

## GEORGIA: CONTEMPORARY LIFE & POLITICS

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### Introduction

I have the honour (or perhaps the word is misfortune!) to begin the day's examination of an exquisite region on Europe's fringes, but this examination, when we reflect on it at 5 pm today, is sadly likely to remain in the memory as, in the main, little more than a catalogue of disasters and tragedy. As for my own particular share of the day's subject, one could sum it up quite laconically by saying: 'Contemporary life and politics in Georgia -- rotten on both counts'. And yet, if we had held this seminar as recently as early 1988, our mood would surely have been one of great optimism, for Gorbachev had come to power in 1985, and his 2-pronged experiment of perestrojka 'transformation' and glasnost 'openness' was in full swing and promising so much. What went wrong?

### General Setting

Georgia is called sakartvelo in Georgian -- the GR-components, seen also in the Russian form Gruzija, have nothing to do with St. George, the country's patron-saint, but seem to have derived via Persian in an attempt to render the Armenian VR-sequence of Yirk', the old nominative plural meaning 'Georgians', vs i Yrac' 'among the Georgians' -- recall that today's eastern Georgia was known to the ancient world as Iberia/Iveria. Of the three Transcaucasian states (Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan) Georgia is the westernmost and occupies part of the Black Sea coast.

The Georgian language belongs to the small family known as South Caucasian (or Kartvelian, from kartveli, the Georgian word for 'Georgian person'). Its 3 sisters are Svan, spoken in the NW province of Svaneti(a), Mingrelian, spoken in the W Georgian lowlands, and Laz, spoken almost exclusively along Turkey's Black Sea littoral from the Georgian border to Rize -- there are few Laz in Georgia but quite a few Georgians (= Imerxevian Georgians) in Turkey. Apart from Laz and Mingrelian, these languages are mutually unintelligible. No genetic relationship has been established between South Caucasian and any other language spoken today or in the past. Of the four only Georgian is written, with its own beautiful and unique script, which in all likelihood was devised towards the close of the 4th century to help disseminate Christian literature in the vernacular after the official adoption of Christianity by King Mirian of central Georgia in the 330s. It has a distinguished literary tradition, little known abroad. From 451 the Georgian

& Armenian churches were united against the diophysite concept of the dual nature of Christ adopted at the Council of Chalcedon, but in 607 the Georgian church abandoned the monophysite view, adopting Chalcedonian orthodoxy, from which time Georgians and Armenians have been rivals in religion and virtually every other sphere too!

## History

Many (?most) Georgians tend to suffer from a naïve belief that the frontiers of Georgia as presently recognised have always (and I mean always!) encompassed a Georgian state -- some carry this to extremes and feel that territory either occupied by any group of Kartvelians or subject to Georgian control at any time in the past remains in some sense God-given Georgian land. I think part of the country's present troubles can be traced to this view, and we should guard against falling prey to the same assumption.

Greek colonies were established around the Black Sea in the 1st half of the 1st millennium BC, including areas occupied by the ancestors of the Laz-Mingrelians and, to their north, the Abkhazians; Colchis was the name used by the Greeks to refer to this regrettably poorly defined region of the east Black Sea coast. Xenophon came close to Georgia and may well have met Kartvelian speakers as he returned to Greece in the 4th century BC. The campaigns of the Roman general Pompey brought him to the region in the 1st century BC. And, of course, Persia was already an influence. The Arabs appeared in the mid 7th century, establishing an emirate in Tbilisi to rule E. Georgia; this lasted until 1122. A colleague has argued that it will have been at this time that Georgian speakers proper probably pushed westwards, splitting the Mingrelian community in the north from the Laz in the south (i.e. establishing Georgian in the areas of Guria and Aĉ'ara/Ajaria) -- the Arab presence in the east is why the provinces of T'ao-K'larjeti in today's Turkey became the prominent centres of Georgian culture for the next few centuries.

With Byzantium's power on the wane along the Black Sea coast in Transcaucasia 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'aukhĉishvili'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. This consolidation continued especially under David the Builder, who finally expelled

the Arabs from central Georgia, and his great-granddaughter, Tamar (1184-1213), who defeated the threatening Seljuk Turks and under whom mediæval Georgia reached its apogee, controlling virtually the whole Caucasus. 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 even with sa-kart-v-el-o, which seems to make its historical debut during this period.

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 what we think of as Georgia comprised merely a conglomeration of such «princedoms» (Georgian samtavroebi), finally disintegrating into the three kingdoms of Kartli, K'akheti in the east and in the west Imereti plus the 5 western princedoms of Abkhazia, Mingrelia, Svanetia, Guria and Samtskhe. Up until the end of the 18th century the western region was subject to the influence and ravages of Ottoman Turkey, whilst in the centre and east the same could be said of Persia. Erekle II (king of K'akheti 1744-1762, and of both K'akheti and Kartli 1762-1798) in 1783 signed the Treaty of Georgievsk with Catherine the Great's Russia, according to which Russia was to come to the aid of Georgia if threatened; Solomon I of Imereti (1751-1784) had already appealed to Russia for help against the Turks. The threat came in the shape of Agha Mohammed Khan, who devastated Tbilisi in 1795. The Russian troops offered no help. The situation became so desperate that E. Georgia was forced to ask to be taken under Russian protection in 1800 -- this led to annexation in 1801, which gave Russia its first toe-hold in Transcaucasia; Mingrelia followed in 1803 and Imereti in 1804; note, however, that whilst Abkhazia came under Russian protection in 1810, it administered its own affairs until 1864. It should also be stressed that there was no formal Georgian state until the October Revolution led to the appearance of an independent (Menshevik) Georgia in 1918. The arrival of Georgian troops in Abkhazia under Gen. Mazniev/Mazniashvili in June was regarded by Abkhazians as a military occupation. There was also trouble in South Ossetia during the 3 Menshevik years, and a British visitor Carl Eric Bechhofer summed up his general impressions of the country, thus: «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). The Menshevik period has come to be viewed through history's distorting prism as a sort of Arcadia to be recreated in post-Soviet conditions -- sadly its worst aspects have indeed been recreated. Soviet Power was established with the invasion of the Red Army under the Georgian Sergo Orjonik'idze acting on orders from fellow-Georgian, Iosep Jughashvili (aka Stalin), in 1921.

#### Georgia under Russian rule

Split into at least the 2 gubernias of Tbilisi and Kutaisi (Georgia's second city, in Imereti), Georgia became something of a lazy backwater, with the language repressed for most of the 19th century in favour of Russian. The capital was largely occupied by Armenians, and Georgians were happy to acknowledge as late as the 80s (though I'm not sure they would today!) the fact that old Tbilisi had been largely constructed by Armenians, joking that: 'We Georgians like to sit, drink and debate, while Armenians are grafters with an eye for money'. The revivalist movement was started in the 3rd quarter of the century by the writers Iliá Ch'avch'avadze and Ak'ak'i Ts'ereteli plus the educationalist Iak'ob Gogebashvili, founding such organisations as the Society for the Spread of Literacy among the Georgians. The movement was very much centred on the Georgian language and its associated great literary tradition. With Russian scholars taking an interest towards the end of the century in the rich linguistic and cultural heritage of the Caucasus as a whole, we find the first signs of resentment among Georgians at observations that Mingrelians, having their own language, deserved to have a liturgy of their own; Gogebashvili wrote a pamphlet that claims some ecclesiastical publication in Mingrelian was publicly burnt by Mingrelians in anger at being asked to give up the Georgian liturgy. The question of Mingrelian identity remains extremely sensitive, and I address the question of Georgian attitudes to Mingrelian language and separateness in my forthcoming article in **Central Asian Survey 14, 2**, listed on the handout.

It was during this period of revival and national consolidation around everything that was felt best embodied the spirit of Georgianness that the young Oliver Wardrop first visited the country in the 1880s and wrote his book 'The Kingdom of Georgia', subtitled 'Travel in a land of wine, women and song'. The later 'Sir' Oliver and his sister Marjorie fell in love with the country, learned its language, translated examples of its literature and laid the foundations of Georgian studies in this country; Sir Oliver eventually established both the Wardrop Collection at the Bodleian Library and, in memory of his early deceased sister, the Marjorie Wardrop Scholarship in order to encourage the subject.

Having opposed the Bolshevism espoused by Stalin and Orjonik'idze, Georgia suffered at the hands of Orjonik'idze in the early 20s, just as it suffered, like everywhere in the Union, during the Purges of the 30s, the Mingrelian L. Beria being Stalin's enthusiastic local executor until transferred to Moscow in 1938. Georgian attitudes towards Stalin (and Mingrelian attitudes towards Beria) remain ambivalent to this day -- monsters, but local monsters made good who beat the Russians at their own game. In fact, most Georgians were rather adept at playing the Soviet system and winning. The derision and contempt in which they held their Russian masters ('Johnie -- or Ivan -- come latelies' who acquired both Christianity and a script 500 years after Georgians acquired the same) was perhaps matched only by that which characterised the Estonians and their Baltic neighbours during the Soviet period. Perhaps in part to justify this loathing Georgians argued that their language and culture had suffered under the Soviet system, but I think there is little evidence to support this firmly held conviction: their language was never repressed, their script never altered, Georgian was always taught and functioned as the medium of instruction in Georgian language-schools, so that one could complete one's entire education from nursery through university in it. As John Russell says in his Minority Rights' Group 1990 Update on the Georgians: 'Given their relatively small numbers of less than 4 millions or 1.4% of the USSR population, the Georgians have exercised throughout Soviet history a significant influence on affairs in the USSR (and, indeed, in the world)', noting that in Gorbac̆ev's Congress of Peoples' Deputies they had 3.2% of deputies, whilst the Supreme Soviet had 5.7% Georgian nationals. Living so far from the Centre, naturally disinclined to follow rules, relying on networks of family and friends, plus the already mentioned talent for playing the system and winning, Georgia became perhaps the most prosperous of the 15 Soviet republics, which cannot be entirely attributed to its generous climate and abundance of delicacies like fruit and nuts -- a real added bonus. As a result, many Russians came to resent both the high Georgian/Caucasian life-style and the swagger of self-assuredness that accompanied it. But at the same time this was part of what made Georgians so attractive to Western visitors, especially after the drabness of life and individuals further north. Georgia was, in the last decades of the USSR, always open to Westerners, which was not true of, say, the North Caucasus. Then again there are more Georgians than any other Caucasian tribe. And so the hail-fellow-well-met attitude coupled with a highly developed oriental cult of the guest, which in my opinion is typical of the Caucasus as a whole, came to be associated in the minds of those relatively few Westerners who had visited the Caucasus with the Georgians *par*

But what could be seen by foreign visitors as the attractive feature of Latin-type bravado in a small people battling against almost 2 centuries of domination by the Russian bear turned into something much less appealing when directed inwards towards the republic's minorities, as happened in 1988. As for Western susceptibility to Georgian charm, even some of those who could see through Stalinist propaganda and knew Stalin for what he was often reported how alluring a person they found him on a personal level. And I am convinced it was faith in Shevardnadze's Georgian blandishments that prompted Gorbachev to appoint this allegedly former KGB operative (actually one-time Minister of the Interior) and Party Boss in Georgia from 1972 to be Soviet Foreign Minister in 1985 -- a masterly stroke! The winning smile did wonders for the image of the Kremlin after the years of Gromyko's iciness. And the poor quality of leaders we seem to have today in Western Europe and America are still being duped by that same smile, which is the moment to turn to turn to the mess that is Georgia today.

#### Late- & Post-Soviet Politics

As the Soviet peoples were invited to raise grievances stemming from their membership of the USSR, forces in Georgia began to discuss their greatest grievance of all -- their very involuntary membership of this Union -- and to begin agitating for national freedom. Various groupings or parties sprang up, often led by known dissidents, amongst whom the most prominent were: Merab Kostava, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, and Gia Chanturia; all 3 were of Mingrelian origin, and all 3 are now dead. The first two had together set up the Georgian branch of Helsinki Watch in 1975 and had subsequently been arrested -- Kostava served his full 12 year term of imprisonment and internal exile, whilst Gamsakhurdia recanted on all-Union TV and was released but lost much of his previous respect amongst the dissident-community, though (to the dismay of many) on his release Kostava willingly began working with him again. Tragically these (and other) unofficial leaders all decided to play the nationalist-card (hysterically so from 1989), which set the state on the road to war, political turmoil and consequent ruin on all fronts. Why was nationalism based on a concept of Georgianness fatal in the context of Georgia?

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

#### **Main Population of Georgia (1979 & 1989)**

	<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%
Azerbaijdzhanis	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%

**Main Population of Abkhazia (1979 & 1989)**

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 reason why 'Georgians' are presented in quotes is that after the 1920s the Mingrelians and Svans (plus those few Laz living in the USSR) lost the right to call themselves anything other than 'Georgians', which I suggest was a deliberate piece of demographic manipulation designed to increase the so-called Georgian percentage of the population. But even if one accepts these figures as accurately reflecting ethnic self-awareness, one sees that no less than 30% of the population was non-'Georgian' (or, as I prefer, non-Kartvelian). In these conditions one needed leaders and political programmes which could unite the whole population if Georgia was to seize the opportunity and strike out for viable independence from Moscow. Instead of this, divisiveness based on demagogic and racist claims became the norm. Ch'ant'uria's National Democratic Party conceived as its slogan 'Georgia for the Georgians (viz. Kartvelians)', and it was in this context that non-Kartvelians were branded as 'guests', one writer notoriously arguing in the press that only 5% of 'guests' could be tolerated; a State Programme for the Georgian language gave no recognition to the needs of any of the country's other languages and insisted on a qualification in Georgian language & literature being taken by anyone wishing to enter higher education in the republic; the danger of being swamped by Muslims and the consequent need to enforce birth-control were discussed in the context of the high birth-rate of the country's Azerbaijani population; restrictions on citizenship were mooted based on adherence to Georgian language & religion; any Mingrelian who dared to ask out loud or in print whether Mingrelians were really Georgians became the object of instant abuse in the media and in one well-known case physical violence; and anti-Abkhazian and Ossetian campaigns began, rooted in ludicrous claims as to when these peoples first arrived on 'Georgian'(!) soil. My

colleague, Donald Rayfield, has said that in this period one found not so much a de-Stalinisation of Georgia as an attempted de-georgianisation of Stalin...

As to the North West Caucasian Abkhazians, they had been the only people south of the Caucasus to fight Tsarist Russia in its long Caucasian War to subjugate the North Caucasus in the 19th century, and most of the North West Caucasians migrated to Ottoman lands after Russia's victory in 1864. This left Abkhazia denuded, and the 1989 population-balance there largely results from Beria's and his successor K'andid Chark'viani's attempt to swamp the Abkhazians on their own soil by forcibly implanting mainly Beria's fellow-Mingrelians in the 1930/40s. In the 40s Abkhaz schools were closed and their literature banned, and later that decade a wild, unscholarly theory was published by a Georgian self-taught literature-expert, P'avle Ingoroq'va, which claimed today's Abkhazians only arrived in 'Georgia' in the 17th century -- this was seen as laying the foundations for their expulsion to Central Asia (after the manner of the Chechens et. al.), but this plan was abandoned, as the intermingling with Mingrelians was felt bound to bring about the assimilation of the Abkhazians within a couple of generations. And in 1989 the Ingoroq'va-fantasy was revived and strenuously promoted by academics, including a tendentious and *aprioristic* linguistically based article from 1991 by none other than Acad. Tamaz Gamq'relidze, honorary member of the British Academy!

Encouraged by *perestroika* the Abkhazians had already sent their own so-called Abkhazian Letter to the Kremlin in June 1988, setting out their historical and continuing dissatisfaction with the subordinate status to Tbilisi which Stalin imposed on them in 1931, for from 1921 to 1931 Abkhazia had been a full republic with special treaty-ties to Georgia; this had led in 1978 to a request to secede from Georgia and join Russia. Knowledge of this Letter seems not to have reached Tbilisi until late '88 or early '89, which shews both that Georgian anti-Abkhazian feeling was not solely motivated by reaction to this Letter and that Abkhazian resentment towards Tbilisi was not solely caused by incipient nationalism in 1988. However, mutual resentments festered and grew throughout 1989, especially after the killing by Soviet troops of about 20 demonstrators in the centre of Tbilisi on 9 April; the mass-blockade of Tbilisi's centre was chiefly a demand for independence but in part was concerned with developments in Abkhazia too. In the event the first ethnic clashes in Georgia took place not in Abkhazia but in the Azerbaijani areas of Marneuli and Dmanisi south of Tbilisi; this was in July. But by the middle of this month, as a result of provocations instigated largely by K'ost'ava, Gamsakhurdia and their followers, clashes



occurred in Abkhazia, resulting in about 14 deaths and the despatch of Soviet Interior Ministry troops to keep the peace, which they did most successfully. Abkhazian leaders decided that, reduced under Georgian control to a mere 17% of their own population, they would be destined to extinction, especially in the atmosphere created after June 1989, and embarked on an attempt constitutionally and peacefully to free themselves from Tbilisi's tight control, crucially having the support of the non-Kartvelian residents of Abkhazia, all of whom naturally felt threatened by the racism emanating from Tbilisi.

K'ost'ava was killed in a car-crash in October, leaving Gamsakhurdia as the main oppositionist, eventually to become the first elected post-communist president. However, trouble was brewing in S. Ossetia, and 4,000 Daghestani residents of E. Georgia were expelled by Gamsakhurdia's supporters; tensions were rising in the Armenian populated area also. As the autonomous republics and regions in the North Caucasus were acquiring full republican status in the autumn of 1990, South Ossetia, an autonomous region within Georgia and already the scene of clashes with Zviadist thugs, likewise declared full republican status. Gamsakhurdia immediately nullified not only this but autonomy **of any sort** for the region, beginning a nasty war which was to lead to a mass-outflow from the region; most of Georgia's Ossetian population lived outside South Ossetia, and, if the figure of 120,000 refugees to North Ossetia is correct, then the bulk of Georgia's 165,000 Ossetes must have left during this period.

South Ossetia was Gamsakhurdia's war. But he had other problems to contend with. Elected to achieve independence, he sought to cut ties with Russia, and independence was indeed attained in the wake of the failed August coup in Moscow in 1991. But he managed to isolate Georgia not just from Russia but from the rest of the world as well, whilst his increasing authoritarianism at home alienated many supporters, both in and out of government. With such figures as Ch'ant'uria and the warlord Dzhaba Ioseliani gaoled, mayhem descended upon Tbilisi in Dec 1991, as oppositionists and Zviad-loyalists shelled each other along the beautiful old Rust(a)veli Prospect. Zviad was expelled, taking refuge with Dudaev in Grozny in January 1992, and an illegitimate State Council took control, with Ioseliani as its hard-man. Sentenced to 25 years for an armed robbery in which a man was killed, Ioseliani later became an orientalist and man of letters, vaunting his criminal past on the grounds that anti-Soviet activities on the part of a Kartvelian should be regarded as the actions of a Georgian patriot. Though never a proponent of Mingrelian distinctiveness, Gamsakhurdia came from Abasha in Mingrelia, and continuing support for him was concentrated in

Mingrelia. And so for most of the first half of 1992 Ioseliani and his Mxedrioni (= 'Cavalry') militia ravaged any area in Mingrelia where Zviadists could be found -- this virtual civil war was largely ignored by the Western media, most of whose representatives had never heard of Mingrelians and were unaware of the importance of this possible split in Georgia along essentially ethnic divisions.

The West, quite rightly in my opinion, had not recognised Georgia under the regime of Gamsakhurdia, even though sources at the FCO tell me that, had he remained in power, we probably would have recognised the country (wrongly, I should say). Anyway, the State Council realised that, if the West hadn't recognised Georgia under a democratically elected leader, their illegal coup would hardly lead to any recognition or help, and so they turned to the one Georgian who, commanding respect abroad, seemed in a position to bring some benefit to his native country, Eduard Shevardnadze. Whether, as Gamsakhurdia never tired of charging, Shevardnadze had been controlling events in Georgia behind the scenes all along must remain an open question, but, as someone has observed, if he weren't closely in touch with the leading players, he wouldn't be much of a political leader. He returned from Moscow at the beginning of March, and instead of lending a hand to help steer the young state towards peace and stability, the West (largely under the misguidance of Messrs. Major and Hurd, acting no doubt on the advice of Sir Rodric Braithwaite, former ambassador to Moscow, foreign affairs' advisor to the PM and noted Shevardnadze fan) embarked on a course that, in my opinion, gave it a share of the responsibility for what was to follow.

Georgia under Shevardnadze Mark 2 ('Democrat and Christian')

The legacy of Gamsakhurdia was an economy in steep decline, a war in South Ossetia, and rumblings of discontent among various other minorities, notably the Abkhazians, plus the fighting in Mingrelia. What the West should have done was to make certain promises to Georgia via its new figure-head on certain conditions. The promises would have been: recognition of the country and exchanges of diplomats, membership of the UN, and credits from the World Bank and the IMF. The conditions would have included: acquisition of legitimacy in the promised elections on 11 Oct that year, resolution of the war in S. Ossetia, cessation of hostilities in Mingrelia, and clear indications that a new state-structure would give meaningful recognition to the rights of Georgia's minorities (which in my view would ideally have meant the creation of a federal structure with local administrations not only in Abkhazia, S. Ossetia and Aĉ'ara, but also in Mingrelia, Svanetia, and the Armenian and Azerbaijani areas as well). In this

way, the West would have demonstrated both a willingness to support a Georgia under Shevardnadze but also a determination to have no truck with the dangerous nationalism that Gamsakhurdia and others had unleashed in 1988. Instead of this, all the carrots were offered to the Georgian donkey at once and the stick was thrown away -- what a precedent for the world to set for anyone minded to overthrow a democratically elected government! The result was all too plain for anyone with a knowledge of the country and with eyes to see (neither of which qualifications were/are applicable to Westminster and/or Whitehall). True, fighting in S. Ossetia was brought to an end (albeit after an initial flare-up) with tripartite Russian-Ossetian-Georgian peace-keepers sent in -- no political solution has even now been reached, however. Mingrelia was in no mood to be pacified, and, with Georgia's rail-link to Russia totally disrupted by skirmishes in this region, the economy collapsed even further. Though negotiations were in progress with the Abkhazians on the form of future constitutional links between the two states (assuming a return to the arrangement of the 1920s), Shevardnadze sent his troops into the region on 14 August 1992, within days of Georgia becoming a member of the UN, beginning an even bloodier war than his predecessor's slaughter in S. Ossetia. And the vulgar pretext for this war, I am firmly convinced, was to unite his and Gamsakhurdia's Mingrelian supporters against what he thought would be viewed as the common foe. This weak calculation utterly failed, and the cost was thousands of lives, widescale human misery, further disruption to the Russian rail-link, and an economy in total ruin -- outside the rouble-zone, Georgian coupons become ever more worthless; the country cannot pay its fuel bills to Turkmenistan and thus regularly finds itself, particularly in the high-rise Soviet slum-creation schemes of Tbilisi, without gas, electricity and water. Bread-queues are the order of the day in this one-time wealthiest of republics -- indeed, a Guardian leader earlier this year quoted figures to shew that the Georgian economy had fared worse than any of the other former Soviet republics! In this environment, where everyone apparently has a gun, there are severe problems of law and order; drug-taking and trafficking in narcotics are reported to be widespread. In the meantime on 11 Oct 1992 Shevardnadze, the only candidate (!), won over 90% of the vote in an exemplary throwback to the communist tradition and set about appointing former apparatchiks to leading posts. Elections could not, of course, take place in those areas affected by war, and the observers sent by British Helsinki Watch stated in their report that, when they raised questions about the State Council's treatment of Zviadist prisoners, a German diplomat in Tbilisi rebuked them with the reminder that they were they only to legitimise Shevardnadze's election and not to raise issues of human rights!

The Abkhazians were strongly supported by local non-Kartvelians and North Caucasian volunteers and were able to buy arms from sympathetic Russian militarymen. The Georgians were finally expelled from Sukhum and routed from the occupied southern half of Abkhazia at the end of Sept 1993. The bulk of the local Kartvelian population decided they had better flee before the arrival of the victorious allies in case of reprisals (according to Caucasian law of vendetta), and please note that the latest report of The Unrepresented Nations & Peoples' Organisation (CAS, 14, 1) makes it abundantly clear that this is how the exit happened rather than through an official policy of ethnic cleansing, as Georgian propaganda and, following this, a poor quality Western media plus the UN & other worthy bodies have maintained -- the first UNPO report (CAS, 12, 3) should also be consulted in order to dispel earlier Georgian propagandist claims about this conflict. Nor is it true, as is regularly stated by the UN and UNHCR etc., that there are 250,000-300,000 refugees in Georgia from Abkhazia. Many non-Kartvelians were targetted by the occupying Georgian forces and fled (to Russia, Armenia, Greece & Israel), and their fate has been largely ignored by the UN and others, who seem only concerned with Kartvelian refugees. Only Kartvelians will have fled to Georgia proper, and since by no means all have left, and since there weren't 250,000 of them prior to the war, it follows that there cannot be as many as is claimed unhoused to the east of the Ingur river. In fact, since many more (Russians, Ossetes, Daghestanis, Armenians, etc.) than this figure have fled FROM Georgia in recent years, there ought not to be a critical housing-shortage!

What is to be done?

Governmental and NGO help is being channelled into Georgia, though apparently not at a level to allow all debts to be cleared and a new start to be made. One cannot deny, given the desperate straits in which ordinary individuals find themselves, that help is sorely needed. But, in my opinion, attitudes towards the country should be predicated on a mature and holistic assessment of the facts rather than on a manifestly superficial appreciation of the character of the country's current leader. Much of Georgia's troubles have been entirely self-inflicted, as I hope to have outlined.

The view of the major international players (i.e. Western governments) seems to have been that Georgia, like the other union-republics of the USSR, deserved its freedom from Moscow and that Shevardnadze would be a stabilising factor, able to steer his native land to a democratic future, presumably outside Moscow's

direct control. this judgment was seriously flawed from the start, for it was based on the paradox that the man who had always been a mere Georgian executor for decisions taken by Russian policy-makers and thus loathed for his pro-Russian sympathies during his 13-year reign as Party Boss in Tbilisi was going to break the pattern of a lifetime. Returning home without a power-base of his own, he found great opposition in & out of Parliament to his acceptance of the need for Russian bases to remain in Georgia. Of course, Georgia needed/needs good relations with its largest neighbour, and one could argue that any sensible leader would recognise this and act accordingly, but, in addition to fact of *Realpolitik*, Shevardnadze has always been and will remain the Kremlin's man. However, to try to win popularity back home he simply adopted his predecessor's stance vis-à-vis Georgia's minorities -- hence the Abkhazian war.

After the Abkhazian victory Gamsakhurdia returned to Mingrelia and began what at one stage looked like a march that would sweep him to power again in Tbilisi. Shevardnadze put himself at the mercy of Moscow, dragged Georgia (screaming!) into the CIS, and gained Russian support in the battle with Zviadists, who were soon routed. Zviad died in Mingrelia in Jan 1994 -- his widow has recently accused Shevardnadze of infiltrating agents into his bodyguard. Working for closer ties with Russia throughout 1994, Shevardnadze faced continuing and growing opposition. Having announced at the start of December that his NDP would enter into an anti-Shevardnadze alliance, Ch'ant'uria was assassinated at the end of the week by unknown assailants...

A Georgian-Russian treaty has recently been signed allowing Russian bases to stay in Georgia for 25 years; Russian Defence Minister Gračëv flew to Georgia at the time and, with nauseating theatricality, was baptised in Tbilisi with his Georgian counterpart, Nadibaidze, as his god-father! Russian peace-keepers have been stationed on the Abkhaz-Georgian border for a year, but reports suggest Shevardnadze is once more on the warpath, again in a cheap attempt to save his position in the eyes of general Georgian hostility; but , unlike 1992, he is now backed by Russian arms & training. While Russia can take pride in the outspoken opposition to its government's brutality in Chechenia by people like Yelena Bonner, Sergei Kovalyëv and Anatole Shabad, I can name not a single Georgian who has similarly condemned the bloodletting in Abkhazia.

Meanwhile the inflexible world-attitude to the Abkhazian issue rests on the stale philosophy of the 'preservation of territorial integrity' -- Georgia was

precipitately & mistakenly recognised and given membership of the most exclusive state-club, the UN, and states protect their own. The UN-sponsored peace-talks that periodically take place in Geneva are attended by representatives of a shady organisation called The Friends of Georgia (FOG!), comprising in the main Britain, France, Germany and America: it has no official meetings and issues no public statements about its activities and aims, but it certainly puts what pressure it can on the Abkhazian delegation to abandon at the negotiating-table the *de facto* independence they won in a war they did their best to avoid in the first place. Fog's most recent stab at this was to draw the Abkhazians' attention to Western inaction over events in Chechnia, to add that no-one would lift a finger if Georgia re-invaded, concluding with the threatening remark that the delegation had it in their own hands to destroy their own people -- such is the depth to which Western diplomacy has now sunk! And as a mark of his neutrality in this conflict, Boutros-Ghali accepted an honorary doctorate on his visit to Tbilisi University last November! The West did nothing to stop or reverse the invasion in 1992 and seems now to be offering no guarantees of its own if the Abkhazians were to return to essentially their pre-1992 by accepting the latest Shevardnadze plan, advanced in a secret missive he sent to Yeltsin on 9 March: the idea is for a federation to be formed between Georgia, Abkhazia, South Ossetia & Aġara, with their autonomy guaranteed by Russia (in other words, a complete regeneration of the autonomous structures of Soviet times, with which nobody was satisfied, though now Russia and Georgia are independent countries). Where are the advantages that should flow from a victory in a war that only the Georgians wanted and which they started? That the Kartvelian side is no more willing than 6 years ago to acknowledge the legitimacy of any Abkhazian concerns was shewn in a Georgian interview given by Gia Gvazava, a Mingrelian member of the so-called Abkhazian Government in Exile, on Radio Liberty at the end of April. He revived the Ingoroq'va accusation that Abkhazians were late-comers to Abkhazia, adding that he, a Mingrelian, was in fact a true Abkhazian! So, it's back to square one, with again the Kartvelian side calling for a military solution. The leader of the Gvazava's group, deputy premier of Georgia, Tamaz Nadareishvili, has recently been spreading his propaganda on a visit to America, and last year Madeleine Albright paid these advocates a visit at their base in Zugdidi, whilst the Abkhazians are denied a voice on world-platforms and their representatives officially shunned when travelling abroad.

The Abkhazians are ready for a confederation between equal partners with Georgia and for nothing more demeaning. The world talks of the dangers of

aggressive separatism, and not surprisingly Shevardnadze has strongly backed Yeltsin's brutality in Chechnia by saying (at Chatham House on 16 Feb) that it should be put down wherever it occurs no matter what the cost. In Georgia's case, however, one should rather speak of 'aggressive territorial integrationism', and a further distressing thought is that the state-structures the West is here stubbornly buttressing in respect of Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabagh and Chechnia (to trespass on fellow-speakers' territory!) are constitutional arrangements fashioned by that great social benefactor and engineer, Joseph Stalin. What the Caucasus with its intricate ethnic balance required as communism collapsed was men of vision, able to handle its needs with sensitivity and intelligence -- what it got was true heirs of Stalin in both Tbilisi and Moscow who are able to act as hand-fistedly as they wish with the tacit approval of Western political pygmies. What is the *raison d'être* for states if not the collective safeguarding of the citizens living within their borders? When the state itself is the source of oppression of any particular group or ethnic minority among its citizenry, surely it sacrifices its right to survival? This applies just as much to Shevardnadze's Georgia (and Yeltsin's Russia) today as it ever did to the former USSR. That our leaders and institutions choose to ignore this point in the post-Soviet world, having argued it loudly in the days of the Cold War, places us firmly on the side of the post-Soviet bully.

## HANDOUT (GEORGIA)

### **Main Population of Georgia (1979 & 1989)**

	1979	1989	1979	1989
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%
Azerbaydzhanis	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%

### **Main Population of Abkhazia (1979 & 1989)**

	1979	1989	1979	1989
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%

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