

THE SOUTH OSSETIAN-GEORGIAN
CONFLICT: 1990-2008

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ABSTRACT

THE SOUTH OSSETIAN-GEORGIAN CONFLICT: 1990-2008

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This thesis deals with the South Ossetian- Georgian conflict and its internationalization especially since the Rose revolution in Georgia in 2003. The main objective of the thesis is to examine the changes in the rivalry between Russia and the United States over the Caucasus and their effects on the relations between Georgia and the South Ossetia. The thesis argues that the development of the conflict between Georgia and the South Ossetia has been shaped by the changes in the level of involvement by Russia and the United States rather than the bilateral relations between Tbilisi and Tskhinvali. Thus, international and systematic factors are more determining than local dynamics of this conflict.

The thesis has six chapters, including the introduction and conclusion chapters. After the introduction, the second chapter examines the ethnic origins of the Ossetians and the Georgians as well as historical background of their relations. The third chapter analyzes the sources of the conflict and the 1991-1992 war between Georgia and the South Ossetia. The fourth chapter discusses the 2003 Rose revolution in Georgia and its affects on Georgia's relations with the Western powers, namely the United States and the European Union. The fifth chapter examines the worsening relations between Russia and Georgia after the Rose revolution as well as the Russian-Georgian War in 2008 with its international consequences.

Keywords: Georgia, South Ossetia, Russia, South Caucasus, Conflict

ÖZ

GÜNEY OSET-GÜRCÜ ÇATIŞMASI: 1990-2008

Bora, Aslı

Yüksek Lisans, Avrasya Çalışmaları Bölümü

Tez Yöneticisi: Doç. Dr. Oktay F. Tanrısever

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Bu tez Gürcü-Güney Oset çatışmasını ve bunun özellikle Gürcistan'daki 2003 Gül Devrimi'nden sonra uluslararasılaştırılmasını ele almaktadır. Tezin temel amacı, Rusya ve Birleşik Devletler'in Kafkasya rekabetindeki değişimleri ve bunların Gürcistan ve Güney Osetya arasındaki ilişkilere olan etkisini incelemektir. Tez, Gürcistan ve Güney Osetya arasındaki çatışmanın gelişiminin Tiflis ile Şinvali arasındaki ikili ilişkilerden ziyade Rusya ve Birleşik Devletlerin müdahale düzeyindeki değişiklikler tarafından şekillendirildiğini iddia etmektedir. Dolayısıyla, bu çatışmada uluslararası ve sistematik faktörler yerel etmenlerden daha belirleyicidir.

Giriş ve sonuç bölümleri dâhil olmak üzere, tez altı bölümden oluşmaktadır. Giriş kısmından sonraki ikinci bölüm, Osetlerin ve Gürcülerin etnik kökenlerini ve aralarındaki ilişkinin tarihsel arka planını incelemektedir. Üçüncü bölüm, çatışmanın ve Gürcistan ile Güney Osetya arasındaki 1991-1992 savaşının sebeplerinin analizini yapmaktadır. Dördüncü bölüm Gürcistan'daki 2003 Gül devrimini ve bunun Gürcistan'ın Batılı güçlerle, Birleşik Devletler ve Avrupa Birliği ile, olan ilişkilerine etkilerini tartışmaktadır. Beşinci bölüm ise, Rusya ve Gürcistan'ın Gül devriminden sonra bozulan ilişkilerini ve 2008 Rus-Gürcü savaşı ile sonuçlarını incelemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Gürcistan, Güney Osetya, Rusya, Güney Kafkasya, Çatışma

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ASSR	Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic
BoP	Balance of Power
BTC	Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan
CEC	Central Election Commission
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CSCE	Conference for Security and Co-operation in Europe
CUG	Citizens' Union of Georgia
EU	European Union
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
IMF	International Monetary Foundation
ISFAD	International Society for Fair Elections
JCC	Joint Control Commission
JPKF	Joint Peacekeeping Force
MVD	Ministry for Internal Affairs
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
SFR	Socialist Federative Republic
SSR	Soviet Socialist Republic
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

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CHAPTER

I. INTRODUCTION

The South Ossetia was an autonomous *oblast* (province) within the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) during the Soviet era while its kin in the north, the North Ossetia, enjoyed autonomous republic status within the Russian SFSR. On account of the rising of the Georgian nationalism in the late 1980s, the South Ossetia began to seek secession from Tbilisi. But the fundamental discourse and implementations of Tbilisi government increased the tensions in the region and finally ended with a bloody ethnic war which lasted nearly two years between 1991 and 1992.

After Sochi Agreement, signed in 1992, which ended the conflict, the South Ossetia declared its independence and since then it has *de facto* independence from Georgia. South Ossetians have their own execution, legislation and judicial bodies. The economic situation and prospect of the region is not bright. Due to the poor agricultural and industrial activities in the region, the very source of revenue for many Ossetians is smuggling activities. They depend on the Russian aid and contraband coming from the other side of the border. Russia also granted South Ossetians Russian citizenship which strengthened Ossetians' loyalty and sense of belonging to Russia.¹

This little territory, about 3,900 km², which is located in the northern part of Georgia, witnessed a small scale war in August 2008 between Georgia and Russia. Importance of this war was that the Russian troops directly involved in an ethnic war in a former Soviet republic for the first time. Russian involvement brought many questions and views for the analysts.

¹ Daan van der Schriek, "Made in Russia, Smuggled in South Ossetia", *Transitions Online*, 09. January 2003.

The 2008 war showed that the South Ossetia problem became the apparent conflict of power struggle between Moscow and the West rather than a regional conflict between Tbilisi government and the South Ossetian authorities in Tskhinvali.² Improving Western influence in Georgia, resurgence of the Russian power, and the struggle to gain the control of this strategically important region paved the way the war in South Ossetia. This study reveals the importance of the international factors which were more effective than the local ones in the last war in the South Ossetia.

This thesis examines the relations of Georgia and its disputed *de facto* independent region the South Ossetia in the context of historical and political developments with a criticizing approach. It also analyzes the Russian presence and influence in the region after the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and its affects on bilateral relations between Georgia and Russia. The thesis also focuses on Georgia's relations with the West and the recent political developments in Georgia.

Georgia has gradually conducted closer relations with the West in the last decade. Economic and military relations that have begun to evolve in Eduard Shevardnadze's presidency reached its peak with Mikheil Saakashvili who came to power after the 'Rose Revolution' in 2003. Increase of the Western interests in the region encouraged Georgia to develop its relations with the West in accordance with its aspirations to integrate with the Euro-Atlantic institutions. On the other hand, increasing prices of oil and gas in the recent years facilitate Russia's economic restoration and helped Russia to become an important actor in the international politics. Russia's insurgence and determination to consolidate its authority in the former Soviet territory created an important obstacle for Georgian aims to join in the Western alliance.

Georgia became a focus for the Western governments, which assess the strategic location of the country as a crossroad for the transportation of the Caspian energy resources to Europe and international markets, after mid 1990s. Political and economic

² Tracey C. German, "Visibly Invisible: EU Engagement in Conflict Resolution in the South Caucasus", *European Security*, vol.16, nos.3-4, p. 363.

relations began to improve since then; however, Georgia, and its internal problems, never became a priority for the Western politics. Moreover, the West is seemed to accept Russia's superiority in the region.³ Thus, Tbilisi was left confronting with Moscow by the West when a dispute emerged between two countries.

It is obvious that Russia has been disturbed with the increasing influence of the West, particularly NATO, in the region. On the one hand, this situation has been effecting the bilateral relations of Russia and Georgia in the recent years. On the other hand, the pipelines transporting Caspian oil and gas to Europe through Georgia and by-passing Russia were conceived by Moscow as West's endeavor to diminish Russia's monopoly on energy supply in the region. Moreover, personal hatred of Russian president Vladimir Putin to his pro-Western Georgian counterpart Saakashvili⁴ caused the rise of the tensions between two countries. To bring to heel Georgia, Russia has two important sanctions: Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the breakaway regions of Georgia. The influence of Moscow over these enclaves can not be ignored.

The thesis argues that the Georgian policies through the South Ossetia change parallel to its relations with Moscow and the West. The power struggle between the West and Russia to gain the control of the region is decisive in the last conflict. Russia has been using its influence in the South Ossetia and Abkhazia to prevent Georgia from joining NATO. The study also indicates Russian involvement in Georgian-South Ossetian conflict and Russia's policy to maintain its presence in Georgia in the name of monitoring and moderating the peace process. It finally examines the last war known as the South Ossetia war between Georgia and Russia in August 2008 as well as its reflection in the international arena.

³ Nona Mikhelidze, "After the 2008 Russia-Georgia War: Implications for the Wider Caucasus", *The International Spectator*, 2009, vol.3, no.27, p. 37.

⁴A Scripted War, *The Economist*, 14 August 2008, http://www.economist.com/world/international/displaystory.cfm?story_id=11920992, accessed on 14 May 2009.

There is no doubt that the Rose Revolution remarks a turning point in Georgia's political life. The very priority of the Georgian government is to become a member of NATO to guarantee its regional security against Russia and to consolidate its territorial integrity which has been a frozen dispute since early 1990s, after a series of ethnic conflicts between Georgia and South Ossetia, as well Abkhazia. Despite cease-fire agreements and monitoring activities to maintain the peace, tensions have been high between Georgia and its secessionist regions. The situation in the region is described as frozen conflict by the Western analysts.⁵

With the increasing support of the West, president Saakashvili enabled to implement comprehensive policies in the name of democratization. Georgia also attempted to incorporate its breakaway regions, particularly South Ossetia, with economic and democratic pledges in vain. The South Ossetia never directly interacted with Tbilisi since 1992; instead it has aspirations to join the Russian Federation, where their kin North Ossetians reside, since 1990 when they first petitioned to Moscow to join the Russian SSR. Russia has also stated its sympathy for the South Ossetia since the independence of Kosovo in 2006.⁶

However, Russia also has been developing its relations with the West since its energy sources gained great importance for Europe. Russian gas and oil have been exported to Europe through the pipelines. Its energy sources also helped Russia to become an important actor in the international arena due to the increasing oil prices. Russia has been conducting negotiations with the European Union (EU) on 'strategic partnership' and with NATO despite a number of problems occurred due to the enlargement process of the organization in former Soviet territories.

Both Russian and the Western governments including U.S. have interests in Georgia due to its strategic location as a crossroad between the Caspian region and Europe. The

⁵ Sir Brian Fall, Conflict in the South Caucasus, *Asian Affairs*, Vol. 37, No.2, July 2006, p. 201.

⁶ Adam Ward, Georgian-Ossetian Conflict, *Strategic Comments*, Vol.12, No.3, p. 1.

pipelines bypassing Russia and passing through Georgia are alternative energy routes to Russian oil and gas; thus, Georgia's strategic location has great importance for the Western markets. This situation also causes a power struggle between the West and Russia to gain the dominance over the region. Damien Helly and Giorgi Gogia mention that the hawkish analysts in both the West and Russia are defending that the region should be recognized in their own sphere of influence. Thus, Georgia is one of the countries in the world where Russian and the Western interests are in direct competition.⁷

Despite NATO's intention to incorporate Georgia, it refrains from provoking the reaction of Russia which accepts the region as its backyard. It can be argued that Russia is one of the main reasons behind the postponement of Georgia's membership to NATO, as well as Ukraine's membership. However, as Charles King mentions, Russia's aspiration is to maintain its presence and influence in the region that it secured throughout the 1990s. Moscow made its goal clear with its intervention to the last war occurred in the South Ossetia in 2008. King argues that the war indicates a new era in which Russia ignored international norms and began to create its own.⁸ Similarly, Sergei Markedonov argues that Yalta-Potsdam model which has shaped international politics since the end of the World War II has ended when Kosovo was recognized as a sovereign country. And now, Russia is acting according to the new model of its own since the old standards of international law do not exist anymore.⁹

However, Russia's intervention to Georgia did not only stem from its aspirations to keep the region in its hegemony, but also its intention to protect South Ossetian civilians from Georgian occupation. Georgia tried to seize the South Ossetia for three times by using force. Neither in 1991 nor in 2004 and 2008, could Tbilisi get the control over its

⁷ Damien Helly and Giorgi Gogia, "Georgian Security and the Role of the West", in Bruno Coppieters and Robert Legvold, eds., *Statehood and Security: Georgia After Rose Revolution*, Cambridge Mass.: American Academy of Arts and Sciences: MIT Press, 2005, p. 283.

⁸ Charles King, "The Five-Day War", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 87, No.6, November/December 2008, pp. 2-11.

⁹ Sergei Markedonov, "The "Five-Day War": Preliminary Results and Consequences", *Russian Politics and Law*, vol.47, no.3, May-June 2009, p. 75.

secessionist region thanks to the poor planned operations, disability of Georgian army and finally Russian involvement to the conflicts.

Oksana Antonenko argues that the war in the South Ossetia is the result of Georgia's intention to incorporate the South Ossetia by using force. She claims that Georgia was preparing to a war for months before the war broke out in August. Despite Russia's repeated and open warnings to intervene in case of a conflict in the region, Georgian army attacked the South Ossetia and paved the way to Russian intervention to protect South Ossetians most of whom got Russian passports therefore described as Russian citizens by Moscow.¹⁰

The possibility of Russian intervention to a potential Georgian attack on the South Ossetia was low for Georgian authorities; moreover, President Saakashvili overtrusted his Western counterparts to line up with him on incorporating the South Ossetia for integrity of Georgia.¹¹ Despite its support for Georgia's territorial integrity, the West stayed impartial to the problem after the war broke out and did not imply any sanctions and was contented with denouncing Russia. In the end, Georgia lost its chance to incorporate the South Ossetia politically and territorially in the long term. It was also criticized by the Western authorities and lost its credibility as it caused a crisis in the region.¹²

This thesis examines the South Ossetian-Georgian conflict from neorealist theory of the international relations. The thesis argues that neorealist theory provides a proper point of view for analyzing the conflict between Georgia and its *de facto* independent region, South Ossetia. The issue was analyzed in a systematic dimension of the theory which emphasizes 'anarchy' and 'balance of power' in the international relations.

¹⁰ Oksana Antonenko, "A War with No Winners", *Survival*, Vol.50, No.5, October 2008, pp. 23-36.

¹¹ Kimitaka Matsuzato, "The Five Day War and Transnational Politics", *Demokratizatsiya*, Vol. 17, No. 3, Summer 2009, p. 236.

¹² Oksana Antonenko, "A War with No Winners", *Survival*, Vol.50, No.5, October 2008, p. 24.

Main argument of the neorealist theory is that the international system is characterized by anarchy, lack of a superior power over states. In this anarchical system, the main aim of the states is to maintain their existence; thus their actions are determined to ensure their survival.¹³ According to Kenneth N. Waltz, one of the founders of the neorealist theory, there is no effective authority over the states in the international system; in other words, the international system has no hierarchical structure like states have within their national systems. In this anarchical structure, there is a lack of trust and even hostility among the states since they can not predict behaviors and intentions of one another. Hence, the states want to assure their security which is a prerequisite for their survival and achieving other goals. This basic instinct to obtain their existence effects states' behavior to bolster their military capabilities and increase their relative power.¹⁴

According to Waltz, states are free in their actions until a more powerful state limits their acts by using military power. States' desire and capacity to increase their relative power, as much as they can, restrict the actions of the others. As a result of this behavior, a 'balance of power' (BoP) emerges among the states which shapes international relations. BoP is a central concept in neorealist theory. The aim of the BoP is to prevent any one state from becoming as strong so as to be able to enforce its bidding over other states. Thus, BoP requires equilibrium or stability between the challenging actors. Waltz also emphasizes that any change in international structure is determined by the relations and interactions of the principle states, which he refers to the great powers.¹⁵ Great powers are differentiated from the other states with their combined capabilities or power they have control over. Any change in their capacities reflects in the outcomes of their relations with others.¹⁶

¹³ Joseph S. Nye, jr., "Neorealism and Neoliberalism", *World Politics*, Vol. 40, No. 2, January 1988, p.163.

¹⁴ Kenneth N. Waltz, "The Origins of War in Neorealist Theory", *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. 18, No. 4, Spring 1988, p. 619.

¹⁵ Kenneth N. Waltz, "The Origins of War in Neorealist Theory", *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. 18, No. 4, Spring 1988, p. 622.

¹⁶ Kenneth N. Waltz, "Realist Thought and Neorealist Theory", *Journal of International Affairs*, Spring/Summer90, Vol. 44 Issue 1, p. 30.

In the light of these information about the theory, it can be argued that the emergence and development of the South Ossetian-Georgian conflict and the 2008 War can be best understand with the aspects of neorealist theory which emphasizes on the role of relative power of states on their behaviors in the international system.

It is important to look at historical developments of Georgia to understand present conflicts. Therefore the second chapter focuses on the historical background of Georgians and South Ossetians. The chapter analyzes the origins of these ethnic groups and examines the interaction between them from middle ages to the independence of Georgia. It is also important to enlighten Georgian-Ossetian dispute over the South Ossetians' status as a titular nation of the region. Many Georgian historians argued that South Ossetians arrived in the region about three centuries ago. This argument was also basis of the political statements of Zviad Gamsakhurdia, the first president of Georgia, who described South Ossetians as newcomers¹⁷ and offered to expel all Ossetians from Georgian land.

The third chapter of the thesis focuses on the sources of the conflict and the first war between Georgians and South Ossetians in 1991. It also examines the Russian military presence in the region following the cease-fire agreement. The war that broke out in the early 1990s is a turning point for Georgian-South Ossetian conflict and the source of hatred among the people. The war caused hundreds of deaths from both sides as well as displacement of thousands of people from their homes. Moreover, it ended in Tbilisi's political and economic control over the South Ossetia and heightened Russian influence in the breakaway region as well as in Georgian foreign policy. The second chapter also concludes Shevardnadze's presidency and Georgia's domestic policies.

The fourth chapter of the thesis examines the Rose Revolution, which is an important political movement for Georgian history. Shevardnadze's ouster and the change of government also indicated a new era for Georgia in its domestic and foreign affairs. This is also an important turning point for relations of Georgia and Russia since the obvious

¹⁷ Svante E. Cornell, *Autonomy and Conflict: Ethnoterritoriality and Separatism in the South Caucasus – Cases in Georgia*, Uppsala, Uppsala University, 2002, p.162.

intention of the new president Saakashvili to incorporate his country into the Western alliance. The chapter compares Saakashvili's commitments for democracy and his implementations in this framework. The chapter also focuses on minority policies of Saakashvili government that endeavors to incorporate ethnic entities and consolidate territorial and political unification of the country. Finally, the chapter analyzes the relations between the West and Georgia after its independence in 1991.

The fifth chapter of the thesis focuses on the 2008 War of South Ossetia. It examines the recent developments in the region and Russia's growing intervention and role in the increasing tensions within Georgia. The chapter analyses the developments during the war, the reaction of the international actors and political consequences of the war. Lastly, the chapter cites humanitarian dimension of the war, the cease-fire and finally, Moscow's recognition of *de facto* governments of the South Ossetia and Abkhazia in August 2008.

CHAPTER

II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

It is essential to examine the historical background of the South Ossetia and the sources of the conflict to understand the Ossetian problem in Georgia. The claims of both sides can be understood best by a research of the residents of the region, their actions in the past and their relations with each other. The aim of this chapter is to show to which extent the Ossetian claims to be the titular people of the region are accurate and to analyze their political existence under other nations' rule. The chapter also examines the history of Georgia which can not be thought as separate from Ossetia's.

2.1 Early History of the Ossetians and the Georgian Rule

We can find information on Ossetians' ancient history in the Byzantine records and the diaries of the itinerants. Ossetians had a distinct history until they become a subject to the Georgian landlords in the 14th century. Afterwards, Ossetian, specifically South Ossetian, history had been parallel to the Georgian history. Therefore the history of the Ossetians will be examined in two subheadings: the origins and the early history of the Ossetians, and the Georgian history after the 14th century.

Today Ossetians live predominantly in the southern Caucasus, a relatively small region, nearly 12,000 km² and the territory of the South Ossetia is about 3,900 km², well known for its wide variety of different nationalities and peoples.¹⁸ Majority of the modern day Ossetians live in North Ossetia which is today a part of the Russian Federation. There are also a significant number of the Ossetians living in the other parts of the world.

¹⁸ Nikola Cvetkovski, "The Georgian-South Ossetian Conflict", <http://www.caucasus.dk/chapter4.htm>, accessed on 17 May 2009.



Figure 1: Map of South Ossetia

Source: <http://thewallstreetshuffle.blogspot.com/2008/08/war-between-russia-and-southosseta.html>, accessed on 23 March 2009.

The widely accepted view among the scholars is that the Ossetians are originally descendents of the Alans, a nomadic Sarmatian tribe which is a branch of Iranian people. Ancestral homeland of the Alans, and thus the modern day Ossetians, was between the Don and Dnyeper rivers in the Northern Caucasus which is today in Russia.¹⁹ Yet another point of view claims that the Ossetians are a purely Arian people, which were enslaved and relocated to the region by the Iskits on their way back to the Caucasus.²⁰ But this view is considerably disputed due to the deficiency of the supporting arguments.

The name *Alan* appears in different sources with different forms. Alans called themselves *Asi* while Chinese records mentioned about Alan kingdom as *Alanliao*. On

¹⁹ Adolf Berje, *Kafkasyali Dagli Kavimlerin Kisa Tasviri*, Kafkas Derneği Yayinlari, Ankara, 1999.

²⁰ Ufuk Tavkul, *Kafkasya Gercegi*, Istanbul: Selenge, 2007, p.167.

the other hand, Romans called Alani land as *Aorsi*.²¹ The name *Alani* appears nearly at the same time in the chronicles of Roman and Chinese historians in the 1st century BC. The Alans were described as tall, good looking and warlike people.²² The root of the name Ossetian is the word *Osi* used by Georgians to mention Alans, afterwards this name was adopted by Russians too.

The Alans formed a kingdom in the second half of the first century AD between Black Sea and Caspian Sea; it was neighboring the Roman Empire to the west. According to the Roman historical records Alans were claimed to raid into Roman and Parthian territories. Alan kingdom was a considerable power in the North Caucasus.²³ About 200 AD, roughly a century after the establishment of their kingdom, the Alans had gained supremacy over other Sarmatian tribes and molded them into a great confederation. This confederation controlled the area between the Don and the Volga rivers. However, this confederation was short lived and was undone in the face of Hun attacks under the leadership of Balamber between 350 and 374, as a part of their expedition crossing to Europe in the 4th century.²⁴

Alans were subjugated to Georgian king Vahtang-Gurgaslan in 454 and became a part of Georgian kingdom. In the 8th century an Alan kingdom, Alania, emerged in modern day North Ossetia. This second Alan kingdom was a strong centralized monarchy around the capital Maghas whose location is not known today. Alans benefited from the trade on the ancient Silk Road. In 916 AD, the Ossetians became Christians under Byzantine influence. Orthodox Christianity became the primary religious belief with the influence of Georgian and Russian missionaries in the following centuries.²⁵

²¹“Alans”, <http://ossetians.com/eng/news.php?newsid=371&f=3>, accessed on 31 August 2009.

²² Agusti Alamony, *Sources on the Alans*, cited in <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alans> , accessed on 11 March 2009.

²³ “Alans”, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alans>, accessed on 31 August 2009.

²⁴ “Alans”, <http://ossetians.com/eng/news.php?newsid=371&f=3>, accessed on 31 August 2009.

²⁵ “Alans”, <http://ossetians.com/eng/news.php?newsid=371&f=3>, accessed on 31 August 2009.

After the Mongol invasion and rule in the region in the 13th century, the Alans migrated towards the Caucasus Mountains and formed three main entities in the region; these were Digor in the west, which converted to Islam by the influence of Kabardians, an east Circassian tribe, in the 17th century, Kudar in the south, today's South Ossetia, and Iron in the north which became North Ossetia. Iron dialect is the literary and written language of the Ossetian language.²⁶ According to Georgian analysts like Revaz Gachechiladze, Ossetians had arrived in modern day the South Ossetia in seventeenth and eighteenth century and welcomed by the Georgian landlords who then in need of cheap labor.²⁷ On the other hand, Glenn E. Curtis argues that the Ossetians arrived in the region in thirteenth century when they were driven by the Mongols from North Ossetia.²⁸ The latter argument is the most accepted view among scholars. After they arrived in the region, the South Ossetia became home for the Ossetians living in the south range of the Caucasus Mountains.

After Ossetian history, it is important to examine Georgian history as well. Modern day Georgians first appeared in the west of the country. The fleeing tribes from the Hittite Empire, destroyed by the Assyrian invaders estimated in 1200 BC, arrived in the southwestern Georgia and melted in and mixed with the local people. This first wave of Hittite immigrants and local ethnic people founded the Kingdom of Colchis in 600 BC. In the following centuries, other Hittite tribes arrived and settled in the east of the Surami Mountain Range in Shida Kartli region, the northern Georgia. They founded the Iberia Kingdom in around 300 BC.²⁹

²⁶“Alans”, <http://ossetians.com/eng/news.php?newsid=371&f=3>, accessed on 31 August 2009.

²⁷ Revaz Givievich Gachechiladze, *The New Georgia*, College Station, Texas A&M University Press, 1995, p.86.

²⁸ Glenn E. Curtis, *Georgia, A Country Study*, Washington, D.C.: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1995, p. 109.

²⁹ Suzanne Goldenberg, *Pride of Small Nations*, London, Atlantic Highlands, N.J., Zed Books, 1994, p. 13.

3rd century AD witnessed the struggle between Roman and Persian empires to dominate the region. Georgia became Christian in around 330 AD under the rule of Iberian king Mirian, they were converted to Eastern Orthodox rite. Georgian land was occupied by the Persian invaders in the 7th century.³⁰ The name Georgia appeared in the following centuries as a variation of a word used by the Iranian and Arab traders: Gurjistan. In the 11th century, in the reign of David the Builder, Georgia was taken under Byzantium wings and the two distant Georgian kingdoms were united. Afterwards, Georgia became an important power in the region.³¹

In the 13th century, Georgians established their great kingdom which reigned over more than twice the territory that Georgia covers today and expanded into the regions what are today Azerbaijan and Armenia.³² But the realm of the Georgian kingdom didn't stand long and Mongols caused the breakup of the state and emergence of two rival dynasties in the late 13th and early 14th centuries.³³ Georgia lost its strong position and importance of its trade routes. This was the time when Ossetians arrived in their present location on Georgian land after Mongols destroyed their kingdom, Alania, and became the subjects of Georgian feudal lords.

In the 15th century Georgia had already lost its power and much of its territory that it had in the thirteenth century. After the rule of Alexander I (1412-1442), the kingdom was divided into three kingdoms (Kartli, Kakheti and Imereti) and numerous principalities as a result of power struggle and conflict among Georgian nobles who wanted to establish their authority over the others. These hostilities continued for centuries and Georgia

³⁰ Ferdinand Joseph Maria Feldbrugge, Gerard Pieter van den Berg, William B. Simons, *Encyclopedia of Soviet Law*, Lancaster, Brill, 1985, p. 462.

³¹ Suzanne Goldenberg, *Pride of Small Nations*, London, Atlantic Highlands, N.J., Zed Books, 1994, p. 13.

³² Svante E. Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers*, Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2001, p.144.

³³ Suzanne Goldenberg, *Pride of Small Nations*, London, Atlantic Highlands, N.J., Zed Books, 1994, p. 14.

could not be united until it was annexed by the Russian Empire in the 19th century.³⁴ In the following years Georgian territory, fragmented by the hostilities among Georgians, became the focus of its Muslim neighbors. Cornell explains the situation of the region: “The regional order that developed in the following centuries left Georgia caught between the expanding Ottoman and Iranian empires. Little by little, Georgia came under the influence and rule of the Islamic empires.”³⁵ Ossetians shared the same fate as they lived on the land that was a part of Georgian territory.

Western Georgia fell under the domination of the Ottomans and the eastern Georgia became a part of Safavid Persia after the Peace of Amasa signed in 1555 between two empires.³⁶ But this balance of power between the two Islamic empires changed when another power emerged in the region. In the 18th century, Russia became an important power in the region and struggled with Ottoman and Persian empires for the domination of the south Caucasus. Russia’s main goal was to reach warm waters and thus the Caucasus was on her way to conquest. There were also Christian elements that were living in the region that can help Russia to capture the region.³⁷

In the middle of the 18th century, Georgia managed to regain some form of autonomy under the rule of Erekle II, who was *de facto* the only independent monarch of the Caucasian region in his time. As Georgia became relatively an autonomous player, it attracted the interest of the Russian Empire, which was increasingly looking southward in its quest for warm-water outlets.³⁸

³⁴ Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994, pp. 45-46.

³⁵ Svante E. Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers*, Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2001, p. 145.

³⁶ Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994, p. 48, cited in Berdzenishvili et al., *Istoriia Gruzii*, pp. 33-34.

³⁷ Suzanne Goldenberg, *Pride of Small Nations*, London, Atlantic Highlands, N.J., Zed Books, 1994, p. 18.

³⁸ Svante E. Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers*, Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2001, p.145.

Georgia tried to get Russian rulers' support against their Muslim sovereigns. Georgian requests for support were in accordance with Russian interests and provided Russia with an opportunity to begin the process of extending its influence into the region. Ossetians voluntarily joined the Russian Empire in 1774. In 1783 the Treaty of Georgievsk was signed between Russia and Georgia to recognize Russia's protectorate over Georgia. In 1795, Persians attacked Georgia because of its relations with Russia; however Russia didn't abide by its treaty obligations and did not help Georgia.³⁹

2.2 The Russian Imperial and Soviet Periods

Annexation of Georgia by Russia began in the early 19th century. In 1801, Russia annexed East Georgia. Afterwards Russia gained the control of other parts of Georgia gradually and extended its domination in Transcaucasia. In the following years, after a series of wars with the Ottoman and Persian empires, Russia occupied the whole region including North Azerbaijan and East Armenia. Annexation of Georgia was completed in 1878 and it entirely became a part of the Russian Empire until it declared its independence after the collapse of the tsarist rule in 1917. Following the 1917 Revolution in Russia, the end of the imperial rule and the establishment of Russian Provisional Government, Georgia declared its independence on 29 May 1918.⁴⁰

In the same year Georgian Democratic Republic was established within Transcaucasus Democratic Federation Commissariat which was installed by Russian Provisional Government in November 1917 to establish a united political authority in the region.⁴¹ The new Georgian republic was neighboring the Ottoman Empire and Democratic Republic of Armenia in the south, Azerbaijan Democratic Republic in the south east, and in the north Kuban People's Republic and Mountainous Republic of the Northern

³⁹ Suzanne Goldenberg, *Pride of Small Nations*, London, Atlantic Highlands, N.J., Zed Books, 1994, p.18.

⁴⁰ Annexation of Georgia in Russian Empire (1801- 1878), http://www.parliament.ge/pages/archive_en/history/his9.html, accessed on 19 May 2009.

⁴¹ Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994, p.191.

Caucasus, in which North Ossetia-Alania was a constituent part. Hence, the South Ossetia became a part of Georgia in 1918.⁴²

Meanwhile, a Bolshevik party, All-Union Communist Party was elected on 12 June 1919 in the First Congress of Bolshevik Organizations of South Ossetia. In the following months, several uprisings took place in the South Ossetia against Menshevik Georgian government. The tensions decreased after Bolsheviks gained the control of Tbilisi in 1921; afterwards South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast (AO) was established within Georgian SSR on 20 April 1922.⁴³ During this period, Moscow avoided joining the conflict directly, since Lenin did not want to disturb or endanger peace with Georgia. These clashes caused thousands of dead from both sides and bad memories among the peoples of the region.

In February 1921, Soviet Russia annexed Georgia by the Red Army and this was the end of the first Georgian Republic. In December 1922, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia were united within Transcaucasian Socialist Federated Soviet Socialist Republic which was the successor of the Transcaucasian Federative Republic.⁴⁴ On the other hand, the South Ossetia became a Soviet Autonomous Oblast within Georgian SSR on 20 April 1922 and its status did not change during the Soviet rule. The Transcaucasian SFR was dissolved in 1936 and Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan became separate republics within the Soviet Union.⁴⁵

After seventy years of Soviet rule, relations between the South Ossetia and Georgia began to sour following the unofficial emergence of Georgian nationalism. Charles King

⁴² “Democratic Republic of Georgia”, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democratic_Republic_of_Georgia, accessed on 31 August 2009.

⁴³ Tim Potier, *Conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia*, The Hague; Boston: Kluwer Law International, 2001, p. 13.

⁴⁴ Suzanne Goldenberg, *Pride of Small Nations*, London, Atlantic Highlands, N.J., Zed Books, 1994, pp. 37-38.

⁴⁵ Svante E. Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers*, Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2001, p. 151.

stresses that: “Despite strong intercultural ties between Georgians and Ossetians, the political climate of the late 1980s encouraged escalating and competing demands for local autonomy and independence.”⁴⁶ Tbilisi’s notion of perceiving minorities as “foreigners” caused apprehension among the non-Georgian population and led to separatist demands. Actually this ‘superiority’ of the Georgians had been felt in the republic, particularly in the last decade of the Soviet Union and was actually condoned and tolerated by Moscow.⁴⁷

However, in the years preceding the collapse of the Soviet Union, national movements and secessionist policies arose particularly in the Baltic States and the Caucasus. Thus Georgia with its multiethnic structure was not immune from these new developments and faced calls of independence and separatist demands from the minorities within its own territory. As a direct result of these competing claims Georgia drifted into turmoil and faced ethnic clashes in its mainly Ossetian and Abkhaz regions in late 1980s and the early years of its independence.

2.3 Independence of Georgia and Gamsakhurdia’s Reign

Independence and the first years of the Georgian Republic were shaped by policies and character of its first president, Zviad Gamsakhurdia. Gamsakhurdia was the son of a famous Georgian academician and writer Konstantin Gamsakhurdia. Influenced by his father, Zviad began his professional career as an academician in philology.

In the following years, he became an activist on human rights. He was the co-founder of Georgian Helsinki group with Merab Kostava, who became another important leader of the Georgian nationalist movement. By the end of 1980s, the rise of Georgian nationalism and anti-Soviet sentiments highlighted these dissidents and their popularity

⁴⁶ Charles King, *Ghost of Freedom*, Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 216.

⁴⁷ Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994, p. 318.

among Georgian society increased over the years. After Kostava's death in a car accident, Gamsakhurdia became the 'one man' of the opposition.

In 1990, Gamsakhurdia established his political party Round Table which welcomed and embraced various opposition groups and fractions against Georgian Communist Party. Wheatley points out that: "Round Table was an umbrella political organization, and was consisted of the Society of St. Ilya the Righteous, The Helsinki Union, The Monarchist-Conservative Party, The Merab Kostava Society and The Popular Front Radical Union."⁴⁸

In the last years of the Soviet Union, nationalist movements and separatist expressions of the Union republics, particularly in the Baltic States and the Caucasus, developed after Gorbachev's *glasnost* (openness) and *perestroika* (restructuring) policies. After becoming the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Gorbachev invited Eduard Shevardnadze, a former Soviet Politburo member, to serve as the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Soviet Union. Gorbachev's attempt to revive the Soviet economy combined with Shevardnadze's efforts to reorient Soviet foreign policy brought new freedoms and a much more political order to the Soviet people.⁴⁹

The turning point of the Georgian political life in Gorbachev era is probably the event referred to as April Tragedy, in which Soviet troops fired on civilian Georgians who participated in a peaceful demonstration in Tbilisi on 9 April 1989. In this unfortunate event, nearly twenty people, mostly women and children, were killed. In the wake of this incident, anti-Soviet and nationalist sentiments arose rapidly and the process of independence was accelerated in Georgia.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Jonathan Wheatley, *Georgia from National Awakening to Rose Revolution*, Aldershot, Hampshire; Burlington, VT, U.S.: Ashgate, 2005, p. 47.

⁴⁹ Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994, p.317.

⁵⁰ Jonathan Wheatley, *Georgia from National Awakening to Rose Revolution*, Aldershot, Hampshire; Burlington, VT, USA: Ashgate, 2005, pp. 43-44.

The aim of the demonstration on 9 April 1989 was to boycott Abkhaz secessionist demands and Soviet government's support to this separatist movement. Actually the reason for Abkhazia's demand to obtain a Union Republic status as it was between 1921 and 1931 was a result of Georgian government's discriminatory policies regarding minorities in general throughout the republic. There were strong kinship among Georgians and belief of the superiority as the titular nation was tolerated by the central government.⁵¹

In the eve of the April Tragedy, thousands of Abkhaz demonstrated in the streets of Sokhumi for independence. This 'unacceptable' movement aroused Georgian nationalists and counter demonstrations and hunger strikes in Tbilisi were organized by Independence Committee, led by Zviad Gamsakhurdia, Merab Kostava, Giorgi Chanturia, Irakli Bathiasvili, Irakli Tsereteli and others.⁵² On the invitation of the First Secretary of the Georgian Communist Party, Jumber Patiashvili, Soviet troops arrived in the capital and intervened to end the protests. In the months following the April Tragedy, the opposition used strikes and other forms of pressure to undermine communist power and set the stage for *de facto* separation from the Soviet Union.⁵³

In November 1989 the Georgian Supreme Soviet took upon itself the right to veto all-Union laws 'if they run counter to Georgian interests and affirmed the republic's right to secede from the USSR'. In March 1990, the Supreme Soviet declared Georgia a sovereign republic, later in the year, Gumbaridze, Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic, announced that the main goal of the party was the restoration of independence.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994, pp. 321-322.

⁵² "Report of the Sobchak's Commission of Inquiry": <http://sobchak.org/rus/docs/zakluchenie.htm>, accessed on 25 March 2009.

⁵³ Glenn E. Curtis, *Georgia, A Country Study*, Washington, D.C.: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1995, p.98.

⁵⁴ Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994, p.323.

Against Communist Party, opposition leaders formed a National Forum, as an alternative to the parliamentary elections which will be held in November 1990. In September 1990, The National Independence Party, led by Erekli Tsereteli got the majority of the voters' ballots in the first congress of the National Forum elections. Parties that represented minorities were not allowed to participate in this election.⁵⁵

In the first multiparty parliamentary elections held on 28 October 1990, Gamsakhurdia's Round Table coalition garnered about two-thirds of the votes and became the first party as a result of Communist Party's loss of popular support among Georgian people. Gamsakhurdia was elected as the chairman of the Supreme Soviet and formed the new government headed by Tengiz Sigua.⁵⁶

In the months following his mission as the chairman of the Supreme Soviet of Georgia, Gamsakhurdia pursued a harsh policy toward Moscow. He refused to attend the meetings aimed to prevent the Soviet Union from dissolution. Moreover, step by step Georgia ceased all economic ties with Moscow including cutting national sales tax on agricultural products. Struggling with internal affairs, Tbilisi was economically and politically isolated from the Soviet Union, which was living its last days. On March 1991, a referendum was held to determine the fate of the Soviet Union. Along with five countries, Georgia did not participate in the referendum. However Abkhazia and the South Ossetia voted in favor of the preservation of the Soviet Union. Instead of participating in the All-Union referendum, Gamsakhurdia organized his own referendum for the independence of Georgia. In his referendum, 98.9 per cent of the Georgian people voted in favor of independence. Shortly after, on 9 April 1991, on the second anniversary of the April Tragedy, Georgia declared its independence.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994, p. 324 and Svante E. Cornell, *Autonomy and Conflict: Ethnoterritoriality and Separatism in the South Caucasus – Cases in Georgia*, Uppsala: Dept. of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University, 2002, p. 157.

⁵⁶ Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994, p. 325.

⁵⁷ Svante E. Cornell, *Autonomy and Conflict: Ethnoterritoriality and Separatism in the South Caucasus – Cases in Georgia*, Uppsala: Dept. of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University, 2002, pp. 162-163.

The first elections of the newly independent state were held on 26 May 1991 and Zviad Gamsakhurdia became the president with the 86 per cent of the votes in the presidential election.⁵⁸ Within the short term of his presidency, Gamsakhurdia began to implement an autocratic and repressive rule. He often featured the dissident politicians as Moscow's agents who try to undermine his government. Many opponents, who were accused of subverting Georgia's progress towards independence, were arrested and put in jail.⁵⁹ But his rule began to diminish as the opposition against him began to grow day by day.

Meanwhile, the clashes in the South Ossetia began to intensify despite Soviet Ministry of Interior Troops' existence. The harsh expressions of Gamsakhurdia and antagonism of paramilitary groups of Georgians also did not help to cool the tensions. As the war escalated in the region and Georgia could not gain supremacy over the Ossetians in the clashes in South Ossetia, Gamsakhurdia's management got more radicalized. Failure of armed conflicts with minorities on one hand, political and economic destabilization on the other hand, Gamsakhurdia became more totalitarian even for his supporters. He dismissed many of his ministers, although politicians loyal to him resigned and join the opposition camp.⁶⁰

There were three names that would overthrow Gamsakhurdia and change the country's future. These were Jaba Ioseliani, leader of *Mkhedrioni* (Horsemen), a paramilitary group founded in 1989 by Jaba Ioseliani; Tengiz Kitovani, commander of the National Guard and Tengiz Sigua, Gamsakhurdia's deputy prime minister. After his resignation, Kitovani went to the Lake Tbilisi military camp, which became the base for the dissidents of Gamsakhurdia.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994, p. 326.

⁵⁹ Svante E. Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers*, Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2001, p. 168.

⁶⁰ Svante E. Cornell, *Autonomy and Conflict: Ethnoterritoriality and Separatism in the South Caucasus – Cases in Georgia*, Uppsala: Dept. of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University, 2002, pp. 162-166.

⁶¹ Edgar O'Ballance, *Wars in the Caucasus, 1990-1995*, New York: New York University Press, 1997, p. 104.

On 19 August 1991, the extremist Communist Party members and their supporters in the KGB (*Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti-Committee for State Security*) attempted a *coup d'état* against Gorbachev. This attempt is known as the August Coup and was headed by the Soviet minister of defense and the chairman of the KGB. Gamsakhurdia obviously supported this attempt and expressed his belief that the coup will be successful. Furthermore, he ordered the National Guard to integrate into the forces of Ministry of Internal Affairs. Gamsakhurdia was criticized by the opposition leaders to capitulate to the coup.⁶² It was interesting that Gamsakhurdia supported the coup leaders to establish a stronger Soviet rule which he tried to be free from. According to Jurgen Gerber, Gamsakhurdia did not condemn the coup but instead he tried to negotiate with the coup-makers to avoid a possible Soviet intervention to Georgia.⁶³ As an interesting irony, while the August Coup did not achieve its goal, Gamsakhurdia himself became the target of a similar plot and was ousted by a military coup after a short time.

The August Coup was a turning point for Gamsakhurdia's presidency. After the unsuccessful coup attempt in Moscow, the opposition against Gamsakhurdia grew stronger in Tbilisi. Particularly, reactions rose when government forces fired on demonstrators from opposition in Tbilisi. As Cornell mentions: "Violent riots broke out between government troops and the armed opposition powers in central Tbilisi in September 1991, leading to over twenty persons being wounded."⁶⁴

By the end of the year, reaction of the people and opposition became even more visible and demonstrations were held in Tbilisi streets to recall Gamsakhurdia to resign. But the president refused to abandon his position. Eventually, on 22 December 1991, the

⁶² Glenn E. Curtis, *Georgia, A Country Study*, Washington, D.C.: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1995, p. 101.

⁶³ Jurgen Gerber, *Georgien: Nationale Opposition und Kommunistische Herrschaft seit 1956*, Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 1997, p. 224 cited in Svante E. Cornell, *Autonomy and Conflict: Ethnoterritoriality and Separatism in the South Caucasus – Cases in Georgia*, Uppsala: Dept. of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University, 2002, p.165.

⁶⁴ Svante E. Cornell, *Autonomy and Conflict: Ethnoterritoriality and Separatism in the South Caucasus – Cases in Georgia*, Uppsala: Dept. of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University, 2002, p. 166.

president's opponents launched armed attacks on the parliamentary building in central Tbilisi, where Gamsakhurdia was holed up in a basement bunker with the people still loyal to him. Then clashes began between the forces of the opposition, which took the control of the government and National Guard's militiamen loyal to Gamsakhurdia. By 2 January 1992, the opposition had gained the upper hand, freed political prisoners, and set up a Military Council to replace the Gamsakhurdia government.⁶⁵ The bombardment of the Assembly building continued despite the Military Council took the control of the country.⁶⁶ The Soviet army did not intervene, as dozens of people were killed and tanks roamed the main streets of the capital.

Gamsakhurdia refused to surrender and resign despite the Military Council's calls. The Military Council, which wanted to solve the problem as soon as possible and to avoid bloodshed, arranged a plan for Gamsakhurdia to flee from the building and take him out of Tbilisi. Gamsakhurdia was persuaded that an all-out attack at dawn on 6 January was imminent. The plan worked and Gamsakhurdia, his family and about 100 people loyal to him escaped from the Assembly building via the deliberately unguarded back entrance.⁶⁷ Therefore, Gamsakhurdia's reign over Georgia was decisively over.

After his overthrow, Gamsakhurdia fled to Grozny, the capital of Chechnya, where he continued to give orders to the troops loyal to him in Georgia and to condemn the illegal coup against him. Many clashes continued between the supporters of Gamsakhurdia and the new government during 1992 and 1993. After his failure to regain the rule and his former post as the president, Gamsakhurdia died on 31 December 1993.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994, p.328.

⁶⁶ Jonathan Wheatley, *Georgia from National Awakening to Rose Revolution*, Aldershot, Hampshire; Burlington, VT, U.S.: Ashgate, 2005, pp. 55-56 and Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994, p. 328.

⁶⁷ Suzanne Goldenberg, *Pride of Small Nations*, London, Atlantic Highlands, N.J., Zed Books, 1994, p. 83.

⁶⁸ Svante E. Cornell, *Autonomy and Conflict: Ethnoterritoriality and Separatism in the South Caucasus – Cases in Georgia*, Uppsala: Dept. of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University, 2002, pp. 166-170.

There were many reasons that one count for the overthrow of Gamsakhurdia, but the main reason is that he tried to gather as much power as he could, and while doing this, he offended his allies and supporters. His irreconcilable attitude and labeling every opposing voice as the enemy of the state caused the diminishing of his authority even over his loyal supporters. On the other side, the increasing power of paramilitary groups like *Mkhedrioni* and National Guard prevented the government from consolidating its power in all branches of the administration. In the end, these paramilitary groups played the most important role in Gamsakhurdia's overthrow.⁶⁹

Following Gamsakhurdia's ouster, the ruling Military Council renamed itself as the State Council in order to bolster its credibility and invited Eduard Shevardnadze to return to Georgia to be the leader of the country. Shevardnadze's arrival to lead the Georgian government was seen as a sign to improve the chances of arriving at a compromise with the minorities and rebuilding the Georgian state.⁷⁰ Naturally, Shevardnadze was obliged to cope with the problems of civil war with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and the Gamsakhurdia supporters in his first years as the head of the state.

While Georgia was struggling with internal clashes between pro-governmental and opposition supporters, Soviet Union was declared to be dissolved on 25 December 1991. Shortly before its collapse, Belavezha Accords which established Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) was signed by the presidents of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. This document was also the declaration of the end of the USSR.⁷¹ Georgia refused to join the new union since it wanted to move away from Moscow's sphere of influence. However, it became a member of CIS two years later, under the presidency of Shevardnadze who had to deal with Russia to consolidate an ostensible peace within the country.

⁶⁹ Svante E. Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers*, Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2001, p. 167.

⁷⁰ Svante E. Cornell, *Autonomy and Conflict: Ethnoterritoriality and Separatism in the South Caucasus – Cases in Georgia*, Uppsala: Dept. of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University, 2002, p.167.

⁷¹ Nicole J. Jackson, *Russian Foreign Policy and the CIS*, London; New York: Routledge, 2003, p. 53.

Nationalism, independence and authoritarianism were the symbols of the Gamsakhurdia's administration. Georgia drifted into ethnic wars with the South Ossetia and Abkhazia as a result of growing nationalism among people and the politics in this era. Gamsakhurdia left an ethnically fragmented country where people mistrusted other ethnic groups with whom they had lived side by side for years. Georgia now was at the edge of a total turmoil.

CHAPTER

III. GEORGIAN – OSSETIAN CONFLICT

In the following months of its independence, Georgia was drifted into an ethnic war with South Ossetia. The war lasted more than a year and left hundreds of dead and thousands to leave their homes. The South Ossetia war in 1991-1992 is also a turning point for Georgian-South Ossetian relations.

This chapter examines the sources of the war as well as the war itself. The chapter also analyzes Shevardnadze era which brought an end to the conflicts and pave the way to the presence of the Russian troops in Georgia.

3.1 Emergence of the South Ossetian Problem

Georgia had no major problems with its minorities when it was ruled by the Russian Empire and subsequently by the Soviet Union. However, there were strong kinship relations among the Georgian population and despite the strong solidarity among the ethnic Georgians, a variety of other ethnic groups inhabiting the same region were living –more or less– in harmony with the Georgians.

Under the Soviet rule, peoples of two sides i.e. Georgians and Ossetians lived in peace and compromise. According to the 1989 census, Ossetians were residing nearly every rural or urban districts in the country. Majority of the Ossetians living in Georgia were residing in Tbilisi.⁷² Thus, intermarriages between Georgians and Ossetians were prevalent. Moreover, majority of the Ossetian people were living in other regions of the Georgian SSR while a significant number of Georgians were living in the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast. Still, Ossetians composed two-thirds of the region's population in the most recent census that was conducted in 1989.⁷³

⁷² Revaz Givievich Gachechiladze, *The New Georgia*, College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1995, p. 87.

⁷³ Svante E. Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers*, Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2001, p.109.

Nationalist consciousness was transformed into a mass movement in the Soviet Union early in 1988 when Armenians in the tiny autonomous region of Mountainous Karabagh in Azerbaijan began calling for merger of the region with the neighboring republic of Armenia and the Baltic peoples began forming broad-based popular fronts.⁷⁴

Shortly after the Karabagh problem had emerged, Abkhaz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) demanded to be an independent republic. Georgians reacted to this demand and in July 1989, and the ensuing violent clashes resulted in the death of several people. With the tension escalated, thousands of Georgians participated in mass demonstrations in Tbilisi protesting Abkhaz's demands. While Georgia was struggling with the Abkhazian problem, the *Ademon Nykhas* (Popular Shrine), South Ossetian nationalist organization which was established in January 1989 for advocating Ossetian interests and led by Alan Chochiev sent an open letter addressed to the Abkhaz people to support their movement for independence. Chochiev claimed that the Abkhaz case would set a precedent for the separation of the South Ossetia from Georgia.⁷⁵ But at that point, the idea of detachment from Georgia did not have widespread support among Ossetians. As Fuller notes: "Many Ossetians rushed to stress their loyalty to Georgia and to emphasize historical friendship of Georgians and Ossetians".⁷⁶

The tensions increased when Georgian government decided to make Georgian the sole official language throughout Georgia in 1989. In reaction to this measure, *Ademon Nykhas* took action and organized strikes in Tskhinvali, the capital of South Ossetia. This development became a milestone as it increased *Ademon Nykhas*'s popular support and thus, affected local policies including the decision to detach from Georgia. Georgia's attempt to make Georgian the sole official language aggravated the situation

⁷⁴ Svante E. Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers*, Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2001, p.320.

⁷⁵ Stuart J. Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds*, New York, Cornell University Press, 2001, p. 106.

⁷⁶ Elizabeth Fuller, "The South Ossetian Campaign for Unification", *Report on the USSR*, 8 December 1989 cited in Svante E. Cornell, *Autonomy and Conflict: Ethnoterritoriality and Separatism in the South Caucasus – Cases in Georgia*, Uppsala: Dept. of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University, 2002, p.191.

and in September 1989, the South Ossetia applied to Moscow for unification with North Ossetia, but this application did not yield any result.⁷⁷

Another important development took place soon after this application as Cornell mentions: “When the elections to the Georgian Supreme Soviet were planned, the inclusion of the provision prohibiting regional parties from participating was heavily criticized.”⁷⁸ Before the elections were held in October 1990, the South Ossetian Oblast Soviet unilaterally upgraded its status to Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. Shortly after, Ossetians conducted their own elections. A few days later, Georgian nationalist moved to Tskhinvali with several buses and two sides faced each other. But the existence of the troops of Ministry for Internal Affairs (*Ministerstvo Vnutrennikh Del*, MVD) prevented further clashes.⁷⁹

The Georgian government, headed by Gamsakhurdia, declared the elections in the South Ossetia illegal and abolished the autonomous status of the South Ossetia on 11 December 1990. “The Soviet government protested Georgia’s moves against the South Ossetia and threatened to impose presidential rule from the center, but Gamsakhurdia refused to back down.”⁸⁰

Rising nationalism and independence deepened the ethnic problems in Georgia. With the extremist expressions and policies of Zviad Gamsakhurdia which in its most condensed and vivid form found its expression in nationalist slogan ‘Georgia for the Georgians’⁸¹, Georgia drifted into civil war with its autonomous regions in the early 1990’s.

⁷⁷ Stuart J. Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds*, New York, Cornell University Press, 2001, p. 107.

⁷⁸ Svante E. Cornell, *Autonomy and Conflict: Ethnoterritoriality and Separatism in the South Caucasus – Cases in Georgia*, Uppsala: Dept. of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University, 2002, p.161.

⁷⁹ Svante E. Cornell, *Autonomy and Conflict: Ethnoterritoriality and Separatism in the South Caucasus – Cases in Georgia*, Uppsala: Dept. of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University, 2002, p. 161.

⁸⁰ Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994, p.325.

⁸¹ Stuart J. Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds*, New York, Cornell University Press, 2001, p.101.

3.2 Fighting between the South Ossetia and Georgia (1991-1992)

After seven decades of peaceful coexistence and accord, despite some low level tensions, Georgians and Ossetians had found themselves in the middle of an ethnic war in the early 1990s. Throughout the Soviet rule, neither the South Ossetia nor the North Ossetia had claims to reunite. As it was poorly industrialized, the south benefited from its economically richer neighbor to the north. Hence the economy of the South Ossetia depended on limited agricultural and mining activities; it subsisted from Soviet industrial resources allocation during the Soviet period. Its conditions for industry and agriculture were relatively poor.⁸² Thus, when Georgian nationalism began to arise, South Ossetians tried to join Russia instead of becoming independent. Actually in recent history, South Ossetians had no wish for independence. The only two exceptions to this were an unsuccessful attempt of the North and the South Ossetia to unite and join Russia back in 1925, and South Ossetian Supreme Soviet's decision to become a SSR in 1990, shortly before the elections for Georgian Supreme Soviet were held in October 1990.

Tbilisi's decision for strengthening of Georgian language's position in the entire country was a turning point for the relations between Georgians and South Ossetians. Since the majority of the Ossetians living in Georgia did not know Georgian, Tskhinvali fiercely opposed and criticized Georgia's decision as Abkhazians did. South Ossetian leadership denounced this decision since the vast majority of South Ossetian people could not speak Georgian. In the face of these measures taken by Tbilisi Ossetians wishing to secede from Georgia and unite with North Ossetia gained the upper hand in Ossetia. In accordance with Ossetian aspirations, *Ademon Nykhas* sent a petition to Moscow that requested incorporation with their brothers at the other side of the border.⁸³

First clashes between Georgian and South Ossetian groups emerged in 1989 after the celebration of the First Georgian Republic's Independence Day on 18 May 1989. These

⁸² Svante E. Cornell, *Autonomy and Conflict: Ethnoterritoriality and Separatism in the South Caucasus – Cases in Georgia*, Uppsala: Dept. of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University, 2002, p. 190.

⁸³ Stuart J. Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds*, New York, Cornell University Press, 2001, p.107.

clashes and the following ones in the summer of 1989 are not well known since they were not reported on the media. In early September 1989, Ossetian authorities proposed giving equal status to Russian, Ossetian and Georgian languages in the oblast; by the end of the month the Oblast Soviet decided to declare Ossetian as the state language of the region.⁸⁴

In November 1989, the leader of the Georgian opposition, Zviad Gamsakhurdia called Georgians to march on Tskhinvali. Nearly 20.000 people arrived at the South Ossetian capital within days. MVD troops prevented further clashes and protected the residents of the city. But small scale clashes between the groups of the two parties erupted from time to time until January 1990.⁸⁵ As Cornell points out: “In April 1990, the Supreme Soviet of the USSR enacted a law which generally enhanced the position of the autonomous regions and republics vis-à-vis the central government.”⁸⁶ This legal attempt by the USSR authorities helped to deepen the ethnic polarization in Georgia.

The intensity of the clashes decreased considerably due to the Georgian political movement for independence from the USSR. However, the tensions re-emerged when the South Ossetian Supreme Soviet unilaterally decided to upgrade its status to SSR in September 1990. “Within two weeks, two hundred buses from Tbilisi drove toward Tskhinvali to rally against the Ossetian Soviet’s decision, and for twenty four hours Ossetian and Georgian demonstrators faced each other with MVD troops between them.”⁸⁷

After being elected as the president of the Georgian SSR on 28 October 1990 in the first democratic multiparty elections of the country, Gamsakhurdia declared that the status of

⁸⁴ Svante E. Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers*, Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2001, p.165.

⁸⁵ Alexei Zverev “Ethnic Conflicts in the Caucasus.” in Bruno Coppieters, ed., *Contested Borders in the Caucasus*, Brussels: VUBPRESS; Concord, Mass.: Distributed in the U.S. exclusively by Paul & Company, Publishers Consortium, 1996, p. 43.

⁸⁶ Svante E. Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers*, Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2001, p.166.

⁸⁷ Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994, p.325.

the autonomous regions would not change. Alexei Zverev mentions that: “Nevertheless, on 9 December 1990, the Supreme Soviet of Georgia reneged on its earlier promise and adopted a law abolishing the South Ossetian autonomy.”⁸⁸ On 11 December, the South Ossetia declared that it is directly subordinate to the USSR. Immediately after this development Georgia started a blockade on the region which lasted until July 1992. As part of this policy of blockade Georgia cut electricity and water supplies to the region. On the night of 6 January 1991, Georgian paramilitary forces and policemen attacked Tskhinvali and caused violence and killing of civilian people.⁸⁹

On 7 January 1991, Gorbachev issued a decree that repealed both South Ossetian decision to become a SSR and Georgia’s abolition of South Ossetia’s autonomous status. He ordered Georgia to withdraw its troops from the South Ossetia within three days. At first, Gamsakhurdia seemed not to abide by the calls from Moscow, but the parties decided to begin the negotiations. The negotiation process started with difficulties as the Georgian party insisted on the issue that South Ossetians should surrender their arms to the Georgian police. As the talks went on the fate of the region, Torez Kulumbegov, South Ossetian political leader, who was the head negotiator for the Ossetians, was arrested on his way to Tbilisi.⁹⁰

Arrest of Kulumbegov, thus, interrupted the negotiations and people protested Tbilisi’s move with demonstrations in Tskhinvali. In response to the Ossetian strikes against Georgian government, Tbilisi cut the electricity and water supplies to South Ossetia. Also, Georgian National Guard blockaded the food aid to the South Ossetia from the North. “The Soviet minister of the interior, Boris Pugo, ordered Georgia to extend the

⁸⁸ Alexei Zverev “Ethnic Conflicts in the Caucasus.” in Bruno Coppieters, ed., *Contested Borders in the Caucasus*, Brussels: VUBPRESS; Concord, Mass.: Distributed in the U.S. exclusively by Paul & Company, Publishers Consortium, 1996, p.44.

⁸⁹ Alexei Zverev “Ethnic Conflicts in the Caucasus.” in Bruno Coppieters, ed., *Contested Borders in the Caucasus*, Brussels: VUBPRESS; Concord, Mass.: Distributed in the U.S. exclusively by Paul & Company, Publishers Consortium, 1996, p.44.

⁹⁰ Alexei Zverev “Ethnic Conflicts in the Caucasus.” in Bruno Coppieters, ed., *Contested Borders in the Caucasus*, Brussels: VUBPRESS; Concord, Mass.: Distributed in the U.S. exclusively by Paul & Company, Publishers Consortium, 1996, pp. 44-45.

state of emergency throughout the South Ossetia and lift the economic blockade. The electricity and water supplies restored.”⁹¹

1991 was the year that the conflict intensified. Tskhinvali was under heavy bombardment during the year, the bombardment of Tskhinvali continued intensely for days and Georgian forces were so close to the capital that Ossetians could not bury their dead until artillery fire stopped. People suffered from hunger and insufficient medical treatment. The Ossetians fled to north while Georgian residents of the region took refuge in other parts of the country. Thousands of people, both Ossetians and Georgians, left their homes, some of whom never would come back to the South Ossetia.⁹²

The outbreak of clashes in Tbilisi between government and opposition groups in early 1992 caused a decrease in the intensity of the conflict in South Ossetia. Some units of the Georgian militiamen were called back to Tbilisi to join the clashes there. Besides the political turmoil in Tbilisi, the clashes between Zviadists (followers of Zviad Gamsakhurdia) and *Mkhedrioni* together with National Guard in Mingrelia and other parts of Abkhazia helped to stabilize the conflict in South Ossetia.⁹³

In early 1992, Gamsakhurdia’s government dissolved in the face of the growing demands from the opposition and a military council was formed to rule the country until new elections were to be held. Within days of Gamsakhurdia’s fall, the military council embarked on a series of initiatives aimed at securing a lasting ceasefire in the region. A delegation was sent to Tskhinvali to seek peace talks and Sigua, the council’s acting

⁹¹ Edgar O’Ballance, *Wars in the Caucasus, 1990-1995*, New York: New York University Press, 1997, p.101.

⁹² Suzanne Goldenberg, *Pride of Small Nations: the Caucasus and post Soviet Disorder*, London: Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Zed Books, 1994, p.106.

⁹³ Svante E. Cornell, *Autonomy and Conflict: Ethnoterritoriality and Separatism in the South Caucasus – Cases in Georgia*, Uppsala: Dept. of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University, 2002, pp. 166-167.

prime minister, gave a press conference in which he repudiated the previous regime's policy towards South Ossetia.⁹⁴

As a further gesture of good will Torez Kulumbegov was released a year after his arrest. But the new Ossetian leaders who had replaced him were not moderate enough to compromise with the new government of Georgia. They refused to have talks on ceasefire unless Georgia first withdraws its troops from the region. On 19 January 1992, South Ossetian leadership held a referendum, boycotted by local Georgians, in which more than 90 per cent of the participants voted in favor of joining Russia.⁹⁵ Referendum received different reactions from North Ossetia and Russia. In the end the decision was not accepted by any party and the South Ossetia ended up not generating the response it desired to have.

In March 1992, Shevardnadze returned to Georgia and became the spokesman of the State Council, the newly renamed military council. As soon as he came to power, Shevardnadze adopted a conciliatory approach towards ethnic conflicts. He visited both Tskhinvali and Vladikavkaz, capital of the North Ossetia, and declared his intention, according to Goldenberg: “[to] set up a human rights commission to investigate claims of atrocities carried out by Georgian irregulars.”⁹⁶

Shevardnadze's control over paramilitary forces, however, was apparently weak, hence the clashes escalated again in May. Many volunteers from North Caucasus gathered in North Ossetia to fight against Georgian forces. A group of Russian volunteers also arrived in Vladikavkaz to join the clashes on the side of Ossetians. Their intent was to mount attacks on scattered Ossetian villages but they were persuaded to return to

⁹⁴ Suzanne Goldenberg, *Pride of Small Nations: the Caucasus and post Soviet Disorder*, London: Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Zed Books, 1994, p.107.

⁹⁵ Alexei Zverev “Ethnic Conflicts in the Caucasus”, in Bruno Coppieters, ed., *Contested Borders in the Caucasus*, Brussels: VUBPRESS; Concord, Mass.: Distributed in the U.S. exclusively by Paul & Company, Publishers Consortium, 1996, p.45.

⁹⁶ Suzanne Goldenberg, *Pride of Small Nations: the Caucasus and post Soviet Disorder*, London: Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Zed Books, 1994, p.107.

Vladikavkaz. They were taken to Tskhinvali by Russian choppers but were refused by the commander of Ministry of Interior troops to fight against Georgian troops. Moreover, Russia supported the South Ossetia and threatened Georgia to stop attacks on the region.⁹⁷

Finally, a cease-fire agreement was signed on 22 June 1992 between Georgian and Russian leaders, Shevardnadze and Yeltsin, with the presence of North and South Ossetian leaders. A ceasefire accord was agreed upon in Tskhinvali on 13 May 1992, but it was interrupted by news of the massacre of a busload of Ossetian refugees fleeing to Tskhinvali. While tension was already high, the statements of the chairman of the Russian Supreme Soviet, Ruslan Khasbulatov and vice president, Alexandr Rutskoi, in June 1992, about the intervention of Russia in the South Ossetia forced Tbilisi to have a permanent ceasefire agreement with Tskhinvali.⁹⁸

In the following days of June, Shevardnadze and Yeltsin met in the Russian city of Dagomys, near Sochi, and agreed on the issue of deploying soldiers to the South Ossetia and on 24 June 1992 signed an agreement, known as the Sochi Agreement, on the establishment of a peacekeeping force which would be deployed to South Ossetia. The composition and the jurisdictional area of this peacekeeping force was agreed upon, as O'Balance describes:

“At a further high-level meeting in Vladikavkaz on 4 July and it was decided to set up a 1500 strong trinational peacekeeping force, to be positioned along a 15 kilometer-wide buffer zone, and that personnel should come equally from Russia, Georgia and South Ossetia.”⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Edgar O'Ballance, *Wars in the Caucasus, 1990-1995*, New York: New York University Press, 1997, p. 117.

⁹⁸ Edgar O'Ballance, *Wars in the Caucasus, 1990-1995*, New York: New York University Press, 1997, p.119.

⁹⁹ Edgar O'Ballance, *Wars in the Caucasus, 1990-1995*, New York: New York University Press, 1997, p.119.

3.3 Peace Process and Russia's Military Existence in Georgia

After the end of the war between Georgia and the South Ossetia with the intervention of Russia, reconciliation efforts began among parties. Sochi Agreement, also known as Agreements on the Principles of Settlement of the Georgian-Ossetian Conflict, was respected by the sides of the conflict and the mediators. In the days following the signing of the agreement, a Joint Control Commission (JCC) was established as it was foreseen in the document.

The first meeting of the commission was held on 4 July 1992, in Vladikavkaz with the participation of representatives from Georgia, Russian Federation and North Ossetia. In the meeting, it was decided to deploy a tripartite Joint Peacekeeping Force (JPKF) which would be subordinated to the Joint Military Command and placed under JCC supervision.¹⁰⁰

The JPKF, which was composed of Georgian, Russian and North Ossetian battalions each about 500 soldiers, was deployed mainly in two areas in Georgia on 14 July 1992. These areas were the conflict zone, which enclosed a radius of 15 km from the center of Tskhinvali and, as Roy Reeve mentions: “the security corridor, an area within 7 km on both sides of the administrative border of the former autonomous region of South Ossetia”¹⁰¹ as it was decided by JCC, in order to “ensure ceasefire control, withdrawal of military units, and disbandment of self-defense forces, and to provide for the security regime.”¹⁰²

According to the decision of JCC, Georgian battalion would be responsible for the areas in which the Georgians lived; North Ossetian soldiers in the Ossetian inhabitants lived

¹⁰⁰ Roy Reeve, “The OSCE Mission to Georgia and Georgian-Ossetian Conflict: An Overview of Activities”, *Helsinki Monitor 2006*, no: 1, p.58.

¹⁰¹ Roy Reeve, “The OSCE Mission to Georgia and Georgian-Ossetian Conflict: An Overview of Activities”, *Helsinki Monitor 2006*, no: 1, p.58.

¹⁰² Mikhail Mayarov, “South Ossetia: Conflict Zone”, *International Affairs*, Vol.48, No.2, 2002, p. 114.

and the Russian battalion would be in charge of the security of Tskhinvali and some other ethnically mixed areas. This division of labor was a novel idea since “for Russia, sending its military contingent to a conflict zone in the territory of a former constituent republic of the USSR was a totally new and untried affair.”¹⁰³

The most important issue on the agenda of the JCC was the fate of the refugees. There were other meetings between the parties to discuss the conditions that provide displaced persons turning back their homes in secure. “In this respect, the JCC followed up the implementation of a bilateral Georgian-Russian agreement of 14 September 1993 on economic rehabilitation in the zone of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict.”¹⁰⁴

On 3 February 1994, President of the Russian Federation, Boris Yeltsin visited Georgia to sign 25 agreements between the two countries. Yeltsin was welcomed by the Georgian leaders and his visit was described as one of the major events in 200 years of history between Russian and Georgian people.¹⁰⁵ In addition to agreements on trade and economic issues, a military document which foresaw the training of the Georgian army by Russia and the establishment of three Russian military bases near Tbilisi to protect the security of the CIS was signed.¹⁰⁶

With this agreement Russia consolidated its presence in Georgia by using the interethnic clashes. In March 1994, Russia and Georgia negotiated on the draft of a new agreement which increased the Russian bases to four besides guaranteeing the Russian military presence in Georgia at least for 25 years, after a series of meetings between Russian Defense Minister Pavel Grachev, Shevardnadze and Georgian defense minister General

¹⁰³ Mikhail Mayarov, “South Ossetia: Conflict Zone”, *International Affairs*, Vol.48, No.2, 2002, p. 114.

¹⁰⁴ Roy Reeve, “The OSCE Mission to Georgia and Georgian-Ossetian Conflict: An Overview of Activities”, *Helsinki Monitor 2006*, no: 1, p.58.

¹⁰⁵ “Chronology of Events”, <http://www2.nupi.no/cgi-win//Russland/krono.exe?2934>, accessed on 17 April 2009.

¹⁰⁶ Edgar O’Ballance, *Wars in the Caucasus, 1990-1995*, New York: New York University Press, 1997, p.146

Vardiko Nadibaidze.¹⁰⁷ On 15 September 1995, Russian Prime Minister, Viktor Chernomyrdin, visited Tbilisi to sign the agreement which envisaged the establishment of Russian bases in Akhalkalaki, Batumi, Gudauta and Vaziani.

The OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe) mission, CSCE (Conference for Security and Co-operation in Europe) until 1995, in Georgia was created in late 1992. Its mission as a 'monitoring instrument' became clear in February 1994 with a formula on close relations between JCC and CSCE, subscribed by CSCE Senior Council. Until then the OSCE mission had an important role on the transparency of the peacekeeping operation in the conflict zone.¹⁰⁸

The Mission also participated in the meetings among parties to the conflict as facilitator with the Russian Federation. In one of those meetings on May 1996, a memorandum was signed on mutual trust of the parties and launching of negotiations on the political settlement of the conflict. Roy Reeve stresses that: "On 5 March 1997, a further meeting agreed to set up quadripartite groups of political experts entrusted with the preparation of proposals towards mutually acceptable solutions on the politico-legal aspects of the Georgian-Ossetian relations."¹⁰⁹

Besides mediating activities of Russia and OSCE, the leaders of Georgia and the South Ossetia met to assess the situation in the region. Eduard Shevardnadze and South Ossetian leader Lyudvig Chibirov had three meetings between August 1996 and June 1998. In these meetings, two leaders agreed on finding solutions to the legal status of the South Ossetia and developing political relations among the parties. Following these

¹⁰⁷ Edgar O'Ballance, *Wars in the Caucasus, 1990-1995*, New York: New York University Press, 1997, p.154.

¹⁰⁸ Mikhail Mayarov, "South Ossetia: Conflict Zone", *International Affairs*, Vol.48, No.2, 2002, p.115-116.

¹⁰⁹ Roy Reeve, "The OSCE Mission to Georgia and Georgian-Ossetian Conflict: An Overview of Activities", *Helsinki Monitor*, 2006, no: 1, p.59.

promising steps towards political rapprochement, the parties decided to work on proposals towards a mutually acceptable settlement of the conflict.¹¹⁰

The groups of political experts held several rounds of consultations to exchange and adjust their respective drafts. From 10 to 13 July 2000, the groups of political experts met in Baden (Austria) under the Austrian Chairmanship of the OSCE to work out a common version of the ‘Intermediary Document’. At the meeting, the experts initialized a draft document, which proposed a nominal recognition of the territorial integrity of Georgia in exchange for a broad autonomy of the South Ossetia within Georgia and privileged economic and cultural links with the Republic of the North Ossetia-Alania of the Russian Federation. However, the sides could not agree on key sentences of the draft document in the end. After the Baden Summit, annual meetings were held in the following years, but the parties did not reach a settlement. The Hague meeting in late 2003 also failed to reach an agreement on a concluding document.¹¹¹

Although a number of meetings under the supervision of Russia, as well as the OSCE, were held, Georgia and the South Ossetia could not agree on a political settlement of the conflict and mutually acceptable legal status for South Ossetia. Hence, the South Ossetian problem remained as a ‘frozen conflict’ until the new Georgian government, lead by Mikheil Saakashvili, assumed power by the events which came to be known as the Rose Revolution in 2003.

3.4 Shevardnadze’s Rule

After Gamsakhurdia fled from Tbilisi, leaders of Military Council, Tengiz Kitovani, Jaba Ioseliani and Tengiz Segua, invited Eduard Shevardnadze to undertake the responsibilities as head of the state. After Shevardnadze’s arrival in March 1992, the

¹¹⁰ “Chapter 2: Frozen Conflicts”, <http://www.report.smr.gov.ge/chapter2-eng.html>, accessed on 15 May 2009.

¹¹¹ Roy Reeve, “The OSCE Mission to Georgia and Georgian-Ossetian Conflict: An Overview of Activities”, *Helsinki Monitor 2006*, vol.17, no: 1, p.60.

military council changed its name to 'State Council' and ruled the country until the elections for the council, in which over thirty political parties and twenty groups, except Gamsakhurdia's party, were represented. There were also efforts to make ethnic minorities to represent themselves but neither Abkhaz nor South Ossetian representatives took place in the new council.¹¹²

There were many reasons to choose Shevardnadze for such an important position. Above all, Shevardnadze had a good reputation as being a former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the USSR and being the First Secretary of Georgian Communist Party. His political skills, which made him to gain the nickname 'white fox', were known both in Georgia as well as the West. The leaders of the military council wanted to use his name as a source of legitimacy to their rule, which they gained by using force, and international recognition.¹¹³

Shevardnadze's return was welcomed by all political groups; he attended the elections as an independent candidate and was elected as the chairman of the State Council on 31 August 1992. He held his post until he was elected as the president of Georgia in 1995. He became the head of the state and commander in chief of the Armed Forces in accordance with the 'Law on Forces' enacted by the new Parliament on 6 November 1992.¹¹⁴

Establishing his rule was not easy for Shevardnadze. Despite his international popularity, Shevardnadze did not have a popular base in Georgia like Gamsakhurdia had once. Besides, Gamsakhurdia's intolerance and hostility towards the ethnic separatist

¹¹² Glenn E. Curtis, *Georgia, A Country Study*, Washington, D.C.: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1995, p.137.

¹¹³ For further analysis on military council's decision, see Jonathan Wheatley, *Georgia from National Awakening to Rose Revolution*, Aldershot, Hampshire; Burlington, VT, U.S.: Ashgate, 2005, p. 69-70.

¹¹⁴ Jonathan Wheatley, *Georgia from National Awakening to Rose Revolution*, Aldershot, Hampshire; Burlington, VT, U.S.: Ashgate, 2005, p.76.

movements reflected the general tendency among the Georgian people; in contrast Shevardnadze had a more moderate approach on the issue.¹¹⁵

After assuming power, Shevardnadze began to shape the political outlook of the government. The appointments he made showed diversity with regard to political background. While he appointed ex-KGB members and ex-Communist Party members to important posts, he also provided the nationalists an opportunity to have a significant control over government. Moreover, paramilitary leaders, commander of National Guard, Kitovani was appointed as the Minister of Defense, as well as deputy prime minister, and Khachisvili, commander of *Mkhedrioni*, as the Minister of Internal Affairs. Shevardnadze tried to compose a political balance among political elites so as to compensate his initially insufficient popular base with gaining the support of political elites and centralizing the power in his presidency.¹¹⁶

After the parliamentary elections in which he garnered the majority of popular support in a landslide, Shevardnadze embarked on consolidating his power with specific tailor made legal arrangements such as taking control of Ministry of Internal Affairs; calling for state of emergency and rule the country with decree; forming his political party Citizens' Union of Georgia (CUG) and joining to the CIS.¹¹⁷

In the early period of his rule, Shevardnadze struggled to avoid the disintegration of the country. Conflicts in the breakaway regions of the South Ossetia and Abkhazia on the one hand, armed clashes between government forces and Zviadist dissidents on the other, Shevardnadze found a country in deep political chaos. To stabilize the situation and assert the control of the state, Shevardnadze asked for Russia's help, which he was criticized by opposition and even by his supporters. As Stefes points out: "By the end of

¹¹⁵ Suzanne Goldenberg, *Pride of Small Nations*, London, Atlantic Highlands, N.J., Zed Books, 1994, p.100.

¹¹⁶ Jonathan Wheatley, *Georgia from National Awakening to Rose Revolution*, Aldershot, Hampshire; Burlington, VT, U.S.: Ashgate, 2005, p.76.

¹¹⁷ Jonathan Wheatley, *Georgia from National Awakening to Rose Revolution*, Aldershot, Hampshire; Burlington, VT, U.S.: Ashgate, 2005, p. 82.

1993, Russian troops joined the Georgian army and defeated the Zviadist forces. Russia's intervention in western Georgia and Abkhazia allowed Shevardnadze to establish some order in Georgia."¹¹⁸

One of the most important steps of Shevardnadze was to strengthen the police power, which led to a sharp decrease in crime and illegal activities. Furthermore, Shevardnadze diminished the political and economic power of *Mkhedrioni* and National Guard, afterwards dissolved these paramilitary groups by arresting their leaders. Besides consolidation of his power in governing organs, Shevardnadze appointed loyal supporters to local and regional administrations.¹¹⁹

In the second half of the 1990s, Shevardnadze's control over Georgia and his popularity among the people increased gradually. Relative normalization of economy, strengthening of central power and the end of armed conflicts with secessionist ethnic minorities paved the way for presidency for the veteran politician. He gained 74 per cent of the votes in the elections and became the president of the Republic of Georgia on 23 November 1995.¹²⁰

Georgia's relations with the West also developed in this period. Tbilisi took steps to become independent from Moscow's policies and influence. Georgia got involved in the organizations like OSCE, the World Bank and the International Monetary Foundation (IMF). Relations with NATO began in 1992 soon after the independence of Georgia. In 1994, Georgia joined Partnership for Peace program, a NATO initiative that aims to develop relations between NATO and other European states as well as former Soviet

¹¹⁸ Christoph H. Stefes, *Understanding post-Soviet Transitions*, Basingstoke [England]; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, p.42.

¹¹⁹ Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994, pp. 328-331.

¹²⁰ Darrell Slider, "Democratization in Georgia" in Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrott, eds., *Conflict, Cleavage, and Change in Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 189.

Republics. Despite efforts to get closer to the West, Russia's control over the country was still visible.¹²¹

CUG's young parliamentarians Zurab Zhvania and Mikheil Saakashvili initiated a number of successful reform programs in political, judicial, financial and social fields. After eight years of his successful administration in Georgia, Shevardnadze was reelected as the president with 80 per cent of the votes in the elections held in 9 April 2000. But the superiority of CUG began to weaken as the municipal elections in 1998 and parliamentary elections in 1999 indicated the decrease in the ruling party's votes. Decline of the CUG continued with the departure of important party members like Minister of Justice, Saakashvili, speaker of the parliament Zhvania and the Head of the Parliament, Nino Burjanadze.¹²² The popularity of the government and Shevardnadze went on to decay with the repression on journalists criticizing the government and Shevardnadze's defense of his corrupt ministers. After closure of a private television station Rustavi-2, known for its support for the opposition of the government, demonstrations were held in Tbilisi with thousands of people calling Shevardnadze to resign.¹²³

Parliamentary elections were held on 2 November 2003. Although opinion polls indicated that United Democrats of Zhvania and National Movement of Saakashvili were far ahead of the pro-government party, the results of the election were quite surprising. Shevardnadze's new bloc For a New Georgia and the Revival Party were the heading parties for the official results and the major opposition parties were far behind. Upon this suspicious election results, the opposition leaders organized demonstrations in

¹²¹ Jonathan Aves, "Post Soviet Transcaucasia", in Roy Allison, ed., *Challenges for the Former Soviet South*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1996, p. 183.

¹²² Ghia Nodia and Alvaro Pinto Scholtbach, *The political landscape of Georgia: political parties: achievements, challenges and prospects*, Tbilisi, Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development, 2006, p. 18.

¹²³ Dan Jakopovich, "The 2003 "Rose Revolution" in Georgia: A Case Study in High Politics and Rank-and-File Execution", *Debatte*, Vol.15, No.2, August 2007, p. 214.

Tbilisi to protest the outcome of the elections with the participation of tens of thousand of people.¹²⁴

Christoph H. Stefes put in the picture of events prior to the Rose Revolution: “Eventually, on 22 November [2003] Saakashvili and his supporters stormed the parliament during the inauguration of the new legislature, forcing Shevardnadze to flee the parliament in the middle of his opening speech.”¹²⁵ The election results were annulled and new elections were held on 4 January 2004 in which Saakashvili’s National Movement party got 96 per cent of the votes cast and Saakashvili, who also had the support of the opposition parties, became the new president of Georgia.¹²⁶

To conclude, the war between Georgia and the South Ossetia was an important impact for the country. Tbilisi lost the control over the South Ossetia as well as over Abkhazia. Moreover, the cease-fire agreements paved the way for Russian troops to deploy in the conflict zone. Shevardnadze could end the war but could not help to political disintegration of the country. Besides, economic and political disorder led young politicians like Mikheil Saakashvili to become hope for Georgian people and open the way to the Rose Revolution.

¹²⁴ Lincoln A. Mitchell, *Uncertain Democracy: U.S. Foreign Policy and Georgia's Rose Revolution*, Pennsylvania, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008, pp. 61-64.

¹²⁵ Christoph H. Stefes, *Understanding Post-Soviet Transitions*, Basingstoke [England]; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, p. 54.

¹²⁶ Laurence Broers, “After the ‘revolution’: civil society and challenges of consolidating democracy in Georgia”, *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 24, No. 3, September 2005, p. 344.

CHAPTER

IV. THE ROSE REVOLUTION AND SAAKASHVILI ERA

After Shevardnadze's ouster from the presidency, the new, pro-Western government and its president Mikheil Saakashvili came to power with promises and hopes of a more democratic, wealthy and integrated Georgia. Determination and vision of the new administration through anti-corruption, democratization, melioration of the legal and political institutions and finally stabilization of the relations with the breakaway regions were welcomed by both Georgian people and international actors. However, in time, Saakashvili and his team faced certain problems that prevented him to achieve these goals in the short term. Moreover, the new government disappointed its internal and external supporters as the democratization process left its place to strengthening of the presidential power. Policies regarding minorities also failed, mostly due to legal obstacles. This chapter examines the Saakashvili era with its goals and policy implementations.

4.1 The Rose Revolution in 2003

The last years of Shevardnadze's presidency was shadowed by corruption claims against the ministers close to him and Shevardnadze's policies towards eliminating dissident voices within the party. Besides opposition, CUG politicians also protested him and the deterioration of the governing party began. Some leading figures of the party joined the opposition side in the parliament. Among these politicians, Mikheil Saakashvili and Zurab Zhvania were important young politicians of the party and were sympathized by both other politicians and people. Saakashvili left the government first and established his own party, New National Movement on 7 November 2001. On the contrary, Zhvania did not leave the party and tried to strengthen his position. Nonetheless, he established his political party, United Democrats, on June 2002.¹²⁷

¹²⁷ Jonathan Wheatley, *Georgia from National Awakening to Rose Revolution*, Aldershot, Hampshire; Burlington, VT, U.S.: Ashgate, 2005, pp. 174-175.

Saakashvili's party joined the elections on 2 June 2002 for Tbilisi City Assembly (*Sakrebulo*), in which the CUG failed to overcome the 4 per cent barrage, and became the first party. Saakashvili was elected as the chairman for the assembly on the 4 June 2002. Two weeks after the elections, on 17 June 2002, Zhvania established his party, United Democrats, which increased its popularity when Nino Burjanadze, chairperson of the Georgian parliament, declared her support for the party. Meanwhile, the civil opposition against Shevardnadze was growing. The Liberty Institute and some NGOs organized a youth movement called *Kmara!* (Enough!), akin to the Serbian youth organization *Otrop!* (Resistance!) which had helped the ouster of Slobodan Milosevic in October 2001.¹²⁸

While the opposition was strengthening its position with the support of the society and civil organizations, Shevardnadze found a solution to oppress the inter-party opposition by replacing the opponents with his supporters. In April 2003, Shevardnadze supported the establishment an alliance called 'For a New Georgia', the main pro-government bloc for the parliamentary elections in autumn, after a series of meetings between Shevardnadze, Avtandil Jorbanadze, the new leader of the CUG; Vakhtang Rcheulishvili, Socialist Party leader; Akaki Chkhaidze, the chairman of the state railway company and Levan Mamaladze, governor of the Kvemo-Kartli region.¹²⁹

The tensions between the government and the opposition increased in June when Shevardnadze suggested creating a new eleven-member Central Election Commission (CEC), nine of which would be nominated by him and approved by the parliament. Opposition parties deprecated the proposal of the president and called their supporters to protest outside the parliamentary building. Despite less people than expected participated the meeting, ten members of the existing CEC resigned due to the protests. Moreover, Nino Bujanadze, the Chairperson of Parliament, publicly announced to the

¹²⁸ Dan Jakopovich, "The 2003 "Rose Revolution" in Georgia: A Case Study in High Politics and Rank-and-File Execution", *Debatte*, Vol.15, No.2, August 2007, p. 215.

¹²⁹ Jonathan Wheatley, *Georgia from National Awakening to Rose Revolution*, Aldershot, Hampshire; Burlington, VT, U.S.: Ashgate, 2005, p.180.

demonstrators that she would side with the opposition for. Her statement was very important for the Georgian political life since she was a trusted politician among Georgian people and other politicians, moreover, her father, Anzor Burjanadze, was a friend of Shevardnadze, of whom political and popular support was diminishing day by day.¹³⁰

Afterwards, Burjanadze left the CUG and joined Zhvania's United Democrats, which then named Burjanadze-Democrats on 21 August 2003. Burjanadze's participation to the array of the United Democrats increased the population of the party, of which had about 19 per cent of the votes according to the surveys, carried out by the Institute for Policy Studies, for the upcoming elections in November 2003. Despite the popularity of Burjanadze, United Democrats were not able to achieve Saakashvili's New Democratic Movement's success since Zhvania's party was perceived as a group of Tbilisi elite. However, Saakashvili's popularity grew as he was seen as the real opposition leader since he continued to campaign in pro-governmental, poor and rural areas.¹³¹

Until the election, the surveys on polls indicated that the New Democratic Movement was ahead of other parties with a significant difference. But on 2 November 2003, after the voting process began, the appeals from both opposition and international observers for the elections increased. Katz stresses that: "Both the International Election Observer Mission and the OSCE commented that problems included inaccurate voters' lists, and the absence of competence and objectivity among election administration officials."¹³² Moreover, the data published by the CEC was different substantially from the exit polls conducted by the independent organizations. According to the data of the CEC, Shevardnadze's party For a New Georgia was the first party with twenty-seven per cent while Saakashvili's National Movement became the second with nineteen percent of the

¹³⁰ Jonathan Wheatley, *Georgia from National Awakening to Rose Revolution*, Aldershot, Hampshire; Burlington, VT, U.S.: Ashgate, 2005, pp. 180, 209.

¹³¹ Lincoln A. Mitchell, *Uncertain Democracy: U.S. Foreign Policy and Georgia's Rose Revolution*, Pennsylvania, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008, p. 51.

¹³² Rebecca S. Katz, *The Georgian Regime Crisis of 2003-2004*, Stuttgart, Ibidem, 2006, p.137.

votes.¹³³ According to the Georgian Fair Elections NGO, the Nationalist Party was the first party with twenty-six per cent while Shevardnadze's For a New Georgia became the second with nineteen per cent of the votes. The rest of the parties' votes were nearly the same with CEC's statistics.¹³⁴

Party/Bloc	Official Results %	Place	PVT (parallel vote tabulation) %	Place
For New Georgia	21.32 %	1	18.92 %	2
Union of Democratic Revival	18.84 %	2	8.13 %	5
National Movement	18.08 %	3	26.60 %	1
Labour	12.04 %	4	17.36 %	3
Burjanadze-Democrats	8.79 %	5	10.15 %	4
New Rights	7.35 %	6	7.99 %	6
7% Threshold				
Industry Will Save Georgia	6.17 %	7	5.20%	7

Table: 1 Official CEC and PVT Results of November 2003 Elections

Source: Post Election Interim Report", http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2003/11/1593_en.pdf, accessed on 8 June 2009.

Besides the differences between exit polls and official results of the elections, many irregularities of the election were reported from many areas of the country. It was claimed that the officers in charge for the elections were not trained accurately to execute and to count the votes. There were also reports that the officials were responsible from empty ballots, inaccurate voter lists and delivering problems of the election ballots which prevent thousands of people from voting. After the results began to be declared precinct by precinct, the appeals increased as the For a New Georgia became the first party throughout the Georgia. In addition to the protests by opposition

¹³³ *The Europa World Year Book 2004*, Joanna Maher, ed., London, Europa Publications, 2004, p. 1809.

¹³⁴ Rebecca S. Katz, *The Georgian Regime Crisis of 2003-2004*, Stuttgart, Ibidem, 2006, p. 138.

and *Kmara!* for the disputed election results, international observers criticized the elections and delays on the announcement of the official results.¹³⁵

On 8 November 2003 a large rally was held in Tbilisi's Freedom Square. It was led by the National Movement with the support of *Kmara!* and joined by the Burjanadze Democrats and *Ertoba* (Unity), a small party that had been established by Jumber Patiashvili. Saakashvili, Burjanadze and Zhvania all addressed the crowd, with Saakashvili demanding the resignation of Shevardnadze and new elections.¹³⁶

Thousands of people outside the capital arrived in Tbilisi to participate in demonstrations organized by pro-government and anti-government organizations respectively. After the demonstrations, hundreds of people began to sit-in outside the Parliament building, which would last for six days. Meanwhile, Shevardnadze went to Batumi to get the support of Aslan Abashidze, the leader of the Ajarian Autonomous Republic. There were rallies in Batumi addressed by the two leaders. In Tbilisi, pro-government Georgians attacked to TV channel Rustavi-2 which they accused to broadcast in favor of opposition. In the following days' larger scale demonstrations were held in Tbilisi to call Shevardnadze to resign.¹³⁷

In addition to opposition, a pro-government crowd gathered outside the Parliament. It was a chance that no serious clashes happened between the two groups since within the pro-government group there were employees which were forced to come to the rally. Among those employees, there were those who were sent by the leader of the Ajarian Autonomous region, Aslan Abashidze who threatened employees to lose their jobs. After days, only hundreds of people remained who were supporting the government.

¹³⁵ Ghia Nodia and Alvaro Pinto Scholtbach, *The political landscape of Georgia: political parties: achievements, challenges and prospects*, Tbilisi, Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development, 2006, p. 107.

¹³⁶ Jonathan Wheatley, *Georgia from National Awakening to Rose Revolution*, Aldershot, Hampshire; Burlington, VT, U.S.: Ashgate, 2005, p.183.

¹³⁷ Dan Jakopovich, "The 2003 "Rose Revolution" in Georgia: A Case Study in High Politics and Rank-and-File Execution", *Debate*, Vol.15, No.2, August 2007, pp. 214-216.

On 20 November, the CEC announced the final official results of the elections. The results showed that For a New Georgia became the first party followed by Revival and National Movement. These results would bring Shevardnadze's presidency to an end.¹³⁸

On 21 November, thousands of cars waving opposition flags entered Tbilisi, led by Saakashvili. On the next day, 22 November, nearly hundred thousand people, with roses in their hands, gathered in Freedom Square while Shevardnadze started his speech for the new session of the parliament. Saakashvili and a number of leading opposition members entered the parliamentary building and forced him to leave accompanied by his bodyguards. In the following hours Shevardnadze refused to resign and declared state of emergency. On the next day, Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov came to Tbilisi for mediating between government and the opposition. The same day, Shevardnadze announced his resignation after the meeting with the opposition leaders and Russian foreign minister.¹³⁹

4.2 More Democratic or More Authoritarian?

Mikheil Saakashvili, who graduated from Kiev State University and had master degree from Columbia Law School, decided to involve in politics with the incitement of his friend Zurab Zhvania when Saakashvili was working as a lawyer in the U.S. Saakashvili was elected as a member of the parliament from Shevardnadze's CUG in 1995 elections. He advanced to the position of ministry of justice in 2000. But after corruption he witnessed within the government, he resigned from the government and established his own party, the United National Movement, in October 2001 and had great success in

¹³⁸ Eric A. Miller, "Smelling the Roses", *Problems of Post-Communism*, Vol. 51, No. 2, March/April 2004, p. 17.

¹³⁹ Dan Jakopovich, "The 2003 "Rose Revolution" in Georgia: A Case Study in High Politics and Rank-and-File Execution", *Debatte*, Vol.15, No.2, August 2007, p. 216.

Tbilisi City Assembly (*Sakrebulo*) elections held on 2 June 2002.¹⁴⁰ After that, Saakashvili became the one of the most important opposition leaders in Georgia.

As mentioned before, his pertinacious election campaign in 2003 led Saakashvili to become the president of Georgia. Besides his political skills and personal charisma, it is important to mention about the civil actors who helped him to become a political hero in Georgia. As Wheatley argues, the Rose Revolution, known for the flowers handed to the policemen by opposition supporters in demonstrations on 22 November, was not the success of a one man. It is important to cite the role of the well organized party structure and support of the civil organizations and NGOs in political revolution in Georgia.¹⁴¹

Saakashvili's National Movement was a well-organized and effective party which succeeded to achieve a substantial support from Georgian society. During the election campaign and afterwards, the local activists undertook important mission as they held demonstrations with *Kmara!* against the government which they believed to become authoritarian and need to be replaced with a more democratic administration. It is important to remind that the protestors participated to the rallies were not only Saakashvili supporters. Zhvania and Burjanadze and the other opposition supporters were also important figures in the Rose Revolution.

The NGOs had also important contribution in the victory of the opposition against Shevardnadze and his For a New Georgia Bloc. Especially Liberty Institute which established the youth organization *Kmara!* and the International Society for Fair Elections (ISFAD) which conduct exit polls that proved the election results were different than declared by the CEC. The Rose Revolution has shown the importance of the mass media to influence people on important issues. The Georgian TV channel Rustavi-2 had important role with its broadcast which allowed the opposition leaders to

¹⁴⁰ Jonathan Wheatley, *Georgia from National Awakening to Rose Revolution*, Aldershot, Hampshire; Burlington, VT, U.S.: Ashgate, 2005, p. 174.

¹⁴¹ Jonathan Wheatley, *Georgia from National Awakening to Rose Revolution*, Aldershot, Hampshire; Burlington, VT, U.S.: Ashgate, 2005, pp.185-188.

spread their messages to the Georgian voters and to reflect their critics about government.¹⁴²

The new government and its president were known to have a substantial support from the West, especially from the U.S. According to Dan Jakopovich, the main elements of the opposition against Shevardnadze were trained and financed by the U.S. government and the NGOs centered in the U.S. Besides, their aspirations to ally with the West and statements of “low-intensified democracy” were in accordance with the Western capital.¹⁴³

Following Shevardnadze, most of his ministers resigned from their posts in the government. On 26 November, Nino Burjanadze, acting head of the state, announced that the National Movement and Burjanadze-Democrats bloc had agreed on supporting a single candidate, Mikheil Saakashvili, in the forthcoming presidential elections. The elections were held on 4 January 2004. According to the results, Saakashvili won the elections with a landslide and became the new president of the Republic of Georgia with the 96.24 per cent of the votes.¹⁴⁴

The new government was established on 17 February 2004, headed by Zurab Zhvania as the prime minister of the new cabinet composed of twenty ministries. Parliamentary elections were re-held on 28 March 2004 since the previous elections were annulled by the Supreme Court. National Movement and Burjanadze-Democrats took part in the elections as one bloc called ‘National Movement-Democrats’ and gained 66.24 per cent of the votes. The only opposition party that succeeded to overcome the seven per cent

¹⁴² Lincoln A. Mitchell, *Uncertain Democracy: U.S. Foreign Policy and Georgia's Rose Revolution*, Pennsylvania, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008, p. 73.

¹⁴³ Dan Jakopovich, “The 2003 “Rose Revolution” in Georgia: A Case Study in High Politics and Rank-and-File Execution”, *Debate*, Vol.15, No.2, August 2007, p. 211.

¹⁴⁴ Jonathan Wheatley, *Georgia from National Awakening to Rose Revolution*, Aldershot, Hampshire; Burlington, VT, U.S.: Ashgate, 2005, pp.193-194.

barrier was Rightist Opposition, the bloc that combined New Rights and Industry will Save Georgia.¹⁴⁵

The Rose Revolution and the presidency of western educated Mikheil Saakashvili were welcomed by the international society particularly by the U.S. Georgia was shown as a precedent for the other former Soviet republics and the countries in the region for democratization and the will of the people. Particularly, as a part of democratization policy of Bush government, Georgia enjoyed a substantial support from the U.S. Washington showed its support both in financial and political sphere. Beside the sympathy of their leader to the West, particularly the U.S., Georgian people embraced the West as the promoter of the democracy.¹⁴⁶

Saakashvili's team came to power with the claim of more democratic Georgia. As Charles Kupchan mentioned, the new administration showed improvements in both social and economical areas. Restrictive measures were taken against bribery and corruption. Endeavors to ameliorate law and education were important steps towards democratization as well as the modernization of roadways and public services. In the first two years of Saakashvili administration, Georgia's economic growth was 6 per cent.¹⁴⁷ But these steps were not enough for consolidation of democracy. Saakashvili inherited a country which was tired of internal ethnic disputes, corrupted state institutions and economic distress.

By the time, it was seen that the new administration was far from a fully democratic management. Despite strengthening of fair elections and struggle with corruption, Saakashvili and its governing party became more centralized and authoritarian in political terms. With constitutional changes approved in the new parliament within two

¹⁴⁵ Jonathan Wheatley, *Georgia from National Awakening to Rose Revolution*, Aldershot, Hampshire; Burlington, VT, U.S.: Ashgate, 2005, p.195.

¹⁴⁶ Lincoln A. Mitchell, "Democracy in Georgia Since the Rose Revolution", *Orbis*, Vol. 50, No. 4, Fall 2006, p. 671.

¹⁴⁷ Charles A. Kupchan, "Wilted Rose", *The New Republic*, 6 February 2006, p.10.

weeks, the executive power of the president was extended. The president appoints the prime minister and the cabinet, as well as several mayors and numerous lower ranking officials, including positions like university provosts. He can dissolve parliament if it rejects his budget twice, and he exercises control over an executive branch of government that dominates the weaker legislative branch. Saakashvili enjoys more formal power than Shevardnadze ever did.¹⁴⁸

According to Mitchell, the strengthening of the president while there is an appointed prime minister and weakened legislature shows that the government is intended to make the changes it desires seriously and not to consolidate democracy. The lack of a strong opposition party is another important issue for Georgia. Good relations with the ruling party are seen as the access to power in any position of politics. Thus, it is not surprising that a strong opposition party did not appear as a political rival against the New National Movement.¹⁴⁹

As mentioned before, free media had important role in the awakening of social consciousness on free and fair elections as well as the exposing of government's collusion on voter ballots. But, unfortunately, the media became less independent than the Shevardnadze era. As the media patrons' interests are connected to the government's the media is less critical against the government. Similarly, the NGOs, which contributed a lot to the Rose Revolution, lost their characteristic as the advocate of democracy.

Laurence Boers explains that there are three factors on the depolitization of the NGOs. First of all, since their leading cadres shift into government, NGOs suffer from experienced leadership. Secondly, the new leaders of these groups are reluctant to criticize their former colleagues. The last, there is a difference between civil groups who

¹⁴⁸ Lincoln A. Mitchell, "Democracy in Georgia Since the Rose Revolution", *Orbis*, Vol. 50, No. 4, Fall 2006, p. 672.

¹⁴⁹ Lincoln A. Mitchell, "Democracy in Georgia Since the Rose Revolution", *Orbis*, Vol. 50, No. 4, Fall 2006, p. 672, pp. 673-675.

supported the Rose Revolution in November 2003 and those who do not. This difference affects the organizations' access to the government.¹⁵⁰ These factors prevent the NGOs to act as affective groups on political and social issues. Thus, it can be said that the institutions which had great contribution in the revolution for a more democratic Georgia lost their attribution to be free and impartial, which are essential for democratic regimes.

After three years in office, Saakashvili's presidency and his policies to centralize the power began to have critics from the opposition and international observers. Public's support for the president and ruling party decreased and it caused a political turmoil in the country. Protests against Saakashvili turned to riots and clashes in Tbilisi streets and police used tear gas, rubber bullets and water cannons on demonstrators on early November 2007. The main argument of opposition leaders and the protestors was the government's tight hold on power. They complained that any opposition against government was labeled as Russian proxy and that the government was not open to any discussion with the opposition.¹⁵¹

Saakashvili ordered a state of emergency to control the events. Two television stations were closed immediately and the public assembly in the capital was banned. One of the opposition channels, Imedi TV stopped broadcasting after Special Forces unit had forayed channel's office. Opposition accused the president for political pressure and the state of emergency was assessed as a betrayal to the spirit of Rose Revolution.¹⁵² However, the government defended its actions and claimed that the demonstrations were not entirely peaceful. In his televised addressing, Saakashvili blamed Russian intelligent

¹⁵⁰ Laurence Broers, "After the 'revolution': civil society and challenges of consolidating democracy in Georgia", *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 24, No. 3, September 2005, p.345.

¹⁵¹ C.J. Chivers, "Georgia protests erupt in violence as police try to clear demonstrators", *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/07/world/europe/07iht07georgia.8229973.html>, accessed on 8 June 2009.

¹⁵² C.J. Chivers, "Georgia Leader Declares Emergency Over Protest", *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/08/world/europe/08tbilisi.html?scp=2&sq=georgia&st=nyt>, accessed on 8 June 2009.

services to coordinate and to help the protestors who caused riots in the capital. Sergei Lavrov, Foreign minister of Russia, stated that the protests in Tbilisi were interior problem of Georgia, and no other statement done from Moscow.¹⁵³

One day after he ordered a state of emergency, Mikheil Saakashvili agreed to conduct presidential elections in January 2008, instead of in fall of the same year as it was scheduled after the amendments of the constitution by the president and the parliament which was dominated by Saakashvili's National Movement Party. The presidential elections, held on 5 January 2008, was a great disappointment for Saakashvili who won the presidency with a landslide in 2004. His votes substantially decreased due to the political turmoil in the country and the discontent of the people. Moreover, he had no important rival in 2004 elections; in 2008, six candidates competed for the presidency beside Saakashvili. However, despite Saakashvili's decreasing popularity, his party United National Movement won more than the half of the votes in the parliamentary elections, held on 21 May 2008.

No. on Ballot	Name	Number of Votes	Percentage
1	Levan Gachechiladze	509,234	25.69 %
2	Arkadi Patarkatsishvili	140,826	7.10 %
3	David Gamkrelidze	79,747	4.02 %
4	Shalva Natelashvili	128,589	6.49 %
5	Mikheil Saakashvili	1,060,042	53.47 %
6	Giorgi Maiashvili	15,249	0.77 %
7	Irina Sarishvili-Chanturia	3,242	0.16 %

Table 2: Official Election Results for the Presidential Elections in 2008

Source: "Georgia: Extraordinary Presidential Election" http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2008/03/29982_en.pdf, accessed on 8 June 2009

¹⁵³ C.J. Chivers, "Georgia Leader Declares Emergency Over Protest", *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/08/world/europe/08tbilisi.html?pagewanted=2&sq=georgia&st=nyt&scp=2>, accessed on 8 June 2009.

No. on Ballot	Name of Party/Electoral Bloc	Votes (proportional)	Percentage (prop.)	Number of Received Mandates		
				Prop.	Maj.	Total
1	Political Union of Citizens' "Georgian Policy"	8,231	7.44 %	0	0	0
2	Georgian Republican Party	67,037	59.18 %	0	2	2
3	"Rightist Alliance, Topadze-Industrials"	16,440	0.19 %	0	0	0
4	"Shalva Natelashvili – Georgian Labor Party"	132,092	17.73 %	6	0	6
5	"United National Movement – for Victorious Georgia"	1,050,237	0.18 %	48	71	119
6	Political Union "Union of Georgian Sportsmen"	3,308	0.89 %	0	0	0
7	United Opposition (National Council, New Rights)	314,668	8.66 %	15	2	17
8	National Party of Radical Democrats of all Georgia	3,180	0.18 %	0	0	0
9	Political Union "Christian-Democratic Alliance"	15,839	0.89 %	0	0	0
10	"Giorgi Targamadze – Christian-Democrats"	153,634	8.66 %	6	0	6
11	"Traditionalists – Our Georgia and Women's Party"	7,880	0.44 %	0	0	0
12	Georgian Political Party "Our Country"	2,101	0.12 %	0	0	0

Table 3: Election Results for the Parliamentary Elections 2008

Source: "Georgia: Parliamentary Elections", http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2008/09/32898_en.pdf, accessed on 8 June 2009.

4.3 Saakashvili's Policies toward Ethnic Groups in Georgia

Georgia is ethnically the most heterogeneous country in the region. The largest ethnic minority in Georgia is the Azeri population with nearly %7 and it is followed by the Armenians with about %6. Despite their substantial proportion, these minorities never had autonomous status within Georgia neither in Soviet era nor afterwards. There are

other minorities with lesser proportions such as Russians (%1.6), Greeks (%0.35), Ukrainians (%0.16), Yazids (%0.42) and the Kists (%0.16).¹⁵⁴

It is important to note that there was a large number of Meskhetian Turks were living in southern parts of Georgia before they were forced to deport to Central Asia in 1944, by order of Joseph Stalin. Most of them relocated in Krasnodar, Russia due to the ethnic rivalry and confusion in the region prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union. In 2005, thousands of Meskhetian Turks immigrated to the U.S. since they did not welcomed by their host inhabitants and not allow turning back their homeland in Georgia. Today, Mekhetian Turks are still a stateless people who are seeking to find a homeland far away from their own home.¹⁵⁵

The most known ethnic entities are also the ones which had enjoyed autonomous status in the Soviet era: Abkhazians, Ossetians and Ajarians. Abkhazians are composing nearly %2 of the Georgian population while Ossetians are about %3. Unlike Abkhazians and Ossetians, Ajarians are ethnically Georgian but they were converted to Islam after the region was conquered by the Ottoman Empire in the seventeenth century. Hence, Ajarians never had secessionist demands from Georgia. However, the other two had separatist claims and this caused ethnic wars in Georgia in the early 1990s. Since then, both Abkhazia and the South Ossetia enjoyed *de facto* independence from and also had no political ties with Tbilisi.

¹⁵⁴ Julia A. George, "Minority Political Inclusion in Mikheil Saakashvili's Georgia", *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol.60, No.7, p. 1153-1154.

¹⁵⁵ Malika Mirhanova, "People in Exile: The Oral History of Meskhetian Turks (Akhyskha Turkleri)", *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Apr2006, Vol. 26, Issue 1, pp. 33-44.

<i>Total population:</i> 4,371,535 subsets	<i>Country ethnic</i>	<i>Ethnic population (%) in Georgia</i>	<i>Total regional/ District population</i>	<i>Ethnic population in region/ district</i>	<i>% of region/ district population which is the titular or enclave group</i>	<i>% of ethnic population in region/ district</i>	
<i>Autonomous territories</i>							
	Abkhazia:	Abkhazians*	95,853(1.77)	52,5061	93,267	17.76	97.30
	South Ossetia:	Ossetians*	164,055(3.04)	98,527	65,232	66.21	39.76
	Ajara:	Muslim Georgians	--	--	--	--	--
<i>Ethnic Enclaves</i>							
	Kvemo Kartli:	Azeri	284,761(6.51)	497,530	224,606	45.14	78.88
	Samskhe-Javakheti:	Armenian	248,929(5.69)	207,598	113,347	54.60	45.53
	Kvemo Kartli:	Armenian		497,530	31,777	6.39	12.77
	Kvemo Kartli:	Greek	15,166(0.35)	497,530	7,415	1.49	48.89
	Kakheti: Kist		7,110(0.16)	407,182	6,997	1.72	98.41
<i>Unclustered minorities</i>							
		Russian	67,671(1.55)				
		Ukranian	7,039(0.16)				
		Yazid	18,329(0.42)				

Table 4: Ethnic Background of Georgian Population

Note: *Due to the inability of the Georgian government to collect data in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the 1989 Soviet Census used for these cases.

Source: Julia A. George, "Minority Political Inclusion in Mikheil Saakashvili's Georgia", *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol.60, No.7, September 2008, p. 1154.

The Republic of Georgia struggled with inter ethnic clashes in Abkhazia and the South Ossetia soon after its independence. South Ossetian conflict stalemated while neither Georgian armed forces could head over Ossetian separatists nor Tskhinvali could secure its independence. However, Abkhazians made out a military success against Georgia. Since 1992, the situation in these disputed areas has been mentioned as frozen conflicts

owing to the absence of final peace settlements. Under the presidency of Shevardnadze, autonomous areas, so to say, were left their own and maintained their *de facto* independence.

After Saakashvili came to power in 2004, one of his main goals was to integrate these breakaway regions to Georgia in both economic and political terms. Saakashvili's stated policy emphasized local government initiatives and decentralized policy making, especially for minority clusters. The logic behind this plan was twofold: minorities would feel less discrimination by the central government, since elections would presumably select minority representatives. Moreover, Saakashvili announced his intention to staff civil service offices with ethnic minorities in enclave districts, using 'positive discrimination' policies to achieve their 'integration into the state apparatus.'¹⁵⁶

Saakashvili's opinion was that if the economic, social and political situation in these areas were restored, the population would want their regions to incorporate with Georgia and would force their local leaders to cooperate with Tbilisi. But his hopes were more optimistic to expect these regions, particularly Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and their people to forget all hostilities and bad memories of the past and to welcome the new administration.

Despite Saakashvili's promises to devolve power to local authorities, power of the president increased with the laws enacted by the parliament. Besides, Georgia's gradually increasing military expenditure and strengthening of the armed forces which were deteriorated under the presidency of Shevardnadze caused agitation among the people of the autonomous regions. Indeed, there was a substantial increase in military budget in the first years of Saakashvili in the office. "In 2004, the defense budget shot up by roughly 40 percent, followed by another sharp increase in 2005. Recent purchases have included tanks and armored personnel carriers, enhancing the army's offensive

¹⁵⁶ Julia A. George, "Minority Political Inclusion in Mikheil Saakashvili's Georgia", *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol.60, No.7, September 2008, p. 1155.

capability.”¹⁵⁷ The minorities’ fear of Georgian nationalism was triggered with these high costs of military expenditure as well as Saakashvili’s tolerance and welcoming to Gamsakhurdia’s supporters to his National Movement. Adoption of party’s flag, five red crosses on a white base that symbolize Georgia’s orthodox heritage, as national flag was also perceived as the rise of Georgian nationalism.¹⁵⁸

Economic conditions were also other important elements that prevented Saakashvili to apply reforms in these regions. Saakashvili government was determined to fight against corruption in the country and substantial improvements had been made. Contraband smuggling was an important trade activity in South Ossetia, specifically at the Erghneti market near Russian border and in Ajaria at the Turkish border.¹⁵⁹ There was not a taxation control or inspection on these areas during Shevardnadze’s presidency. The new government closed the region’s main smuggling market Erghneti, a small town near Tskhinvali; afterwards armed clashes took place between Georgian troops and Ossetian militias in August 2004 near South Ossetian town Gori and resulted with at least 20 killings. The very reason for the clashes was the reaction to Tbilisi government to cut-off the main revenue of the Ossetian authorities and smuggling gangs.¹⁶⁰ It can be argue that the anti-corruption policies confronted Georgian government with local authorities and smuggling gangs who had the support of the local people of their regions. Tbilisi’s efforts were perceived as the endeavors to gain control and to strengthen Georgian rule over these territories.

Another important reason of the failure of Saakashvili’s efforts was the political obstacles that prevented minorities from participating Georgian politics. After the Rose Revolution, one of Saakashvili’s commitments was the political representation of the

¹⁵⁷ Charles A. Kupchan, “Wilted Rose”, *The New Republic*, February 6, 2006, p. 11.

¹⁵⁸ Julia A. George, “Minority Political Inclusion in Mikheil Saakashvili’s Georgia”, *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol.60, No.7, September 2008, p. 1164.

¹⁵⁹ Julia A. George, “Minority Political Inclusion in Mikheil Saakashvili’s Georgia”, *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol.60, No.7, September 2008, p. 1159.

¹⁶⁰ Charles A. Kupchan, “Wilted Rose”, *The New Republic*, 6 February 2006, p. 11.

minorities which would facilitate their participation to politics. But the legal basis was not well prepared for the engagement of the ethnic minorities. As George mentioned, the law on political parties and threshold law were main obstacles that caused local parties opt out from Georgian political life. Besides, 2005 Local Governance Law strengthened the central power rather than devolution of power to the ethnic minorities.¹⁶¹

To summarize, despite the efforts of the new Georgian government to incorporate the regions of ethnic minorities into political and economical sphere of Georgia and integrate the country by reforms, it was faced with the resistance and uncompromising attitude of the local authorities and peoples. Saakashvili promised more autonomy to those areas that were mentioned as frozen conflicts, improving economic conditions and educational reforms including protection of the titular languages. But the poverty and unemployment did not reduce in the short term and decentralization could not be successful due to the lack of a comprehensive legislation on political parties as well as the lessening of the local authorization. Moreover, first clashes since 1992 took place between Georgian troops and local people owing to the anti-corruption policies through the border regions. In the end, Tbilisi failed to achieve its main goals on devolution of power to local authorities and economic development of these areas as a result of its aggressive state-building policies and reluctance to share central power with local administration.

4.4 Tensions between Georgia and the South Ossetia in 2004

As it was mentioned in the previous chapters, after becoming the president of the Republic of Georgia, Mikheil Saakashvili focused on the breakaway regions and promised Georgian people to reestablish the country's territorial and political integrity. His first step was to change the administration of the Muslim territory of the country, Ajaria. The leader of the region was Aslan Abashidze who was known with his support for Eduard Shevardnadze during the Rose Revolution. Abashidze was overthrow on 5

¹⁶¹ Julia A. George, "Minority Political Inclusion in Mikheil Saakashvili's Georgia", *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 60, No. 7, September 2008, pp. 1167-1172.

May 2004, after a series of strikes organized by Tbilisi and pressure by the central government in Tbilisi. To consolidate his power in Ajaria, Saakashvili established a new provisional Interim Council to govern the region until the elections were held. The council had twenty members and was directly subordinated to the president of Georgia. The elections were held on 20 June and the Interim Council handed over its authority to the new Supreme Council which was drastically made up by the pro government bloc Saakashvili – Victorious Ajaria.¹⁶²

After his success in Ajaria, Saakashvili turned his attention to South Ossetia. His plan was to incite the people to rise against South Ossetian government. Fertilizers were sent to the rural areas and villages of the region to help the peasants in developing the agriculture. Saakashvili promised to pay pensions to local people, to warrant an ambulance in Tskhinvali, to begin television broadcasts in Ossetian language and to rehabilitate railway to Tskhinvali.¹⁶³ Besides his efforts to entice Ossetian people to integrate into Georgia, like Ajarians did, Saakashvili also tried to daunt Ossetians by military operations.

Troops of Georgian Ministry of Interior were deployed in four villages near the South Ossetia border by the end of May 2004. The main reason of the deployment of the Georgian soldiers in the region was to terminate the contraband activities, which costed several billion dollars each year. However, Georgia's efforts to attract the Ossetian people and to control the region were in vain. Ossetian villages rejected the fertilizers.¹⁶⁴ Tbilisi's pledges were received with suspicion by the Ossetians. Moreover, the closure of the smuggling center Erghneti affected many Ossetians whose livelihood depended on it and the hostility against Georgia increased in the region.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² Jonathan Wheatley, *Georgia from National Awakening to Rose Revolution*, Aldershot, Hampshire; Burlington, VT, U.S.: Ashgate, 2005, p. 196.

¹⁶³ Jonathan Wheatley, *Georgia from National Awakening to Rose Revolution*, Aldershot, Hampshire; Burlington, VT, U.S.: Ashgate, 2005, p. 197.

¹⁶⁴ Daan van der Schriek, "Fertilizing Tensions", *Transitions Online*, 7 June 2004.

¹⁶⁵ Maya Beridze, "A Frozen Conflict Turns Warm", *Transitions Online*, 12 July 2004.

Saakashvili hoped to incite the Ossetians by humanitarian aid and other pledges to urge the regional government to cooperate with Tbilisi. He thought that after closing the Erghneti market, South Ossetians would blame the Tskhinvali regime and the authority of the South Ossetia president Eduard Kokoity would weaken. On the contrary, support for Kokoity increased as the parliamentary elections indicated. Pro-presidential party, Unity, won two-thirds of the seats in the elections held on 23 May 2004. Ossetians directly accused Tbilisi to cut off their main livelihood and deployment of the Georgian soldiers to the checkpoints to terminate smuggling. Moreover, the existence of the Georgian troops caused disturbance among the people of the region, both Ossetians and Georgians.¹⁶⁶

Tbilisi's plan was to integrate the region by overthrowing the Ossetian leaders with the support of the Ossetian people, like in Ajaria. But the situation in the South Ossetia was quite different from Ajaria. First of all, South Ossetians did not accept themselves as a part of Georgia like Ajarians did. Second, Ajaria enjoyed an autonomous status within Georgia, but the South Ossetia had *de facto* independence from Tbilisi since the war between Georgia and the South Ossetia in 1992, after the independence of Georgia from the USSR. Besides, the sour memories of the bloody war still remained. Russia's support for the region was also important for Ossetians to feel themselves part of the Russian Federation instead of Georgia. Daan van der Schriek mentions that: "Up to 90 percent of the South Ossetian population had over the past two years [between 2002 and 2004] taken Moscow up on its offer of acquiring Russian citizenship."¹⁶⁷

Russia also did not intend to give up the South Ossetia as it did Ajaria. Moscow began to send arms and missiles to the region. In June and July 2004, Georgia accused Russia to send military ammunition to the breakaway region. On 7 July 2004, a convoy of trucks which was carrying reportedly 300 missiles to Tskhinvali and belonged to Russian peacekeeping forces was stopped by Georgian Interior Ministry forces. This caused the

¹⁶⁶ International Crisis Group, *Georgia: Avoiding War in South Ossetia*, Europe Report No: 159, 26 November 2004, p.13.

¹⁶⁷ Daan van der Schriek, "Fertilizing Tensions", *Transitions Online*, 7 June 2004.

rise of the tensions in the region.¹⁶⁸ The retaliation from the South Ossetian side came quickly; Ossetian troops captured fifty Georgian peacekeepers and fired on Georgian checkpoints in Vanati, a Georgian-populated village in South Ossetia. Two Georgian soldiers were injured according to the statement of Georgian officials.¹⁶⁹

The conflict between Georgians and South Ossetians broke out again after 12 years of the bloody war in 1992 among the parties. Tbilisi immediately sent more troops to the region and the two sides began to fight for the control of the villages in the conflict zone of the region. Neither telephone conversations between Vladimir Putin and Mikheil Saakashvili nor the visit of the Russian president's emissary to Tskhinvali could help to ease the tensions. In the following days, the clashes continued increasingly.¹⁷⁰

While the armed conflict was continuing, Georgia sought the support of the West, particularly of the U.S.; Saakashvili had telephone conversations with the U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell and National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice as he refrained to confront with Moscow. He held a visit to Washington on 4-5 August 2004 to gain support from the Bush administration to put the South Ossetia issue on to the U.S.-Russia agenda and to implicate the U.S. into the negotiation process. But he did not find the support he sought; Washington bluntly announced that it would not take part with Georgia if it would go into war with Russia.¹⁷¹

On the other hand, in search for putting the issue into the international platform, Georgian Foreign Minister, Salome Zurbishvili, made a presentation to the OSCE Permanent Council on 29 July 2004, calling for increasing the monitoring presence of the organization specifically in the Roki Tunnel, the only land route from the South

¹⁶⁸ "Georgia Seizes Russian Arms Convoy in South Ossetia", *Civil Georgia*, 7 July 2004, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=7280>, accessed on 7 June 2009.

¹⁶⁹ Maya Beridze, "A Frozen Conflict Turns Warm", *Transitions Online*, 12 July 2004.

¹⁷⁰ Maya Beridze, "A Frozen Conflict Turns Warm", *Transitions Online*, 12 July 2004.

¹⁷¹ International Crisis Group, *Georgia: Avoiding War in South Ossetia*, Europe Report, No. 159, 26 November 2004, p. 18.

Ossetia to Russia, and Java district near the Russian border. She also called for a conference at the level of presidents or prime ministers on settlement of the conflict. In the following days, the OSCE gradually intervened in the efforts to ease the tensions in the region and it decided to increase the number of observers in the region from four to six despite Russia's reluctance.¹⁷²

The European Union did not directly engage with the conflict. In August, the EU's special envoy for the South Caucasus, Heikki Talvitie, paid a visit to Georgia and South Ossetia. On 23 August, he met with Spokesman of the Georgian Parliament Nino Burdjanadze, Prime Minister Zhurab Zhvania, Russian Ambassador Vladimir Chkhikvishvili and the U.S Ambassador Richard Miles to discuss the situation in the region. After his negotiations in Tbilisi, Talvitie visited Tskhinvali to meet with South Ossetian president Eduard Kokoity and then to Moscow for talks with Russian leadership.¹⁷³

While Georgia was seeking international support for the South Ossetia issue, the clashes between Georgian and South Ossetian troops reached the peak in mid August. It was reported that seventeen Georgians and five Ossetians were killed in the gunfire.¹⁷⁴ Low level clashes and gunfire between Georgians and Ossetians lasted for 6 weeks. The JCC and JPKF did not get involve in the clashes. The JCC meetings were postponed during the conflict since both Georgian and the South Ossetians boycotted. JPKF was reportedly unable to operate in the zone of conflict and could not function. But the JCC had a crucial role in the peace talks. The fighting sides came together with the mediation of the JCC in mid August when the clashes intensified. The high level representatives from the sides of the conflict agreed on withdrawal of the Georgian troops from the

¹⁷² International Crisis Group, *Georgia: Avoiding War in South Ossetia*, Europe Report, No. 159, 26 November 2004, p. 19.

¹⁷³ Dow Kimbrell, "EU Envoy Calls for Peaceful Solution to South Ossetian Conflict", *Georgia Daily Digest*, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/georgia/hypermail/200408/0060.shtml>, accessed on 7 June 2009.

¹⁷⁴ Jonathan Wheatley, *Georgia from National Awakening to Rose Revolution*, Aldershot, Hampshire; Burlington, VT, U.S.: Ashgate, 2005, p. 198.

region and demilitarization of the conflict zone. Georgia began to withdraw its troops from the zone of conflict on 20 August. Nevertheless shootings continued on the following days and both Tskhinvali and Tbilisi blamed each other to be responsible from the events.¹⁷⁵

To conclude, Saakashvili government inaugurated with great hopes and pledges for Georgia. But in retrospect, it can be argued that Georgia is not ahead from previous government in democratic terms. Despite genuine fight against corruption and efforts to consolidate political and territorial integrity of the country, Saakashvili's policies brought ethnic divisions further. Moreover, Saakashvili's determination to gain control over breakaway regions and to bring his country into Western world agitated relations with Russia which will intervene when Georgia attempted to incorporate the South Ossetia in 2008.

4.5 Western Policy towards Georgia

Georgia's relations with the West, particularly with the U.S., NATO and the EU, have significant importance to understand Russia's aggressiveness toward Georgia and its effect on Georgian-Russian War in August 2008. Bilateral relations of Georgia with U.S., NATO and the EU are examined below respectively.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Empire, the U.S. began to expand its sphere of influence in the former territories of the Soviet Union in political, economic and military domains. Most of the former Soviet republics were also favorably disposed to cooperate with U.S. on the same issues. Among those states Georgia was one of the most aspiring countries that wanted to cooperate and integrate with the West. However, the U.S. did not want to seize the opportunity of the weakness of Russia and did not rush to establish closer relations with Georgia until the mid 1990s. Western countries, including the U.S.,

¹⁷⁵ International Crisis Group, *Georgia: Avoiding War in South Ossetia*, Europe Report No: 159, 26 November 2004, p. 15.

began to be interested in Georgia only after 1995, when President Shevardnadze established a relative stability and some degree of order within the country.¹⁷⁶

Ethnic conflicts between Georgia and its separatist regions, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and the following instability in the region were important effects that prevented the U.S. from being involved in the region's politics. Throughout this process the West expected Georgia to consolidate order at home, to develop its relations and cooperation with Russia as well as its other neighbors and to resolve its disputes with its breakaway regions, which were also closely interconnected with the establishment of security and stability in the region.¹⁷⁷ As put forward by Svante Cornell:

“Georgia’s continued instability and weakness formed another major threat to the stability of the region and to US goals of seeing the South Caucasus develop a transit corridor from the Caspian Sea to Europe. This continued instability in the South Caucasus also thwarted any existing ambition in the Department of Defense to develop closer security links with the region.”¹⁷⁸

On the other hand, the importance of the South Caucasus region increased once it was recognized that the energy reserves of the Caspian Basin was much more than the previous estimates of the Soviet times.¹⁷⁹ Since then, the countries located in the region, Georgia and Azerbaijan particularly, became a focus of the global oil companies and, as a result, for the Western governments- above all the U.S. Despite the proven oil reserves in the Caspian Basin was far less than the proven oil reserves in the Middle East, the region, nevertheless, came to be perceived as an alternative energy supplier that would

¹⁷⁶ David Darchiashvili, “Georgian Defense Policy and Military Reform” in Bruno Coppieters and Robert Legvold, eds., *Statehood and Security: Georgia After the Rose Revolution*, Cambridge Mass.: American Academy of Arts and Sciences: MIT Press, 2005, p. 129.

¹⁷⁷ Damien Helly and Giorgi Gogia, “Georgian Security and the Role of the West”, in Bruno Coppieters and Robert Legvold, eds., *Statehood and Security: Georgia After the Rose Revolution*, Cambridge Mass.: American Academy of Arts and Sciences: MIT Press, 2005, pp. 271-276.

¹⁷⁸ Svante E. Cornell, “US Engagement in the Caucasus: Changing Gears”, *Helsinki Monitor*, no.2, 2005, p. 112.

¹⁷⁹ Alec Rasizade argues that the Caspian energy reserves were exaggerated by the Western countries to enter the region and fill the void after Russia’s withdrawal. See Alec Rasizade, “The Great Game of Caspian Energy: Ambitions and Realities”, *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans*, vol.7, no.1, April 2005, pp. 1-17.

reduce the West's dependency on Russian and the Middle Eastern natural resources, i.e. oil and natural gas. Thus the U.S. involvement in the region as a whole increased dramatically. In 1998, integration of the key areas of the CIS to the Western markets was argued to be a priority in the U.S. National Security Strategy.¹⁸⁰ Svante Cornell points out that the driving force of the U.S. policy in the region was energy politics in the mid 1990s; it was after September 11 that Georgia's strategic location became a major aspect for U.S. policy in the South Caucasus.¹⁸¹

September 11 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington have dramatically changed U.S. foreign policy. The U.S.' new interpretation of its own national security interests motivated Washington to strengthen its position in the South Caucasus. Georgia now began to be seen in the Greater Middle East project and its location became crucial for the logistic support for the U.S. troops deployed first in Afghanistan and then in Iraq.¹⁸² In this context, Georgia's key role as a gateway to Central Asia and the Middle East; besides its role as a partner in the fight against terrorism in the region increased its significance for Washington.¹⁸³ Furthermore Georgia's willingness to cooperate with the U.S. and its assistance and support for U.S. operations in different contexts consolidated its role and position in the U.S. policy as a strategic partner in the region next to Turkey.

Georgia – U.S. relations entered into a new period after Mikheil Saakashvili became president in November 2003, in the wake of the Rose Revolution. Saakashvili's presidency was welcomed in Washington since his policies included on the one hand anti-corruption, democratization, transparency and establishing closer relations with the

¹⁸⁰ Jaba Devdariani, "Georgia and Russia: The Troubled Road to Accommodation" in Bruno Coppieters and Robert Legvold, eds., *Statehood and Security: Georgia After the Rose Revolution*, Cambridge Mass.: American Academy of Arts and Sciences: MIT Press, 2005, p. 170.

¹⁸¹ Svante E. Cornell, "US Engagement in the Caucasus: Changing Gears", *Helsinki Monitor*, no.2, 2005, p. 111.

¹⁸² Svante E. Cornell, "US Engagement in the Caucasus: Changing Gears", *Helsinki Monitor*, no.2, 2005, p. 113.

¹⁸³ Damien Helly and Giorgi Gogia, "Georgian Security and the Role of the West", in Bruno Coppieters and Robert Legvold, eds., *Statehood and Security: Georgia After the Rose Revolution*, Cambridge Mass.: American Academy of Arts and Sciences: MIT Press, 2005, p. 276.

Western governments and organizations and on the other seeking to reduce Moscow's influence in the region. Georgia's aspiration to integrate with the West was in accordance with U.S. interests which sought partnerships with former Soviet satellites in order to counterbalance Russian influence in the region.

Georgia's economic importance as a transit country for the pipelines was also an important aspect for U.S. interests in the region. Georgia is one of the countries that compose Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) Pipeline Project, which is expected to reduce U.S. dependence on the Middle East oil. Lincoln Mitchell stresses that transporting Caspian and Central Asian oil and gas to the West has been in the heart of the U.S. policy while promoting democracy in the region has a lower priority. However, democratization of Georgia, settlement of the internal conflicts and the security of the energy routes were perceived as a requirement for its integration with the West.¹⁸⁴ Besides, the U.S. aimed to reduce Russia's influence in the region through building alternative energy routes bypassing the Russian territory. Zeyno Baran and Robert A. Smith claim that U.S. policy in the region is not anti-Russian. "Rather, it is anti-monopoly, anti-corruption and anti-political manipulation of energy supplies."¹⁸⁵

Conversely, Anush Begoyan argues that the U.S. strategy is more than to control the pipelines passing through region but to eliminate Russian influence in the region and to create a new American sphere of influence and thus expand the U.S. hegemony in the former Soviet territories reflecting the post-cold war realities.¹⁸⁶ This argument can be true to some extent; however it is important to remind the importance of Moscow's strategic partnership with U.S. in a variety of areas. Nona Mikhelidze points out to the strategic partnership between the U.S. and Russia as follows:

¹⁸⁴ Lincoln A. Mitchell, "More than Location: Crafting a US Policy for the Black Sea Region", *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, vol. 8, no. 2, June 2008, p. 132.

¹⁸⁵ Zeyno Baran and Robert E. Smith, "The Energy Dimension in American Policy towards the Black Sea Region", *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, vol. 7, no. 2, June 2007, p. 273.

¹⁸⁶ Anush Begoyan, "United States Policy in the South Caucasus: Securitisation of the Baku-Ceyhan Project", *Iran and the Caucasus*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 2004, pp. 154-155.

“Major areas of U.S.-Russia cooperation include multilateral initiatives such as the Six-Party Talks on North Korea, the P5+1 group on Iran, the Middle East Quartet, and initiatives to combat nuclear terrorism. In this context, the West had limited leverage to intervene in the Georgian-Russian conflict and Russia can continue to quietly ignore Western warnings.”¹⁸⁷

Thus, it is unlikely that U.S. will risk a deterioration of its relations with Russia by (over)meddling in the latter’s backyard. Despite the increasing strategic importance of the region due to energy projects, U.S. refrained from intervening in the ethnic disputes in Georgia. Like the EU, U.S. accepted Russia’s peacekeeping monopoly in the region, despite demanded to internationalize the peacekeeping forces in the conflict regions.¹⁸⁸ NATO’s postponement of Georgia’s membership, as well as Ukraine’s, at the Alliance’s Bucharest summit in April 2008 can be seen in this perspective.

However, the U.S. seeks to strengthen its position in Georgia in political and military spheres indirectly through NATO initiatives. NATO is the most important means for Washington to develop strategic relations with Tbilisi despite Russia’s growing concerns. Relations between Georgia and NATO date back to 1992. Shortly after its independence, Georgia joined the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC), which became Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) in 1997. In 1994, Georgia joined Partnership for Peace (PfP) program which aimed at strengthening security and defense cooperation between the two parties.¹⁸⁹ It is important to note that Georgia signed PfP agreement only after getting Russia’s approval, as a result of Russia’s positive contributions to the ending of ethnic conflicts on Georgian territory and the developing close strategic relations between the two countries in the early 1990’s.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁷ Nona Mikhelidze, “After the 2008 Russia-Georgia War: Implications for the Wider Caucasus”, *The International Spectator*, 2009, vol.3, no.27, p. 39.

¹⁸⁸ Nona Mikhelidze, “After the 2008 Russia-Georgia War: Implications for the Wider Caucasus”, *The International Spectator*, Vol. 44, No. 3, September 2009, p. 37.

¹⁸⁹ “NATO’s Relations with Georgia”, <http://www.nato.int/issues/nato-georgia/index.html>, accessed on 29.10.2009.

¹⁹⁰ Jonathan Aves, “Post Soviet Transcaucasia”, in Roy Allison, ed., *Challenges for the Former Soviet South*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1996, p. 183.

Georgia made its official application to become a NATO member in 2002, but it was and still is far from fulfilling, as pointed above, certain requirements such as resolution of domestic disputes and consolidating political stability at home. Though NATO seemed to be unwilling to accept Georgia as a member in the short-term, it took steps to encourage Georgia about full membership.¹⁹¹ After the Rose Revolution, bilateral relations intensified, particularly on development of the projects between NATO and Georgia like Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP). This action plan aims to provide customized assistance to Georgia and to propel Georgian army closer to Euro-Atlantic standards in the areas of civil-military relationship and interoperability, with a view to conducting joint operations with NATO.¹⁹² It is also worth noting within this framework that Georgia became the first country to sign an IPAP with NATO in 2005.

In the Bucharest Summit, held in April 2008, NATO leaders declared their intention of preparing Georgia for eventual membership in the Alliance. As a result of this new step in Georgian-NATO relations in September 2008 NATO-Georgia Commission (NGC) was inaugurated. NGC oversees all aspects of the NATO-Georgian relations like key reforms in political, military and security sectors which are essential for Georgia's membership.¹⁹³ Georgia is expected to accomplish these reforms to become a full member of the Alliance. However, above all else, Russia is the biggest obstacle on the road for Georgia's eventual NATO membership. Russia considers NATO's enlargement towards its borders as a threat for its national security and warns its southern neighbor, as well as Ukraine, not to seek membership.

As for the EU, after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, it did not get involved in the conflicts and disputes in the region. Instead, the EU admitted Russia's supremacy in the

¹⁹¹ Damien Helly and Giorgi Gogia, "Georgian Security and the Role of the West", in Bruno Coppieters and Robert Legvold, eds., *Statehood and Security: Georgia After the Rose Revolution*, Cambridge Mass.: American Academy of Arts and Sciences: MIT Press, 2005, p. 273.

¹⁹² Stephen Blank, "Security in and around Black Sea: Is a Virtuous Circle now Possible?", *Mediterranean Quarterly*, Vol. 16, No. 3, Summer 2005, p. 55.

¹⁹³ "NATO's Relations with Georgia", <http://www.nato.int/issues/nato-georgia/index.html>, accessed on 29 October 2009.

region and contended with contributing the peace process with its non-political body, the OSCE. Moreover, its political relations with Georgia were also relatively poor. However, as years passed, some of the former Soviet-bloc and Eastern Europe countries started to be member states of the Union. The enlargement process expanded the EU borders closer to the South Caucasus and made it inevitable for the parties to conduct relations.¹⁹⁴

Georgia's growing importance for the EU has different aspects. According to the European point of view, the region is an important transit route for the Central Asian and Caspian energy resources to Europe, which reduces Europe's dependence on Russian oil and gas. Moreover, the presence of the European values in the region makes the South Caucasus associated with Europe. Europeans also compared the region with Balkans, in terms of ethnic conflicts. Finally, the region has importance to be linked to Russia and the Middle East.¹⁹⁵

There is no doubt that Georgia's, and the region's, importance for the EU mostly derives from its strategic location, in which important energy pipelines pass through. Thus, the EU included Georgia in its 1997 Black Sea strategy, despite the lack of close political relations between the Union and Tbilisi.¹⁹⁶ Georgia's importance as a transit country increased for Europe when these pipelines began to function, Baku-Supsa in 1999 and BTC in 2006. Stability and security of the region is an important issue for the EU and its member states such as Great Britain, France and Italy since their national oil companies (BP, TotalFinaElf and ENI respectively) have benefits from the BTC project. However, there was a lack of common energy policy and a disagreement among the EU members on importing the oil via Mediterranean to Europe. Thus, the EU, as a whole,

¹⁹⁴ Sergei Markedonov, "The "Five-Day War": Preliminary Results and Consequences", *Russian Politics and Law*, vol.47, no.3, May-June 2009, p. 77.

¹⁹⁵ Irina Pop, "The Assessment of the European Neighborhood Policy in the South Caucasus: What the European Union can do?", *EuroTimes*, 2009, Vol. 7, p. 23.

¹⁹⁶ Damien Helly and Giorgi Gogia, "Georgian Security and the Role of the West", in Bruno Coppieters and Robert Legvold, eds., *Statehood and Security: Georgia After the Rose Revolution*, Cambridge Mass.: American Academy of Arts and Sciences: MIT Press, 2005, p. 280.

could not be decisive in the decision-making process of the project¹⁹⁷ while US government strongly supported the BTC pipeline despite the doubts on the commercial viability of the project.¹⁹⁸ Russia, on the other hand, saw the project as an initiative to undermine its influence and to on energy market in the region.

Relations between the EU and Georgia accelerated after Saakashvili became president in January 2004. The new government, which is determined to fight with corruption, democratization of the country and to become a part of the Western society, had positive impression on European leaders. Furthermore, Georgian foreign policy began to remove from Russia's sphere of influence and to pursue a more pro-Western policy that seeks to engage with the Western states and organizations.¹⁹⁹ These encouraging developments were effective on the EU's changing approach towards Georgia. EU showed its interest in the region and aspiration to conduct closer relations as it began, as Helly and Gogia points out, "to consider Georgia as a part of its 'new neighborhood' policies."²⁰⁰

Georgia was included in the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) Strategy Paper along with Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Moldova, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Tunisia, Ukraine and Syria on 12 May 2004.²⁰¹ The EU began to be more involved in the region's politics with the ENP Action Plan which was adopted in November 2006 on the basis of a Partnership and

¹⁹⁷ Damien Helly and Giorgi Gogia, "Georgian Security and the Role of the West", in Bruno Coppieters and Robert Legvold, eds., *Statehood and Security: Georgia After the Rose Revolution*, Cambridge Mass.: American Academy of Arts and Sciences: MIT Press, 2005, p. 277.

¹⁹⁸ Anush Begoyan, "United States Policy in the South Caucasus: Securitisation of the Baku-Ceyhan Project", *Iran and the Caucasus*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 2004, p. 148.

¹⁹⁹ Tracey C. German, "Visibly Invisible: EU Engagement in Conflict Resolution in the South Caucasus", *European Security*, Vol.16, Nos.3-4, p. 362.

²⁰⁰ Damien Helly and Giorgi Gogia, "Georgian Security and the Role of the West", in Bruno Coppieters and Robert Legvold, eds., *Statehood and Security: Georgia After the Rose Revolution*, Cambridge Mass.: American Academy of Arts and Sciences: MIT Press, 2005, p. 277.

²⁰¹ Irina Pop, "The Assessment of the European Neighborhood Policy in the South Caucasus: What the European Union can do?", *Eurotimes*, 2009, Vol. 7, p. 22.

Cooperation Agreement, between the EU and Georgia, which entered into force in 1999.²⁰²

The aim of the EU in the region with the ENP is to provide economic and political reforms, settlement of the conflicts and enhancing inter-regional cooperation. Though the ENP does not offer prospective membership, it provides a privileged relationship with the Union in terms of investment and trade in the region. The ENP also aims to promote European values such as democracy, human rights and rule of law in the region.²⁰³ As Sergei Markedonov points out, the significance of the region for the EU is neither military nor strategic; instead, the Europeans consider the region as a space where their values can take root.²⁰⁴

The EU has been one of the major donors for the rehabilitation of the conflict zones in the South Ossetia and Abkhazia since 1997. The European Commission also participates in the economic related issues at the JCC. Despite spending the same amount of money for Georgia, the EU has not been thinking strategically about the region since it refrains from deteriorating relations with Russia²⁰⁵, which is the main gas supplier of the European countries. On the other hand, the EU's political involvement and contribution to stability in the region increased after the 2008 August War between Georgia and Russia. Then the Chair of the EU rotating presidency, French President Nicolas Sarkozy played an important role as a mediator and became the co-author with his Russian counterpart Dmitry Medvedev for the Six-Point Ceasefire Agreement that ended the

²⁰² Commission of the European Communities, Commission Staff Working Document, "Progress Report Georgia", Brussels, 3 April 2008, p. 2.

²⁰³ Tracey C. German, "Visibly Invisible: EU Engagement in Conflict Resolution in the South Caucasus", *European Security*, Vol.16, Nos.3-4, p. 360.

²⁰⁴ Sergei Markedonov, "The "Five-Day War": Preliminary Results and Consequences", *Russian Politics and Law*, Vol.47, No.3, May-June 2009, p. 77.

²⁰⁵ Irina Pop, "The Assessment of the European Neighborhood Policy in the South Caucasus: What the European Union can Do?", *EuroTimes*, 2009, Vol. 7 p. 24.

conflict.²⁰⁶ In the future it is likely that the EU will be a more active actor in the region than it was before.

²⁰⁶ Sergei Markedonov, “The ‘Five-Day War’: Preliminary Results and Consequences”, *Russian Politics and Law*, Vol.47, No.3, May–June 2009, p. 77.

CHAPTER

V. THE GEORGIA-RUSSIA WAR IN 2008

After his inauguration, the Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili gave priority to incorporate the breakaway regions of his country, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and to stabilize the control of Tbilisi throughout the country. But Russian support for these regions, the bad memories of ethnic wars in early 1990s and *de facto* independence of these two enclaves made it difficult, even impossible for Georgia to integrate the South Ossetia and Abkhazia neither economically nor politically into Georgia. As Saakashvili failed to achieve his goal, he tried to use force to take the control over South Ossetia. After an ill-planned military operation, Georgia obliged to withdraw from the region and maybe lost the hopes for unification, at least for a short term. This chapter examines the South Ossetia War in 2008.

5.1 Worsening Relations between Georgia and Russia

Since its independence, Georgia has had aspirations to integrate with the West. These aspirations and endeavors became more apparent after the pro-Western government, leaded by Mikhail Saakashvili, came to power after the so-called democratic Rose Revolution in late 2003. With the new administration of Tbilisi economic, political and military relations with the U.S. and NATO have increased so far. As a result, in the last years Georgia's relations with Russia, which gradually irritating from the increasing presence of its old hatreds in the region, became tenser.

Russian Federation declared its military doctrine, approved by the Security Council on 2 November 1993 that the former Soviet territories were its security zone and sphere of influence.²⁰⁷ Following the dissolution of the USSR, Moscow established the CIS after the Minsk Declaration signed by Belarus, Ukraine and Russian Federation in December 1991. The aim was to maintain Russia's domination in the former republics. But

²⁰⁷ Idil Tuncer, "The Security Policies of Russian Federation: The "Near Abroad" and Turkey", *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 100.

political and economic turmoil in transition process weakened Moscow's authority over the region and it could not prevent the West influence to reach its 'sphere of influence'.

Georgia refused to join the CIS at first; however, after bloody ethnic clashes with the South Ossetia and Abkhazia, the intervention of Russian troops and mediation of Moscow to the conflicts, the new government in Tbilisi led by Shevardnadze had to account for joining the former republics league. Shevardnadze pursued a balanced foreign policy with Russia and the West. Georgia enjoyed a substantial economic and military aid from the U.S. and NATO without disturbing Moscow during Shevardnadze's presidency. This granted Tbilisi a relative peace period with its breakaway regions which gained *de facto* independence after cease-fire agreements signed in 1992 with South Ossetia, and in 1993 with Abkhazia.

Moscow's influence in the region began to increase after Vladimir Putin took over the presidency from Boris Yeltsin in 2000. Russia again became an important actor in the international arena with its increasing economic and political power due to the high oil and gas prices in the international markets. Energy sources became an important sanction instrument for Russian foreign policy in the following years, thus Europe began to seek new energy routes avoiding Russia. At this point, Azeri and Turkmen gas became crucial as alternates to Russian and Middle Eastern energy sources. Two new pipelines, Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum, gained great importance for Europe. Both pipelines were passing through Georgia and this made the country more strategic than ever.

The U.S. had realized Georgia's geostrategic location a long time ago. The endeavors of NATO to incorporate Georgia began in 1992 after Georgia joined North Atlantic Cooperation Council, renamed the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council in 1997. But Georgia couldn't become a NATO member until now due to the Russia's fierce objection. Essentially, Georgia's aspirations to become a NATO member and the U.S. military presence in the region are the main problems between Tbilisi and Moscow.

Russia obviously expressed its discontent with Georgia's tendency towards American camp for many times.

The Rose Revolution was a milestone for Georgian-Russian relations. Since then, Tbilisi left the traditional moderate relations with Moscow and turned its face entirely to the West. Being sure of the support of the West, the new president Saakashvili had statements accusing Russia to help secessionist movements in Georgia; it was obvious that Saakashvili wanted to convince the West that the Georgian territorial integrity would be possible if the Russian influence in the region could be reduced. President Saakashvili even appealed to the EU to have a common stand against Moscow's efforts to extend its sphere of influence and to divide EU members with separate trade and energy deals.²⁰⁸

Despite Russia's support to the separatist enclaves of Georgia in terms of finance and ammunition, Putin is known to call Abkhazian and Ossetian leaders to abandon secessionist policies and to integrate with Georgia in 2007.²⁰⁹ This was a message to the world that Russia respected the territorial integrity of Georgia and did not recognize separatist movements within. But the independence of Kosovo was a milestone that changed Russia's approach to the breakaway regions dramatically. As retaliation to the West, Putin established legal ties with the governments in Tbilisi and Sokhumi²¹⁰ and committed economic and agricultural aid for these regions. After then, the relations of Georgia and its autonomous regions became more sense in 2008.

The tensions increased when a Georgian reconnaissance drone was shot down by a Russian jet in April 2008 over the Abkhazian territory where Georgia claimed the Russian jets had fled over and violated its airspace back in the summer of 2007. The

²⁰⁸ Ivars Indans, "Relations of Russia and Georgia: Developments and Future Prospects", *Baltic Security & Defence Review*, Vol.9, 2007, p. 132.

²⁰⁹ Ivars Indans, "Relations of Russia and Georgia: Developments and Future Prospects", *Baltic Security & Defence Review*, Vol.9, 2007, p. 135.

²¹⁰ "A Scripted War", *The Economist*, http://www.economist.com/world/international/displaystory.cfm?story_id=11920992, accessed on 18 June 2009.

tensions increased in the region. Both Georgia and Russia accused each other for disturbing relations and the situation in the region. Two countries came to a close conflict after the political crisis, but it was hindered by the diplomatic efforts. It was predictable that a war between Georgia and Russia was possible over the breakaway regions but it was a surprise that it exploded in South Ossetia.

5.2 The Georgia-Russia War in 2008

The relations between Moscow and Tbilisi began to get tense in late 2005 and early 2006, when Russia began to lay embargo on Georgia's agricultural products, wine and mineral water, which composed the entire exports of the country. In the following months Russia cut off natural gas supplies as well as electricity to Georgia, in the middle of the winter.²¹¹ The relations once again deteriorated when Georgia arrested four Russian military intelligence officers on charges of spying in October 2006. Officers were released and returned to Russia afterwards but the Georgia's action sparked fury in Moscow.²¹²

2008 was the year that tensions between Russia and Georgia escalated to the highest point. As mentioned, in April, a Georgian reconnaissance was shot down by a Russian fighter jet over Georgia's breakaway region Abkhazia. Soon after this development, Russia began to deploy paratroopers and artillery in May to reinforce its peacekeeping forces therein.²¹³ President of the Russian Federation Dmitri A. Medvedev bluntly uttered the discontent of Russia on Georgia's aspirations to join NATO on a meeting with Georgian president Mikheil Saakashvili in St. Petersburg in early June 2008. He also added that Georgia's membership to NATO would cause deepening of the conflict

²¹¹ James Traub, "Taunting the Bear", *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/10/weekinreview/10traub.html?scp=12&sq=ossetia&st=nyt> Accessed on 10 May 2009.

²¹² Matthew Collin, "High Stakes in Georgia Standoff", *BBC News*, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/5403714.stm>, accessed on 17 May 2009.

²¹³ James Traub, "Taunting the Bear", *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/10/weekinreview/10traub.html?scp=12&sq=ossetia&st=nyt>, accessed on 10 May 2009.

among former Soviet republics and not to decrease the tension between Georgia and its disputed regions, Abkhazia and South Ossetia.²¹⁴ Russia perceived NATO's spreading through its borders as a threat to its national security and abuse of its power sphere. So it passionately opposed the membership of Georgia and Ukraine to the organization.

Presence of the Russian peacekeeping troops in Georgia was another subject of dispute between two countries prior to war in August. Russia sent some additional troops and an army unit to Abkhazia at the end of May 2008 to repair railroads that would link the breakaway region to Russia and Olympic facilities in Sochi which will be the host of 2014 Winter Olympics.²¹⁵ Georgia demanded Russia on June 2008 to withdraw these military units which, as Russia claimed, was sent to repair infrastructure in the region.

Another important event before the war broke in South Ossetia. Dmitry Sanakoyev, who was considered as the legitimate leader of the South Ossetia by Georgia, dodged an assassination attempt in early July 2008. A day later after this event, 2 people were killed and 11 were wounded in the armed clashes between Georgian troops and Ossetian soldiers. Both sides blamed each other from the escalation of the tensions and cause to clashes. On 10 July 2008, Georgia recalled its ambassador in Russia after it was admitted by Russia that a Russian aircraft had flown over breakaway regions to monitor the situation due to the fears of a possible Georgian invasion.

The tensions reached the boiling point after six Georgian policemen were wounded after a bombing attack in the Georgian village of Eredvi, east of Tskhinvali, on 31 July 2008. The next day, firefighting began between Georgian troops and Ossetian militiamen in the border region of Georgia and South Ossetia. Georgian officials claimed that they had made a substantial incursion in the region upon to the shelling from the other side of the border. In the clashes, 6 people of whom were Ossetian militiamen were killed and over

²¹⁴ Sofia Kishkovksky, "Georgia is Warned by Russia Against Plans to Join NATO", *The New York Times*, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9C0DE6D71E3CF934A35755C0A96E9C8B63&scp=1&sq=ossetia&st=nyt>, accessed on 11 May 2009

²¹⁵http://www.gab-ibn.com/IMG/pdf/Ge1-Georgia_Dismayed_By_The_Deployment_Of_Russia_s_Railroad_Construction_Troops_In_Abkhazia.pdf, accessed on 9 June 2009.

a dozen people from both sides were wounded according to the official statement made by Georgia.²¹⁶

As the reciprocal clashes at the border continued, Yuri Popov, Russia's ambassador at large and the Russian Co-Chair of the JCC for Georgian-Ossetian Conflict Resolution, stated on 5 August that Russia would intervene to defend its citizens if the conflict arose.²¹⁷ Meanwhile, the South Ossetia began to evacuate women, children and elder people to Russia to save them from escalating clashes. According to the report of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, almost 1100 people from the South Ossetia arrived in the North Ossetia by busses to escape from violence.²¹⁸

On 7 August 2008, the United Nations Security Council called an emergency session after Russia's request to discuss the situation and response to the conflict between Georgian and South Ossetia. Besides, Secretary General of the United Nations Ban Ki-moon called parties to refrain from activities that could escalate clashes. On the same day, Georgian president Mikheil Saakashvili ordered the troops to end the clashes. But despite his instructions, the conflict intensified. Despite the announcement of truce on the same day, heavy shelling on South Ossetian capital Tskhinvali continued all night.

Saakashvili declared state of war and Georgian military attack launched on 8 August to capture Tskhinvali, violated the terms of 1992 ceasefire agreement signed by Georgian president Eduard Shevardnadze and Russian president Boris Yeltsin after the conflict between Georgia and South Ossetia. In a televised address, Saakashvili vowed to restore Tbilisi's control over what he called the criminal regimes in breakaway regions the South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The head of the Georgian peacekeeping forces in the South

²¹⁶ "Six Die in South Ossetia Shootout", <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=18871>, accessed on 16 May 2009.

²¹⁷"Russia vows to Defend South Ossetia", <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7543099.stm>, accessed on 16 May 2009.

²¹⁸"*Georgia: Ban voices alarm at growing violence in South Ossetia*", <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=27629&Cr=georgia&Cr1>, accessed on 16 May 2009.

Ossetia also stated that the aim of the operation was to restore constitutional order in the region.²¹⁹ Thereby, the war officially began.

Georgia launched heavy shelling on Tskhinvali, including rocket firing, and the bombardment left significant part of the city in ruins. Russia accused Georgia for conducting genocide and announced that 2000 civilians were killed in Georgian attack on the city. It was obvious that this number was exaggerated as later Russian prime minister mentioned only dozens of civilian death in his speech in Vladikavkaz, capital of North Ossetia. Russia involved in the war in early hours of 8 August, nearly twenty hours later than Georgian attack began, and Russian military units including tank, artillery and reconnaissance reinforced by armored personnel carriers, enter the South Ossetia to fight beside separatist region while Russian aircrafts began to conduct air strikes on Georgian targets.²²⁰

The U.S. and other Western countries immediately condemned Russian intervention to the conflict and demand the withdrawal of Russian troops and putting an end to the conflict, but Russia did not retreat and Russian soldiers remained. On 9 August, a new frontier was opened by Abkhazia in Kodori Valley, which was under control of pro-Georgian loyalists prior to war, after a Georgian boat carrying missile launchers was sunk by the Russian Navy in the territorial waters of Georgia in Black Sea. Prior to the sea battle, Russia had notified that the ship belonged to the Russian Navy was moving to Ochamchire, a port on the Abkhaz coast, where the sea forces of two countries faced each other.²²¹

²¹⁹ Kimitaka Matsuzato, "The Five-Day War and Transnational Politics", *Demokratizatsiya*, 2009, pp. 232-233.

²²⁰ Anne Barnard, "Georgia and Russia Nearing All-Out War", *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/10/world/europe/10georgia.html?scp=10&sq=ossetia&st=nyt>, accessed on 10 May 2009.

²²¹ Anne Barnard, "Georgia and Russia Nearing All-Out War", *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/10/world/europe/10georgia.html?scp=10&sq=ossetia&st=nyt>, accessed on 10 May 2009.



Figure 2: Conflict Map for 2008 Georgia-Russia War

Source: http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/russo_georgian_war_and_balance_power, accessed on 17 May 2009.

Conflict between Georgian troops and Russian forces to take control of the Tskhinvali continued throughout 8 August. At early hours on 9 August, commander of Russian forces in Tskhinvali, Marat Kulakhmetov stated that South Ossetian fighters held the control on the significant part of the city and that the Georgian troops were present only in southern part of breakaway region’s capital. His statement was verified with the statement of Georgia’s ambassador to United Nations, Irakli Alasania, who told that Georgian forces had the control of eight villages at the edge of the city.²²² 1500 civilians and 15 Russian peacekeeping forces were killed in the conflict according to Russian authorities.

²²² Michael Schwirtz, Anne Barnard and C.J. Chivers, “Russia and Georgia Clash over Separatist Region”, *The New York Times* <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/09/world/europe/09georgia.html?scp=5&sq=ossetia&st=nyt>, accessed on 10 May 2009.

Georgian side offered peace talks on 10 August and said that the Georgian forces would withdraw from the South Ossetia but Russia refused to deal with Georgia until it would unconditionally withdraw its troops from the region and stipulate conditions of signing a pact that renounced Georgia to use force against the South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Thus, peace call of Georgia was fault for an answer from Russia.

Russian troops entered the Georgian city Senaki where there was a Georgian military base which could be use to reinforce troops stuck in South Ossetia. Russian forces destroyed the base. Afterwards Russian troops began to shell Gori, birthplace of Soviet leader Joseph Stalin and the regional capital of Shida Kartli. The location of the city was also important as it was on the main highway of the country that connected the east and the west Georgia to each other. After occupying Gori, Russian troops destroyed a railway bridge and caused the detachment of communication and logistic lines of the country.

Meanwhile, Bernard Kouchner, French Foreign and European Affairs Minister, arrived in Gori on 11 August for talks for a possible armistice, but the fighting continued among the parties. Furthermore, Russia deployed more than 9000 paratroopers to Abkhazia, more than the limit established by the 1994 peace agreement.²²³ Georgian forces attacked on the road that linked the South Ossetia to Russia to cut off the shipment of ammunition from Russia. Georgia also focused on protection from air strikes conducted by Russian aircrafts. According to official statements from Georgia, ten Russian jets were destroyed by Georgian forces. Georgian officials also claimed that Russian warplanes attacked the major Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipe-line, but it was not struck.²²⁴

²²³ Alexis Crow, "Georgia-Russia Conflict Timeline", *Royal United Services Institute*, <http://www.rusi.org/go.php?structureID=S433ACCE7CB828&ref=C48A08074B93E4>, accessed on 16 May 2009.

²²⁴ Anne Barnard, "Georgia and Russia Nearing All-Out War", *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/10/world/europe/10georgia.html?scp=10&sq=ossetia&st=nyt>, accessed on 10 May 2009.

5.3 Ceasefire

On 12 August 2008, Russian president Medvedev instructed Russian troops to end the armed clashes in Georgia after a meeting with Russian Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov and chief of Armed Forces General Staff Nikolai Makarov. However, despite Medvedev's order for armistice, the air strikes of Russian aircrafts in Georgia continued during that day. The EU played a more active role in the ceasefire and normalization of the Georgian-Russian relations. Medvedev and Nicolas Sarkozy, president of France and President-in-Office of the EU, met in Moscow on 12 August and agreed on a six-point peace plan that was presented by French president on behalf of the EU. The plan included the following principles:

1. No recourse to the use of force.
2. Definitive cessation of hostilities.
3. Free access to humanitarian aid (and to allow the return of refugees).
4. Georgian military forces must withdraw to their normal bases of encampment.
5. Russian military forces must withdraw to the lines prior to the start of hostilities. While awaiting an international mechanism, Russian peacekeeping forces will implement additional security measures (six months).
6. Opening of international discussions on the modalities of lasting security in Abkhazia and the South Ossetia (based on the decisions of the U.N. and the O.S.C.E.).²²⁵

The peace plan was calling warring sides, "to cease hostilities and pull troops back to positions they had occupied before the conflict began. Other elements of the peace plan include allowing humanitarian aid into the conflict zone and facilitating the return of

²²⁵ "TEXT; Peace Accord Sarkozy Gave to Georgians", <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9801E4D9103DF937A2575BC0A96E9C8B63&scp=1&sq=Russia+withdraw&st=nyt>, accessed on 17 May 2009.

displaced persons.”²²⁶ The plan envisaged the withdrawal of Russian troops from Georgian territory but allowed the Russian peacekeeping forces to remain in the security zone outside the South Ossetia to patrol in the region besides the international discussions to determine the modalities of security and stability in Abkhazia and the South Ossetia. However there was not any mention about territorial integrity of Georgia²²⁷ which caused Georgia to hesitate the plan.

On early 13 August, it was reported that the peace plan which envisaged the withdrawal of the troops to the positions prior to war was agreed in principal by both Russian and Georgian leaders after a phone consultation the night before. Later same day, EU foreign ministers held a meeting in Brussels and agreed on a peace plan that put an end to conflict in the South Ossetia and on a possible participation of EU monitoring. The next day, on 14 August, president of Russia hosted Sergey Bagapsh and Eduard Kokoity, *de facto* leaders of Georgia’s breakaway regions Abkhazia and the South Ossetia respectively. Both leaders signed the six-point peace plan which included principles of conflict resolution.

On 15 August, U.S. Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice visited Tbilisi and the six-point peace plan was signed by Saakashvili in Rise’s presence. On the same day, a Russian military convoy which included 17 armored personnel carriers and 200 soldiers encamped in the village Igoeti, 55 km far from Tbilisi, the closest advance to the Georgian capital. The convoy left Igoeti a week later on 22 August and headed to Russia. In the following days Russian troops were spotted in Gori and Zugdidi, the western town which is located near Abkhazia.²²⁸

²²⁶ Jim Nichol, *Russia-Georgia Conflict in South Ossetia: Context and Implications for U.S. Interests*, CRS Report for Congress, Updated: 22 September 2008, p. 7.

²²⁷ Jim Nichol, *Russia-Georgia Conflict in South Ossetia: Context and Implications for U.S. Interests*, CRS Report for Congress, Updated: 22 September 2008, p. 7.

²²⁸ James Kilner, “Russian Convoy Moves Deeper inside Georgia”, *Reuters*, <http://www.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idusLF7284720080815?feedType=RSS&feedName=worldNews&rpc=22&sp=true>, accessed on 16 May 2009.

On 16 August Russian troops occupied Poti, an important port city and headquarters of the Georgian Navy. On the same day, Russian president Medvedev signed the peace plan in Moscow. The Kremlin announced that despite the plan was signed by Medvedev, Russia won't withdraw its troops immediately. Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov stated that "Russian forces would stay in Georgia as long as they were needed" and that "their withdrawal would depend on the introduction of... additional security measures"²²⁹ Russian troops began to pull back from Georgian territory on 18 August according to the statement of the deputy chief of the Russian General Staff, Anatoly Nogovitsyn. Most of the troops headed to Russia as six-point plan envisaged, except for some others who remained in Abkhazia, the South Ossetia and the security corridor around South Ossetia.

Charles King claims that Russian intervention could be compared with Turkey's military operation to Cyprus in 1974. He emphasizes that like the Turkish people threatened by Greek nationalists; Ossetians were under the threat of Georgians who wanted to seize the region by using force. Russia's disproportional use of force should not be perceived as an expression of its imperial ambitions.²³⁰

5.4 Russia's Recognition of the Abkhaz and the South Ossetian Independence

While the tensions were calming down after the five day war between Russia and Georgia in South Ossetia, Russian president Dmitry Medvedev declared in a televised address to the Russian people that Moscow recognized the independence of breakaway regions, Abkhazia and the South Ossetia from Georgia on 26 August 2008. On 25 August, Russia's Federation Council and the Duma had held a session and recommended the president to recognize those two enclaves, after the parliament's unanimous vote for recognition.

After Russia's unilateral recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Georgian president Mikheil Saakashvili declared that Russia's recognition of Georgia's disputed regions'

²²⁹ Clifford J. Levy and C.J. Chivers, "Kremlin Signs Truce but Resists Quick Pullout", *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/17/world/europe/17georgia.html?scp=10&sq=Russia+withdraw&st=nyt>, accessed on 17 May 2009.

²³⁰ Charles King, *Five Day War*, Foreign Affairs, Vol.87, Issue.6, Nov/Dec 2008, pp. 2-11.

independence and had no legal basis. He also claimed that Russia's decision was a part of its plan to annex these territories. Western countries, including the U.S. also denounce Russia's action and described the recognition of the breakaway regions' independence unacceptable.²³¹ Indeed Russia formerly vowed to increase its support for Abkhazia and the South Ossetia after Kosovo declared its independence from Serbia to be recognized by many Western countries in February 2008.²³²

Nicaragua announced on 5 September 2008 that it recognized Abkhazia and the South Ossetia as independent states and supported the Russian government's position.²³³ Nicaragua is still the sole country except Russia to recognize Georgian enclaves as sovereign entities. On 17 September, Russia signed Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance agreements with the South Ossetia and Abkhazia which pledged to unify their civil, tax, welfare and pension laws as well as their energy, transportation and telecommunication systems with Russia. Russia gained the right to establish military bases and use them as well as protecting the borders in these regions.²³⁴

The UN Georgia Mission began its duty in the region on 1 October 2008 with 265 unarmed observers and civil officers. Two weeks later on 15 October the tenure of United Nations Georgian Mission (UNOMIG) was extended to 15 February 2009. However, these observers, deployed in Georgia according to the six-point plan, could not be operative within the conflict zones in the South Ossetia and Abkhazia since they were "to monitor the situation, the respect for human rights and the return of internally

²³¹ Mike Shuster, "Georgia Calls Russian Actions Illegal", *NPR*, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=93993971>, accessed on 17 May 2009.

²³² Michael Schwartz, "Fiercest Fighting in Years Near Georgian Border", *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/08/world/europe/08georgia.html?scp=2&sq=ossetia&st=nyt>, accessed on 10 May 2009.

²³³"Russia ally strengthens grip on South Ossetia", <http://www.Russia-ic.com/news/show/7008/>, accessed on 17 May 2009.

²³⁴ Jim Nichol, "Russia-Georgia Conflict in South Ossetia: Context and Implications for U.S. Interests", CRS Report for Congress, Updated: 22 September 2008, p. 9.

displaced persons (IDPs) in the areas affected by the conflict, but not in the South Ossetia and Abkhazia proper.”²³⁵

On 31 May 2009, parliamentary elections were held in the South Ossetia. According to the first results, pro-government Unity Party has garnered nearly half of the votes. According to the election commission of the South Ossetia, Unity Party gained %46.36 of the votes, the People’s Party got %22.53 and the Communist Party got %22.25 of the votes. Two parties, known to be opposed to the president Eduard Kokoity, did not participate the elections by the decision of central election commission.²³⁶

The European Union, the U.S., Georgia and the NATO condemn the elections as illegitimate. On 1 June U.S. Department of State made a statement and said that the parliamentary elections in the South Ossetia “represent a step away from a peaceful and negotiated solution to the conflict. The U.S. reiterates its support for Georgia’s sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders.”²³⁷

5.5 Consequences of the South Ossetia War

As soon as the war began in South Ossetia, reactions from the international community started to come. Most countries blamed both the Georgian and the Russian sides. Russia was criticized for its disproportionate use of force and targeting civilians; Georgia was criticized for attempting to incorporate the South Ossetia by using force. Nevertheless, world leaders tried to mediate the fighting parties and found a peace ground with acceptable terms by both sides from the first day of the war.

²³⁵ Nona Mikhelidze, “After the 2008 Russia-Georgia War: Implications for the Wider Caucasus”, *The International Spectator*, Vol. 44, No. 3, September 2009, p. 30.

²³⁶“Russia ally strengthens grip on South Ossetia”, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/georgia/5421164/Russia-ally-strengthens-grip-on-South-Ossetia.html>, accessed on 9 June 2009.

²³⁷ “Georgia: Parliamentary Elections”, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2009/06a/124200.htm>, accessed on 9 June 2009.

Nona Mikhelidze points out that the responses of the Western countries', particularly the U.S. and the EU, "responses to Russia were firm in words but compromising in deeds."²³⁸ The EU stopped the negotiations with Russia on 'strategic partnership' for three months after the war between Georgia and Russia in August. After EU meeting in Brussels in early December 2008, it was decided to resume the talks with Moscow despite the Russian troops had not withdrawn to their positions before August 2008. The U.S. also softened its approach towards Russia. In her final NATO meeting on 2 December 2008 in Brussels, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice stated that the U.S. agreed to support reopening a modest and gradually dialogue with Russia. Both the EU and NATO officials emphasized that their decision did not convey the approval of Russia's intervention and use of disproportionate force in Georgia.²³⁹

The war also revealed that the Western countries have different approaches to the Caucasus. Markadenov mentions that NATO officials' statements toward Russia were politically more correct than the arguments prepared by the U.S. representatives. This, according to Sergei Markedonov, shows that the Organization should not be identified with the U.S. any longer.²⁴⁰ On the other hand, it was revealed that there was a lack of common opinion among the EU countries on how to react Russia. Some member states, like UK and the Baltic states, demanded soft containment of Russia while other states such as France and Germany, wanted more active engagement.²⁴¹ Thus, one of the most important outcomes of the August War was the exposure of the disagreement among the Western countries and therefore, as Mikhelidze stresses, their: "inability to prevent

²³⁸ Nona Mikhelidze, "After the 2008 Russia-Georgia War: Implications for the Wider Caucasus", *The International Spectator*, Vol. 44, No. 3, September 2009, p. 27.

²³⁹ Steven Erlanger, "U.S. Softens Stance on Russia at NATO Summit", *The New York Times*, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/03/world/03nato.html?_r=1, accessed on 9 June 2009.

²⁴⁰ Sergei Markedonov, "The "Five-Day War": Preliminary Results and Consequences", *Russian Politics and Law*, vol.47, no.3, May-June 2009, p. 78.

²⁴¹ Nona Mikhelidze, "After the 2008 Russia-Georgia War: Implications for the Wider Caucasus", *The International Spectator*, Vol. 44, No. 3, September 2009, p. 38.

Russia from moving aggressively to restore its primacy over the former Soviet territory.”²⁴²

Another important consequence of the war was the situation of the IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons). During the war and afterwards, thousands of people left their homes and fled from the conflict zone. Actually, there were already 223.000 internally displaced persons in Georgia before the 2008 war due to the ethnic clashes in the past years. The report of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated 157.000 people to be displaced within Georgia and the South Ossetia due to the war in August. It is estimated that nearly 35.000 Ossetians fled to Russia and the North Ossetia. After the war, 68.000 people were able to return when the report was published, on 12 September 2008.²⁴³

Total Displacement caused by the recent conflict over South Ossetia	
Displaced population within Georgia excluding The South Ossetia (GoG figures)	127,000
Displacement within The South Ossetia (UNHCR estimates)	30,000
<i>Sub Total Georgia</i>	<i>157,000</i>
Displaced population to Russian Federation (GoRF figures)	35,000
Total	192,000
Returns within Georgia excluding The South Ossetia to date	
Population already returned	68,000
Projected number of returns before onset of winter	5,000
Total	73,000

GoRF: Government of the Russian Federation

Gog: Government of Georgia

Table: 5 Report of the UNHCR for Georgia after 2008 War

Source: UNHCR Report in Georgia: Report for 12 September 2008, <http://www.unhcr.org/news/NEWS/48ca83734.pdf>, accessed on 9 June 2009.

Humanitarian aid and financial support for the recovery of the infrastructure of the region was another important issue for the international community. Many countries and international organizations immediately started humanitarian assistance efforts. The

²⁴² Nona Mikhelidze, “After the 2008 Russia-Georgia War: Implications for the Wider Caucasus”, *The International Spectator*, Vol. 44, No. 3, September 2009, p. 27.

²⁴³ UNHCR Report in Georgia: Report for 12 September 2008, <http://www.unhcr.org/news/NEWS/48ca83734.pdf>, accessed on 9 June 2009.

assistance was firstly focused on the basic humanitarian necessities of the displaced people such as health, food, water, sanitation and protection. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs was the first to take action in the conflict zone. It was also reported that other UN agencies, NGOs and donor countries sent large amounts of relief commodities for the needs of the civilians in the region. In early September 2008, the International Monetary Fund also announced the stand-by package of \$750 million for Georgia. The EU also decided to provide up to 500 million euros for humanitarian aid and recovery of the infrastructure damaged in the war.²⁴⁴

²⁴⁴ Jim Nichol, "Russia-Georgia Conflict in South Ossetia: Context and Implications for U.S. Interests", CRS Report for Congress, Updated: 22 September 2008, p. 20.

CHAPTER VI. CONCLUSION

Collapse of the Soviet Union and the independence of its former republics brought new states and a new balance of power in the world politics. In the way for accommodating to the needs of the new political and economic system, nearly all former republics, including Russia, had to face certain difficulties and confusion. Moreover, new borders caused ethnic conflicts in the South Caucasus due to its ethnically heterogenous structure. Moscow's influence in the region continued to be a more or less important factor after the disintegration of the USSR and more so after 2000.

Among the other former Soviet republics, Georgia is probably one of the most important ones due to its history of political turmoil and ethnic wars. In retrospect, Georgian territory has witnessed most of the ethnic clashes within the former Soviet states due to its ethnically diversified composition. The main reason for the increase of the ethnic tension in the region was the extremist Georgian nationalism which began to appear prior to the disintegration of the Soviet Union as a result of Gorbachev's *glasnost* and *perestroika* policies.

Basic argument of the thesis is that the effect of the international factors on the conflict between Georgia and the South Ossetia became more decisive particularly in the recent years. Therefore, South Ossetian problem can not be identified only as a regional conflict anymore. Georgian-South Ossetian relations have differed in time parallel to the changes in Tbilisi's relations with Moscow and the West. In time Georgia developed closer relations with the Western countries and organizations. Moscow, no doubt, was disturbed from the increasing influence of the West in its 'backyard', and this situation caused a power struggle to control the strategically important region. Thus, Russia benefited from Georgia's disputes with its breakaway region, South Ossetia. When Georgia attacked the South Ossetia in August 2008, Moscow used this opportunity to strengthen its position in the region.

This thesis underlines the affect of Georgia's foreign relations on its ethnic disputes, particularly on South Ossetian problem and examines the South Ossetian problem of Georgia, which remained as a frozen conflict from 1992 to 2008, in a critical perspective in the light of the historical and political developments in the region. It also points out the resurgence of the Russian influence and its determination to keep its presence in the region as well as the policy of the West toward Georgia. It is essential to examine the historical events to understand present conflicts and disputes. Therefore, I tried to analyze and evaluate the political developments in and around Georgia from a historical perspective.

In the second chapter I examined the historical background of the region for a better understanding of the current disputes between Georgians and South Ossetians. As the historical and academic sources indicate, the presence of the Ossetians traced back to the 14th century. This information supports the South Ossetian argument to be a titular nation in the region in opposition to Georgian claims which describes the South Ossetians as 'new comers'.

The influence of Russia which began in the early 19th century is also important for its present policies toward Georgia. Russia annexed Georgia in 1801 and until the collapse of the Soviet Union, except for a short period of independence between 1918 and 1921, Georgia had been subordinated to Moscow. Therefore, Moscow's historical relations with Georgia are very essential to understand Russia's perception about the region as its backyard and its policy to keep Georgia in its sphere of influence.

In the third chapter I examined the sources of the conflict. The study reveals that, the reason of the emergence of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict is the rising Georgian nationalism during the declining period of the Soviet Union. Anti-Soviet and anti-Russian sentiments began to increase among Georgians after the 'April Tragedy'. This unfortunate event changed the direction of Georgian policies and paved the way to independence under the leadership of Gamsakhurdia.

Gamsakhurdia was a nationalist who claimed that Georgia belonged to the Georgians. Despite his radical policies, he gained the support of a great majority of the Georgian people and became the first president of the Republic of Georgia with a landslide in 1991. In his short-termed presidency, radical nationalism and hatred towards non-Georgians increased and ended with probably the most dramatic ethnic war in Georgian history.

Due to the turmoil in the USSR, Moscow could not intervene or stand against the rising of the Georgian nationalism. Georgia was the first republic to declare its independence from the USSR, it also refused to join the CIS when it was first established. In the first year of its independence, Georgia totally refused Russia's influence. As a result of Gamsakhurdia's intolerance to the demands of South Ossetian government, Georgia drifted into a bloody ethnic war with the South Ossetia in 1991. The war caused hundreds of dead and thousands of IDPs and, beyond all, a deep hatred between South Ossetians and Georgians. The war ended only after Gamsakhurdia's ouster by the opposition groups in 1992 and Shevardnadze's permission for Russian mediation to cease the fight in the region.

The third chapter analyzed the Shevardnadze era, in which the relations between Tbilisi and Moscow moderated. The improvement of the relations between Georgia and Russia also affected Georgia's the South Ossetia policy. Shevardnadze's presidency was a new epoch for Georgia. Ethnic conflicts were ended with cease-fire agreements under the auspice of Russia, both the South Ossetia and Abkhazia gained *de facto* independence since then. Moreover, Russia came across an opportunity to deploy its soldiers in Georgian territory and to develop its relations with the breakaway regions. On the other hand, Georgia pursued a balanced foreign policy between the West and Russia. Shortly after Shevardnadze came to office, Georgia joined the CIS.

Despite the end of the conflict in the breakaway regions, Georgia struggled with economic hardships and corruption in the government. Shevardnadze's hegemony and popularity among Georgians decreased due to these factors and an opposition began to

emerge within his own party, CUG. Mikheil Saakashvili was one of the young and successful politicians within CUG cabinet. After his resignation from the party, he became the leading figure of the opposition which claimed more democratic institutions and fight against corruption in Georgia.

In the fourth chapter, regime change in Georgia was examined with a critical approach to Saakashvili government's policies after inauguration. Rose Revolution was a turning point for Georgia in political sense. President Saakashvili who gained the support of the Georgian people and the West came to power with democratic and economic commitments. More important than these, he pledged to reunify Georgia; to integrate breakaway regions and garner the political control throughout the country. But, despite Saakashvili's popularity among the people and his support from the West, Georgia is still far away from territorial and political integrity due to the unsuccessful policies of his government.

The fifth chapter reveals that Russia's role in ethnic tensions of Georgia can not be ignored due to its support and patronage for breakaway regions, especially after the West began to be interested in the region. This situation threatens the territorial integrity of Georgia which wants to deprive the effect of Russia in the region and become a member of NATO. Until 2008, Russia ostensibly supported Georgia's territorial integrity and advised both the South Ossetia and Abkhazia to integrate with Georgia. On the other hand many South Ossetians hold Russian passports and Russia gives them citizenship. In the 2008 War in the South Ossetia, according to Moscow, Russia intervened to stop ethnic cleansing over South Ossetians and protect its 'citizens'.

The thesis emphasizes that Russian existence and influence in the region is a priority for the Russian foreign policy. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, Russia considerably lost its influence in world politics. But she became an important power again in 2000s due to its economic resurgence owing to high oil and gas prices. Moscow began to consolidate its authority in the region since Putin became

president in 2000, but Saakashvili appeared as an important obstacle for Russia's aim to increase its influence in the Caucasus.

Between 2004 and 2008, relations between Russia and Georgia worsened. The fifth chapter focuses on the bilateral relations and crises between Moscow and Tbilisi over the breakaway regions of Georgia during Saakashvili's presidency. Russia was obviously fretful about the increasing influence of the West in the region due to the endeavors of Tbilisi government to join the West camp. There was also a personal conflict between Russian president Putin and Saakashvili that affected the bilateral relations. This controversy was ended with war in the South Ossetia in 2008.

The 2008 War in South Ossetia was a clash between two leaders besides being a regional conflict. Putin ordered Russian troops to enter Georgian territory to prevent Georgia from seizing the region by using force. Russian troops moved until a close distance to Georgian capital Tbilisi. It was also a challenge to Georgia to show how its territorial integrity was fragile. Moscow reminded Tbilisi that the region's stability was still depended on Russia's will and Russia would not refrain from military intervention in such situation. It was also a challenge for the West; Russia violated Georgia's territorial integrity and international law. But no country or international organization went further from condemning Russia's action.

To sum up, the source of the Georgian-South Ossetian conflict is the Georgian nationalism that ignored South Ossetians' ethnic presence in the region and drifted country into ethnic war. Moreover, the wrong policies toward the South Ossetia have deepened the division between Georgians and South Ossetians and complicated the territorial integrity of the country which is an important requirement for Georgia's NATO membership. Georgia's aspirations to become a part of the Western world apparently disturb Russia which has its own aspirations to reconsolidate its influence in the former Soviet territories. Therefore, Russia uses its control over Georgia's breakaway regions to gain supremacy over Tbilisi and prevent Georgia from joining NATO. As the last war indicated, in the short term, it seems highly unlikely that

Georgia will be able to decrease Russia's influence in the region and totally integrate with the West.

Based on the analysis of the South Ossetian-Georgian conflict, it could be concluded that the neorealist approach to international politics is capable of explaining conflicts like the South Ossetian – Georgian conflict, because it demonstrates the importance of systemic factors in the development of local conflicts. In fact, the seemingly local conflicts could have potentially very destabilizing systemic effects if their systemic dimensions were neglected as it was seen during the Georgian Russian War in 2008. The relevance of great power politics and the rivalry between Russia and the United States over the Caucasus could be explored better by such a systemic approach to international relations. Thus, the neorealist theory contributes to the analysis of the South Ossetian-Georgian conflict significantly.

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