders of 1991. Renaming "Georgia" as the "Union Republic of Georgia" – demonstrating that the Common State does not belong solely to the Georgian ethnic majority – could be seen as another step that might be agreed to by both parties. It could be said that Chirikba is taking quite literally the statements by the Georgian Head of State, Eduard Shevardnadze, that Georgia was ready to accept the most extensive rights of federated States that may be found in the modern world. This is probably a positive sign. A discussion on the basis of existing legal precedents could be fruitful in discussing a compromise between the two parties.

The chapter by Gocha Lordkipanidze on federal practice in foreign policy resulted from a research trip to Brussels in March 1999, at the invitation of the Flemish Community. The Belgian federal model may be interesting for the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict insofar as it has to a large extent succeeded in avoiding hierarchical forms of policy-making. The Flemish and Francophone communities still disagree on quite substantial issues to do with further state reform in Belgium, but both are relatively satisfied with the present federalisation of foreign policy mechanisms. Other European models for foreign relations in federations are also of interest for the Georgian-Abkhazian case. Some reflections on the German experience of foreign policy making in federated states are included in Gocha Lordkipanidze's contribution, which makes a number of recommendations for a federalisation of foreign policy in a future Common State.

One of the main characteristics – and difficulties – of renewed Georgian-Abkhazian cohabitation is the fact that before the war the greater part of Abkhazian territory was inhabited by mixed populations, whereas the representatives of both the Georgian and the Abkhazian communities have been claiming a dominant position in the political structures. A return of the Georgian refugees and their political representatives could lead to increased tensions and open conflicts in these territories. In order to solve this problem, some have suggested having separate territories and institutions for the Georgian and Abkhazian communities inside Abkhazia. The contribution from Ivlian Haindrava starts out from the

presupposition that the degree of confrontation between Georgians and Abkhazians is so great that it will be next to impossible for them to cohabit in the immediate future. In his perception, many of them simply do not wish to live together. Haindrava proposes that Abkhazia should be divided into two parts. The capital, Sukhum(i), would itself be divided. In the part west of Sukhum(i), 30,000 out of the 240,000 Georgians were living before the war. If they returned – and according to Haindrava all minorities would receive guarantees that they could keep their homes irrespective of the area in which they lived – they would constitute only 12% of the population. In this part, which would be called the Abkhazian Republic, the Abkhazians would have the opportunity for self-determination and self-government, but the Republic would remain part of Georgia. East of Sukhum(i), the 210,000 Georgians who lived there before the 1992 war would form an absolute majority. This territory would constitute one of the regions of Georgia and would be named the "Abkhazian Region". One of the main problems with this proposal is that a large part of the Abkhazian population – 39,000 Abkhazians out of 93,000, according to Haindrava's figures – were living in this part of Abkhazia before the war. These would then have to cohabit with the Georgian population or move westwards, whereas Haindrava's view of a territorial division is based on the presupposition that cohabitation would be impossible in the medium term, and also on the presupposition that any form of forced resettlement is unacceptable. This contradiction cannot easily be resolved, but his discussion of a territorial redivision of Abkhazia remains very interesting. The Gal(i) region is populated almost exclusively by Georgians, who may choose to secede from Abkhazia if the degree of sovereignty given to Abkhazia in a peace plan seems unacceptable to them. The principle of territorial redivision may play a role in future negotiations, even if the dividing line proposed by Haindrava would hardly be the one agreed on during peace negotiations.

The contribution by Theo Jans analyses an alternative to territorial division. He proposes the use of a mixed system, such as the one existing in Belgium. In this system, institutions dealing with issues that are directly linked to the territory (transport or the economy, for instance) coexist with institutions that manage all matters not linked to the territory but that concern the interests and identity of ethnic groups (culture or education, for instance). In Belgium, the institutions based on the territorial principle are called regions, while the institutions designed to deal with extra-territorial affairs are called communities. In the case of Belgium, the multiplication of the various levels of government has led to the separate management of the affairs of the three communities (French, Flemish and German) and of the three regions (Brussels, Flanders and Wallonia). This complex system of government makes the cohabitation of two ethnic groups possible on particular territories, like Brussels. Theo Jans discusses the potential but also the limitations such a model would have if it were implemented in Abkhazia. He considers the possibility of extending the model, which was originally designed in Belgium for a bipolar conflict situation, to more than two ethnic groups. The contributions by Ivlian Haindrava and Theo Jans follow an opposing logic, but they could to a certain extent be combined in the search for a practical solution to the problems posed by the return of the refugees to Abkhazia and the political status of Georgia and Abkhazia within a Common State.

The Georgian-Abkhazian negotiations have not advanced beyond the stage of "negotiations about negotiations",⁽⁷⁾ in which questions to do with launching the negotiations on political status itself have not yet been cleared up. The Georgian side, for instance, has demanded that such negotiations should involve the political representatives of the Georgian refugees, which is rejected by the Abkhazian authorities. The latter, for their part, are demanding that the economic sanctions imposed by Georgia, Russia and the CIS must be lifted before serious negotiations on political status can be undertaken. The present book reflects on the limits of this preparatory stage in the negotiations. The contributions from the Georgian and Abkhazian authors do not depict the concrete functioning of stable institutional arrangements, but focus on some basic principles which, in their view, have to be taken into account when constructing such alternatives. The success of a future Common State depends on a number of factors, such as, for instance, electoral procedures or mechanisms for joint decision-making, which are not discussed in this volume. It can only be hoped that this first joint effort to stimulate interest in Georgia and Abkhazia in political alternatives based on federal practice will be followed by others, which will be able to go further in analysing the conditions for viable political alternatives.

The international community has its own responsibility in finding a political solution to the conflict. Russia and the other members of the group known as the Friends of the Secretary-General on Georgia are participating directly in the mediation efforts being made by the United Nations. It is striking in this respect that, at the time of writing (March 1999), not one of these governments is making any significant effort to provide the minimal level of expertise on federal principles and techniques that is necessary for achieving an agreement on the principles of a Common State and – most importantly – its successful implementation. The many programmes sponsored by Western governments and institutions in this part of the world focus on the building of a civil society, the democratisation of political structures or the qualification of administrative personnel. Despite the fact that some of the "Friends of the Secretary-General" countries themselves have a federal character (the Russian Federation, the United States of America and the Federal Republic of Germany), or are themselves undergoing a radical transformation which is leading in this direction (the United Kingdom), none of them seems to take the universal nature of federal principles seriously enough to make it a substantial part of their aid programme to Georgia and Abkhazia. The Western "Friends" seem to have far more faith in military co-operation programmes under NATO's Partnership for Peace. The Georgian and Abkhazian leaderships may themselves be considered largely responsible for this indifference. The discussion on the federalisation of Georgia has made no significant progress since the new Georgian constitution came into force in 1995. The Abkhazian leadership has given no sign that they are ready to go beyond a confederal arrangement, so that any sharing of experiences with federal States may in fact be superfluous.

The Memorandum of 1 December 1993, signed by the Georgian and Abkhazian authorities, provided for the formation of an expert group which would make recommendations on the status of Abkhazia. It led to a "Declaration on measures for a political settlement of the Georgian/Abkhaz conflict" signed on 4 April 1994. At the time, members of the expert group were of the opinion that the lack of expertise in both delegations was one of the main problems in the negotiations.⁽⁸⁾ This group has not met since April 1994.⁽⁹⁾ It is doubtful whether there would be much point in reconstituting an expert group – composed exclusively of outsiders to the conflict – as a means of reactivating the negotiation process. It would make far more sense to give the Georgians and Abkhazians an opportunity to study, by themselves, the various aspects of federal practice, in order to build up, for themselves, the necessary knowledge on the conditions of political stability in federal systems. Co-operation between Georgian and Abkhaz scholars and civil servants in an international academic framework is a more worthwhile exercise.

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Notes

1. I would like to thank Viacheslav Chirikba, Nikolay Petrov, Xiaokun Song and Alexei Zverev for their comments on this introduction.
2. In 1989, the Abkhaz constituted 18% of the population of their autonomous republic.

3. In his report to the Security Council on 25 April 1997 concerning the situation in Abkhazia, the UN Secretary-General stressed that the UN appreciated the efforts of non-governmental organisations and research institutions to "discuss problems of common interest, with a view to facilitating progress towards the political settlement of the conflict" (II,6).
4. Bruno Coppieters, Ghia Nodia and Yuri Anchabadze, *Georgians and Abkhazians. The Search for a Peace Settlement*, Sonderveröffentlichung des Bundesinstituts für Ostwissenschaftliche und Internationale Studien, Oktober 1998. The Russian version has been published under the title *Gruziny i abkhazy. Put k primirenyu* by Ves Mir, Moscow, 1998. Both publications are available on the WWW as a double issue of the electronic journal *Caucasian Regional Studies*, Vol. 3, 1998, Nos 2 & 3: <http://poli.vub.ac.be/>
5. Lars Ingmar Johansson writes that the autonomy of the Åland Islands cannot be regarded as being granted by a central government. In that respect it differs from those autonomy systems that are based on unilateral commitments from the centre. The Autonomy Act of Åland can only be altered or repealed if the Parliaments of Finland and Åland reach concurrent decisions, which have to be adopted according to specific procedures, including a qualified 2/3 majority of the Åland parliament. See Lars Ingmar Johansson, 'The Autonomy of Åland - Background and Present Situation', in: *The Åland Islands. Demilitarized Region*, Ålands Fredsförening, Mariehamn, 1995, p. 38.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 36.
7. On the notion of "negotiations about negotiations" in the Georgian-Abkhazian context see Maarten Theo Jans, 'Theory and Experiences of Ethnonational Conflict Regulation: Their Relevance to the Georgian-Abkhazian Conflict', in: Coppieters, Nodia and Anchabadze (eds), *Georgians and Abkhazians, op. cit.*, p. 138.
8. Ségolène Adam, *Le rôle de l'ONU dans la gestion du conflit en Abkhazie (Géorgie)*, étude manuscrite pour l'Institut Universitaire de Hautes Etudes Internationales (Genève), avril 1997, p.17.
9. *Ibid.*, p.18.