

Armed Conflict between Georgia and Russia Case Studies of ‘Peace Process in Abkhazian- Ossetian Ethnopolitical Conflict’

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Abstract

The post-conflict peacebuilding process between two major ethnicities under the central authority of Georgia - Abkhazians and Ossetians - has a long history that dates back to the beginning of the 20th century. This study tries to address the dynamic of the frozen conflict and an unstable ceasefire in Georgia, from the early 1990s, when the conflicts erupted, to early 2019. The central claim of the research is that despite the long peace process, which first mediated and arranged by the United Nations (UN) and Russia and since 2008 negotiated and mediated by the European Union (EU) and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), has not brought about any serious progress towards a peace settlement. Hence, a frozen hostility and potential conflict zone in the Caucasus persists. The main goal of this study is to give a more up-to-date understanding of the Abkhazian and South Ossetian conflicts (called an ethnopolitical conflict in Post-Soviet era), and to explore how it plays in and influences the peace process. To explain the relatively stable frozen nature of the conflicts, the paper focuses on the role of the protector state and of EU as the main mediator. By analyzing the process of peace settlements, and particularly the faults made by international organizations and other external players, this research aims to recommend new potential peace approaches to the conflict in this area.

Keywords: Caucasus, Ethnocentrism, Westernization, Peacebuilding, Nationalism.

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Introduction

Building a sustainable peace in the aftermath of civil war and armed conflict is one of the biggest challenges faced by academic literature when it comes to peacebuilding in Georgia. The post-conflict peacebuilding between the Abkhazians and the Ossetians, two major ethnicities under the central authority of Georgia has a long history that dates back to the beginning of the 20th century. Two major armed conflicts that took place in the early 1990s and 2008 caused further insecurity, fragility, and instability, and created more obstacles to development in the whole Caucasus region.

This article addresses the dynamic of this frozen conflict and an unstable ceasefire in Georgia, from the early 1990s, when the conflicts erupted, to early 2019. Generally, the hostilities and tensions between ethnic groups in the Post-Soviet countries in the Caucasus resulted in violent conflicts after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Since 2008, confronting a deep security conflict, the peacebuilders and external players - the European Union (EU) and Russia - have stepped up their involvement in these conflicts. According to literature, Russia has not been an accurate mediator in the process of peacebuilding, but itself an outstanding player in igniting the conflicts and sustaining the conditions of unresolved tension (Popescu, 2006; Trenin, 1998; Trenin, 2009). Therefore, the security remains fragile with some of the requirements of the ceasefire still unrealized, and there has been little meaningful progress in the negotiations mediated by EU. The central claim of this research is that despite its length, the peace process has not brought about any serious progress towards a peace settlement. This long process was first mediated and arranged by the United Nations (UN) and Russia, then negotiated and mediated since 2008 by the European Union (EU) and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)¹. Hence, a frozen hostility and potential conflict zone in the Caucasus persists (Ciobanu, 2008; SWP, 2016; Hill, 2001; Popescu, 2009).

The main aim of the research is to give a more up-to-date understanding of the *Abkhazian* and *South Ossetian* conflicts, which

1. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe is the world's largest security-oriented intergovernmental organization. Its mandate includes issues such as arms control, promotion of human rights, freedom of the press, and fair elections.

are called ethnoterritorial and ethnopolitical conflicts of the Post-Soviet era, and explore how they play in and influence the peace process. The conflicts in Georgia show many commonalities with frozen conflicts including an ineffective peace resolution, the emergence of separatist regions as *de facto* states¹, and the active role of a protector state, namely Russia. To explain the relatively stable frozen nature of the conflicts, the research focuses on the role of the protector state and the EU as the main mediator. By analyzing the process of peace settlements and particularly the faults made by international organizations and other external players, this research aims to then recommend new potential peace approaches to the conflict in this area. This introduction briefly elaborates on the background of the research. Subsequently, it explains the choice of the focal point in the final research as well as the case selection.

Research Objective

As mentioned above, this research aims to discuss the dynamics of tensions and frozen conflicts in the Post-Soviet era and to give a truly up-to-date understanding of the Abkhazian and South Ossetian conflicts in Georgia, one of associated Eastern Partnership (EaP)² countries of EU. After, it addresses the role of two major actors - Russia and the EU- in the peace process. The research period begins in the early 1990s when hostilities erupted in both regions and includes developments to date. This article, therefore, aims to first provide an understanding of the causes of conflict instead of starting with a pre-conception, and then elaborates on these causes.

Methodology

This study is largely qualitative, with very limited quantitative data, combined with document analysis. The primary method to answer the

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1. De facto state, De facto regime, self-proclaimed region – these concepts are used as synonyms and refer to a separatist region, which declared independence from a central government but has not gained international recognition, like Abkhazia, and South Ossetia.
 2. The Eastern Partnership is a joint initiative of the European External Action Service of the European Union (EU) together with EU, its Member States, and six Eastern European Partners that governs their relationship with the post-Soviet states of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine.

research question is content analysis and qualitative interviews. The qualitative interviews have acted not as the primary research method, but only as complementary to the content analysis. Therefore, qualitative interviews are limited in number. The main sources studied systematically to extract data are newspapers, journals, statements, and communiqués from 1991 to 2019. Various Russian and English language news reports have been examined. The primary sources used for the study include Georgian, Russian, and European foreign and security concepts (briefs), military doctrines, statements, and official speeches. Moreover, research reports from global think tanks and peacebuilders such as the Centre for European Policy Studies¹, Carnegie Foundation², German Foreign Policy Council³, and International Crisis Group⁴ have also been examined for this study.

Research Questions

As explained above, this research hopes to contribute to the existing literature in two ways: discussing the most recent developments in these conflicts, and looking into different players' approach towards the conflicts. These are reflected in the main research question as follows:

How and why are we seeing underneath the permanent tensions and the frozen peace process in the Abkhazia-Ossetia conflict?

From a conflict studies perspective, the main question can be put into Galtung's triangle to find an answer more easily:

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1. The Centre for European Policy Studies is a think tank based in Brussels, Belgium that undertakes research leading to solutions to the challenges facing Europe today. It was established in 1983 (www.ceps.eu).
 2. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching is a U.S.-based education policy and research center. It was founded by Andrew Carnegie in 1905 and chartered in 1906 by an act of the United States Congress (www.carnegiefoundation.org).
 3. The German Council on Foreign Relations is Germany's national foreign policy network. As an independent, private, non-partisan and non-profit organization, the Council actively takes part in political decision-making and promotes the understanding of German foreign policy and international relations (www.dgap.org).
 4. The International Crisis Group is a transnational non-profit, non-governmental organization founded in 1995 that advertises itself as carrying out field research on violent conflict and says it advances policies to prevent, mitigate or resolve conflict (www.crisisgroup.org).

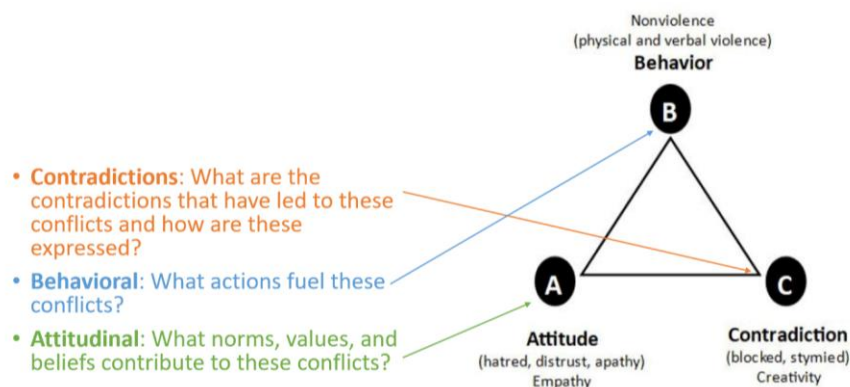


Fig. 1. Research Question Applying to Galtung's Triangle

To further study the main research question, it is essential to divide it into sub-research questions as follow:

Sub1: What were the roots and causes of the conflict?

Sub2: Why and how did the conflict start and continue?

Sub3: How did the peace process follow the conflict, and why did it not achieve its goals?

Sub 4: What can we propose for the future, and what is the conflict resolution perspective?

The answers to sub-research questions, taken together in the order outlined, provide the data needed to answer the main research question. Sub1 describes the dynamics of the conflicts in Georgia. Sub2 provides the analytical framework by using the existing literature on frozen conflicts and their main characteristics. Sub3 analyses and discusses factors that may explain the main players and mediators, and Sub4 shows us the future of conflict.

Ethnoterritorial & Ethnopolitical Background

Ethnoterritorial and ethnopolitical conflicts are often an essential part of the development of modern societies. The ethnic principle has been somehow present in almost all socio-political, socio-economic, and cultural conflicts that break out in the world. The ethnic divide further aggravates the crises that exist in public life, politics, and international relations as a result of which the line between social, political, and ethnopolitical conflicts is blurred. While conflicts differ from each

other in origin, nature, kind, and resolution, ethnopolitical conflicts stand out from other forms of conflict due to complexity and protractedness. The historical experience demonstrates that the scale, duration, and severity of ethnoterritorial and ethnopolitical collisions raging in multi-ethnic countries exceed other types of conflict.

We should consider that territorial disputes account for most of ethnopolitical conflicts. The majority of modern governments are multi-ethnic and have often been shaped as a result of lengthy conflicts over residential territories in history. Some ethnic groups continue to struggle for their statehood by claiming territories under the control of other ethnic groups or states (Gurr, 2000: chapter 3).

Historical facts, such as possession of a territory by a specific ethnic group, are often used to legitimize territorial claims. Conflicting parties believe that they have unchallenged historical evidence backing up their claims of ownership over contested territory. In contrary, however, state borders and territories that were called homeland by ethnic groups changed often as a result of migration, invasion, and other geopolitical processes. Most ethnoterritorial problems are closely linked with the process of territorial state formation. Most ethnic groups have no nation-state of their own while some may have a clear form of statehood under other sovereign states. In turn, an ethnic minority's desire to exercise the right to self-determination in any form is usually comprehended as separatism with a so-called goal to disappoint the larger state of a piece of territory (Cornell, 2002: 22-25).

In general, a combination of subjective and objective factors places in the core of Georgian-Abkhaz and Georgian-Ossetian conflicts. Struggles and tensions arising in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia, as elsewhere in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), were directly linked to the breakup of the Soviet Union and accompanying processes. Based on this introduction, the research addresses the ethnographic and historical background of these conflicts to have a clear understanding of the issues in the region.

Peacebuilding Process

The end of the armed conflicts in South Ossetia (1992) and Abkhazia (1993) marked an important period in the history of Georgia. Georgia

had to face some of its most difficult challenges: fighting for peace, confidence-building for parties, and unifying the country. The situation was further aggravated by meticulous attempts of the Russian Federation to establish some pro-Russian autonomous zones, encouraged by the lack of interest by the international community in the South Caucasus. Despite negotiations, operations had started in South Ossetia and Abkhazia almost simultaneously. While considerable progress had been made with South Ossetia between 1992-2003, the Abkhazian case was different. The divergence was caused by differences in collective memory and ambitions of local politicians. Therefore, the processes of peace in these two contexts need to be explained and analyzed separately. However, the distinction between the peace talks in South Ossetia and Abkhazia should still be maintained when analyzing the peace process. In this chapter, the research tries to analyze and summarize all attempts for a peace settlement and point out the errors made by mediators or parties involved (Whitman, 2010).

Peace Agenda

This continuous tension is playing out on three different levels: the internal, the regional, and the geopolitical. Each party has a propensity to emphasize analysis and sight of the conflict reverberating its preliminary political and security observations and consolidate its political arguments. This deeply influences conflict resolution strategies and has an impact on the peace agenda. The literature on the subject is also mainly set on the various and often contrasted interests between the European Union and Russia on questions of security in the South Caucasus, and not explicitly on the social and political reconciliation and ethnic solidarity for sustainable peace in the conflict zone.

Role of the EU (in 2008)

There has been a lack of coherence in the EU's attitude to conflict resolution in the South Caucasus from the early 1990s until the aftermath of the Russo-Georgian conflict. After defining conflict resolution and mediation, this subchapter offers three explanations for the lack of coherence: limited awareness, presence of international actors, and inability to incentivize the conflicting parties.

EU mediation in the South Caucasus was prompted by the outbreak of armed conflict between Georgia and Russia in August 2008. During the crisis, the EU increased its political level of engagement by appointing the EUSR to the Crisis in Georgia, sending in the EUMM, and establishing the Geneva Process. Whilst the EU views its mediation in Georgia as a major example in common policy coherence, this chapter claims that EU member states had divergent opinions regarding their involvement in Georgia and the EU has not been coherent in its conflict resolution. This idea is developed in four steps; first is on EU's mediation, marked by two ceasefire agreements: a Six Point Peace Agreement on Ceasefire, and a Declaration from the European Commission and the European Council. During negotiations led by Nicolas Sarkozy, the President of the Council of EU, the key principles sought by the Georgian Government were overridden. The second step reveals differing positions and limited security capabilities of EU member states. The third argues that differences among member states over the deployment of the monitoring mission challenge the existing view on the effectiveness of the EUMM. Through examining the GID rounds, the fourth step demonstrates that the EU has not been assertive in its negotiations (Popescu, 2007).

Geneva Process (Since 2008)

While EU mediation facilitated conflict stabilization in 2008, it has subsequently been unable to resolve the conflict in the course of the Geneva International Discussions (GID). 31 rounds of Geneva talks, in which the EU continued to be engaged as a mediator, found little tangible progress. Having examined the deployment and limitations of the EUMM, this section takes stock of the GID and evaluates the second phase of EU's mediation following the sixth point of the peace agreement on security in Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Kereselidze, 2015: 151).

The Geneva Process started as a peace platform to negotiate security and stability in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and to present the new style of negotiations. This platform was established as a result of the peace agreement on 12 August 2008 and the accompanying measures that followed on 8 September 2008. Building on the sixth point of the August agreement, referring to international

negotiations on security and stability arrangements in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the talks started in October 2008. This was the first time negotiations were carried out in a format that addresses the mutual specifications of both Georgian-Abkhaz and Georgian-South Ossetian conflicts. A month after the 5-days war, the Council appointed the European Union Special Representative (EUSR) to take the lead in the GID in which all parties, Georgia, both Abkhazians and South Ossetians, Russia, and even the US, were brought together under the co-chairmanship of the EU, the UN, and the OSCE¹. All three intergovernmental actors are meant to strengthen each other and help the conflicting parties reach a compromise through discussions in working groups, plenary meetings, and consultations.

Although the EU tried a readiness to create a dialogue between parties, the GID revealed three major limitations. First, following EU's non-recognition policy, the EUSR inevitably had a pre-determined position on the status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia that inherently limited its neutrality when representing the Council (Merlingen and Ostrauskaitė, 2009: 28). Second, the varying preferences of the conflicting parties exceeded EU's already restrained leverage, limiting the outcome of negotiations. Third, a lack of obligation from the EU to address the political appearance of the conflict restricted their impact. The first round of GID reflected disagreement in political interests among the parties, which were predicated on the status issues rather than on reconciliation.

Similarly, in June 2009, Russia vetoed a Security Council resolution to renew the mandate of UNOMIG that had operated in Abkhazia for 15 years.² Parties to the conflict, therefore, lost their international presence. The UN remained involved only in development-related activities through the UNDP and election observation through the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human

1. Council of the European Union, Council Joint Action 2008/760/CFSP on Appointing the EU Special Representative for the Crisis in Georgia, Official Journal of the European Communities L 259 2008, Accessed 5-01-14:

<http://eurlex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2008:259:0016:0018:EN:PDF>

2. United Nations Security Council, "Security Council Fails to Adopt Resolution Extending Mandate of Georgia Mission for 2 Weeks, as Russian Federation Votes against Text," Press Release SC/9681, 19 June 2009, Accessed 1-12-12, <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2009/sc9681.doc.htm>

Rights (ODIHR)¹. In the sixth meeting, in July 2009, proposals on the non-usage of force were exchanged and the two subsequent meetings in the same year addressed humanitarian issues. The ninth and tenth meetings reiterated the continuous approach in January and April 2010. After the eleventh round, in June 2010, the Abkhaz delegation temporarily withdrew from the peace talks.

Between 2010 and 2013, the limited socio-political dimension of EU's engagement re-established the status quo in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which are currently recognized as independent states by Russia and some other countries. The EUSR was convinced in 2009 that, despite the recognition, the dialogue on Georgia's conflict zone was instrumental and had to continue. The EU's Political and Security Committee (PSC) expressed "*deep concern about the putting up [of] physical obstacles to the freedom of movement*"².

The EU needs to be more confident when it comes to its Neighbourhood Policy and be able to conduct a decisive policy with strategic patience. By 2019, the pre-conflict status quo had not been restored in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and there was no movement on the path. Unfortunately, in summer of 2016, the Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs in Abkhazia, Kan Taniya, said in an interview with the German newspaper *Junge Welt* that Geneva International Discussions are locked in a standstill.³ Still, this process is the only way to achieve a meaningful peace settlement in Georgia.

Summary

The road that conflicting parties have taken towards peace since the 1990s have turned out to be filled with obstacles and errors. Since Abkhaz and Ossetian ethnonationalism in the 1990s, a sound peace had nevertheless been voiced on several occasions and regrets. Most of

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1. Robert E. Hamilton, "Georgia – Why We Should Be Watching, Commentary," Washington: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2009, Accessed 27-10-09: http://csis.org/files/publication/090619_Hamilton_Georgia.pdf
 2. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, "Information on the Meetings Held during the Visit to Georgia of a Delegation of Ambassadors of the European Union's Political and Security Committee," 30.09.2013, Press and Information Department, MFA: Tbilisi, 2013, Accessed 18-10-13: http://www.mfa.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=464&info_id=16705
 3. The link of news: <https://www.jungewelt.de/loginFailed.php?ref=/artikel/287712.wir-w%C3%A4ren-gerne-mitglied-der-eurasischen-union.html>

them should be understood based on theories of International relations. Georgia has failed to end the destructive conflicts the consequences of which continue to devastate the country. Due to a lack of interest by the international community in South Caucasus in the '90s, Georgia's ethnopolitical issues would only appear on the global agenda to the extent that Russia played a role and according to the theory of International relations which it is discussed in the first chapter. This situation has led to the localization of the peace process and absence of international communities beginning in the '90s. The peace policy was inherently appropriate to specific individuals as well as the visions and interests of domestic political parties and authorities.

The conflict resolution process that could have been executed in a pluralistic atmosphere with active public engagement and investment of immense material and intellectual resources instead became the subject of internal and external political exploitation by politicians. Moreover, an outward perception that the conflicts would be easily resolved, exceptionally characterizing the period between 1995 and 2007, had contributed to spoiling of valuable time and missing on opportunities that affected all parties. In its turn, the war of August 2008 has remodeled a figure of Georgia's peace policy into '*Russia has entered into the conflict with Georgia followed by a military interposition, intervention, and invasion of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and recognition of their autonomy*'.

The signing of *quasi-annexation* treaties between Moscow and the *de-facto* authorities of Abkhazia and South Ossetia was a symptom that Georgia's peace policy was moving away and entering a wider geopolitical context. Admitting that the key negotiation plan has overall faded more than 10 years in the post-conflict era. Therefore, the obstacles that were created by the Russian occupation remain barriers. This article was designed to analyze the indeterminacy of the peace process and examine fundamental causes that led Georgia to this situation. The research findings and analysis help to explain the theoretical foundations in the following figure:

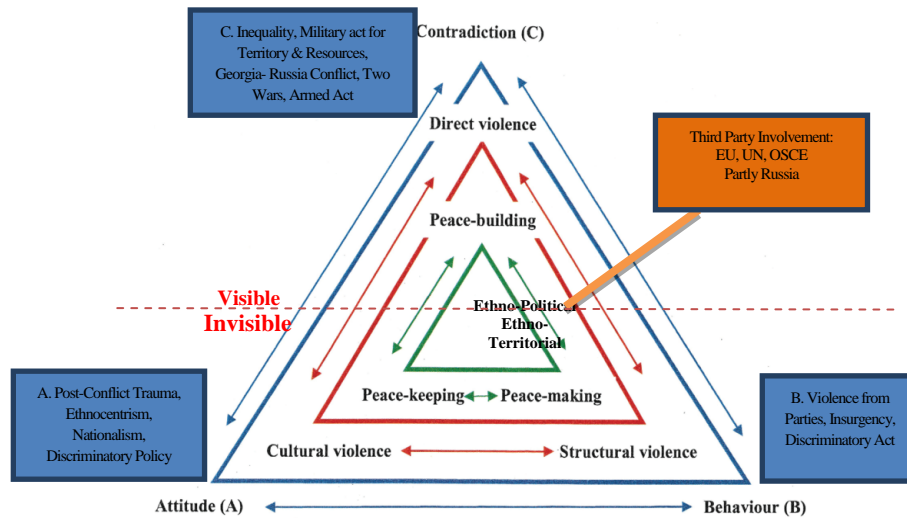


Fig. 2. Applying Galtung's Conflict Triangles: Conflict in Georgia

To explain the conflict in Georgia, the International relations theory and Galtung's Triangles are very useful. Even though there is no exact theory to describe this conflict with international, ethnoterritorial, and ethno-political dimensions as well as external and internal players, the theories help easily map the conflict to understand and analyze it more clearly. In the conclusion, as mentioned in the introduction, I am going to explain the possible peace perspectives and recommend possible approaches that different parties and players can take in this theoretical framework to reach a stable and sustainable peace agreement.

Discussion and Conclusion

Since the war in August 2008, the results have been clear enough. Russia has recognized the independence of the two breakaway regions in Georgia and announced that it would keep 3000 troops within the borders of Abkhazia. The war also made the possibility of Georgia's membership in the EU and NATO less probable. Moscow vetoed an extension of a UN observer mission mandate in Georgia and Abkhazia, and the observers are leaving.¹ Russia also rejected the

1. BBC News: UN Monitors to leave Georgia, at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/8150946.stm>

attempts to keep the OSCE mission in Georgia; its mandates finished on 30 June 2009.¹ Georgia was hopeful that the observing and monitoring of the EU would keep protect the ceasefire in the region. The EUMM², originally set up to warranty the six-point ceasefire plan, is now the only observer body in the country (Corso, 2009). The main duty of this mission was to monitor military and police activities near borders and survey IDP's settlements – Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) that used to live in the 'buffer zones', but do not feel secure enough to come back to their homelands (International Crisis Group, 2009).

The above information comprises the first part of this paper's findings. The results of the research are categorized based on the sub-questions in four parts:

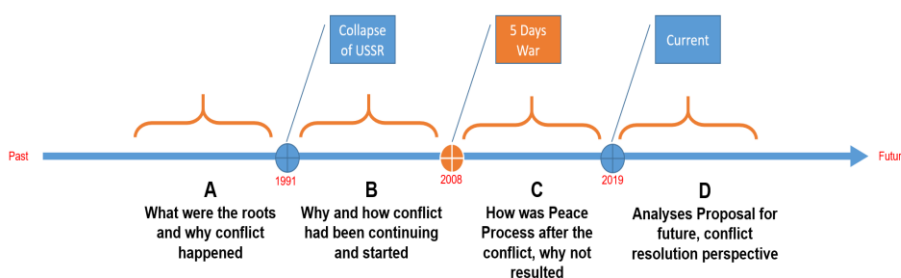


Fig. 3. Questions according to the chronological approach

According to Roland Paris (2004), building Peace after long civil conflicts needs long-term reconciliation and agreement of all parties. The first sub-question can be answered in part (A); the roots of conflict were mainly:

- Russia's desire to maintain hegemony in the region after the breakup of the Soviet Union,
- Central Georgian government's mistreatment and neglect of ethnic minorities and rise of nationalism,
- Western encroachment on Russia's historical sphere of influence, especially regarding energy.

1. 53 Reuters: Russia vetoes deal on OSCE Monitors in Georgia, at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSLC3-00177>

2. European Union Monitoring Mission

Russia describes itself as a guarantor of regional stability.¹ However, the war in August 2008 had consequences for Russia as well. The decision to fight Georgia had urgent economic costs, and the recognition of the two separatist regions may turn into a serious problem in the long-term since it can influence the relationships between the federal government in Moscow and boundary regions - the North Caucasus - given its rebellious history and previous attempts to secure independence (Secrieru, 2009).

The second sub-question for part (B) regarding how the conflict evolved until 2008 can be answered here. The main context was the geopolitical rivalry in the south Caucasus, which can be considered the theoretical framework of this paper. Additionally, the lack of serious attempts for ending the conflict and arriving at a peaceful settlement in the 90s, and losing opportunities for peace by all sides in the early twentieth century can be highlighted.

The EU has also been playing the role of a facilitator. The French President Nicholas Sarkozy mediated the peace talks between parties on behalf of the EU. The recent role of the EU in the region, however, has been greater than in the 1990s. It maintains a relationship with countries in the region through the European Neighborhood Policy, a framework providing "broad and intensive interaction on a large part of European *acquis* (Nuriyev, 2007). This region is of great importance to the EU for many reasons. First, the last expansion moved the borders to the Black Sea region, which translates into greater interest of the Union in the greater area of the Black Sea, to which the South Caucasus belongs. Second is the need to diversify the sources of energy and the routes used for the supply of these resources. The six-point peace plan obliged the parties not to use force to resolve the conflict, immediately stop all military action, enable free access for humanitarian aid, allow Georgian forces and Russian troops to return to their pre-conflict positions, and start an international discussion about the future status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Bremner, 2008).

When it comes to security issues, the US and the EU share the same interests in the region. However, the EU is most interested in the

1. Financial Times: Lavrov: "Why Russia's response to Georgia was right" at: <http://www.ft.com/home/-/Europe>

security of the Caucasus because of its proximity. Romania and Bulgaria have joined the EU from the Black Sea region, and if Turkey was accepted, the South Caucasus region would become the direct neighbor of the EU (Cornell, 2006). The conflict resolution management process in Georgia involves many actors. In Abkhazia, the so-called the Geneva process led by the UN was launched and discussed security, economic cooperation, and the return of refugees and internally displaced persons. UN and OSCE agreed to set up a joint human rights office. In South Ossetia, the Joint Control Commission (JCC) was established to control and direct the Joint Peacekeeping Forces including Russians, North and South Ossetians, and Georgians.

However, in the first half of 2008, when the situation in the region started to worsen, Georgia and South Ossetia did not attend any talks because they could not agree on the framework. After the war in August 2008, Georgia, Russia, South Ossetia, and Abkhazia signed the six-point peace plan mediated by the French president *Nicholas Sarkozy*. The first round of talks in October 2008 was not successful since there were issues concerning the presence of authorities from South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Russia recognized them as independent states while Georgia viewed them as part of the Georgian territory. The peace talks have been ongoing along with mutual accusations. In March 2009, Georgia accused Russia of undermining the peace talks and thus blocking further conflict prevention in the region. *“Shootings, kidnappings, and other incidents have continued in and around South Ossetia and Abkhazia since last year's war between Russia and Georgia”*.¹ Frozen conflicts are, despite many endeavors to find a solution, far from being resolved. Many were hoping that regional cooperation and integration would help the process of CR.

The answer to my third question in part (C) on how the peace process continued after the war and why it did not result in a sustainable peace is discussed here. In 2008, Russia's power was different from the beginning of the conflict in the 90s'. It played a greater role than previous years based on international relations theory

1. EU Business: Russia undermining Geneva peace talks: Georgia, at: http://georgiandaily.com/-index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=10253&Itemid=1&lang=ka

and Geopolitical rivalry. The contradictions over territory at the center of these conflicts remain irreconcilable: while the Georgians continue to regard Abkhazia and South Ossetia as integral parts of their nation, the Abkhaz and Ossetians do not want to be a part of the Georgian state and many of them support autonomy at the very least. This stalemate is furthered by a lack of mutual understanding and stereotyping for both sides, usually based on the idea that the opposing group hates or fears them. The lack of communication perpetuates the contradictions and attitudes that fuel these conflicts.

Many international and external actors have been involved in the conflict resolution process because of the strategic and economic importance of the region. Since the South Caucasus is part of the European Neighborhood Policy, the EU has been deeply involved. Additionally, Georgia has been wanting to unify and integrate into the EU and NATO, which would help Europe diversify its energy sources by building the Baku – Tbilisi – Ceyhan pipeline. Therefore, an incapacitated Georgia would mean fewer strong partners in the region. Not only regional, but national integration and cooperation is important to prevent further conflicts in Georgia. Georgia has been trying to make progress in state-building since the Rose revolution. Except for economic development, it included the idea of renewing the state authority over the territory of Georgia. Conflicts with Abkhazia and South Ossetia remain unresolved, but there are other minorities in Georgia as well that do not have autonomy. Armenians and Azerbaijanis in Georgia never rebelled against the central government; however, their relations with the state are damaged by the policies towards them. The experience in regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and the Russian support for them, especially the fact that Russia recognized their independence, is suggesting that these conflicts are part of the broader framework, therefore they need to be resolved in the broader framework (Niklas and Popjanevski, 2009).

The only possible peace settlement can be achieved if all parties follow the recommendations of peace organizations. First, there needs to be a permanent ceasefire regime and a peacebuilding plan. Second, there needs to be a new political agenda that includes purposes of all sides and reconciliation. The agenda of federalism can be fitted to the peace settlement for the future of Georgia. This part of the

research has addressed the attitudinal dynamics of the Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian conflicts. The findings show that the conflicts' historical dimensions are widely considered to be a result of a long-term Russian strategy to weaken Georgia and undermine the country's ability to be independent. This commentary links diverse historical events to one clear, relevant, and fixed motivation: Russian imperial interests. Moreover, this narrative is very distinct from the Abkhaz and Ossetian views, which hold that these conflicts arose due to nationalism and mistreatment by Georgians. These two challenging interpretations need to be reconciled through national dialogue to receive some degree of common understanding.

Table 1. View of De-Facto States

Features of 'frozen conflict'	Peace resolution, mediation & monitoring	Heating-up of conflicts	De facto states and recognition issue	Military involvement external Actor	Instability (Freedom Level by FH, 2017) 1 best - 7 worst
Three conflicts					
Abkhazia	Peace resolution highly problematic GID (conflict sides, Russia, US, EU, UN and OSCE) No international observer inside region (UNOMIG vetoed by Russia in 2009)	Yes in 2008	Yes – recognized by 4 UN member states	3.500 Russian troops 'Creeping occupation'	Unstable 4.5
South Ossetia	Peace resolution highly problematic GID (conflict sides, Russia, US, EU, UN and OSCE) No international observer inside region (OSCE mm vetoed by Russia in 2009)	Yes in 2008	Yes – recognized by 4 UN member states	3.800 Russian troops 'Creeping occupation'	Unstable 3

As Russian foreign policy and the geopolitics of the post-Soviet region increasingly dominate headlines around the world, the communities and people directly affected by the region's frozen conflicts should not be forgotten. It is time to overcome the geopolitical situation by empowering grassroots actors to bring about change at their level and help rebuild trust in societies that have been deeply divided for more than two decades.

A timetable for establishing a new peace framework has been proposed. However, its future mandate, scope, and resourcing in the conflict areas are still unclear and already include several elements that are not linked:

- EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia (EUMM Georgia);
- OSCE Mission;
- United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG);
- The presence of Russian military forces;
- Any future Joint Peace-Keeping Force (JPKF) framework;
- The operation of Georgian, South Ossetian and Abkhaz security and justice mechanisms in the areas of the respective control.

Overall, this lack of clarity, especially over how different elements come together, may undermine the effectiveness of a peace and security framework and its ability to serve the needs of affected people and communities. The international community provided substantial support for the Georgian Government in the years preceding the conflict, largely based on Georgia's intentions to build a state on Western-oriented principles. This support has taken different forms, including the development of administrative capacity, military retraining and re-equipment, commercial and banking development, and democratization. While this support has been an essential part of Georgia's economic and social development, the international community needs to be sensitive to its potentially positive role in influencing the response of the Georgian Government and society to the challenges brought about by the conflict. In particular, there is a concern that international interest in the East-West dimension of the crisis will overshadow attention to the necessary internal conditions and reforms that will affect long-term peace and security.

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