

International Alert.



**DIALOGUE ON SECURITY
GUARANTEES IN THE CONTEXT
OF THE GEORGIAN-ABKHAZ
CONFLICT**

September 2009

Understanding conflict. Building peace.

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Our field work is based in Africa, South Asia, the South Caucasus, Latin America, Lebanon and the Philippines. Our thematic projects work at local, regional and international levels, focusing on cross-cutting issues critical to building sustainable peace. These include business and economy, gender, governance, aid, security and justice. We are one of the world's leading peacebuilding NGOs with more than 120 staff based in London and our 11 field offices.

For more information, please visit www.international-alert.org

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Dialogue on security guarantees in the context of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict

September 2009

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Introduction from International Alert

This paper is one of the results of a long-term engagement by International Alert in the South Caucasus, more specifically as a facilitator of dialogue between Georgian and Abkhaz civil society leaders. It presents the findings of a joint research initiative that resulted from a process in which two teams of researchers commissioned each other to study the question of security guarantees in their own societies. As such, this paper is an attempt to present a new analytical framework for dialogue to stimulate communication across the conflict divide.

Alert's work in the context of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict dates back to the 1990s, starting with tried and tested confidence-building methodologies, laying the foundations for peacebuilding. Alert's partners themselves played an active and creative role in conceptualising ways in which dialogue might be established. Since the very beginning, meetings between the two sides have played an important role in bringing together different social groups united by gender, age or professional interest. Examples of these include meetings between journalists, youth, women activists, historians, combatants, government representatives and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). From such status-based groups, dialogue has evolved to focus around thematic issues, relevant for the two societies. The main purpose of these meetings has been to establish lines of contact between the sides that are independent of the facilitators, and to build confidence between the participants in the meetings and between the societies.

Using analytical work as an approach to conflict transformation and engaging active sectors of society in substantive dialogue, Alert had to understand and take into consideration a number of challenges. The process of beginning a civil dialogue is itself complex and full of contradictions and unexpected moments. When such processes are coloured by the political context, it can result in direct or indirect resistance to such public processes from different stakeholders in the conflict. Alert's work at times posed many distinct risks for the participants and for the process itself. For example, peacebuilding projects came under intense scrutiny from the authorities, especially when official contacts and negotiations between the sides were frozen. Such scrutiny and indirect pressure could not but impact on the organisation and implementation of bilateral meetings between civil society experts.

Within this process, Alert has facilitated a multitude of bilateral and multilateral meetings, bringing together experts from other conflict regions in the Caucasus as well as conflict specialists from the international community on a range of post-conflict issues. Such meetings have been and continue to be very important. They have had their own outcomes, influencing the participants' perceptions of the conflict, and through the participants, influencing a certain strata of society. Whether such projects have had an impact on a broader societal level remains unknown, as such impacts are difficult to measure. The practical discipline of peacebuilding offers few indicators or methods for measuring impact in a constantly changing political context – or at least such methods are not widely put into practice. Indeed, this is perhaps one of the main shortcomings of peacebuilding initiatives, since it is difficult to talk confidently about the results of such projects without a means of evaluation.

Through meetings, roundtables and discussions, opportunities were created for mutual understanding and the acknowledgement and debate of diverse positions. This understanding of the differences in approach and interpretations of the conflict, and of the primary relevance of security for both societies, were the two key motivations for Alert and its partners to take an academic, or an epistolary approach, to their dialogue. A third and possibly no less important motivation for such analysis was the relevance of disseminating as widely as possible the findings of such research amongst those stakeholders and groups that are able to influence political decision-making.

The long-term nature of Alert's engagement has facilitated the emergence of two core groups of activists from within civil society and academic circles, who over time have accumulated their own social capital and levels of internal trust. This has helped both the dialogue process between the two societies as well as the advancement and implementation of peace initiatives. Trust between the groups has been built to such an extent that it allows and encourages open discussion of the most sensitive issues relating to the conflict. However, with the understanding that open discussions between participants not burdened by political and public affiliation to exclusive groups will not, for a number of reasons, resonate further than a narrow audience, Alert undertook the publication of the present papers on topical themes as a way of continuing academic and public dialogue. This approach of discussing current issues through research commissioned by each other is innovative. It would be beneficial for both societies if the findings were disseminated through public discussions, which themselves could serve as a means of lobbying the authorities on the issues in question.

Understanding the novelty and extreme sensitivity of this method, both the Abkhaz and Georgian groups found themselves again at the start of a process: at the stage when the sides are just getting to know each another and when an atmosphere conducive to open discussion is only just being established. This is because they felt the presence of a potentially new audience for their discussions. The research would be widely circulated, and in anticipation of possible reactions to the papers from a new audience, the groups have to some extent retreated to their positions and a greater sense of belonging to a particular side. By promoting public discussion on this research, Alert is hoping to address two issues hindering the long-term resolution of the conflict: the limited vision within both Georgian and Abkhaz society of the key conflict issues; and inadequate communication between the sides on sensitive key issues.

In this project, the Georgian group of researchers examined questions related to the agreement on non-resumption of hostilities and presented a number of papers on related themes, as well as a summarised version of the researchers' conclusions and recommendations.

The Abkhaz group researched questions relating to the agreement on the non-use of force and its importance for the resolution of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict, specifically examining international experience of guarantees for such agreements; the main phases of work done by the respective sides on such a document; and factors that influenced Georgian-Abkhaz relations.

The researchers exchanged research methodologies, and interim and final drafts, either using Alert as an intermediary or directly, and they had the opportunity to discuss their initial findings at a bilateral meeting.

These shortened versions of the papers are intended for a reader who is interested in the views of both sides of the conflict. The full versions of the papers will be published locally.

This form of dialogue and exchange of analytical research was proposed and agreed at a bilateral meeting of Alert's partners working on the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict in May 2008. This meeting, held just before the August war, identified that in order to advance peace initiatives, it is necessary to conduct in-depth analysis of past political events surrounding the conflict and find alternative ways to reach a solution. All participants understood that the sides perceive, evaluate and interpret past events from different perspectives, which were strongly contested by each side during the discussions. It is possible that in contesting each other's interpretations, the sides were promoting their own positions, or alternatively it could simply be an indicator of the diversity and accessibility of information sources on each side.

By reflecting on earlier phases of the dialogue process, the main participants conceptualised a different level of dialogue, based on practical and academic research and conclusions arrived at through group work by specialists in a particular field. Alert's contribution to this process was

to provide the opportunity for dialogue, to facilitate and create a safe and neutral platform for confidence-building with the aim of advancing peace initiatives.

The very process of writing these papers was in itself a bilateral dialogue. The sides commissioned each other to research in their own communities the issue of an agreement on the non-resumption of hostilities, shared their findings, and decided to disseminate their findings within their societies and to an external audience. The project was planned in May 2008; data was collected over the summer and resumed again after the events of August, while the actual writing was done only after the August war. Clearly the intensity of events during this period influenced the work a great deal, as the sides came face-to-face with new realities and new challenges – something that is reflected in their papers.

It is important to note that the sides consider the importance of such an agreement both as a political treaty and as a mechanism through which political and public dialogue between opposing sides and within different levels of society can be constructed. The papers are unambiguous in their conclusion that each stage of the agreement that they have been studying is of equal importance for both sides: the political negotiations on the preconditions for signing; the practical work on and signing of the agreement; and the utility of the agreement as a resource for politicians on a range of bilateral issues.

The human security framework within which this project is conceived is unequivocally accepted by both sides as the basis for dialogue. Examining the interests of both sides from a broad human security perspective opens up opportunities to discuss the more problematic socio-political themes related to security guarantees. It was important to the sides to research the same issue and present the views of experts who enjoy trust both within their own domestic environment and on other levels. The fact that the researchers have a high level of social capital means that the information presented is received as reliable and neutral.

However, the papers do show a varied use of terminology, as well as a different interpretation of facts. For example, the different sides use the term “refugee” and “IDP” when making reference to the same group of people. These diverging views are based on the political positions of the sides and are published here in the form agreed upon by the sides themselves.

The value of these papers lies in a number of factors. In part, these papers help Alert to make its own conclusions, informing discussions on strategy towards the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict on a number of levels. Furthermore, the papers contain a wealth of statistical information and analysis of events relating to the entire negotiation process and all engaged sides.

This published, shortened version of the Georgian and Abkhaz papers underlines the urgency of the question of security guarantees for the two sides. The papers analyse the dynamics of the negotiation process, the role of external factors, opportunities lost, lessons learned, and possible outlooks for the future. These themes were chosen for their relevance. The changed situation after the five-day war in August 2008 contributed its own corrective influence to the status of the problem under discussion. Nevertheless, the unsigned agreement continues to be subject to discussion, research and recommendations.

1. The Abkhaz paper: The agreement on the non-use of force as an important factor in the resolution of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict

1.1. Introduction

The question of signing a special document on the non-use of force in resolving the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict and international guarantees on the non-resumption of hostilities has been discussed from time to time in both the official negotiation process as well as in informal Georgian-Abkhaz experts' dialogue. Whilst realising that an agreement on the non-resumption of hostilities is not sufficient to ensure the final resolution of the conflict, Abkhaz officials and experts believed that it could nevertheless serve as a basis for establishing the confidence necessary to create a more favourable climate for the resolution of many controversial issues. The signing of this kind of agreement on an international level would make both sides and intermediaries more accountable for preventing the use of force of any kind in the resolution of the conflict.

This research, conducted by experts from Abkhazia, is intended to:

- Study international experience of guarantees on the non-resumption of hostilities and to analyse it in terms of the applicability of different models to the Georgian-Abkhaz process;
- Analyse the Georgian-Abkhaz negotiation process in terms of missed and seized opportunities;
- Identify the major factors influencing the dynamics of the conflict and the negotiation process, both prior to the events of August 2008 and immediately afterwards; and
- Analyse the situation in Abkhaz and Georgian societies (both at the level of the political elite and of society as a whole) since August 2008 in relation to the necessity of signing an agreement on the non-use of force, and also to give their point of view on the need to sign such a document.

In accordance with the objectives of the research, the full version of this report includes an introduction, four chapters, a conclusion and a list of references. The authors of the individual chapters are:

- Chapter 1: 'International experience of guarantees on non-resumption of hostilities' – Irakli Khintba.
- Chapter 2: 'The Georgian-Abkhaz negotiation process and main stages of work on documents on security guarantees and the non-resumption of hostilities' – Natella Akaba.
- Chapter 3: 'Factors influencing Georgian-Abkhaz relations before and after August 2008' – Manana Gurgulia.
- Chapter 4: 'The relevance of signing of agreements on non-resumption of hostilities as an important stage in conflict resolution' – Arda Inal-Ipa.

The conclusion of the full report presents the main findings and recommendations of the authors. The overall editor of the full report is Liana Kvarcheliya.

The following research methods were used in the preparation of the full report: Analysis of academic literature, media publications, reports of various missions and international organisations, UN Security Council Resolutions, official documents and project documents prepared during the negotiation process, interviews with political figures, and expert interviews. This paper is a summary of the research and an abridged version of the full report.

1.2. International experience of guarantees on the non-resumption of hostilities

The legal dictionary defines guarantees as ‘international instruments, which provide assurances, or guarantees of some states in relation to other participants in international dialogue on specific action to enforce respect of established rights or status of any state (or group of states), the implementation of international obligations or the preservation of a certain state of international affairs’.¹ Another less widely used definition is that is that guarantees are principles of law or political obligations relating to states and/or particular objects within the state.

In practice the number of concrete examples of international safeguards on the non-use of force is very limited. Moreover, often these international mechanisms are conspicuous for their lack of efficiency. The notion of guarantees on the non-use of force is often also confused with concepts of peacekeeping, peace enforcement and other international interventions in conflicts.

In most post-conflict situations, as N. McFarlane notes, the use of guarantees is described only by general principles, but there are no agreed concrete consequences in case of their violation.² The lack of a clear mechanism for enforcement remains an obstacle to the implementation of guarantees in the peace-consolidation process.

On the whole, the mechanism used to ensure the observation of guarantees is the deployment of peacekeeping forces, usually with the approval of the UN Security Council. Peacekeeping forces then separate the conflicting parties while an agreement on the non-use of force is implemented and preparations are made for the conclusion of a comprehensive agreement. In addition, in certain situations, security guarantees imply the deployment of international political and administrative and police forces not simply to separate the conflicting parties, but also to develop a model for their coexistence and also to influence the internal political processes in order to prevent the conflict from developing further.

However, the question of the character, system and guarantee mechanisms requires a tailored approach to each individual case. Therefore, we can only discuss individual elements of one system of guarantees or another, which for example would have been useful to ensure non-use of force in the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict. One thing is obvious: guarantees on the non-resumption of military action are necessary to preserve a minimal level of trust, which further diplomatic efforts can then build on. For this reason, guarantees can be described as an intermediate step on the path to a wider agreement.

Factors that ensure the sustainability of security mechanisms (the system of guarantees)

- **The interest of intermediaries in the real provision of safeguards, plus their impartiality.** An essential condition for the success of peacemaking and peacebuilding is the interest of a powerful force – a global or regional power – that acknowledges the fact that influencing the situation in the conflict zone is critical to its own national interests. The difficulty here is balancing the real interests of third parties in achieving positive developments in the conflict situation with their impartiality. The more complicated the context, the more important it is that the global actors be willing to employ strong means to ensure safeguards are upheld.
- **The guarantor should be acceptable to both parties.** It is necessary that parties to the conflict have no serious objections to the guarantor chosen to mediate between them. It is always difficult to find a guarantor that is equally acceptable to all parties. Therefore, one side at

1 Prof. A.Ya. Sukhareva (Ed.) (2007). *Bol'shoi yuredicheskiy slovar'* (Big legal dictionary) (3rd Ed.). M.: INFRA-M. VI, p.858. [B-ka dictionaries "INFRA-M"]. Available at <http://slovari.yandex.ru/dict/jurid/article/jur1/jur-1171.htm>.

2 N. S. MacFarlane (2003). "International guarantees" (standalone paper). Geneva: Geneva Centre for Security Policy.

least should fully support the efforts of the guarantor, and the other side should allow its participation in the absence of another, more acceptable guarantor.

- **The commitment of the militarily strong party to the conflict is particularly important.** This will mean a significant reduction in the risk of renewed hostilities. Any guarantees will be realistic and effective if the strongest military party to the conflict agrees not to use strategies based on military force.
- **Military parity of the parties to the conflict.** Mutual deterrence is a very efficient way of avoiding violence. However, to achieve a long-term resolution to the conflict, measures must be taken for mutual demilitarisation, especially as equality of military strength is often unstable. Therefore, parity can exist not only in strength, but also in “weakness”.
- **The willingness of intermediaries to provide substantial financial resources for securing the agreement.** These will be required to support confidence-building, investment in infrastructure, the demilitarisation of the population and the creation of peaceful employment.
- **Effective sub-processes for peacebuilding: demilitarisation, democratisation, human rights, reintegration of ex-combatants, psychological support.** An important type of guarantee is the creation of a situation where neither party can use force during the process of the disarmament and demobilisation of the other party.
- **External threats.** Sometimes in situations of internal conflict, the presence of external threats can lead to the conflicting parties presenting a consolidated front. This occurs when the benefits of ending the confrontation in the face of a common external danger are preferable to the “zero-sum game”.

Factors undermining the sustainability of security mechanisms (the system of guarantees)

- **In some situations international intervention can have a destabilising effect.** In cases where military parity of the conflicting parties exists, the emergence of a third party – a new actor with its own interests – may become a destabilising factor.
- **Agreement on the non-use of force could be used as a cover for the implementation of military plans.** It is precisely this situation that often renders the process of demilitarisation foreseen by the guarantees ineffective, as the parties are not confident that the safeguards will work in the event of renewed hostilities.
- **Safeguard mechanisms do not have a reliable “credit history”.** It is difficult to find examples of full implementation of guarantees in complex conflict situations in recent decades.
- **The priority of realpolitik over international standards, or “double standards” in international relations.** Foreign policy principles underlying the behaviour of the world’s leading states are often regulated on the basis of power and the manipulation of international law. Such practice has led to widespread pragmatism in international affairs and the strengthening of the position of supporters of political realism. Against this background there is an increasing lack of confidence in the protective capacity of international law, which is often interpreted or applied in accordance with the geopolitical goals of the influential global actors. The rule of “double standards” in world politics undermines international agreements and creates the impression that they do not need to be complied with.

- **Competition between the guarantors to the agreement.** The problem of interaction between guarantors is that they often try to strengthen their own political influence or oppose the activity of their competitors. The solution to this is to achieve a “balance of guarantors”, where the presence of at least two guarantors is required, each of which is trusted by one of the conflicting parties, allowing for real control.
- **Tectonic power shifts in the international arena, changing geopolitical realities.** Such processes may lead to the destruction of the existing systems of guarantees. The system of international guarantees often depends on the geopolitical make up. It is this that encourages intermediaries to accept the role of a guarantor.
- **Ethno-political conflicts render agreements more difficult to achieve and implement.** Conflicts arising from clashes over ethnic identities are amongst the most complicated. In these cases, there are significantly fewer interests that can be reconciled, as parties’ interest in the “zero-sum game” is much higher. Therefore, there is a very narrow window of opportunity in which to resolve such conflicts and options to do so range from “deferred status” to the recognition of independence.³

1.3. The main agreements reached during the Georgian-Abkhaz negotiations and their role in the non-resumption of hostilities

The question of non-use of force and security guarantees was a key issue at all stages of the Georgian-Abkhaz negotiations. First one then another party to the conflict put forward the issue as a priority, although their reasons and objectives for doing so were different. The mere provision of solid guarantees on the non-use of force in such conflicts as the Georgian-Abkhaz one is a highly complex task, burdened in this case by the nature of the conflict, the geopolitical distribution of power in the area, and other factors. Nevertheless, during the process of negotiations, certain agreements were reached and documents signed concerning issues, including the non-use of force as a means for resolving the conflict.

The beginning of the Georgian-Abkhaz negotiation process took place almost immediately after the end of hostilities in September 1993, with two rounds of talks. These took place in Geneva under the auspices of the UN, with the participation of Russia as a facilitator, on 30th November–1st December 1993 and 11–13th January 1994. The result of the Geneva phase of resolution was the signing of a *Memorandum of understanding between the Georgian and Abkhaz sides* and also a *Communiqué on the second round of negotiations between the Georgian and Abkhaz sides*. Under point one in both of these documents is the reaffirmation by each party to commit ‘not to use force or the threat of force against each other’. In the above-mentioned communiqué, the parties consented to the ‘deployment in the conflict zone of UN peacekeeping forces or other forces authorised by the UN. They expressed mutual consent to the use of Russian military forces amongst these’.

Later, the obligations of the parties were confirmed and further expanded on in the *Declaration on measures for a political settlement of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict* (4th April 1994) and the *Agreement on a ceasefire and separation of forces*, or Moscow Agreement (signed 14th May 1994). Although the role of observers of the implementation of the agreements was given to the CIS Collective Peacekeeping Forces and the UN Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG), the actions to be taken by guarantors/observers in the case of any violation by one of the parties of the

³ In particular, the opposition between Serbia and Kosovo was recognised by western politicians and theorists as primarily a conflict of identities. This led to the impossibility of coexistence between Serbs and Kosovar Albanians in one state, i.e. models of federalisation were inapplicable. The only way to resolve the conflict and to avoid human casualties would be the recognition of Kosovo’s independence.

conditions set out in the agreement were not clearly defined. The text simply stated: ‘in the event of an attack or a direct military threat against the peacekeeping force, it shall take appropriate measures for its safety and self-defense’.⁴

The second phase of negotiations covers the period from 1995 to 1999, when the parties moved to an active discussion on various models of state-legal cooperation between Georgia and Abkhazia. At this stage of the negotiations, Sukhum’s official position was based on the interpretation of the statement of 4th April 1994, contained in the *UN Report of the Secretary-General concerning the situation in Abkhazia, Georgia* of 3rd May 1994, and Annex II, which reads ‘Abkhazia will be a subject with sovereign rights within the framework of a union state to be established as a result of negotiations after issues in dispute have been settled. The name of the union state will be determined by the parties in the course of further negotiations. The parties acknowledge the territorial integrity of the union state, created as indicated above, within the borders of the former Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic on 21 December 1991’.⁵ The principle of equal participation in a possible federal state was important for the Abkhaz side.

In 1995 Russian diplomats managed to get the parties to initial the *Protocol on the settlement of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict zone*, which in practice decreased the status of Abkhazia to that of a subject of a Georgian federation or an autonomous entity within Georgia. A political scandal broke out in the Abkhaz capital as a result of this. Members of the Abkhaz parliament insisted on the withdrawal of the Special Representative of the President of Abkhazia from negotiations, to the dissatisfaction of the Russian Foreign Ministry.

Negotiations were resumed in the summer of 1997, when Evgeny Primakov (then the Russian minister of foreign affairs) personally joined negotiators from the Russian side. Having agreed on all articles of a new protocol on the Georgian-Abkhaz settlement, the parties decided the timeframe for its signing – 18th June 1997. They were in fact discussing the creation of a union state. However, the Georgian side later refused to sign the document after attempts to significantly alter its content. The Abkhaz side agreed to change seven points out of nine, but this was not enough to satisfy the Georgian side.

At the insistence of Primakov, President of Abkhazia Vladislav Ardzinba made an unprecedented visit to Tbilisi on 14th August of the same year, on the anniversary of the beginning of the Georgian-Abkhaz war of 1992–93. Here a meeting was held with the presidents of Georgia and Abkhazia in the presence of Primakov and a joint statement was announced. According to the statement, the parties again undertook ‘not to resort to arms to resolve the differences that divide them and not under any circumstances to permit a renewal of bloodshed’.⁶ Many observers say that this visit and the joint statement by the two presidents significantly reduced the high tension in the relationship between the two parties for a certain time.

A second round of Geneva talks beginning in November 1997 ended with the establishment of a Coordinating Council, composed of three working groups.

The events of May 1998 dealt a serious blow to the negotiation process. The attack by Georgian semi-military formations on Abkhaz security structure staff in the Gal District, which resulted in the resumption of hostilities in mid-May 1998 and another exodus of the Georgian population, were not spontaneous acts. The May events significantly damaged the negotiation process, as well as undermining the trust of the Abkhaz side in Georgian intentions. It was obvious to the

4 ‘Agreement on a ceasefire and separation of forces’, Moscow, 14th May 1994, 2.i. Available at <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900SID/MHII-65FB8X?OpenDocument>.

5 UN Security Council (1994). *Report of the Secretary-General concerning the situation in Abkhazia, Georgia* (Doc. S/1994/529). Annex II. Available at <http://www.un.org/Docs/secu94.htm>.

6 ‘Statement on the meeting between the Georgian and Abkhaz parties’, Tbilisi, Georgia, 14th August 1997. Available at <http://www.c-r.org/our-work/accord/georgia-abkhazia/keytext6.php>.

Abkhaz side that documents previously signed with international mediation were no guarantee that Georgia would not resort to the use of force in one way or another. It was necessary to reinforce existing agreements with more weighty international guarantees. Moreover, there was growing discontent in Abkhaz society with any discussions on agreements which would lead to a loss of independence. International recognition of Abkhaz independence was perceived as the only effective guarantee of security in Abkhazia. A referendum on state independence was held in Abkhazia in 1999, where the vast majority of citizens of the republic were in favour of establishing an independent state. Since then, Sukhum has refused to discuss the political status of Abkhazia and instead suggests working on documents on security.

The third phase of negotiations took place from 1999 to 2006. At this stage, the parties were uncompromising in their positions. Against the background of their experience of relations with Georgia, the Abkhaz side insisted that only full statehood, backed by international guarantees, could provide the conditions for the physical survival and preservation of its ethno-cultural identity. Georgia, for its part, further entrenched its position on political cooperation with Abkhazia. Tbilisi increasingly made official statements regarding its intention to ‘define the status of Abkhazia within the framework of Georgian territorial integrity’, implying cultural autonomy in some cases while in others, an asymmetric federation.

The Georgian side linked the signing of any security document with the process of return of Georgian refugees – a line of argument that displeased Sukhum. The Abkhaz side then proposed developing two parallel documents: one on security issues and another on refugees.

The process of negotiations on security guarantees was resumed after the change of power in Georgia that followed the “Rose Revolution”. The Abkhaz Ministry of Foreign Affairs prepared and passed on via UNOMIG a draft document on security guarantees in the light of the changed situation in the conflict zone. The document was agreed upon and on 5th December 2005, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Abkhazia Sergei Shamba met with the Georgian government Minister for Conflict Resolution Giorgi Khaindrava in Sukhum, in the presence of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Georgia Heidi Tagliavini. A protocol was signed, affirming that on a ministerial level, the preparation of a document on guarantees on the non-resumption of hostilities had been completed.⁷ However, the entry of Georgian military troops into the Upper Kodori Valley in July 2006 resulted in the virtual suspension of the negotiation process.

The evolution of attitudes and motivations of parties in regard to signing an agreement on the non-resumption of hostilities and security guarantees

In our opinion, Tbilisi saw international guarantees primarily as a tool to ensure the return of refugees to the entire territory of Abkhazia. The return of refugees, in turn, was seen as a way to restore Georgia’s “territorial integrity”. The Georgian leadership’s view of refugees as a tool is supported by several facts. Georgian representatives quoted highly inflated figures in statements on the numbers of refugees, which only served to intensify the concerns of the Abkhaz side about demographic changes upon the refugees’ return. They served as propaganda for the Georgian leadership and not as a basis for real dialogue on this complex issue. Tbilisi’s reluctance to agree to the registration of Georgian refugees returning to the Gal District by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) allows the Georgian side not only to continue to manipulate the numbers, but also to accuse Abkhazia of an unwillingness to let anyone return. Persecution by Georgia’s security forces of those residents of the Gal District that cooperated with the Abkhaz authorities also demonstrates the lack of will of the Georgian leadership to allow this population to integrate in Abkhazia.

For its part, Sukhum was hoping that the status quo would continue, with the help of international guarantees on the non-resumption of hostilities, which to some extent suited Abkhaz interests

7 Ibid.

in the absence of international recognition. For Sukhum, the guarantee of non-resumption of hostilities implied avoiding the return of large numbers of Georgian refugees, which the Abkhaz believed would inevitably lead to renewed violence in the absence of a political settlement. In other words, the Abkhaz authorities concentrated on security guarantees for the population residing in Abkhazia (including the Georgian population of the Gal District), while the Georgians prioritised the safe return of Georgian refugees to the entire territory of Abkhazia.

There are several reasons for the radical positions adopted by both sides. Repeated violations by the Georgian side of ceasefire agreements (in Gal District in 1998 and Kodori Gorge in 2001, and the militarisation of the Upper Kodori Valley in 2006) and the obvious involvement of Georgian power structures in subversive (so-called “partisan”) activities on Abkhaz territory, did not give the Abkhaz reason to believe in the peaceful intentions of Georgia. Georgia in turn became increasingly convinced of the reluctance of their Abkhaz negotiating partners to allow refugees to return to the entire territory of Abkhazia and to make concessions on the political status of Abkhazia.

As far as international intermediaries are concerned, the Abkhaz side believed them to be biased because of their unwavering commitment to the principle of the territorial integrity of Georgia. This meant for Sukhum that the outcome of the negotiations had been decided in advance – one which was the most advantageous for Georgia and unacceptable for the Abkhaz.

While in Georgia and in the West it is widely believed that Russia unreservedly supported Abkhazia at all stages of the settlement discussions, a more or less impartial analysis of the facts gives a less clear-cut picture. After the end of the 1992–3 war, the intermediary role of Russia more or less suited the Georgian leadership. At this time, Russia put pressure on Abkhazia to renounce the idea of independence and aimed to preserve Abkhazia as part of a “soft” Georgian federation. However, as Georgia continued to drift towards the Euro-Atlantic area and the exclusion of Russia from the Georgian-Abkhaz process became a real possibility, and in the light of the changing power balances within the region, Russia began taking steps to retain its position in the South Caucasus. Despite all the breaks given over recent years by the Russian leadership to the Abkhaz, the need to respect the “territorial integrity” of Georgia was nevertheless always present in Moscow’s rhetoric.

Meanwhile, the Georgian side, with the unconditional support of the US and the West in general, agreed to reconciliation exclusively on its own terms. In order that a settlement of this kind could be reached, Georgia aimed to get rid of Russia as an intermediary. At this time, Abkhazia understood that neither Russia nor any other state was ready to recognise its independence, and was satisfied with the fact that although Moscow did not recognise Abkhazia, Russia’s position was, nevertheless, to stop Georgia from “restoring” its territorial integrity by force or on its own terms. Georgia raised the question of changing the format of the peacekeeping operations and the negotiation process with increasing urgency.

In response, Moscow increased first its political and diplomatic support, and then its military and economic support to Abkhazia, although still refusing to officially recognise Sukhum. The West condemned Russia for its unilateral withdrawal from the sanctions regime, which inevitably led to increased mistrust amongst the Abkhaz population towards western policy in the region. The geopolitical interests of intermediaries and potential guarantors were increasingly contradictory. This significantly reduced possibilities for concerted action and the achievement of consensus on the majority of contentious issues, including security.

1.4. Factors influencing Georgian-Abkhaz relations before and after August 2008

The year 2008 was marked by yet another increase in tension in the relations between Georgia and Abkhazia. The presence of Georgian troops and weaponry in the Kodori Valley disrupted the

negotiation process. Official contacts between the parties to the conflict practically ceased, with the exception of an unpublicised visit of the Plenipotentiary Representative of Georgia to the UN Irakli Alasania to Sukhum on 12th May, and an informal meeting between the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Abkhazia Shamba and Alasania in Sweden on 15th–17th June 2008.

The Abkhaz side demanded the withdrawal of Georgian military units from the Upper Kodor Valley, as Georgia's actions violated previously signed agreements, including the Moscow Agreement of 14th May 1994. The Abkhaz side said that the withdrawal of Georgian forces from the Upper Kodor Valley would open up possibilities for the resumption of the negotiation process. Georgia, at the same time, sought to change the format of the negotiations by giving a leading role to the EU and calling for the internationalisation of the peacekeeping forces in the conflict zone.

At the same time, Georgia's military capacity was increasing. In the absence of an agreement on the non-resumption of hostilities, this caused serious concern in Abkhazia. In these circumstances, Abkhazia urgently demanded the signing of a document on the non-resumption of hostilities and security guarantees. Shamba and Alasania managed to agree on the text of the document: 'A statement by the Georgian and Abkhaz sides on international security guarantees the non-resumption of hostilities'. Khaindrava began drafting this text when he was the Georgian government minister for conflict resolution. In this statement the sides undertook obligations to renounce the use of force and threats of the use of force. At the insistence of the Georgian side, the statement included a provision on the return of refugees, which, after discussions with the Abkhaz, was formulated in such a way as to link the solution of this problem with previous agreements and resolutions of the UN Security Council on this issue.

Shamba and Alasania reached an agreement on the format, time and place of the signing of this document. It was to be signed in Sochi in the presence of Russian President Dmitry Medvedev. It is possible that the signing of this document would have defused tensions between the parties – both between Georgia and Abkhazia, and between Georgia and Russia. More importantly, it would have reaffirmed a commitment to the peacekeeping mechanisms that existed at that time – the Collective Peacekeeping Forces (CPF) and UNOMIG. However, President Mikhail Saakashvili of Georgia refused to sign the statement.

There are several possible explanations for Georgia's attitude toward this document. Within Georgia's ruling elite one could see different approaches to the best way to resolve the conflict: there were supporters of a phased peace settlement, taking into account Russia's interests in the region, and there were others who supported edging Russia out of the Georgian-Abkhaz process. In general, Georgia gave a false impression of being interested in peaceful resolution whilst in fact actively increasing its military potential and preparing to use force to solve the issue.

Following the recognition of Kosovo's independence by a number of states, on 6th March 2008 Russia announced its withdrawal from the regime of economic sanctions against Abkhazia. At this time preparations were underway for the NATO summit in Bucharest, where Georgia expected to receive a Membership Action Plan from the alliance. The withdrawal of Russia from the sanctions regime was a warning to Georgia and its allies that Moscow would not tolerate a NATO presence on its southern borders. In fact, Abkhazia and Georgia found themselves at the epicentre of the complicated Russian-US relationship, with all of its geopolitical contradictions, while at the same time, they found themselves enmeshed within the not-simple Russian-European relationship, where Europe's energy interests played an important role. Tbilisi attempted to use this controversy to drive Russia out of the negotiation process, as a party not willing to return "lost territory" to Georgia.

On 28th March 2008 the president of Georgia called the Abkhaz authorities to the negotiating table to discuss Georgian proposals for the settlement of the conflict, in which Abkhazia was seen as autonomous entity within the Georgian state. First, the statement by the president of Georgia on

his readiness to grant Abkhazia broad autonomy was not presented as part of a specific document and was not handed to the Abkhaz side. Second, when compared with previous projects which foresaw, for example, the creation of a union state, the position presented in the statement was a significant step backwards. Given that Abkhazia had adopted an Act of Independence in 1999, the idea of autonomy was pre-destined to fail. Third, the statement was made on the eve of the Bucharest NATO summit and intended to give the impression that Georgia was actively seeking a peaceful resolution. Fourth, the “Saakashvili Plan” was intended to demonstrate that Georgia had the potential to peacefully solve the conflict and that Abkhazia supposedly hindered any peace initiatives. And finally, President Saakashvili’s statement was made prior to the parliamentary elections in Georgia and was therefore seen by many political forces, not only in Abkhazia but also in Georgia, as a public relations move.

On 12th May 2008 Russian peacekeepers and UNOMIG recorded a fleet of Georgian warships invading Abkhaz territorial waters. Georgia violated the Moscow agreement of 14th May 1994 and the UN Security Council resolutions by increasing the numbers of military and police forces in the Upper Kodori Valley and increasing Georgian reconnaissance flights over areas of security intelligence. Tbilisi’s refusal to comply with the UN Secretary-General’s recommendation to close down the youth-military Patriotic Camp “Patriot”, located in close proximity to the confrontation line, was also the source of a series of acts of provocation. Along with the reluctance of Georgian authorities to sign an agreement with Abkhazia on the non-use of force, these actions led Russia to increase the number of peacekeeping forces in the conflict zone, as provided for in the Moscow Agreement of 14th May 1994.

Western governments started to voice their concern over the situation in the conflict zone and the more active role of Russia in the region. Within a short time Abkhazia was visited by large numbers of western diplomats of various ranks. This was linked, amongst other things, with the upcoming EU-Russia summit in Khatny-Mainsiysk, on the eve of which Georgia expected to gain EU support on the question of changing the format of the peace process to resolve the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict.

Less than a month before the August events of 2008, Germany proposed a plan for resolution, which was presented by the Minister for Foreign Affairs Frank-Walter Steinmeier on 18th July in the town of Gal during a meeting with the President of Abkhazia Sergei Bagapsh. The three-stage plan included:

- 1) ‘Assurances on the non-use of force, security guarantees for the Kodori Valley, general agreement on principles of and continuation of IDP and refugee return, and consideration of international security arrangements;
- 2) confidence building by practical projects to be initiated by an international donors’ conference in Berlin, return of IDPs and refugees, practical cooperation in the fields of security, trade, travel, selected legal issues, culture and sports under the political status quo; [and]
- 3) agreed settlement of Abkhazia’s political status in the framework of internationally mediated bilateral negotiations’.

Discussion on the political status of Abkhazia was unacceptable to official Tbilisi, because Georgia did not want to question the idea that Abkhazia is an integral part of its territory. The other main criticism from Tbilisi of the German plan was that it did not stipulate that Russian peacekeepers be withdrawn from the conflict zone.

The Abkhaz leadership also criticised the plan, saying that the German initiative took Georgian interests primarily into account, despite the fact that the plan, for the first time, and in significant contrast to other international initiatives, did not mention the “territorial integrity” of Georgia. Despite a series of objections from Sukhum on certain points, the Abkhaz side agreed to work

on the document. The suggestions of the Abkhaz leadership, which were put forward to the representatives of Germany and Georgia, included a series of points from the “Steinmeier Plan”, but also new language and provisions. The Abkhaz version included: 1) the signing of an agreement on security guarantees on the basis of the Shamba-Alasania document, and confidence-building through the non-use of political and economic sanctions; 2) an agreed settlement of state-legal relations between Georgia and Abkhazia in the framework of bilateral negotiations with international mediation; and 3) a discussion of practical projects to be initiated on the basis of an international donors’ conference: practical cooperation in the areas of security, trade, travel, selected legal matters, culture and sports with the existing political *status quo*. The consequence of the restored confidence between parties was to be the recognition of the principle of the right of all refugees to return to Abkhazia in accordance with prior Abkhaz commitments and UN Security Council Resolutions. The Abkhaz side also proposed the gradual withdrawal of Georgian troops from the Kodori Valley, replacing them with police forces comprised of local Svanetian residents as they come to the end of their training with international police through the relevant UNOMIG programme. These proposals were put to Georgia on the eve of August 2008.

Upon analysis of the behaviour of the parties to the conflict over the past few years, a clear strategy can be seen. It can be assumed that after the “Rose Revolution”, the strategy of the Georgian leadership was shaped by the following positions:

- Georgia was not prepared to negotiate with Abkhazia on any issues (security, economic rehabilitation, etc.) unless the solution of these issues was directly connected to the territorial integrity of Georgia. Georgia is aware that such a position is unacceptable to Abkhazia. In offering obviously unacceptable solutions to Abkhazia, the Georgian leadership tries to present Abkhazia as the side responsible for the freezing of the negotiation process.
- Georgia accuses Russia to an even greater extent, claiming that Russia’s support allows the Abkhaz position to be intractable. Georgia tries to present the preservation of the status quo as counter-productive, substituting the unfreezing of the negotiation process with the unfreezing of the military component of the conflict. The Georgian leadership maintains that the main obstacle to changing the status quo is Russia: not only is Russia not interested in resolving the conflict (by which Georgia means the restoration of its territorial integrity), but is also a party to the conflict. Georgia therefore believes it is necessary to change the format of the negotiation process and peacekeeping operations.

Abkhazia’s strategy is probably built on the knowledge that, firstly, it is necessary to exclude any possibility of the use of force in disputes, as the resumption of hostilities would have devastating consequences for Abkhazia. Abkhazia did not use force to respond to the Georgian military operation in the Kodori Valley, in order to avoid becoming involved in a large-scale military confrontation. However, Abkhazia’s calculation that its moral superiority in the Kodori situation would allow it to gain points in the eyes of the international community has not yielded tangible benefits, although its image has improved somewhat. Secondly, in the absence of other alternatives, the status quo suited Abkhazia, as it was interested in signing an agreement not to renew hostilities, which would have strengthened existing guarantees, particularly with the CPF, UNOMIG and other actors, on the obligations of parties not to use force. Thirdly, Abkhazia expected that Georgian plans to join NATO would, if not accelerate Russian recognition of Abkhaz independence, then at least ensure Moscow provided military assistance in the event of an attack by Georgia, not to mention increased economic support for Abkhazia. The Abkhaz leadership consistently maintained the policy of not succumbing to any provocations, which would lead to widespread military action.

For Georgia, the August campaign resulted in a deep internal crisis, with the destruction of military infrastructure and an increase in the numbers of refugees. In a very complicated situation in the Caucasus resulting from the war in South Ossetia, active consultations between French President Nicolas Sarkozy and Dmitry Medvedev led to steps being outlined for the resolution

of the conflict. However, on the insistence of the Georgian president, the sixth point of the Medvedev-Sarkozy plan to begin international consultations on the political status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia was reformulated so that, rather than discussing political status, the new draft discussed the provision of security in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In the event of direct military confrontation between Moscow and Tbilisi, this draft could potentially lead to the questioning of the legitimacy of Russia's military presence in the region. Under these circumstances, Russia decided to recognise the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

The Georgian parliament responded by passing a law on occupied territories, declaring the presence of Russian military troops on the territory of Abkhazia and South Ossetia to be illegal. In turn, Abkhazia proposed that Russian military forces replace CIS in the republic, as agreed in the *Treaty of friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance* between Russia and Abkhazia. The Abkhaz side was also interested in having an international presence in its territory and repeatedly stated that it had no objection to the UN mission remaining with a new mission title and amended mandate to reflect new political realities. The EU took a tougher stance in relation to Abkhaz independence, actively opposing it and calling on Russia to reverse its decision on recognition. Senior EU officials issued numerous statements saying Abkhazia would never be recognised and that Brussels would openly pressurise any state planning to do so. Such a position means that the EU cannot be seen as impartial and therefore does not comply with the requirements allowing for the presence of European observers on the territory of Abkhazia.

1.5. The relevance of the signing of an agreement on non-use of force as an important step in conflict settlement

After Russia recognised Abkhazia's independence, it was widely believed in Abkhaz society that the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict was resolved and security assured in Abkhazia following the agreement for the provision of military assistance signed by Abkhazia and Russia.

This paradigm is based on the belief that there is an all-out threat from Georgia. Since there is no indication that the Georgian leadership is turning away from aggressive plans against Abkhazia, Abkhaz society considers the only real way to ensure security in Abkhazia is to strengthen its defence capacity and strengthen the borders with the help of Russia. It is clear that following the defeat in the war in South Ossetia and the tangible impact of the Russian army, the Georgian side will develop a tendency towards militarisation, and search for military alliances and military assistance, including military-technical assistance.

While acknowledging the need to develop the army and strengthen defences, it is important to continue to seek opportunities for an agreement on the non-use of force. This will be an extremely difficult objective to achieve, but if successful, the result would improve security not only in Abkhazia and Georgia, but in the region as a whole.

Even in the new political situation, apart from the short-lived loss of interest in negotiations with the Georgian side immediately after the recognition by Russia of Abkhazia's independence, the Abkhaz leadership expresses its readiness to cooperate in identifying mechanisms to ensure stable security. This is shown by the participation of Abkhaz representatives in all meetings of the new "Geneva process", even though the format of the meetings, and in particular the status of the participants, demanded a certain degree of flexibility on the part of the Abkhaz. Meanwhile the Georgian leadership not only demonstrates no interest in seeking possible agreements on the non-use of force, but is opposed to Abkhazia even being represented at the Geneva negotiations as a party to the conflict, only agreeing that the representative of Abkhazia should participate in a personal capacity.

Although the signing of the document on the non-use of force is a purely political engagement, agreement on this issue, if achieved, could be a way to reduce tensions and support positive processes in other areas.

The consequences of the absence of an agreement on international guarantees on the non-resumption of hostilities

It is well known that in the context of a possible military threat, there is a need to enter military alliances, and conclude long-term military contracts. This creates certain external security guarantees, but inevitably leads to partial loss of external sovereignty. The stronger one side feels the threat to its security to be, the more it will need assurances from the guarantor countries. In addition, in the absence of a bilateral agreement, each party seeks security guarantees through military support from its more powerful allies, resulting in the line of confrontation between sides being drawn up even more clearly.

Another important point is that in the absence of an agreement, governments of both countries must consider possible negative developments that will directly affect priorities and budget planning. Obviously, the focus on strengthening military capacity will mean budgets will neglect social issues, science, and the development of new technologies in various spheres of the economy, as these will be considered secondary when a country is under military threat. The ongoing threat of a resumption of hostilities will no doubt deepen the mistrust between the peoples, making it difficult to overcome the negative effects of war and establish healthy relations between Abkhazia and Georgia. The existence of such a threat will be detrimental to the situation in the Gal District of Abkhazia, where people will continue to feel themselves hostages of the unresolved conflict.

In terms of regional economics, the lack of an agreement and security guarantees prevents the exploitation of the potential for economic development of the South Caucasus as a region. The closing of borders in the South Caucasus, severing economic and transport links, has led to the creation of irrational economic projects, forcing the economy to survive against market forces.

The impact of the possible signing of the agreement on the non-renewal of hostilities on development prospects in various spheres of domestic and foreign policy

- Firstly, reducing the military threat will increase the level of trust between parties and reduce opportunities for manipulation by internal and external actors, rendering military rhetoric irrelevant and redundant.
- With security guarantees, external assistance will be provided to parties for mutually beneficial development and not to ensure security in exchange for strategic resources.
- One important positive result of signing the agreement is the prospect of legalisation of both bilateral and multilateral economic relations, which would be of mutual interest. For example, arrangements for transport links and power lines between republics of the South Caucasus could be realistically achievable, and could ensure progression of the entire region's economy to a whole new level.
- Signing the agreement would create conditions for the favourable discussion of other issues, aimed in particular at improving the living conditions of populations living near the borders. As far as the problem of the Gal District is concerned, the removal of the threat of war would significantly improve relations between inhabitants of the Gal District and the rest of Abkhazia, and provide momentum to many reintegration programmes for the population of Gal.
- The signing of the agreement between Georgia and Abkhazia would also be positive for Russia. By helping to stabilise the situation in the South Caucasus, Russia would become

trusted as a party striving for stability and peace and also as one which sees its interests in the broader regional context, as every step in helping to establish security in neighbouring countries is an investment in the security of Russia itself.

Factors that reduce the likelihood of reaching an agreement

Firstly, the parties do not accept that signing the agreement on international guarantees on the non-use of force is a matter of paramount importance. This is due to the fact that today the **concept of security** primarily focuses on foreign military assistance, rather than on reducing tension between the conflicting parties.

Another important factor hampering the process is undoubtedly the **lack of motivation of the parties to sign this document**. The Georgian side has been underestimating and sometimes ignoring the fact that the conflict is between Georgia and Abkhazia, which is not conducive to promoting a bilateral Georgian-Abkhaz agreement.

Another factor impeding the process of reaching agreement on the non-resumption of hostilities is the different preferences of parties for **intermediaries in the negotiation process and guarantors of the implementation of the agreement**.

A further factor is the lack of ideas of a **mutually acceptable guarantee mechanism**, which would ensure compliance in the context of the Georgian-Abkhaz stand-off. The number of positive examples from international experience is extremely limited and makes the search for reliable and proven mechanisms to ensure the non-resumption of hostilities a very difficult task.

The **extremely low level of trust between the parties** and negative experience of repeated breakdowns of previous agreements, including the signing of such an agreement, create unfavourable conditions for the negotiation process.

Conditions necessary for the signing of the agreement

- A move away from the “all or nothing” approach, i.e. a readiness to be flexible;
- Effective confidence-building measures between parties;
- An understanding that the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict cannot be resolved by military means;
- Society itself must demand not revenge or vengeance, but peace;
- Selection of acceptable intermediaries for negotiation procedures and reliable guarantors of implementation of agreements;
- Support from international institutions and western partners for a search for peaceful means of resolving the conflict. These parties should refrain from using all means possible to strengthen one party to the conflict – in this case Georgia, which is being rewarded for its loyalty as a political and business partner;
- Negotiation – bilateral and multilateral – with the aim of attaining peace and stability in the region; and
- The willingness of parties and intermediaries to tread the long path to long-term, sustainable peace.

1.6. Conclusion

The *Agreement on a ceasefire and separation of forces* signed in Moscow on 14th May 1994, concluded between the Abkhaz and Georgian sides with the mediation of Russia and the UN, remains a key document which sets out the obligations of parties to refrain from the use of force in relation to each other. However, the said agreement proved ineffective when the situation worsened in 1998 (in Gal) and in 2001 (the sortie of the R. Gelaeva squadron in the Kodor Valley). The limitations of the guarantees were clearly seen in 2006 when Russian peacekeepers proved unable to halt the advancement of Georgian military vehicles into the Upper Kodor Valley – a territory belonging to the demilitarised zone established by the Moscow agreement of 1994. As a result, the agreement has not calmed the fears of the Abkhaz population about a new outbreak of war.

However, soon this mechanism, imperfect though it was in terms of clearly formalising the obligations of the parties with regard to the security guarantees and stipulating what sanctions would be applied in case these obligations are violated, was also abandoned. After the August war in South Ossetia, the Georgian side declared that Russian peacekeepers could no longer be present in the conflict zone and unilaterally withdrew from the Moscow agreement, and by doing so called the mandate of UNOMIG into question.

With the signing of the *Treaty of friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance* with Russia on 17th September 2008, Abkhazia had largely solved its security problem. CIS peacekeeping forces, whose mandate had been changed by the withdrawal of Georgia from the Moscow agreement, were replaced by regular Russian troops in Abkhazia. Moscow plans to build two military bases there (a land base in the town of Gudauta and a naval base in Ochamchira).

The new military-political reality in Abkhazia led to the reassessment of old problems and priorities. There are an increasing number of people in the republic who claim that the signing of an agreement on the non-use of force with Georgia is no longer relevant. At the same time, there are those who believe that the recognition of Abkhaz independence does not mean that the conflict with Georgia has been resolved, and therefore think that the threat of renewed hostilities remains. The signing of an agreement on guarantees on the non-use of force could be the first step in creating the safe space necessary for a constructive negotiation process to allow the two countries to resolve the conflict. Moreover, an agreement of this kind is important for the parties, as its guarantees on the non-use of force would allow Sukhum and Tbilisi to gain greater political autonomy.

Meanwhile the Georgian and Abkhaz sides have differences of opinion on the guarantors of the potential agreement. For Georgia, the most plausible and acceptable guarantor may be the EU. EU military observers are already deployed in Georgia, in security zones bordering Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The presence of European observers on Abkhaz territory is officially seen by Sukhum as unacceptable due to the firm position of Brussels on the issue of Abkhaz independence.

On the whole, the EU, which since 2004 has been more active with regard to its eastern neighbours, has not been able to seize the opportunity to play a meaningful role in the Georgian-Abkhaz resolution process, against the background of the UN's general fatigue. The Abkhaz side, which in principle looked positively on the novelty of the EU as an actor in the South Caucasus and expected new ideas and flexible approaches from the institution for the resolution of the conflict, has been disappointed by the lack of pragmatism from Brussels and its obvious bias in favour of Georgia. As a result, and especially following the August war in South Ossetia, Abkhaz society is even less ready than before to accept the EU as a legitimate player in the region.

Therefore, the Abkhaz side is only prepared to accept the deployment of the UN mission to implement the guarantee on the non-use of force on its territory, in addition to the Russian military

presence, which it currently sees as the main guarantee of security. An agreement on the non-use of force could become the legal basis for the presence of the UN on Abkhaz territory, and also for the internationally recognised involvement of Russia in ensuring security in the conflict zone.

However, the participation of the EU in this process is necessary, it seems, as alternatives may lead to inconsistency, lack of transparency and unbalanced guarantees. Brussels is able to actively participate in activities aimed at reducing recurrences of violence, acting in the territory of Georgia, but also participating in multilateral mechanisms that might be developed to ensure the non-resumption of hostilities. In addition, the European Commission could play a significant role in the reconstruction of social-economic infrastructure in the conflict-affected areas, creating conditions for the normalisation of life for returnees to the Gal District and solving other humanitarian issues. Brussels could also influence Tbilisi by means of an appropriate system of obligations under the “Eastern Partnership” programme, with the aim of a non-military development plan for the country.

Findings and recommendations

- The Abkhaz authorities have consistently supported the signing of an agreement on the non-use of force irrespective of any changes in the political situation, and the strengthening of military cooperation with Russia has not been regarded as a factor that mitigates the need for Georgia and Abkhazia to sign such a document.
- Over recent years, the Georgian side has shown inconsistency on this same issue, which implies that it has not yet discounted military means as a possible method for resolving the conflict.
- The most effective method to guarantee the non-resumption of hostilities to date has been the military presence of the Russian Federation in the territory of Abkhazia, the presence of the UN mission (which requires a new name and mandate) on both sides of the border, and also the EU observer mission in Georgia.
- The absence of guarantees of non-military action limits the political independence of Georgia and Abkhazia, as the threat of war requires security to be provided by third countries or by entry into military alliances.
- The agreement on the non-use of force is significant also because it can serve as the institutional framework for the continuation of an international presence in Abkhazia, which is currently without a clear legal framework and therefore could be scaled down in the near future. This agreement, with the UN as one of the logical guarantors, would allow the UN to undertake new functions if the old peacekeeping format is put aside. Russia would then be able to enhance the international legitimacy of its military presence in the region. In addition, this document could provide the legal basis for activities of the EU as part of the institutionalised consultation mechanisms.
- Three levels of guarantees could be secured in a potential agreement on the non-use of force: mutual (Georgia and Abkhazia); regional (Russia, Turkey, Iran); and inter-, or supranational (EC, UN).
- The agreement being drawn up on military cooperation between Abkhazia and the Russian Federation should include a mechanism for Russia’s role as guarantor of security, with an appropriately clear mandate.
- Interaction between Russia and the EU to ensure agreements on the non-use of force can be intensified and developed through the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) within the framework of cooperation in the “security space”.

- Competition between the EU and the UN could lead to uncoordinated actions, which could hamper the achievement of the “balance of guarantors” necessary for effective agreement.
- Agreement not to use military force to resolve the conflict could be a foundation upon which all subsequent stages of confidence building between the parties could be built.
- Agreements on guarantees in specific areas could also be possible: border security in the Gal District, the stable operation of the Ingur hydroelectric power station, etc.

2. The Georgian paper: The prospects for an agreement on non-resumption of hostilities

2.1. Introduction

The theme of the non-resumption of hostilities in the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict has always been key to the relations between the parties to the conflict. The theme of guarantees of observance of ceasefire agreements became relevant in the war of 1992–1993. Since this time there have been countless numbers of negotiations in a variety of formats devoted to signing the appropriate agreements. In some cases the terms of ceasefire were agreed and documents signed. As a result, hostilities ceased, but the fragile peace was disturbed each time by clashes of varying intensity because the sides did not comply with the agreement. In this way the risk of resumption of military activity has always been present.

Despite the obvious relevance of ensuring a ceasefire's sustainability, until recently insufficient attention has been paid by the expert community and academia to identifying the causes of non-observance of relevant agreements, and to the study of conditions necessary to create solid guarantees on the non-resumption of hostilities. Meanwhile, against the backdrop of the events of August 2008 the theme of establishing guarantees for sustainable peace in the zone of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict became even more relevant, as the sources of threats to peace in the region multiplied.

As a result of the Georgian-Russian war, Russia became another – and undeniably the main, at least for Tbilisi – “party” to the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict. It was no accident that the ceasefire agreement signed on 12th August 2008 by the presidents of France, Georgia and Russia concerned a ceasefire between Georgia and Russia, rather than Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This agreement provides, *inter alia*, that the conflicting sides ‘renounce the use of force’ and ‘definitively end hostilities’. Compliance with these principles is crucial to ensuring the implementation of all such agreements.

It is worth noting that for the moment the agreement remains the only document that can serve as a basis for the cessation of hostilities, the maintenance of the ceasefire and the continuation of high-level international political negotiations in Geneva on security and the stabilisation of the situation.⁸ However, the “Geneva process” is aimed at developing integrated mechanisms and security guarantees for the whole region, including the zones of the Georgian-Abkhaz and the Georgian-South Ossetian conflicts – thus suggesting that the interests and determination of the share of responsibility of the Abkhaz and South Ossetian sides will be taken into account as well. Past experience, however, casts doubts about the effectiveness of the agreement, especially in regards to the undertakings by parties to refrain from the use of force, and indicates the need for an analysis of the obstacles and enabling factors to develop recommendations for strengthening the guarantees of security and stability.

From October to December 2008 a group of Georgian experts⁹ conducted detailed research with the main aim of accomplishing this. The objectives of the research were as follows:

1. To identify the causes of the ineffectiveness of the negotiation process between the conflicting parties – Vakhtang Kolbaia

⁸ Experts note the complexity of the negotiation process. After four rounds of talks a compromise agreement was adopted with difficulty, which outlines renewed cooperation between parties on border incidents. However, the fifth round of talks was unable to build on this success and new agreements were not accepted.

⁹ The Georgian team included: Elena Chomakhidze, Nodar Sarjveladze, Vakhtang Kolbaia, Ivlian Khaindrava and Archil Gegeshidze.

2. To analyse the new realities in the context of Georgian-Abkhaz relations – Archil Gegeshidze
3. To study international experience of compliance with the conditions of ceasefire agreements – Ivlian Khaindrava
4. To study the perceptions of the consequences of Georgian-Russian war, in Georgian society – Nodar Sarjveladze, Marina Baliashvili, Nino Shushania
5. To study attitudes to the non-resumption of hostilities in different parts of Georgian society – Elena Chomakhidze, Archil Gegeshidze

The following conclusions and recommendations are based on the results of this research. Note that observations on individual research topics are the authors' own and are not necessarily shared by other participants in the project. However, during the research process, the authors independently came to a number of similar conclusions.

2.2. Identification of the causes of the ineffectiveness of the negotiation process between the conflicting parties¹⁰

During research on this issue an attempt was made to document and analyse the whole negotiation process of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict since the beginning of the hostilities in August 1992. Based on this analysis the author found it useful to distinguish five phases of the negotiation process and, on this basis, identify periods of the evolution and dynamics of the parties' motivations to concluding an agreement on the non-resumption of hostilities and also to identify similarities and differences in their approaches. The first phase is the “period of active military conflict” (August 1992–September 1993); the second phase, the “first post-war period”, covers the next two years of negotiations and is characterised by an intensification in diplomatic pressure on the Abkhaz side, particularly by international organisations; the third phase, the “second stage of the post-war period”, begins with the introduction of the economic embargo against Abkhazia by the Council of Heads of State of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and lasts for two and a half years until the May events of 1998 in Gali; the fourth phase, the “third stage of the post-war period”, covers the period from the middle of 1998 to 2003, during which there were instances of serious deterioration in the situation (1998, 2001), and numerous meetings at various levels – the so-called “Boden Document” was also drafted during this stage and Abkhazia adopted the Act on State Independence; the fifth phase, “the fourth stage of post-war period”, covers the period after the “Rose Revolution” in Georgia, which was on the whole marked by continued alienation of the parties and the rapid escalation of the conflict situation.

During the research, documents (agreements, protocols, resolutions, etc.) signed during the Georgian-Abkhaz negotiation process or adopted by international organisations, were collected and analysed. The emphasis was put on documents that were relevant to the issues of ceasefire and non-resumption of hostilities. Various materials from the author's personal archive were used including recorded conversations and interviews with knowledgeable respondents.

Key findings

- From the very beginning of the war, both Sukhumi and Tbilisi saw the Kremlin in the role of third arbitrator and out of habit, appealed to Moscow. Each side hoped to win over Moscow to its cause. Russia, in turn, took advantage of the passivity of the international community, which hoped to have Russia as a partner, and secured a privileged position for itself in the conflict resolution process. Time would show that this would not suit Tbilisi.

¹⁰ In this section, which mainly covers the period up to August 2008, “parties” are considered to be the Georgian and Abkhaz sides. Russia is seen as a facilitator and mediator in the negotiation process.

- Russia took advantage of the passivity, and indeed the overall indifference of the international community and took the initiative into its own hands, securing a privileged position in the conflict resolution process. Thus, the west passed over the main means of influence on Georgia to Russia. As a result, the Georgian side was given a *de facto* border with Russia in the region of Inguri. This of course suited Sukhumi.
- Russia was the party most interested in the deployment of peacekeeping troops in the conflict zone, allowing it to manipulate the situation on the ground, especially in relation to influencing Georgian policy. Although fully aware of the far-reaching consequences of the deployment of Russian troops in the conflict zone, in the context of the ineffectiveness of international organisations and internal contradictions, Georgia was forced to accept such developments.
- Practice has shown that agreements and treaties alone do not guarantee compliance with the provisions they contain, and the Roman principle *pacta sunt servanda* (agreements must be respected) is not effective in present times.
- The situation of “neither war nor peace” was sometimes set aside, with the resumption of outbreaks of violence. The cause of this was that each side believed that they had achieved the maximum they could: Georgia at the level of international law and interstate relations to recognise its territorial integrity; and Abkhazia the ability to declare its “independence” to the whole world.
- A difference in understanding of the compromise solution to the main political issue became a major factor in the absence of trust between the parties to the conflict. In the beginning, when the subject of negotiations was the status of Abkhazia, representatives of Georgia proposed a federated unitary state (later the issue of a common state was discussed). The Abkhaz side maintained its understanding of a unitary state as a confederate union of the Republic of Georgia with the Republic of Abkhazia, acting as independent states with equal legal rights and obligations, including in the international sphere. After the Abkhaz side refused to negotiate on the issue of status, the peace process quickly became complicated.
- The inadequacy and inconsistency of the parties’ policies did not help increase trust during negotiations. Tbilisi’s policy was based on putting “pressure on Sukhumi” rather than solving the main moral problem: the restoration of the moral unity with the people of Abkhazia. Moreover, Tbilisi chose the wording of the decision on the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict as ‘the restoration of the territorial integrity of the Georgian state’, instead of the ultimate goal of the peace process, which was the reconciliation of Georgians and Abkhaz through the intensification of bilateral contacts.
- International intermediaries, although sincere, had a modest impact on the peace process. Several “trust-building” meetings between parties held under their auspices were encouraging, but nothing more. There was a plan to ‘implement agreed measures in the framework of the Coordinating Council and by means of bilateral contacts’, which clearly alarmed Russia. Russia saw in this the threat of loss of influence over the process and therefore such meetings no longer took place.
- Public opinion in Georgia has remained conservative and has not had a catalytic effect on the negotiation process. On the whole, despite radical, large-scale changes in thinking about the causes and consequences of the Abkhaz conflict, the search for new approaches to solve it has not occurred in most of Georgian society.
- The almost continuous state of internal political instability and the difficult social situation in Georgia were not conducive to the negotiation process. The unresolved political problem of hundreds of thousands of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) and their social

problems adversely affected the mood of the Georgian side at the negotiation table. And between the multiple rounds of negotiations, the above-mentioned situation did not ensure the observance of the earlier agreements.

- The bias of the Russian side as the main peacekeepers led to the uncontrolled formation of military units/groups on both sides of the conflict, which systematically undertook reprisals on peaceful citizens, which led to reciprocal reactions and turned into armed fighting.
- The failure of the international community to develop effective mechanisms to prevent violation of the agreements reached between parties to the ceasefire reduced the motivation of parties to genuinely seek compromise solutions. For various reasons, parties to the conflict were not sufficiently interested in the search for compromises to ensure the non-resumption of hostilities.
- Contrary to expectations, the “Geneva process” was not able to minimise Russia’s role in the conflict resolution process. International mediators are reluctant to admit that the issue of security in Europe is linked to the problem of conflict resolution in Georgia.

2.3. Analysis of new realities in the context of Georgian-Abkhaz relations

This part of the research aims to identify and describe the main events and phenomena of global and regional policy and, in particular, the elements of Georgian foreign policy over the last three years that had a direct impact on Georgian-Abkhaz relations. The political analysis carried out took a wide range of issues into account. In particular, special attention was paid to the following themes:

The dynamics of relations between Georgia and Russia. The starting point taken was the Russia embargo on certain types of Georgian agricultural produce at the end of 2005, which led to the escalation of confrontation between the two countries. It should be noted that during the research the emphasis was put on those events initiated by either side which acted as “irritants” in exacerbating bilateral relations. The confrontational nature of relations between Georgia and Russia adversely affected the already crisis-stricken Georgian-Abkhaz relations. Every setback in the relations between Georgia and Russia instantly affected the mood of parties, especially Sukhumi.

The dynamics of relations between Russia and the West. In recent years, relations between Russia and the West have noticeably cooled for a number of reasons. Basically, there was a growing rejection of Russia after the end of the Cold War and based on the US world hegemony. The increasing tension in Russian relations with the West did not help the Georgian-Abkhaz dialogue. It is obvious that one of the frontlines of the geopolitical confrontation between Russia and the West crosses through Georgian conflict zones. For example, the polarisation of positions of Russia and the West on the issue of the status of Kosovo created illusions and false expectations amongst parties to the conflict and ultimately reduced their readiness to engage in constructive dialogue. With each spiral of tension the Abkhaz side became more cautious. The cautious approach of Abkhazia can be explained by its general suspicion of the position of international organisations and Western intermediaries and its instinctive wish in such a situation to “stick close” to Russia. As a result, the official negotiation process of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict almost entirely came to a halt.

The policy of integration of Georgia into NATO. Georgian efforts to join NATO were never welcomed in Abkhazia. In contrast to the Russian elite, which will interpret the possible accession of NATO by Georgia as an extremely hostile act towards Russia purely on geopolitical grounds, in

Abkhazia it is believed that membership in the alliance will encourage Georgia to decide to “go to war” against Abkhazia. In fact Georgia had hoped to use the rapprochement with the alliance as an additional means of putting political pressure on Russia and therefore on the Abkhaz side too. In parallel, it was felt that the modernisation of the armed forces, in part within the framework of the Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) and the increased operational capacity of the Georgian army could be a serious means of putting psychological pressure on the Abkhaz side. At the same time the image of NATO as an enemy was promoted in Abkhazia, which has the same news and information services as Russia. For its part, NATO made few diplomatic or other efforts to counterbalance this propaganda.¹¹ It was against this background that the process of accelerated rapprochement with the alliance took place. All this frightened and alarmed the Abkhaz and extinguished their wish to cooperate with the unconvincing calls from Tbilisi to begin a ‘direct and sincere dialogue’.

Consequences of the Georgian-Russian war of August 2008. Due to the gravity of their consequences, the events of August 2008 stand apart amongst the influential factors in Georgian-Abkhaz relations. Despite the fact that active hostilities did not take place directly in the zone of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict, these events had enormous political significance and psychological consequences for Georgian-Abkhaz relations. The most serious consequence of the August war, which will continue to influence the course of processes in the region, was the creation of a new status quo after the recognition by Russia of Abkhaz and South Ossetian independence and the deployment of its military bases. As a result, parties became more intransigent and inflexible in their positions. Note that the emphasis of the positions of different sides in relation to the former “stimuli” changed. Whereas before the Abkhaz side had insisted on the withdrawal of Georgian military forces from the Kodori Valley, the Georgian side now strives for the withdrawal of “occupying forces” from there and the return of refugees. However, the most vivid example of the increased rigidity of the parties’ positions in the conflict is the negotiation process in Geneva, where many relevant issues have not yet been resolved, and where progress towards solutions is made with great difficulty. Such an atmosphere of inflexibility and intransigence creates an unfavourable basis for fruitful discussions on the guarantees of non-resumption of hostilities.

Key findings

For historical and geographical reasons, Georgian-Abkhaz relations need to be examined in the wider context at this stage. In particular, “the Russian factor” plays a decisive role in the dynamics of these relations and therefore the climate of Russian-Georgian relations directly affects the course of the Georgian-Abkhaz negotiation process.

In a lesser but still obvious way, a degree of causal relationship can be observed between the nature of relations between Russia and the West and the course of the Georgian-Abkhaz negotiation process. It is true that the erosion of relations between Russia and the West does not have such a decisive and immediate impact on the peace process in the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict as the deterioration of Russian-Georgian relations does. Nevertheless, the post-August reality witnesses the need to find a “common language” between Russia and the West in order to ensure stability and continuity in the negotiation process.

Despite the fact that searching for guarantees of physical security in NATO made sense in political and historical terms, the process of Georgia’s integration into the alliance was not properly planned and organised. The use by Georgia of accelerated rapprochement with the alliance as a means of exerting pressure on Abkhazia helped to further alienate the parties to the conflict.

11 In 2007 in Istanbul, international non-governmental organisations held a meeting of representatives of civil society from Georgia and Abkhazia devoted to the impact of Georgia’s integration into NATO and the dynamics of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict. It was the first, and so far the only meeting where representatives of Abkhaz society and NATO officials could directly communicate and exchange views.

The status quo created after August 2008 was the most serious obstacle to constructive dialogue between parties to the conflict and the conclusion of an agreement to the non-resumption of military hostilities. It is urgent to find a way around the impasse resulting from the deployment of Russian army forces in Abkhazia; otherwise the chances of progress in negotiations on guarantees of non-military actions remain slim.

2.4. Study of international experience on compliance with conditions of ceasefire agreements

In the light of the non-resumption of military activities between conflicting parties, it is worth considering the existing practice of *de facto* non-resumption of hostilities in the absence of relevant treaties and obligations (accepted by parties themselves). In this study two specific cases were taken as examples: Cyprus and Nagorno-Karabakh. The author does not aim to analyse the causes of these conflicts, which each have their individual characteristics, but instead considers the circumstances that led to the initiation and maintenance of the status quo for considerable periods of time.

In Cyprus (for 35 years) and in Nagorno-Karabakh (for 15 years), non-resumption of hostilities occurred in practice in the absence of corresponding obligations accepted officially by parties to the conflicts. These situations arose from complex internal and external factors, which have significant differences as well as interesting parallels with specific conflict situations.

In the case of Cyprus, several factors play a stabilising role. Despite the fact that over the last decade it has not been possible to find a mutually acceptable formula for resolving the conflict, the non-resumption of hostilities continues, facilitated by factors such as:

- The presence of the armed forces of the UN peacekeeping operations in Cyprus (UNFICYP) has been an important preventative factor. However, UNFICYP was unable to prevent flare-ups of hostilities in 1974, which were provoked by a number of internal and external factors. Nevertheless, in general the ceasefire continues to hold on the island.
- The existence of two UK military bases on the island, which remained there after the decolonisation of Cyprus in 1960. It is clear that military action in the immediate vicinity of their bases puts the UK in a “hairy” situation – especially in light of UK obligations in relation to the sovereignty and integrity of the state of Cyprus.
- The fact that during the period of occupation of the north part of the island, Turkey managed to gain control over the maximum amount of territory – right up to the ceasefire line – which was as much as even the boldest of Turkish Cypriots could have hoped for. Further expansion into territories occupied only by Greek Cypriots was fraught with significant political and other losses, despite disorganisation in the enemy camp. The Greek side at that time was simply unable to hold their own land against the 40,000-strong contingent of the Turkish army.

In Nagorno-Karabakh, the strategic balance is founded on the following factors:

- There are no obvious advantages for either party in violating the current *de facto* regime of non-resumption of hostilities. Violation of the ceasefire and the moving of Armenian forces deep into Azerbaijani territory would only weaken the Armenian position politically and would not bring military benefits. An attempt by Azerbaijan to reclaim the lost territories through the use of force would also be politically damaging (resumption of the war is unacceptable to the international community). Such an attempt would also be beyond the level of acceptable risk in military terms as, despite a significant increase in military spending, Azerbaijan has not yet reached a level of qualitative superiority over its adversary as to guarantee success in military operations.
- Foreign policy realities have changed as well. Azerbaijan withdrew from the Collective Security Treaty of CIS countries (which later became the Collective Security Treaty Organisation, or

CSTO), but Armenia remains an active member. A Russian military base is situated in the territory of Armenia, which is more strategically important since the withdrawal of Russian bases from Vaziani, Akhalkalaki and Batumi. Russia also facilitated the upgrading and modernisation of the Armenian army, and concluded a number of agreements with Armenia under the CSTO, which forced Azerbaijan to seriously consider the fact that in any attempt at military revenge Azerbaijan will not be dealing with Armenia alone.

- Any failure (military or political) on an issue as sensitive to both the Armenian and the Azerbaijani societies as the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is fraught with internal political dangers, with a direct threat to power as a result of popular discontent.

There are therefore significant differences, as well as interesting parallels, between these specific conflict situations. Amongst those to note are: the deployment of international peacekeeping forces in Cyprus and the lack of peacekeepers in Nagorno-Karabakh; and the existence of an agreement on cessation of hostilities and non resumption of military action in Karabakh, and the absence of an official ceasefire agreement in Cyprus. Other points of interest include that the line of ceasefire was fully acceptable to one party; and the interest of the international community in preventing resumption of hostilities.

Key findings

- The conclusion of a treaty on non-resumption of military action (non-use of force or threat of the use of force) is not itself a guarantee against military excesses of different scale and duration.
- The deployment of international observers or other international forces (e.g. peacekeeping forces) is not an absolute guarantee of the non-resumption of hostilities, although it reduces the risk.
- The conclusion of a treaty on non-resumption of hostilities and the parallel deployment of international peacekeeping forces, trusted by the parties on both sides of the conflict, can reduce risks to a minimum.
- The implementation of conditions set out in the third bullet point should be considered a necessary but insufficient step towards building mutual trust, without which it will not be possible to achieve lasting peace and the prospect of resolving the conflict.

2.5. Study on the perception of the consequences of the Georgian Russian war, in Georgian society

The August war and new status quo it created deserves comprehensive evaluation and careful consideration. This research attempts an expert evaluation of the “winners” and “losers” with direct or indirect links to the main parties involved in this situation. Therefore, the following subjects were selected: Georgia, Russia, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, the US and EU. The study was carried out using qualitative analysis. A questionnaire with 48 questions was drawn up. The questions were worded to allow respondents to evaluate the “gains” and “costs” in political, economic, military and psycho-social spheres. Thirteen experts participated in the study, from both government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The results of the study directly relating to Georgia and Abkhazia are of particular interest in terms of assessing the influence of the war on perspectives for Georgian-Abkhaz relations.

Costs to Georgia

The costs to Georgia as a result of the war are obvious in all spheres. However, while some experts evaluated the situation as catastrophic, some felt that the situation can still be rectified.

On a political level

- Georgia suffered a military defeat, losing (for many years) a significant part of its territory; large numbers of inhabitants from the central part of Georgia – Kartli – have become refugees; Russia controls South Ossetia and Abkhazia and has legalised its military presence on this side of the Caucasus mountain range. Georgia almost lost its role as a player in the international arena. These functions were taken on by intermediaries – Western countries and international organisations.
- Abkhaz confidence in Georgia has been lost. Official bilateral contacts with the Abkhaz side have been cut.
- A new image of Georgia has appeared: as the aggressor and initiator of resumption of hostilities; as a politically scandalous, unreliable, short-sighted country pursuing incoherent policies.
- The geopolitical situation of Georgia has turned out to be delicate, and the position of those sceptical about the future integration of Georgia into Euro-Atlantic structures has strengthened.

On an economic level

- A significant reduction in foreign investment and the forced sale of Georgian-owned enterprises.
- Damage was caused to the infrastructure (port of Poti, a cement factory in Kaspi, etc.).
- The rapid growth of the economy stopped; the economy is expected to decline from 12 percent growth of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to three percent.
- Unemployment increased due to an increase in refugees.

On a military level

- Large numbers of soldiers were killed and infrastructure, buildings and military equipment destroyed.
- Seventy tanks and armoured vehicles and some expensive artillery machinery were taken (as booty).
- Total disintegration of the Georgian army – hundreds of officers were relieved of their posts, causing staff shortages.
- The war exposed the bad decisions that had been made in military investment. It is unlikely that Western partners will again help Georgia to build up its military capacity.

On a psycho-social level

- The sense of hope and aspiration was lost in society: thousands of refugees have no prospects of returning to the homes built by their fathers and grandfathers and to cultivate their land.
- Georgian society is suffering from a “lost war syndrome” characterised by confusion, depression, apathy and loss of pride.

Gains for Georgia

Despite the tragic consequences of the war, experts did see some gains for Georgia.

On the political level

- The state managed to survive, it was possible to avoid chaos and utter collapse as well as an ensuing guerrilla war.
- Georgia won a passive but serious place in the broad, global political game, and has gone from being considered as “small fry” to becoming a strong player known throughout the world.
- For many years Georgia was unable to call the conflicts on its territory Russian-Georgian conflicts. Now this is obvious to the whole world, and speaking of the peacekeeping role of Russia in these conflicts is entirely inappropriate.
- People started to separate Georgia and the Georgian leadership. Western relations to President Mikheil Saakashvili have changed for the worse, but remain sympathetic to Georgia. They recognised that the preservation of Georgia as a stable partner will only happen through a change of power in the country.
- Society remained united in the face of an external threat.
- The interest of the EU in the stabilisation of the situation in Georgia significantly increased. The mere fact that the 27 members of the EU decided to send an impressive number of observers to the region shows that Russia is no longer considered a reasonable intermediary in these conflicts.

On the economic level

- If it were not for the war, Georgia would not have received over US\$4 billion in aid from Western donors. If these resources are used reasonably, Georgia can potentially overcome the effects of war and find a dignified way out of the financial crisis.

On the military level

- A number of false priorities in the development of the Georgian armed forces were identified, which will probably lead to the revision of military planning, the concept of security and a series of conclusions being drawn, namely the reduction of the military budget and a revision of priorities, with increased spending on education and health.
- It became clear that it was pointless to spend huge sums on arms and this was the last nail in the coffin of the “party of war”.

On the psycho-social level

- An increased sense of solidarity, as evidenced by refugees who were for a week fully dependent on the hospitality of the inhabitants of Tbilisi and other towns.

Costs to Abkhazia**On the political level**

- The most important problem for the Abkhaz, the preservation of their own identity, was exacerbated. They are now at risk of being made “Russians”.
- Without any real prospects of independence, Abkhazia is now entirely under the influence of Russia. Today, occupying forces (and indeed they are just as much an occupying force for the Abkhaz as for the Georgians) are posted in Abkhazia instead of peacekeepers, and the country’s pursuit of independence, the “collection of land”, the return of the Mahajirov who were previously deported to Turkey, all are failing. The fact that Abkhazia was granted independence by Russia has proved a powerful tool for leverage in Russia’s hands.

- Increased Russian military presence in Abkhazia will increase the dependence on Russia's military support and will therefore change the demographic picture.

On the economic level

- Experts did not foresee economic costs to Abkhazia.

On the military level

- Abkhazia should wave goodbye to its dream of becoming an independent country with its own military resources. The Abkhaz army will be reformed, with the senior positions taken by Russian military personnel.

On the psycho-social level

- Experts found it difficult to think of costs on the psycho-social level, as the Abkhaz have not yet fully realised the situation they are in – a situation which it seems they themselves did not expect.

Gains for Abkhazia

- Abkhazia received from Russia the long-awaited recognition of independence;
- Abkhazia has rid itself of the military threat from Georgia and in security terms is protected as never before;
- Abkhazia now has control of forces in the Kodori Valley, which it has never controlled before and from where Georgia could stage a military strike; and
- The Olympic Games in Sochi, the restoration of Black Sea coastal resorts of the Caucasus and the garrisoning of 3,800 military personnel at the military base in Ochamchira will all contribute to the economy of Abkhazia.

Key findings

Georgia and Abkhazia both lost out as a result of the events of August. These losses are so severe that for political and psychological reasons, the parties are not yet able to acknowledge their full extent. One thing that can be said with confidence is that if the countries had signed the Georgian-Abkhaz document on the non-resumption of hostilities, the likelihood of war and its consequences would have been reduced. In other words, the price for not signing the agreement proved to be very high.

At this stage it is difficult to accurately assess the extent to which the parties to the conflict won or lost, as the strategic, long-term, tactical and short-term losses and gains are not always consistent with each other, as neither are their political, economic and military aspects.

Having considered expert opinion, one can conclude that Georgia lost more in the conflict, having lost a significant part of its territory and the prospect of becoming a country with a stable democracy. This is followed by Abkhazia, which has now lost all prospects of building its nation state.

2.6. Study of attitudes to the non-resumption of hostilities in different parts of Georgian society

The overall objective of this study was to examine the attitude of the Georgian population to signing an agreement on the non-resumption of hostilities in the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict, and identifying possible concerns and circumstances around this issue.

The study aimed in particular to identify the range of views on the following issues:

- Attitudes to the signing of an agreement on non-resumption of hostilities;
- The parties to the agreement on the non-resumption of hostilities;
- The terms of the agreement on the non-resumption of hostilities;
- The expected consequences (results) of signing such an agreement;
- The expected consequences of the absence of such an agreement;
- The conditions necessary for the implementation of an agreement;
- The possibility of violation or failure to comply with the agreement; and
- The expected consequences of violation or failure to comply with the agreement.

It was felt to be necessary to use qualitative and quantitative research methods as an additional means of cross-checking.

The results of qualitative research

A qualitative study is on the one hand the initial pre-quantitative stage of the research process, and on the other hand its results have an independent meaning, allowing for the identification of expert opinion on the range of issues examined.

The method of individual focus interviews was used to carry out the qualitative research. Those interviewed included high-ranking government officials involved in decision-making in relevant areas (including former officials), independent experts and also leaders of major political parties. A total of 25 people were interviewed.

Key findings

- There is no unified opinion amongst experts, government officials and leaders of political parties on the question of signing an agreement on the non-resumption of hostilities with Abkhazia:
 - Almost all major opposition parties, with one exception, were of the opinion that it is necessary to sign such an agreement.
 - Several experts were less categorical, however, questioning the wisdom of signing an agreement on the non-resumption of hostilities in Abkhazia at this stage, believing it would cast a defeatist shadow.
 - All government officials and representatives of the ruling party interviewed unanimously believe that first the Medvedev-Sarkozy plan should be implemented and only after this should the signing of other agreements be considered.
 - The majority of the government officials and representatives of the ruling party questioned believe that any agreement should be aimed at the unconditional and safe return of IDPs and the recognition of the territorial integrity of Georgia.
- There is no agreement on the issue of possible parties to this agreement:
 - The majority of independent experts, and all surveyed opposition party leaders (with one exception, who felt that such an agreement would be inappropriate at this stage) are of the opinion that the agreement should be concluded between the Georgian and Abkhaz sides. However, the majority of these feel that the participation of guarantors, such as international organisations (e.g. the UN, EU, Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe [OSCE], etc.) and Western countries (e.g. the US), is necessary. Only a few experts and leaders of the political opposition suggest that this agreement should be negotiated directly between Georgia and Abkhazia.

- Experts employed in the government sector, leaders of the ruling party and one opposition party representative believe that the agreement should be negotiated between Russia and Georgia, because they are the parties to the conflict. In their view, the best format for the signing of this agreement is the “Geneva process”, with participation of international organisations (e.g. the UN, OSCE, EU, etc.) and western countries (e.g. the US).
- With regard to the terms of the agreement not to resume hostilities in Abkhazia:
 - Nearly half of the independent experts and leaders of political opposition parties believe that the agreement on the non-resumption of hostilities in Abkhazia should be signed without stipulating additional conditions. The other independent experts and leaders of political opposition parties believe that it is necessary to provide for some additional conditions at the time of signing, such as: the demilitarisation of regions of conflict; the conclusion of an agreement on the withdrawal of Russian troops; the deployment of military observers along the perimeter of the administrative boundaries, and of international observers within conflict zones; and the creation of conditions favourable for the unconditional return of refugees.
 - Representatives of the authorities and the ruling party consider a necessary prerequisite for signing the agreement to be the restoration of the status quo of 6th August 2008, the implementation of the Medvedev-Sarkozy plan, the creation of conditions for the unconditional and safe return of IDPs, and guarantees of the protection of human rights. To achieve this, they suggest that it is necessary to have international police and military forces in the form of a rapid reaction corps situated in the conflict zone.
- Differences of opinion were also revealed on the consequences of signing an agreement on the non-resumption of hostilities in Abkhazia, in particular:
 - The majority of independent experts and leaders of political opposition parties, who support signing an agreement not to resume hostilities in Abkhazia, deny the possibility of any adverse effects. They foresee only positive outcomes from signing the agreement: the recognition of the inadmissibility of a military solution to the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict; safeguards to prevent military action by one party or another; greater accountability and control; the possible demilitarisation of the conflict zone; and the reestablishment of dialogue and cooperation between Georgians and Abkhaz, and a joint search for peaceful ways to resolve the conflict.
 - Representatives of the authorities and the leading party believe that it is only possible to talk about the positive impact of signing an agreement if a package of agreements is signed, including on the safe return of refugees and international guarantees in this regard.
- With regard to the consequences of not concluding an agreement on the non-resumption of hostilities in Abkhazia:
 - Virtually all the people interviewed denied the possibility of any benefits from not concluding an agreement on the non-resumption of hostilities in Abkhazia.
 - Almost all independent experts and leaders of opposition parties saw the absence of this agreement as presenting the danger of: renewed hostilities; permanent instability along the administrative border; the impossibility for IDPs to return; lack of international monitoring; lack of trust of Abkhaz society and therefore the impossibility of dialogue; and the lack of any mechanisms to limit Russia’s actions. They believe that signing the agreement is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the peaceful settlement of the conflict.
- In connection with the conditions necessary to ensure compliance with the agreement on the non-resumption of hostilities in Abkhazia:
 - All persons interviewed believed that strengthening the involvement of the West (e.g. the EU and US) and international organisations is a necessary condition for achieving the agreement on the non-resumption of hostilities in Abkhazia, believing that only these players could become guarantors of the implementation of this agreement.
 - The majority of independent experts and leaders of opposition parties believe that first of all it is necessary to: demilitarise the conflict zone; create mixed monitoring commissions;

begin a dialogue with the Abkhaz and real negotiations in the framework of the “Geneva process”; and also facilitate the implementation of mutually beneficial cross-border projects in conflict zones by international organisations (commercial-economic, humanitarian, etc.).

- Representatives of the authorities and the ruling party believe that it is necessary to replace the Russian occupying troops with international forces, and to expand the activities of international peacekeeping forces – by introducing police and military forces in the form of a rapid reaction corps, as well as strengthening international monitoring.
- The opinions of those questioned diverge again on the possibility of non-compliance or violation of an agreement on the non-resumption of hostilities in Abkhazia, in particular:
 - The biggest cause of fear in terms of non-compliance or violations of the agreement on non-resumption of hostilities in Abkhazia is Russia. Aggressive Russian geopolitics and its desire to retain its positions in the Caucasus and re-establish its influence over Georgia were mentioned. All those questioned believe that if the West’s attention slips, Russia will begin further provocation and will violate an agreement on the non-resumption of hostilities on any pretext.
 - Almost all those questioned excluded the possibility of non-compliance or violation of the agreement on the non-resumption of hostilities by Abkhazia.
 - The majority of independent experts and all leaders of political opposition parties think there is a possibility of non-compliance or violation of the agreement on the non-resumption of hostilities by Georgia. Representatives of the authorities categorically exclude this possibility.
 - Without exception, all respondents completely trust the international guarantors (the West and international organisations), believing that they always fulfil their role under their mandate.
 - All respondents without exception believe that the consequences of a violation or failure to comply with the agreement on the non-resumption of hostilities in Abkhazia would be disastrous for both Georgians and Abkhaz, with consequences including: the deployment of large-scale military action; new waves of IDPs; and the subsequent fragmentation of the territory of Georgia.

The results of the quantitative research

Ten multiple choice questions were included in the questionnaire: for example, with a list of possible answers and the option “other”. In four questions respondents were asked to choose only one answer, and for the remaining questions respondents were allowed to select multiple answers. In order to maximise the results and obtain a broad spectrum of opinion, the following target groups were identified:

- Intelligentsia
- IDPs (from Abkhazia)
- Former soldiers
- Young people (students)
- Journalists (based on their role in shaping public opinion)

In all, 300 people were questioned.

Key findings

- The vast majority of the Georgian population realises the necessity of signing an agreement on the non-resumption of hostilities between Georgia and Abkhazia, and believes it is necessary to do so as quickly as possible. This result suggests that there is a clear public opinion on this issue in the country.

- With regard to the parties to the agreement, more than half of the respondents are of the opinion that the parties to the agreement should be Georgia and Abkhazia, and about half of them consider the involvement of the guarantors as necessary. A smaller number suggest that the agreement should be concluded between Georgia and Russia, also with the participation of a guarantor. In all cases guarantors are seen to be the West and international organisations.
- The vast majority of the Georgian population expects that the signing of an agreement on the non-resumption of hostilities between Georgia and Abkhazia would bring positive results. Moreover, almost half of those questioned see this as an opportunity to address the most urgent problems in a country that has recently gone through the horrors of war, and neutralise the threat of Russian aggression. Almost half believe that the signing of this agreement would help restore the confidence of the Abkhaz society and therefore allow the dialogue to resume.
- In relation to the signing of an agreement on the non-resumption of hostilities between Georgia and Abkhazia, there is a clear view in Georgian society that the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict cannot be solved by the use of military force and that there is the need to restore dialogue between the Georgians and Abkhaz.
- The vast majority of those questioned believed that in the absence of this agreement it will be impossible to restore Abkhaz confidence and resume the dialogue between the Georgians and the Abkhaz.
- The vast majority do not consider it appropriate to sign an agreement not to resume hostilities between Georgia and Abkhazia without certain additional conditions. In particular, the opinion prevails that the prerequisites for signing an agreement not to resume hostilities between Georgia and Abkhazia are:
 - Restoration of the status quo of 6th August 2008;
 - Conclusion of an agreement on the withdrawal of Russian occupying troops from the territory of Abkhazia; and
 - Agreement on the unconditional return of IDPs.
- The majority believe that to ensure compliance with the agreement on non-resumption of hostilities between Georgia and Abkhazia it is necessary to:
 - Ensure the wording of all provisions and obligations of the agreement is clear and precise to avoid misunderstandings and interpretation;
 - ‘Replace Russian occupying troops with international peace (police) forces’;
 - ‘Start a real dialogue with the Abkhaz side’; and
 - ‘Involve a neutral party (the West, international organisations) as guarantor’.
- A mistrust of Russia pervades Georgian society: Russia is the cause of the greatest fears in terms of non-compliance or violation of the agreement not to resume hostilities between Georgia and Abkhazia. The majority exclude the possibility of a violation of this agreement by the Abkhaz side, though a quarter of the population can see the possibility that the Abkhaz side would not implement the agreement. The vast majority of the population trust international guarantors (e.g. the West and international organisations), believing that they fulfil their obligations under the agreement. The vast majority do not allow for the possibility that the Georgian side would not implement an agreement on the non-resumption of hostilities between Georgia and Abkhazia.
- The overwhelming majority believes that violation of or failure to comply with an agreement on non-resumption of hostilities between Georgia and Abkhazia would have tragic consequences. Almost a third believe that violation of this agreement would lead to:
 - Large-scale hostilities with Russia;
 - Destabilisation of the political situation in Georgia;

- Subsequent fragmentation of the country; and
- Georgia becoming a battlefield (like Vietnam or Afghanistan) – about a quarter of respondents believe this is a possibility.

2.7. General conclusions and recommendations

The issue of guarantees of non-resumption of hostilities has always been on the agenda of talks between Georgia and Abkhazia. Despite the fact that several agreements and other documents were signed stipulating the obligations of parties to maintain the ceasefire and refrain from the use of force, the issue remains relevant. In fact, the negotiation process to agree to the terms of the ceasefire was far from perfect. Consequently, commitments are often not met and the documents signed have lost their force. This was in part due to the historic lack of trust between Georgian and Abkhaz sides, who viewed themselves not as negotiating partners but as enemies, and therefore planned their strategies in the manner of a “zero-sum game”. Despite its role as facilitator, Russia was not always interested in genuine trust-building between the parties, and manipulated the situation to try to reduce the motivation of the sides to take part in constructive negotiations. In turn, the UN and other international actors have not been able to contribute to the effectiveness of the peacekeeping process.

Georgian-Abkhaz relations are hyper-sensitive to processes and changes, both in the region and beyond. Regional and global geopolitics linked the conflict to the interests of different players, large and small, and not always with the same values and goals. Confrontation of those interests and goals further exacerbated the already complex issues of Georgian-Abkhaz relations, which have undergone an exceptionally dangerous phase of development over the last decade.

The August war in 2008 was one such phase. Overall, its effects on Georgian-Abkhaz relations were so serious that it is clear that more time must elapse before the parties regain the strength, will and real awareness of the need to find a path to reconciliation. The consequences of the war have had a contradictory impact on the situation of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict: on the one hand they have strengthened the acknowledgement that it is impossible to find a mutually acceptable solution through military means, and on the other hand, Georgian authorities received serious factual evidence that Russia was not a neutral peacekeeper, but rather in itself a party to the conflict. The constant, large-scale Russian military presence in Abkhazia, viewed by Georgia as a permanent risk to the security of the country – a perception which is unlikely to change in the near future – can be seen as a risk for Abkhazia itself, along with other circumstances reducing its sovereignty to a very low level. As the Russian presence (primarily military, but not entirely) in Abkhazia increases, this argument will only get stronger, overshadowing the need for settlement of the real, serious problems in Georgian-Abkhaz relations.

Therefore, the normalisation of these relations is held hostage to Georgian-Russian relations, and in a wider sense to the relations between the West and Russia. The balance of forces has changed accordingly: if prior to the recognition of Abkhazia, Russia seemed to be a party interested in concluding a contract with Georgia on the non-resumption of hostilities (the possibility of aggression on the part of Abkhazia against Georgia was not seriously considered, and the Abkhaz side constantly drew attention to the possibility of aggression from Georgia), then after the conclusion of the treaty between Russia and Abkhazia, and after the stationing of various Russian armed forces in Abkhazia, Abkhazia can already be seen as a source of the threat for the rest of Georgia. In addition, the conclusion of the treaty on the non-resumption of hostilities by the Abkhaz side alone is not (and cannot) be taken by the Georgians as a guarantee against aggression from the territory of Abkhazia. This is because Russia is seen as a potential aggressor that Abkhazia clearly does not have the means and mechanisms to influence. Therefore, concluding an agreement with the Abkhaz side makes no sense, in any case, in the current circumstances.

Nevertheless, the task of normalising Georgian-Abkhaz relations undoubtedly remains on the agenda, and the pursuit of appropriate agreements should be the priority of both parties. Sociological surveys carried out for this research show that the vast majority of the population of Georgia believes it is necessary to sign an agreement on the non-resumption of hostilities. Even the most sceptical and cautious group of respondents – high-ranking government officials – do not deny that such a document is appropriate. It is worth noting that opinion is divided in Georgian society on certain details of the agreement, such as who the parties to the agreement should be or the conditions of signing. However, careful analysis of the objective circumstances, as well as the views and attitudes of society and its rulers, makes it possible to summarise them and thus determine the position of the Georgian side on this issue:

- Due to changing realities, Russia is the main military force in the zones of the Georgian-Abkhaz and the Georgian-South Ossetian conflicts. In addition, after the August war Russia became the main party to the conflict with Georgia. Therefore the agreement should and can be signed only with Russia. In addition, the agreement should also negotiate commitments from the Georgian, Abkhaz and South Ossetian sides on mutual security guarantees.
- The principle focus of the agreement must be to stabilise the situation and maintain the ceasefire, not only in the Georgian-Abkhaz and Georgian-South Ossetian conflict zones, but a broader agreement not to use force between Russia and Georgia in general. Due to extremely tense bilateral relations, the potential threat of renewed military action could come from outside the conflict zones.
- The signing of the agreement should not be an unconditional act. It must be a part or component of a broader package of decisions which must imply a certain peace process and include:
 - The implementation of the Medvedev-Sarkozy plan, especially the stipulation on the withdrawal of Russian troops and the restoration of the status quo as of 6th August 2008;
 - The creation of conditions for the unconditional and safe return of IDPs;
 - The guaranteed protection of human rights in conflict zones (for this, international police and military forces will need to be present in the conflict zones, and an international peacekeeping force positioned along the Inguri river); and
 - The adoption of a UN Security Council Resolution outlining these elements.

The most acceptable format for reaching an agreement on the non-resumption of hostilities (in the context of the package of solutions) is the “Geneva process”. However, it is unrealistic to expect in the near future that the conditions will be established for the agreement on comprehensive and multilateral guarantees. Unfortunately, the “Geneva process” promises to be a long one. In the event of failure of this format, discussions will need to be raised to the level of the UN Security Council. However, in this case Russia would threaten to use its veto to try to influence the process in its favour. This being said, steps must now be taken to create a more conducive environment for negotiations. In order to do this, at this stage it is necessary to: 1) improve confidence between parties to the conflict; 2) stabilise the situation along the line of confrontation; and 3) improve the efficiency of the “Geneva process”.

The recommendations below could be used to create a more favourable atmosphere and establish the specific conditions necessary for the signing of an agreement on the non-resumption of military action. These conditions are obligatory prerequisites for the development of this agreement and no less importantly, for the parties to strictly adhere to it.

Recommendations to the Georgian government

- **Strongly contribute to the implementation of the Medvedev-Sarkozy plan.** Russia, blaming “changed realities” barely complies with the main points of the agreement any longer. Political and diplomatic means must be used to raise this issue in all international forums and/or bilateral consultations with all partners.

- **Change the paradigm of conflict resolution.** Recent developments have shown a vicious approach to conflict resolution based on a policy of psychological, political and diplomatic pressure. The new approach should be directed by voluntary conciliation and based on the principle of mutual respect.
- **Develop an appropriate communication strategy.** Despite the bitter lessons of the August events, Georgian society has not yet fully backed finding an exclusively peaceful solution to the conflict. Consequently, not everyone understands the need for an agreement on the non-use of force. There is a need to develop an effective communication strategy and undertake advocacy to influence public opinion in this respect.
- **Promote public diplomacy.** In the absence of effective mechanisms for dialogue with the Abkhaz side on an official level, the expansion of existing formats and creation of new ways of interaction within the framework of public diplomacy is all the more important. The same applies to relations with Russia.
- **Show the necessary flexibility in the discussions over the extension of the UNOMIG mandate.**¹² In the context of the political non-resolution of the conflict and the imposing military presence of the Russian Federation in Abkhazia, the question of extending the UNOMIG mandate in the Georgian-Abkhaz zone of conflict is particularly important. By being flexible in their positions, the sides could come to a compromise in this matter.
- **Determine a strategy for dialogue with Russia.** The lack of dialogue with Russia could undermine the current fragile stability in Abkhazia, including along the confrontation lines. In addition, hostile propaganda in Russia has served to create negative public opinion about Georgia. Considering the reality of the situation, it is necessary first of all to look for alternative channels, most likely beginning with non-governmental ones, in order to put forward the Georgian point of view to the Russian public.

Recommendations to Georgian civil society

- **Promote the idea of reconciliation.** Unhealthy nationalism is a source of inter-ethnic tension. It is necessary to promote ideas of tolerance and reconciliation among broad sections of society, by means of public debates and other events. The aim of such a campaign, which should be the strategic direction of all political forces and society in general, should be to promote public awareness of the need to address the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict through peaceful means, through the restoration of trust and voluntary reconciliation.
- **Develop alternative long-term development models for Georgia suitable for the different possible options for conflict resolution.** One of the consequences of the August events was that the long-term development goals of the Georgian government became disoriented. International partners similarly lost their way, and indeed, are still in the process of thinking through what happened. There is a need to carry out research and initiate public discussions about the possible scenarios for the medium and long term, and make appropriate recommendations.
- **Widen the dialogue with representatives of Abkhaz society.** Dialogue with the Abkhaz community is a prerequisite for restoring trust and initiating the joint search for compromise solutions to the conflict. Developments show that the scope of existing contacts is not sufficient. It is necessary to widen the scope, and change the forms and formats of dialogue with particular emphasis on the active participation of young people.

¹² This research was completed before the Russian veto on the extension of the UNOMIG mandate at the meeting of the UN Security Council on the situation in Georgia on 15th June 2009.

- **Increase dialogue with representatives of Russian civil society.** Against the background of exceptionally difficult bilateral relations, severed diplomatic ties and highly undesirable public opinion, dialogue between representatives of the creative intelligentsia, academic circles and experts becomes particularly important. This would facilitate the mutual recognition of mistakes and the search for ways out of the crisis.

Recommendations to international intermediaries of the “Geneva process”

- **Promote the viability of the “Geneva process”.** Used to its role as third judge, Russia does not consider the “Geneva process” to be a comfortable format for negotiations, as the process casts Russia as one of the parties to the conflict. Presumably Russia will try to move the themes under discussion in the “Geneva process” to the UN Security Council, where it has power of veto. It is necessary to prevent such intentions on the Russian side.
- **Convince Russia of the need for admission of the Observer Mission from the EU (EUMM) to the territory of Abkhazia.** Because EUMM has not had the opportunity to penetrate deep into the conflict zones, the situation along the confrontation lines remains tense. At first, it is necessary to convince Russia of the advisability of signing a memorandum of understanding with EUMM as a first step towards stabilising the situation along the confrontation line. In future it will be necessary to agree that the mandate of the EUMM extends to the conflict zones.
- **Call upon Russian and Abkhaz sides to be more flexible in the discussion on extending the UNOMIG mandate.**¹³ The Russian and Abkhaz sides are revisionist in regards to the UNOMIG mandate. This position entails the complete cessation of the mission mandate, which will undoubtedly be detrimental to stability in the region. It is necessary to reinforce efforts with all parties to prevent events developing in this way.

Recommendations to international peacebuilding organisations

- **Encourage parties to find peaceful means of resolving the conflict, including through the continued sponsorship of joint projects on confidence-building measures.** During the years of conflict, the alienation between Georgian and Abkhaz society increased. This is partly a result of the limited number and scope of joint projects that were funded and managed by various peacekeeping organisations. There is a need to put more resources into funding such projects, in order to involve more representatives of Georgian and Abkhaz society. It is also important to focus predominantly on the involvement of young people.
- **Facilitate a wider dialogue between representatives of Georgian and Russian society.** Against the backdrop of severed official relations between Russia and Georgia, it is particularly important to promote dialogue between creative intellectuals, academic circles and experts in the two countries. Individual one-off meetings, although relevant, are clearly insufficient given the scale of the problem. It is necessary to encourage the establishment of sustainable mechanisms for dialogue and facilitate their institutionalisation.
- **Contribute to improving the professional level and skills of civil society for the development of effective recommendations for peaceful conflict resolution.** The events of August 2008 demonstrated clearly the need for dialogue between government and civil society. One of the reasons for the poor communication between government and civil society is the lack of skills and abilities in civil society to undertake professional policy analysis, and put forward effective recommendations and carry out advocacy (policy communication), i.e. bringing their concerns to the attention of decision-makers. There is a need to develop special training programmes to develop the ability and potential of public policy research.

¹³ See footnote 12.

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