

CONFIDENCE-BUILDING MATTERS

The Georgia–South Ossetia Conflict

Dennis Sammut and Nikola Cvetkovski
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THE GEORGIA-SOUTH OSSETIA CONFLICT

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Written by Dennis Sammut and
Nikola Cvetkovski

Dennis Sammut co-ordinates the
Programme on Conflict and
Confidence-Building at VERTIC.

Nikola Cvetkovski is the
Administrator of the VERTIC
Transcaucasus Office in Tbilisi.

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VERIFICATION TECHNOLOGY INFORMATION CENTRE

Carrara House, 20 Embankment
Place, London WC2N 6NN
Tel: +44 (0)171 925 0867
Fax: +44 (0)171 925 0861
E-mail: verticcsbm@gn.apc.org

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Executive Summary

- The Georgia–South Ossetia Conflict of 1989–92 resulted in more than a thousand deaths and tens of thousands of refugees. It was one of several conflicts that plagued the territory of the former Soviet Union after its collapse.
- 1995 saw a major thaw in relations between the government of Georgia and the authorities in South Ossetia. Progress was registered in the three tiers of contacts; those within the framework of the Joint Control Commission, the contacts facilitated by the OSCE and contacts through non-governmental organisations.
- There is now a window of opportunity that may allow a comprehensive political solution to be worked out this year. However, it will depend on whether the political leadership of the two sides have the courage to take decisive steps in this direction.
- The two sides should not try to work out all the legal and technical details in the first instance but should focus on an agreement on basic principles.
- A constitutional arrangement will necessarily also require a parallel treaty arrangement between Georgia and North Ossetia, as well as a healing process that will require input and good will from both sides.

Introduction

The disintegration of the Soviet Union plunged the former Soviet Republic of Georgia into political chaos and civil war.¹ One of the first areas of conflict was South Ossetia,² an autonomous region within Georgia during the Soviet period and the scene of a bloody conflict in the period 1989–92.

In the uncertainty following the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), the status of ethnic groups and/or nations and state borders once more became a subject of dispute as old conflicts and rivalries that had been brutally suppressed by Moscow in previous centuries re-emerged. Georgians striving for independence, statehood and national reassertion felt deep national insecurity. The Ossetians found themselves victims of the disintegration, divided between two different states — an insecure Russia, still reeling from the collapse of the USSR and a Georgia caught in a wave of nationalist euphoria.

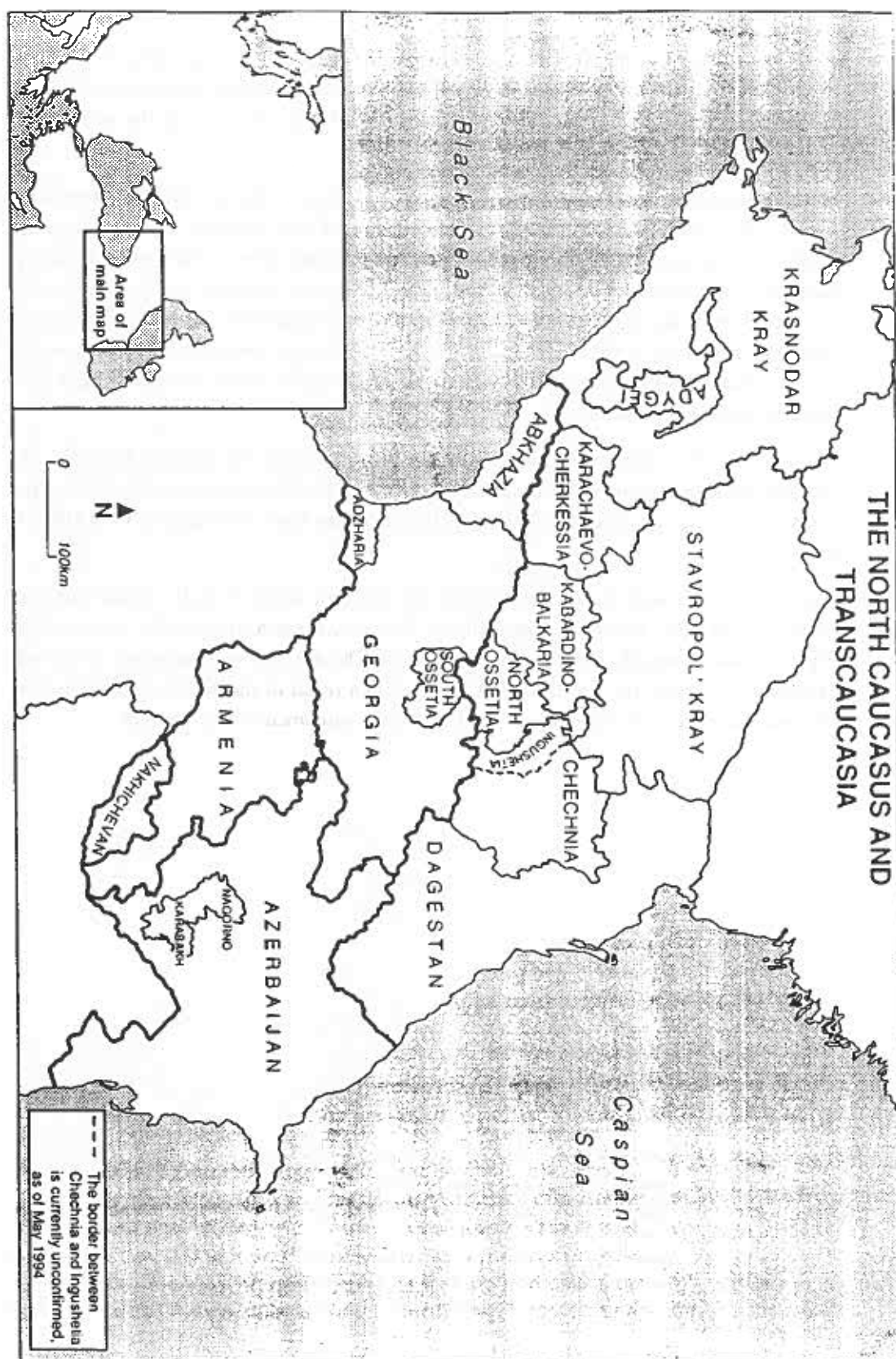
The conflict that ensued resulted in a death toll of around one thousand people and refugees numbering tens of thousands. It has left South Ossetia separated from Georgia but still unrecognised except as a part of the Georgian state according to international law.

Soon four years will have passed since the fighting stopped and a cease-fire was implemented. The situation, especially in Georgia, though also in the surrounding regions, has changed, but the Georgia–South Ossetia problem remains unsolved. However, new hope for a solution has emerged as a result of the political determination of the leadership of the two sides to find a peaceful settlement to the conflict.

¹ For an overview of the problems facing Georgia following the collapse of the USSR, see Dennis Sammut, "The Birth of the Georgian State, Giving Georgia a Second Chance", *Confidence Building Matters* No. 3, VERTIC, London, November 1994.

² Well aware of the controversy of terminology, we will use the terms used in international documents and usage. Therefore we write South Ossetia and Tskhinvali, and not Samachablo, Shida Kartli or Tskhinvali-region as used by the Georgian side, and not Tskhinval and Republic of South Ossetia as used by the Ossetian side.

Map of the Region



Basic Facts

South Ossetia covers an area of 3,900 square kilometres. It is situated on the southern foothills of the Greater Caucasian Mountain Range, surrounded by the rest of Georgia on its southern, western and eastern sides, leaving only the northern side open through a tunnel towards the Russian Federation, or to be more exact to the Republic of North Ossetia within the Russian Federation.

According to the 1989 census, taken just before the first phase of the Georgia–South Ossetia Conflict, around 98,000 people lived in South Ossetia. There seems to be agreement among both Georgian and South Ossetian sources about the total distribution of Georgians and South Ossetians in South Ossetia and Georgia proper. Both parties rely on the numbers given in the 1989 Soviet census, according to which there were 164,000 Ossetians (roughly 3% of the population of Georgia). Of these, some 65,000 lived in the Autonomous Oblast of South Ossetia, while some 99,000 lived in other parts of Georgia.

In South Ossetia, according to the 1989 census, Ossetians accounted for approximately two-thirds (66.61%) of the population and Georgians the other third (29.44%). The remaining 4% is made up of Russians, Armenians and Jews.

In Tskhinvali, the administrative centre of South Ossetia, Ossetians constituted about 74% of the population, Georgians 16% and others around 9%.

Because of the conflict, these figures have changed drastically. It is estimated that about half of the Ossetians who lived in Georgia proper have moved to North Ossetia, while a less significant number have gone to South Ossetia. Some who lived in South Ossetia also moved to North Ossetia for economic reasons.

In South Ossetia, many Georgians have left for other parts of Georgia. In Tskhinvali Georgian sources estimate that very few Georgians remain. Those who do are mostly elderly people. According to Ossetian sources, most Georgians left Tskhinvali when the conflict started. Official sources estimate that around 5,000 Georgians have returned to Tskhinvali now that the situation has calmed (1993–5). According to unofficial Ossetian sources, these figures are exaggerated, and in fact there are only about 500 Georgians in Tskhinvali.

In other parts of South Ossetia the situation is different. Many Georgians have left, but there are some Georgian villages (particularly in the north) around Tskhinvali city, which today are not only inhabited by Georgians but are also still under Georgian jurisdiction. Hence, when the parliamentary and presidential elections took place in Georgia on 5 November 1995, there were also elections conducted in these parts of South Ossetia.

Generally speaking, Georgians and Ossetians have been living in peace with each other in recent times, except for this conflict and an episode in 1920, which will be described later. The two groups have had a high level of interaction. This can be seen in the high rate of intermarriages.

The Georgia-South Ossetia Conflict

Ossetians and Georgians basically share orthodox Christianity,³ though some Georgians would state that the Ossetians are not Christian but pagans. In fact, there are elements of paganism in both groups, but nevertheless they both take pride in their religion, and both toast and venerate Saint George as their patron Saint.

As languages, Ossetian and Georgian differ significantly, as they are from two different language families. Georgian is a unique subgroup of the Caucasian group and has its own unique alphabet. Ossetian belongs to the Indo-European group and is distinctly related to Iranian but uses the Cyrillic alphabet with Ossetian modifications. According to some sources, only 14% of the Ossetians in South Ossetia speak Georgian,⁴ and although their language is Ossetian, Russian seems to be more commonly used.

When Georgia was part of the Soviet Union, Georgian was the official state language, with some of the minority languages having equal status in minority areas. In South Ossetia, Russian functioned more or less as the official language in the school system and in public administration. Still, there were Ossetian and Georgian schools, where only one language was taught and the other ignored.⁵

³ Amongst the North Ossetians there are a minority of Muslims but none in South Ossetia.

⁴ Fuller, Elizabeth, "Report on the USSR," 15 Feb. 1991, p. 21.

⁵ In contrast, in North Ossetia there were no schools with instruction in the Ossetian language until 1988.

History

The history of the area, including the history of relations between Ossetians and Georgians, has been one of the key issues of the conflict. The central question is who came first and hence to whom does the land historically belong? If every square metre of soil in the former Yugoslavia is filled with history and legends, the same is true for every inch of the Caucasus. Several historical publications have been written by both Georgian and Ossetian historians to attempt to prove the other side wrong.

The Georgian position is exemplified by the following quote: "...Ossetian settlements began mostly in the last two or three centuries (which is very recent time for Georgians)..."⁶ This position was further sharpened during the period of nationalist leader Zviad Gamsakhurdia, who called the Ossetians "ungrateful guests of Georgia", having their historical homeland in North Ossetia.

The Georgians see South Ossetia as one of the oldest centres of "the material and spiritual culture" of the Georgian people that has been an indivisible part of Georgia for centuries.

They claim that the Ossetians are newcomers to this area, having their historical homeland in North Ossetia and consequently that they have no right to territorial autonomy. This contrasts with their position on Abkhazia, which is recognised by the Georgians as the historical homeland for the Abkhaz and a territory which the Abkhaz are entitled to have.

The Ossetian standpoint is that they have been living in this area for centuries on both sides of the Greater Caucasian Mountain Range. The South Ossetians consider themselves to be the southern branch of the Ossetian nation. Furthermore they see the Ossetians as descendants of the Alans, a Scythian tribe that came to the Caucasus in ancient times and merged with the local population.

Ossetians state that they and the Georgians have lived side by side for more than two thousand years. In the wars against invading powers the Ossetians always fought by the Georgians' side. They refer to the fact that the famous 12th Century Georgian Queen Tamara was married to an Ossetian. It is also claimed that Stalin was half Ossetian and half Georgian. Hence, during Khrushchev's time, when Stalin fell into disfavour in Moscow, both Vladikavkaz and Tbilisi made claims for his body.

Georgian sources agree that the Ossetians are the ancestors of the Alans, but they stress that this merger happened in the North Caucasus. According to Georgian sources, Ossetians first started to migrate across the mountains in the 17th and 18th Centuries, appearing first on the southern slopes and then in the lowlands of what the Georgians call Shida Kartli (meaning the inner and unifying province of the country).

After the Mongol–Tatar invasions in the 13th Century, the Ossetians (encouraged by the Mongols) attempted to occupy the territory south of the mountains but were forced back by the Georgians. According to Georgian sources, the Ossetians began their

⁶ Gia Nodia in *"Current Politics and Economics of Europe"*, Vol. 2, No. 1/2, 1992, p.39.

settlement in Georgia in the 1860s in the estates of Georgian feudal lords (hence one of the Georgian names for South Ossetia is Samachablo, after the feudal Duke Machabeli). By 1880, the number of Ossetians in the area amounted to 52,000.

If one can talk about a collective memory or consciousness among the Georgians it is that they see the Georgian nation as the eternal historical victim in relation to the surrounding powers, from Persia and the Ottoman empire to Russia. From this perspective, the minorities of Georgia are often seen in the light of a possible fifth column.

This consciousness collides with that of the Ossetians who also see themselves as victims. As the Chairman of the Supreme Council of South Ossetia, Ludwig Chibirov, puts it:

"...this is the second time in one generation that we have been the victims of genocide by the Georgians; in that way our demand for independence should be seen not as idealism but as pragmatism."⁷

Historically, as now, the Ossetians have seen themselves as having no other choice than to look towards Moscow. As one Ossetian puts it:

"...this striving for survival as an ethno-historical entity — and identity — drove us 'to side with Soviet Russia'—not our genetic love for bolshevism, sovietism and other 'isms'..."⁸

After the collapse of the Tsarist Empire in 1918 (of which Georgia had been a part since 1801) Georgia declared its independence. Georgia became a democratic republic led by the Georgian social-democrats — the so-called Mensheviks. The country was recognised by several Western states. On 7 May 1920, a treaty of friendship was signed between Georgia and Russia in which, according to Georgian sources, Russia recognised South Ossetia as an integral part of Georgia. It was named as Tiflis Gubernia and included the district Shida Kartli, therefore including what was to become the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast.

The Ossetian historical experience and their interpretation of events in Georgia is markedly different. The Ossetians joined Russia voluntarily in 1774, and they state that in the agreement nothing was mentioned distinguishing North and South Ossetia. Therefore when Georgia left Russia in 1918 it was natural for South Ossetia not to stay within the framework of Georgia. Hence, on 8 June 1920, South Ossetia declared independence as a Soviet Republic.

Georgia sent its army to crush what they saw as a South Ossetian uprising challenging the territorial integrity of Georgia. Russia protested this action as an intervention into South Ossetian internal affairs.

The South Ossetians saw this as a denial of their right to self-determination. According to Ossetian sources about 5,000 Ossetians were killed, and 13,000 subsequently died

⁷ From conversation of Chibirov with the authors, July 1995.

⁸ Tskhovrebov, "A Letter to an Editor", p.4, unpublished paper, Malmo, Sweden, 1991.

from hunger and epidemics. The South Ossetians consider this to be the first genocide committed by the Georgians.

Conversely, the Georgians view this as the first attempt by Ossetians to seize Georgian territory and the first attempt by Russia to destabilize Georgia by encouraging South Ossetia to secede. In 1921, the Red Army invaded Georgia and annexed it.

One year later, the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast within Georgia was declared.⁹ Hence, the Georgians see South Ossetia as a concept forcibly and artificially introduced when Georgia was annexed by Soviet Russia following the old imperial principle of *divide et impera*.

On the other hand, Ossetian historians dedicate much effort to show that the name South Ossetia was not an invention by the Soviet Union, but used much earlier; this they demonstrate by using Russian, Armenian, Western and Georgian sources. They state that the first written source mentioning the name South Ossetia is in the early middle ages by Armenians.

When the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast was created, the city of Tskhinvali was chosen as its capital. According to Georgian sources, it was an almost completely Georgian populated city and the decision was made despite local Georgian protests. The same Georgians remark that after the establishment of the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast, the ethnic composition of the town changed completely: "It happened so that this oldest Georgian town on the bank of the Liakhvi river became Ossetian".¹⁰

Against this highly contentious historical background, some Georgians felt that it was inevitable that the Ossetian issue would someday rise again.¹¹ The question was only when and how. Like so many ethnic conflicts, the issue flared up with the collapse of central government.

⁹ This was two years before North Ossetia was granted autonomy within Russia. In many ways South Ossetians have always been a step ahead of their northern bretheren in emphasising their national identity. This can also be seen in the use of the Ossetian language as mentioned above, as well as in the use of the white, red and yellow Ossetian flag which was used for the first time in South Ossetia.

¹⁰ Totadze, Anzor, "The Population of Abkhazia – The Ossetians in Georgia", Tbilisi, 1994, p. 49.

¹¹ See, for instance, Gia Nodia in "Current Politics and Economics of Europe", Vol. 2 No.1/2, 1992, p. 39.

The Conflict

Georgia was one of the first republics of the Soviet Union to seize the opportunity of the *glasnost* ("openness") policy of Mikhail Gorbachev and call for independence.

The situation at the end of the eighties was characterised by a massive wave of nationalist euphoria and political turmoil, leading to independence in April 1991. The leader of the independence movement (eventually first president of Georgia), Zviad Gamsakhurdia, based his popularity on a nationalist agenda. Primarily, it was directed against the imposed Soviet/Russian communist rule, but it also manifested itself as Greater Georgian nationalism at the expense of the minority groups of Georgia.¹²

In this atmosphere of heightened and often antagonistic Georgian nationalism, the South Ossetians felt threatened and began to organise themselves. Looking towards the situation in Abkhazia, the South Ossetian nationalists formed a popular front called Adamon Nykhas (Popular Shrine) and began to express their national aspirations through solidarity with the Abkhaz nationalists.

In the spring of 1989, the leader of Adamon Nykhas, Alan Chochiev, published an open letter, declaring his group's support for the Abkhazian campaign against the opening of a Georgian branch of Sukhumi University in Abkhazia. This triggered the first clashes between Ossetians and Georgians in South Ossetia. Furthermore, on 26 May, the anniversary of the declaration of Georgian independence in 1918, clashes between irregular groups of Georgians (encouraged by Zviad Gamsakhurdia) and local Ossetians took place. The stand-off intensified with the Georgians issuing declarations and manifestations calling for sovereignty and independence from the Soviet Union, while South Ossetia responded by seeking greater autonomy and eventually separation from Georgia.

In August 1989, the Supreme Council of Georgia put forward a Georgian language programme. Though Georgian was already the state language of the republic, with some of the minority languages having equal status in minority areas, this programme aimed to stress the use of Georgian in all public spheres of society.¹³

This provoked a response from the South Ossetians. In September 1989, Adamon Nykhas addressed an appeal to the USSR Council of Ministers, the USSR Supreme Soviet and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) Central Committee protesting that the Georgian language programme was undemocratic and

¹² In this connection, a Georgian academic has made a good observation: Since encouraging ethnic conflicts was supposedly a "KGB policy", some of Gamsakhurdia's adversaries used his anti-minority stand for charging him with being "KGB agent" (Ibid. Nodia, p. 36).

¹³ This programme involved not only increased use of the Georgian language but also, for example, a Georgian language test for entry into higher education, programs for the promotion of Georgian history, the institutionalisation of previously unofficial Georgian national holidays, creation of republican military units comprising only Georgians and the resettlement of Georgians in areas dominated by minorities (Jones, Stephen, "Nations and Politics in the Soviet Successor States", edited by Ian Bremmer, Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 294-295). Some of these measures are understandable in the process of Georgian state-building, but in an atmosphere of nationalist euphoria and chauvinism it increased the insecurity felt by the minorities.

unconstitutional. Furthermore, they asked for the question of the unification of North and South Ossetia to be discussed at the CPSU Central Committee plenum of nationalities. In November, the Supreme Council of South Ossetia passed a resolution demanding that Ossetian be the official language of the Autonomous Oblast. This was refused by both Moscow and Tbilisi.

A group from the Supreme Council of South Ossetia demanded that its status be changed from autonomous oblast to autonomous republic, changing the status to the same level as that of Abkhazia. The Supreme Council of Georgia reacted immediately, declaring the claim illegal and stepped up the war of words by stating that the Supreme Council of Georgia had the right to veto any Soviet law which went against Georgian interests.¹⁴ Furthermore the Georgian authorities responded by firing the First Party Secretary of the oblast.

On 23 November 1989, Gamsakhurdia organised what he called "a peaceful meeting of reconciliation". Thousands of Georgians, in buses and cars, left for Tskhinvali. This was naturally perceived by the Ossetians as a clear power demonstration and a threat to South Ossetia. The Ossetians blocked the road and clashes took place, in which several people were wounded.

This episode clearly aggravated the situation: armed conflict seemed imminent. South Ossetians started arming themselves and Georgians in South Ossetia started moving their belongings from their homes, leaving only things they could not carry with them.

In August 1990, prior to the parliamentary election in Georgia, the Supreme Council of Georgia passed an election law that banned any party whose activity was confined to specific areas of Georgia from participating in the election. This law could only be interpreted by the South Ossetians as a way of cutting them off from influence and a way of showing them what they could expect in an independent Georgia.

On 20 September 1990, the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast declared independence as the South Ossetian Democratic Soviet Republic, appealing to Moscow to recognise it as an independent subject of the Soviet Union. When the election of the Georgian Supreme Council took place in October 1990, it was boycotted by the South Ossetians. The election resulted in a victory for the "Round Table-Free Georgia" coalition headed by nationalist Zviad Gamsakhurdia.

In response to this and as a manifestation of their independence from Tbilisi, the South Ossetians held elections to their parliament in December 1990. According to Ossetian sources, 72% of the population of the republic took part in the election, which exceeds the percentage of the Ossetian population. The Georgian response was swift. Within days the Georgian Supreme Council cancelled the results of the election and voted to abolish the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast as a separate administrative unit within the Republic of Georgia.

The scene was set for direct confrontation. Following violent incidents in and around Tskhinvali, a state of emergency was declared by the Georgian parliament in the

¹⁴ *This was of course part of the Georgian struggle for independence from the Soviet Union and was not aimed specifically at South Ossetia, but nevertheless the South Ossetians felt threatened.*

Tskhinvali and Java regions on 12 December 1990. Troops from Russia's and Georgia's MVD (Interior Ministry) were despatched and the commander of the Georgian MVD troops was appointed as the mayor of Tskhinvali. According to South Ossetian sources, the Georgian militia started disarming the South Ossetian militia with the consent of Moscow.

In the first days of 1991, the Supreme Council of Georgia passed a law on the formation of the National Guard of Georgia. A few days later, on the night of 5 January, several thousand Georgian troops entered Tskhinvali and committed atrocities. According to the South Ossetians, this was apparently in agreement with the local Russian troops.

The war took place mainly in and around Tskhinvali, around the Georgian villages and north along the road to North Ossetia, the lifeline of the South Ossetians.¹⁵ The fighting in Tskhinvali first resulted in a divided town — an Ossetian controlled western part and a Georgian controlled eastern part. After some 20 days of fighting, the Georgians withdrew to the hills around the city. The Ossetians say they forced the Georgians out, while the Georgians say that, after a cease-fire agreement mediated by the Russian commando on the ground, they withdrew to the outskirts of the city.

This uneasy situation lasted for the remainder of the war. The Georgians sat in the hills around Tskhinvali, besieging the city, and other fighting took place around the city in the nearby villages and along the road to North Ossetia.

In Tskhinvali today, the evidence of destruction is still evident. There are bullet holes in almost every building and several houses remain in ruins. According to Georgian sources, some of these houses belonged to Georgian families who fled or were driven out of Tskhinvali, their houses subsequently burnt. Another monument of the war is School No. 5. Not being able to bury their dead in the cemeteries because of the shelling and the snipers, the Ossetians used the school playground instead.

In addition to this front-line fighting, the Georgians carried out a blockade by controlling the road south of the tunnel which connects South Ossetia with North Ossetia, using the Georgian villages along the road north of Tskhinvali as strongholds. Georgians disconnected electricity supplies to Tskhinvali, and blocked the road by which the city received food and other products. In February 1991, the central Russian television characterised the situation in the city as "worse than Leningrad in 1942. The entire city is without heating and electricity...there is no food". On several occasions, the South Ossetians blocked the Georgian villages north of Tskhinvali from the rest of Georgia as well.

During this time, the South Ossetian authorities made several proclamations, requesting to join the Russian Federation. A referendum was held in January 1992, in which the Ossetian authorities claimed 99% voted to join the Russian Federation and unite with North Ossetia.

¹⁵ Ossetians living in Georgia proper were affected by the conflict. According to Ossetians living in Georgia proper, 50% of 100,000 Ossetians living there fled Georgia, some for South Ossetia, most for North Ossetia. The cause was increasing nationalist rhetoric, discrimination and incidents of violence, just before and during Gamsakhurdia's period (conversation with the Ossetian organisation "Vsmaroni" (brotherhood), October 1995, in Tbilisi).

As mentioned, troops from Russia's MVD had been in Tskhinvali from the start of the conflict. Their role was rather ambiguous and even contradictory. According to the Ossetians, they did not try to stop the Georgians from taking Tskhinvali. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union collapsed and, in December 1991, the Russian MVD troops left Tskhinvali. According to Georgian sources, the Russian MVD gave their arms to the Ossetians. Incidents of more overt assistance given by the Russian army were to follow.

In June 1992, the Chairman of the Russian Supreme Soviet, Ruslan Khasbulatov, made a statement in which he described the Georgian actions in South Ossetia as genocide which could force Russia to consider the South Ossetian authorities' request to join the Russian Federation.

Shortly afterwards it was reported that heavy weaponry with Russian identification marks were used by the Ossetians. Edward Shevardnadze, having been appointed as the chairman of the interim State Council of Georgia (March 1992), made a statement condemning the Russian armed forces' open participation in the conflict on the South Ossetian side.

The Georgians claim that the Russian army helped and supplied the Ossetians several times during the conflict. The Ossetians deny this, saying that they fought alone with no outside help.

Most independent observers agree that the Russian forces were not innocent on-lookers in the conflict. Some argue that the actions of the Russian troops were a reflection of decisions made by independent-minded generals rather than as a part of some sinister plan to destabilize Georgia. Nevertheless, the defeats of Georgia, in both South Ossetia and Abkhazia, at that time, fitted perfectly into Russian political and strategic interests in the region. Georgia subsequently crawled to membership of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), accepted (though it has yet to ratify) an agreement to allow Russian military bases for a period of 25 years and signed a treaty of friendship with Russia.

In the end, Georgia changed, or rather had to change, its strategy towards Russia to a more co-operative one. Some call it submissive; others realistic. Certainly, Shevardnadze made concerted attempts to stop the fighting in South Ossetia after coming to power — approaching both the Russians and the South Ossetians. The Ossetians contest this, stating that after he came to power, some of the most severe shelling of Tskhinvali took place.

It should also be stated that the nature of this military mission can best be described as confused and anarchic. The Georgian troops in the area were not a disciplined armed formation. The commanders and soldiers were often acting in their own interests or giving in to the emotional mood of the local civilian population. On the Ossetian side the situation was no less complicated. Several political factions had armed formations of their own and their interests did not always coincide. At one point the Minister of Information of South Ossetia, Stanislav Kochiyev, was asked whether he was aware of

the existence of forces on Ossetian-controlled territory that were not obeying the Ossetian leadership; he did not deny this possibility.¹⁶

The aspirations of armed groups working outside the control of the recognised leaderships created an atmosphere of tension throughout the first part of 1992. Cease-fires were violated, hostages taken and civilian targets bombarded. In a particularly serious incident on 20th May 1992, 36 Ossetians, including women and children, were killed in lorries and cars on a secondary road northwest of Tskhinvali. The incident threatened to bring Russia even more directly into the conflict on the side of the South Ossetians. Hard-liners in the Duma used the incident to accuse Georgia of genocide; in retaliation, helicopters with Russian markings bombarded Georgian-controlled villages.

On 24 June 1992, Shevardnadze and Russian President Boris Yeltsin met in Sochi to discuss the question of South Ossetia and a cease-fire. On 14 July 1992, a CIS peace-keeping operation began, consisting of a Joint Control Commission and joint CIS–Georgian–South Ossetian military patrols.

There were still a few isolated incidents of fighting after the patrols were put in place. However the cease-fire can be characterised as a success, inasmuch as it has separated the conflicting parties. Since then, the situation has been rather frozen. The process has effectively separated South Ossetia completely from Georgia and contacts between the two sides were rare.

¹⁶ *The Current Digest*, Vol. XLIV, No. 24, 1992, p. 15.

Towards a Resolution

Very little progress in resolving the conflict was registered in the period 1992–4. This was due mainly to reticence by both sides stemming from a number of factors and sometimes misperceptions. On the one hand, the Georgian leadership had its hands full with events at home. Shevardnadze's return in 1992 brought some legitimacy and authority to the central government in Tbilisi. Yet, before he had had time to settle in, Georgia got caught in another conflict with a separatist region — this time, Abkhazia. The Georgian forces, fragmented and disorganised, were no match for the Russian-backed Abkhaz forces and their North Caucasian allies. As they retreated, another rebellion sprung up in western Georgia, led by ousted president Zviad Gamsakhurdia. With his country disintegrating, Shevardnadze reluctantly took Georgia into the Commonwealth of Independent States and agreed to start negotiations on the continued presence of Russian bases in the country.

The massive refugee problem created by the defeat in Abkhazia, as well as the perception that the two separatist movements in Abkhazia and in South Ossetia were both instigated by Moscow, meant that Georgia gave priority to dealing with the Abkhaz issue. This was in the hope that if that conflict was resolved, then efforts to resolve the South Ossetia conflict would fall into place as well.

In South Ossetia, the Georgian predicament in Abkhazia was perceived with understandable glee. There was a feeling that the Abkhaz would do the dirty work and the South Ossetians would gain by the result. As the Georgia–Abkhazia conflict grinded to a stalemate (and became complicated by internal Russian politics), both the Georgians and the South Ossetians became aware of the need to engage directly in negotiations and to try to separate one conflict from the other.

In 1995, the two sides developed contacts with each other not seen since the 1992 conflict, prior contacts having been strictly private and restricted. These contacts can be grouped in three categories:

- (a) Contacts in the framework of the Joint Control Commission;
- (b) Contacts promoted by the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE);
- (c) Contacts promoted by non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

Contacts in the framework of the Joint Control Commission

The Yeltsin–Shevardnadze Sochi agreement of July 1992 provided for (a) a cease-fire; (b) a joint Russian–Georgian–South Ossetian peace-keeping force; and (c) quadripartite talks involving Russia, Georgia, South Ossetia and North Ossetia. The OSCE also joined this process at a later date.

The cease-fire has, on the whole, held well. The idea of a joint peace-keeping force was quite innovative in that it brought the Georgians and South Ossetians into a joint effort. In reality, it was the Russian battalion that did most of the peace-keeping. OSCE

military observers monitoring the peace-keeping forces speak highly of the seriousness of the Russian peace keepers but complain of many incidences of drunkenness and petty crime by Georgian and South Ossetian soldiers.

The work of the Joint Control Commission has been more complex. The meetings of the Commission take place mainly in Moscow or Vladikavkaz. Initially, the Commission was involved mainly in dealing with the cease-fire and often day-to-day issues, such as access to the Georgian villages in South Ossetia. In 1995, however, the Joint Control Commission tried to open up a more substantive dialogue. In July 1995, the Joint Control Commission meeting was held for the first time in Tbilisi. The South Ossetian delegation, however, rather than going to Tbilisi directly, went to Vladikavkaz and travelled to Tbilisi in a convoy escorted by the Russian military and accompanied by the North Ossetian delegation.

In the meeting held in December 1995, the Joint Control Commission became more ambitious and pushed through a number of initiatives aimed at re-establishing the infrastructural links between Georgia and South Ossetia.

A number of low-profile meetings between the two sides have since taken place. A basis of co-operation in the fields of energy, fighting crime and others are now in place between South Ossetia and the neighbouring Georgian regions of Kartli and Mtskheta-Mtianeti.

Contacts through the OSCE

The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) — then known as the Conference for Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), first became involved in the Georgian–South Ossetian problem in 1992. The first rapporteur mission to Georgia, headed by former Belgian Foreign Minister Mark Eysken, visited the region in May 1992, shortly after the decision of the CSCE Council of Ministers to admit Georgia as a member, taken on 24 March 1992. On 6 November 1992, the Committee of Senior Officials decided to set up a mission in Georgia headed by the Personal Representative of the CSCE Chairman in Office.¹⁷

Assessments of the OSCE's role in this dispute vary a great deal. On the one hand, both parties to the conflict try to downplay the role of the OSCE — yet both parties clearly derive benefit from it. For the Georgians, since as far back as 1992, the OSCE provided international supervision of the Russian “peace-keeping” role at a time when Georgia was weak and very much at the mercy of Russia. Since then, the importance of the OSCE for Georgia, at least in the context of the dispute with South Ossetia, has decreased. This is due in part to the fact that the OSCE mission expanded to include wider terms of reference, of which South Ossetia is now only one part. These terms include the monitoring of human rights in Georgia, as well as general involvement in the Abkhazia issue. Georgians still see the OSCE as a balance to Russia's role as “peacemaker” and “peace-keeper”.

¹⁷ *The Resolution is included as Appendix B.*

For the South Ossetians, the OSCE provides an important link with the international community. Although South Ossetian officials are somehow perplexed by the rotating principle of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office and short terms of the members of the mission, they have generally put aside the technical problem of the name of the mission (OSCE Mission to Georgia) and have co-operated with it. A request that was made by the mission to open an office in Tskhinvali has, however, been refused.

The mission has been successful in its task of monitoring the peace-keeping forces. They have had less success in the promotion of contacts between the two sides and the development of confidence-building measures. This is due partly to the cumbersome procedures of the OSCE and partly to the fact that both the Georgians and the South Ossetians were very hesitant to be seen making concessions in the rigid structures of OSCE talks. Both sides feel that any commitments made in such a high-level international forum will be difficult to get out of. The process has therefore been slow and frustrating.

The third field in which the OSCE is playing a role is in working out the framework — legal and constitutional — in which a comprehensive political solution can be enshrined. On 15 August 1994, a proposal was circulated by the mission to the parties outlining a framework for a constitutional model. The paper was coldly received by both sides. It failed to address some serious issues whilst raising many points which the parties had not really thought through, and consequently on which they had reservations. The mission still sees this third role as one of its most important in the context of the Georgia–South Ossetia Conflict.

Contacts through NGOs

There have been many initiatives aimed at bringing Georgians and South Ossetians together through non-governmental organisations (NGOs) since the end of hostilities. Most of these, however, were one-off events. They were not always successful, because the South Ossetians in particular were wary of these initiatives, preferring distance from Tbilisi as the best way of safeguarding their new identity. Some successful projects involved meetings of women's groups in February 1995 and meetings involving the Helsinki Citizens Assembly.

In March 1995, the Verification Technology Information Centre (VERTIC) embarked on a new approach. Having already established itself in Georgia, it launched a programme of intensive contacts with the South Ossetians. Using the benefit of an office in Tbilisi manned by expatriate staff (a luxury not shared by other NGOs), it established and maintained contacts with the South Ossetians through weekly visits and regular, frank dialogues. In June 1995, VERTIC proposed to the South Ossetians that they participate in a meeting of young people VERTIC was organising in Batumi. After protracted discussions and negotiations, the South Ossetians agreed to go to Batumi with a delegation which included their foreign minister and several representatives of youth and other public organisations. The event was of great significance. It was the first time since the conflict that a South Ossetian delegation had agreed to participate in

a meeting in Georgia in such a public manner. More significantly, the South Ossetian group agreed to travel overland through Georgia for the meeting.

The event was a huge success. VERTIC's main goal was to ensure that contacts could be established without fear from either side that their positions were being jeopardised. This goal was achieved. There were public meetings within the framework of the conference as well as private meetings involving South Ossetian Foreign Minister Dimitri Medoev and senior Georgian politician Zurab Zhvania, now Chairman of the Georgian Parliament. Other meetings were also held between various NGOs.¹⁸

Both sides agreed that the meeting was useful. In December 1995, the two sides met again in Vladikavkaz (North Ossetia). This time, the Georgian and South Ossetian delegations travelled together in one bus to the meeting. VERTIC was again asked to facilitate the meeting and put forward a number of civilian confidence-building measures aimed at facilitating contacts and the flow of information between the two sides. Six civilian confidence-building measures, covering a broad spectrum of topics, were agreed upon. They are:

- (a) the establishment of a committee of Parliamentarians from the two sides that will meet regularly to exchange information on the work of their respective parliaments and to facilitate the exchange of documentation;
- (b) the establishment of a civilian telephone hot-line based at the parliaments of the two sides to facilitate communication and contacts between officials and NGOs;
- (c) the establishment of a committee of experts that will look at accurate and comprehensive information on other models and situations that may help to bring about a comprehensive political solution to the Georgian-South Ossetian problem;
- (d) encouragement of journalists from the two sides to come together and produce a joint television documentary on the 1989-92 conflict;
- (e) measures to facilitate the flow of information between the two sides, including the exchange of television programmes;
- (f) the creation of a joint committee to organise a conference for the youth of the Caucasus in the summer of 1996.

The political leaderships of the two countries endorsed the suggestions of the meeting and both sides are currently engaged in their implementation.

In this delicate phase, the three tiers of contacts (the Joint Control Commission, OSCE and NGOs) each have something important to contribute to the resolution of the problem. A minimum amount of co-ordination between these three tiers is vital in order to avoid duplication.

In this context, VERTIC has tried to co-ordinate its work with the OSCE Mission in Georgia. As an NGO, however, VERTIC had also to be careful to retain its

¹⁸ For a report of the Batumi Conference and the Georgia-South Ossetia Youth Dialogue, see *Georgia Youth Project Newsletter* No. 3 and No. 4, July and August 1995, VERTIC, London, 1995.

independence of action. On the other hand, VERTIC recognises that if and when a comprehensive political solution is worked out, it will be the states and state organisations, that will have to enshrine such agreement, rather than NGOs.

A Solution in 1996?

1996 provides a window of opportunity for a solution of the Georgia–South Ossetia Conflict. Although this is a small territory with a small population and there have been no hostilities in recent years, the conflict is still a source of instability in an increasingly problematic region, both for countries around it and the international community.

Because of South Ossetia's special relationship with North Ossetia — a subject of the Russian Federation — the conflict involves Russia directly and indirectly. At a time when Russia perceives North Ossetia as a reliable adjunct in a troublesome North Caucasus, the South Ossetian problem is now seen by many close to the present leadership in Moscow as at best a nuisance, at worst a potential new conflict zone.

Unlike the Abkhaz, who look directly to Moscow and the Communists in the Duma for their support, the South Ossetians rely on their North Ossetian brethren. North Ossetian authorities have their hands full with the neighbouring republic of Ingushetia, and fallout from the conflict in Chechnya. The economic situation is bad and North Ossetia relies on subsidies from Moscow, some of which are allocated to South Ossetia.

For the South Ossetians themselves, independence is proving an unfeasible option. Economic stagnation, an increasing sense of isolation and increasing lawlessness mean that people leave Tskhinvali for better prospects in Vladikavkaz and Moscow. Squabbles amongst the political leadership have created an air of instability and widespread discontent amongst the local population. South Ossetia's leader, the chairman of the parliament, Ludwig Chibirov, is a retired history professor; he understands the dangers the present situation poses and seems ready to take the leap forward towards a negotiated solution. He also understands that the elections in Georgia in November 1995 have resulted in a crushing defeat for ultra-nationalist forces and that the character of the present Georgian leadership may offer the best partner for any agreement.¹⁹

For the Georgians, too, South Ossetia is important beyond its size and population. At the heart of the Georgian state, not more than two hours from Tbilisi, it is, together with the 250,000 refugees from Abkhazia, the embarrassing remainder of an ugly chapter in Georgian history. With no solution in sight for the Abkhaz problem, South Ossetia offers Georgia the possibility of a breakthrough that would seriously impact the domestic political scene. Shevardnadze knows very well that his hard-gained political and economic successes of 1995 could very easily be wiped away, unless he can deliver on his promise to restore the territorial integrity of the country. If he can bring South Ossetia back into the fold, peacefully and honourably, the pressure on him to go to war with Abkhazia, with all its implications, would decrease considerably.

¹⁹ From discussions of the authors with Chibirov, Tskhinvali, 22 February 1996.

For its part, the international community is also quite keen to resolve the conflict. Western economic and political interests in the Transcaucasus are growing, and the European Union in particular sees Georgia as an important partner for future co-operation in the region.²⁰

²⁰ For a comprehensive look at European Union strategy towards Georgia, see "Towards a European Union Strategy for Relations with the Transcaucasian Republics," EU Series No. 9-en, Delegation of the European Commission in Moscow, May 1995.

Framework for a Solution

Both sides are now keen to find a way forward, but there is still considerable disagreement on the modalities and framework of a lasting solution.

For the Georgian side, the basic minimum is the restoration of Georgia's territorial integrity. This will be a demand to which the South Ossetians will have to accede, albeit reluctantly. They have realised by now that independence in any real sense is out of question, as is unity with North Ossetia. No government in Moscow, even a hard-line communist one, can afford to disregard internationally recognised borders. Russia itself has too many borders that are disputed by other countries, privately if not publicly, to risk endangering this important principle for the sake of South Ossetia.

The character of South Ossetia within Georgia is, however, a subject for negotiation. Georgia must seriously consider the format of the federal structure it aspires to establish. The idea of an asymmetrical federation, whereby units of the federation have different levels of autonomy and power, is favoured by the Georgians but is not so popular with the South Ossetians. It may, however, be that neither side quite appreciates the full implications of this option.

The federal model poses a dilemma to the Georgians, that of secession. Even if the Georgian constitution was to allow secession in principle, the parties would have to agree to a long moratorium before this right could be exercised.

Apart from the constitutional framework, there are two other very serious aspects of the problem that need to be tackled concurrently — a failure perhaps of the negotiations thus far: firstly, the healing process that needs to be developed to allow the reconciliation to happen; secondly, the framework in which Georgia and North Ossetia can develop a form of co-operation that would allow some North Ossetian involvement in South Ossetian issues. Both issues are now high on the South Ossetian agenda.²¹

Reconciliation will probably have to involve some apportion of blame. This will not be an easy matter for any of the parties involved. This must be done through a series of prudent confidence-building actions. This should be possible, as many Georgians already recognise that in South Ossetia, as distinct from Abkhazia, they are far from being the innocent party.

The North Ossetia issue is more delicate. North Ossetia is not a sovereign state. Yet under the treaty signed by Russian President Yeltsin and North Ossetian President Akhasarbek Galazov in Moscow on 23 March 1995, North Ossetia was able to secure a number of rights allowing it some room for manoeuvre in the international sphere.

Under these agreements, North Ossetia has the right to have contacts with foreign states, to conclude agreements with them, to conduct foreign economic activity and

²¹ Both issues were raised by Dimitri Medoev, South Ossetian Foreign Minister, in various meetings during a visit to the United Kingdom in January 1996.

activity in the field of humanitarian relations. It can also establish trade representation in a foreign state.²²

However, whilst outlining these rights, federal officials in Moscow hasten to add that none of the entities of the Russian Federation are subjects of international law; unless any agreement they enter into is also signed by the Russian Federation, it will have no juridical force under international law.²³

The issue is of great significance. The South Ossetians point, out for example, that North Ossetia under the Federation Treaty is allowed to establish special traffic regimes with neighbouring regions.²⁴ This issue will surely come up when the border arrangement between North and South Ossetia surfaces in any discussion that may lead to the reintegration of South Ossetia into the Georgian State. In reality this cannot be done without involving Russia. The sensitivity of involving Russia in any arrangement cannot be underestimated, especially given Georgian sensibilities to Moscow's interference in its domestic affairs and the still strong anti-Russian sentiment in some Georgian political circles.

The parties to the conflict have to recognise that there is now a window of opportunity that should not be closed. It is, however, very easy for the two sides to get bogged down in fine legal details on constitutional and treaty arrangements. Given the current situation, that type of negotiation should be left for a later date. The two sides should focus on a broad agreement governing basic principles. They are well within reach of such an agreement. A high-profile meeting between Shevardnadze and Chibirov may accomplish it. However, such a breakthrough is unlikely to occur unless accompanied simultaneously by a Georgia-North Ossetia Agreement. A way needs to be found to allow such an agreement to be signed without exposing it to the machinations of Russian domestic politics.

The framework for peace is in place. It is now up to the parties concerned to find the courage to move on to the next stage.

²² From conversation of Vyacheslav Mikhailovich Masakov, Head of the Department of Relations with Entities of the Federation, Ministry of Nationalities of the Russian Federation, with Dennis Sammut, Moscow, 29 January 1996.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ From speech of Dimitri Medoev to the Caucasian Region Discussion Group at the London School of Economics on 22 January 1996.

Appendix A: Chronicle of Events of the Conflict, 1989-92

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| 1988 | South Ossetian movement <i>Adamon Nykhash</i> formed by Alan Chochiev. |
| Spring 1989 | Alan Chochiev's open letter to the Abkhaz people supporting their struggle for independence against the Georgians. |
| 26 May 1989 | Anniversary of the declaration of Georgian independence in 1918. Clashes between irregular groups of Georgians, encouraged by Z. Gamsakhurdia, and local Ossetians. |
| August 1989 | The Supreme Soviet of Georgia puts forward a new language programme for the Republic: Georgian language shall be used in all public spheres of society. |
| September 1989 | Adamon Nykhas and a group of Ossetian workers address an appeal to the USSR Council of Ministers, the USSR Supreme Soviet, and the CPSU Central Committee protesting that the Georgian language program is "anti-democratic and unconstitutional;" they ask for the question of unification of North and South Ossetia to be discussed at the CPSU Central Committee plenum of nationalities. Later this month, Supreme Soviet of South Ossetia announces that Ossetian will be the official language of the region. |
| 10 November 1989 | The Supreme Soviet of South Ossetia demands that the status of South Ossetia be changed from autonomous oblast to autonomous republic. |
| November 1989 | Supreme Soviet of Georgia calls the claims illegal and put forward a law on sovereignty, stating that the Supreme Soviet of Georgia has the right to veto any Soviet law which goes against Georgian interests. Georgian authorities respond by firing First Party Secretary of the oblast. |
| 23 November 1989 | Z. Gamsakhurdia organises what he calls "a peaceful meeting of reconciliation." Takes thousands of people, in buses and cars, to Tskhinvali; Ossetians block the road and clashes take place, several people are wounded. |
| March 1990 | Representations of informal groups from North and South Ossetia apply for membership to the assembly of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus, and are admitted. |

The Georgia-South Ossetia Conflict

- August 1990 J. Ioselani comes to Tskhinvali, in his own words, in order to calm fears and assure that Georgia has no hostile intentions.
- August 1990 Supreme Soviet of Georgia passes an election law banning any party whose activity is confined to specific areas of Georgia from participating in upcoming parliamentary elections.
- 20 September 1990: South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast declares independence as South Ossetian Democratic Soviet Republic, appealing to Moscow to be recognised as independent subject of the Soviet Union.
- 21 September 1990 Supreme Council of Georgia declares South Ossetian move illegal and unconstitutional.
- October 1990 Election to the Georgian Supreme Soviet, boycotted by the South Ossetians, ends in victory for the Round Table-Free Georgia coalition headed by Zviad Gamsakhurdia.
- 9 December 1990 Elections to the parliament/Supreme Soviet of South Ossetia. According to Ossetian sources 72% of republic's population took part in elections (exceeds percentage of Ossetian population).
- 11 December 1990 Georgian Supreme Soviet cancels the results of the elections in South Ossetia and votes to abolish the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast as a separate administrative unit within the Republic of Georgia.
- 12 December 1990 Shooting episode in Tskhinvali, two Georgians and one Ossetian dead; one is Gamsakhurdia's bodyguard (Ossetian version). Unidentified men open fire on a car with passengers of Georgian nationality, killing three and seriously wounding two (Georgian version). State of emergency declared by Georgian parliament in the Tskhinvali and Sava regions, Russian and Georgian MVD troops dispatched. Commander of Georgian MVD troops, General-Major G. Kvantaliani appointed mayor of Tskhinvali. According to South Ossetian sources, with the consent of the ministry of internal affairs of USSR, Georgian militia begin to disarm the South Ossetian militia.
- 16 December 1990 South Ossetian Supreme Soviet confirms the decision made on 20 September 1990.
- December 1990 At the end of this month, following talks between officials from Georgia, Ossetia and Moscow, a conciliation commission is created; there are no results.
- January 1991 Supreme Soviet of Georgia passes a law on formation of the National Guard.

- January 1991 In the first days of the year several Georgian militiamen assassinated in Tskhinvali.
- 5-6 January 1991 Several thousand Georgian troops enter Tskhinvali and commit atrocities overnight; the war starts.
- 7 January 1991 Soviet president, M. Gorbachev, issues decree condemning South Ossetian declaration of independence and Georgian parliament's abolition of Ossetian autonomy; calls for withdrawal of Georgian troops from the area. Georgian parliament votes to refuse to comply.
- 25 January 1991 Cease-fire agreement between Georgians and Ossetians in Tskhinvali, according to TASS mediated by Soviet troops, but new fighting breaks out some days after.
- January 1991 At the end of the month, Ossetians succeed in forcing the Georgian troops out of Tskhinvali to hills around the city. According to Ossetians, Georgians, start shelling the city from the surrounding hills. According to Georgians, Ossetians start burning down houses belonging to Georgians in Tskhinvali.
- 29 January 1991 Chairman of Supreme Soviet of South Ossetia is invited for talks outside Tbilisi, but when he gets there he is arrested and put in jail .
- February 1991 Georgians cut electricity supplies to Tskhinvali and block road by which the city receives food and supplies. At the same time, Ossetians block Georgian-populated villages around Tskhinvali from the rest of Georgia.
- 5 February 1991 Russian central television characterises the situation in Tskhinvali as "worse than Leningrad in 1942. The entire city is without heating and electricity....there is no food".
- February 1991 Short cease-fire, with Soviet troops patrolling Tskhinvali.
- March 1991 Russia and Georgia sign a protocol pledging to establish a joint commission of the Russian and Georgian Ministries of Internal Affairs to assess the situation in the region, to disarm all illegal armed formations in the area and settle the refugee question.
- May 1991 The Soviet of South Ossetia votes to abolish the self-proclaimed South Ossetian Democratic Soviet Republic and to restore the oblast status under the Russian Federation. This is promptly rejected by the Georgian Supreme Soviets presidium.
- August 1991 Failed coup attempt in Moscow, heralds the collapse of the USSR.

The Georgia-South Ossetia Conflict

- November 1991 South Ossetian Soviet declares the oblast a republic within the Russian federation. This is annulled by the Georgian parliament.
- December 1991 Russian MVD troops leave Tskhinvali and, according to Georgian sources, give their arms to the Ossetians.
- 21 December 1991 Uprising and fighting in Tbilisi between supporters of Gamsakhurdia and opposition.
- 19 January 1992 Referendum in South Ossetia to join the Russian Federation and reunite with North Ossetia, 99% vote in favour.
- March 1992 Shevardnadze appointed as Chairman of the Interim State Council of Georgia.
- 15 June 1992 Statement made by the Chairman of the Russian Supreme Soviet, Ruslan Khasbulatov, describing Georgian actions in South Ossetia as genocide, which could force Russia to consider the South Ossetian authorities' request to join the Russian Federation.
- 18 June 1992 Near Tskhinvali, three combat helicopters with Russian Air Force identification marks launch attack on Georgian units and villages. At the same time, armed formations begin attack from the direction of Tskhinvali using tanks and armoured personnel carriers.
- 20 June 1992 Shevardnadze makes a statement condemning Russian armed forces' open participation in the conflict on South Ossetian side.
- 24 June 1992 Shevardnadze and Yeltsin meet in Sochi to discuss the question of South Ossetia. Agreement in principle on a cease-fire and the establishment of a Joint Control Commission.
- 14 July 1992 Russian peace-keeping operation starts (three-sided peace-keeping forces—Russians, Georgians and South Ossetians) upon agreement between Russian government and Georgian state council, with consent of South Ossetian Supreme Soviet.
- 3 December 1992 CSCE (now OSCE) mission established in Georgia.

Appendix B: Modalities Establishing CSCE Mission to Georgia

Personal Representative of the CSCE Chairman-in-Office for Georgia

The Committee of Senior Officials,

Welcoming the cease-fire based on the Agreement on Principles of Settlement of the Georgian–Ossetian Conflict signed on 24 June 1992 in Sochi,

Being concerned by the possibility of a deterioration of the situation in the region and the risk of renewed conflict,

Noting the Appeal of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Georgia for CSCE Observers in the region,

Taking into consideration its decision of 18 September 1992,

Noting the report of the Personal Representative of the Chairman-in-Office, the statement of the representative of Georgia and the recommendations of the Consultative Committee of the Conflict Prevention Centre,

1. Mandates the Personal Representative of the Chairman-in-Office to Georgia, to be assisted by a staff of two diplomatic advisers and a military team of four officers, headed by a senior military officer, and requests the Mission to

- begin discussion immediately with all parties to the Georgian–Ossetian conflict to identify and seek to eliminate sources of tension with the aim of extending civil order and political reconciliation beyond the immediate cease-fire zone to the surrounding towns and countryside;
- initiate a visible CSCE presence in the region and establish contact with local authorities and representatives of the population;
- in support of the existing cease-fire, liaise with local military commanders of the trilateral peace-keeping forces established by the Sochi Agreement and establish appropriate forms of contact with them within the overall context of the CSCE political efforts, establish regular contacts with local military commanders, gather information on the military situation, investigate violent incidents and call local commanders' attention to possible political implications of specific military actions;
- facilitate the creation of a broader political framework, in which a lasting political conciliation can be achieved on the basis of CSCE principles and commitments;

2. Also request the Personal Representative of the Chairman-in-Office to help establish a negotiating framework between the parties to the conflict in Abkhazia with the aim of establishing a stable cease-fire and to work out a political solution to the conflict;

3. Requests the Consultative Committee of the Conflict Prevention Centre to elaborate by 25 November, upon the recommendation of the Personal Representative of the Chairman-in-Office, modalities and financial implications for the Mission to allow the Mission to be despatched immediately. Between sessions of the CSO, overall guidance to the Personal Representative of the Chairman-in-Office will be provided by the Vienna Ad Hoc Group, the mandate of which is extended for this purpose.

The Personal Representative of the Chairman-in-Office will be responsible for regular exchange of information and co-ordination with the United Nations and other international organisations, which are or may be involved in the future in the conflict;

4. Tasks the Personal Representative of the Chairman-in-Office to report to the Chairman-in-Office on a regular basis about his activities in Georgia, consider further possibilities for their extension and submit appropriate recommendations to the next meeting of the CSO.

Asks the Chairman-in-Office to keep the Ad Hoc Group informed about the progress of the Mission;

5. Opens a separate budget line for the Mission with the CSCE Secretariat of an initial amount of 800,000 ATS and requests the Director of the CSCE Secretariat to inform the participating States of their contribution, according to the CSCE scale of distribution, to be paid, if possible, by the end of November.

The CSO will decide on the duration of the Mission and its budget at its next regular meeting.

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Areas of Work

Arms Control and Disarmament including nuclear non-proliferation, nuclear testing, remote sensing technologies, conventional forces and open skies, and chemical and biological weapons.

The Environment including climate change, biodiversity and sustainable development.

Conflicts and Confidence-building including special case studies of Romania, Georgia and Egypt.