

## **Abkhazia: a problem of identity and ownership**

### **History and Documents**

*The Abkhazians living in Turkey have preserved very well the customs, language and dances carried there from Abkhazia by their ancestors. The etiquette of the Abkhazians (*apswara*) is strictly observed. Of late they have been asking us to send them copies of the alphabet, books, teaching manuals, films on Abkhazia, recordings of songs, language-primers. In hundreds of letters sent to the homeland there resounds a passionate longing to become acquainted with the life and culture of the Abkhazians residing in the motherland, and we believe that the time will soon come when many of them, setting foot on the soil of their forebears, will say: 'Greetings, our father Caucasus, greetings, our mother Apsny!'...*

The collective **History of Abkhazia** (in Russian), Sukhum, 1991, page 281.

The first variant of this paper was composed for **The Nationalities' Journal** (New York) in the summer of 1991, when the ex-dissident and rabid demagogue Zviad Gamsakhurdia still headed the government in Tbilisi and before the Soviet regime had collapsed in the wake of the failed August coup. The second variant was an up-date to the middle of June 1992, taking account of events following the overthrow of Gamsakhurdia and the return to Georgia of former Party Boss Eduard Shevardnadze to head the (then still illegitimate) State Council. This variant was delivered at SOAS' Conference on Transcaucasian Boundary Disputes (15 June) and will appear in the volume arising out of that conference. A further adaptation and up-date to 11 October 1992 (the day of Georgia's 'democratic' elections in which Shevardnadze, being the only candidate for head of state, duly received his 'personal triumph') was prepared for submission to the Parliamentary Human Rights' Group at the invitation of its chairman Lord Avebury. This variant took account of the open war that had broken out between Abkhazia and Georgia on 14 August and was without some of the academic notes and bibliography of its predecessors. The present version restores some of those notes plus the bibliography, incorporates the English translation of certain relevant documents, expands the history (particularly for the years 1917-1921) and up-dates current events to the end of 1992.

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### Geography and Ethnic Affiliation

Appendix 1 contains two maps depicting (a) the relative positions of Abkhazia and Georgia (on Map 1 the dotted lines indicate the borders of Georgia allegedly<sup>1</sup> recognised by the League of Nations), and (b) the administrative districts and other salient features of Abkhazia.

The Abkhazians<sup>2</sup> are related most closely to the Abazinians<sup>3</sup>, who live across the Klukhor Pass in the foothills of the North West Caucasus, and more distantly to both the Circassians (Cherkess) and the Ubykhs, who lived around Sochi between the rivers Hamish and either Bu or Vardan (Bell: 1840.53 & 447). The Ubykhs in their entirety, along with many Circassians, Abkhazians and other North Caucasian peoples, migrated to the Ottoman Empire (principally modern-day Turkey) following Russia's conquest of the North Caucasus in 1864. The small language-family to which Abkhaz-Abaza, Circassian and the all-but extinct Ubykh belong is called North West Caucasian. The Georgians<sup>4</sup>, on the other hand, are a South Caucasian people, though there are problems about determining precisely who is correctly describable as 'Georgian'.

The South Caucasian (or Kartvelian) language-family consists of Georgian, Mingrelian, Laz and Svan. Apart from the Laz, whose traditional homeland, Lazistan, lies within Turkey, and the Imerkhevian Georgians, who also reside in Turkey, the bulk of the Georgians, Mingrelians and Svans live within the Republic of Georgia. Georgian is the only literary language of the three -- indeed it has been a written language with a distinguished literary culture for 15 centuries -- and thus has served as the language of tuition for all Svans as well as most Mingrelians (and Georgians, of course) since the establishment of universal schooling by the Soviets<sup>5</sup>. Whilst the Georgian language has a generic term kart-v-el-ur-i to refer to the Kartvelian language-family, it lacks the equivalent human-adjective \*kart-v-el-el-i and thus utilises the adjective kart-v-el-i 'Georgian' to refer generically to any of these four peoples. And from circa 1930 upto the census of 1989 the Mingrelians, Svans and the negligible number of Laz resident in Georgia were deprived of the right they had previously enjoyed of designating themselves as Mingrelian, Svan or Laz on their census-returns -- they were required officially to register as 'Georgians'<sup>6</sup>. The majority of these peoples do today seem happy with this arrangement, although there is no reason to carry this terminological inaccuracy over into English, where 'Kartvelian' should be employed as the generic term. Below I shall write 'Georgian' (i.e. within single quotes) whenever rendering the terms kart-v-el-i/kart-ul-i (sc. other than in quotations) in what I regard as their illegitimate sense. It is, of course,

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<sup>1</sup>In the paper *Edinenie* 'Unity' (5, 1991, p.4) Stanislav Lak'oba observes that, since Georgia was not admitted to The League by a vote of 14 to 10 (16 Dec 1920), Georgian dissemination of this map as 'proof' of Georgia's pre-Soviet internationally recognised borders is 'an elementary swindle'.

<sup>2</sup>The Abkhazians' self-designation is aps-wa and their country is a-ps-ny, whilst the Georgians call the people apxaz-i and the country apxaz-et-i.

<sup>3</sup>Self-designation abaza.

<sup>4</sup>Self-designation = kart-v-el-i (cf. kart-ul-i 'Georgian (thing)'), whilst 'Georgia' = sa-kart-v-el-o (literally 'place designated for the Kartvels').

<sup>5</sup>See Enwall (1992) for a discussion of the debate in the early 1930s about the need for a Mingrelian literary language.

<sup>6</sup>There is, of course, no question of the Laz outside Georgia (predominantly in Turkey) conceiving of themselves as 'Georgians'.

important to stress that the deliberate obfuscation just described applies not only to ethnicity, however fundamental this may be -- it also allows the Georgians unceremoniously to appropriate as their own any thing, event or even territory that would more properly carry the epithet Mingrelian, Svan or Laz<sup>7</sup>.

The 1989 Soviet census reveals the following demographic picture for the main populations of Georgia and Abkhazia, compared with that obtaining in 1979:

<b><u>Main Population of Georgia (1979 &amp; 1989)</u></b>				
	<u>1979</u>	<u>1989</u>	<u>1979</u>	<u>1989</u>
Whole Population	4,993,182	5,400,841	100%	100%
'Georgians'	3,433,011	3,787,393	68.8%	70.1%
Armenians	448,000	437,211	9.0%	8.1%
Russians	371,608	341,172	7.4%	6.3%
Azerbaijanis	255,678	307,556	5.1%	5.7%
Ossetians	160,497	164,055	3.2%	3.0%
Greeks	95,105	100,324	1.9%	1.8%
Abkhazians	85,285	95,853	1.7%	1.8%
<b><u>Main Population of Abkhazia (1979 &amp; 1989)</u></b>				
Whole Population	486,082	525,061	100%	100%
Abkhazians	83,097	93,267	17.1%	17.8%
'Georgians'	213,322	239,872	43.9%	45.7%
Armenians	73,350	76,541	15.1%	14.6%
Russians	79,730	74,913	16.4%	14.2%
Greeks	13,642	14,664	2.8%	2.8%

The basic historical facts, to which we now turn, are generally recognised by both sides, but the problems arise over their interpretation.

#### Historical Survey

For all their curiosity the Ancient Greeks were peculiarly uninterested in the diversity of languages attested among the many peoples with whom their travels brought them into contact, all of whom were classified as 'barbarians'. Specifically, they have left us no evidence of the languages spoken by those tribes their writers named as residing along the east coast of the Black Sea, which they loosely termed Colchis, described by the Mingrelian scholar Dzhnashia (1988.295) as 'more a geographical than political term, and even then with uncertain boundaries,' though for Strabo (1st century B.C.) it extended roughly from Pitsunda (northern Abkhazia) to Trebizond (Turkey).

In the general area of Abkhazia a fragment of Hekataios (c.500 B.C.) mentions the He-ni:ok<sup>h</sup>oi 'Charioteers'<sup>8</sup>. Skylax of Karyanda (c.500 B.C.) also mentions Ak<sup>h</sup>aioi; 'Achaean', placed by Melikishvili (1970.400) around Sochi, to their north and yet further north the Kerke:tai '(=)Circassians/Cherkess', though Kuipers (1960.7) queries any link between these ancient and modern ethnonyms. Strabo places the Zugoi; between the 'Charioteers' and the Achaean, and these have been

<sup>7</sup>For example, in the legend of the Golden Fleece Jason visits Colchis, land of King Aetes. Indefinite though the term 'Colchians' is, the Georgians conventionally identify them with the ancestors of the Laz-Mingrelians, and, since they subsume anything Laz-Mingrelian under the term 'Georgian', 'Georgia' and a 'Georgian' king are thus conjured into one of the most celebrated Greek myths.

<sup>8</sup>The etymology of this word is clearly Greek, viz. he:nia 'reins' ± ok<sup>h</sup>os 'bearer' from ek<sup>h</sup>o: 'I have/hold'.

identified with the Circassians too<sup>9</sup>. The Apsilians (gens Absilae) are first mentioned by Pliny Secundus in the 1st century A.D., whilst Arrian a century later introduces the term Abasgoi; ‘Abazgians’, whom he locates to the north of the Apsilians (Apsillai), whilst to their north he places the Sanigai ‘in whose territory lies Sebastopolis’ (K’eCh’aghmadze 1961.43), which is conventionally identified as Abkhazia’s modern capital Sukhum<sup>10</sup>. Thus the Apsilians are to be located around Ochamchira (Greek Gue-no:s). In the 6th century Agathias introduces the Misimianoi, who are separated from the Apsilians by the fort at Tibe;los (modern Ts’ebelda).

According to Arrian, the Apsilians and Abazgians were subjects of the Laz. At the start of the 6th century, with its southern border at the R. Ghalidzga, Apsilia plus Abazgia, Misimiania and the southern part of the territory of the Sanigai were still dependents of the Laz Kingdom (Anchabadze 1959.6-7) or Lazika, better known in Georgian sources as the Kingdom of Egrisi, the older name of Mingrelia, which itself was in a state of formal vassalage to Byzantium. Christianity was introduced by Justinian (543-6). The mediaeval Georgian Chronicles (kartlis cxovreba) already speak of the Abkhazians (apxaz-eb-i). With Byzantium’s power on the wane in the late 8th century, Leon II, potentate of the Abkhazians, took his opportunity and ‘seized (da-i-p’q’r-a) Abkhazia and Egrisi as far as the Likhi [Mountains] and took the title ‘King of the Abkhazians’ (Chronicles 1 p.251 of Q’aukhchishvili’s 1955 edition). The resulting Kingdom of Abkhazia, comprising the whole of today’s Western Georgia, lasted for roughly 200 years until the accession of Bagrat III in 975 produced the first king of a united Georgia. From c.780 to 975 the term ‘Abkhazia’ was generally used to refer to the whole of Western Georgia. During the period while Georgia remained united (upto c.1245) this term became synonymous with sa-kart-v-el-o ‘Georgia’, after which time it resumed its original, restricted sense.

Central power in Georgia collapsed with the appearance of the Mongols in the 13th century, who caused the country to split into two kingdoms, which in their turn fragmented into smaller political units, constituting sovereign princedoms. At the close of the 13th century Georgia as a whole represented a conglomeration of such ‘princedoms’ (Georgian samtavroebi) (Anchabadze 1959.234). In the 14th century the Mingrelian prince Giorgi Dadiani acquired the southern half of Abkhazia, restricting the Abkhazian rulers, the Shervashidzes (or Sharvashidzes, in Abkhaz Chachba), to the north of their domains. Around this period a portion of the population crossed via the Klukhor Pass to become today’s Abazinians in the North Caucasus (Georgian Encyclopaedia vol.1 p.11). Eventually at the close of the 14th century the whole of Abkhazia became vassal of the princedom called Sabediano (essentially Mingrelia),

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<sup>9</sup>cf. Georgian dzhik-i, Abkhaz a-zaxwa.

<sup>10</sup>In Abkhaz AqW’a -- see Hewitt (1992). Moving along the coast from Trebizond Arrian mentions the following tribes: Trapezuntines, Colchians, Drils, Sa:nnoi/Tza:nnoi ‘(=Zans’ (N.B. the Laz self-designation is ch’an-i, the Svan term for a Mingrelian is my-za:n, and the parent-language of Mingrelian and Laz is known as Zan), Macrones (N.B. the Mingrelian self-designation is ma-rg-al-i), ‘Charioteers’ [sic], Zydreitai, Laz, and then the Apsilians. Procopius of Caesarea (fl.c.550) mentions a tribe Brouk<sup>h</sup>oi to the north of the Abazgians, who have been identified with the Ubykhs (cf. Dumezil 1965.15), whose self-designation is twyx (though this has been challenged by Christol 1987.219). All references in the classical authors to tribes in the region have been gathered and translated into Russian by Gulia (1986.215-255).

even if Shervashidze did not obey all the Dadiani commandments<sup>11</sup>. From the early 16th century Abkhazia begins to be mentioned as an independent entity: during this century the Ottoman Turks introduced Islam. The Italian missionary, Lamberti, who lived in Mingrelia from 1633 to 1653, puts its border with Abkhazia at the R. K'odor (1938.5).

Taking advantage of a weakening Mingrelia in the 1680s, the Shervashidzes extended their southern border to the R. Ingur and strengthened their hold over the territory by increasing the Abkhazian population there (Anchabadze 1959.297). In 1705 three Shervashidze brothers divided up the territory, one taking the north (from Gagra to the K'odor), the second the central Abzhywa region (from the K'odor to the Ghalidzga -- N.B. in Abkhaz A-bzhy-wa means 'the-central-people'), and the third, Murzaq'an, the southern part (from the Ghalidzga to the Ingur), and so this province, which is slightly larger than the modern Gali District, became known as Samurzaq'ano (Georgian Encyclopaedia vol.9 p.37).

In 1810 Abkhazia came under the protection of Tsarist Russia -- Eastern Georgia had been annexed in 1801, Mingrelia followed in 1803 and the western province of Imereti in 1804<sup>12</sup>. Both Abkhazia and Mingrelia continued to administer their own provinces until they were taken under full Russian control in 1864, when the war in the North Caucasus ended in Russia's favour, and 1857 respectively<sup>13</sup>. A number of administrative regions were established in 1810 and altered in various ways thereafter. From 1864 to the 1866 Abkhazian rebellion against land-reform Abkhazia was styled the Sukhum Military Department, consisting of the Bzyp, Sukhum, Abzhywa Districts (Russian okrug) plus the prefectorates (Russ. pristavstva) of Ts'ebelda and Samurzaq'ano, all under the control of the Governor-General of Kutaisi (capital of Imereti in Western Georgia). In 1866 these prefectorates were abolished, and four new districts were created within the Sukhum Military Department. Another reform was introduced in 1868 when this Department was split

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<sup>11</sup>The chronicler is Egnatashvili. All references to Abkhazians and Abkhazia in mediaval Georgian sources have been gathered and put into Russian by G. Amichba either without Georgian original (1986) or including it (1988). See the latter (pp.112-113) for this quote.

<sup>12</sup>That Abkhazia was not seen at the time as forming part of any Georgian state (none such existed!) is evident from the imperial document that acknowledged Abkhazia's formally coming under the protection of Tsarist Russia: 'Charter given 17 February 1810 by the Emperor Aleksandr I to the ruler of Abkhazia, Prince Georgij Sharvashidze...We, Aleksandr the First, Emperor and Autocrat of All Russia....Ruler and Sovereign of the Iberian, Kartlian, Georgian and Kabardinian lands...offer Our Imperial grace and favour to the Ruler of the Abkhazian land, Prince Georgij Sharvashidze, Our amiable and true subject. In consideration of your request to enter into permanent subjecthood of the Russian Empire and not doubting your devotion to Our supreme throne as expressed in your letter of commitment despatched in Our Royal Name, we confirm and recognise you, Our loyal subject, as the hereditary Prince of the Abkhazian domains under the protection, orb and defence of the Russian Empire, and incorporating you, your family and all the inhabitants of the Abkhazian domains within the number of Our subjects, we promise you and your descendants Our Imperial grace and favour...' (Frontispiece of the collective **History of Abkhazia** (in Russian), Sukhum, 1991).

<sup>13</sup>Samurzaq'ano was taken under Russian control in 1845 because of Abkhaz-Mingrelian quarrelling over rights to the area (Sakhok'ia 1985.390).

into the regions of Pitsunda (from Gagra to the K'odor) and Ochamchira (from the K'odor to the Ingur). In 1883 the Military Department was downgraded and renamed a Military District, which from 1903 to 1906 was made directly subservient to the Russian authorities responsible for the Caucasus and based in Tbilisi. From 1904 to 1917 Gagra and its environs were re-assigned to the Sochi District of the Black Sea Province. During the first eight decades of the 19th century it is estimated (Dzidzarija 1982) that over 120,000 Abkhazians migrated or were expelled to the Ottoman Empire, especially in 1864 and 1877-8 in the wake of the Russo-Turkish war<sup>14</sup>.

A Soviet commune was established in Abkhazia in 1918 but lasted for only 40 days, when the Mensheviks, who had come to power in Tbilisi, brought Abkhazia under their control. Soviet power was re-established on 4th March 1921, and the Abkhazian Soviet Socialist Republic was recognised by Georgia's revolutionary committee on 21st May. On 16th December a special 'contract of alliance' was signed between Abkhazia and Georgia. On 13th December 1922 Abkhazia (along with Georgia) entered the Transcaucasian Federation. In February 1931 Abkhazia lost its status of a treaty-republic *associated with* Georgia to become a mere autonomous republic *within* Georgia, the position it still holds (at least as far as the Georgian and most other governments around the world are concerned).

### The Argument

The Georgian position is quite simple, not to say simplistic, namely that any territory included within the borders of Georgia at the time of the collapse of the USSR (i.e. in the now universally recognised independent Republic of Georgia) is indisputably Georgian land, so that virtually all articles that have dealt with the problem of Abkhazia since the latest troubles erupted in 1989 have ritualistically described Abkhazia as either 'an indivisible part of Georgia' (Georgian sakartvelos ganuq'opeli nac'ili) or as 'Georgian territory from earliest times' (Geo. jirjveli kartuli t'erit'oria)<sup>15</sup>. The Abkhazian position is that, while (a) they have lived as neighbours to the Kartvelians (specifically the Mingrelians and Svans) for millennia, (b) they have at times decided to join forces with their neighbours (specifically the Mingrelians) in the face of common external threats (e.g. Arabs, Turks, etc.), and (c) they share with the Kartvelians aspects of what might be called general Caucasian culture<sup>16</sup>, nevertheless they remain a distinct North West Caucasian people, occupying the southern reaches of what was once (viz. upto 1864) a common N.W. Caucasian homeland, so that they resent recent Kartvelian encroachment on their land, which has been accompanied by repeated attempts to georgianise/kartvelianise them. They see

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<sup>14</sup>If one includes Abazinians and the whole Ubykh nation, the figure reaches 180,000 (Lakoba 1990.40, quoting Dzidzarija 1982). Numerous descendants of those who suffered this Maxadzhirstvo 'exile' live today all over what was then the Ottoman Empire, principally though in Turkey, where, apart from the Ubykhs, they have with a greater or less degree of success retained their language(s) and culture(s).

<sup>15</sup>Indeed, there were indications at the end of the 1980s that Georgia would have liked to extend its borders into Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaydzhan and Russia to incorporate those areas noted on Map 1 (Appendix 1) by dotted lines. This map was included in the publicity-material for the Rustaveli Symposium held in Finland (11-12 April 1991, Tarku) and was no doubt the one shewn by Zviad Gamsakhurdia to a visiting foreign correspondent from Moscow in July 1989 (personal communication).

<sup>16</sup>Including that generous hospitality which many visitors to Georgia have tended naively to assume to be exclusively a Georgian trait for the simple reason that the Caucasians with whom most Westerners come into contact are Georgians.

today the main threat to the continuing viability of their language and culture as coming from Tbilisi (not Moscow), which leads them to conclude that to secure a viable future they need real autonomy (not the fictional autonomy of the last 60 years) from Tbilisi, which will leave them freer to cooperate with other North Caucasian peoples<sup>17</sup>. Details of the argument are now examined.

(i) The Historical Settlement of Abkhazia

The Abkhazians, not unreasonably, see the classical ethnonym Apsilian as a Graeco-Roman attempt to render their self-designation aps-wa, whilst the classical Abazgians are conventionally viewed as the ancestors of today's Abazinians, whose self-designation is abaza and who lived somewhere in Abkhazia prior to their 14th century migration north-eastwards. The classical Sanigai are identified with the tribe/people called in Abkhaz a-saj (plural a-saj-kWa), who once lived around the north of the territory. The Turkish traveller Evliya Chelebi visited the region in the 1640s and has left us a sample of the language he ascribed to the 'Sadzian Abazas' (Puturidze 1971.107) -- it is clearly Ubykh (located around modern Sochi). As for the Misimians, they have been connected with the Abkhazian clan Marshania, whose ancestral fiefdom incorporated Ts'ebelda (cf. Anchabadze 1959.11-16; 1964.169-183). Stress is laid on the fact that it was only after the tragedy of the mass-migrations in the 19th century that non-Abkhazians began to settle in any significant numbers in Abkhazia, and even so Abkhazians remained in a majority until at the earliest (see flii below) the 1926 census. As late as 1886 the breakdown of the permanent population was: Abkhazians 58,961, Mingrelians 3,474, Georgians 515, Russians 972, Armenians 1,337, Estonians 637, Greeks 2,056, Others 1,460<sup>18</sup>. Subsequent censuses (prior to 1979) present the following picture for the three largest ethnic groups:

**Demographic changes in Abkhazia (1897-1970)**

	1897	1926	1939	1959	1970
Abkhazians	58,697	55,918	56,147	61,197	77,276
Kartvelians	25,875	67,494	91,067	158,221	199,595
Russians	5,135	20,456	60,201	86,715	92,889

At least two strategies have been adopted by the Kartvelians when advancing arguments in support of their contention that the land belongs to them. The less objectionable accepts that, while Abkhazians may have age-old rights in Abkhazia, Kartvelians nevertheless not only possess the status of co-aboriginals but have always formed the majority-population, although this latter assertion is immediately faced with the problematic evidence contained in the population-figures just quoted. The wilder stance denies the Abkhazians any presence in Abkhazia until at most 500 years ago. Strategy-(a) would perhaps grudgingly allow the correlations Abazgians = Abazinians, Apsilians = Abkhazians but would follow Eusebius of Caesarea (c.260-

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<sup>17</sup>Not necessarily muslim peoples. It has been part of the Kartvelian campaign to try to tar the Abkhazians with the brush of islamic fundamentalism, though, as the 'Father of Abkhaz Literature' D. Gulia wrote in his autobiography: 'We Abkhazians are equally cool to both islam and christianity'. Even this simple fact has eluded most foreign journalists for at least three years, as evidenced (to take just one of innumerable examples) by Peter Pringle's reference to the 'Muslim Abkhas[sic]' in **The Independent on Sunday** (11 October 1992). For the Abkhazians in Abkhazia religion of any kind is of NO importance.

<sup>18</sup>The source is *Svod statisticheskix dannyx o naselenii Zakavkazskogo kraja, izvlechennyx iz posemejnyx spisikov 1886* [Collection of statistical data on the population of the Transcaucasian district, drawn from family-lists 1886], Tiflis 1893.

340) in seeing an equation between the Sanigai and the Sannoi (Dzhanashia 1959.9-11), which latter people everyone accepts were Kartvelians, despite the geographical distance separating these two tribes according to the classical authors, and then conclude that the coastal strip of Western Georgia was entirely inhabited by Georgian tribes (K'ech'agmadze 1961.12, quoted by Gunba 1989.6). As for the Misimians, classicist Simon Q'aukhchishvili had suggested as early as 1936 (p.174) that they were a Svan tribe -- the Svans' self-designation is mu-shwan (plural = shwan-ar). However, Q'aukhchishvili's over-enthusiasm for detecting Kartvelian roots is illustrated by his 1965 statement (p.28) that the Greek He-ni+ok<sup>h</sup>oi was Kartvelian in its etymology!

The notorious strategy-(b) is most closely associated with the name of P'avle Ingoroq'va, who propounded it in the late 1940s in the journal *mnatobi* 'Luminary'. He then repeated the argument as chapter 4 of his monumental *giorgi merchule* (1954). In short he tried to argue that the 'Abkhazians' referred to in mediaeval Georgian sources had been a Kartvelian tribe who had no genetic affiliation to the Abkhazians of today. These last, he claimed, migrated from the North Caucasus only in the 17th century, displacing the Kartvelians resident there and adopting the ethnonym of the dislodged population. In partial support of this extraordinary theory he adduced the testimony of Evliya CHElebi to the effect that the Abkhazians of his day were speakers of Mingrelian<sup>19</sup>. Ingoroq'va's theory was favourably received in print by (amongst others) Q'aukhchishvili and phonetician Giorgi Akhvlediani<sup>20</sup>. Though Ingoroq'va was discredited when the anti-Abkhazian policy of 1933-53 was reversed, it is essential to mention this distortion of history here, because his ideas are being enthusiastically re-disseminated by certain individuals. In *lit'erat'uruli sakartvelo* 'Literary Georgia' (21 April 1989) critic Rost'om Chkheidze published a lavish praise of Ingoroq'va, urging his academic re-habilitation for his 'contribution to the study of the history of Western Georgia'. Deposed president Zviad Gamsakhurdia himself in the unofficial *Letopis' 4* 'Chronicle 4' (1989), a pamphlet instructing the Mingrelians how to conduct anti-Abkhazian agitation, urged them to read Ingoroq'va to learn how they are the true inheritors of the territory of Abkhazia. Again in the paper *kartuli pilmi* 'Georgian Film' (6 Sept 1989) Gamsakhurdia sought to lecture the late A. Sakharov on how the Abkhazians had come to Abkhazia only '2-3 centuries ago'! In a two-part article published over the New Year 1989-90 in the paper *saxalxo ganatleba* 'Popular Education' the Svan linguist, Aleksandre Oniani, strove to buttress the Ingoroq'va-hypothesis, even though his date for the Abkhazians' arrival on 'Georgian' [sic!] soil was 400-500 years ago, presumably because he knew that CHElebi's text when correctly translated does not support a 17th century influx<sup>21</sup>. And finally historian Prof. Mariam Lortkipanidze in **Literary Georgia** (16 Feb 1990)

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<sup>19</sup>Those Southern Abkhazians living alongside Mingrelians have tended to be bilingual in this language, and CHElebi's text actually supports an identical state of affairs for his day too, when he says that the Southern Abkhazians also spoke Mingrelian. Ingoroq'va's mistranslation is ascribed by Abkhazian historian Anchabadze (1959.295) to CHElebi's Russian translator, F. Brun.

<sup>20</sup>A variant has now been proposed by Academician Tamaz Gamq'relidze (honorary member of both the British and American Academies!) in the journal *Macne* [Reporter] (2, 1991, pp.7-16), subsequently reproduced in Russian translation in the Moscow journal *Questions of Linguistics*, of which Gamq'relidze is editor! For a detailed rebuttal see Hewitt (1992a).

<sup>21</sup>For a full discussion with counter-arguments see Hewitt (1992).

dignifies Ingoroq'va by describing him as the author of one of three 'scholarly' [sic!] theories on the ethno-genesis of the Abkhazians. Although Lortkipanidze makes it clear that she herself does not subscribe to the Ingoroq'va-view, she still states: 'It is precisely from the 17th century that there appear the first reports of the existence of a spoken language different from Georgian (Mingrelian) to the north of the R. K'odor'<sup>22</sup> Perhaps Lortkipanidze is ignorant of the existence of the travel-diary of one Johannes de Galonifontibus, who passed through the Caucasus in 1404 and wrote: 'Beyond these [Circassians] is Abkhazia, a small hilly country...They have their own language...To the east of them, in the direction of Georgia, lies the country called Mingrelia...They have their own language...Georgia is to the east of this country. Georgia is not an integral whole...They have their own language' (Tardy 1978). However that may be, Lortkipanidze most certainly was and is aware that the great Georgian queen Tamar (1184-1213) gave the nick-name 'Lasha' to her son Giorgi, which term the Georgian Chronicles interpret as 'enlightener of the world in the language of the Apsars.' In Abkhaz the word for 'bright' is *a-lasha*, which surely suggests that 'Apsar' is an attempted rendition of *aps-wa*<sup>23</sup>.

In fact, as Anchabadze (1959:221) points out, it was the Georgian historian D. Bakradze (1889:272-273) who first suggested the Abkhazians were relative newcomers onto 'Georgian' territory, even though Ingoroq'va nowhere alludes to this earlier work. Bakradze noted that in his day the Mingrelian language was located between the rivers Ingur and Tskhenis-ts'q'ali, whereas in the XVIIth century its range reportedly extended beyond the Ingur to the R. K'odor (see the earlier reference to Lamberti). Thus, in Bakradze's view (as later in the view of Ingoroq'va), Kartvelian toponyms are found even further into Abkhazia; as example he quoted an older variant of 'Sukhum', namely 'Tskhum(i)', which he said means 'hot' (cf. Geo. *cxeli*) in Mingrelian and which he derived(!) from Georgian *cxuneba* ('causing to heat up'), although 'hot' in Mingrelian is actually *chxe*! Georgian logic then led him to make the following deduction: 'We think that the Abkhazians, after their transmigration from over the mountains, being the more powerful, pressed down upon the Mingrelians. These latter because of their weakness conceded to them their territory. Evidence for this opinion is provided to us by a fact from [French traveller -- BGH] Chardin at the end of the XVIIth century. Chardin was told by Lamberti, who had spent a long time in Mingrelia, that the Abkhazians and the Mingrelians are divided by the R. K'odor, and that to the north of the K'odor Abkhaz is found, whereas to its south is Georgian. We have no reason not to believe Chardin, and, if after the XVIIth century the Mingrelian language was so far driven from the K'odor's left bank by the Abkhaz language that now it is squeezed in between the Ingur and the Tskhenis-ts'q'ali, then it should be clear that little by little from right ancient times the Abkhaz

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<sup>22</sup>Lortkipanidze has in fact been one of the most persistently belligerent and outspoken 'academic' opponents of the Abkhazians over recent years. In 1990 she published a tri-lingual (Georgian, Russian, English) brochure encapsulating her theories on the Abkhazians and Abkhazia. For a rebuttal readers may consult Voronov (1992).

<sup>23</sup>Q'aukhchishvili, however, on p.636 of volume II of his edition of these Chronicles glosses the term 'Apsars' as 'one of the Georgian tribes in Western Georgia', for which view, of course, he adduces no evidence at all. It should perhaps be also noted that the street on which stands the Linguistics Institute of the Georgian Academy of Sciences has now been re-named 'Ingoroq'va Street' from its former designation as 'Dzerzhinski Street'.

language has been taking hold of the territory of the Mingrelian language, and, as we think, at that time...the whole of Ts'ebelda and Abkhazia, if not in their entirety, at least the greater part will still have been likewise held by the Mingrelian tribe.' Readers may decide for themselves whether this is a 'logic' they would aspire to emulate!

(ii) The question of Samurzaq'ano (largely today's Gali District)

Given what was said above about Abkhazia's historically fluctuating southern border, it might have been expected that a specific border-issue would have developed over the possession of Samurzaq'ano (largely today's Gali District). Perhaps because the question of Abkhazia is an all-or-nothing struggle, no particular arguments currently centre around this southern province, but this has not always been the case, and the one-time debate over the Abkhazian vs Mingrelian occupation of Samurzaq'ano (and of Abkhazia in general) is a convenient bridge between the problems of history and georgianisation.

In 1877 the Georgian educationalist and writer, Iak'ob Gogebashvili, addressed a series of newspaper-articles (republished in volume I of his collected works in 1952, pp.90-120) to the theme 'Who should be settled in Abkhazia=' The last wave of Abkhazian migration to Turkey had just occurred, and Gogebashvili was moved in view of the fact that 'Abkhazia will never again be able to see its own children' (p.90) to ask who should be sent in as 'colonisers'<sup>24</sup>. Because of the extent of malarial marshes (since drained) 'to which the Abkhazians had become acclimatised over many centuries in their own region' (p.92) Gogebashvili argued that the obvious colonisers should consist of Mingrelians, since the climate in their territory was most similar to that prevailing in Abkhazia. In addition they were the most adept of the Kartvelians at adapting to new conditions, there was a shortage of land in Mingrelia, already in Sukhum and Ochamchira they had gained control of commerce, and finally 'the Mingrelians by themselves would rush to Abkhazia, when in order to settle other nationalities there the use of artificial means is necessary' (p.98)<sup>25</sup>. Confirming this when writing in 1903 and referring to Abkhazia's central region, leading Mingrelian intellectual, Tedo Sakhok'ia, speaks of an increase in local commercial activity 'especially after the Mingrelians began to flood into the district...following the [Russo-Caucasian] war' (1985.401).

However, in the course of his discussion Gogebashvili appends a revealing comment to his mention of the residents of Samurzaq'ano: 'From a political viewpoint the Mingrelians are just as Russian as the Muscovites, and in this way they can exercise influence over those tribes with whom they happen to have a relationship. A striking proof of this is given by the fact...that, thanks to Mingrelian influence, the Samurzaq'anoans -- **a branch of the Abkhazian race** -- who have permanent intercourse with the Mingrelians, have become entirely faithful subjects of Russia' (pp.109-110, stress added). This observation is significant in view of the fact

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<sup>24</sup>The 1952 editors felt it necessary to gloss this term on p.93 thus: 'Gogebashvili here and below uses the word 'coloniser' not in its modern sense but to mean the persons settled there'. Obviously they sensed some discomfort over one of the leading Georgians of the 1870s describing Kartvelian settlers on territory that had been by 1952 long and strenuously argued to be Georgian soil as 'colonisers'!

<sup>25</sup>The 1952 editors note: 'Gogebashvili's ideas on the settlement of Abkhazia's empty territory by Georgians achieved their actual realisation under the conditions of Soviet power' (p.93). This unequivocally confirms the Abkhazian complaint, discussed below, about the manipulation of local demography in the 1930-40s.

that in his well-known school text-book *bunebis k'ari* 'Nature's Door' Gogebashvili subsequently wrote that 'the Mingrelians and the Samurzaq'anoans are one people'<sup>26</sup>!

In 1899 a debate took place over the ethnic status of the Samurzaq'anoans in the pages of the *Chernomorskij Vestnik* 'Black Sea Herald' (Batumi) between the Kartvelians K. Mach'avariani and, it is believed, T. Sakhok'ia, who employed the pseudonym 'Samurzaq'an', the latter arguing for their Mingrelian ethnicity, the former that they were Abkhazians. On the 8 May the following conversation between Mach'avariani and the Samurzaq'anoan peasant Uru Gua was reported: '[UG] Why are you putting these questions to me? [KM] Some people maintain that the Samurzaq'anoans are Mingrelians, that they spoke and speak Mingrelian, and that the whole of Samurzaq'ano formed part of the principality of Mingrelia. [UG] What's that you say? I'll tell you this. I well recall my father and grandfather. They never spoke Mingrelian. Everyone conversed in Abkhaz. Take the communities of Bedia, Chkhortoli, Okumi, Gali, Tsarche -- everywhere you'll hear Abkhaz amongst adults. If in Saberio, Ot'obaia, Dikhazurgi they speak Mingrelian, this is thanks to the residents of these villages having close contacts with the Mingrelians. Don't our names, surnames, manners, customs and even our superstitions prove we are Abkhazians and not Mingrelians? In the [18]50s you'd almost never hear Mingrelian anywhere in Samurzaq'ano<sup>27</sup>. Upto then a Mingrelian was a curiosity. May I ask you who you are? [KM) A Georgian. [UG] Where did you learn Mingrelian and Abkhaz? [KM] I was born in Mingrelia but grew up in Samurzaq'ano and Abkhazia.'

In 1913 Mach'avariani put the number of Abkhazians in Samurzaq'ano at 33,639. And the charge is made by Abkhazians today that by fiat of the Menshevik authorities in 1919 30,000 or so Samurzaq'anoan Abkhazians were arbitrarily reclassified as 'Georgian', a practice they claim that was continued for the census of 1926. For this reason, they say, the accuracy of this census in Abkhazia must remain open to severe doubt. And indeed a glance at the figures for the Abkhazian vs Kartvelian population of Abkhazia and their relative balances between 1897 and 1926 does suggest that something odd was happening. Lezhava, a Mingrelian who works at the Abkhazian Research Institute in Sukhum, speaks of 'natural assimilation' (1989.13ff.). Whatever the truth may be, all agree that today the Gali District has to all intents and purposes been fully mingrelianised.

In a pamphlet published by the Rustaveli Society in 1990 entitled *Georgia -- A Little Empire?* (designed to answer this charge made by A. Sakharov in his article in

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<sup>26</sup>It is not known when or why Gogebashvili changed his mind. The 1868 edition of this work does not contain the relevant section, but it is included in the 7th edition of 1892, which is the earliest version at my disposal. I thank the late Michael Daly of the Bodleian Library in Oxford for making it accessible to me.

<sup>27</sup>Bell observed in 1840 (p.53) that Abkhaz was spoken down to the Mingrelian frontier (at the Ingur), which would seem to confirm this. However G. Rosen writing *U?ber das Mingrelische, Suanische und Abchasische* in 1844 placed the linguistic frontier between Abkhaz and Mingrelian at the Erti-ts'q'ali (i.e. somewhat to the north). Bell included in his Appendix XIV the Abkhaz word agrua 'slave'. This is clearly the same as today's ethnonym a-gyr-wa 'Mingrelian' and tends to support the often-heard boast that the first Mingrelians brought into Abkhazia were unskilled peasants to do the manual work disdained by the Abkhazians. Sakhok'ia (1985.399) himself talks of the Abkhazians having been spoiled by nature and possessed of such a dislike of physical labour that they have to summon a carpenter from elsewhere just to fit a plank of wood!

*Ogone/k* , July 1989) I. Antelava (1990) not only queries the ethnicity of those residing between Sukhum [sic!] and the Ingur but asks how the Abkhazian leaders can lay claim to Sukhum itself ‘the majority-population of which always was and remains Georgian’ (p.25) -- in the associated footnote he observes that in 1886 Sukhum had only 3 Abkhazian residents! This is a good illustration of the misuse to which statistics lend themselves, for there was a simple explanation of this ‘fact’. It is stated by Sakhok’ia (1985.381): ‘The former indigenous Abkhazians were deprived of the right to take up residence near the town of Sukhum (for a distance of 20 kilometers), on the grounds they were untrustworthy elements’ (sc. for their pro-Turkish sympathies). Needless to say, Antelava did not deem it necessary to impart these minor details to his readers!

### (iii) Georgianisation

The **Abkhazian Letter** [= AL] is an 87-page document signed by 60 leading Abkhazians and completed on 17 June 1988 for transmission to Gorbachev. The hope was that the Abkhazians too could take advantage of Perestrojka and finally resolve the problems of Abkhazia that were ascribed to their having been dominated by Tbilisi for so long. The **Letter** defends the historical distinctness (i.e. non-Kartvelian status) of the Abkhazians and presents a list of the grievances held against the Kartvelians. It dates the start of georgianisation to the first influx of Kartvelians in the latter half of the last century (p.36). In a sense this is beyond dispute, but it is not necessary to impute any hostile intent at this stage -- after all, why should someone not have the benefit of land where, as one Abkhazian once put it, ‘all you have to do is throw seeds out of your window, and Nature does the rest to bestow a vegetable-plot upon you’?! But the situation had certainly altered by the time of the acquisition of power in Tbilisi by the Mensheviks in 1918, who ‘used fire and sword in their passage through South Ossetia, bent on the violent georgianisation of these peoples...Zhordania took the route of aggression, deciding to employ all force to capture the whole Sochi District as far as Tuapse...lands which had no links with Georgia proper’ (AL p.6). Furthermore, ‘ignoring the specifics of Abkhazia, where the majority-population spoke Russian, the Mensheviks in pursuance of realising a programme for the ‘nationalisation’ of the region forced upon schools ‘the obligatory teaching of the Georgian (State) language’.

To jump for a moment to modern times, the draft of a **State Programme for the Georgian Language**, which appeared in the autumn of 1988 and which was promulgated into law in August 1989, with its clauses about the obligatory teaching of Georgian in all schools within the republic and tests in Georgian language and literature as pre-requisites for entry into higher education re-kindled the old worries of 1918-21 (and not only among Georgia’s Abkhazian minority) about being saddled with a language they regard as totally unnecessary. It may seem odd that Georgian was not always an obligatory subject in the republic’s schools<sup>28</sup>, but, to concentrate on Abkhazia, the reason for this is clear -- although Kartvelians constitute around 45% of the population, these are almost wholly Mingrelians, who tend to speak amongst themselves in Mingrelian, even if they also know Georgian from their schooling. And so, Georgian is actually very sparsely heard in Abkhazia. Abkhazians are either bilingual in Abkhaz and Russian or trilingual in these two tongues plus Mingrelian; not unnaturally, then, they regard the imposition of yet another language as a threat to the numerically least strong of their languages, namely Abkhaz. Supposing that Georgia, still incorporating Abkhazia, were to break all ties with the Russian-

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<sup>28</sup>Language-planning in Georgia is discussed in Hewitt (1989).

speaking world, then a natural process of evolution would eventually replace Russian with Georgian amongst Georgia's minorities. But to have tried to force Georgian on unwilling recipients in the conditions prevailing in 1988-9 was to invite trouble and lend credence to the widespread belief that an independent Georgia would see the completion of the georgianisation-strategy of 1918-1921 (and 1933-1953).

What exactly happened in Abkhazia in the years following the Russian Revolution<sup>29</sup>? The collapse of Tsarist control removed the hand of St. Petersburg from Abkhazia, and on 20 October Abkhazia, as part of the Union of United Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus (founded in May 1917 and becoming in November 1917 the Mountain Republic), signed the union-treaty that created the so-called South-East Union, which also incorporated other regions of southern Russia. The Chechen A. Sheripov headed the Union of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus. The idea of self-determination for Abkhazia was first mooted by the first (of three) Abkhaz People's Council (i.e. prior to any specifically Bolshevik organisation in the region) at a meeting in November 1917, attended by A. Chkhenk'eli from Tbilisi, who tried unsuccessfully to prevent Abkhazia uniting with their North Caucasian brethren, although the Gali District indicated its growing orientation towards Tbilisi by supporting Chkhenk'eli's stance. The People's Councils of both Abkhazia and Georgia met in Tbilisi on February 1918 to establish relations between the two (Chkhenk'eli again failing to wean the Abkhazians away from association with the North Caucasians). The agreement included these three points:

- '(i) To re-establish a single, undivided Abkhazia within the frontiers from the R. Ingur to the R. Mzymta, into the composition of which enter Abkhazia proper and Samurzaq'ano, or that which is today's [sc. 1918] Sukhum District [= Suxumskij Okrug];
- (ii) The form of the future political construction of a united Abkhazia must be worked out in accordance with the principle of national self-determination in the Constituent Assembly of Abkhazia, convened on democratic principles;
- (iii) In case Abkhazia and Georgia should wish to enter into political treaty relations with other national states, they are mutually obliged to hold preliminary discussions with each other in this regard.'

A Bolshevik regime held sway in Abkhazia for just 40 days (8 April to 17 May) in 1918, being put down by Georgian troops under V. Dzhugheli, who then managed to create a second Abkhaz People's Council, which this time was led by Tbilisi-orientated Mensheviks. During this period the Batumi Peace Conference was convened (11-16 May) at which the independence of the North Caucasian Mountain Republic (including Abkhazia) was recognised. However, ten days after this conference the Transcaucasian Confederation fell apart, and Georgia declared its independence (26 May), at which time there was, of course, no suggestion that its territory incorporated Abkhazia. The pro-Georgian faction in the People's Council pressed for a treaty with Tbilisi, and the delegation that went to Tbilisi in June under the leadership of the Samurzaq'anoan R. K'ak'uba(va) granted itself the authority to sign this 'Treaty' on 8 June, even though the People's Council back in Sukhum was discussing a somewhat different draft on 10 June for signing the following day. The first clause (of eight) even so makes clear the independent status of Abkhazia: 'The concluded treaty will be reviewed by the National Congress of Abkhazia which will finally determine the political construction of Abkhazia and also the mutual relations

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<sup>29</sup>For full details on this period readers should consult Chapter VI (pp.281-325) of the collective **History of Abkhazia** (in Russian), Sukhum, 1991.

between Georgia and Abkhazia'. However, it was clause 6 which gave rise to what many Abkhazians see as the real start of their tragedy vis-a-vis their relations with Georgia. The clause reads: 'For the speedy establishment of revolutionary order and the organisation of stable rule the Georgian Democratic Republic sends to the Abkhaz People's Council for its aid and for it to direct a detachment of the Red Guard until the need for it has passed'. With this as excuse General Mazniev (Mazniashvili) was despatched, and on 23 June he promptly declared himself 'governor' of the so-styled 'General Guberniate of Abkhazia'. This action was seen at the time and has been interpreted ever since by the Abkhazians quite simply as a military occupation. On 17 July the Orthodox priest G. Tumanov stated: 'Abkhazia was independent and could not have been a province, and, if this is now impossible, then the Abkhazians are ready to follow the Japanese custom of *harakiri*, so as only to die as free men on their own soil.'

Since the independence of the Mountain Republic (including Abkhazia) had only recently been recognised at the Batumi Conference, Prince Aleksandr Shervashidze appealed for help to fellow-Abkhazians resident in Turkey. Of this the leader of Menshevik Georgia, Noe Zhordania, somewhat tendentiously wrote in his memoirs: 'Malcontent with us, Prince Shervashidze ran to the North Caucasus and in one meeting made a present to it of Abkhazia. Instead of asking him by what right or on whose authority he was speaking, they then and there accepted this gift and declared to us their pretensions: 'Abkhazia is ours, begone from there!' These were the kind of neighbours we had' (**My Life**, Stanford, 1968).

On 26 July Mazniev advanced as far as Tuapse. 'Justification' for this move was later offered at the Paris Conference of 1 May 1919 by I. Odishelidze, who argued that the whole of the Black Sea coast had been 'Georgian land' in the XI-XIIIth centuries, that Sochi was a 'pure Georgian town' and that the whole Black Sea District had been an 'old Georgian province'. He further asseverated that the Tsar's minister Ermolov had 'distributed as gifts Georgian [sic!] territory to Russian bureaucrats and generals'. The White Russian general Denikin took a rather different view of these events: 'In the first period, that of Turkish-German occupation, the lusts of Georgia were directed towards the Black Sea Guberniate. The weakness of the Black Sea area served as cause for this, the battle with the Bolsheviks served as the excuse, the agreement and support of the Germans, who had occupied and strengthened Adler, served as the guarantee.' The pro-German leanings of the Georgian Mensheviks should not be forgotten...

The second Abkhaz People's Council was disbanded. The main Abkhazian deputies of a non-Georgian persuasion were arrested and sent to Tbilisi. They were released within a short time of the 'democratic' elections to the third Council at the insistence of the British General Thomson in December 1918 -- the Germans had left Georgia after their defeat in World War I in November. At a meeting with Thomson's colleague, Officer Stocks, the Georgians produced an Abkhazian stooge, Marganadze, to try to deceive the English side by his statement: 'I am an Abkhazian and serve the Georgian Government. I must convince you that there are no hostile relations between the Abkhazians and Georgia'! Twenty-seven of the forty deputies to the third Council elected in February 1919 were openly supportive of the Tbilisi government.

It was not only native Abkhazians in Abkhazia who suffered at the hands of the Georgian Mensheviks during this period. On 26 February 1919 Denikin appealed to the head of the British military mission, Gen. Briggs: 'Official representatives of the Armenian National Union of the Sochi District have appealed to me with a request that I defend the Armenians of the Sukhum District, especially the settlements around

Gudauta, from the use of force by the Georgian forces. With the cleansing of the Sochi District by Georgian troops the Georgian military authorities laid a tax upon the Armenian settlements of the Gudauta Area of the Sukhum District with a contribution of 1,000 puds of maize, hay and beans from every village. The relevant villagers, having no produce, could not fulfil the demands laid upon them by the Georgians. Then on 10 February the Georgian forces surrounded the villages and began to shoot at the peaceful population with artillery and machine-gun fire...I beseech Your Excellency to bring to the attention of the supreme British command in Transcaucasia my protest at the use of force against the defenceless Armenian population and my request for energetic pressure on the Georgian government for the cessation of these acts of brutality.' Such attacks caused many Armenians and Greeks to leave Abkhazia. In 1920 Gagra and Gumista suffered the importation of outsiders from regions of western Georgia, a demographic tactic that was to be repeated on a wider scale in Abkhazia almost a generation later.

The awarding of autonomous status to Abkhazia in March 1919 is ascribed to pressure from both the Volunteer Army to the north and the British. The attitude of the British to the behaviour of the Georgian Menshevik government may be crystallised in the statement of Gen. Briggs to E. Gegech'k'ori: 'The Abkhazians are discontent with the Georgian government and actually declare that, if they are given arms, they themselves will purge the district of Georgian forces. The Georgians behave there worse than the Bolsheviks: they seize homes and land and carry out the socialisation and nationalisation of property.' On 6 June Deputy I. Margania announced: 'It is well known to many of you that the former Special Commissar Chkhik'vishvili sent a telegram to the effect that he had found Abkhazia in the grip of anarchy. I declare that it is the Georgian government itself which is causing the strengthening of anarchy...'

The third Abkhaz People's Council split between the Abkhazians and the Independents, on the one hand, and the pro-Georgian group, on the other, with only one Abkhazian, Arzakan Emukhvari, prepared to work with the latter. However, this Council was only required by Tbilisi to give the air of some legitimacy to the 'autonomous status' supposedly enjoyed by Abkhazia. In fact, this autonomy was a sham, and control remained firmly in the hands of the Mensheviks in the Georgian capital. A general assessment of the Menshevik government of 1918-1921 through the eyes of a foreigner was given by Carl Eric Bechhofer, when he wrote: 'The free and independent Social-Democratic government of Georgia will ever remain in my memory as a classical example of an imperialistic minor nationality both in relation to its seizure of territory to within its own borders and in relation to the bureaucratic tyranny inside the state. Its chauvinism exceeds the highest limits' (**In Denikin's Russia and the Caucasus, 1919-1920**, London 1921)<sup>30</sup>.

It will, thus, come as no great surprise that 'the establishment of Soviet power on 4 March 1921 was received by the peoples of Abkhazia as liberation from occupation by the Georgian Democratic Republic and the repressive regime of the ruling Menshevik Party' (AL 79). But the undermining of the subsequently declared Soviet Socialist Republic of Abkhazia (31 March 1921) by its demotion first to a 'Treaty Republic' (16 Dec 1921) and finally to an autonomous republic within

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<sup>30</sup>For the views of a Georgian, see the constant references to chauvinism against the minorities in his home-republic throughout Joseph Stalin's collected articles and speeches (**Marxism and the National and Colonial Question**, Martin Lawrence, London, no date).

Georgia (Feb 1931) is credited to Stalin, who held responsibility for the nationalities at the time (AL p.10), to Stalin's fellow-countryman and chief-lieutenant in the Caucasus as secretary of the Caucasian Bureau, Sergo Ordzhonik'idze (AL p.11), and in general to the manoeuvrings of the authorities in Tbilisi in alliance with (fellow-Georgian) Stalin at The Centre<sup>31</sup>.

Mingrelian Lavrent'i Beria was appointed head of the Georgian Party in 1931 and chairman of the Transcaucasian Party Committee in 1932. From 1933 he instituted an anti-Abkhazian policy that was maintained and strengthened till the deaths of both himself and Stalin in 1953. Quite independently of 'The Terror', which affected all Soviet republics (including Georgia's Kartvelian residents) in 1936-38, Abkhazia experienced a forced importation of various nationalities, especially Mingrelians and Georgians from such western provinces as Mingrelia, Rach'a and Lechkhumi-- Abkhazians recall truck-loads of these, often unwilling, immigrants being dumped with nowhere to live and thus having to be given temporary refuge by the locals themselves. The effect of this was to reduce the Abkhazian percentage of the population to below 20%. In 1938, when Cyrillic was being introduced as base for the writing-systems of all the 'Young Written Languages' (such as, indeed, Abkhaz) that had been awarded the status of 'literary languages' early in the Soviet period as part of the drive to eradicate illiteracy<sup>32</sup>, Abkhaz (along with Ossetic in Georgia's autonomous region of South Ossetia) was forced to adopt the Georgian script (until 1953). From the mid-40s, under K'andid Chark'viani's stewardship of the Georgian Party (1938-1952) with Ak'ak'i Mgeladze in control in Sukhum (and subsequently succeeding Chark'viani in Tbilisi, 1952-1953), teaching in and of Abkhaz was abolished, and Abkhaz-language schools were turned into Georgian-language schools<sup>33</sup>. At this time the publishing of materials in Abkhaz was stopped. The belief

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<sup>31</sup>It is common practice today to downplay Stalin's georgianness, the popular view being that he was completely russianised. Western commentators who propose/accept this assessment have, on the whole, very little direct experience (if any) of matters Georgian (especially the all-important language). Consider, then, in this regard the assessment of someone who was well acquainted with both the language and history of this land, David Marshall Lang, who wrote in his **A Modern History of Soviet Georgia** (1962, p.20): 'Every medal has its reverse. In many Georgians, quick wit is matched by a quick temper, and a proneness to harbour rancour. The bravery associated with heroes like Prince Bagration, an outstanding general of the Napoleonic wars, is matched by the cruelty and vindictiveness found in such individuals as Stalin and Beria.'

<sup>32</sup>The absence of any development of a literary Abkhaz language during the Abkhazian Kingdom and its reliance on Georgian as state- and church-language is used by the Kartvelians as a further argument that, historically, Abkhazia must have seen itself as an ordinary part of Georgia. The use of Latin in mediayval European liturgy or of Greek, Aramaic etc.. as state-languages in non-Greek or non-Aramaic countries is ignored.

<sup>33</sup>Those who may suspect that Russian schools might have replaced these Abkhazian schools should note the conclusion of the relevant commission's report of 12 March 1945: it reads: 'Knowledge of the Georgian language by a significant part of the Abkhazian populace, the lexical similarity of the Georgian and Abkhaz languages, and their shared alphabet [the Abkhaz alphabet was changed from Latin to Georgian only in 1938 -- BGH] dictate the necessity of switching teaching in Abkhazian schools to the Georgian language'. The whole document is reproduced on pp.481-483

is widespread that there was a plan to transport the Abkhazians in their entirety to Central Asia, and that the theory of Ingoroq'va, discussed above, was designed-to-order as a kind of 'scholarly justification' for their removal from territory to which, it would have been said (much as it is being said even now in certain quarters!), they have no justifiable claim. One Abkhazian, prominent in the 40s, is reported to have revealed prior to his death that the authorities had wished to avoid the upheaval that had accompanied the transportation eastwards during the war-years of all the other peoples whose cases are now so well-documented and that they were convinced anyway that, after both Beria's artificial merging of Kartvelian elements with the native residents, who were now swamped in their own republic, as well as Chark'viani-Mgeladze's closure of the schools and local publishing, enough had probably been done to effect the georgianisation (?mingrelianisation) within a couple of generations of all remaining Abkhazians.

Information for the period 1953-1979 is most readily accessible in the study made by American sovietologist Darrell Slider (1985). He shews that, although the extremes of the discriminatory policy towards the Abkhazians, their language and culture were halted and to a degree reversed by the re-opening of schools, re-entry of Abkhazians into local politics and the re-emergence of radio-broadcasting and publishing in Abkhaz, all was not well *in comparison with the other regions of Soviet Georgia* in the spheres of access to higher education, backwardness in industrialisation, and deprivation to the tune of 40% by the Tbilisi authorities in terms of the local budget as measured on a *per capita* basis. Matters came to head in 1977-8<sup>34</sup> in connection with the Union-wide deliberations over the shape of the new Brezhnevite constitutions. Just as the Kartvelians took the opportunity to demonstrate in Tbilisi in defence of the rights of the Georgian language in the republican constitution, so 130 prominent Abkhazians had despatched a letter to the Kremlin listing their continued complaints against what they saw as the ongoing georgianisation of their country. They even sought secession from Georgia and union with the Russian Federation, an extremely bold step at the time. Public disturbances took place in 1978, and troops had to be sent in, as then reported in the Western media<sup>35</sup>. In response a commission arrived from Moscow, and a variety of measures was recommended as a way of ameliorating the situation. In Slider's words: 'In essence, the Georgian leadership was forced to admit that many of the complaints made by Abkhaz nationalists were legitimate.' The changes included an increase in

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of **Abxazija: dokumenty svidetel'stvujut 1937-1953** 'Abkhazia: Documents Bear Witness 1937-1953' (Sukhum 1992). This book of 567 pages draws testimony from the State Archives about the transplantation-policy of the 1930s which had such a disastrous affect on the demography of Abkhazia from the Abkhazian point of view. Its preparation and publication were timely since Georgian troops deliberately burnt down these State Archives (along with the Abkhazian Research Institute and the Writers' Union) in the first half of November 1992, refusing to allow the fires to be extinguished...

<sup>34</sup>In fact, there had been protests also in 1957 and 1967.

<sup>35</sup>The Kartvelian samizdat-reports about Abkhazians attacking Kartvelians, taken at their face-value by Slider, should be treated with caution in view of the role played by their author, Boris K'ak'ubava, in various anti-Abkhazian gatherings organised in Abkhazia by such dangerous demagogues as the late Merab K'ost'ava in early 1989, for example on 1 April in Lykhny. It is true, however, that road-signs in Georgian were defaced.

the general budget, the upgrading of Sukhum's Pedagogical Institute into a university (only the second in Georgia), reservation of places at Tbilisi University for students from Abkhazia, introduction of Abkhazian TV-broadcasts, increase in publishing, and development of local enterprises. However, Moscow refused to countenance any secession from Georgia or to allow the withdrawal of constitutional recognition of the Georgian language in Abkhazia.

And yet the changes of 1978-9 brought no long-lasting, fundamental improvement. The final 8 pages of the **Abkhazian Letter** address the problems contemporary with its composition (i.e. 1988). In essence the charge was that Abkhazia's autonomy was a total fiction (this recalls what was said above about Abkhazia's 'autonomy' during the Menshevik period) -- whilst Abkhazians may have held figure-head positions in government, all crucial decisions were taken in Tbilisi by, and for the advantage of, Kartvelians. Kartvelian hold on power took a more covert and subtle form than in the past, but in the critical question of land-tenure, policy in 1988 was a simple continuation of what the Mensheviks had begun and what Beria and his successors later re-activated. The suggested solution was a radical shift of status, namely the re-creation of the original Abkhazian SSR (with, we must recall, special treaty-ties to Georgia), so that Abkhazia could henceforth meaningfully control its own destiny for the benefit of all residents.

It is unclear when knowledge of the **Abkhazian Letter** first filtered through to the general public in central Georgia, but, when its aspirations received emphatic endorsement at a huge public meeting on 18 March 1989 in the village of Lykhny in the form of the **Lykhny Declaration**, signed by 37,000 locals (Kartvelians as well as other non-Abkhazians significantly among them), this immediately became headline-news in Tbilisi. The consequences were dire. An intense anti-Abkhazian campaign was started by leaders of the various (then) unofficial parties, amongst virtually all of whom it became common practice to refer to the Abkhazians as 'Apswas', thereby implying that the 'true' Abkhazians were in fact some other people -- indeed, the then-leader of the Rustaveli Society, Ak'ak'i Bakradze, is reported to have told a meeting of Mingrelians in Sukhum that they were the descendants of the original Abkhazian residents of the Black Sea littoral! A whole series of distasteful articles denigrating both Abkhazian history as well as individuals was run by the Georgian press in all of its outlets, which suggests that the campaign must have had the approval of the republican authorities, as the Party's grip on power had not at that stage been shattered. Students and staff in the Georgian sector of the Abkhaz State University were 'encouraged' to agitate for protection against the encroachment of Russian in the University (a charge the Abkhazians say was completely bogus). This demand was seized upon, and the Georgian Ministry of Higher Education announced that it was opening a branch of Tbilisi University in Sukhum to be based on the Georgian sector of the existing university. Recognising the threat to the continuing viability of their own higher educational establishment, the Abkhazians strenuously *but legally* campaigned against it. They succeeded in having an official commission appointed in Moscow, which backed them by condemning Tbilisi's action as illegal. Nevertheless, plans to hold entrance-exams went ahead, and the result was the series of ethnic clashes in Sukhum on 15 July and in Ochamchira on 16 July 1989. The still unpublished personal investigation into these events, carried out on the spot as they were unfolding, by Russian journalist, Viktor Popkov, clearly reveals that the

premeditation behind these clashes lay on the Kartvelian side<sup>36</sup>. I was myself in Ochamchira at the time of the fighting and for over two months thereafter, and it is my conviction too that the Kartvelians were to blame for the bloodshed.

Produced in specific response to the **Letter** is the 119-page *simartle apxazetze* 'Truth about Abkhazia', which was rushed out by literary critic Roman Miminoshvili and writer Guram Pandzhik'idze in 1990<sup>37</sup>. In style and content it can all too sadly serve as a typical example of Kartvelian works of the genre, with its admixture of arrogance, irony, aprioristic argumentation, avoidance of the issues, and the inevitable downright abuse<sup>38</sup>. Many of the Kartvelian lines of defence/attack already outlined are repeated in this pamphlet; some of the others will now be adumbrated.

Complaints about attempts to georgianise Abkhazia are dismissed on the grounds that, since Abkhazia is an integral part of Georgia, talk of georgianising Georgia is a contradiction in terms. Equally the use of force during the Menshevik period cannot be held against the Georgians, who were merely defending their own territory from Bolsheviks and/or White Russians under Denikin<sup>39</sup>. However, on p.47 the authors do try to distance the Mensheviks from responsibility, pointing out: 'The fact should be noted that the Bolshevik revolt in the spring of 1918 was put down not by 'Menshevik Georgia' but by the Transcaucasian Sejm [Parliament].' With typical self-contradiction just 6 pages later they do, nevertheless, let slip that: 'The Menshevik Government of the Georgian Democratic Republic...was putting down Bolshevik demonstrations.' To 'prove' that pro-Kartvelian sentiment was not foreign to the Abkhazians as recently as 1916, they note that an Abkhazian delegation visited the Tsarist Transcaucasian Viceroy in Tbilisi that year to urge that Abkhazia not be assigned to the (Russian) Black Sea District, and that, if it could not become an administrative district in its own right, it should be part of the (West Georgian) Kutaisi District (Menteshashvili and Surguladze 1989). Allusion is also made to a number of speeches delivered throughout the decade by Nest'or Lak'oba<sup>40</sup>, Prime Minister of Abkhazia from 1922 (until murdered by Beria in 1936<sup>41</sup>), wherein he

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<sup>36</sup>Popkov's work takes the form of a book on the ethnic problems that faced the (collapsing) USSR, one section of which deals with Abkhazia. These two chapters were translated into English and distributed to every American senator by an activist in the USA in 1990.

<sup>37</sup>Pandzhik'idze became chairman of the Georgian Writers' Union in the wake of the overthrow of Gamsakhurdia! An edited Russian translation was also produced. An Abkhazian response can be read in numbers 6 and 7 of the paper **Edinenie** 'Unity' (Sukhum, December 1990), written by Vitalij Sharia and Guram Gumba.

<sup>38</sup>Donald Rayfield (1992) has compared the language employed in the modern Georgian press in reference to Abkhazia with that used for ritual denunciations in the Georgian press at the time of Stalin's Purges (1936-38).

<sup>39</sup>Interestingly Georgian apologist Tamara Dragadze uses the same argument to justify the use of force on 14 August against the Abkhazians by the (illegitimate!) regime in Tbilisi in her comments printed in **The Yorkshire Post** (7 October).

<sup>40</sup>The source is **N.A. Lakoba: Stat'i i rechi** 'N.A. Lakoba: Articles and Speeches' (1987, Sukhum: Alashara).

<sup>41</sup>Strangely Suny (1989.277) speaks of Lak'oba dying of a heart-attack. A two-part documentary on Beria shown on Russian television in 1991 made much of Lak'oba's death. After dining with Beria he was taken violently ill at the theatre in Tbilisi that night and quickly died. When his body was returned for burial to Abkhazia, all the vital organs that could have identified the true cause of death had been removed.

states that the proclamation of a full Abkhazian Soviet Republic in 1921 was a temporary necessity, because of the ill-feeling created amongst the Abkhazians by the actions of the Mensheviks<sup>42</sup>; any attempt immediately to subordinate Abkhazia to Georgia would have been unacceptable, even though Lak'oba (and colleagues) seemingly felt that this was the only practical solution. Thus, Abkhazia's downgrading to an autonomous republic in 1931 cannot be blamed on the dirty deeds of Stalin, Ordzhonik'idze and the Kartvelians in general. If such were the views of Abkhazian representatives in 1916 and throughout the 20s, the authors rhetorically ask who can have engineered this ethnic division in the 80s. The answer, of course, is not necessarily the one that their query implies...

Any people will choose its allies according to the circumstances prevailing at the time<sup>43</sup>. This was essentially the point made in her letter to *Index on Censorship*<sup>44</sup> by Zaira Khiba when she remarked: 'Only when Georgia acquires worthy leaders who are reasonable in word *and* deed will there be harmony with the ethnic minorities,' for in that case '...the country could now have been proceeding towards peaceful independence with the full support of all those living within its current boundaries.' In 1916 the choice was association with fellow Caucasians vs linkage with a part of the Empire once inhabited by close relatives but now inhabited, and ruled, by the very Russians whose actions had denuded both that area as well as much of Abkhazia itself of its indigenous population. As regards Lak'oba, the sheer idealism that fired the early supporters of the Revolution before it was perverted should not be overlooked. It is quite likely, however naïve we may judge it with the benefit of hindsight, that Lak'oba firmly believed that, with the dawning of a new age, any existing local enmities would disappear as workers came together in a new spirit of cooperation. If such was the case, why should not Caucasian Abkhazia work closely with (even within) Caucasian Georgia? Lak'oba, like most others, had no inkling that Stalin would become the bloodthirsty tyrant, now universally recognised, as of circa 1930. So possible innocence on the part of Lak'oba (and colleagues) in no wise rules out possible skulduggery on the part of Stalin and (certain of) his fellow-countrymen in this matter also.

The authors try to argue that Abkhazia's cosmopolitan structure is the result of Tsarist measures or the importation of outside labour by the Abkhazian authorities themselves. True, there is acknowledgement that 'at a certain period Abkhaz schools were closed' (p.75), which is admitted to be 'an unforgivable crime' (ibid.). On the very next page, however, they proceed to make the quite extraordinary assertion: 'The only 'crime' which can be imputed to the Georgian people is that, starting from the 19th century, at the wish of those who inspired the Georgian national-liberation movement...there began and continues to this day, unfortunately without any result, not the georgianisation of the Abkhazians but rather our defending them from being russified and our preservation of them as Abkhazians'! A similar boast was made by

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<sup>42</sup>By not challenging this motive, the authors implicitly acknowledge that the Mensheviks were guilty of excesses in Abkhazia!

<sup>43</sup>Just as in the late 18th century Georgia itself sought the protection of Holy Russia, which in turn led to its incorporation into the Russian Empire in 1801.

<sup>44</sup>'An Abkhazian's Reponse' (sc. to letters from two Georgians attacking an earlier, anonymous article on the Abkhaz-Kartvelian dispute in the same journal of January 1990) pp.30-1 of the May 1990 issue.

linguist Nana Ch'anishvili in the middle of 1990 during a Voice of America radio-link between Tbilisi and some kartvelologists in America<sup>45</sup>.

The Abkhazians stand accused of being an ungrateful and hugely privileged minority<sup>46</sup>. What other people of less than 100,000 has its own (a) university, (b) TV-channel and (c) so many of its own citizens in prominent positions when it constitutes only 18% of its province's population? Kartvelians (and their apologists) making these debating-points never inform their audience that the Abkhaz sector of the Abkhaz State University was always the smallest of the three (viz. Abkhaz, Russian, Georgian), as, despite its name, the university was always designed to cater for the needs of the whole of Western Georgia. When TV-broadcasting in Abkhaz began, there were only two half-hour programmes per week; in 1989 these had been increased to three hour-long programmes, which subsequently became nightly (Monday-Friday) and no longer masked Georgian transmissions from Tbilisi, about which local Kartvelians were formerly right to feel aggrieved. Allusion has already been made to Abkhazian over-representation in Party-posts. Interestingly, though, over-representation was not foreign to Kartvelians either -- John Russell<sup>47</sup> compares the figures whereby Kartvelians formed 1.4% of the USSR population, whereas they filled 3.2% of places at the Congress of People's Deputies and 3.7% in the Supreme Soviet.

Two individuals are singled out for personal abuse -- Vladislav Ardzinba, President of Abkhazia since 4 December 1990, for being an 'extremist' and the elderly ethnographer Shalva Inal-Ipa, who is depicted as a charlatan masquerading as an academic, a charge regularly heard in attempted belittling of Abkhazian scholars<sup>48</sup>. A passage from one of Inal-Ipa's books (1976) is cited: 'I recorded in June 1952 in the village of Eshera these words of a 70 year-old...The whole Caucasian coast of the Black Sea used to be called Kalkha. The population of Kalkha spoke Abkhaz. Its frontiers stretched far from south to north, and it was ruled by Abkhazian kings, who had a strong army and 350 forts'. This is adduced as the sort of evidence Abkhazians are said to rely on to prove their historical rights over the land. It is a pity that the authors' eyes did not pass over to the top of the following page, where they would have read this: 'In a word, if in new and old statements of this kind we find a definite exaggeration of the role of the Abkhazian element, **it is equally mistaken**, it seems to

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<sup>45</sup>The dialogue was reprinted in the Georgian-language paper 'Popular Education' (5 July 1990, 14-16) and in the Russian-language translation a week later.

<sup>46</sup>This has been the standard charge since 1989 of the London-based Tamara Dragadze (as illustrated again in **The Yorkshire Post** of 7 October 1992).

<sup>47</sup>'The Georgians' A Minority Rights Group Soviet Update (1991).

<sup>48</sup>The Abkhazians are not alone in finding the sense of national superiority amongst the Kartvelians objectionable (not to say threatening), even if casual visitors regularly regard what they see as mere 'Latin-type bravado' as welcome relief after the drabness of central Russia. Reporting the results of a survey conducted in late 1989 Mickiewicz (1990.146) gave the following interesting percentages of those responding 'yes' to the question 'Should someone who takes the position that nationalities are advocating ethnic superiority be allowed to appear on television?': Central Asians 13%, Ukrainians 20%, Belorussians 20%, Russians 21%, Balts 25%, 'Georgians' 52%!

me, completely to ignore it in the ethno-cultural history of the enigma that is Colchis' (stress added)<sup>49</sup>.

On p.108 Miminoshvili and Pandzhik'idze write: 'Unfortunately, in order to attain this goal, they, as we became convinced above, frequently resort to such base tricks as are unworthy of scholars, members of the intelligentsia and even ordinary human beings -- provocation, slander, lies, bribery, demagoguery, the politics of shamelessly picking excessive quarrels and who knows what else?' Perhaps enough has now been said for readers to decide for themselves to whom the 'they' in this quote really refers. Readers may also like to muse over why the Kartvelians feel it necessary to resort to such tactics as their first line of defence...

#### Post-Perestrojka Developments

The Abkhazians see the struggle as one for the survival of their culture and language, or, in a word, preservation of their separate identity. The Kartvelians, if nothing else, desperately do not want to lose a piece of land that could provide an independent Georgia with much needed foreign currency from the tourist-trade, given the rich potential of such exotic resorts as Gagra, Pitsunda and Sukhum itself.

The historical justification for the Abkhazians' claim to their territory is, I trust, beyond dispute by now<sup>50</sup>. Equally the prevailing demographic situation in the region, however it came about, cannot be ignored. But the presence of a 45% Kartvelian (albeit largely Mingrelian) population cannot justify the perversion of history attempted by the Kartvelians to 'prove', with the aid of historians and linguists prepared to prostitute their disciplines, historical rights that are simply not founded on fact.

With Soviet communism on the wane in the later 1980s the unofficial opposition-leaders in Tbilisi made, to my mind, a fatal mistake -- instead of acting to cement the 30% non-Kartvelian population of Georgia to the Kartvelian aspiration of achieving independence for Georgia from Moscow, they decided to play the nationalist-card. In essence the rallying-cry 'Georgia for the Georgians!' (sc. 'Georgia for the Kartvelians!') characterised not just the man who was later to become the first elected president of Georgia, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, but ALL leading oppositionists. This bandwagon was picking up speed throughout 1988, with hardly anyone daring to speak out against it, and by 1989 it was unstoppable, when not only budding, if incompetent, politicians but leading writers and academics were all jumping aboard. The alienation of at least 30% of Georgia's population was inevitable. We have already mentioned the fighting in Abkhazia in the summer of 1989; this was preceded by skirmishes within the Azerbaijani districts of South Georgia. Trouble soon spread to South Ossetia, and Gamsakhurdia eventually managed to expel around 4,000

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<sup>49</sup>This accusation flows indisputably from the pen of Pandzhik'idze, for he included it in an article ('It is essential that truth triumph') in **Literary Georgia** of 26 May 1989. His repetition of it in the booklet under discussion was quite deliberate, for in the meantime I had written to him to point out that his ruse had been rumbled!

<sup>50</sup>Given the large-scale ignorance of Abkhazian affairs in the West and a rather wide, if unwise, sympathy for the Kartvelians, all commentators need to weigh their words carefully when commenting on the complexities of the situation. Thus, whilst Donald Rayfield's bold assessment of Georgia's unwholesome triumvirate (Shevardnadze, K'it'ovani, Ioseliani) in **The New Statesman & Society** (11 September 1992, pp.19-20 -- 'Unholy Trinity') is to be welcomed, his casual remark that 'Abkhazia has been a vassal of Georgia for a thousand years' is to be regretted.

Daghestani residents from East Georgia<sup>51</sup>. There have been tensions with the Armenians both in South West Georgia over the ownership of local churches and in Tbilisi over the number of hours that the Armenian language may be taught. But the Armenians have kept a low profile, given their war with Azerbaijan over Karabagh and the fact that their only other neighbours are Turkey and Iran.

There was no way the Abkhazians were going to find a *modus vivendi* with Gamsakhurdia, elected president in 1990. It is true that in an interview with Anatol Lieven of **The Times**, published in **The Georgian Messenger 4** (January 1991), when asked about his attitude to Abkhazia's autonomous status, he replied: 'The Abkhaz deserve autonomy, but not in this exaggerated form.' But the Abkhazians knew that in December 1990 within less than a week of assuring the South Ossetians that their autonomy was safe in his hands he actually abolished the South Ossetian Autonomous Region. And mention of reducing Abkhazian autonomy raises the spectre of the realisation of a proposal from the already mentioned 'Chronicle 4' of early 1989, which was supported by, among others, Gamsakhurdia's Georgian Helsinki Group, whereby all the regions of Abkhazia where there is a Kartvelian majority (namely Gali, Gulripsh, Gagra, Sukhum, and part of Ochamchira) should come under the direct control of Tbilisi, leaving Gudauta and the remaining portion of Ochamchira to be downgraded to national Abkhazian 'regions'. This should put in a proper perspective the often-heard statements by supporters of Shevardnadze that Ardzinba is in league with the deposed president of Georgia -- Gamsakhurdia, after all, in his turn dubbed Ardzinba 'Shevardnadze's number-one pupil'! And since those who opposed Gamsakhurdia in the alternative parliament (the National Congress) shared Gamsakhurdia's views towards the ethnic minorities, there was no real hope of reaching agreement with them either. And so, the answer had to be cooperation with the local residents inside Abkhazia in the search for a better common future.

After the loss of the Georgian sector from the Abkhaz State University, it was replaced by a wholly new Armenian sector -- here we have an academic microcosm of the sort of large-scale political alignment that has characterised Abkhazia of late, with only the Kartvelians adopting obstructionist tactics, both inside and outside parliament, to what the 55% majority in Abkhazia prefer, namely NOT to be subjected to the racism seemingly endemic in Tbilisi.

Initially hopes were pinned on Gorbachev's new Union Treaty. In the all-Union referendum of 17 March 1991, boycotted by Kartvelians throughout Georgia in general, 52.3% of Abkhazia's electorate did vote, with 98.6% of these saying 'yes' to remaining within a union of sovereign republics. The Union Republics were due to sign in mid-August 1991 with the autonomous units, like Abkhazia, adding their signatures a few weeks later and thereby gaining equal status with the former republics in a re-constituted Union. This would have realised Abkhazians' desiderata, removing them from the immediate control of Tbilisi. Gamsakhurdia's government, of course, kept up its pressure against 'Abkhazian separatism' -- in early August a public meeting of Kartvelians in Sukhum was addressed by Georgia's then Minister of Education, Temur Koridze, and the then Minister of the Interior, former judo-champion, the boorish Svan Dilar Khabuliani. Koridze displayed his commitment to rational argument by promising that, if Abkhazia signed the treaty, 'rivers of blood

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<sup>51</sup>Compare this sad reality with Peter Pringle's grossly inaccurate (and thus journalistically incompetent) interpretation of the period as 'the proud march towards independence on which Georgians embarked as the Soviet Union broke up' (**The Independent on Sunday** 11 October 1992)!

would flow'! Khabuliani's contribution was to reveal his government's understanding of a neutral law-enforcement agency by promising his fellow-Kartvelians that in any local struggle the local police-force would be 'on your side'! This meeting was secretly filmed and broadcast on Abkhazian TV. The government of which these individuals were a part may have been swept away, but I would argue that the attitude to the Abkhazians that their comments reveal is still sadly all too typical of the bulk of the Kartvelians. However, all of the carefully laid plans for the new Union Treaty became irrelevant in the wake of the Soviet coup, which was precipitated by the imminent signing of this very treaty, and the more or less immediate disintegration of the Union.

Another consequence of the failed coup was that the serious internal dissensions that had already appeared within the Gamsakhurdia regime, culminating in the sacking of the Prime Minister (Tengiz Sigua) and Foreign Minister (Giorgi Khosht'aria) just in advance of the August coup, began to widen even more. Tengiz K'it'ovani, leader of the National Guard and later Georgia's Defence Minister, notably refused to follow Gamsakhurdia's command to disband his men. Sigua together with K'it'ovani soon sided with the opposition, and at the beginning of September the first clashes took place on the streets of Tbilisi. This, not unnaturally, elicited a certain *Schadenfreude* amongst the Abkhazians who felt that now the world would at last realise, if it had not so realised already (given the battle in Abkhazia in July 1989 and the ongoing bloody war in South Ossetia), that the Abkhazians (and the South Ossetians) did indeed have compelling grounds for wanting to remove themselves from Tbilisi's control -- if Kartvelians could turn on one another in this way, who could expect them to respect the rights of the minorities?

While the Kartvelians were otherwise preoccupied, the Abkhazians pursued discussions with their fellow-North Caucasians, with whom in August 1989 they had formed an Assembly of North Caucasian Peoples in response to the danger threatening Abkhazia from the alarming resurgence of Georgian chauvinism. In November 1991, the IIIrd Congress of the Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus took place in Sukhum. On 2nd November participants ratified a document entitled 'Treaty for a Confederative Union of the Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus', the first Article of which proclaims the new Confederation to be 'the legitimate successor of the independent North Caucasian Republic ('Mountain Republic'), created on 11th May 1918'<sup>52</sup>. The Confederation, replacing the earlier Assembly, currently incorporates sixteen North Caucasian peoples, including both the North and South Ossetians.

Intra-Kartvelian politics descended into the ultimate madness of Government- and opposition-forces shooting at, and even shelling, one another on the main thoroughfare of the capital over the New Year period 1991-92. The fighting received such coverage by the world's media that there is no need here to recapitulate the details. Gamsakhurdia's regime collapsed, with Gamsakhurdia fleeing first to Armenia, thence (though doubts have been cast on the validity of this next stage of his peregrinations) to Mingrelia's capital, Zugdidi, via Sukhum airport, and finally to Grozny in Chechnia, where he remains to this day as a guest of President Dzhokhar Dudaev, whom many outside-observers regard as a Gamsakhurdia clone, something that might not augur well for the future of either Chechnia itself or the North Caucasian Federation, the largest single ethnic group of which are the Chechens. The Military Council that took over power when Gamsakhurdia fled soon arranged for the return to his homeland of ex-Soviet Foreign Minister, Eduard Shevardnadze, who had

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<sup>52</sup>For the full text of this Treaty see Appendix 4.

been Georgia's Communist Party Secretary from 1972 up until his elevation by Gorbachev onto the international stage in 1985. He was immediately appointed to head the (wholly illegitimate) State Council. This development was disastrous for the Abkhazians, who felt that one more year of Gamsakhurdia's ridiculous presidency, which had brought no international recognition for Georgia, would have seen them succeed in their endeavour to remove themselves from Tbilisi's clutches. For, with Britain's John Major and Douglas Hurd taking the unseemly lead, the West suddenly reversed its policy of non-recognition of Georgia. In this it revealed its collective ignorance and *nai/vety* -- ignorance at the extent of non-Kartvelian hostility towards the Kartvelians (especially the Georgians) occasioned by the depth of the latter's racist attitudes, and *nai/vety* in allowing hope to get the better of experience by supposing that Shevardnadze alone could make any difference to the mess that Georgia had become; most Western politicians may know nothing of his days as Party Boss in Georgia (nicknamed there 'The White Fox'!), but residents of Georgia (Kartvelian and non-Kartvelian alike) have not forgotten...

The now-universal recognition of Georgia established its borders in international law, thereby legitimising that whim of the Georgian Stalin to place Abkhazia within a Georgian state in 1931<sup>53</sup>. It will also have been taken as a signal by the hot-heads in Tbilisi that the world was giving them a green light to act as they chose to settle their own internal problems, a view enhanced by constant British, American, German and UN statements about respect for Georgia's territorial integrity without any corresponding public reminder to Shevardnadze of his international commitments to respect the rights of his minorities. The Abkhazian parliament, however, continued to try to function as the legislative assembly of a *de facto* independent republic with the right to choose its own local allies. Elected on 22/29 September 1991, it consists of 28 Abkhazians, 26 Kartvelians, plus 11 representatives of the other local nationalities<sup>54</sup>. Kartvelian deputies, however, tended to boycott the meetings. The 45% Kartvelian population of Abkhazia has been and will long remain

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<sup>53</sup>In response to a specific question about the British Government's attitude to the status enjoyed by Abkhazia during the 1920s, as enshrined in their 1925 constitution, and its reduction in status by Stalin in 1931, Minister of State Douglas Hogg responded in a letter (via my M.P. on 6 October 1992): 'We do not have any official views on the manoeuvrings [sic] of the Bolshevik regime decades ago.'

<sup>54</sup>Those reluctant to condemn the Kartvelians outright for their actions in Abkhazia point to the concessionary nature of this apportioning of seats agreed to by the Gamsakhurdia government. However, two comments are appropriate. Ronald Suny observed in his 'A Hard Balancing Act' (*Aim* November 1992, 20-23): 'This arrangement, known in political science as 'consociationalism', is almost always an inherently unstable one.' By insisting that all major changes should be supported by a two-thirds' majority, the purpose of establishing such a polity was no doubt to give the illusion of power to the Abkhazians whilst really seeking to maintain the *status quo*. And such an arrangement of local politics was not what the Abkhazians themselves had been proposing. Their preferred solution was sketched out by V. Ketsba in an article 'What form should the Abkhazian parliament take?' (in the Russian-language newspaper *Abxazija* 26 March 1991, p.7). The proposal was that a two-chamber parliament be created, consisting of a Republican Council, based on the principle of the equality of rights of citizens, and a Nationality Council, based on the principle of the equality of rights of nations. The former would have been formed on territorial lines, the latter on nationality lines. This was rejected by Tbilisi.

a problem for the 55% majority who want to break with Tbilisi -- the great British media (and no doubt not just the British media) have persisted in completely failing to notice this majority in the months since the outbreak of fighting, just as they have failed to distinguish between the Mingrelian-Georgian dispute, on the one hand, and the Abkhaz-Kartvelian dispute, on the other. However, it should not be assumed that the 45% Kartvelian block will permanently support the Tbilisi line. As stated above, these Kartvelians are almost wholly Mingrelians, and the behaviour of Shevardnadze's deputy during the period of the illegitimate State Council, Dzhaba Ioseliani, with his Mkhedrioni-militia in Mingrelia proper (sc. outside the borders of Abkhazia) following Gamsakhurdia's overthrow could hardly have been more expertly calculated had the wish actually been to turn Mingrelia too against the policies of Tbilisi<sup>55</sup>. Is there, then, any way in which the Mingrelians in Abkhazia might be persuaded that they would be given a better deal inside an Abkhazian Republic than by an independent Georgia? In the clashes of 1989 it was a miraculous relief that these Mingrelians did not, by and large, allow themselves to be roused to arms in the way that characterised their brethren in Georgia proper. And those rare Mingrelian voices that have been heard calling for recognition of their non-Georgian identity have come from Mingrelians inside Abkhazia<sup>56</sup>. Since the Georgians and leading Mingrelians, such as ex-president Gamsakhurdia himself, have always fiercely denied the need for any special provision to be made for ensuring the future of this language, what would be the reaction of Abkhazia's Mingrelians if they were offered by the Abkhazian authorities, in addition to continuing education in Georgian (should they truly desire this), the chance of having a literary language designed for their mother-tongue, along with all that this would entail (e.g. some level of tuition of and in Mingrelian, publishing, radio- and TV-broadcasting)? Abkhazians have never regarded the Mingrelians as Georgians, and so why should they not give substance to their beliefs<sup>57</sup>? Here is a tantalising possibility for the future.

Signs of alarm in Tbilisi at the close links Abkhazians were establishing with the North Caucasians were appearing from early 1992 in the Georgian press, the tone of which mirrored that which had preceded the fighting in Abkhazia in 1989. It became depressingly obvious that the Kartvelians had totally failed to learn the crucial

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<sup>55</sup>The hostile reception given to Shevardnadze on his visit to Mingrelia in July 1992 probably supports the rumours of excesses committed by the Georgians in this universally ignored conflict. Information on events in Mingrelia can be found in the Paris-based Russian-language paper **Russkaja Mysl'** 'Russian Thought'.

<sup>56</sup>One can mention at least three from 1989-90: T. Bok'uchava-Gagulia (**Literary Georgia** 28 April 1989), Vano Dgebuadze (**Bzyp** 16 Sept 1989), and Nugzar Dzhodzhuva (**Bzyp** 4 July 1989 and **Unity** July 1990). The onslaught they suffered as a consequence saw the first lambasted for being no real 'Georgian' (which, of course, she is not!) if she cannot speak Georgian: the second was alleged to have falsified his war-record, whilst the last lost his job, and his mother was forced to disown him in the press. See Appendix 3 for the translation of an article he could not get published (even in Abkhazia) on the sensitive question of Mingrelian-Georgian relations.

<sup>57</sup>The Abkhazians arranged in 1991 for the publication of a Mingrelian translation by Gedevan Shanava of Georgia's great epic **The Man in the Panther's Skin** by Shota Rust(a)veli. No publication of either this translation or an earlier one by K'ak'a Zhvania has ever been sanctioned by the authorities in Tbilisi despite the tremendous excitement that any new translation of this work normally arouses amongst the Kartvelians!

lesson of the preceding three years, namely that, if Georgia is to prosper at all, genuine attempts must be made to carry the minorities along with the aspirations of the Kartvelians themselves. Take as a concrete example the report in **Express Chronicle 16** (14-21 April 1992): 'On 12 April in Gulripsh law-enforcement agencies detained a Georgian of Svan origin. The man was frisked and the search produced documents testifying that the Georgian deportation policy towards Abkhazians continued. The organization involved with such matters was called the Abkhazian All-Georgian Settlers' Society.... The law-enforcement agencies confiscated files of Georgian Svans' applications for a place of residence in Abkhazia, lists of non-Georgian families residing in the Gulripsh district, and some coded documents from the detained. Under interrogation, the man said that the Society had its own seals and a bank account. One D. Kaldani, of Svan origin, is the chairman of the Society.' The Beria-policy of artificially (and now covertly) increasing the Kartvelian population of Abkhazia seems to be alive and well, with the added ingredient that pressure to leave might be being applied to non-Kartvelian residents in areas of Kartvelian domination (such as Gulripsh).

With Yeltsin's Russia unwilling to countenance small peoples such as the Tatars and Chechens being easily allowed to break away from his Federation, Abkhazia was unlikely to win open support from Moscow in its struggle with Tbilisi (just as fear of setting a precedent for Abkhazia and South Ossetia no doubt is one of the reasons why Georgia has not supported its neighbour and natural christian ally Armenia against Azerbaijan over Karabagh). And so, the Abkhazians' main hope had to lie in ever closer association with the North Caucasians, though the viability of the infant Confederation cannot be guaranteed, incorporating, as it does, so many different peoples with local disputes of their own (e.g. the land-dispute between the North Ossetians and the Ingush, another legacy of Stalin's policies for the nationalities). However, the Abkhazians obviously prefer to weigh this doubt against the certainty of their fate under a Tbilisi now free of Moscow's bridle.

At my meeting with Ardzinba in Sukhum in July 1992 he stated it was his intention to strengthen the republic to a satisfactory degree and then declare the temporary restitution of Abkhazia's 1925 constitution, in which the status of the republic from 1921 to 1931 was set down -- Tbilisi, after all, had arbitrarily decided to overturn its 1978 Soviet constitution in favour of the one promulgated in 1921. Abkhazia's 1925 constitution was reprinted in 1992<sup>58</sup>, and Article 4 reads thus: 'The Soviet Socialist Republic of Abkhazia, united with the Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia on the basis of a special union-treaty, enters through this into the

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<sup>58</sup> The text is taken from *S"ezdy Sovetov Sojuza SSR, sojuznyx i avtonomnyx sovetskix socialisticheskih respublik*. Tom 6, str. 686-700, Moskva, 1964. A report in the Survey of World Broadcasts for the Soviet Union (1446 b/8 30 July 1992) quotes from an article in *Izvestija* of 28 July to the effect that speakers in the Georgian parliament had stated that this constitution had never been ratified. This is contradicted by the collective *Istorija Abxazii* 'History of Abkhazia' (1991), which declares on page 332 that this constitution was not only ratified and brought into effect by the IIIrd Congress of the Soviets of Abkhazia but that: 'In it, as in the constitution of the Georgian SSR (February 1922), the fact of the joining of these two republics on the basis of a Special Union Treaty received its confirmation'. Had the 1925 constitution not been ratified, it would surely not have been included in the 1964 publication of union-documents.

Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Union Republic and through the latter into the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics'. Article 5 includes the clause: 'The Abkhazian SSR reserves the right of free secession both from the Transcaucasian Federation and from the USSR'. By re-instating the 1925 constitution at the end of July 1992 the Abkhazian parliament was signalling its readiness to establish a new treaty-status with Georgia to parallel the one that existed in the 1920s. A draft of such a treaty had been published in the newspaper **Abxazija** (29 June - 4 July 1992, page 2<sup>59</sup>). Talks between parliamentary representatives of the two sides, led by Zurab Achba for the Abkhazians, were held in Sukhum (NOT Tbilisi, as written in earlier versions of this paper) on 13 August and were due to be resumed the following day in Sukhum. Achba gave an interview to Georgian TV on the 13th, but this was never shown. Early on the 14th these discussions were sabotaged when Shevardnadze launched his massive military assault on Abkhazia on the initial excuse that this was necessary to secure the release of his kidnapped Interior Minister R. Gventsadze.

It must be abundantly clear from all that has been said above that the Abkhazians in general and the Abkhazian authorities in particular have no interest or involvement in intra-Kartvelian affairs. Those who kidnapped Gventsadze were Mingrelian supporters of Gamsakhurdia, and a month earlier they had also taken hostage Georgia's Deputy-Premier A. K'avsadze. Anarchy had reigned for some time throughout Mingrelia as well as in the mingrelianised Gali province in the south of Abkhazia. It is by no means implausible, therefore, that one or both of these kidnapping-victims might have been held in the Gali district, although the Abkhazians firmly maintain these individuals were held near Mingrelia's old capital, Zugdidi (i.e. in Mingrelia proper). This, however, in no way justified the attack on the government-buildings in Sukhum itself, miles to the north. Indeed, Georgian Defence Minister K'it'ovani announced within days of the invasion that the goal had really been to put a stop to the 'secessionist'-moves by the Abkhazian parliament<sup>60</sup>.

Since the start of the war in August the Abkhazians have been at a distinct disadvantage in terms of the difficulty they have experienced in presenting their case to the outside world. This contrasts with the position of the Georgian authorities in Tbilisi, who benefited (and indeed continue to benefit) disproportionately from the prestige enjoyed by just one prominent Georgian, Eduard Shevardnadze, whose position as head of state has in the eyes of most been legitimised following his victory in the elections of 11 October<sup>61</sup>. Whether or not attitudes to Shevardnadze have

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<sup>59</sup>The text of this draft is given in full in Appendix 5.

<sup>60</sup>Shevardnadze in his interview with Peter Pringle in **The Independent** (24 September 1992) evidently felt the need to put the emphasis on a quite different pretext when he spoke of the necessity of defending his rail-link to Russia: 'They were blowing up bridges, they were stopping trains, the total damage was 11-12 billion roubles...the police refused to obey orders because there were too many criminals all armed to the teeth.' Georgia-watchers know full well that it was Mingrelians, not Abkhazians, who had been disrupting this link. Cf. comments by Georgia's Foreign Minister in Appendix 6, where readers should note the total absence of any reference to the freeing of ministerial hostages.

<sup>61</sup>The report on these elections by the British Helsinki Human Rights' Group observers is rather disturbing not only in what it has to say about human rights under Shevardnadze's regime but also in connection with the view of at least one Western diplomat in Georgia on the general role of foreign observers at the elections. Consider the following form p.29: 'The German charge; d'affaires, Hans-Peter Nielsen, at a

coloured the media's interest (or rather lack of interest) in attempting adequately to cover and report the Abkhazian war, it is difficult to say. Certainly in Britain the poor standard of reporting is typified by the fact that, even three years after the world's attention was first drawn to this region, the Abkhazians still tend to be grossly labelled as 'muslims'. Even the BBC, which has largely ignored the war since the Moscow talks of 3 September, despite its much vaunted impartiality conveys the orthodox Georgian view in its (perhaps unthinking) use of the terms 'separatists' and 'rebels' to describe the Abkhazians, which logically implies that the opposing side are presumably to be regarded as the 'forces of law and order', representing as they do 'the Georgian state'! Just as under the Mensheviks when the Georgians maintained they were in Abkhazia to put an end to anarchy, so in 1992 the Tbilisi authorities have argued their troops needed to enter Abkhazia to restore stability and protect fellow-Kartvelians, and yet when I was in Abkhazia in June-July 1992 the only places where the law was in danger of being openly flouted were the Mingrelian-dominated provinces of Gulripsh and Gali, a lawlessness soon thereafter to be superseded by the behaviour of the Mkhedrioni and Georgian National Guard themselves (essentially a rabble, let us remember, rather than a disciplined, well-trained, standing-army in the Western tradition). There is general ignorance amongst even Moscow-based correspondents (to say nothing of the media's commentators on international affairs outside the former USSR) about the nature, history and subtlety of the complex issues that characterise the Caucasus in the troubled post-Soviet era. This is well illustrated in the leading-article in **The Guardian** on 7 October, which was entitled 'No case for partition' and which charged the Abkhazians with acting 'at the expense of other communities'<sup>62</sup>, whereas all the evidence adduced above surely demonstrates how willing the Abkhazians are to work with, and for the benefit of, all who today share their land, as long as they are not required to submit to the dictates of an essentially racist regime in Tbilisi. A further example of the poor journalistic standards that are brought to bear in discussions of Georgian affairs was the BBC 2 TV Assignment-programme on Shevardnadze and Georgia that was broadcast on Tuesday 8 December. This essentially unquestioning PR-presentation masquerading as a documentary not only erroneously informed its viewers that the present problem in Abkhazia arose out of a simplistic desire on the part of the Abkhazians to ape their fellow North Caucasian Chechens, whose leader Dudaev had taken the lead in declaring Chechenia to be an independent republic, it also included the suave and smiling Svan, Gela Chark'viani, talking as follows to the camera: 'Well, this is one of our difficulties. I think these are bombs that have been planted into our society, I would say. They lay idle for a long time. But now they have exploded. Yes, this is a legacy from the time of the totalitarian regime. But then it didn't matter for that regime whether you had autonomy or not, for nothing was real under that regime. The western part of Georgia generally is a paradise -- it has a sea-coast, warm climate, palms, tangerines and all that. This piece of land always attracts people, and probably it attracts some generals too.' So, again as under the Mensheviks, we hear the charge

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pre-election briefing for CSCE observers even went so far as to state that the purpose of our visit was to 'legitimise' the election. Unlike the observers from the National Democratic Institute, the British Helsinki Human Rights Group observers could not regard the conduct of the elections as likely to 'confer democratic legitimacy on the new government'.

<sup>62</sup>See Appendix 2 for my unpublished reply to this leader: The text of two other letters to the British press is also given there.

that Russian generals have been carving out for themselves personal fiefdoms along Georgia's [sic!] Abkhazian coast (as explicitly stated in Hugh Prysor-Jones' accompanying commentary). But apart from this argument, the name of Chark'viani too should be familiar to readers. It will be recalled that K'andid Chark'viani was Party Boss in Georgia from 1938 to 1952, in succession to Beria himself. It will also be recalled that it was under Chark'viani that Abkhaz-language schools were closed and publishing in Abkhaz banned. And who is Gela Chark'viani, who, when addressing British viewers, can so easily and nonchalantly lay the blame for Abkhazia's problems on the Centre and Russian generals= -- none other than K'andid Chark'viani's son!...

But it is not just journalists whose grasp of reality in matters Georgian is faulty. More worrying is such ignorance when it underlies the opinions of those who are in a position to influence how leading politicians and world-institutions (like the United Nations) will respond to the events we have been considering. Little international concern was evinced for the fighting in Abkhazia upto the time of the ceasefire-talks in Moscow on 3 September, when an agreement was signed, even though Ardzinba made it clear that he had been compelled to put his signature to it. Article 10 of this document reads: 'The Parties will help restore the normal functioning of legitimate authorities in Abkhazia by September 15, 1992' (English translation printed in the Georgian paper **uc'q'ebani** 'Reports' of 11 September 1992). On this same day (11 September) the Supreme Soviet of Abkhazia sent faxes signed by Ardzinba to Boutros Boutros Ghali and to Dr. Michael van Walt van Praag (of the United Nations' Unrepresented Peoples' Organisation in The Hague) stating: 'Unfortunately, the Georgian party did not follow the provisions of the above agreement. The bloodshed is still taking place.' This was clarified in a fax the following day to Yeltsin, stating: 'The mass media have reported that on September 14, 1992, a so-called session of the Abkhazian Supreme Soviet will convene in Sukhum. The State Council of Georgia has called for this meeting. The participants are to be Georgian deputies, including those who gave up their positions in connection with the appointment of administration leaders. Other participants are to be some Russian and Armenian deputies who were forced to remain in Sukhum and who have been threatened with reprisals if they decline. Even though the meeting will not have the necessary quorum, as stipulated in the Abkhazian Constitution, the plan is to pass a resolution on the dissolution of the Abkhazian Supreme Soviet. This is how the Georgian State Council intends to give the appearance of legitimacy to its forcible ousting of the constitutional Abkhazian government. This is a flagrant violation of Article 10 of the Final Document of the Moscow summit which stipulates 'by September 15, 1992, restoration of the normal activities of Abkhazia's legitimate governing bodies'. Eduard Shevardnadze, speaking on September 5, 1992, at a meeting of the Georgian State Council, stated that he would not implement Article 10 because he said the stipulation was nothing more than a recommendation'<sup>63</sup>. The fighting, not unnaturally, continued, and the Kartvelians suffered a humiliating reverse at the beginning of October when their troops were driven out of the northern Abkhazian town of Gagra and indeed the whole of the territory north of Sukhum. Since the Moscow meeting various international missions have visited Georgia and Abkhazia. One such, from the UN, was in the area from 13 to 15 October 1992 and was headed by Antoine Blanca, Director-General of the UN Office at Geneva. On 11 November the UN Secretary-General sent a report (S/24794) regarding this mission to

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<sup>63</sup>Copies of these faxes were sent to me and are in my possession for consultation.

the President of the Security Council. In the annex to this report the following appears: 'The situation in Abkhazia described in the previous report remained relatively unchanged without any progress being made in the implementation of the 3 September agreement until 1 October when Abkhaz forces, supported by fighters from the north Caucasus, captured the town of Gagra...' This clearly lays the blame for the failure to implement the September agreement on the Abkhazians and completely ignores the attitude of Shevardnadze to Article 10 of that self-same agreement, an attitude which of and in itself sealed the fate of that agreement. The annex continues: 'Should the Abkhaz succeed in capturing Ochamchira, this could lead to the fall of Sukhumi, *which would bring nearly 80% of Abkhazia under Abkhaz control. The continued risk of this possibility*, not to mention its actual fall, could trigger major military action, which could engulf the area in a major conflict that could involve neighbouring countries' [stress added]. We have here the ultimate absurdity of a document carrying the signature of the Secretary-General of the world's most prestigious organisation for international diplomacy supporting the imperial goals of perhaps that organisation's newest and without doubt prematurely admitted member when it speaks of the 'risk' [!] of the Abkhazians regaining control of their own territory! Perhaps a more detached assessment of the situation would lead to the conclusion that a regional conflagration on a wider scale is much more likely to result, if the various small states peopled by the members of the Confederation of North Caucasian Peoples are abandoned to the grip of the imperial vice whose jaws are Russia to the north and Georgia to the south.

Readers can hardly fail to have been struck by a series of parallels between what happened in Abkhazia following the collapse of Tsarist Russia (specifically during the period of Menshevik Georgia, 1918-1921) and what has been happening there since the rigid hand of Soviet communism started to disintegrate in the late 1980s. There are other similarities.

Noe Zhordania, a principled Marxist of the Menshevik variety, was none too complimentary about the North Caucasians, with whom the Abkhazians allied themselves in 1917. With those remarks quoted earlier we may compare the statements of the principled opportunist who leads Georgia today. Typical of Shevardnadze's denigrations of the North Caucasian Confederation are the words quoted in the Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS-SOV-92-199) for 14 October from an interview with Ye. Krutikov: 'As far as the Congress of Caucasus Mountain Peoples is concerned, they are fundamentalists of a terrorist persuasion and I cannot hold talks with them.' The post-Revolution bogey for the Georgian Mensheviks were the Bolsheviks, and troops went into Abkhazia under Mazniev on the excuse of ridding the region of the Red Peril. Today the whole world fears a resurgence of Russian nationalism under such hotheads as Zhirinovskij or is alarmed at the prospect of hardline communists returning to power -- Georgians view the organisation 'Sojuz' as a bed of just such hardline communists. And so, it comes as no surprise to read (FBIS-SOV-92-216 for 6 November) the following comment of Deputy Prime Minister (kidnapped, as described above, by Mingrelians in the summer of 1992), A. K'avsadze: 'There are other forces, apart from Ardzinba. Moreover, in Moscow too you have the 'Soyuz' bloc; Zhirinovskiy's party, which has been joined by about 4,000 members of 'Aydgylara' ['Unity', the Abkhazian Popular Forum -- BGH] and the People's National Front of Abkhazia, which, together with the

Confederation of Mountain Peoples, support and egg it on'<sup>64</sup>. Measures were taken by the Mensheviks to ensure the presence/dominance of politicians sympathetic to Tbilisi in the second and especially the third Abkhazian People's Councils. Whilst Kartvelian politicians in Abkhazia since the late 1980s have sought to obstruct any progressive proposals put forward by the Abkhazians and their local non-Kartvelian allies, it might be feared that, being largely Mingrelians, they could not necessarily be counted on to continue supporting Shevardnadze. The leader of this Kartvelian faction at the end of 1992 was Tamaz Nadareishvili. Is it not interesting, then, that FBIS-SOV-92-226 (23 November), quoting ITAR-TASS correspondent Albert Kochetkov, reports: 'Tbilisi, 22 Nov -- Today, Eduard Shevardnadze proposed Tamaz Nadareyshvili, a deputy of the Georgian and Abkhaz parliaments, as a candidate for deputy head of state'=! The ethnic Abkhazian Marganadze was presented to the British officer Stocks by the Mensheviks in an attempt to dispel British fears of Kartvelian treatment of the Abkhazians. Since the late 1980s the ethnic Abkhazian Ada Marshania, resident of Tbilisi, member of the Georgian State Council as an Abkhazian political scientist, and contemptuously dismissed by Abkhazians in Abkhazia as no spokesman of theirs, could be described as playing the Marganadze-role, as when addressing on July 29 1992 the IFES representatives, who were visiting Tbilisi to advise on arrangements for the elections of 11 October, on the question of Abkhazia. Regrettably, there were no equivalents to the British generals, Thomson and Briggs, in the Georgia of 1992 to lay the necessary pressure for restraint on the fire-and-sword tactics<sup>65</sup> being then employed by the post-Soviet Menshevik clones...

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<sup>64</sup>Consider also the charge made (to give just one illustration of it) by Ramaz K'limiashvili on the BBC World Service's 'World Today' (Friday 28 August 1992) that Abkhazia was in the grip of communists, who just had to be expelled. This is a rich charge when one considers the political credentials of the man in charge in Tbilisi!

<sup>65</sup>Apart from the usual horrors associated with ill-disciplined troops in occupied territories, a few specific examples should be mentioned. Abkhazians have long been famed for the longevity of many of their citizens. A fax sent by O. Domenia of the Committee for Saving the Centenarians of Abkhazia from Physical Destruction on 14 November 1992 includes the following: 'Among those who are subject to brutal tortures are the centenarians of Abkhazia....87 year-old W. Kokoskir, a member of the famous folk-ensemble of centenarians, was taken hostage, and his house was burnt down. Nobody knows where 106 year-old P. Emkhaa is now. 92 year-old Lili Gvaramia from the village Akwaskia was brutally beaten when she attempted to defend her great-grandson from Shevardnadze's brigands...' On the same date a fax was sent signed by a number of writers to inform about the fate of one of their number: 'A month ago the Abkhazian poet Taif Adzhba was beaten in his Sukhum flat and then arrested. Despite repeated enquiries the Abkhazian authorities have not succeeded in discovering anything of the fate of the writer.' Another writer, Dzhuma Axwba, has now apparently been removed from Abkhazia by the troops. At the beginning of December a helicopter on a humanitarian mission carrying women and children out of the besieged mining town of T'q'varchal, inland from Ochamchira, was shot down with the loss of all on board. And none of this was condemned (publicly at least) by Western governments: indeed, Turkey offered Georgia a loan of 50 million dollars in mid-December -- for a comparison of Georgia with Turkey in terms of their treatment of some of their linguistic minorities see Feurstein (1992). But this silence is hardly suprising when one remembers that even the chilling threat

At the time of writing (i.e. end of 1992), four and a half months after this invasion, a period which has seen bloody battles across the whole of Abkhazia, no Western politician has spoken out against what Shevardnadze has been doing within the frontiers that these same politicians overhastily and with extreme recklessness recognised as forming Georgia's legal borders in the spring of 1992. The already questionable nature of that act of commission is thus compounded by the subsequent omission of any public reproach. Yeltsin, from whose troops the Georgian invasion-forces were reported to have acquired many of the tanks used in the invasion, responded by closing his border with Georgia in an attempt, happily futile as it transpired, to stop the only help available to the Abkhazians actually reaching them (viz. military support from the battalions and volunteers, NOT mercenaries, of the North Caucasian Confederation) -- little wonder the Abkhazians complain of the fate that has placed them now for two centuries between the empires of Russia and Georgia! There was a view that sought to exonerate Shevardnadze himself from responsibility for the despatch of the troops that was thus laid at the door of his colleagues on the (still then illegitimate, though internationally recognised!) Georgian State Council, Dzhaba Ioseliani and Tengiz K'it'ovani. Shevardnadze, however, was happy enough to accept full responsibility himself in **The Independent** (24 September 1992).

The week before the invasion of Abkhazia Shevardnadze spoke on Georgian TV of the evil abroad in his country. He was referring to the kidnapping of state-

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to wipe out every last Abkhazian in Abkhazia issued in August by the local Georgian military chief Gia Q'arq'arashvili similarly failed to elicit any reaction from Shevardnadze's Western supporters. This threat was even reported in the Georgian newspaper **7 dghe** '7 Days' (No.31, 4-10 September 1992, p.3): 'On 25 August Gia Q'arq'arashvili, general of the National Guard stationed in western Georgia appeared on Abkhazian television. He issued an ultimatum to the Abkhazian side: if within 24 hours they should not lay down their arms and hand themselves over to members of the State Council, 'the Abkhazians would have no-one left to carry on their race: 100,000 Georgians would be sacrificed for the 97,000 [27,000 is printed in error -- BGH] Abkhazians, but Georgia's borders would remain in tact'. International Pen has, however, taken an interest in the case of Taif Adzhba, and on 19 November Amnesty International issued an 'urgent action' appeal in view of the following: 'According to the Russian news agency Interfax, Gia Khachirashvili is an ethnic Georgian accused of siding with the Abkhazians in the current armed conflict with Georgian Government forces. He was sentenced to death in Sukhumi, the Abkhazian capital, which is in Georgian Government hands.' And on 2 December a supplementary stated: 'According to the latest reports **Vitaly Gladikh**...was sentenced to death on 10 November 1992 and executed on 15 November' having been accused of being a mercenary for the Abkhazian side. One of the claims of Georgian propaganda was that a mass-slaughter of Georgian civilians was committed in Gagra after the fall of this town. In the press-statement of 7 November the leader of the mission to Abkhazia from the United Nations' Unrepresented Peoples' Organisation unequivocally stated: 'We found no evidence of any mass-killings in Gagra committed by the Abkhazians as reported by Georgian authorities and by the press'. Also stated in the same document is: 'It appears that the majority of deaths and injuries are among civilians, a significant number the result of cluster-bombs prohibited by the Geneva Convention and used by the Georgian side.' At the moment of writing the final report of this mission is about to be made public.

officials by the Mingrelians. I hope to have said enough above to have demonstrated that the main evil abroad in Georgia is essentially militant Georgian chauvinism, a phenomenon we have seen to be anything but new there<sup>66</sup>. When the armed forces of a country of some five and a half million are deployed against a 93,000 minority in pursuance of policies stemming from the racial hatred of the majority-population, such action verges on fascism. If the leaders of the ‘civilised world’ wish to lay claim to any moral superiority, they cannot be selective in the incidences of fascism around the world that they choose to condemn. After 14 August such condemnation might have exercised a restraining influence on the Georgian authorities. It was not forthcoming. Great Britain was in a particularly strong position to exercise an influence for the good on the Georgian authorities -- after all, London had been amongst the first to recognise Georgia and to establish diplomatic relations, urging the same on other EC countries and sponsoring Georgia’s membership of the UN; added to this Britain held the presidency of the EC in the second half of 1992. Like the rest, Britain said nothing...

Paul Henze, writing in 1992 of the noble, almost century-long struggle of the North West Caucasian Circassians (plus Ubykhs and Abkhazians) to defend their land from the encroachment of the Tsars’ ‘civilising’ armies, painted an interesting contrast between the way Western Europe did nothing to help the North Caucasians while intervening to halt Russia’s contemporary advances in the Balkans. With a few appropriate alterations, this passage might equally apply to how the West in general abandoned the North West Caucasian Abkhazians in 1992 (this time to Georgian aggression), preferring to look no further east than these same Balkan regions. ‘It can be argued that the Caucasian peoples were as much entitled as those of the Balkans to having the European powers ensure arrangements whereby they could achieve their national aspirations. But in European eyes the Caucasus was part of the Middle East, utterly foreign and barely civilised; it may have been exotic and exciting but had little direct relationship to the affairs of Europe. Many Europeans may have had the same feelings about the Balkans, but this region was too close to home to be ignored...’ (p.96)<sup>67</sup>.

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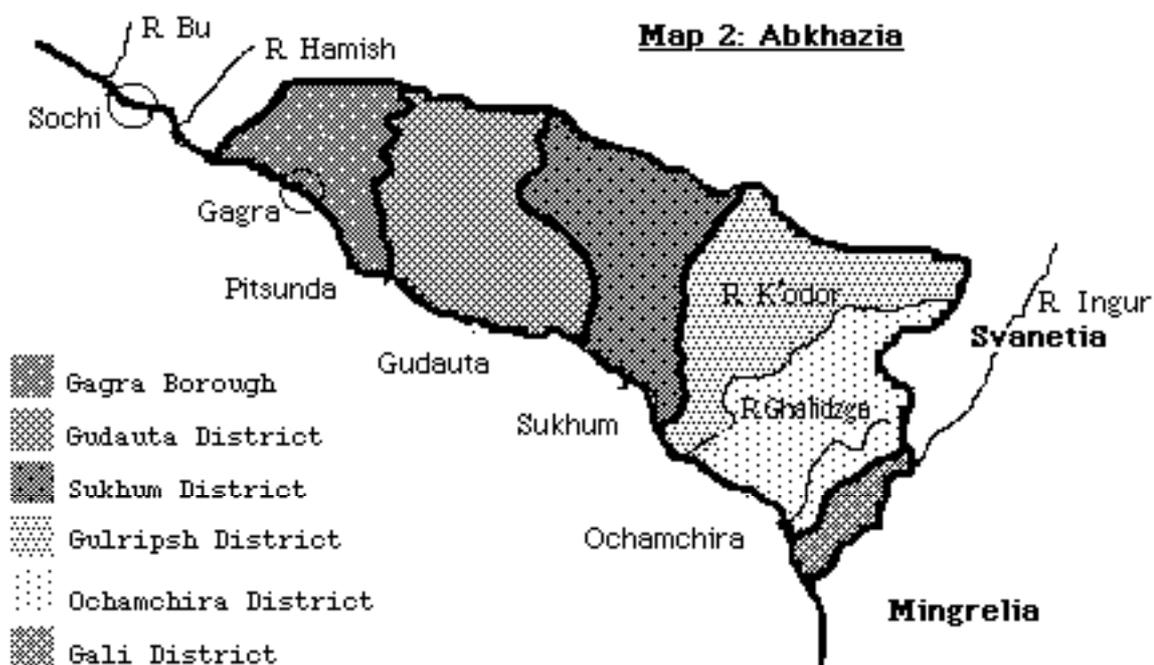
<sup>66</sup>For parallels between the Kartvelian treatment of the Abkhazians and South Ossetians see Appendix 7.

<sup>67</sup>It might be relevant to quote also the following: ‘The liberation of small nationalities must be thorough and final, as without that Europe will again be shaken by conflagrations more violent than ever...’. This is taken from the final page of the pamphlet **Georgia and the Georgian Race**, published in London in 1919 by the National Georgian Committee!

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## APPENDIX 1



## APPENDIX 2

Text of letters sent by the author to (a) 'The Guardian' (7 October 1992) and (b) 'The Times' (9 October 1992), both unpublished, and (c) 'The Times', published 21 November 1992 to coincide with the visit to London of Georgia's Foreign Minister, Aleksandre Chik'vaidze.

(i) 7 Oct 1992

Dear Sir,

Your report and leading-article (7 Oct) on the Abkhaz-Georgian conflict require some comments.

That the Abkhazians have been reduced to an 18% minority on their own territory would lead most casual observers to agree with the sentiment 'No Case for Partition'. But reporting of this conflict has totally ignored the fact that the majority of Abkhazia's population support the search for looser ties with Georgia, given the ugly racism rampant there -- N.B. 51% of Abkhazia's electorate voted in favour of Gorbachev's new union-treaty in the referendum of March 1991, which went against the general Georgian boycott. Your suggestion that it is the Abkhazians alone who are threatening to act 'at the expense of the other communities' is ridiculous. It is only the 45% so-called 'Georgians', who anyway are largely Mingrelians (a people related to the Georgians but with their own language) who have opposed this move. The little reported actions of the Georgian National Guard in Mingrelia proper since the expulsion of (Mingrelian) President Zviad Gamsakhurdia in January are hardly likely to have endeared Shevardnadze to the maybe one million Mingrelians in Western Georgia either.

Shevardnadze's first excuse for sending the troops into Abkhazia was to free his kidnapped ministers; it was only in his **Independent** interview (24 Sept) that his latest excuse became the defence of his railway-link to Russia. Your readers should know that it was Gamsakhurdia-supporting Mingrelians (NOT Abkhazians) who kidnapped the ministers and kept disrupting the railway-line. The troops went in solely to block the independence-moves.

The now reinstated 1925 constitution of Abkhazia presupposes special links with Tbilisi, and talks on the nature of these links were taking place in Tbilisi on 13 August but were sabotaged by the invasion of 14 August.

Your leader refers to the interests of Russia and Georgia. Herein lies the problem. The demise of the Soviet Empire has left intact a number of smaller empires, of which Russia and Georgia are but two. The North Caucasian Confederation under its academic president, Yuri Shanibov, seeks to bring smaller peoples together for their common benefit, and the Abkhazians believe that Georgia itself only has a future as a confederation. It does your paper (of all papers) no credit to dismiss the rights of such small peoples while advocating those of the imperialists.

Yours sincerely...<sup>68</sup>

(ii) 9 October 1992

Sir,

HMG is sadly open to the charge of turning a 'blind eye' to racism not only regarding Azerbaydhan (Letter from Lord Avebury et al. 7 Oct). Neighbouring Georgians are notorious to regional specialists for intolerance of other races. This intolerance has long been directed outwards to the Russians but is now turned inwards to such local minorities as the South Ossetians and the Abkhazians. It was HMG which bounced the West into ill-considered recognition of Georgia under Shevardnadze's (still) illegitimate regime, and the refusal to condemn the action of The White Fox's troops since their invasion of Abkhazia on 14 August is a disgrace.

The Abkhazians, though today an 18% minority in their own homeland, have worked constitutionally in harmony with most other peoples in the region to gain a majority in favour of looser ties with Tbilisi. It is only the 45% so-called 'Georgians', who anyway are largely Mingrelians (a people related to the Georgians but with their own language) who have opposed this move. As reward the Abkhazians have been

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<sup>68</sup>After the mission to Abkhazia of the UN's Unrepresented Peoples' Organisation in November 1992 the British delegate, Lord David Ennals, gave a long interview to **The Guardian's** Moscow correspondent -- it was never published...

branded 'separatists' and 'rebels' by the British media, one leading example of which suggested on 7 October that they were a threat to the other local communities!

Shevardnadze, on the other hand, has become the latest 'teflon' head of state. His interview in one British broadsheet on 24 September allowed him to repeat his superficially plausible excuse for invading Abkhazia -- to free his kidnapped ministers and to protect his rail-link with Russia. But this plausibility disappears when one reflects that it was Mingrelian supporters of deposed president, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, who held the hostages and were disrupting the railway (NOT Abkhazians).

The demise of the Soviet empire has left intact a number of smaller empires, of which Russia and Georgia are but two. The North Caucasian Confederation under its academic president, Yuri Shanibov, is seeking to bring smaller peoples, including the Abkhazians, together for their common benefit. Should not the West rather be supporting those who by their actions have demonstrated their willingness to work democratically and constitutionally for the rights of smaller nations? We currently seem more concerned with advocating the claims of the last of the imperialists.

Yours sincerely,

(iii) 17 Nov 1992

Sir!

The British Government has shown its readiness to oppose the evils of 'ethnic cleansing' by supporting UN sanctions against Serbia and by committing troops to Bosnia. This determination is to be contrasted with its attitude to events unfolding in Georgia, which we recognised in March after Eduard Shevardnadze's return and whose Foreign Minister will be in London on 22nd Nov for a 2-day visit.

Georgia has now been recognised by the EC and other Western countries, is a signatory to the CSCE accords, and has been welcomed as a member of the United Nations. Despite all this, it launched a full-scale attack on the republic of Abkhazia on 14th Aug to prevent this region re-instituting the federative relations enjoyed with Georgia throughout the 1920s, even though negotiations on the nature of this new federation were being held at that time.

We would strongly urge the Foreign Office in its meetings with its Georgian guest to make three points abundantly clear: (i) Tbilisi must cease its use of force immediately and return to the negotiations sabotaged by the resort to force; (ii) no aid of any kind will be forthcoming from the UK unless Tbilisi abides by its CSCE undertakings to respect the rights of all its citizens regardless of ethnicity or political opinion -- the newly appointed CSCE High Commissioner for national minorities should surely play a mediating role in Abkhazia; (iii) there can be no question of this country accepting a Georgian ambassador (planned for December) without a prior peaceful settlement of the Abkhazian conflict.

We would judge the offer of official hospitality to Mr. Chikvaidze as morally acceptable only if the visit served as an opportunity to impress upon him what is expected of a civilised society in the post-Soviet world of 1992.

Yours sincerely,

(Dr.) George Hewitt

with, in alphabetical order:

Lord Avebury (Chairman, Parliamentary Human Rights' Group)

Rachel Clogg (Marjorie Wardrop Scholar in Georgian)

Lord Ennals (UK delegate on UN Commission to Abkhazia, Nov 1992)

Alf Lomas (MEP)

Hakan Mercan (The London Support Group for Abkhazia)

Donald Rayfield (Professor of Russian Literature, London University)

### APPENDIX 3

[The author, Nugzar Dzhodzhuva, is a Mingrelian from Abkhazia. In 1989 he went on Abkhazian television to declare that he could not accept the view which since circa 1930 has been 'official' throughout Georgia to the effect that Mingrelians are correctly classified as 'Georgians'. His reward for stating this personal opinion was to be beaten up and sacked from his job; his home was frequently visited by armed individuals who wished to 'persuade' him publicly to renounce his views, and his mother was obliged to denounce him in the local Georgian-language press... The following article is in the form of an open letter addressed to those of his fellow-Mingrelians who unthinkingly accept this false ethnic classification. No-one in the new 'democratic' Georgia has been prepared to accept the article for publication.]

#### Some have no other value apart from their surname

*chkin kianas mindzhe va?uns,  
vai chkini ucha dghasu.*

[Our country has no protector,  
Woe for our black times.]

It is well-known to all that during and after the time of Stalin the raising of the issue of the Mingrelians and generally of Mingrelia has been strictly prohibited. Today the odd article or letter will appear in the press, but these articles and their authors are subjected to the severest and most uncouth forms of criticism totally devoid of any moral rights and historical facts.

It is a matter of some surprise, fellow-citizens, as to where you can have amassed so much hatred, poison and venom against those who have raised and still raise the question of Mingrelia and the Mingrelians. Do you people who have been reared on Georgian culture and are well educated not know how to respond in a civilised fashion? Why are we 'so-called' Mingrelians? Or why are we so-called Mingrelians 'dogs'? Does it follow then that our language is 'the language of dogs'. The reason couldn't be, could it, that our traditional rulers, the Dadianis, treated Mingrelian peasants and in general their families 'like cattle, and sometimes even worse. The buying and selling of peasants, renting them out, offering them as gifts, giving them away as a dowry, exchanging them for livestock and birds, putting out their eyes with heated candelabra, smearing yoghurt over their bodies and holding them in the rays of the sun, cutting off body-parts with the executioner's knife and other acts were common currency in Mingrelia' (cf. Irak'li Akhalaia **Peasant Reform in Mingrelia** (1958), also Dimit'ri Lemondzhava **The Peasant Revolt in Mingrelia 1856-1857** (1957), Don Arkandzhelo Lambert'i **The Description of Mingrelia** (1901, 1938, 1990) -- all in Georgian).

Fellow-citizens, may I ask you what language you use to speak to your children and grandchildren (Mingrelian or Georgian)?...

To me and undoubtedly to every right-thinking individual it is regrettable when Georgians and Mingrelians speak to one another with 'the bullet' [N.B. reference is to the fighting that has been taking place in Mingrelia throughout 1992, culminating in the battle at Ts'alendzhixia in July -- translator]; after all, what is wrong with a man, whoever he may be, expressing his views and position in the press and on television in a civilised manner, especially if the last thing on his mind is the amassing of political dividends or material benefits=

Fellow-citizens, in the words of M. Dzhanashia ('The Custom of Mourning in Georgia' **Iveria** 7 June 1887): 'The desire to learn the past is born in a people only

when that people reach a high level of development and national self-awareness springs up amongst them.’

If you are really educated and truly honest men, why do you not explain the content of the terms *Gruzija/Gruzin* [N.B. the Russian terms for ‘Georgia/Georgian’ -- translator], on the one hand, and *sakartvelo/kartveli* [N.B. the Georgian terms for ‘Georgia/Georgian’ -- translator], on the other hand? Are these pairs identical in content or not? I am certain that you know full well that they are not, but you find it impossible to deviate from the now accepted tendentiousness. I shall explain their meanings now:

*Gruzija/Gruzin* are artificially created collective words designed to incorporate Mingrelians, Svans and Georgians. That is to say that these three peoples have created a single *Gruzin* people, and their common homeland has been styled *Gruzija*. The terms *sakartvelo/kartveli*, on the other hand, are not collective words, since they do not include Mingrelians and Svans. It follows that *Gruzija/Gruzin* and *sakartvelo/kartveli* are pairs of words with totally different senses. If we were to substitute for *sakartvelo/kartveli* the pair *samegrelo/megreli* [‘Mingrelia/Mingrelian’ in Georgian] or *svaneti/svani* [‘Svanetia/Svan’ in Georgian], both of these pairs would be equally incorrectly translated into Russian by *Gruzija/Gruzin*. You will surely respond to me by pointing out that the Mingrelians have no literature. But you should understand that having a writing-system is not a defining characteristic of an ethnic group; a writing-system is simply the means of expressing a language’s system of sounds.

That a Mingrelian is not a Georgian needs no proving. Personally I find it difficult to take seriously attempts so to do. But I am forced to assemble before you a few facts -- perhaps I’ll succeed in reminding you of some old ones as well as tell you something new.

All foreign scholars take for granted that Mingrelians are not Georgians. It is matter for regret that many ‘Mingrelians’ do not themselves know this fact!

In June 1990 there took place in London the Vth Colloquium of the European Caucasological Society. One of the papers, now published in a volume entitled **Caucasian Perspectives** (1992), was devoted to the Mingrelian and Laz languages, and the argument was presented that Mingrelian is discriminated against in Georgia in just the same way as its sister-language, Laz, is discriminated against in Turkey. For some reason not one of the ‘scholars’ sent as part of the Georgian delegation from Tbilisi chose to offer the Georgian public any information about this paper in the Georgian press – why? The reason is simply that our scholars know better than you and me that Mingrelians are not Georgians, but you have heard the saying;

‘Sometimes it is better to speak than to be silent,  
Sometimes by speaking harm is done’...

‘In Georgia and in Mingrelia I spent the years 1633-1653 as a missionary,’ writes Ark. Lambert’i in his book **The Description of Mingrelia**. Clearly Lambert’i is saying that he visited two countries, otherwise he would have written: ‘I was in Georgia and in one of its regions, Mingrelia.’ He did not write anything of the kind nor could he have done!

In his critical article ‘Comrade Bregadze, Brother Doiashvili’ (**Literary Georgia** 7 16 February 1990) T. Ts’ivts’ivadze writes: ‘Unfortunately for me it seems that my pen ran away with itself when I wrote the lines: ‘Some children reared in the villages of Mingrelia master Georgian somewhat late.’ With the exception that the word ‘some’ needs to be replaced by either ‘most’ or even ‘all’, Ts’ivts’ivadze is of course

quite right, for, if a Mingrelian child did not learn Georgian at school, he would not know it at all, since the native language of Mingrelian children is Mingrelian.

In the same article we read: 'I should not have written these lines, and that's the end of the matter.' The author does not repudiate these lines on the grounds that they are factually incorrect, nor could he have done, as they are factually fully correct, and I offer him my personal thanks for telling the truth -- an honest man should have no fear of saying what is right...

I have said openly before and I repeat it here -- I am a Mingrelian and not a Georgian.

No historian, linguist, philologist, or any other specialist could prove that Mingrelians are Georgians. The Mingrelians were compelled to view themselves as Georgians, and this is why the issue of Mingrelia and the Mingrelians, which has been so sensitive for so many years, will sooner or later 'explode', and the longer it takes, the more bitter and savage will be the result.

Most recently in Georgia the ongoing processes in Mingrelia [N.B. again the fighting in Poti, Abasha, Samt'ordia, Zugdidi and Ts'alendzhikha is meant -- translator] have shown that the myth of the creation of a unified Georgia has burst like a soap-bubble.

In an article printed in **Literary Georgia** on 3 November 1989 georgianised Mingrelian Zviad Gamsakhurdia insulted us Mingrelians as Mingrelians, but the whole world now knows how tragically the author ended his political career.

Reason should rule the behaviour of us all. The Mingrelian language, which is today officially banned by the government, should be given official status (I have in mind its being allowed to serve as a literary language).

The Mingrelian language, which you style the language 'of dogs', is immeasurably beautiful, rich and varied; its loss would be tragic not merely for the Mingrelians but generally for humanity.

Clearly you have given no thought to the question as to why the Georgians themselves are silent on this issue. Why do they not participate in the debate=

And finally, fellow-citizens, my appearance on Abkhazian television in 1989 was not so dangerous as your appearances today. There is absolutely no need for men from Mingrelian homes to shout out for all the world 'I am not a Mingrelian'. Who knows when candle and incense will find their own path= Let us not do anything for which our descendants in the future will have to answer.

*shegnebulo ipcxovrat,  
ducu mitink vauchkara,  
vara uk'ul gviani re,  
chilamurit gilangara.*

[Let us live sensibly,  
No-one of you should hurry,  
Otherwise it is then too late,

And all will wander in tears and lamentation.]

#### Appendix 4

### **TREATY ON THE CONFEDERATIVE UNION OF THE MOUNTAIN PEOPLES OF THE CAUCASUS\***

We, plenipotentiary representatives of the Abazinian, Abkhazian, Avar, Adyghe, Auxov-Chechen, Dargwa, Kabardian, Lak, Ossetian (of North and South Ossetia),

Cherkess, Chechen, Shapsugh peoples, sensing our ethno-cultural kinship and the common character of our ecological surroundings and historical fate, which have found their confirmation at every heroic and tragic stage in the history of our common struggle for self-preservation:

taking into account the inalienable right of each nation to self-determination;

aspiring on the basis of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and of other generally recognised international-legal acts to create all conditions for satisfying the interests of each nationality, to guarantee equal rights for all peoples, ethnic groups and each person;

convinced that unity and collaboration between our fraternal peoples, for the separation of whom were directed the politics of both the tsarist autocracy and the totalitarian regime of the former Soviet Union, will facilitate the self-preservation and survival of the Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus;

recognising as unacceptable any infringement of the interests of individuals by race, religion or other factor and as contrary to natural law any attempts to achieve one's own freedom at the expense of the oppression of others;

considering it our sacred duty by every means to facilitate the return to the Homeland of our fellow-nationals, [whose ancestors were] forced into exile during the period of the Russo-Caucasian war;

firmly determined to oppose any action designed to inflame inter-ethnic enmity, and ready with united forces to face up to any aggression;

entrusting to democratic methods, in particular to people-diplomacy, which has a multi-century tradition and which has not lost its power in the Caucasus today, an exceptional role in settling vexed questions and disputes in inter-ethnic relations;

inspired by the prospect of shewing to the whole world through the example of the multi-ethnic Caucasus, a region unique on the ethno-cultural plane, our sincere striving for the establishment of brotherly relations between peoples on the basis of the principle of equality of rights and close collaboration in the settling of socio-economic and cultural problems,

have decided to conclude the following

## TREATY

### ARTICLE 1

The IIIrd Congress of the peoples of the Caucasus, in continuation of the work begun by the Ist Congress of the united mountain-peoples of the Caucasus (1 May 1917, Vladikavkaz), announces the start of the process of restoring the sovereign statehood of the mountain-peoples of the Caucasus and declares the Confederation of the Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus (CMPC) to be the legitimate heir of the independent North Caucasian Republic ('The Mountain Republic'), formed on 11 May 1918.

### ARTICLE 2

The subjects of the Treaty are the mountain-peoples of the Caucasus existing as the historically independent ethnic communities who have expressed in their national congresses (conferences) and their executive committees their desire to enter the Confederation and whose plenipotentiary delegates drew up and recognised the present Treaty.

## ARTICLE 3

The Treaty partners declare that they will act in the spirit of fraternity, friendship and cooperation with the aims of further developing and strengthening political, socio-economic and cultural ties between the mountain-peoples of the Caucasus, following the principles of respect for state-sovereignty, cooperation, mutual help and non-interference in the internal affairs of the republics which they represent.

## ARTICLE 4

The Treaty partners recognise the need for (i) the coordination of forces for mutually agreed management of socio-political processes in the republics and national-territorial formations of the region, (ii) the formation of a highly developed and optionally functioning inter-republican socio-economic complex, (iii) the creation of conditions for the transition to a market-economy, (iv) the effective and rational use of natural resources and their conservation, (v) the development and strengthening of the artificially interrupted ties between our peoples, (vi) the raising of the standard of living of the population of the republics and of the region in general, and with this aim they go with proposals for the concluding of bilateral and multi-lateral treaties on cooperation and mutual assistance to the highest leading organs of the republics and national territorial formations.

## ARTICLE 5

The subjects of the Confederation have equal rights within the limits of the association irrespective of the number of their peoples. They can differ according to the size and structure of the powers delegated by them to the Confederation.

## ARTICLE 6

The formation of confederative organs is produced by national congresses (conferences) to the Congress of the Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus by means of delegating their plenipotentiary representatives. The Congress itself forms and confirms the confederative organs according to this very principle on a basis of parity. However, it is proposed that with the appearance of necessary conditions the Caucasian Confederation will pass over to the conducting of direct directions of delegates to the Congress of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus.

## ARTICLE 7

The President, Presidential Council, Chairman of the Court of Arbitration, the Caucasian Parliament (Caucasian Assembly), the Chairman of the Committee of Caucasian Associations and the Coordinator for the business of the CMPC chosen by the supreme organ of the CMPC will with unconditional priority for the legislative and executive organs of the republics fulfil their plenary powers by discussion, decision and control for the realisation of each and every problem and question touching upon the interests of the peoples united in the Confederation.

## ARTICLE 8

The organs of the CMPC are built according to the principle of the division of powers between the legislative, the executive and the judiciary, and they function in accordance with the 'Statute concerning the leading organs of the CMPC', ratified at the IIIrd Congress of the Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus, and with regard to the laws of the republics of the region.

#### ARTICLE 9

The Caucasian Parliament (Caucasian Assembly) is elected directly by the plenipotentiary representatives chosen at the congresses of the participating peoples of the CMPC and is not dependent on national parliamentary institutions but at the same time effects a direct link with them through persons who are simultaneously deputies of the Caucasian and national parliaments.

#### ARTICLE 10

The Committee of Caucasian Associations -- the executive organ of the Confederation -- consists of leading employees of the ministries, departments and public organisations of the republics heading the various specialist associations.

#### ARTICLE 11

The Committee of Caucasian Associations in the person of the President, his First Deputy, the Chairman of the various specialist associations and the Coordinator for the business of the CMPC on the basis of treaties in a variety of directions will draw up a general plan for the socio-economic and cultural cooperation of the republics, and after agreement in the institutions of the Caucasian Parliament and Presidential Council they will distribute it to the national parliaments and governments of the republics.

#### ARTICLE 12

Particularly acute and complex vexed questions within and between the subjects of the Confederation and also between them and the Confederation will with agreement of the parties be examined in the Confederation's Court of Arbitration. Decisions of the Court convey a recommendatory character and are effected through the influence of the authority of the general opinion of the united peoples.

#### ARTICLE 13

With the aim of resolving inter-ethnic conflicts and of guaranteeing stability in the region, the IIIrd Congress of the Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus charges the Caucasian Parliament with drawing up a special Statute on the status and functions of established forces for regional security.

#### ARTICLE 14

The subjects of the Confederation have the right to unite among themselves and with other subjects in any associations if their goals are not directed against the interests of the Confederation they have created.

#### ARTICLE 15

The Treaty is open for new subjects to join. An act of union with it will be effected by a special Agreement, confirmed by the Parliament of the Confederation or by the next Congress of the Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus.

#### ARTICLE 16

Withdrawal from the Confederation is achieved by decision of a national congress (conference) of the subjects of the Treaty and will be considered by the Parliament of the CMPC.

#### ARTICLE 17

The Statutes of the present Confederative Treaty can be abolished, altered or supplemented at the request of the subjects by decision of the Parliament of the Confederation with subsequent confirmation by the Congress of the Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus.

#### ARTICLE 18

The participants to the Confederative Treaty commit themselves to observe its conditions and to bear responsibility before their own peoples and the commonwealth of Caucasian peoples as a whole for their actions according to the commitments they have taken upon themselves.

#### ARTICLE 19

The parties to the Treaty have chosen as place of residence for the leading organs (headquarters) of the CMPC the city of Sukhum, capital of the Abkhaz Republic.

#### ARTICLE 20

The Treaty comes into effect from the moment of its recognition (i.e. from 2 November 1991). It is subject to ratification in the national congresses (conferences) or parliaments of the peoples who have created the CMPC. Documents of ratification will be deposited with the Presidential Council of the CMPC.

The Confederative Treaty of the Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus was drawn up and recognised unanimously at the IIIrd Congress of the Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus in Sukhum on 2 November 1991

\* The Russian text of this Treaty may be consulted on page 2 of the newspaper **Edinenie** 'Unity' (11 (020), November 1991). This constitution may be compared with the Russian text of the Charter for the Assembly of Mountain Peoples of the

Caucasus, which it replaced and which was published in the newspaper **Edinenie** (1, 25 October 1989, page 6).

The leading officers at the time of the formation of the Confederation were: Yuri Mukamedovich (Musa) Shanibov (President of the CMPC), Jusup Soslambekov (Speaker of the Caucasian Parliament), Den'ga Khalidov (Deputy-Speaker of the Caucasian Parliament), Konstantin Ozgan (Chairman of the Committee of Caucasian Associations), Zurab Achba (Chairman of the Confederation Court of Arbitration), Gennadij Alamia (Coordinator for the Business of the CMPC, Vice-President of the CMPC).

#### Appendix 5

T.M. SHAMBA, DOCTOR OF LAW\*

### **TREATY**

on the Principles for Mutual Relations between the Republic of Abkhazia  
and the Republic of Georgia  
(Proposal for the Project)

In accordance with the Declaration of the State Sovereignty of Georgia and the State Sovereignty of Abkhazia, until the adoption of new Constitutions, the official delegations of both republics, hereafter referred as *The Sides*, have as a result of talks agreed to the following:

1. The Sides declare their wish to:
  - strengthen the mutual respect and friendship of the Georgian and Abkhazian peoples;
  - develop the socio-economic and cultural ties;
  - expand cooperation into all spheres of life on equal and mutually beneficial conditions;
  - strictly observe human rights and liberties, including the rights of national minorities;
  - prohibit hostility and international discord, use of force or threat to use force;
  - refrain from interference in the internal affairs of each other;
  - respect territorial integrity;
  - cater for the satisfaction of national, cultural, spiritual, linguistic and other requirements of all the peoples living on the territory of Georgia and Abkhazia.
  
2. The Sides recognise Georgia and Abkhazia as sovereign states and full and equal participants of international and foreign economic relations, as well as agreements with other republics and regions of the Russian Federation and the other members of the Commonwealth of Independent States.
 

The Sides will independently conclude treaties and agreements with other countries which should not cause damage or be directed against the other Side.
  
3. The Republic of Abkhazia of its own free will unites with the Republic of Georgia and possesses all legislative, executive and judicial power on its own territory apart from those plenary powers which are assigned by the Constitutions of Georgia and Abkhazia to the jurisdiction of the Republic of Georgia.

In the Constitutions are listed those plenary powers which are effected jointly by the organs of state-power of Georgia and Abkhazia.

4. The territory and status of the the two sovereign states cannot be changed without their consent, expressed by their supreme organs of government or by a plebiscite (referendum).

5. The land, its mineral wealth, waters, flora and fauna are the property of the peoples living on the territory of Abkhazia.

Questions concerning the possession, use and exploitation of the natural resources are regulated by the laws of Georgia and Abkhazia and also are settled on the basis of bilateral agreements.

6. The governmental bodies of the Republic of Abkhazia will take part in the realisation of the plenary powers of the Republic of Georgia and have their own representation in its organs of power.

7. On questions of joint-authority the organs of governmental power will issue the Fundamentals (general principles) of the legislative system in accordance with which the organs of power of Abkhazia will independently effect legal regulation.

Projects for the Fundamentals of the legislative system will be sent to Abkhazia, and her suggestions will be taken into account when they are revised.

8. The Constitution and laws of Abkhazia will enjoy supremacy on the territory of the Republic of Abkhazia.

The laws of Georgia in matters which are under the jurisdiction of the Republic of Georgia are mandatory on the territory of Abkhazia, provided they do not contradict the Constitution and laws of Abkhazia.

The Fundamentals for the legislative system of Georgia, issued on questions of joint-management, will come into power on the territory of Abkhazia after their approval by the supreme organs of state-power of the Republic of Abkhazia.

9. The Republic of Georgia recognises the citizenship of the Republic of Abkhazia.

The Sides guarantee to their citizens equal rights, liberties and responsibilities, declared by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and reflected in international-judicial acts and in the Constitutions of Georgia and Abkhazia.

Discrimination on the basis of national identity, religion or any other difference is prohibited.

Each Side shall protect the rights of its citizens irrespective of the place of their residence or sojourn, providing them with comprehensive help and support. In this the Sides shall cooperate with each other.

Matters concerning the acquisition or loss of citizenship of one of the Sides by persons living on the territory of the other Side are regulated by the laws of citizenship of Georgia and Abkhazia.

10. The Sides confirm the agreement reached previously concerning the creation on the territory of Abkhazia of the unified multi-national Abkhazian Guard, subordinated to the Supreme Council of Abkhazia and, at times of general threat to or attack upon them, to the Ministry of Defence of Georgia.

The Sides commit themselves not to create any military formations on nationality lines and directed against the other Side.

11. In case of disputes the Sides commit themselves conscientiously and in the spirit of coo/peration to make every effort to settle them in the shortest possible time on the bases of legislation actually in force or, in the absence of such legislation, on the basis of the principles and norms of international law.

The procedure for the settlement of disputes shall be determined by the Sides arising out of the prevailing circumstances.

12. The Abkhazian Side declares its readiness to participate in the drawing up of a new Constitution for the Republic of Georgia and the constitutional laws resulting therefrom.

The Georgian Side regards this declaration with understanding and considers the participation of the representatives of the Republic of Abkhazia as well as the representatives of the other nations and peoples residing on the territory of Georgia essential in the drawing up of the new Constitution and constitutional laws of the Republic of Georgia.

13. The Sides have agreed to have permanent plenipotentiary representations -- the Republic of Georgia in the city of Sukhum, the Republic of Abkhazia in the city of Tbilisi.

14. The Sides do not exclude the possibility of additional inter-parliamentary, inter-governmental or other treaties and agreements concerning specific questions of coo/peration and mutual relations between the Sides.

15. The present Treaty comes into effect from the moment of signing and remains in force upto the formation of new supreme organs of state-power and governance in the Republic of Georgia, after which the process of negotiation shall be continued.

\* The original Russian text may be consulted on page 2 of the newspaper **Abxazija** (23) for the week 29 June - 4 July 1992.

#### Appendix 6

##### Meeting with Aleksandre Chik'vaidze, Foreign Minister of Georgia, at Chatham House (Open Session), London, on 23 Nov 1992.

*(Summary of the discussion, prepared from notes, relevant to the present topic)*

Chik'vaidze spoke for 30 minutes on the present condition of Georgia, and much of his presentation was devoted to the present war in Abkhazia. He began by reminding us that he had a musical background and so well knew the meaning of the word 'accompaniment'. This being the case, he did not mind at all the 'accompaniment' that was coming from the square outside, where local Abkhazians were mounting a demonstration! Later, however, he somewhat irritably remarked that those who organised such demonstrations were in no way helping to bring about a settlement of the Abkhazian problem. He welcomed Georgia's recognition by so many countries and its acceptance as a member of the UN on 31 July. He stated his country's willingness to adhere to its international obligations, especially those of the CSCE to protect the rights of ethnic minorities, BUT minority-rights could not be protected at the expense of the indigenous population. By this expression the audience was no

doubt meant to conclude that the Abkhazians are NOT indigenous to Abkhazia and that their moves towards greater autonomy represented a threat to the Georgians living there -- he did, however, note later that both Georgians and Abkaziens had Abkhazia as a common homeland. He said that Georgians have never laid claims to lands belonging to other people and that there was no territory within Georgia's borders today that was not Georgian land. When Jason visited the old Georgian [sic!] state of Colchis, Georgians were living there, just as they were a few years ago when Englishman Tim Severin repeated Jason's voyage! Given Georgia's historical tolerance towards other races (especially towards the Jews, with whom Georgians have never had any ethnic problems), he thought it ironic that so many ethnic conflicts should have flared up in the republic over recent years. He, therefore, followed Shevardnadze's explanation and saw here the hand of Muscovite totalitarianism. He has been spending his holidays in Abkhazia for 35 years and thinks the Abkhazians are a really nice people, which makes him even more surprised at what has happened. He stressed the unfairness of the electoral law in Abkhazia whereby Abkhazians (whom he numbered at 83,000, which in fact was the 1979 census-figure), constituting only 18% of their republic's population, have 28 seats against the 26 for the local Georgians, who make up 45.7%. Georgia's economic position is critical, and yet attacks in Abkhazia [sic!] on the railway-link with Russia were causing great hardship not only throughout Georgia but also in Armenia, which is supplied now only through Georgia. And so, Shevardnadze secured the agreement of Ardzinba to position Georgian troops in Abkhazia to protect the railway. Despite this agreement, which in any case only allowed for Georgian troops to be re-located on Georgian soil, the Abkhazians treacherously attacked the Georgians, and thus did the war start. Despite the peace-agreement signed by Shevardnadze, Yeltsin and Ardzinba on 3 September, after which the Georgian forces withdrew to designated positions, the Abkhazians treacherously attacked and captured Gagra. Today the Abkhazian separatists and their so-called volunteers are treating the Georgians so badly that one could accuse them of genocide. In Abkhazia today we see the same mixture of home-grown fascists and external reactionary forces that exist in other parts also of the ex-USSR. You know, we have a famous song which ends with the words 'What hatred has destroyed, love builds again'. I can tell you that we really love everybody, and we want to solve our problems through love.

### Questions

(1) Lord David Ennals: I was in Abkhazia only 2 weeks ago as part of a UN mission, and I can tell you that I have proof that your Georgian troops have been treating the Abkhazians atrociously. What do you say about this, and why do you not issue an invitation for the newly appointed CSCE commissioner for ethnic minorities (a former Foreign Minister of Holland) to involve himself immediately in this war?

Chik'vaidze: I can tell you that the North Caucasian forces are mistreating local Georgians -- indeed, there is not a single Georgian house between the Russian border and Sukhum that the Abkhazians have not burned.

Ennals: Excuse me, but I was in Gagra, where I spoke to many Georgians who were living in their own houses.

Chik'vaidze: No, you do not understand, I am telling you that there is not a single Georgian property left unburnt between the Russian border and Sukhum. Half a million [sic!] Georgians have already fled from Abkhazia [N.B. according to the 1989 census there were only 239,872 'Georgians' living in Abkhazia! -- BGH]. As for the

CSCE commissioner, I have to tell you that we Georgians are a special people with our own customs that are poorly understood by outsiders, and so we have to sort out our own problems without any external assistance.

(2) Mark Almond (observer at the Georgian elections): Let us leave aside Abkhazia, where it is clear that a civil war is in progress. What concerns me are those areas of Georgia where only Georgians live compactly. It was obvious to me that in such communities if someone disagrees with Shevardnadze, that person is likely to attract the unwelcome attentions of official representatives of the ruling party, with the result that even among ethnic Georgians there is much fear. Take for example the case of Zaza Tsiklauri.

Chik'vaidze: I know nothing about that and don't really believe that it is so.

Almond: Well, even Shevardnadze admitted that such things were going on, and so I can't understand why these people, who are evidently connected with official bodies, cannot be arrested and prosecuted.

Chik'vaidze: No, I think you must have misunderstood -- I cannot think that Shevardnadze will have made any such admission.

(3) Peter Roland (Foreign Office): I read in a recent Moscow paper an interview given by your Minister of Defence in which he said that no autonomy would be returned to Abkhazia. Is this your government's position?

Chik'vaidze: No, not at all. You know that Mr. K'it'ovani is a very emotional man. I like him very much on a personal level, but he sometimes gets carried away, and this may be his own opinion but it is definitely not our government's position.

(4) Margaret Coles (journalist): I have here in my hand a lengthy document giving details of individuals who have been shot, tortured, and attacked because they are supporters of Gamsakhurdia, and for this reason alone. They are Georgians, and this document is being taken very seriously by Amnesty International. What do you say about it=

Chik'vaidze: Well, I have not seen the document, and so I cannot comment on it.

Coles: I am afraid that is not good enough. You would accept that Amnesty International's credentials are beyond dispute, and such a document cannot be so easily dismissed.

Chik'vaidze: Have you ever been to Georgia? Come as my guest, and I shall let you see for yourself, as a journalist, what is really happening in Georgia.

### Appendix 7

[Just before the fall of Gamsakhurdia the present writer was commissioned by **Index on Censorship** to edit and translate an article in Russian by the nonagenarian Ossetian linguist, Vasil Abaev, entitled 'The Tragedy of South Ossetia'. In view of Gamsakhurdia's overthrow and perhaps in the (vain!) hope that Kartvelian attitudes to their minorities would then change the journal's editor did not print the translation. The following are sections from Abaev's work, beginning with Andrei Sakharov's observation from **Ogonek** in July 1989.]

'Georgia has become consumed with a chauvinistic psychosis and behaves towards its ethnic minorities as a little empire.'

What is ethnocracy? We are speaking of when some ethnos declares itself to be sole ruler and awards itself the right to crush, oppress and exterminate all the ethnic minorities on its 'own' territory. This ethnos arrogates to itself unique qualities, a profound antiquity, a brilliant history, and, of course, a racial superiority over all other

peoples. The leaders of the chauvinistic groups puff themselves up to appear large and important. The mania of power is always comical and especially provincial.

‘The most interesting moment begins when they undertake to argue for the ‘right’ of the given ethnos over the territories of others, alleging that these belonged to it in the past, forgetting that the whole history of mankind is a continuous process of transmigrations, splits and convergences of peoples, that there is no ethnos on earth whose formation would not have resulted from some special variety of migration and assimilation’ (A. Osipov *Svobodnoe Slovo* 25 July 1989)...

Long before the inter-ethnic relations in South Ossetia became seriously strained and the sound of gunfire thundered on the streets of Tskhinval, the Georgian mass-media, its papers, journals and responsible persons began strenuously to cultivate the concepts of ‘hosts’ and ‘guests’. The essence of this notion is as simple as the mooing of a cow -- the Georgians are the ‘host’, all others in the republic the ‘guests’...

In order to discredit the ‘wild’ Ossetians, the propaganda of the Georgian fascists baulks at no fabrication. On 7 March 1991 Belgian and Dutch television broadcast in the evening news-programme information to the effect that the conflict in South Ossetia was of a religious character. The Ossetians, they claimed, follow islam (!!) and speak a Turkic tongue (!!!) [in fact Ossetic is a branch of Iranian -- translator]. This ‘information’ was evidently tossed over from Georgia and broadcast through the grace of the Soviet ambassador, the Georgian A. Chik’vaidze.

#### The war of toponyms

The Georgian chauvinists resort to such absurd claims that they should simply be ashamed of themselves. They now maintain that South Ossetia does not exist. If they use the term at all, they put it in quotes and preface it with the words ‘so called’. They now call the area *Shida Kartli* [Inner Kartli] or *Samachablo* [Fiefdom of the Machabeli family].

In fact the Georgian and Russian equivalents of the term ‘South Ossetia’ are found hundreds of times in 19th century sources (cf. *Sovetskaja Ossetija* 8 March 1991). Whilst the Georgian for ‘South Ossetia’ figures in the 8-volume Georgian Academy Dictionary, the term ‘Samachablo’ does not...

If Modern Georgia is going to build its relations with its ethnic minorities on the principles of ‘abuse’ and ‘liquidation’, then the international community and public opinion in all countries will have to judge it accordingly.

#### Real and imagined history

Wherever fascism erupts, the humanitarian disciplines always suffer, history most of all. There is one open and cynical goal for scholarship -- not the search and resurrection of historical truth but unrestrained ethnic, national and racial self-adulation.

In the paper *Zarja Vostoka* (26 May 1989) I happened upon the article ‘How old are we=’ by Georgian historian Lovard T’ukhashvili. The author asserts that the Georgian state is 6,000 years old. The evidence? If you please: ‘The analysis of national ethno-psychology, heightened ambition, unshakeable self-love, pride.’ And that is all! National conceit becomes the determiner of the age of national statehood -- the greater the conceit, the older the state. Such is the level of the new fascistic historiography of Georgia.

Let us move from concocted ‘patriotic’ fantasies to actual history. Before the 10th century of our era there is not a hint of any Georgian kingdom. If before that time a Georgian-speaking ‘kingdom’ did exist, then it had no political relevance even within the confines of Transcaucasia. Only with King David the Builder (1073-1125) does the Georgian state gain a stable political status and, thanks to the crusades,

become known in the West. 'The Georgian Chronicle' begins by presenting a varied mix of fantasy with reality. Many 'kings' figure here. But there is something odd -- not one of them has a Georgian name -- they are all Iranian.

All this has been demonstrated by Georgian historians themselves, the venerable Ivane Dzhavakhishvili among them. From Dzhavakhishvili to T'ukhashvili -- what a deplorable degradation!..

Totalitarianism -- animal-like fear of pluralism, brutal political repression of any alternative thinking, savage censorship, uniformity of all the outlets of mass-information, a puppet-parliament where all decisions are taken unanimously, the concept of 'host' and 'guest' with the hint of the expulsion of all 'guests', rabid racism, half-baked messianism....the fascist character of the ethnocratic Georgian regime is no longer a secret either at home or abroad. Writing in *Le Monde* (25 April 1991) T. Nask'idashvili prophesies: 'And if Gamsakhurdia doesn't come to his senses in time, the Ossetians will be followed by Adjarians, Abkhazians, Kurds, Greeks, Armenians....all those who for centuries judged Georgia to be beautiful and lofty-spirited.'

Abkhazian People's Deputy Shamba twice called the Georgian regime fascistic, and on both occasions Chairman A. Luk'janov stopped him speaking...