



EVENTS IN KODORI GORGE OCTOBER, 2001



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PREFACE

The Caucasus Forum is a network of Caucasus NGOs, founded in 1998. The CF has already carried out several monitoring missions: to Karachai-Cherkessia Republic in 1999 and monitoring of the situation in Pankissi Gorge in 2000. Together with the CF, initiators of the research were CIS NGO Working Group on Prevention of Conflicts, and William R. Nelson Institute at James Madison University in Virginia. The latter was responsible for funding this project.

The monitoring was carried out with the aim of express analyse at the moment of deterioration of the situation in Kodori Gorge. It is published, since it may serve as a source of information for the problem of solution of the Georgia-Abkhazia conflict, and also as a source of information for peacemaking issues in the Caucasus in general.

The research consists of the following parts: Monitoring in Abkhazia, Monitoring in Georgia, Review of Georgian and Abkhazian press and news of that period.

Monitorings are carried out with different aims. The aim of the present monitoring was not finding facts of what had happened, but rather to clarify positions of different public groups and positions of Mass Media. Since the aim of the Caucasus Forum, the Working Group and William R. Nelson Institute is peacemaking, on the basis of this monitoring one can arrive at some conclusions and recommendations as to what should be done to reduce the possibility of repeating similar events. The authors of this document tried to remain impartial in their work, and were not aimed at advocating any political opinions. Nonetheless, this is difficult to achieve in the tense situation of the Caucasus.

The authors and the Caucasus Forum Coordination Council bare the full responsibility for this document, and hope that any critical remarks ((which we welcome) would serve further improvement of our work, and would be expressed in all sincerity.

QUESTIONNAIRE SAMPLE

1.	Sex.	M.	F.			
2.	Age.	17-30	30-45	45-60		
3.	Occupation, education.					
4.	Where from do you get information on the current events?	Mass Media	Official sources	Rumours	Witness	I do not get any
5.	Which one from these sources you trust most?	Mass Media	Official sources	Rumours	Witness	I do not get any
6.	If it is Mass Media, then which?	Abkhazian	Russian	Western	Georgian	MSC
7.	What is the reason for the deterioration of situation in Kodori Gorge?	Abkhazia-Georgia conflict	International terrorism combat	Struggle for the influence in the Caucasus	Other	Do not know
8.	Who do you think is the initiator of the deterioration of the situation in Kodori Gorge?	Georgia	Abkhazia	International terrorists	Others	Do not know
9.	What way out of the situation do you see?	Military	Peaceful negotiations	Interference of the third parties	Do not see any	Do not know
10.	How would Kodori events influence the process of settlement of the Georgia-Abkhazia conflict?	The process will continue as before	New participants will get in the process	The process will become possible	Other	Do not know
11.	Your forecast of the Kodori Gorge events in the nearest future?	The armed clashes will continue	The armed clashes will be suspended	Will develop into full-scale conflict	Other	Do not know

Alan Parastaev

RESULTS OF SURVEY IN ABKHAZIA

While preparing for the monitoring, we were not planning to conduct a survey. Nevertheless, the questionnaires were prepared in Sukhum and distributed among the respondents with the assistance of Abkhazian colleagues. The first day brought encouraging results – over 20 questionnaires were filled in. 120 filled questionnaires were collected during the three days of work in Sukhum. Such a survey cannot claim to be a full public opinion poll for a number of reasons, such as the lack of random sampling, insufficient number of respondents, etc. Wide sections of the population were surveyed: state and NGO employees, creative and scientific intelligentsia, students, private entrepreneurs, peasants.

The survey was conducted in different regions of Abkhazia, such as Sukhum, Kodori Gorge, Gagra. Among those surveyed there are people who participated in the hostilities and also people from the affected villages in Kodori District. The Working Group members tried to keep the age and gender balance. We have processed the information gathered and have used it as an auxiliary indicator of the situation of the Abkhazian society at the moment of conflict deterioration and its reaction on the events in Kodorsky Valley. Despite the irregularity of some of the survey parameters, the material given below would be useful for the analyses of October events and for the development of recommendations for peace-keeping activities.

Altogether 120 people were surveyed in Sukhum, Gagra and Kodori Gorge villages, 54% (66 persons) men and 46% (54 persons) women. The age breakdown of the surveyed is as follows:

- a) From 17 to 30 years - 37% (44 persons)
- b) From 30 to 45 years – 43% (52 persons)
- c) Over 45 years – 20% (24 persons)

The social breakdown of the respondents is as follows:

- ü 25% (30 persons) – representatives of state structures (including law-enforcement bodies and the Army)
- ü 30% (36 persons) – intelligentsia, reporters, NGO representatives
- ü 25% (30 persons) – private entrepreneurs, businessmen and peasants
- ü 20% (24 persons) unemployed and pensioners.

The idea of carrying out monitoring appeared in the Caucasus Forum's Office as a result of a number of unsuccessful attempts to obtain from our Georgian and Abkhazian colleagues, most of whom are participants of the Georgia-Abkhazia Confidence Building Projects, more information on the Kodori Gorge events than it was provided by Russian TV at that moment. This determined the inclusion of a number of questions in our questionnaire regarding the source of information received and the attitude to that information. We have divided the information sources into three categories:

- a) Mass media
- b) Official sources
- c) Rumors and street conversations

For the local official press readers points a) and b) were identical, while those who had access to independent Abkhazian and/or non-Abkhazian editions differentiated these two sources. It is interesting that out of 49 Kodori events witnesses 29 indicated that they trust to official sources. This fact could be interpreted in two

ways: either the respondents have demonstrated their support to official position of the Abkhazia Government, which shows consolidation of the Abkhazian society, or in their opinion, the official information indeed reflected the actual situation.

The aim of the third question of the "information set" was to specify what mass media enjoyed confidence. As it was expected, most confidence enjoyed Abkhazian mass media – 45% (54 persons). Unfortunately, the survey did not identify names of the media, but in conversations, most frequently mentioned was "Nuzhnaya Gazeta" – an independent Abkhazian edition with opposition reputation, and also information "leaflet", which had been issued by the Humanitarian Programs Center during the deterioration of the situation. 16% (19 persons) gave preference to Russian media. Not a single answer was given to the question regarding Georgian and Western information sources.

This is explainable vis-à-vis Georgian Mass Media: firstly, they are inaccessible, and secondly, there are few people in present day Abkhazia who would express confidence in Georgian Mass Media even in the issues that are far from the politics, not to mention Kodori Gorge events. As for the Western Media, this is also explained by their inaccessibility, although the attitude to this Media is a priori far from confiding.

The next set of questions directly related to the events in Kodori Gorge. We tried to find out the opinion of the respondents on the reasons and initiators of the deterioration of the situation and also their forecast for the nearest future. It is interesting that in the question regarding the reasons for deterioration of the situation the opinions practically equally divided among the following three variants of answers:

- ü Abkhazian-Georgian conflict – 34% (41 persons)
- ü Combating with international terrorism – 30% (36 persons)
- ü Struggle for the influence in the Caucasus – 32% (38 persons)
- ü 5 persons responded they do not know the actual reasons for the current events.

It should be noted that on the next question concerning initiators for the deterioration of the situation, 29 out of 36 respondents who had mentioned combating international terrorism in the previous question indicated Georgia, and only six considered initiators terrorists themselves. 58% (69 persons) considered Georgia as initiators of the deterioration, 18% (22 persons) indicated international terrorists, and 23% (27 persons) blamed "some other" forces for it. Among "other forces" 9 persons indicated Russia.

None of the respondents indicated Abkhazian side as initiator of the current situation though in everyday life in Abkhazia the republican authorities' policy is often criticized. In our opinion, this fact once again confirms the wrong opinion prevailing in Georgia that constant partisan operations could lead to dissatisfaction of Abkhazian population by their leadership.

By asking the third set of questions (No. 9, 10 and 11) we aimed to find out the Abkhazian society's vision of the further prospects of peace-keeping process during the aggravation of conflict, the influence of Kodori events on this vision and the role of the third parties in the person of the three great powers that have interests in the region. 48% (58 persons) of the respondents considered that intervention of a third party could be the way out of the Kodori crisis.

Question No. 10 in this set was "How would the Kodori Gorge events influence the peace-keeping process?" Among the 63% (76 persons) who considered that new players would actively get involved in the peace-keeping process in the nearest future (which is an absolute record of "unanimity" in the survey), over half of respondents

expressed the opinion that for the solution of the Kodori crisis a third party intervention is necessary. 35% (42 persons) considered possible negotiations between the confronting sides. 13% (16 persons) found acceptable military solution to the situation. It is interesting that these 13% of respondents included reporters, scientific intelligentsia and private entrepreneurs but not a single military. 4% of respondents did not see the way out. None of the surveyed expressed the fear that Kodori fighting could grow into a large-scale war.

In general, only few respondents (5 persons) admitted that there was a danger of transformation of the Kodori Gorge fighting into a large-scale war (question No. 11), and the same number of respondents considered that the peace-keeping process would reach a deadlock and become impossible, while 17% in their turn had the opinion that these events would not influence the process of negotiations.



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RESULTS OF THE MONITORING IN ABKHAZIA

The monitoring in Abkhazia was carried out on 16-19 October 2001, i.e. during the hostilities in Kodor Gorge. The aim of the present part of the monitoring was to receive information from the first hands, i.e. from immediate witnesses of the events. The Working Group members tried to fully abstract their minds from information by any mass media, Georgian, Russian or Abkhazian, and tried to work exceptionally with the information sources, considering that the geographic situation of Abkhazia allowed to meet with the key players and witnesses of the events within a short period of time. Despite the shortage of time, the task was completed thanks to the assistance from the Abkhazian authorities and especially, from Abkhazian NGOs.

The methods of interview and questioning were used. The informants were the captives, civilian population in the immediate area of hostilities, the victims, reservists, the military, the MFA and Security Services officials, reporters, UN representatives and representatives of international and local NGOs based in Abkhazia.

The most precious informants were, of course, the participants of hostilities from the both sides. The Abkhazian authorities gave us an opportunity to communicate with the captives in private for a rather long period of time. Certainly, we were not the first who met them, reporters from different agencies also had the same possibility. While considering the preliminary "work" which had been done with the captives, nonetheless the Working Group managed to have a frank conversation.

Owing to the Caucasus Forum contacts with the ex-combatants, we also worked with the participants of hostilities from the Abkhazian side. Naturally, this fact should be attributed to the achievements of the program of ex-combatants' meeting with a single reservation: in the opinion of its participants, capacity of the program is big enough to apply it not only for the research of already existing crisis situations, but also for the prevention and solution of such situations. From the Abkhaz side, only reservists, but not the conscripts serving in the Abkhazian Army participated in the hostilities.

The third category of the surveyed was the civilian population who suffered from the fighters which infiltrated into Kodor Gorge. This is rural population of Armenian ethnicity. These people provided valuable information since it was less influenced by different Media advocating the positions of this or that side.

The analyses of different sources was carried out considering specific situation in the region and the desire of informants to advocate their political opinions.

As a result of the monitoring it was more or less demonstratively established that some large-scale "intervention" in Kodor Gorge indeed had taken place. Reportedly, there were two groups of "interventionists", who differed in the level of their fighting preparedness and equipment, in their ethnicity and, most probably, in the aims of their intervention.

The first group, consisting entirely (or practically entirely) of some 100-120 ethnic Chechens was well equipped and had necessary equipment for the fighting in mountains, with good ammunition, etc. Evidently, the fighters of this group were good professionals. It is quite possible, that the group was headed by Gelaev or by a person who called himself Gelaev. All captives indicated that he personally was there, but when asked in detail it became evident that they had information from the second hands, most of all this concerns the victims and the Abkhazian military. It should be noted that if that was the famous Chechen field commander Gelaev, then it wasn't his

first "visit" to Abkhazia. During the 1992-1993 Abkhazian-Georgian conflict he headed one of the Chechen volunteers' detachments fighting on the Abkhaz side.

The same was the situation with the question regarding the presence of Arabic mercenaries in this group. None of those who had supposedly seen them was able to differ Arabian language from any other unknown one. Furthermore, several times when speaking about Arabs, the witnesses could mix them with representatives of the Turkic-language ethnicities (there were used phrases of a clear Turkic origin and "Azerbaijans speaking Arabic").

To all appearances, this group infiltrated into Kodori Gorge at the end of July – early August. Their advent in this location in early August coincides with the beginning of the anti-Abkhazia rhetoric in Georgian Mass Media. This group had not revealed itself until the beginning of the very events, and autonomously existed in Mountain Svanetia for over two months. Naturally, these people had guides, presumably from the local Svans. Some Abkhaz reservists claimed that they had contacts with Chechens who were in Abkhazian Svanetia end of summer, where they negotiated the possibility of their spending winter there. The Chechens' request to provide one of the vacant Alpine tourists centers to spend the winter was turned down. There is no information as to whether these were the above-mentioned people or not.

The second group was much bigger (some 300 people) consisting of different ethnicities. Some 100-130 members were ethnic Georgians, including refugees from Abkhazia. Other members of this group were mainly representatives of the Caucasus ethnicities of traditional Islamic confession: Chechens, Kabards, Dagestanians, Balkars, Azerbaijanis and a minimum one Ukrainian among them. Most of them reached Abkhazia via Georgia in three groups, including in covered KAMAZ Trucks from Pankissi Gorge villages, and then in barges via Dzhvarsky Storage Pond. As the Chechen captives claim, on the way they only had stopped for the nights, and were accompanied by people in civilian dress in vehicles. After spending several days in a camp in Svanetia Foothills where they were joined by Georgians, representatives of the first, "Gelaev's" group split them into several detachments and then took them to Mountain Svanetia. Some of the detachments were formed on the basis of ethnicity ("Georgians"), and some (Islamic ones) on the basis of motivation ("Jihad").

These people were recruited in different places, mainly in Pankissi Gorge. Most of them were untrained people who were enticed into Abkhazia. They were deceived in different ways: Chechens and the most "religious" minded were told they would be taken to Chechnya to fight with "unfaithful" Russians; Georgian refugees from Abkhazia were told they would be taken to free their motherland; some were evidently just promised an opportunity to loot. They received arms when reached Abkhazia passing Georgia armless, without even basic military training. The members of this group were mostly lumpen people of little education and without a clear idea as to where and why were they going to. Thus, one of the captives claimed he studied the Koran, but in practice he had a vague idea of what Jihad is. We could not get a clear answer on how things like Jihad with the Orthodox Georgians against partially Muslim Abkhaz ethnicity could be combined. One thing was clear: they were not ready for the raid, they did not have necessary equipment and some of them were wearing summer clothes.

Right after entering Abkhazia the first group (for some reason, they were called "the scouts") made an action, evidently with the aim to intimidate the other "fighters", where a randomly chosen Azerbaijan from the second group was accused of cooperation with the FSB and was slaughtered in the presence of the others. Thus members of the second group were intimidated. After that they started to drive them from place to place in the mountains with senseless tasks, such as to go to some height,

stay there overnight and come back in the morning. By that time they were given green frontlets, the Korans and other Muslim attributes. All these things had being lost in the mountains in numerous quantities, and besides, footmarks were being made in the chaotic trips. All these aimless sorties were taking place in an absolutely desolated area, and evidently, only the organizers of this monstrously inhuman action know their aim. In few days, the feeding of the second group members was stopped, and all attempts of the hungry men to apply the "scouts" were harshly suppressed. They started to understand they were entrapped, and some of them tried to escape at that stage, but without an idea of where to go they did not go to Georgia or Russia mountains, but went to the coast where they were either killed or captured. They were kept starving approximately for a month, which was evidently followed by the next stage of the operation.

We failed to make a clear picture of the first attacks on the villages of Abkhazian part of the Kodori Gorge. Those cruel actions of the fighters who attacked the Abkhaz villages were most likely made by the first group, the "scouts", though it is possible that the second group was allowed to the looting as well. After that the first group, i.e. the "Gelaevites" disappeared. They clearly somehow left the Abkhazian Svanteia: they are not among the captives, and not or almost not among the killed. The participants of the fighting from the Abkhaz side said in the rare contacts they could always recognize Gelaevites by the level of their battle training. With the withdrawal of the "scouts", the hungry and untrained men were left in unfamiliar mountains without the leadership and food on the winter eve. Having seen results of the brutality in the mountain villages, by that time the Abkhaz reservists moved to the mountains and started "to clean" the Gorge. The hungry, becoming lousy and completely unable to fight groups came down the gorge to ask for or to steal food. They ate away the corn fields, ate raw kidney beans (it was found in the pockets of the killed); in the villages they cleaned the food stock without remainder and did not touch valuable things (in one of the villages they even took a can with emulsive paint, tried it and threw it away when understood it was not food). And everywhere they stumbled across the groups of Abkhaz reservists.

The "interventionists" were doomed. The Abkhaz Army is rather efficient and is based on the Swiss principle. Those men who served their time in the Army have arms at home and are ready to stand up when required. The reservists have smell of powder, know the mountains and are much more efficient than the Army comprised of conscripts. They were the reservists whom the second group hungry and inefficient "interventionists" stumbled across (see above).

The military specialists that we were talking to, including the Abkhaz military, insisted that such operation as a single could not and had not military sense, even if all the four hundred attackers had been experienced soldiers. When coming down the plain the attackers could not but clash with the machines and artillery, while it is senseless to confront tanks and APCs with "Kalashnikovs". Furthermore, such operations are possible in spring, but not in autumn, when it is snowing on mountains passes and the attackers are cut from supply sources.

This operation was not an abstractive maneuver as a part of a greater offensive plan by the Georgian military forces on Abkhazia as the Abkhaz military official insisted, at least because there was not a greater plan. According to the information provided by the UN Mission staff who are constantly monitoring the situation there, in Ghali District, the number of border crossings to the market in Zugdidi and back even almost did not change. There was put forward a version of a raid on one of Abkhaz cities similar to Basaev's raid on Budenovsk. If so, then why take three hundred men unfit for action – such operations are implemented only by experienced and tried

fighters. Even if such a plan existed, there were not serious barriers to its implementation.

Also, no evidences were found to prove the presence of Arabs and other far abroad freelancers among the attackers. It is impossible to completely exclude the presence of any ethnicities in the groups of fighters, however we failed to find any serious evidences to admit there had been any considerable number of Arabs there.

Basing on the facts, the following conclusions can be made:

- Firstly, it is possible to contend that it was indeed a large-scale operation, which is surprising as such big groups seldom fight in the mountains.
- Secondly, the groups crossed into Georgia freely and someone led them through the country.
- Thirdly, the operation could not and did not have any military sense.

Political evaluation and interpretation of the events were not the aim of the present monitoring, however the lack of military sense of the operation allows one to assume that it was a large-scale political provocation. Thus, the officials and participants of the negotiation process expressed the opinion that the operation of Chechen fighters in the Kodori Gorge was organized on the highest governmental level in Georgia with the aim to show the inability of Abkhaz Government to have control over its territory. By doing so, they aimed firstly to provoke anti-governmental moods among the population of Abkhazia and secondly, to force the official Sukhum to be more compliant at the negotiations. Nonetheless, they failed to consider the factor of the 11th of September, i.e. the declaration of a “crusade” against the international terrorism. This fact was confirmed by mentioning the fact that E. Shevarnadze received extremely cool reception during his visit to USA.

Another fact of the October 2001 events in Kodori Gorge without which the picture would not be full and which is wrapped in mystery as many other facts is the bombing. The Abkhazia Interior Ministry took the responsibility at least for one instance of bombing. This does not concern bombing of the first days, when unmarked aircrafts bombed the Chechen positions. Also the Armenian village of Naa was bombed, and naturally, no one took the responsibility for this incident as well. Luckily, no casualties were reported as most of the villagers left their houses following the “intervention”.

And at last, the most tragic fact not only of the Kodor events but also in the history of ethnic conflicts of the Caucasus of the last 10 years is the crush of the helicopter with the UN observers. Results of the investigation by the UN Mission military specialists showed that the helicopter had been downed by a “land-sky” missile identical to “Stinger”. The captives claimed they saw it was launched from the region where “Gelaevits” located. It is impossible to mix the UN helicopter with a military one as it is clearly marked.

Generally, the UN representatives were brief, including for the lack of information. The words of Mr. Dieter Boden, Head of UN Mission that the shooting could be heard in Sukhum had a great response. Most likely that these words served as a signal for the Georgian media to start publishing articles that Sukhum was just about to be taken. Evidently, Mr. Boden was talking about shelling of aircraft bombing, and not the shooting, which could not be heard in Sukhum, however his words were misinterpreted.

In a conversation, General A. Badge, Head of the UN Military Observers Team in the zone of Abkhazian-Georgian Conflict expressed his satisfaction with the activities of Russian peace-keepers, “thanks to whom there has been no war in Abkhazia for 8 years”. As is known, the official Tbilisi on the contrary considers the presence of Russian peacekeepers as a negative factor, and seeks their replacement.

Our interlocutor mentioned that he witnessed that during the last year, every time leaders of the both sides made statements which were far from a peacekeeping nature. At the same time, there is a chain of events indicating deterioration of the situation. He added that "today it is difficult to say whether the events were consequences of the statements or vice versa". The UN Mission and other international organizations took all measures to receive refugees from Abkhazia should the military operations intensify; they coordinated their activities with the Russian frontier guards (it is surprising, but they never managed this until now).

The reaction of the community in Abkhazia on these events was extremely negative. Especially negative reaction of the population caused participation of the North Caucasus representatives in these events, which was widely covered in the media, particularly in Russia. It should be acknowledged that thank to the work of the Government, and to a greater extent to the work of NGO sector in Abkhazia, the frustration of the population was reduced in a way, and the conflict was at least partially "de-ethnicised". Already on the final stage of the Kodori operation, the most common opinion among the population was that that was a fight with international terrorism representatives backed up by the Georgia political top. It should be noted that the same was the opinion of NGOs from Tbilisi participating in the projects on building confidence between the two people. Such a coincidence of opinions could be regarded as an achievement of NGOs activities in conflict transformation. Nevertheless, as it was the case with combatants, in case of emergencies NGOs stir up after the events. In our opinion, following are the reasons:

NGOs are fruitfully implementing project of a practical nature, i.e. different workshops and meetings (of women, reporters, youth, children etc.), however monitoring, evaluation and analyses of the current situation are not carried out, hence the late response to changes of the situation, including negative developments. Therefore, Mass Media is the only source of information for the community.

As it was in the initial implementation of the projects, the work is being carried out with NGOs from the two capitals, Tbilisi and Sukhum. In our opinion, with the present-day high level of relations between the Georgian and Abkhazian NGOs it is possible to localize the process and attract community representatives from the areas of immediate confrontation line.

Insufficient use of ex-combatants' capacity, including in establishing relations between the confronting sides, has been a characteristic of this phase of the conflict.

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Vitalii Sharia

ABKHAZIA PRESS REVIEW ON MILITARY OPERATIONS IN KODORI GORGE (AUGUST – NOVEMBER 2001)

The information coverage of another military round of Georgia-Abkhazia confrontation had a number of peculiarities in Abkhazia.

The informational grounding was made by the Russian TV, which during the summer of 2001 twice emphatically attracted attention to the concentration of armed groups in Kodori Gorge in Abkhazia. With the exception of a few brief articles, the Abkhazian press practically did not react on these reports. Indeed, "Nuzhnaya Gazeta" claims that from time to time it had approached the Defence Ministry and the Security Service with the request of information, however they referred them to the broadcast of State Information Agency "Apsnypress", where there was a bare minimum.

Abkhazia population learnt about the beginning of military operations in Kodori Gorge from the Russian TV, which actively covered the events. Such an activity was not observed even during the war of 1992-1993. The daily coverage of the events alongside with the hottest news provoked an unjustified panic among the population in the Republic, and as a result, part of the population has left Abkhazia. Initially, Abkhaz TV simply duplicated the Russian information, and started releasing their own coverage only at the height of the events.

The civil sector, which considerably increased its capacity in the recent years, has actively entered into information support. Temporary NGO Press-Centre and public press centre were created in Abkhazia Humanitarian Research Institute already on 10 October. From 12 to 20 October, i.e. during the period of most active clashes, the NGO Press Centre issued 5 information bulletins "Abkhazia – From the Spot of Events", where they tried to picture the events impartially, published statements by the community and civil sector representatives, information from the area of military operations, news in pictures and extracts from foreign press. Together with information by "Apsnypress" Agency, these materials were the basis for the creation of the "Abkhazia" site. The NGO information bulletins were immediately distributed among the population and were taken to the area of military operations, which mostly filled in the information vacuum. The reason for this vacuum was that as a rule, the official and independent newspapers were issued weekly, and they had no time to reflect on rapidly unfolding events.

Also, the achievement of the civil sector is the change of the public opinion vis-à-vis Chechens residing in the republic. As a result of information on Chechen terrorists in Kodori Gorge by Russian TV, the local Chechens started feeling undertone of hostility and suspect of the population. On 11 October, a meeting with Vainakh society in Abkhazia was organised in the NGO Club, and was broadcast on the Abkhaz TV the same evening. This meeting assisted population of the republic to balance its attitude to ethnic Chechens residing in Abkhazia, not identifying them with terrorists in the zone of military operations.

There were little attempts of political evaluation of the Kodori events in the press, which was connected to certain unwillingness of the society to make their opinion public considering the rather complicated external political situation of unrecognized Abkhazia. Thus, on 27 October, the HRS and Temporal NGO Press Center organized a Round Table "Events in Kodori Gorge: evaluation of the situation, consequences, prospects", with the participation of community and the government;

nonetheless, despite the roughly discussion and numerous theories of the events, the coverage in the press was rather discreet.

Generally, after the active phase, the Kodori events rapidly got out of public's attention, as it was again concentrated on the complicated internal political situation.

"Ekho Abkhazii", "Nuzhnaya Gazeta", "Respublica Abkhazia", "Apsny", "Aytara", "Sukhum-Akua" Newspapers, Abkhazia NGO Bulletin "Abkhazia – From the Spot of Events" and "Grazhdanskoye Obshestvo" and "Kolokol" Magazines have been reviewed.

Four people were taken hostage by unknown persons in Tkuarchali District on 31 July. This information was provided to Apsnypress Agency by RA State Security Services.

Tkuarchali District residents tended cattle on alpine meadows of Khodzhal Mountain when they were attacked by some 5 armed men.

The offenders injured one and captured four herders including two Kwarchia brothers (one aged 16), and two Polikovsky brothers. The bandits have stolen over 200 cattle and small cattle to the territory controlled by Georgian authorities. The law-enforcement bodies are in search of the hostages. In the opinion of Defence Minister, a Georgian subversive group has seized the herders.

Note by "AP": In a month period, the Georgian subversive groups killed 9 and captured 8 civilian Abkhaz citizens.

"Respublica Abkhazia", 4-5 August 2001

Abkhazia special services have information on infiltration of several armed groups, from 5 to 15 men in each, from Georgia territory to the north of Abkhazia Ghali District security zone. According to Abkhazia State Security Services Chairman R. Khazhimba, the Abkhaz side has provided participants of the meeting (between leaders of Abkhazia and Georgia power structures with the participation of D. Boden, Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General – author) corresponding information on the activities of Georgia subversive and terrorist groups in Abkhaz territory. "We think that regardless of Georgian side's attitude to our information, these facts are irrefutable. We know not only the facts of infiltration of groups, but also names of individual members of these armed formations. Furthermore, we know about their arms, military and communication equipment", said R. Khazhimba.

"Respublica Abkhazia", 16-17 August 2001

Remind of the chronicle. On 23 August, Apsnypress Agency spread information that according to RA State Security Services, a well-armed formation numbering to 700 persons was concentrated in Georgia territory in 10 km from Abkhaz border. According to information by Abkhazia special services, "a large-scale provocation with infiltration of Georgia terrorist groups into Abkhaz territory" had been planned for 25 August. On the same day, RA Foreign Ministry made a statement saying that from early June 2001, Georgian terrorist groups liven up their activities in Kodori Gorge in Abkhazia. Intruding over 70 km into Abkhaz territory, they killed five and took hostage 9 citizens of Abkhazia. As a result of activities by the RA law-enforcement bodies, a terrorist group with a temporal base in the vicinity of Pskhu mountain village was identified on 17 August 2001. The group was scattered as a result of a clash on 18 August. Reportedly, there are killed and wounded among the terrorists. Materials taken by Abkhazia law-enforcement bodies irrefutably indicate the involvement of Georgia State structures in the terrorist activities on RA territory. The RA MFA stated that it was still possible to find solution to the existing situation by peaceful political means, negotiations and consultations...

The situation became less tense only on Monday, 27 August, when RA Prime Minister A. Djergenia said in his press conference that the invasion had been prevented by mutual efforts of Abkhazia and Georgia political leaderships and power structures.

"Ekho Abkhazii", 29 August 2001

On 24 September, clashes took place between the Abkhazia military and Georgian subversive group in Lata village area. According to information from Defense Ministry, two persons were wounded; the armed forces were chasing the subversive group, which tried to escape in Georgia territory.

"Nuzhnaya Gazeta", 26 September 2001

In his interview to "Nuzhnaya Gazeta" on 5 September, Defence Minister Vladimir Mikanba said, "Abkhazia would take respective measures unless the Georgian formations that infiltrated Abkhazia are not driven back to Georgia". He said that military formations numbering to 500 persons have passed the confrontation border and entered mountain village Azanta. "We maintain constant contacts with official Tbilisi, and despite their persistent silence, we consider that these events have occurred not without the involvement of Georgia power structures... Partial mobilisation of reservists has been declared in Abkhazia, military equipment has been deployed to the area of confrontation, and we are ready to repulse anyone who would attempt on our territory".

"Nuzhnaya Gazeta", 10 October 2001.

A Mi-8 helicopter of UN Mission with 9 people aboard was shot down on 8 October at 9.15 a.m. in the vicinity of Sakharnaya Golova Mountain.

"Nuzhnaya Gazeta", 10 October 2001.

I can assure you that these are the Georgian special services, which are precisely dealing with all terrorist formations further sent on Abkhaz territory. The Georgian authorities, including the power structures, cannot but know about all the events of the last two months. Evident is the fact of accretion of religious extremism and Georgian terrorism. This is confirmed by the events in the upper zone of Gulripshsky District. The bandit groups have infiltrated Abkhazia territory firstly, with the aim of creation in the mountain region bases for terrorist attacks in Russia, and secondly, for terrorist acts immediately in Abkhazia.

...It is not realistic to land such a number of people with the existing facilities in Georgia. Moreover, none of them has any relation to landing troops. They have passed the well-known route: Khida-Saken and then went to the region where they were discovered. It is difficult to say who have assisted them, and how. Certainly, there are guides... (From the briefing of RA State Security Services Chairman R. Khazhimba)

"Republica Abkhazia", 9-10 October 2001

In the light of today's events, it is a strange feeling that one rereads with our article of almost two months ago "The Clouds are Lowering at the Border..." (?35 "RA"). In a different way is now apprehended the brave tone of RA Prime Minister A. Djergenia's press conference of 27 August of this year. "I have brought you peace!" – this is the famous phrase that one involuntarily remembers while thinking of how together with Edward Ambrosiyevich they prevented the intrusion into Abkhazia of a big armed formation from neighbouring Georgia territory, and also thinking on the recent visit of our Prime Minister to Tbilisi, where the agreements had been confirmed and signed.

Alas! As a resident of Sukhumi has said yesterday, "Wait for trouble when Shevardnadze starts to talk sweetly". Five hundred terrorists have successfully "infiltrated" into Abkhazia Kodori Gorge over the well-known mountain route of Khida-Saken (and possibly, as some Abkhazian officials think, also on helicopters

belonging to Georgia Air Forces). According to RA Security Services, they are armed with light weapons, grenade cup discharges, antiaircraft guns and heavy anti-tank machine-guns.

And not only "infiltrated", but have launched wild robbery and terrorist activities from that base. Right were those who said that sooner or later, the Georgian enclave in upper Kodori left out of the jurisdiction of Abkhazia authorities would turn into the sword of Damocles over our country.

"Ekho Abkhazii", 11 October 2001

"In recent days, the events in Abkhazia are developing according to a dramatic scenario that resembles the situation in August 1992. In spite of Georgia-Abkhazia negotiations that have been carried out over 8 years, the peace process still did not become inevitable. The fact that "The Accord on Peace and Non-resumption of Military Activities" between Georgia and Abkhazia has not been signed yet under different pretexts is another illustration of putting political ambitions beyond human lives in Georgia. The Georgian 'war party", the aggressive goals of which have been voiced by one of the key figures in Shevardnadze's government – Interior Minister K. Targamadze, took the advantage of the complicated international situation to start a new military campaign against Abkhazia.

...Furthermore, as a result of such a policy of playing footsie and manipulating with bandit groups, Georgia becomes the base of international forces that in fact divide the Caucasus by their destructive actions; it is acting in the favor of those who does not want to see the united and strong Caucasus.

We have conceived with great satisfaction the statement of Georgia public representatives, where they condemned the armed adventure in Abkhaz territory and demanded to call to account its initiators and accomplices. We hope that these voices will be heard in Georgian society." (Extract from the statement of Abkhazia NGOs).

"Abkhazia – from the Spot of Events", ?1, 12 October 2001

There are some 700 residents in Naa Village. The clashes with the terrorist group are not stopped even at nights. They managed to break into the village and cause many damages to the villagers. There are killed, some have been robbed. The bandits are well dressed and equipped. I think that Shevardnadze is supplying his terrorists as good as Bin Laden does, and he will not calm down.

According to the villagers, two helicopters came from Georgian side at the dawn and bombed the village. As a result of the bombing, the school was destroyed; there is one big shell-hole in the yard of one of the villagers, and a scrap pile – remnants of vehicles.

... There is a dead body under the tall fir at the side of the road. He is 20-23 by appearance. Reservists say he was killed in the night shoot-out. The others managed to escape in the dark and hide in the mountains. ... After the search of his pockets it became clear that he is a Georgia citizen and belonged to the "Forest Brothers" bandit group.

"Apsny", 12 October 2001

"We declare that no terrorist provocations will be able to undermine brotherly relations between Abkhaz, Chechen, Kabard and other North Caucasus people.

Abkhaz people are always ready to defend their land from any attempts, no matter where the threat comes from. At the same time, we call upon our people and all people of the Caucasus to unite in the name of our common future. We have common history, culture, system of values, and fate. Religious differences have never disturbed us.

... In the present situation, when Georgia is trying to use the united terrorist forces for the annihilation of Abkhaz people, brotherly Caucasus people again have

confirmed their readiness to join Abkhazians in the name of freedom and justice". (Extract from the Appeal of Abkhazia community representatives to people of the Caucasus, 11 October 2001).

"Abkhazia – From the Spot of Events", ?2, 13 October 2001

Concern over the possibility of anti-Chechen moods was expressed in today's meeting with Ruslan Tuntaev and Albek Muradov, Vainakh Charity Fund "Daimokh" representatives in the NGO Club. "Someone may wish to embroil people of the Caucasus in a quarrel, but we should do everything possible to avoid it. One cannot associate Chechen people with the groups of Georgian and North Caucasian fighters that intruded Abkhazia territory", said the meeting participants.

"Abkhazia – From the Spot of Events", ?2, 13 October 2001

"We are not dealing with Chechen, Kabard or some other people. We are dealing with terrorists who came to us with arms", said Sergei Shamba, Abkhazia Foreign Minister.

"Abkhazia – From the Spot of Events", ?2, 13 October 2001

For a long time, Georgia has been playing footsie with Chechens with the aim of using them in their own guileful plans, for example, in the solution of Abkhazian issue, to cause a clash between us, to manipulate them in the relations with Russia.

The fact that Chechens were found to have joined this rabble in their provocation against Abkhazia – simply for money or other material gain - is indicative of the scale of tragedy of these long-suffering people.

"Kolokol", ? 4, 2001

After our patrol left carrying five bodies, two people were killed from Abkhazian side at night. The same night, the fighting moved to the vicinity of Naa Village. On 10 October, the Abkhazia military had carried another four bodies to Ganakhleba Village, from where the UN Mission representatives took them. In both raids, representatives of CIS peacekeepers accompanied us. I want to emphasise that we consider these as joint activities by the UN, peacekeepers and Abkhazia home guards. The transportation of the bodies could not be possible without the assistance of the latter. The Abkhazia military implemented this work taking the risk of their own lives.

The situation in Abkhazia is not just tense – it is dangerous. I would like first of all to remind that the main position of the UN in this issue is to stick to the peaceful solution to the conflict, no matter what happens. From our side, we are taking every effort to speed up the beginning of a dialogue between the political leadership of the conflicting sides. In our opinion, intervention of politicians is currently needed. (Extract from interview with General Anis Badgva, UN Chief Military Observer in Abkhazia, 12 October 2001).

"Abkhazia – From the Spot of Events", ?3, 14 October 2001

The 11 September attacks on New York and Washington echoed with a new war in Abkhaz territory. The pessimistic expectations of those who feared that the deteriorated international situation would serve as a screen for the big and small states in achieving their own goals came true. The so-called "small empires" that are trying to get "their own piece of cake", such as Abkhazia is for Georgia, have showed their activity.

... Unfortunately, the situation in Kodori Gorge that has been developing for the last several months did not have a necessary reaction from the Mission of UN Observers in Georgia.

UNOMIG confirmed the presence of armed persons in Abkhazia only after this issue has been widely covered even in the Georgian media. Nonetheless, the Mission

representatives evaluated the information on imminent clashes as "speculations". Similar underestimation of the events could not facilitate prevention of new clashes.

"Civil Society" Magazine, ? 14, 2001

In the days when a large-scale military provocation has been unleashed in Abkhazia by Georgia and other destructive forces, the Russian Mass media broadcast statements of different politicians, including the RF President. The main point of these statements is that despite the deterioration of relations between Russia and Georgia, Abkhazia has been and will remain an integral part of Georgia, and Russia performs almost as a guarantor of territorial integrity of the latter... The thesis that the Republic of Abkhazia is an integral part of Georgia is not acceptable for Abkhazian people.... We state that the people of Abkhazia have gained independence with the blood of its best sons and daughters, and it is ready to defend it both today and in the future. Political Council "Aitaira" ("Vozrozhdeniye"), 12.10.2001.

"Nuzhnaya Gazeta" 17 October 2001.

"The Abkhazia Armed Forces were given two tasks: either to annihilate the terrorists, or capture them," said Anri Djergenia, RA Prime Minister.

"Nuzhnaya Gazeta" 17 October 2001.

Sergei Dbar, Kodori Contingent Commander: «...This time we are facing entirely different tactics of military operations. This group is well equipped. They move fast. Each of them has three uniform kits: two military and one civil, i.e. they are well prepared. Their age does not exceed 30. They have satellite communications. They are trying to avoid open fighting. They leave when they encounter checkpoints. Evidently, they were not tasked with combating. Most likely their task is connected with moving to Sukhum... Not a single attempt to run through the encirclement has been taken within three days. When stumbling on us they immediately escape. Most probably, they had some large-scale plan which failed, and they found themselves in a difficult situation".

"Nuzhnaya Gazeta" 17 October 2001.

The Parliament Deputies raised before Defence Minister the issue of necessity to create within Abkhaz Armed Forces special units able to adequately react in situations similar to the present one.

"Nuzhnaya Gazeta", 17 October 2001.

The events in Kodori Gorge are not of a local nature. They are part of the world processes that currently take place in Asia region. This is first of all connected with the definite approach in the positions of USA and Russia on the problem of international terrorism, and it is natural that both countries are co-ordinating their activities... In fact, the events are happening simultaneously... The US is bombing Afghanistan, which is thousand kilometres away from it, and naturally, Russia cannot be indifferent to what is happening right under its very nose... Of course, Shevardnadze set a definite goal, but he has failed to achieve it, and will hardly achieve it now. Those who thought he was trying to solve Abkhazia problem in a peaceful way were mistaken. Shevardnadze always intended to return Abkhazia in a military way only... Another thing is that he did not expect such reaction from Russia because he had overestimated his own role and his value to the West.

The opinion of Russia will always carry the greatest weight in all of the political issues in this region. This has become even more the case as a result of Russian-American cooperation following the 11 September terrorist attacks. Another issue is how long such an alliance would last. Today they are allies in the issue of Talibs. And this is a very important moment, which Shevardnadze has evidently underestimated. (Extract from interview with Stanislav Lakoba, History Professor).

"Nuzhnaya Gazeta" 17 October 2001

Alarming is that the initial "Georgia-Chechen" name of terrorist group has gradually transformed into "Chechen-Georgian", and then the term "Georgian" imperceptibly died, and now they more often speak about "Chechen band". Undoubtedly, nothing can justify either a Chechen or someone else who decided to plunge knife into his brother's back. I am sure, such person would deserve contempt and curse of the people whose representative he would have been. Unlike politicians and terrorists, people seldom betray each other. We should be strong by this belief. Otherwise, following an imposed scenario we can be left alone with those who so much love our motherland without us.

"Aitaira", October 2001

Those who came to Abkhazia to fight are people who do not belong to any nationality, who probably, have been misled and who are being used. Politicians like Shevardnadze cannot think of anything new.... Then, in 1992, criminals were broke out from all prisons in Georgia. They armed them and sent them to loot and kill in Abkhazia. Thus Shevardnadze wanted to kill two birds with one stone: to put down Abkhazia and to get rid of criminals. Something similar is also happening today. Relying on his reputation as a terrorist combatant, he hoped to liberate Pankisi. At the same time, he wanted to solve the issue of Abkhazia with the assistance of these terrorists or, at a minimum, to crush of Abkhaz popular morale. (Extract from interview with Gennadi Alamia, "Aitaira" Political Council Member).

"Nuzhnaya Gazeta", 17 October 2001.

Abkhazia is again under aggression. The Georgian leadership sent to our republic groups of terrorists headed by Gelaev, who had been brought up by Georgian special services in Pankissi Gorge. International terrorists have seized peaceful villages in Gulripshsky District of Abkhazia killing over 20 civilians and downing a UN helicopter.

.... The Georgian authorities, which are trying to unleash a new bloody war, understand that this goal is hindered by CIS peacekeeping forces represented by Russian peacekeepers, who prevent the resumption of large-scale military operations. Therefore they demand their withdrawal, seeking their replacement with international forces, in fact, with NATO forces, with the assistance of which they intend to occupy Abkhazia.

The people of Abkhazia have experienced all burdens of war. They long for the closest approach with Russia. Over 50 Russian citizens are residing in Abkhazia, and they need protection from Russia.

.... This is why we are calling upon you to do everything depending on you to prevent another bloody war. We hope that you as a leader of Great Russia will not leave people of Abkhazia in a difficult moment, and we ask you to prevent withdrawal of Peacekeeping forces from Abkhazia. (Extract from the Appeal of RA parties and public movements to V. V. Putin, President of the Russian Federation).

"Respublica Abkhazia", 16-17 October 2001

We were driving along Shaumyanovka. Here and there we met groups of local men sitting and guarding the village. Seven-eight people usually had one machine-gun or a rifle. In the opinion of some of them, should the terrorists get into the village, they could easily take hostages there. However, others thought that the fighters were only interested in food in the village: they have literally become brutal with starvation, and were ready to eat rind on the trees and mixed fodder for cattle. All our interlocutors were unanimous that the authorities should distribute arms to the villagers, and then they would not let the fighters in themselves.

"Ekho Abkhazii", 17 October 2001

On 14 October, the pursuit group traced the retreating terrorists. Judging from the flattened grass and fern, a very big group had passed over the strip of 2-3 meters. Further on they found remnants of 52 camp fires. On the assumption that each fire warms three to five persons, there should have been at least 200 fighters. Later they broke up into small groups and traveled toward Svanetia.

...There are little evidences to the fact that well-prepared mobile groups invaded Abkhazia. From their free movement in the area it was clear that they had local Svans guiding them. Otherwise it would be impossible to pass over the front line. During the fighting, the terrorists seized several vehicles and transported in them food and cargoes. An overloaded vehicle got stuck in the passage through Chertov Bridge, and they had to leave it and go further on foot.

“Respublica Abkhazia”, 20-21 October 2001

The aggressor has been pushed out of Kodori Gorge. The people have repelled the armed attack. But it is not less important to win the political confrontation with the enemy. As is known, this is the task of political leadership of the country. The victory in Kodori Gorge and the victims would become senseless if after the victory our leadership contends with festive meals and numerous toasts the victory.

“Ekho Abkhazii”, 24 October 2001

Vladimir Arshba, Chef of Abkhazia Armed Forces Headquarter informed the reporters that the military leadership has precise evidences of the participation of Georgia Interior Minister, SS Chairman, Interior Forces Commander and Georgia Defence Ministry in drafting and organising the operation (in Kodori Gorge – the author).

“Nuzhnaya Gazeta”, 24 October 2001

According to information by agencies, Gelaev headed the group. The information on the participation of other representatives of the North Caucasus along with the Chechens was actively exaggerated. Probably, they did, and it was done to drive a wedge between the Caucasus people. Nevertheless, Maskhadov, Basaev and Kist Chechens elders repudiated these terrorists.

At last, Abkhazians themselves stated that they remain grateful to Chechens and other people of the Caucasus for the brotherly assistance rendered during the Patriotic War of 1992-1993, “moreover that many volunteers sacrificed their lives for the holly thing for Abkhazians – liberty of the Motherland. But one could not talk about sympathy with those who intruded Kodori Gorge. Firstly, they came to our home with arms, and secondly, they came with our enemies. Finally and most important: the terrorists have no nationality.

As for the deeds of the group itself, evidently, its raid on Kodori Gorge was the first stage of the operation on seizure of Abkhazia. In the second stage, in case of victory they would have been declared units of Georgia active forces (this is proved by the respective documents the terrorists were having), and Georgia would have opened the second front by entering forces into Ghali District; thus a large-scale war could be a fact. But after the first phase of the operation has failed, Georgia distanced from the terrorists it had sent, even declaring its readiness to fight with them. Naturally, how Georgia, being “the outpost of civilisation in the East” could further support unlucky terrorists, even if she itself forced them to go! Another thing would be if they were lucky.... But Georgian strategists should have thought over that while appearing in Georgia again after they have been pushed out of Abkhazia, the terrorists surely ask why they have been deceived.

“Respublica Abkhazia”, 27-28 October 2001

Being aware of the highly explosive situation in the Kodori Gorge for more than three months, the leadership of Abkhazia did not take any measures to remove the

threat of invasion. The situation in Kodori Gorge and the predecessor Tbilisi talks between Djergenia and Shevardnadze have once again fully confirmed the complete inefficiency of the high republican leadership, and provoked complicated situation in the society, lead to suffering of the civil population and to the deaths of our citizens.

“Nuzhnaya Gazeta”, 7 November 2001

The invasion of fighters in Kodori District was a scout battle. Georgia has already tried two bases for the offensive – from down Ingur River, and from upper Kodori River. God forbid! But now we should be ready also to a combined blow.

“Ekho Abkhazii”, 8 November 2001

One cannot but note that this time, there were people among the Georgia intelligentsia who have negatively reacted on the military adventure in Kodori Gorge... I would like to call upon our leadership for a more openness and transparency of the policy. At that, no one is demanding disclosure of military secrets....

“Ekho Abkhazii”, 8 November 2001

Indeed, there also was an echo of the antiterrorist campaign thunder peals in the world. The traces of relations between Abkhazia and Georgia, Russia and Georgia, Russia and Abkhazia, Georgia and Chechnya, Russia and Chechnya were reflected in the Kodori events, and forcibly were drawn in the relations between Abkhazia and Chechnya.

...Alarming was even the unusual activity of the Russian Mass Media, which suddenly started to talk about us and our problems so openly and good-willingly... And therefore, when their tone has changed by the end of events, and the incident started to be limited to the Chechen issue leaving aside Georgian terrorists who led them here, there again came doubts and the usual anxiety as to whether it is possible that as soon as the authorities in Georgia show their pro-Russian face, Russia who always wanted to keep Georgia in its magnetic field, would demand from Abkhazia becoming part of Georgia again?

.... And if let's say, in Georgia they have realized their criminal attitude to Abkhazia, this would mean not only the change in our relations, but also the recovery of people. Furthermore, the only moral salvation for Georgian people would have been the voluntary renunciation of claims to Abkhazia and the recognition of its liberty and independence.

“Kolokol”, ? 4, 2001

Gagik Avagian
Alan Parastaev

MONITORING IN GEORGIA: TBILISI - ZUGDIDI

In Georgia, the monitoring was carried out in Tbilisi and Zugdidi District. Zugdidi is neighboring Abkhazia District, where most of refugees from Abkhazia are staying for 10 years. Some of them have the possibility to travel to Ghali District of Abkhazia to cultivate their land. "The White Legion", "Forest Brothers" and other guerilla groups are also located and operate from here. In the process of monitoring we met different authorities (from Justice Ministry, Ministry for Foreign Affairs and also with the exile Abkhazia Government), law-enforcement bodies, famous political figures, members of non-governmental organizations, reporters and human rights defenders, political scientists and representatives of international organizations in Georgia. Furthermore, the monitoring team met with commanders of the military units, Georgian guerillas, refugees and local residents in the districts neighboring the area of hostilities.

Also there was carried out a survey, which could not be considered as impartial because of the limited number of respondents, however, to a certain extent it has expressed the moods prevailing in the Georgian community.

From the very beginning of the monitoring it became evident that most of the interlocutors did not have actual information on Kodori events. The only source of information for them was Russian Mass Media. The Georgian Mass Media usually retransmitted pictures from the Russian TV adding their own comments of mainly expressive and evaluative, but never of purely factual nature. Considering that inadequacy, and sometimes the clearly provocative nature of such materials exceeded even the standard frames for such situations, the uninformed (disinformation) level of the Georgian population was evident.

Also, the population was not receiving any information from the governmental sources: on statements of high-ranking officials or from the meeting that were permanently held in Tbilisi those days. In both cases, no one informed the population of the actual state of Kodori events, and the statements were of purely emotional nature. The lack of possibility to get reliable information along with the desire of some political circles in Georgia to use the developments to their own advantage raised completely fantastic rumors circulating among the population in the country. Thus, at one time they were completely sure that the clashes took place in the very center of Sukhumi, and hours were left before the complete "liberation of Abkhazia from separatists". Refugees from Abkhazia were called on to pack and get ready for the return home. At the same time, our colleagues from Abkhazia told that they had been receiving phone calls from their acquaintances from Tbilisi who warned them of the danger. During the meetings in Tbilisi, the so-called Georgian Guerilla representatives (who are often rather far from being related to guerillas) urged to immediately join the defense forces "to be in time to participate in the crush of the enemy". Something similar was also happening in Sukhumi University functioning in Tbilisi. In this University, the students were called on to participating in the armed conflict. In return, they had been promised to pass all exams without any problems for the period of the conflict.

It should be noted that some information agencies, such as "Radio Liberty", "Rustavi-2" TV Channel operated in the immediate area of operations and even traveled to Sukhum, however their voice was not the decisive one and was perceived as another theory in the chain of information by other Mass Media.

Against this background it is not surprising that one of the main questions of the interviews, "Who could benefit from the Kodori events and could consequently be their initiator?" usually led our interlocutors into a dead end. Thus it became clear that purely emotional evaluation of the events continued to prevail in Georgia (at least during the monitoring exercise), and only few tried to abstract themselves from emotions to impartially analyze their hidden motives. Even those who unambiguously called the events "provocation" did not have an idea as to who the initiator could be and what the aim was. And they clearly tried to answer spontaneously only after they had been asked direct questions on this issue. It is not surprising that among other theories there was the one that Kodori action had been planned by Chechens to draw away Russia's attention from Chechnya to scatter its forces and to undertake a big military operation inside Chechnya. Another theory was that with this actions the Chechens tried to gain for Chechnya access to the Black Sea; and the most exotic was the theory that the main goals of the Chechens was to get into Sochi to seize Putin who had been on leave there. The sub-theory was they would hijack an airplane in Sochi to attack the Kremlin (similar to the September attack in USA).

Symptomatic was the position of most of the authorities, which tried to distance from any hint on Georgia officials' involvement in the Kodori events. At that the surveyed officials tried to deny even the facts well-known by that moment, e.g. that most of the fighters had been taken to Kodori from Georgia in the vehicles with number plates of one of the law-enforcement bodies of Georgia escorted by patrol vehicles. There were no replies to our question as to whether the Government held control of its country if 400 armed men could travel through its territory unnoticed by the Georgian authorities.

Also, different theories were voiced by the officials as to who and what political forces or third countries could the authors of such a "scenario" be. Other theories were that the operation was not targeting Abkhazia, but the neighboring North Caucasus republics to destabilize the situation there. We also heard such a theory from an analyst from one of the Russian law-enforcement bodies. Operation participants captured by the Abkhazia military units also claimed that they had been told that they would operate against "Russians" in the Caucasus. There was also an opposite theory that "Chechens" had come from the North, from Karachai villages, where "Wahhabi" moods are very strong.

The following reasons were given to prove the noninvolvement of the Georgian government in the operation in Kodori Gorge:

The Georgian economy is not ready for the resumption of military operations;

The military operation in Kodori Gorge took Georgia by surprise, where even the President was in the USA at that moment;

Georgia does not support military operations against separatists without the UN sanctions even in the person of Mr. Nadaireshvili, leader of the Abkhazia exile government. Georgia is waiting for the UN resolution on the division of authority between Tbilisi and Sukhumi;

Georgia calls on the pull out of Russian peacekeepers, and the military operations would postpone the solution to this issue, and, consequently, they suit Russia.

Many statesmen extremely negatively reacted on the actions of Tbilisi NGOs, where they condemned official Tbilisi's involvement and support to the Kodori Gorge operation. In our description we shall come back to this issue yet.

Interestingly, by the moment of our interviews with governmental officials, Georgia Interior Minister had publicly acknowledged that the ministry in fact took

active part in the preparation and implementation of Kodori action, and would be doing that in the future. On the following day, President Shevardnadze declared his "full support to Interior Minister Targamadze". Right after this announcement, the new theory we have heard from a number of political scientists started to be introduced into public minds, possibly not without the involvement of officials. According to this theory, it was the Georgia Government who actually stood behind the Kodori events with the following aims:

To get rid of Chechen fighters in Pankissi Gorge without any efforts, thus turning off Russia's allegations in baking terrorists, plus considerably releasing the existing tension between the Georgia citizens and Chechens in Pankissi.

To stir up the Georgia guerilla movement in Kodori Gorge at the expense of Chechens to soften the Abkhazia positions at the negotiations.

To once again destabilize the situation in Abkhazia drawing the world's attention to the issue of return of refugees, etc.

These aims were fully achieved as well as another hidden aim that was most frequently mentioned by "non-governmental sector" respondents: drawing attention of the Georgia population away from the increasingly deteriorating economic and social issues, explaining failures in these areas by the problems of conflict regions.

Furthermore, the government has demonstrated its ability to plan and successfully implement long-term programs without any leakage of information. According to one of the leading political scientists in Georgia, "...the aims have been indeed achieved, but the point is that they were false".

There are hardly any sufficient reasons to claim that this theory has been widely spread. The overwhelming majority of the respondents clearly viewed the Kodori events as a provocation. At that, some of them were inclined to accuse the Georgian Government, particularly President Shevardnadze. In their opinion, with the existing power pyramid constructed and fitted by Georgian President exceptionally to himself, there is hardly any slightest possibility that something could happen in Georgia without his sanctions. The majority accepted the "non-Georgian" authorship of the Kodori operation, but excluded non-involvement of the highest state officials. They saw provocation in the attempt by Shevardnadze, who was completely unable to lead the country out of the deep economic and social crises, to draw people's attention away from the necessity to solve these issues, thus prolonging his term of presidency. We have repeatedly heard the opinion that in general, solution of the Georgia-Abkhazia conflict is impossible as long as Shevardnadze is the President. The argument was that the conflict has developed because of unreasonable actions, including actions of Shevardnadze himself. And the confrontation would be artificially kept "smouldering" until people who have not stained themselves in the past come to power both in Georgia and Abkhazia. From time to time, when the social tension in the country is on the verge, one can quickly flare the conflict up (what was particularly the case with Kodori), thus disorienting the society and turning its discontent in another (less dangerous for the authorities) direction.

Among those evaluating Kodori events as provocation, there was an opinion as to the "authorship" of the operation. They saw Russia as the author of the developments. The strategic goal of the operation would be the return of Georgia to the sphere of Russia's attention by eventual destabilization of the situation in the country. At the present stage, Russia has at once successfully solved several interim tasks:

- a) It has vividly demonstrated to the world that Georgia has been backing international terrorists in its territory, now directly using them in its own goals. Considering particularly exacerbated attitude of the world community to this issue following the 11 September events, thus the

democratic image of Georgia had been seriously damaged, which in its turn would have a negative impact on Georgia's relations with the countries that had been assisting it in its attempts to resist Russia's expansion.

- b) As a result of Kodori events, Russia received new arguments for the prolongation of the mandate of its peacekeeping contingent in the zone of Georgia-Abkhazia conflict, and therefore keeping its military presence in the region;
- c) The feeling of despair and uncertainty grew up in the Georgian society, thus the positions of those circles in Georgia who are ready to put the country into allegiance from Russia became stronger as it had been once again demonstrated to everyone that only Russia is able to solve the existing problems;
- d) Georgia looks as the only guilty in the breakdown of talks and as a supporter of the military solution to the conflict. Therefore, most favorable (both military and political) conditions have been formed for the Abkhazian side to expand, if needed, its control over new territories: part of Megrelia and Ghali Distric. Following the Kodori events, such actions of Abkhazian side would be perceived as response or preventive, and thus as quite equitable and legal ones.

At the same time, supporters of this theory in no way took the responsibility for the developments off the Georgian authorities. In their opinion, the security of Georgia is threatened and its national interests suffer from the inefficiency of the high-ranking officials busy with their own interests. Russia would have never been able to implement this operation without the indulgence of the high-ranking Georgian officials based on lucrative impulses or engagement. We have been told that continuation of such a policy would lead Georgia to national disaster.

In Georgia, no one has mentioned Abkhazian side or at least Abkhazian leadership as initiators or guilty for the Kodori events. Same was the opinion of even those who saw "Russian trace" in the developments and could suppose that Abkhazia as Russian partner had been informed well in advance, and played the Moscow scenario towards the promised dividends. Furthermore, from all we had been told it was clear that Abkhazia, as well as Georgia was also the victim to a greater geopolitical game, and the Abkhazian people deserved same sympathy for their asperities as the Georgians did. Surely this encouraging fact should be noted, and in the future one should consider that the "enemy syndrome" and its a priori guilt are not dominant in the Georgian public opinion.

This is confirmed by the position of a number of Georgian NGOs and human rights defenders, who in the very beginning of the conflict "hot phase", when militarist moods had been artificially stirred up in the society made a joint statement headed "No War!" which said:

«We consider the military operations in Kodori Gorge as an outrage not only on Abkhaz and Georgian people, but an outrage on all people of the Caucasus. We are sure that internal Caucasus problems should be solved only peacefully. Violation would lead to disaster. In the name of the Peace and the Caucasus we ask you to stand with us and say "No" to War!"

NGOs tried to bring their position to people via press and TV. But according to them, where the First State TV Channel and some independent TV stations popularized war in unison, it took great efforts to voice the opposite opinion. Nonetheless, NGOs managed to get to the TV and newspapers with the following:

- 1) Demand from the Georgian authorities to punish all those who allowed the criminal adventure and to adopt immediate measures to prevent further bloodshed;
- 2) Call upon the Georgian people to find moral strength, responsibility and courage to confirm in their minds that no issue could be solved through violence and it is impossible to keep one's place through violence;
- 3) Evaluation of the developments as a crime where not only the authorities and "the war" parties, but also the whole society including the NGO sector are to be blamed.

In conversations with us, NGO representatives voiced expectations that soon the governmental circles would unleash real persecution against them for their opinion diametrically opposite to the official one. Same days, students of functioning in Tbilisi Sukhumi University hold a meeting to protest against the activities of the University leadership who had demanded the students should immediately go to fight. The students were made aware that they would be surely expelled from the University after winter exams. As was expected, NGOs in Tbilisi did not have more information than provided by Mass Media. Furthermore, Abkhazia NGOs had little information on their actions, which of course added them little efficiency.

Symbolically, the position of NGOs from Tbilisi in many ways coincided with the position of the population in areas neighboring the conflict zone. In Zugdidi District, we have repeatedly heard from common people that they would have found common language with Abkhazians, but the Tbilisi political elite doesn't want that and is using the conflict in their own internal political goals. Though Georgia guerilla movement does not receive any assistance from the official Tbilisi, it is also being used exceptionally in their internal political goals.

In conversations, refugees from Abkhazia - representatives of the local NGO, "The House of Youth" and their leader repeatedly expressed their readiness to actively participate in the peacemaking process. They were surprised that all activities are concentrated in Tbilisi, and their capacity was not being used. While participating in one of the meetings between Georgian and Abkhazian NGOs, they had an impression that the process had slowed down and did not influence the general situation. Our Zugdidi colleagues had their own opinion on the popular diplomacy, different from what had been said on the above-mentioned meeting. At the same time, in their opinion, one cannot regard international projects as a panacea from all disasters; to a greater extent, the problem lies in the Georgian society itself, and after 10 years since the beginning of conflict, it is necessary to soberly evaluate what had happened between the two people and to confess in one's mistakes.

The surveyed in Zugdidi District claimed they were sure from the very beginning of the Kodori events that that had simply been another provocation. According to them, the escalation of tension threw the negotiations process back together with the hope of refugees to return home soon. In the recent years, relations between the Georgians and Abkhazians destroyed by the conflict have been slowly rehabilitated, and now these fragile bridges of confidence are again under the threat. Here, we have heard the term "popular diplomacy". In the opinion of local residents, it was popular diplomacy that could become the most effective way of the solution of Georgia-Abkhazia conflict. In the central square of Zugdidi we talked to a group of people who rather clearly formulated their concept of the solution to Georgia-Abkhazia conflict. According to them, it is necessary to more actively implement such activities as meetings between relatives and friends from both sides. Our interlocutors claimed that there existed traditions of communication that had been developed for centuries and now they are lost. Until present, for the population of Western Georgia,

the image of Abkhazians have been associated with the most positive human qualities, such as devotion, keeping one's word, courage. In their opinion, these are the links that are still connecting the two people. Possibly, this is the area where efforts of the international and Caucasus peacemaking NGOs should be directed in. It should be noted that our conversation took place in a rather crowded place, and literally in few steps from us there was a group of young people – guerilla formation fighters; driven by curiosity, part of them had gradually approached us. We tried to ask them questions, but they replied they were not ready for the conversation, as they had been celebrating all night an important event in the history of guerilla movement in Western Georgia: for the first time since many years, Zviadies and "Mkhedrioni" representatives (Leader – Jaba Ioseliani) sat at one table, and would be operating together in the future. It was them who had been the main confronting parties during the 1992 civil war in Georgia. In the conversation with Jaba himself, we were surprised by his new role as a peacemaker. According to him, he managed to convince "his guys" not to enter the military operations, thus preventing the big bloodshed. He considered Kodori Gorge operation pure adventure, by interaction supported by President Shevardnadze, who could easily distant himself from the operation in case of a failure. Most of our Zugdidi interlocutors were not enthusiastic about the prospect of the return to Abkhazia at the point of Chechen or someone else's bayonets.

Same was the opinion of a leader of one of the guerilla formations. According to him, the guerilla movement does not receive any assistance from Georgia Government, while it is using the guerilla factor in its own goals. While admitting that the main task of the guerillas is to remind of the problems of Abkhazia refugees by constant attacks thus making the Abkhazian side more concessive in negotiations, he was sure that the regimes existing in Sukhumi and Tbilisi are not able to solve the Abkhazia problem since "they had created it themselves, and they exists thanks to it". As for the Kodori events, he said their formation does not participate in these events and considers such actions provocation and disastrous. Generally, in his opinion, this problem could not be solved in a military way (!), he saw the only way out in the change of regimes and in negotiations between the people "capable of real activities". On a traditional question regarding the role of Russia we received a quite unusual reply that "...Russia should not be expelled from the region, but it should be made want peace between the Georgians and Abkhazians, otherwise there would be no success..." We felt this was a rather unusual point of view for a "guerilla". This conversation has once again confirmed us in the opinion that the work of peacemaking NGOs should at last move closer to the "front line", closer to the people actually participating in the conflicts.

Marina Pagava
Gia Anchabadze

SURVEY OF GEORGIAN PRESS ON "THE SMALL WAR" IN KODORI GORGE (AUGUST – OCTOBER 2001)

Over eight years have passed since the Georgian-Abkhazian war of 1992-1993. The peacekeeping process has not achieved much during this period. Apart from the political negotiations by the official Tbilisi, an important factor influencing the post-war Georgia-Abkhazia relations from the Georgian side is the guerilla movement in South regions of Abkhazia. According to Abkhazian side, the movement has been inspired and supported by the Georgian authorities. Official Tbilisi denies these allegations arguing that the guerillas are Abkhazia residents who have been displaced as a result of the conflict. They have, officials insist, lost all hope for a political solution to the conflict and are, at great personal risk, struggling to return home. Many high-ranking officials and Parliament members in Georgia openly declare their sympathy for the guerillas. From time to time, in Georgia press and TV there are reports about state funding of the guerilla movement.

In May 1998, the sluggish guerilla war transformed into "6 day war" in Ghali District of Abkhazia, as a result of which the Georgian guerilla and, according to some information, supporting them some sub-units of Georgia force structures were defeated and subsequently the part of the Georgian population was expelled from Ghali District of Abkhazia for the second time.

Recently, calls to intensity the guerilla war have become more frequent in Georgia, where the emphasis is already made not on Ghali District but on Kodori Gorge, the upper part of which remains the only enclave under Georgia jurisdiction on Abkhaz territory¹.

State of emergency declared in Kodori Gorge, the local population is ready for action. The Kodori residents are in expectation of attacks from the Abkhazians. (Akhalı Taoba, 22.08.01). According to E. Kvitsiani, the population Kodori Gorge repulsed Abkhazian fighters who on August 18 burnt down Georgian military checkpoint in the Gorge placing their own checkpoint nearby. Kvitsiani said the Abkhaz checkpoint was destroyed (KAVKAZPRESS News Agency, 27.08.01).

According to the statement by Georgia Defense Minister David Tevzadze, the present mandate of the Russian peacekeepers in the zone of Georgia-Abkhazia conflict does no longer satisfy the developing realities. "Good impulse" could be the "internationalization" of the Russian contingent, even the "symbolic". (KAVKAZPRESS)

In the opinion of Georgian diplomats and experts, Russia is trying to unleash a new war between Georgia and Abkhazia to justify the non-fulfillment of its international obligations on the settlement of Georgia-Abkhazia conflict by the escalation of tension. The matter concerns the Gudauta Military Base, which became an issue of political trade for Putin ("REZONANSI" Newspaper, 23.08.01).

¹ Kodori (Abkh. – Kudry) is one of Abkhazia main rivers. Is springing from the South mountainside of the Main Caucasus Mountain Ridge and flows into the sea 25 km. South of Sukhumi. Before the second half of XIX century, Kodori valley was all over inhabited by a sub-ethnic group of Abkhaz ethnicity. Following the resettlement of the considerable part of Abkhazians to Osman Empire in 60-70-ies of XIX century, the upper part of Kodori Gorge was settled by Georgia Svans, and the middle part – with Georgian Megrels, Greeks and Armenians. Abkhazian villages preserved mainly down the river. After the 1992-1993 Georgia-Abkhazia war, the upper part of the Kodori Gorge remains under the jurisdiction of Georgia central government. A large part in the preservation of Georgian jurisdiction over the territory played the home guard of local residents.

The Russian Mass Media spread information that up to 500 armed Chechen fighters are standing by the Abkhazian border ready to enter its territory. According to the information provided by representatives of the Russian peacekeepers, there are 800-armed Georgian and Chechen fighters at the Abkhazia border. The fighters headed by the well-known Chechen Field Commander Ruslan Gelaev are heading to Russia via Abkhazia. According to the statement by Abkhazia Interior Minister Zurab Aguman, every effort is taken to prevent the infiltration of Chechen fighters into Abkhazia territory. Official Tbilisi dismissed the information published by Russian mass media as a provocation. However, according to a statement by Georgia Interior Ministry Information Department, Georgian Special Services were ordered to monitor the situation at the Abkhaz border to prevent any provocations. (REZONANSI, 25.08.01).

According to unconfirmed information, the Chechen fighters stood in Zugdidi and Tsalendjikhsy District villages in Megrelia (Western Georgia), and are preparing to pass on to Abkhazia territory. None of Georgia force structures confirmed this information, though definite deterioration of situation is being shaped out in Megrelia. Guerilla formation Commander Dato Shengelia called a bluff the information on entrance of Chechens into Zugdidi and Tsalendjikh. Other guerillas neither confirm nor deny this fact (AKHALI TAOBA, 25.08.01). Meanwhile, the Georgian population in Ghali District is clearly feeling "the smell of gunpowder in the air", and is facing the risk of repetition of the 1998 events. In Megrelia, people are saying that up to 800 fighters of Chechen Field Commander Ruslan Gelaev are hiding in Abkhazia forests getting ready for full-scale military activities (RESONANSI, 25.08.01). Georgia power structures (MIA, DM, MSS) do not confirm the fact of Chechen presence in Georgia territory and called absurdity the rumors about Gelaev's presence in Georgia (AKHALI TAOBA, 25.08.01). At that, the authorities stated that if necessary, Georgia is ready for the war (RESONANSI, 25.08.01). In a TV interview, Interior Minister Targamadze stated that "if it is impossible to achieve peace in Abkhazia by peaceful negotiation, forceful methods are not ruled out". (AKHALI VERSIA Newspaper, 8-15.10.01).

Gelaev's commandos were located in Inguri Gorge for almost a month and a half. According to one of the Georgian guides who end of July accompanied Gelaev from Tbilisi to Abkhazia border, initially it had been planned to attack Tkvarcheli. Then they were going to attack Ghali. But the dates of the beginning of the operation were delayed, and meanwhile, end of August and early September some Georgian politicians started to talk that by provoking military operations in Abkhazia, Interior Minister K. Targamadze intends to cause destabilization and seize the power. After that, Targamadze lost the initiative, and instead of Tkvarcheli, Gelaev's formation was deployed from Inguri Gorge to Central Abkhazia, the lower zone of Gulripshsky and Sukhumsky Districts (AKHALI VERSIA, 22-29.10.01).

It is quite possible that the escalation of war in Abkhazia is convenient for the authorities. The people's patience is exhausted, and in such a situation the authorities have nothing else to do but to involve population into the war to prevent social explosion. In the opinion of Abkhazia legitimate power leader Tamaz Nadareishvili, the recent activities of the Abkhazian side are directed at provocations with the aim to prevent the pullout of Gudauta Military Base from Abkhazia.

According to one of the theories, simultaneously with America, Russia would start anti-terrorist operations: after the blow on Chechnya it would attack the so-called Chechen military camps which, in its opinion, are situated in Pankissi and Kodori (REZONANSI, 25.08.01).

A truck driver informed "Alia" Newspaper that he transported from one of Zugdidi villages to Svanetia up to 20-armed fighters who spoke Russian with accent.

The driver claimed that the two fighters who were sitting with him in the cab felt guilty and to redress the wrong they were going to return Abkhazia to Georgia. The driver said the formation was well armed. According to "Alia" theory, the matter concerns not only Chechens, but also the guerilla and the local population who would join Chechen fighters. Rumors are circulating that the blows would be made simultaneously from Ghali and Kodori Gorges.

The situation in Abkhazia becomes tense. Georgia Special Envoy Malkhaz Kakabadze went to Abkhazia to hold negotiations with its leadership. In meetings with the UN military observers and Russian peacekeepers he was informed that no excitement relating to Chechen guerilla had been noticed in the area of their activities. (Rezonansi, 27.08.01)

The Megrelia population is seriously concerned with the appearance of armed Chechens in Georgia territory and considers that Abkhazia has nothing to do with this – some forces are getting Chechens ready for the raid on Samegrelo (Rezonansi, 4.09.01).

Georgia former Defense Minister Tengiz Kitovani claims he always has been war supporter and there is no other way to return Abkhazia. Nonetheless, he considers hazardous the recent statement by Interior Minister Kakha Targamadze on the possibility of forced measures to return Abkhazia claiming that the participation in this adventure would ruin Chechen people. The former Defense Minister said he does not understand "what could these fighting people have in common with Shevardnadze?" (Akhal Taoba, 10.09.01).

The population in Tbilisi considers the current political situation in the country as "a complete chaos" and "a big provocation". As for the possibility of war in Abkhazia, "let go and fight there those who are most of all shouting about it" (Rezonansi, 27.09.01)

In the opinion of Ramin Pirtskhalava, the First Deputy Commander of "The White Legion" Guerilla Formation, the guerillas are against military operations, although the situation could get out of control.

He claimed that as of present, there were Interior troops stationed in Kodori Gorge. He admitted the beginning of military operations on 27 September, the day of Sukhumi's fall. At the same time, Interior Minister Kakha Targamadze said since three years, there was not a single Interior serviceman left in Kodori Gorge. (Alia, 27.09.01)

The officials deny the presence of armed Chechens in Georgia. The Parliamentary Defense and Security Committee Chairman George Baramidze was the first to confirm the information by Russian Media on an incident between the Georgian-Chechen group and Abkhazians in Gulripshsky District. According to Baramidze, an armed group of Georgia citizens and citizens of other countries is presently staying in the part of Abkhazia out of Tbilisi control. Baramidze claims this a provocation aiming to involve Georgia in the Caucasus war. He does not exclude that this group could operate on the instructions of Russian special services. (Rezonansi, 26.09.01)

Georgia on the verge of peace and war – this was the main issue on the 26 September Parliamentary Session, where Deputies offered ways out of the existing situation. While commenting that power structures could not have taken the decision without the knowledge of Security Council and the President, George Targamadze ("Vozrozhdenie" Party, Leader – Aslan Abashidze) demanded the presence of President on the Parliamentary sitting to explain the situation.

Vakhtang Rcheulishvili (Socialist Party) expressed his opinion about making a statement where the Georgian Parliamentarians should condemn terrorism and dissociate from it, and also declare the inadmissibility of forced measures in the

solution of Abkhazia problem. He condemned the anti-Russian hysteria and suggested sending a parliamentary delegation to Moscow.

The Parliament Chairman Zurab Zhvania expressed his opinion about active cooperation with Russia to demonstrate Georgia's readiness to join the international antiterrorist campaign. (Alia; Rezonansi, 27.09.01)

The 8 years since the fall of Sukhumi coincided with Russia's ultimatum to Chechnya. For the first time, Shevardnadze acknowledged the presence of Chechen armed fighters and terrorism in Georgia. The country is facing the danger of being involved in the war (Rezonansi, 27.09.01).

The Russian authorities who are close to Georgians from Moscow suggest that a "rather tragic scenario" has evolved in connection with the Kodori Gorge incident. This view is also often repeated by Georgian power structures. The questions "What is really happening? Who precisely has moved Chechen fighters from Pankissi to Kodori Gorge? Where do the interests of Moscow "script writers" and its Georgian performers intersect?" are being increasingly asked in the society. (Dilis Gazeti, 27.09.01)

"The Unity, Accord and Revival Alliance" Co-Chairman Avtandil Margiani informed that the talks that there are some 600 Chechens in the Kodori Gorge have initially appeared a month ago. (Akhali Taoba, 28.09.01)

According to confidential sources, during his visit to Moscow, the Head of Georgia Defense Ministry Headquarters General Joni Pirtskhalaishvili agreed with high-ranking Russian officials that they would refrain from any operations before the meeting of the Presidents of the two countries.

Chairman of the Georgia Body Guards Department Valeri Chkheidze shares the theory that possibly, the North Caucasians including Chechens reached Georgian territory via the uncontrolled perimeter of the Georgia-Russian border. (Rezonansi, 28.09.01)

On 27 September, the day of Sukhumi's fall, the Abkhazian refugees organized an action near the Georgian Parliament where they demanded creating conditions for their return to Abkhazia. It was clear that every participant in the action sympathized with the guerillas. (Akhali Taoba, 28.09.01)

In connection with the current situation, Abkhazia Prime Minister Anri Djergenia visited Tbilisi end of September. No precise information was given as to his conversation with E. Shevardnadze, however it was stressed that the meeting was a constructive one. Georgia President publicly promised on the TV to "lead the armed men out of Kodori Gorge".

Following A. Gergenia's visit to Tbilisi, there has appeared the hope that the problem with "uncontrolled" armed formations in Kodori Gorge would be solved peacefully. In his radio interview, E. Shevardnadze called the meeting with A. Gergenia a very important one. Georgia President positively evaluated the fact that the presence of armed groups in Abkhazia territory ended without any excesses. He called it the result of the right policy of the Georgian authorities. At that, Shevardnadze said he did not exclude his visit to Sukhumi to "actually push forward the process of conflict solution, no one will solve our issues for us; others may help, but we should reach the goal ourselves". («Droni» Newspaper, 2.10.01)

Soon after that, Georgia President went on official visit to the USA, where he expressed his support to anti-terrorist operation.

Georgia Interior Minister K. Targamadze who was in Moscow at the same time stated during his meeting with the RF Security Council Secretary V. Rushailo that "Gelaev and other famous field commanders are currently staying in the territory out of Georgian authorities' control" (Droni, 2.10.01).

In light of the subsequent events, this statement by Targamadze could be evaluated also as the indirect recognition of the fact that at that time, Gelaev's group had already been on the territory of the self-proclaimed Republic of Abkhazia. (M. P., G. A.)

Military Operations

On 4 October, the UN Secretary General's Special Representative in Georgia Mr. Dieter Boden stated to reporters in Tbilisi that on 3 October, a fighting broke out in the lower part of Kodori Gorge (the area under Abkhazia control – M. P., G. A.). Mr. Boden said he had communicated with the Abkhazian side and according to their information, the fighting also continued on 4 October. Mr. Boden did not specify as to which side had provoked the confrontation. («Respublica Gruzia» Newspaper, 5.10.01)

On the same day, 4 October, the Georgia high-ranking officials made quite different statements: thus, State Minister George Arsenishvili said to Mass Media representatives that "the information on Wednesday (3 October – M. P., G. A.) about fighting between the Georgian and Abkhazian formations has not been confirmed". According to Arsenishvili, Georgia "competent bodies" have checked up the information and made a conclusion that it was groundless to consider that any military operations took place (in Kodori Gorge). (Respublica Gruzia, 5.10.01)

Different in a way was the information released to Mass Media by Georgia Special Minister M. Kakabadze, who said that "according to unconfirmed reports, there had been some shooting in the lower part of Kodori Gorge which could be occasional as well, however there were neither dead nor wounded". Kakabadze did not except that that could be a regular sort-out between armed groups. (Respublica Gruzia, 5.10.01)

At the same time, anonymous representative of Georgia Defense Ministry claimed that "Georgians took Tkvarcheli, Tsebelda and Merkheuli (settlements in Abkhazia, the last of them in 10 km. from Sukhumi – M.P., G.A.), but yet hide this information... "The settlements" were easily cleared from the residents – they have fled". According to the same anonymous source, "Emzar Kvitsiani is presently not in the Gorge, but is busy with "establishing control over the gained territories". (Droni, 4.10.01)

The hostilities in Abkhazia have resumed. The clashes between separatist Abkhazia military formations and the Georgia-Chechen group lasted all day long yesterday. The both sides are suffering losses. According to the last information, an armed group of Chechens and Georgians fortified their positions in Georgievka Village in Gulripshsky District. As it turned out, the Georgian authorities do not have detailed information on the above-mentioned events (Rezonansi, 5.10.01) and cannot take the responsibility for the current events in Abkhazia. (Rezonansi, 10.10.01)

The Russian Peacekeepers located in Gudauta Military Base actively interfere in the ongoing military actions in Abkhazia. The fighting is going in spite of the claims by Abkhazia part that the Georgian guerillas and Chechen fighters have retreated. The Abkhazia population (not only women and children, but also the men) is fleeing again to Russia. (Akhali Taoba, 8.10.01)

The population fears the appearance of Chechen fighters; the situation in Megrelia becomes tense. (Rezonansi, 9.10.01)

On 8 October, a helicopter with UN military observers was shot down in Kodori Gorge. Independent observers and experts trend to the idea that the helicopter was shot down by Abkhazians or Russians, who thus wanted to draw the world's attention to the situation in Abkhazia with the aim of putting pressing upon Georgia. (Droni, 9.10.01)

Also, one cannot exclude that Russian interests included the deterioration of Georgia-Ukraine relations as the helicopter crewmembers were Ukrainians. (Rezonansi, 09.10.01)

Dieter Boden, the Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General in Georgia blamed for the helicopter downing the Georgia and Abkhaz parts, which failed to ensure security of the military observers. He also specified that the helicopter had been shot in the area of Sakharnaya Golova Mountain at the entrance to Kodori Gorge. (Droni, 11.10.01)

M. Kakabadze, Minister for Special Affairs claims that the UN helicopter was not downed and considers that was an accident.

The Georgian guerilla claimed they had not downed the helicopter since they did not have anti-aircraft guns. (Rezonansi, 09.10.01)

The Georgian, Abkhazian and Russian sources spread controversial information about the Abkhazia events, though all the three sides confirm that fighting between armed groups is going on the territory under Abkhazian control (Rezonansi, 10.10.01). According to information by "Mkhedrioni" Leader Jaba Ioseliani, some 100 Mkhedrioni participate in the clashes in Abkhaz territory. These are mostly Kodori Gorge residents, though there are also Mkhedrioni from other cities. Members from the Tbilisi organization do not participate in the fighting. (Alia, 11.10.01)

Tbilisi does not specify the status of Georgian fighters in Abkhazia. The Georgia Defense Minister denied participation in this military operation. The Abkhazians inform the world community that Chechen and Arab terrorists are fighting together with Georgians. The former Defense Minister G. Karkarashvili is sure that the Abkhazians are using against Georgians the military equipment from Gudauta Military (Rezonansi, 10.10.01). In the opinion of A. Margiani, Chairman of the Fighters' Union, it is not the Abkhazians but the Russian Army which participates in the military operations. (Akhali Taoba, 8.10.01). According to the statement of captured by Abkhazians Chechens and a Georgian to the Russian TV, the group of North Caucasians is headed by Chechen Field Commander Ruslan Gelaev, who claimed that he was operating under the guidance of the Georgia special services. (Dilis Gazeti, 10.10.01)

Following the 9 October air attack on the Kodori Gorge and the latest developments in Abkhazia, Georgia Foreign Minister I. Menagarishvili held a press-conference, where he stated that "The Georgian authorities would take every measure to normalize the situation in Abkhazia and to prevent further escalation of the current situation". Menagarishvili said that Georgia intended to demand from Russia investigation of this fact and explanation of how the aircraft could get into the Russia's airspace after the bombing. In the opinion of the Minister, the Abkhazian authorities do not control the territory and do not take constructive measures to solve the conflict. (Sakartvelos Respublica, 10.10.01)

President Shevardnadze stated that "following the air attack, this time the response would be the severest one". He said that following this fact, he has already received a phone call from American officials, where they expressed their support. (Rezonansi, 10.10.01) In Georgia Department for State Border Guards they hope that evidences would be collected together with representatives of other special services, and the type of the aircraft would be identified and the fact of the breach of the Georgia airspace from the Russian side would be officially confirmed. Meanwhile, following the air attack, the population of the Swan Villages of Sakeni, Omarishara and others (women and children mostly) are fleeing the Kodori Gorge. The Swans are forming volunteers' corps to protect their villages and ensure personal security. (Rezonansi, 10.10.01)

The political parties operating in Megrelia called the Abkhazia events provocation and do not intend to take up arms as the population has already have bitter experience of participating in the military conflict in Abkhazia. Nonetheless, the same issue states that the Megrelia population believes that "soon the President will sell Kodori Gorge as well", and demands that authorities provide them with arms. Otherwise, they threaten to undertake "mass actions". The Georgian authorities do not see anything alarming and say that Megrelia is stable. (Rezonansi, 11.10.01)

In the meeting of the Georgia Government, Security Minister V. Kutateladze unambiguously claimed about Russia's participation in the provocation (Alia, 11.10.01). The Parliament member I. Batiashvili considers that the Abkhazia events have been provoked by Russian special services in cooperation with the pro-Russian forces among Georgian authorities, claiming that he avails information on everything, including on financial dealings which stand behind these events. (Akhali Taoba, 11.10.01)

According to information from the Abkhazian officials, on 10 October, the Georgian and Chechen fighters have attacked two Abkhazian police checkpoints in Ochamchirsky District. The Georgia-Chechen groups have been encircled by Abkhazians. The Georgia Interior Minister K. Targamadze does not know anything about the incident. (Interfax, 11 October)

On 11 October, the Georgia Parliament met in a closed session, where the situation in Abkhazia and the mandate of Russian peacekeepers were discussed. In the evening session, a Resolution on suspension of the mandate of Russian peacekeepers was adopted by a majority vote.

At the same day, IDPs from Abkhazia gathered in front of the Georgia State Chancellery. They made a number of demands for the Government, main of them the pullout of Russian peacekeepers from the conflict zone. They expressed their solidarity with the fighting guerillas and demanded support of the authorities for them. President Shevardnadze met with the participants of this action and expressed his support to their demands and accepted his responsibility for all what had happened in Abkhazia. "Today we are closer to the victory than ever before... In the present situation, the solution of the problem of Abkhazia cannot take long... Abkhazia can be returned only via negotiations, not only with the Abkhazian government, but also with the Abkhazian people". (Sakartvelos Respublica, 12.10.01)

"Shevardnadze and his supporters know that their time is over, that is why they resorted to the provocation in Abkhazia,» said General T. Yepitashvili in his interview. (Akhali Taoba, 12.10.01)

Interior Minister K. Targamadze, Security Minister V. Kutateladze and Abkhazia legitimate authorities in Tbilisi are blamed in the deterioration of the situation. Possibly, criminal interests hinder the solution of conflict in Abkhazia. Several times, the conflict resolution policy has reached definite point, but finished with similar provocations. Recently, Anri Djergenia has visited Tbilisi, where he had rather lengthy negotiations with Shevardnadze. It is known that Abkhazian side demands dismissal of the legitimate authorities. Possibly, official Tbilisi would make these concessions. And this is not because the legitimate officials are not popular or they are questionably rich. Besides, their role and activities during the Georgia-Abkhazia conflict were rather doubtful. They would not have achieved all these without backing by the power structures from Tbilisi. How would the things develop? (BS-Press,12.10.01)

In Tbilisi, fears are being increasingly voiced that the military adventure could result in the loss of the Kodori Gorge, Georgia last enclave in Abkhazia (P. Zakareishvili, D. Berdzenishvili, L. Bakradze and others).

According to Defense Minister D. Tevzadze, Georgia National Guard Commander Colonel K. Kobaladze has been deployed to the Gorge to implement measures on retaining control over Kodori (Sakartvelos Respublica, 12.10.01).

Abkhazia Plenipotentiary Representative in Moscow Igor Akhba said to "Droni" reporter that Georgia special services are standing behind the guerilla and international terrorists that have invaded Abkhazia (Droni, 13.10.01).

«... Should the events in Abkhazia get complicated, participants of the 92-92 events, mainly Guardsmen and Mkhedrioni, are ready to come into service again. The registration of volunteers has already started" (Droni, 13.10.01).

On 13 October, in his Krtsanissi residence G. Arsenishvili met with 20 Ambassadors from OSCE member states. The ambassadors were unanimous in the opinion that the conflict in Abkhazia could be solved only by continuous political dialogue between parties to the conflict. In this process, international organizations should have the catalyst role and should support the peacekeeping efforts. The OSCE Chairman Liviu Bota once again expressed the position of this organization: Georgia territorial integrity and sovereignty, return of refugees, determination of Abkhazia status within the frameworks of united Georgia. According to him, the peaceful solution to the conflict does not have an alternative; the military intervention would undoubtedly have a negative impact on the process. (Sakartvelos Respublica, 14.10.01).

«The only for the salvation of Abkhaz people is peace negotiation, common residence of Georgians and Abkhazians within the framework of united Georgia state», said E. Shevardnadze in a briefing on 15 October (Sakartvelos Respublica., 16, 10.01).

In his interview to "Kviris Palitra" Newspaper, one of Georgian guerilla operating in Abkhazia said that regardless whether the official government would support them or not, the guerilla intend to fight until the end. He thinks that peace in Abkhazia is destructive for Georgia, and if the government does not assist the guerilla, only few would come back from Abkhazia alive. He addressed Mass media representatives "not to tell everything loudly". He brought as an example broadcast a month ago conversation with one of the drivers, where he had said from where and to what Gorge did he drive the Kisties, Chechens and the guerilla (see Base-Press, 25-25.08). "We have lost a month and a half because of this. This is a war, and it has its own rules", was said in the interview (Kavkazpress, 15.10.01).

The daughter of Interior Minister David Tevzadze Ketii Tevzadze said she would certainly take part in the war should large-scale military operations begin in Abkhazia. Ketii Tevzadze is Georgia AF Senior Lieutenant, she serves in the Defense Ministry ("Akhali Versia" Newspaper, 15.10.01).

In connection with the aggravation of the Georgia-Abkhazia conflict, a Round Table of Georgia public representatives took place on 9 October in "Kavkazsky Dom" – Georgia Center for Cultural Relations. Participants of the Round Table evaluated Kodori events as an adventure by Georgian authorities. Here are some extracts from the statements: "We have warned the society that Georgia will lose everything if the war is resumed. The duplicity of the government is disgusting: they a sort of long for the peace for show for the West, and at the same time they are waging completely unexplainable guerilla war in order to retain "dignity" in the eyes of their own people. To make peace, one needs talent, education and conscience", said Naira Gelashvili, a writer. David Berdzenishvili, Republican Party: "This problem cannot be solved in a military way. In the interest of Georgia is construction of a democratic state. I think it cannot be constructed with the existing President and his supporters." George Anchabadze, historian: "Any adventure vis-a-vis Abkhazia is the blow on Georgia-Abkhazia relations that are being built after the war. It turns out that the tried remedy

for our authorities is to check with bayonets from time to time whether the Abkhazians are ready for the "extended autonomy" or not. Paata Zakareishvili, human rights defender: "One can unambiguously say that these events have been provoked. Now and then Shevardnadze and Targamadze said that the people's patience has exhausted, that the authorities did not support forced measures, but the people... All talks about the people are lie, the desire to close down oneself with the people." Nodar Sarjveladze, psychologists: "Everyone is trying to get dividends. Georgia is the only one who will not benefit." Goghi Khutsishvili, conflict researcher: "The question is: does the population understand how dangerous the current situation is? Today we are facing the danger of declaring Georgia as the country that supports terrorism." Anna Tsvinaria-Abramishvili, "Kavkazski Dom": "Otar Nodia used to say, "if Abkhaz people do no longer exist, then our turn will also come". The time has come for all of us in Georgia to think over these words". ("Kavkazsky Aktsent" Newspaper, 16-31.10.01; «Mostik" Newspaper, October, 01)

The same newspaper issues published the 5 October Statement of Georgia public representatives "On aggravation of the Georgia-Abkhazia conflict", where the armed adventure in Abkhazia is brutally condemned.

President Shevardnadze, who initially did not give serious evaluation to the developments in Abkhazia acknowledged that together with Georgian guerilla and Chechens and Kisties who came from Pankissi Gorge, also representatives of other North Caucasus people who reached Abkhazia in different ways are operating there. Former Parliament member M. Areshidze was more precise about transportation of the Chechens saying that according to some witnesses, fighters from Gelaev's group had been taken in vehicles to InguriGES, and from there they passed Russian peacekeepers' checkpoints in boats via storage ponds first to Mestiisky District and then to Kodori Gorge. (Akhali Versia, 1-8.10.01)

All mass media in Georgia reported that heavy fighting was going on in Abkhazia, namely in Georgievskoye, Tsebelda, Naa, Merkheuli, Mchara, Sukhumi and elsewhere.

On 15 October, in a briefing in the State Chancellery the President confirmed the information that clashes between the guerilla and Abkhaz formations are going not only in Gulripshsky and Ochamchirsky Districts, but also in Sukhumi outskirts. E. Shevardnadze made a stated that the dialogue with the Abkhaz side still continued and did not exclude his visit to Sukhumi should the necessary ground be prepared. (Droni, 16.10.01)

On 15 October, in 9 o'clock news program "Kurier" "Rustavi-2" TV Company broadcast information on gaining by Georgian-Chechen formations control over Sukhumi TV Tower and some other objects in the city. The information was received from a guerilla, however was not officially confirmed. M. Gurgulia, Abkhazpress Information Agency staff in a live phone communication in 11 o'clock news of the same program, denied this information.

On 16 October, the information on seizure of Abkhaz capital by guerilla was also refuted in newspapers. According to a source closely connected to guerilla, their groups did not intend to seize state institutions in Sukhumi, they had been destroying water and power supply systems. The guerilla did not take up seriously the statement by Abkhazia Defense Minister that they would soon complete "the clearing" of Gulripshsky District from Georgian and North Caucasus formations. (Sakartvelos Respublica, 16.10.01)

Subsequent events

According to corridor information, Gelaev did participate in the fighting; all this that time he had been in Emzar Kvitsiani's house in Chkhalta, and now they came to Tbilisi together. Gelaev is not satisfied with the Georgian side: prior to intruding in Abkhazia Kodori Gorge, the Chechens had been guaranteed that Georgians would start fighting in Tkvarcheli District, which never materialized. The "Gelaevits" suffered notable losses. The formation is presently numbering to some 550 men, not only Chechens, but also Arabs, Pakistanies, Azerbaijanians, Ukrainians. Also, Gelaev's threat to make a terrorist act in Tbilisi is talked about (Alia, 17.10.01).

The Georgian military machine is not in the condition to fight for the return of Abkhazia, which does not mean that the guerilla operations should be suspended. In the opinion Liberal-Economic Party Leader of Beso Djugeli, on the contrary, the authorities should render the guerilla all kinds of support (Akhali Taoba, 17.10.01).

Russia is waging "a TV war" in Abkhazia, said Georgia Deputy Defense Minister Ghela Bezhuashvili. Russian TV Channels spread wrong and contradictory information. There were instances where the frames of Georgia-Abkhazia conflict of 1992-1993 were used.

The Abkhazian side is using aviation against the Georgian guerilla. The Ardzinba Government claims they suffice with their own military arsenal and they are doing without Russia's assistance, while T. Nadareishvili claims that Abkhazians received military equipment from Russians already during the Georgia-Abkhazia conflict (Rezonansi, 17.10.01).

The issue of pullout of Russian peacekeepers from Abkhazia conflict zone has not been eventually solved. Georgia is trying to replace Russian peacekeepers with other forces. Suppose Russia has pulled out its forces. What should we do then? Certainly, the war is inevitable in this case, as the Georgian guerilla try to resume large-scale military operations in Ghali District and in Kodori Gorge. One can expect beginning of a big war for the return of Abkhazia. It is difficult to say how things would develop, but one has to be ready to continuous war. (BS-Press, 17-10-01).

Rezonansi Newspaper brings up facts of violation of law by Russian peacekeepers in the zone of Georgia-Abkhazia conflict zone. The newspaper claims that the Special Parliamentary Committee has the evidences of Russian servicemen's participation in the genocide against the Georgian population. The number of crimes against Georgian population would considerably reduce after the pullout of Russians (Kavkazpress, 19.10.01).

The Kodori events did not influence situation in Ghali District. Chechens did not appear here, and there were no armed clashes (Akhali Versia, 22-29.10.01).

On 17 October, aircraft again bombed Kodori in the area of Marukhsky pass. The information on casualties is contradictory – some report no casualties, others report big losses among the guerilla and Chechen fighters.

On 17 October, the Russian and Georgian presidents had a telephone conversation. The suspicion that Shevardnadze and Putin are playing agreed game is growing in the society. (Akhali Taoba, 18.10.01).

Samegrelo and Svanetia population is scared by the military operation in Abkhazia. The official representatives persuade that nothing serious is happening; however a reliable source informs that those who are able, take their children away from Zugdidi for security reasons. Despite the deterioration of situation in Abkhazia, there are forces in Samegrelo that are not going to leave the region and intend to complete everything. According to local residents, no one had remembered about

Abkhazia for several years, and at last the guerilla movement for its return has started. They think one should not stop half way, saying that Abkhazians are scared by the guerilla movement, and support of the authorities is presently needed to continue (Rezonansi, 19.10.01).

The stirring up of Georgian guerilla in Abkhaz territory brought the "results" – the Kodori residents are leaving their houses. The residents fear three things: the bombing, the forthcoming winter and the North Caucasians. Unfortunately, the population has grounds for serious concern. (Dilis Gazeti, 23.10.01).

Schools in the Gorge are closed because of the frequent bombings. "Studies will be resumed after the local residents feel safe", said E. Kvitsiani (Rezonansi, 30.10.01).

An injured North Caucasian guerilla was reported to be in the Azhara Village Hospital (Dilis Gazeti, 2.10.01). They need special medical assistance for the wounded man but the authorities cannot find a helicopter to take them to Tbilisi. (Rezonansi, 19.10.01)

Five Georgian guerillas and ten North Caucasians have died during the week of guerilla war (Dilis Gazeti, 23.10.01). According to Chairman of the "Soldiers' Union" R. Gogokhia, three Georgian guerilla have died and 11 captured (Rezonansi, 25.10.01). In Megrelia, they think that guerilla movement does not make sense without participation of the army (Rezonansi, 30.10.01). Nonetheless, R. Gogokhia said Georgia guerilla would fight until the return of Abkhazia. (Rezonansi, 25.10.01). The Parliamentary Defense and Security Committee Chairman G. Baramidze does not exclude that some staff of power structures are agents of Russian special services. The Parliamentary Defense and Security Committee Chairman once again repeated his demand to create special investigation committee for the investigation of the origin and the course of the last developments in Abkhazia. (Alia, 30.10.01).

In the opinion of Imeretia Governor Teimuraz Shashiashvili, government of the country should actively support the guerilla movement in Abkhazia unless the Georgian authorities achieve serious support from international organizations and unless Russia gives up the policy of intervention into Georgia's internal affairs. Shashiashvili said the 300 thousand of refugees are tied of being guests in other regions of the country. Besides, they are heavy burden on these regions. (Rezonansi, 31.10.01).

In the opinion of T. Nadarishvili, UN is taking pro-Abkhazian position, and he does not expect anything from the UN Security Council's meeting devoted to Georgia-Abkhazia problem. The 25 resolutions adopted by the UN during the past eight years will be reduced to rubbish. (Alia, 31.10.01)

On 30 October, a meeting of the Parliament Committee for Defense and Security took place with the participation of representatives from power structures. Georgia Defense Minister David Tevzadze assured of the reliable protection of Kodori Gorge from land military operation. Different is the situation with protection of Kodori Gorge from the air, where the Gorge is being bombed every day. According to Tevzadze, the order on aircraft downing is beyond the Defense Ministry's competence, only the president can give such an order, and it should be approved by the Parliament. Apart from legal one, there also exists a technical side of this problem, as in order to down an aircraft as the Defense Minister had threatened once; one should have respective means. It turned out that the Defense Ministry does not have such ones (Dilis Gazeti, 31.10.01).

In the opinion of political scientists Gia Nodia, the Georgian establishment has become animated after the terrorist acts in the USA, and in some of them appeared the hope to return Abkhazia. Shevardnadze's visit to America supported this hope. According to him, Russia has took the advantage of America's being busy with other issues, and took an aggressive position vis-a-vis Georgia. Nodia considered events in

“THE KIDS’ CRUSADE” TO KODORI GORGE: AN OPERATION, WHICH DID NOT HAVE AND COULD NOT HAVE ANY MILITARY SENSE

Alexander Iskandarian’s Interview to “Gazeta SNG.RU” Newspaper

Following the recent events in Kodori Gorge, the UNHCR Working Group on Conflict Prevention together with the Caucasus NGO Forum decided to carry out monitoring of the situation there. It was decided to carry out the monitoring on “Abkhaz” and “Georgian” sides simultaneously. Alexander Iskandarian, Political scientists and Caucasus researcher from Moscow headed the Monitoring Team in Abkhazia, and he answered questions of “Gazeta SNG.RU” Newspaper.

Please tell, what precise information have you gathered and from what sources?

We wanted to get maximum information from the first hands: from the witnesses, participants, victims, etc. Within a short period of time, we were able to talk to the captives, civil population from the area of immediate military operations, to the victims reservists, the military, the MFA and SS officials, representatives of local and international NGOs based in Abkhazia. I would like to use this opportunity and thank Abkhazian leadership, as well as NGOs for their assistance to the work of our group. We had good working conditions, we were given any opportunity to go into the immediate area of hostilities and to talk with the captives in private, without the Abkhazian policemen who guarded them.

Did you learn anything new compared to the information by Mass Media?

Certainly we did. Generally, both in Russian and in Georgian Media these events were covered with unusual amount of misinformation. The limited access to reliable sources together with the desire of all parties to the conflict to use the events to their own advantage gave birth to quite fantastic information. Suppose they tell us on the TV that the fighters have reached Abkhazia from Chechnya via Russia, and that they have intended to seize Sochi by a group amounting to some 500 men, and that that was the way from Chechnya to Karachai-Cherkessia and Kabardino-Blakaria; then even in Moscow one can guess that voluntarily or not, they are taking us in. And it was not clear for us in Moscow what was happening in the reality, even with the ability to read between the lines and the ability to sum up information by different sides. Sometimes this is possible, but the case with Kodori Gorge was the one when no specialist from outside could understand what was happening. Actually, this was the reason why it was decided to send a working group to the very spot of events: there was so much untruth in the media that one could not make head or tail of anything. Therefore the WG members tries to abstract from any information by Mass Media, Georgian, Abkhazian or Russian, and to work exceptionally with the first source of information, considering that Abkhazia is rather compact and it was possible there.

Did you arrive at any conclusions as to what has actually happened there?

First of all, we made sure that some “intervention” had taken place in Kodori Gorge. When coming there we were not sure in that, and we were ready for the idea that nothing has happened there, and the events actually took place on the TV only. Also, we managed to find out that there were two groups of “interventionists”, different in their battle readiness, equipment, ethnicity, and most likely, with different tasks. The first group comprised entirely (or almost entirely) of ethnic Chechens amounting to some 100-120 men, was well equipped for fighting in the mountains, and was well armed, etc. The fighters from this group were clearly good professionals. It is

quite possible that the group was headed by Gelaev, or someone who called himself Gelaev. All captives claim that he had been there personally, but when questioning in detail, it becomes clear that that this is information from the second hands, moreover this concerns the victims and Abkhaz military. It should be noted that if that had been Gelaev, the famous Chechen Field Commander, than that was not his first "visit" to Abkhazia. During the Georgia-Abkhazia Conflict of 1992-1993, he headed one of Chechen volunteer units who fought then on the Abkhaz side. The same was situation with the question relating to the presence of Arab mercenaries in this group. None of those who claimed that they have seen them was able to distinct Arabian from any other unknown language. Besides, when talking about the Arabs, the witnesses could have mixed them with representatives of Turkic language people (there were used phrases of a clear Turkic origin and "Azerbaijans speaking Arabic"). To all appearances, this group arrived in Kodori Gorge end of July-beginning of August. Their appearance in this area approximately in early August is simultaneous with the beginning of anti-Abkhaz rhetoric in the Georgian Mass Media. This group practically did not reveal itself until the very beginning of the events, and had autonomously existed in the mountain Svanetia over two months. Of course, these people had guides, supposedly from local Svans.

The second group was poly-ethnic and much bigger (some 300 men). There were some 100-130 Georgians, including refugees from Abkhazia; other members of this group were Muslims, including Chechens, Kabards, Balkarians, Azerbaijanians and at least one Ukrainian. The second group reached Abkhazia via Georgia in three groups, including in covered KAMaz trucks and in boats via Dzhvarsky Storage Pond. Then members of the first group, the "Gelaevits" split them into groups and split them into several detachments and then took them to Mountain Svanetia. Some of the detachments were formed on the basis of ethnicity ("Georgians"), and some (Islamic ones) on the basis of motivation ("Jihad"). These people were recruited in different places, mainly in Pankissi Gorge. Most of them were untrained people who were enticed into Abkhazia. They were deceived in different ways: Chechens and the most "religious" minded were told they would be taken to Chechnya to fight with "unfaithful" Russians; Georgian refugees from Abkhazia were told they would be taken to free their motherland; some were evidently just promised an opportunity to loot. They received arms when reached Abkhazia passing Georgia armless, without even basic military training. The members of this group were mostly lumpen people of little education and without a clear idea as to where and why were they going to.

What was, actually, the meaning of the military actions?

Right after entering Abkhazia, the first group (for some reason, they were called "the scouts") made an action to intimidate others: an Azerbaijanian was randomly chosen out of the second, "lumpen" group, and was accused of cooperating with the FSB ("he asked too many questions") and they slaughtered him in the of the others. The second group members were absolutely not ready for the raid. They did not even have necessary clothes, some of them were wearing T-shirts, in the fall, in the height of three thousand meters! They were intimidated by the massacre of the Azerbaijanian, and they started to drive them in the mountains with senseless tasks, let's say, to go to some height, stay there overnight and then come back in the morning. They carried their belongings, including the given green frontlets, Korans and other Islamic attributes here and there. They lost all these things in big quantities on the way, making traces at the same time. I repeat this was happening in a desolated area. In few days, the feeding of the second group members was stopped, and all attempts of the hungry men to apply the "scouts" were harshly suppressed. They started to understand they were entrapped, and some of them tried to escape at that stage, but without an idea of where to go they did not go to Georgia or Russia mountains, but went to the coast where they

were either killed or captured. They were kept starving approximately for a month, which was evidently followed by the next stage of the operation. We failed to make a clear picture of the first attacks on the villages of Abkhazian part of the Kodori Gorge. The cruel actions of the fighters who had attacked the Abkhaz villages were most likely made by the first group, the "scouts", though it is possible that the "cannon fodder" was also allowed to the looting. Right after that the strangest thing began to happen. The first group, i.e. the "scouts" disappeared. They have dissolved in the air.

They were not among the captives, and not or almost not among the killed. With the withdrawal of the "scouts", the hungry and untrained men were left in unfamiliar mountains without the leadership and food on the winter eve. Having seen results of the brutality in the mountain villages, by that time the Abkhaz reservists moved to the mountains and started "to clean" the Gorge. The hungry, becoming lousy and completely unable to fight groups came down the gorge to ask for or to steal food. They ate away the corn fields, ate raw kidney beans (it was found in the pockets of the killed); in the villages they cleaned the food stock without remainder and did not touch valuable things (in one of the villages they even took a can with emulsive paint, tried it and threw it away when understood it was not food). And everywhere they stumbled across the groups of Abkhaz reservists. There were also curious amusing incidents: in one of the villages, while an "international terrorist" was eating in the kitchen of an old Abkhazian, he said he would bring food from the basement, came from his back and stunned the "Islam combatant" with a stick. Then he took him where appropriate. In short, the "interventionists" were doomed. The Abkhaz Army is rather efficient and is based on the Swiss principle. Those men who served their time in the Army have arms at home and are ready to stand up when required. The reservists have smell of powder, know the mountains and are much more efficient than the Army comprised of conscripts. They were the reservists whom the second group of hungry and inefficient "interventionists" stumbled across. In fact, this is the whole story of the war. There were not any large-scale military operations. Success of the Abkhazians was unambiguous.

In this case, what could the aims of the attackers be?

All military specialists who were interviewed, including the Abkhaz military, insisted that this operation did not have and could not have had any military sense, even if all the four hundred attackers were experienced soldiers. Abkhazia cannot be attacked from the mountains, as it is impossible to take technical equipment to the mountains, while it is senseless to confront tanks and APCs with "Kalashnikovs". Besides, such operations, even if they are undertaken in support to attacks in other directions, are possible in spring, and not in the autumn, when it is snowing on mountain passes, and the attackers are cut from supply sources. This operation was not part of a greater plan, also because there had not been any greater one. In Ghali District (this is the only place from where it is really possible to attack Abkhazia), the number of border crossings to the market in Zugdidi and back even almost did not change (this information was provided to our group by UN Mission staff, who are constantly monitoring the situation there). And considering the contingent that was "fighting" there, it becomes evident that it is simply impossible to recruit these people for the war. Even the Abkhaz military we were talking to have often asked us: "Why did they do that?"

And why did they do that in your opinion?

Political evaluation and interpretation of the events were not the aim of the monitoring. However it is quite clear that the events were neither military operation, nor a part of it. That was a classic provocation in the manner of bad novels, and badly implemented one. One could take these people to Abkhazia exceptionally with the aim

to kill them, or for them to be captured to demonstrate these were Chechens, North Caucasians and other Wahhabies in green frontlets. Generally, the first analogy one can think of is the Kids' crusade. The lumpen from Georgia and the North Caucasus taken to Abkhazia do not much resemble innocent kids, but they less resemble soldiers.

Have there really been Arabs or any mercenaries?

We have not found any serious evidences to prove their presence. Of course, everyone indicated their presence: the captives, the victims and the military. But the captives claim "there were Arabs" only by memory, but they were confused when asked what language did they talk with the others and what countries they had been from: "Russian, they all spoke Russian", "only Daghestanians talked to them, they have similar languages". The local residents are also sure there were Arabs there, explaining that "they said it on the TV". An old man even funnily explained: "The Arabs were shouting "gyal bura" when they came down the village from the mountain". Then he thought and explained again: "it means "come here" in Azerbaijan". The military referred to radio intercepts in Arabic, however when translated, these turned to be a set of disjointed words. These could be explained as the code, but also as disjointed words, could they not? In short, while it is impossible to completely exclude the presence of any particular ethnic group among the fighters, we failed to find any serious evidence that there had been a considerable number of Arabs there. Another thing is that, unfortunately, we have witnessed the birth of such information, if you could call it that. The reporters arrive with preconceptions and easily find the "proof". Yet, one cannot deny there there had been Chechens and Wahhabies in the region and there were even radio interceptions in Arabic.

What conclusions could still be made from these events?

Yet we only have to summarize the information received in the process of monitoring. You will be able to get results of this work, The report will be available. First of all, one can claim that it was indeed a large-scale operation (before the trip I doubted, as they seldom fight in the mountains with such big quantities). Secondly, the groups have passed Georgia freely, or someone has led them through the country. One can say that large-scale provocation has not been planned long ago, and people who "facilitated" it could stop neither after the 11 September, which changed the whole political configuration, particularly around Georgia, nor later, when the failure became clear. Possibly, something went wrong in the "line". Perhaps money for the transportation of 400 people to Abkhazia was given to "contractors", and they have found out what kind of people that had been only later, when part of the money, as it is usually the case, was lost on the way. In one word, any interpretation is possible, especially considering the development in Georgia after the Kodori operation. One thing is clear: for some internal political incentives, one hundred "drivers" have taken three hundred deceived people to Kodori Gorge, so that they could give up their lives, without even knowing where and what for.

AFTERWORD

The material you have just read caused numerous disputes already in the preparation process, from complete approval to criticism and accusations in partiality. The reaction on our research could itself become a subject of analyses and the indicator of the relation of peacemaking projects participants to each other. In particular, interesting is the fact that the material was considered not impartial by those our colleagues who do not belong to any ethnicity involved in the events. It is quite possible that this fact could be explained by the increased feeling of responsibility for our mutual activities and for the consequences their results may cause.

Another aspect to be underlined is that this is the first action of the Caucasus Forum, which has been carried immediately during the deterioration of the armed conflict. In spite of rather complicated conditions for carrying out the monitoring, we met full support and understanding not only from our colleagues from Abkhazian and Georgian NGOs, but also from official representatives. In our opinion, this fact is indicative of the desire of the latter to cooperate with NGOs in the area of conflict transformation. We were given the full freedom of movement, and the officials and politicians were pleased (if this word could be used in this context) to contact us.

The reader may ask: "What is the sense of such researches, what is their practical advantage?" We tried not to evaluate the events, and to provide the complete range of opinions and positions. We wanted to give you another opportunity to analyze and evaluate the occurred events. It would be extremely useful for us to hear your response and opinions, including on the practical advantage of our work.

In our opinion, participants of the peacemaking processes themselves can find in the results of the monitoring food for thought on increasing efficiency of the process and attraction of new participants to it.

And at last I would like to thank all participants to the project for their cooperation and high professionalism, and also thank all those who have rendered us cooperation and support in our work.

You can contact Dr. Stephen Bowers of James Madison University at 540/568-7163 and Bowerssr@JMU.EDU or you can contact us directly at the following address:

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