

NATO involvement in the Black Sea Region
and
its possible political consequences.

First question that comes into mind is why should NATO get involved in the so called “wider” Black Sea region? What is the significance of this region for the North Atlantic community?

First of all, NATO should engage the region in the process of bringing democracy and economic and social development to the wider territory, the territory of bigger importance called the Greater Middle East.

Secondly, NATO should have bases and safe allies in the region to carry out the “out of area” operations; aiming at the Middle East as a target at this stage.

The third factor is as S. Celac points it out, to “Encourage the development of a Black Sea regional identity as a meaningful partner for the West through enlightened policies and coordinated EU-NATO-U.S. action”.¹ This, in turn, could involve some additional factors both as a basis and a consequence. Namely, strengthening the independence of the Black Sea region states via the revenues from the energy production and developing the overall business opportunities in the region; establishing the strong economic linkages among the states of this region. We should not forget however that especially in the South Caucasus this will be a very hard task to implement.

Since the Black Sea region serves as a transit route, encouragement and raising the quality of security in the region is another challenge NATO should deal with. Especially when the EU and the US are trying to diversify their energy supplies from Saudi Arabia and Persian Gulf oil. As Z. Baran puts it, “The Black Sea is an ideal conduit by which non-OPEC, non-Gulf oil and natural gas can flow into the European markets... Russia is already out-producing Saudi Arabia, while Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan have significant oil reserves as well... most of this oil will reach European markets after transiting the Black Sea region,...”.²

Notion of the tranquil Black Sea region leads us to another spotlight topic, the most important probably, the role of Russia in the region and relation of the Atlantic community with Russia. Namely, the challenge is how to positively involve Russia in the processes described above, taking into consideration its legitimate rights in the region, without turning back to the stagnant zero-sum clashes of interests between it and the West.

Under these circumstances it is impossible not to touch the subject of the so called “frozen conflicts” in the region. Before examining why the conflict-resolution should be a priority for NATO and what, in my opinion, is the most reasonable approach NATO

¹ “Five Reasons Why The West Should Become More Involved In The Black Sea Region”, Celac, S. in Anew Euro-Atlantic Strategy for the Black Sea Region, p.144. Editors – Asmus, R.D. Dimitrov, K. Forbrig J. 2004.

² Developing a Euro-Atlantic Strategy towards Black Sea Region: The example of the Caspian, Baran, Z. in Anew Euro-Atlantic Strategy for the Black Sea Region, p.116. Editors – Asmus, R.D. Dimitrov, K. Forbrig J. 2004.

can have, let us go over those “three basic options”³ as argued by S. Larrabee in developing a strategy toward Russia in regard to the Black Sea region.

The first one is ***Rapid Integration***. This means, that the West should incorporate the Black Sea region into Western institutions as quickly as possible. Practically, leaving Russia with no other choice than to cooperate when put to the fact of the determined Western power. This strategy has several advantages as well as disadvantages. Namely, it would reduce Russian influence in the region, by local support of the regional governments or Western control of the energy supplies, however as a reaction Russians would attempt by every means possible to provoke instabilities in the region, including putting pressure on the conflict zones. It would also need a significant Western military presence/investment and in addition it is doubtful that this strategy would win the overall consensus within the Alliance itself.

Next one could be the strategy of ***Cooperative Engagement***. The basic principle of this strategy is that any Western action would need a prior Russian blessing. Here the balance of the points is that it avoids Russian irritation, shows that West respects Russian interests in the region, on the other hand however it is least likely that local governments would support this policy; additionally Russia practically monopolizes the flow of events in the region and above all the key Western countries will not support this.

The third and the most acceptable for everyone, I think, is the strategy called ***Integration Plus Cooperation***. The strategy that need not be created ex nihilo. This is the dual track strategy used by NATO toward Central European countries during the first phase of the enlargement. It would try to manage the integration of the Black Sea region with the Russian cooperation if possible, or without it if necessary. It would treat Russia as a partner, however if Russia fails to cooperate it would not give veto right to Russia. This strategy avoids Russian opposition at some possible level, however still risks giving Russia too much influence.

Why take Russia into account?

It is true that Russia can not stop NATO expansion or deny the countries of S. Caucasus their right to join the alliance. That being the case, some ask, why strain so hard in the first place to take Russia into account, let alone to allow Moscow a veto over NATO enlargement? The answer is that the implications of the enlargement if it is not accompanied by the compromise with Russia are very serious ones. In addition to the disruption of the present security enlargements between Russia and the US, the political fallout could include deterioration of the larger bilateral relationship, a Russian policy toward China, Iran and Iraq that would disregard American interests and concerns; a more frequent invocation by Russia of its veto in the UN Security Council; a more assertive Russia in the former Soviet Union space. In short, it could mean a Russia that, while not directly challenging the role of the US in Europe, might become a “loose cannon” of world politics.

The last but not the least is the role of NATO in the conflict resolution in the Black Sea region.

³ The Russian Factor in Western Strategy toward the Black Sea Region, Larrabee, F.S. in Anew Euro-Atlantic Strategy for the Black Sea Region, p.p. 153-54. Editors – Asmus, R.D. Dimitrov, K. Forbrig J. 2004.

Under the NATO-Russian Council (NRC) these issues were being discussed however campaign in Iraq shifted the focus elsewhere. Additionally, two obstacles stand on the way to the direct Western involvement in these processes. First is that the Russian factor again is of significance to the Alliance. The Russian cooperation in anti-terrorism or anti-WMD proliferation is of big importance to West. Another obstacle is that 2003-04 Afghanistan-Iraq campaigns, Balkans leaves the Black Sea and South Caucasus in particular in a vague situation. It is true that the US backs up Georgian interests in particular on a regular basis however more organized Western contribution is necessary. Especially when the S. Caucasus in particular would entail incomparably smaller resources and what's the most important the less militarized, civilianized peacekeeping than those involved in Afghanistan or Iraq and would serve, as already mentioned above, as a base and ally.

If the Euro-Atlantic community is to uphold its interests in his region, it can not continue to abstain from assuming direct responsibilities for peace support and conflict-resolution. Peacekeeping operations must be internationalized, the peacekeeping must be civilianized and the negotiations must aim for a democratic opening in the conflict-torn areas as a prerequisite to any sustainable settlement.

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- **NATO, Russia, NRC, Enlargement, Black Sea Region, Greater Middle East Rapid intergartion, Cooperative Engagement, Integration plus Cooperation.**

On the Abkhaz unity and Democracy-building

The major demand of the de facto Abkhaz Republic is total independence from Georgia. The de facto authorities are not willing to give up on this and furthermore trust to receive the desired political recognition from the international community.

In my opinion, there are particular directions de facto government puts impetus on that in their point of view are crucial for achieving the overall recognition and independence.

Notwithstanding the fact that de facto Abkhaz state is rejected by the international community on all possible levels it is still central for them to have unity and solidarity among their lines with respect of carrying out the internal as well as external political course. This is especially true with the unofficial negotiation, opinion exchange processes

organized on international level (workshops, dialogue processes arranged by various international organizations, etc.). Since those representatives of the Abkhaz side who are willing to compromise could be identified and supported by international actors thereby weakening Abkhaz long term strive for full liberty.

Another key point in this context, as I see it, is democracy and the establishment and development of full-bodied civil society as an integral process of democratization.

The last but not the least in this “Abkhaz Freedom Campaign” would be the factors of a parliament that is able to perform its control functions and an independent judiciary.

With respect of unity everything looked fine for de facto authorities in Abkhazia even after 2004-05 **presidential elections**. The compromise was found between nowadays de facto president **Bagapsh** and de facto vice president **Khadjimba**, who is supported by the Forum for Public Opinion, opposition coalition movement including 12 parties. Khadjimba seemed reluctant to criticize his opponent, Bagapsh, stressing that the Abkhaz cause and the matter of unity were supreme. The situation changed however after the **parliamentary elections** in March, 2007 when people loyal to Bagapsh gained 28 out of 35 seats. Several opposition members even threatened to address the Supreme Court with an official complaint regarding faking the ballot papers. Another dispute arose when de facto president requested Vladimer Arshba, member of the opposition coalition, to withdraw his candidacy form the Sukhumi N.7 constituency. De facto President was backing his argument by explaining that he is protecting the national minority rights since the mentioned constituency was ethnic Russian dominated. During de facto presidential elections 2004, it was crucial for Bagapsh to have the ethnic minority backing (including the Georgian dominated Gali region). Since then he is to defend their rights, Armenians especially (this “devotion” partially comes probably because the Armenian community is highly sensitive on the return **of Mohajirs**, inhabitants of Abkhazia exiled in 19th century to Turkey. The Abkhaz de facto authorities are actively engaged in this affair however denied appointment on any official level from the Turkish side. It would also be expedient to find out whether those Muhajirs are willing to come back at all).

Another issue disrupting the de facto Abkhaz unity is that the opposition leader Khajimba is strongly supported by the Russian Kremlin administration for his famous Russo philia.

Since the events that took place in Kodori valley in 2006 the pro-Russian Abkhaz party encourages fears of the Georgian military intervention and sees the Russian troops as the only guarantor of peace. Whereas, Bagapsh and his supporters, especially prime minister Ankvab, are “enlightened” with the idea of sovereign and independent Abkhaz state it will be very difficult for him to decrease the criticism for his inability to deal with **Kodori** issue without Russian help. Depending on the support of Moscow it may either draw Abkhaz side to the negotiation table with Georgia or result in a tougher stance in relation with Tbilisi. Anyways, the increased pro-Russian standpoint would do little to persuade West of Abkhazia’s aims of joining the international community as an independent actor.

After the Abkhazian de facto presidential elections, 2204-05, the democracy **building and civil society are portrayed as limestone of Abkhazian statehood**. From this perspective democratization is regarded naturally – as a value as well as *strategy*. Since the democratic entity can expect ultimately to be accepted and recognized by the international community. It would be very difficult for any power to restrict this democracy, to put pressure on it without anticipating condemnation on international level. Therefore, the process of democracy is perceived to have “protective function” within the conflict prism.

Although existence of civil society enhances the legitimacy of the de facto Abkhaz side it also poses certain risks to it with respect of unity. Since various civil actors are allowed to take part in Georgian-Abkhaz negotiations for example, the chances of diversity of opinions from Abkhaz side increases which is very undesirable for the de facto Abkhaz authorities and might be used by different actors not in their favor as was mentioned above.

“We must build civil society together!” that is how Taras shamba, president of International Abkhaz-Abazg Association, addressed the meeting of leaders of social-political movements and national communities. I’m afraid it will be quite difficult to do that under those circumstances that exist in Abkhazia nowadays with respect of socio-political life?

According to the commentary on the parliamentary elections given by the publicist and contributor to the Abkhaz based 'Civil Society' magazine, resident of Sukhumi, **Nadejda Venediktovna**, the elections were shameful. People are voting because it is in their habit to do so, many of them exchange their votes for a pack of rice or wheat. Those two years of the new government did not bring any developments, nothing to hope for. According to her, the level of corruption is even higher, the Russian inflation is devastating the Abkhaz economy.

The deputies went even further. None of them did even simply publicly review their election programs for their voters. As Venediktovna sees it, it is important for them to sneak into parliament in order to lobby their business or start an enterprise that will make them rich or take part in the privatization arrangements then to receive "gratitude".

According to Irina Agrba, historian, the TV program presenter and newly elected deputy, those deputies previously shading tears for their Muhadjir fellow-countrymen very easily betrayed that standpoint for personal gains. There were some criminal elements present at the elections as well.

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- **2004-05 presidential elections ion Abkhazia, 2007Parliamentary Elections in Abkhazia, Khajimba, Bagapsh, kodori Valley, Mohajirs, Nadejda Venediktovna Democracy and Civil Society building in Abkhazia.**

Georgia, Abkhazia and Osetia And the Russian backward-looking factor

Building on the separatism orchestrated in Abkhazia and South Ossetia by Moscow, there are several parallel lines, coordinated by several Russian ministries and agencies:

First, the manipulation of ethnic issues by freezing settlement negotiations, through Russia's monopoly on "peacekeeping" troops. On October 11, 2006, the Georgian parliament passed a resolution on the present state and current peacekeeping operations on the conflict regions of the country. Georgia's major complaints against the Russian "peacekeepers" is their failure to execute those critical responsibilities they have taken and owe, to some extent to the international community, not to mention Georgia with its conflict regions in the first place. Further, Georgia thinks that the current

peacekeeping operations and conflict resolution formats have run out of their effectiveness. Georgia demands replacement (just recently this demand was moderated into something more temperate from the Georgian Ministry for Re-integration, namely that Russian peacekeepers are joined by different corps too) of the Russian peacekeepers, who have started carrying out their duties under the UN aegis and the CIS countries resolution. This will be productive taking into consideration that the Baltic states, Estonia in particular and Ukraine have expressed their readiness to join the peacekeeping forces.

Although Georgia should definitely aim for withdrawing the Russian forces, it should also avoid a new armed conflict. The critical issue of security comes to the fore here. As long as Abkaz and Osetian population feels insecure, Russia will manage to lead the events in the desired direction very easily. First of all, it is necessary to start talking individually with the rebellious authorities without Russian or other interference. Especially when there is a great international support for that. In concrete cases, separatist authorities give incentive for this as well (as discussed below). So the feeling of security should be restored in local populations through the consistent peaceful policy as well as introduction of peacekeeping forces of different countries under the aegis of international organizations.

Second line is, installing and supporting local political leaderships loyal to Moscow, usually affiliated in one way or another with the secret services. This is true of Osetia and *was true* of Abkhazia till the 2004-05 Presidential elections. When the new de facto government of Abkhazia offered the document called “Key to the Future”, where, along other rather unacceptable conditions for Georgia, there are some issues worth paying attention to. There is expressed willingness of the Abkhaz side to find peaceful solution to the conflict practically not mentioning the Russian role in this; moreover to start integration in the Black Sea region and in the European space. Practically, Abkhazs have to decide between the Russia and the democratic Europe and this matter of choice gives hope for future Georgian-Abkhaz peaceful co-existence in the single state.

Third, isolating the territory from the international information space and media, while connecting it to Russia's.

Fourth, creating a corps of separatist troops where there are included all sorts of mercenaries led by specially trained Russian army officers.

Fifth, introducing the ruble as the only "legal" currency.

After Mr. Putin came to power, the process of absorption of Georgian territories by Russia considerably accelerated.

Sixth in this listing is the conferral of Russian citizenship on residents of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, en masse and with almost no formalities (never mind that it short-circuits Russia's own law on citizenship). According to the statement of the President of Georgia, M. Saakashvili from the tribune of the UN, “Abkhazia and South Osetia have been annexed by our northern neighbour, the Russian Federation, which is actively distributing Russian passports among the local population, actively participating in the privatization of the private property that has been left behind by the forcibly displaced people and this is a gross violation of the international law”. The official

excuse is that any citizen of the former Soviet Union is entitled to Russian citizenship irrespective of his place of residence, e.g., in any ex-Soviet republic. By now, Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other government bodies routinely claim a right of intrusive protection of "Russia's citizens" in those territories.

This can have "side effects" on the international level as well. Namely, when civil war broke out in Abkhazia, Georgia, 14 years ago, hundreds of thousands of ethnic Georgians were forced to flee their homes. The majority packed just a few personal belongings, since they were told they would be able to return in a few days. Nearly a generation has passed since then and those 300,000 refugees remain scattered throughout Georgia, still waiting to go back. A few sought to build their futures outside of Georgia, but the large majority held onto their Georgian passports in the hope of ultimately going home - to mind their orchards, to properly bury their dead, and to heal the wounds of the brutal war together with their Abkhaz kin and neighbors. On June 1, 2007 an agreement between the European Union and Russia on visa facilitation entered into force. What this means is that those residents of Abkhazia who had kept their homes and agreed to accept illegal Russian passports - over 80 percent of the current population of Abkhazia, Georgia - are now able to travel relatively easily to the EU. But the 300,000 refugees who were forced to flee and those who did not succumb to Russia's illegal passportization campaign receive no such benefit. In the absence of a similar agreement between Georgia and the EU, the refugees will be punished for their dutiful adherence to the law. Moreover, a destructive precedent is being created in Georgia, potentially usable in other places with highly destabilizing effects.

Seventh, Russian state and private economic entities are taking over Georgian state properties in Abkhazia and establishing railroad and shipping links with it, without bothering to ask permission from Georgia, which is the legal sovereign there. In addition, insolently violating the rule of law, for example, Mr. Zhirinovskiy in August, 2004 sailed from the port of Sochi to Abkhazia on a Russian gunboat, which he turned over to the Abkhaz forces as a gift – complete with its Russian training crew.

Finally, **eighth:** Russian troops, along with Abkhaz and Ossetian troops, control those two sectors of the Georgian-Russian border on the Georgian side, while Russian political officials no longer refer to those sectors as the Russian-Georgian border. In other words, the internationally recognized, legally valid border is being erased in practice. A clear example for that is what recently happened in Ganmukhuri camp (Samegrelo-Abkhaz border within state of Georgia) and in Ochamchire, Abkhazia, Georgia where Russia has deployed additional military hardware and at least 200 more soldiers, mainly ethnic Chechens, five T-72 battle tanks; five GRAD-type multiple rocket launchers; five armored vehicles and seven howitzers in the beginning of this month.

International organizations and Georgia's Western partners have yet to react to the destruction of international law and order in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. They'd better act fast, lest the destabilizing precedent be repeated in other post-Soviet territories and beyond those.

Sources:

- www.jamestown.org
- www.euobserver.com
- www.civil.ge

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- **Georgian Ministry for Re-integration, Russian Peacekeepers, “Key to the Future, separatist troops, specially trained Russian army officers, forced distribution of Russian passports, agreement between the European Union and Russia on visa facilitation, Russian-Georgian border, Ganmukhuri camp.**

Georgian-Osetian Disputes

It is a special case to understand why those residents of S. Osetia who are against “joining” the Georgian state feel the way they do.

“Our citizens who suffered through the freeze, war, various misfortunes are being trapped by seductive offers for cooperation...

“Economic prosperity and happy life are being promised in a parcel with a dollar tie around it. We are called to forget our past (those who perished, who were tortured and humiliated...). We are offered free medical care, and employment in modern hi tech offices, etc. In exchange for what? Georgia is not so far and we all have a good knowledge of the jails that are overfilled, of the strikingly high amount of beggars on the streets and extremely high level of corruption in the horrifying Georgia. Look what they did to the Adjarian autonomy?! It is practically disfunctioned...” (Eduard Kokoity, newspaper, “Southern Osetia”, 14.04.07 N 30-31).

Our anonymous source claims that, “for many years already there are Georgians from the Liakhvi, Prone or the other gorges who do the building or renovating on private or public constructions in Tskhinvali and its surroundings. They also bring the help from the other parts of western or eastern Georgia. Most importantly, Georgians are the cheapest labor force here, they work better and are paid less. They find an excuse, what can they do? They are having hard times, no money. Additionally, they are informers, providing different kinds of information. Otherwise it is impossible for them to find a job here. It is a heavy “toil”... No matter the restrictions, people from the nearby villages come to buy and sell or exchange the goods”.

One of the Georgian churches in Tskhinvali was repainted and walled Osetian type. Nearby there is a memorial for the genocide on Osetians inflicted by the Georgians too. It is because of the "hard times" perhaps that the "toil" was carried out by the Georgian hired labor! (It is appropriate to note here that somehow the history repeats. In XVIII-XIX centuries the Georgian slave-prisoners called Guirdziags were the cheapest labor force in Osetia. They had to work under extremely poor conditions. It is well known that the Georgian slave trade was mainly organized by Georgians themselves. For a general knowledge – in Osetia, it was a great shame to trade the kinsmen). All these bear a very negative fruits, the Osetian side can see that the Georgians have to go through many misfortunes in order to survive.

Additionally, work has begun to launch the gas pipeline from the N. Osetia to S. Osetia – Dzarikau-Tskhinvali. This project, according to the Russian side, is of a distinctive eminence (it will cost 15 billion rubles-652 million USD. There is also oil search works to come conducted by the South Koreans). The 163 km long. gas pipe will secure the local population with alternative, non-Georgian, source of gas supply. These and other to say the least, questionable projects are being implemented "thanks" to the Russian "efforts" to stabilize situation in S.Osetia.

It is well known to the public that besides the Russian assistance S. Osetia also receives support from the Northern Osetian Republic be it material, moral or any other. The article titled: "Why does Georgia need destabilization?" was placed in the May edition of newspaper "Severny Kavkaz"("Northern Caucasus"), which is published throughout the entire Northern Caucasus as well as other parts of the Russian Federation.

The article represents point of view of the author S. Shakaryants and describes how the human rights violations are aggrieved in Georgia. The article describes case of the Azeri National Assembly chairman in Georgia, Dashgin Gyulmamedov. It is argued by the author that those several attacks on him, including in Azerbaijan, were plotted by the Georgian law enforcement high officials. The grounds for such self-assured statements, according to Gyulmamedov, provide the attitude and negligence the Georgian authorities reveal in relation to the national minorities and good evidence for this is the murder case of the Marneuli, village Sadakhlo mullah that happened two years ago and is not even investigated yet. In the latter Gyulmamedov traces the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Furthermore, discrimination of ethnic minorities, dissemination of pamphlets with threat content in the Marneuli district as well as Jvakheta (Southern part of Georgia) aimed at the local national minority union "Javakhk" are being planned and implemented on the government level. As Gyulmamedov continues, the department of the Constitutional Security at the Ministry of Internal Affairs is busy setting up terrorist organization the "Akhalsikhe Liberation Brigades" (which is not functioning yet, according to him), having confrontation of the Turk-Meskehetians and local Armenian population as its final goal in order to better control the region by bringing the very Russian formula (for Georgians it comes from Russia) of the "divide and rule" into action. Head of the Azeri National Assembly is not surprised anymore, since "the Georgian authorities by their attitude toward the Abkhaz and the Ossetians have already demonstrated that they do not have much respect of the human rights and are intolerant in relation with the other nationalities" (newspaper "Severny Kavkaz (Northern Caucasus), 05.07 N19 (833)). Although, all this is a kid stuff, in comparison to what can happen in case if Georgia

starts a war, then, according to Gyulmamedov Georgians are going to force Azeris and Armenians against Abkhazs and Ossetians.

Although, most of the above mentioned is exaggeration and is based on disinformation and alleged miscalculations in order to portray those existing tensions in even more troubled fashion. We need to also admit that there is a common sense in these accusations and the sooner we handle them the better it is for Georgia.

In my opinion, another thing that the Georgian government has to accomplish is to mobilize its resources, namely the reconstruction projects at its highest by putting the roads, TV and phone communications, electricity provisions, enhance the infrastructure in general. There should be a high level of respect for the tolerance in society and protection of human rights, respect for the rule of law; the rule of law based on legal grounds first of all in order to attract the rest of the population to those mainly Georgian populated villages of the region as a clear example of modernization and democracy, respect for basic human values, etc. (otherwise there are strong arguments to expect that these are the futile words of the Georgian government).

What is to come, as politologist G. Khutsishvili, director of International Centre on Conflict and Negotiation, noted is that "they {people under the Kokoity de facto rule} will determine themselves where is it better for them to stay, under the regime based on kinship rules (clanship) and poverty or in union with Georgia that is economically progressing, and on its way for the democratic development.

This, according to Khutsishvili, will swiftly result in "the Koikoity electorate becoming increasingly disappointed in the political course carried out by the de facto government, causing if not the protest rallies (it is difficult to express the discontent while having put a gun to you head) then the hidden displeasure against the regime (which by the way there exists for quite a long time already) (The newspaper "Kviris Palitra" p. 3, June, 4-10, 2007).

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- **Eduard Kokoity, Liakhvi, Prone, Georgian churches in Tskhinvali, Georgian hired labor, Dzuarikau-Tskhinvali gas pipeline, Dashgin Gyulmamedov, "Javakhk", the murder case of the Marneuli, village Sadakhlo mullah, "Akhaltsikhe Liberation Brigades", politologist G. Khutsishvili**