

# THE GEORGIAN CHRONICLE

## MONTHLY BULLETIN

### Major events and trends in politics, economy and social life

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## CONFLICT IN ABKHAZIA

**September turned out to be the most dramatic month in the political development of Georgia since its former President Z.Gamsakhurdia was ousted from his office in January 1991. The Georgian troops failed to repel a sudden assault of the separatist forces on Sukhumi, who broke the Cease-fire Agreement of July 27, and were compelled to surrender the entire territory of the Abkhaz Autonomous Republic to the separatist coalition. Armed supporters of the former President took advantage of the situation to regain power, thus initiating a large-scale civil war. A bitter anti-Russian sentiment was combined with severe debates around the expediency of joining the Commonwealth of Independent States.**

Despite many difficulties, the peace process seemed to work until a sudden assault of the separatist forces on the early morning of September 16. The tripartite commission in the conflict zone and its provisional control groups, as well as a group of the UN observers continued their activities. On September 9 the Chief of the UN Military Observer's Mission Brigade General John Eidegaard arrived in Sukhumi. Representatives of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees led by Mr. Taslim Rakhman arrived in Tbilisi on September 6, and later proceeded to Kutaisi, Sukhumi and Gudauta.

Both sides accused each other of violations of different items of the Cease-fire Agreement. Namely, the Abkhaz side drew the attention of the tripartite commission to the failure of the Georgian side to withdraw its heavy equipment from the conflict zone. The Georgians admitted it, referring to practical impossibility of withdrawing them, because of pro-Gamsakhurdia insurgents who controlled the regions of West Georgia adjacent to Abkhazia. Georgia had to apply for help to the Russian fleet to deliver the equipment to Poti.. However, on September 13 Russian ships removed the last parts of the equipment to be withdrawn. According to official Georgian sources, they withdrew 237 units of heavy equipment and 4304 fighters. Only 30 units remained in the harbor of Sukhumi. Thus 80% of the government forces (100% of those on the Eastern front) left the conflict zone. According to the estimations of the Georgian members of the tripartite commission, the Abkhaz side concentrated only 20% of its military equipment in predesignated areas (Akhali Athoni and Psirtskha), while SU-25 and SU-27 warplanes, MI-24, MI-28 and AM-2 helicopters and delta-planes had not been reported at all. No artillery was removed from the sailing vessels (later, it was from these vessels that the separatists side shot down Georgian aircraft and civilian planes with thermal missiles).

On September 13 a special inspection group discovered two fully equipped *Grad* plants, anti-aircraft installations, explosive devices and 50 armed fighters near the village of Zemo Eshera (controlled by the Abkhaz side). The fact was reported to the UN military mission. The Abkhaz side complained of similar violations on the part of the Georgian side in the Ochamchire region, where four *Grad* plants were discovered. Georgian representatives stated the plants were known to the tripartite commission, and they were kept there stripped of all principal parts to be duly shipped.

The Georgian side in its turn complained of ethnic cleansing in the regions under the Abkhaz control, the unwillingness of the Abkhaz authorities to let Georgian refugees return to their homes, and of Georgian POWs not released by the Abkhaz side. On September 7 refugees from the villages occupied by the Abkhazs gathered in front of the Council of Ministers of Abkhazia in Sukhumi and demanded return to their homes.

Article 8 of the Agreement that of the return of the 'legitimate government' to Sukhumi came to be the most controversial issue, since the sides interpreted it in a different way. Under 'legitimate' the Abkhazs meant the government led by V.Ardzinba, while the Georgian side considered the Sukhumi government led by Zh.Shartava, (representing the part of Abkhazia's population loyal to Tbilisi), to be the one that could claim legitimacy as well. On September 5 leaders of the tripartite Commission met in Sukhumi to set up a working group which was to prepare conditions for the implementation of Article 8. However, both sides rejected the proposed composition of the group of 19 members.

Life in Sukhumi seemed to get normalized. A considerable part of refugees returned to the city, public transportation was restored and it was announced that classes would begin in some schools from September 20.

The sudden assault of the Abkhaz forces began in the Ochamchire region at 5:20 in the morning of September 16. The separatists seized several villages and blew up a bridge on the river of Tamish, thus isolating Sukhumi from the rest of Georgia, which was followed by the offensive of major Abkhaz forces, stationed at Gumista river, on Sukhumi.

The Abkhaz leadership in Gudauta described the beginning of the offensive as a spontaneous act of military units based in the town of Tkvarcheli which could no longer stand a 400 day-long siege. Mr.Ardzinba stated those units were not subordinated to him and he was not issuing an order to stop fighting since it would not be fulfilled anyway. The beginning of the offensive was clearly tied to the completion of withdrawal of Georgian equipment from the conflict zone, as well as to renewed military activities of pro-Gamsakhurdia forces in West Georgia, which greatly hampered an adequate retaliation of the Georgian side.

The Georgian government demanded Russia, as the guarantor of the peace process, to fulfill its obligations and ensure the implementation of the Cease-fire Agreement. However, the reaction of various branches of the Russian government to the resumption of hostilities was quite controversial. Russian President Eltsin in his telephone talk with Mr.Shevardnadze promised to take decisive steps. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Pastukhov arrived in Gudauta to persuade the Abkhaz side to stop fighting but in vain. On September 17 Mr.Shevardnadze held a meeting in Sochi with Russian Defense Minister Grachev, but it brought no tangible results either. After the talks Mr.Grachev stated that he had proposed to Mr.Shevardnadze to bring in more Russian troops but the Georgian leader had rejected the proposition calling it 'the Russian occupation'. Later, on his return to Moscow, he said he would not use Russian troops since he 'did not want to have coffin sent back to Russia'. He blamed both sides equally for their unwillingness to resolve the conflict with peaceful means. The Supreme Soviet advised the government not to allow Russian troops to be involved in

the conflict. Russian Chief of Staff Gen.Kolesnikov announced at the Supreme Soviet on September 17, that he expected Sukhumi 'to become Abkhaz' by next morning. On September 20 the Russian government condemned the violation of the Agreement and introduced economic sanctions, which included switching off electricity, suspending the 25 billion rouble credit and closing the border. However, the Georgian intelligence reported that the border had not been effectively closed and trucks with fighters and military equipment continued to enter Abkhazia from Russia.

When convinced that Russia was not going to take any effective measures Mr.Shevardnadze sent a letter of protest to Eltsin and publicly accused Russia of betrayal. On September 16 a group of fifty Georgian MPs led by Speaker V.Goguadze visited the Russian Army Headquarters in Tbilisi and handed the Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the Transcaucasian Military District Mayor General Diukov a letter to Gen.Grachev protesting against the failure of the Russian side to fulfill its obligations of a guarantor of the peace process. On September 18 the Foreign Ministry of Georgia sent a Note of Protest to the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs accusing Russia of non-compliance with its obligations.

Mr.Shevardnadze, as well as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs also appealed to the UN and other major international organizations for help. On September 18 Mr.Shevardnadze sent a letter from besieged Sukhumi to States and Peoples of the world, in which he urged them not to allow the separatist and imperial forces to destroy Georgia. However, though the actions of those forces were quite unanimously condemned by major states and international organizations, it served as only a moral support for Georgia and its leader. After the fall of Sukhumi Mr.Shevardnadze said he was disappointed at the actions of the world community.

On September 19-20 the Conflict Regulation Tripartite Commission held a meeting in Sochi, but with no results. The Abkhaz side presented the Georgians an ultimatum to withdraw their troops from the entire territory of Abkhazia right away, while the Georgian representative A.Kavsadze dwelt on the facts of ethnic cleansing.

The decisive fight for Sukhumi continued for 12 days. The Head of State arrived in Sukhumi on the very first day and stayed there to the very end at the apparent risk of his life. In the course of several days the Georgian side managed to send troops and military equipment by air, since all other routes were closed. However, in the course of tense fighting, the Georgian military commanders failed to activate all those troops, which included many volunteers who went to Sukhumi for the first time. In some cases inexperienced detachments abandoned key positions at the front.

As to the Abkhaz side, it had mobilized all its resources for the supreme assault on Sukhumi. Their fighting detachments were composed of Abkhazs, North Caucasians and ethnic Russians. Al though it is hard to evaluate the exact proportions of those three ethnic elements,, according to the information of some Western reporters most of the field commanders were Russians with professional military training. The separatist forces were evidently far better equipped and organized than the Georgian ones. Since in the course of implementing of the Cease-fire Agreement, the separatists had handed their heavy equipment over to the Russian government troops deployed in Abkhazia, the fact of their being returned to the Abkhaz demonstrated most clearly that besides the direct participation of ethnic Russian mercenaries/volunteers in the fighting, regular troops also backed the separatists.

During the assault, continuous shelling of the town forced its defenders to gradually leave its various parts, though there had been some temporarily successful counteroffensives of the Georgian side. Despite the fact that the town was surrounded, some Georgian detachments from the Ochamchire region managed to penetrate into the town, but their number was insufficient. The Georgian side expected help from the groups of pro-

Gamsakhurdia forces led by Vakhtang (Loti) Kobalia, which were deployed in the Ochamchire region, but according to the evidence of the military, their ostensible participation in military operations had not provided any efficient help.

On September 21-23 the Abkhazs shot three civilian planes by means of thermal missiles causing 126 casualties. One Georgian SU-25 aircraft was also destroyed.

Sukhumi fell on September 27. E.Shevardnadze managed to leave the town, but Chairman of the Council of Ministers Zhiuli Shartava was captured and later shot in Gudauta. On September 28 the Head of State returned to Tbilisi. He said he had sent a telegram to Boris Yeltsin consenting to join the CIS on the last day of the siege, defining it 'Georgia's kneeling down'. He said it had been the last desperate attempt to stop the assault that had been planned 'in the General Staff of the Russian Army'.

Demoralized Georgian troops could no longer offer any resistance to the separatist troops. On September 30 they seized Ochamchire and Gali, that finally ensured their control over the entire territory of the Autonomous Republic. More than hundred thousands of Georgian refugees began to flee Abkhazia in two directions: the inhabitants of the Gali district crossed the Enguri river to Megrelia, while those of the Gulripshi and Ochamchire regions, that were cut out from the South, had to take a mountain route to the region of Svaneti.

The exact number of casualties, as well as that of the refugees, had not been specified. During the first three days of the assault on Sukhumi the Georgian troops lost 47 dead with 450 wounded. A Georgian and a Russian journalists were killed.

After the fall of Sukhumi Secretary-General of the UN Boutros Boutros-Ghali invited Mr.Shevardnadze to take part in the negotiations with the Abkhaz side in Geneva, saying his personal representative Eduard Brunner had persuaded the Abkhazs to negotiate. The Georgian Head of State turned down the offer.

## GOVERNMENT

Before the outbreak of the offensives of pro-Gamsakhurdia forces and Abkhaz separatists in mid-September, Georgian politics were concentrated on overcoming a grave power crisis which had developed during summer, as well as on substantial strengthening of the position of the Head of State. Having failed to get a steady support of the Parliament to his draft new structure of the Cabinet of Ministers in August, Mr.Shevardnadze gave up his policy of maintaining a 'unified Parliament' in favor of "formally establishing" a Parliamentary majority. Earlier efforts of National Democrats, Liberals and the Greens to achieve it had failed due to the lack of enthusiasm on the part of the Head of State. On September 3, 132 MPs (out of 222) announced at their meeting that they supported the policy of the Head of State and were ready to share the responsibilities for it. Mr.Shevardnadze himself said he now understood that was the only way to overcome the inefficiency of Parliament's activities and presumed some 10-15 more deputies would join the ruling coalition later. However, some of the MPs, as well as commentators raised doubts as to the future stableness of this coalition including former radicals, liberals, former communist *nomenclatura* and people of vague politics. Claiming support of Mr.Shevardnadze's policy was the only point that had kept them together so far. Inside the new majority, a new fraction *Consensus* was soon formed, comprising former *nomenclatura* and intellectuals loyal to Mr.Shevardnadze (Tch.Amirejibi, J.Charkviani, J.Patiashvili etc.). Some of them had earlier been members of *the Liberals*.

On September 7 the Head of State announced the new Cabinet (Prime Minister O.Patsatsia had been appointed earlier). 20 members of the previous Cabinet retained their offices or were transferred to other posts. The National Democrats strengthened their position with I.Sarishvili being appointed a Vice Premier. Roman Gotsiridze, the Vice Premier in charge of economic reforms, who had been considered to be the leader of the reformist forces in the Cabinet, but also criticized for inefficiency, was dismissed. Amiran Kadagishvili, President of the Caucasian Exchange, is a new Vice Premier in charge of economic reforms. David Iakobidze, an academic economist who had been A.Kadagishvili's Deputy at the Caucasian Exchange, was appointed Minister of Finance. While the hopes for competent economic reforms are pinned on these two, most of other members of the Cabinet represent old communist and managerial elite strongly opposing radical changes.

The creation of the new majority did make the sessions more orderly and facilitated the Head of State to get his projects through. On September 7 the Parliament confirmed a new structure of the Cabinet without any amendments. It included 16 Ministries, 5 State Committees, 18 Departments, 3 State Inspections, 4 Corporations and Concerns. Offices of 5 Vice-Premiers were retained (it had been criticized not only by the opposition, but by some supporters of Mr.Shevardnadze as well). The Procurator's Office, Chamber of Control, Information and Intelligence Bureau, Committee of Statistics and National Bank were subordinated to the Parliament. The Head of State asked the Parliament to postpone the confirmation of new Ministers due to the tense situation in the country.

The Head of State took made one more unexpected decision of assuming the responsibilities of the Minister of Internal Affairs. Earlier this office had been occupied by T. Khachishvili, a member of the paramilitary formation *Mkhedrioni* led by J. Ioseliani. Strained relations between the police and *Mkhedrioni*, many of whose members had been involved in criminal activities, led to conflicts between the Minister and his subordinates. Mr. Shevardnadze's self-appointment also revealed his intention to lay a particular stress on the police in his efforts to restore order in the country. As to *Mkhedrioni*, whose position was weakened after the dismissal of Khachishvili, it was supposedly appeased by receiving a long-aspired official status of the State Committee under the name of the Georgian Rescuers' Corps.

The next step for which the Head of State needed a support of the Parliamentary majority was the introduction of the State of Emergency, the conditions of which entailed the suspension of the Parliament. The idea had been propagated in August too, but in the first half of September, after a new crisis emerged in Megrelia, Mr.Shevardnadze's supporters began a public campaign stressing that extraordinary measures were the only chance to restore basic order in the society, since all other ways had proved ineffective. The climax of this campaign was a meeting organized by *Tbiliseli* society on September 10, where Mr.Shevardnadze stated he had come to understand why the Georgian kings had had to behave severely at times.

On September 14 Mr.Shevardnadze proposed his project (which had previously been approved at the meeting of the ruling majority) of introducing the State of Emergency to the Parliament. Some parties (Ilia Tchavtchavadze Society, *Charter-91*) criticized the project as being only ostensibly directed against the criminal world, while actually it aimed at neutralizing the political opposition. However, it could not be a serious obstacle for Mr. Shevardnadze's proposition to pass. The situation changed after Mr. J. Ioseliani, who had earlier been supposed to be a reasonably reliable supporter of Mr. Shevardnadze, sharply criticized his proposal as a 'return to communist methods' which *Mkhedrioni* would not tolerate. He threatened the Parliament to withdraw his forces which were deterring pro-

Gamsakhurdia offensive in West Georgia. After the dismissal of Khachishvili and an attempt to arrest some members of *Mkhedrioni*, involved in criminal activities, in the town of Rustavi, he was worried (with good reason) that the introduction of the State of Emergency would lead to the weakening of *Mkhedrioni's* and his personal position.

Mr. Shevardnadze's reaction to his criticism was most unexpected. Saying that he could no longer stand personal insults (Mr. Ioseliani at one point had used some indecent words towards the Head of State) he declared his resignation. Although the Parliament almost unanimously (with one abstained) rejected the resignation, Mr. Shevardnadze declared he would not reverse his decision. It caused certain panic among his supporters. Thousands of people began to gather in front of the Parliament building demanding the come-back of Mr. Shevardnadze. In the evening Mr. Shevardnadze appeared before the public saying he needed another night to think everything over before he announced his final decision. However, after some of the people in the crowd knelt down in the street, urging others to do the same, Mr. Shevardnadze gave in and said he would reverse his decision in case the Parliament accepted his plan.

That day seemed to be a triumph of Mr. Shevardnadze. The next morning the Parliament adopted a resolution on introduction of the State of Emergency for two months (beginning from September 20) without any complications (however, it was noted that only plenary sessions of the Parliament were to be suspended and not its work in Commissions). After a reconciliatory meeting with Mr. Ioseliani the problems of *Mkhedrioni* were finally resolved. The parliamentary opposition seemed intimidated after an extraordinarily strong manifestation of public support to Mr. Shevardnadze (which was further strengthened by Minister of Defense Karkarashvili who threatened 'those in opposition who he knew were plotting against the Head of State'). His supporters hoped it would put an end to his policy of endless balancing and maneuvering and he would use momentum to substantially solidify his power at least throughout that part of Georgia which was under the control of the current government.

On September 18 a decree of the Head of State on introduction of the State of Emergency was issued. This step was defined to aim at 'improving the crime situation, restoring order and strengthening the defense potential'. Rallies were prohibited, registration of guns were suspended, a special regime of entering and departing from populated areas was determined. In order to implement the state of emergency a Provisional Committee, subordinated to the Head of State, was set up with. Relative offices in the regions, whose chiefs were to be appointed by the National Security and Defense Council. Two other extraordinary bodies -- the Operations Staff of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and that of the Cabinet of Ministers were created. Lots of armed pickets to stop and search cars appeared in the streets. In Tbilisi, the citizens that were mobilized by the *Tbiliseli* society helped the police in these activities.

However, Mr. Shevardnadze did not get a chance to further develop his success. After an assault of separatist forces began on Sukhumi of September 16, he departed to Abkhazia accompanied, among others, by such key figures in his campaign to restore order as Mayor of Tbilisi Kote Gabashvili and Chief of the Tbilisi Police David Zeikidze.

Following the above events, the political life in Tbilisi came almost to a standstill. However, it was in the absence of the Head of State that the issue which had previously been tabooed in the Georgian political discourse, was raised, consisting in the possibility and expediency of Georgia's joining the Commonwealth of Independent States. On September 17 Speaker of the Parliament Vakhtang Gogvadze made a public declaration that joining the CIS was the only way to save Georgia. He said it was his personal view. Leaders of pro-

Shevardnadze factions in the Parliament I.Sarishvili (the National Democrats) and M.Naneishvili (the Liberals) harshly criticized V.Gogvadze's announcement as 'disgraceful' and demanded his resignation. Other members of the majority coalition refrained from any comments evidently waiting for Mr.Shevardnadze's judgment, but the latter avoided making any clear-cut statements except for defending the right of the Speaker to express his personal views.

The idea was put forward once again on September 26 at an enlarged meeting of the Cabinet of Ministers with the leaders of Parliamentary factions and commissions present. Prime-Minister Patsatsia, who had just returned from Moscow (see below) presented his considerations in favor of joining the CIS. He was supported by all the ministers in the fields of economy, who rendered it requisite to restore economic relations with Russia and other former Soviet states. The Greens also supported the idea and called for using it as a 'bargaining issue' with Russia. The idea was outright condemned by Vice-Premier Sarishvili, and more mildly criticized by Vice-Premier Kadagishvili and Minister of Justice Ninidze.

Upon his return from Abkhazia, the Head of State continued to refrain from declaring his position with regards to joining the CIS. He said that issue was to be decided by the people. At the same time, he said 'he would not kneel any more' (meaning his having sent a telegram to Yeltsin with his consent to join the CIS), and took a clearly anti-Russian stand by labeling Abkhazia as a 'territory occupied by a foreign country'.

However, having suffered a humiliating defeat in the war, Shevardnadze had another, far graver problem to face, that of the forth coming large-scale civil war with the supporters of the former President.

## **FOREIGN RELATIONS**

By the end of September Georgia had had established diplomatic relations with 78 countries, having signed treaties on economic cooperation with 16 of them (Iran, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Belgium, Germany, USA, Great Britain, China, Hungary, Poland, Chekhia, Slovakia, Romania). Draft treaties were being worked out with Israel, Russia, Austria, Moldova. Uzbekistan and Tajikistan were among the former Soviet Republics with whom Georgia had no diplomatic relations so far. Germany, USA, Turkey, Israel, China, Russia, Armenia, Iran and Vatican have their embassies in Tbilisi. Georgia in its turn has embassies in three countries: Russia, USA and Kazakhstan. In September, the Georgian Representative to Eurocommunity Z.Abashidze was granted a diplomatic rank of the Ambassador to the same organization.

Controversial relations with Russia continued to be the focus of the foreign policy. A certain trend towards improving these relations had been shaping before the separatist assault on Sukhumi. On September 1 Russian Minister of Defense Grachev visited Tbilisi to meet the Head of State Shevardnadze and Minister of Defense Karkarashvili and discuss the status of remaining Russian troops in Georgia. An agreement was reached to concentrate the Russian troops in three military bases (Tbilisi, Batumi, Akhalkalaki) subordinating them all to the Transcaucasus Military Command. No military equipment was to be removed from Georgia. The problem of the division of the fleet was to be settled after the general Treaty was signed between the two countries. E.Shevardnadze stated that Russian-Georgian relations began to improve after the regulation of military conflicts in the Tskhinvali region and Abkhazia.

On September 7-10 the Fifth Round of Russian-Georgian negotiations over the package of treaties between the two countries took place in Moscow. Head of the Russian

delegation F.Kovalev said that the delegations had completed their work on the text of the *Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation*, but some newly-emerged problems prevented the signing of the Treaty in the nearest future.

On September 14-15 a Georgian delegation headed by Prime Minister Patsatsia visited Moscow to attend a meeting of the Heads of Governments of the CIS with an observer status. Mr.Patsatsia signed several agreements on economic issues with the Russian Vice-Premier Shokhin. On September 15 Defense Minister Karkarashvili discussed with his Russian colleague Grachev the legal status of Russian troops in Georgia as well as the problems of preparing a treaty on the regulation of conflicts in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region (South Ossetia).

In the beginning of September leader of Ajaria Aslan Abashidze stated in his interview to the *Krasnaya Zvezda* newspaper that Russia was a great friend of Georgia and if the latter did not change its policy towards Moscow it would have greater problems. He described the Russian troops in Ajaria as guarantors of peace and stability in the Region.

However, after a renewed assault of separatist forces in Abkhazia the relations between the two countries took a more dramatic turn (s. the *Conflict in Abkhazia* section).

In the beginning of September President of Ingushetia Ruslan Aushev visited Batumi and Tbilisi holding meetings with Mr.Abashidze and Mr.Patsatsia. In Batumi, a Treaty on Economic Cooperation was signed between the two autonomous regions. In Tbilisi, the two sides agreed to establish an air flight between Tbilisi and Nazran.

On September 7 T.Gogoladze was appointed the Georgian Ambassador in Kazakhstan.

On September 3 Georgian Ambassador at the USA P.Chkheidze presented his credentials to President Clinton. The latter handed him a letter to Mr.Shevardnadze and expressed the hope for the cooperation between the two countries in resolving regional conflicts.

On September 8-9 a Georgian delegation headed by Foreign Minister A.Chikvaide visited Austria to sign a treaty on economic relations.

## **SUPPORTERS OF THE FORMER PRESIDENT (THE ZVIADISTS)**

On September 2 a session of the former Supreme Council took place in Zugdidi. 62 former deputies participated (initially 250 had been elected in 1990). The session declared the restoration of the "legitimate government" and asked Zviad Gamsakhurdia, who was still in Grozni, Chechenia, to return to Georgia. The session elected a new Chairman (Merab Kiknadze instead of Akaki Asatiani) and decided to resume the activities of the Cabinet of Ministers, led by Besarion Gugushvili, on the territory of three districts of West Georgia. The armed formations supporting the former President began to concentrate in the directions of the towns of Poti and Kutaisi.

Political forces in Tbilisi divided on their approaches to the "Zviadism" issue. Supporters of the majority called for resolute actions, regarding the prospects of negotiations rather skeptically, while the opposition insisted that a civil war would inevitably lead to the division of Georgia and it should be avoided by any means. Two negotiating teams visited West Georgia. One mainly included opposition figures and was led by Vazha Adamia. The another one, led by Vice-Speaker V.Rcheulishvili, was authorized by the government and met with the Zviadist leaders in Kobuleti, with the leader of Ajaria Aslan Abashidze acting

as a mediator. However, the "Zviadists" would not give up their major demand "restoration of the legitimate government" (after which President Gamsakhurdia might appoint new elections if he deemed it necessary). Thus the negotiations proved to be a failure.

On September 15 early in the morning (following the day of Mr. Shevardnadze's resignation and come-back) pro-Gamsakhurdia forces began their offensive in West Georgia, seizing the remaining parts of the historical province of Megrelia with the exception of the harbor of Poti and attempted to advance further to the East. They entered the province of Guria, nearing Mamati, a native village of Eduard Shevardnadze. The armed group which entered Guria was composed solely of the natives of that province, in an evident attempt to demonstrate that the movement for "the restoration of the legitimate government" had nothing to do with the sub-ethnic Megrelian identity.

After Sukhumi was assaulted, negotiations between the current and former governments switched on to the issue of the participation of Zviadist forces in the defense of Abkhazia. L. Kobalia was even granted time on Tbilisi television, and E. Shevardnadze said that once Sukhumi was saved he and Kobalia would solve all the problems. Mr. Shevardnadze did not make any comments on Z. Gamsakhurdia's arrival to Zugdidi either, saying it was not an appropriate time to discuss things like that. In the end, though some small groups of pro-Gamsakhurdia forces did go to Abkhazia without taking an active part in the hostilities, most of the Zviadists did not abandon their positions in West Georgia confronting the government forces.

On September 24 the former President landed in Senaki airport and soon addressed several thousands of his admirers in Zugdidi. Although he called them to fight in Abkhazia, the necessity of getting rid of the 'junta' was particularly stressed.

Later the Georgian television broadcasted two radio communications intercepted by the Georgian Intelligence; one between Gamsakhurdia in Grozni and his representative in Zugdidi soon after the beginning of the assault on Sukhumi and the other between Zugdidi and Gudauta immediately after the separatists' victory in Abkhazia. In the first case, Gamsakhurdia insisted that only the natives of Abkhazia should be permitted to fight for their land, and that L. Kobalia was to stay in Zugdidi (Kobalia did not comply with this order). On the second occasion, Zugdidi congratulated Gudauta with the victory, but reproached them for seizing the district of Gali, which according to their mutual agreement was to be controlled by the Zviadists. Gudauta apologized saying "they could not halt their fighters".

## **SOCIETY**

The meeting on September 10 brought the *Tbiliseli* ("Inhabitant of Tbilisi") society (which was created last summer), to a focus of public interest. The society, which has a rather loose structure and no particular leader, consists mainly of the middle-aged that have been united around the ideas of public order, extension of the personal power of E. Shevardnadze, resolute actions in relation to pro-Gamsakhurdia forces and denouncing any kind of opposition to the Head of State. The meeting on September 10 was notable for its extremely heated atmosphere. Calls for the dissolution of the Parliament were repeated several times. The speech of the former Minister of Defense Kitovani was wooed after he stated he would go to West Georgia with "his people". The Chief of the Tbilisi Police D. Zeikidze retorted that movements of any armed groups were to be authorized by the Head of State. Later the members of the society took part in pickets together with the police.

Whenever the government tightens its internal policy the issue of freedom of media comes to the foreground. Two pro-Gamsakhurdia newspapers: "Sakartvelos Samreklo" and

"Iberia-Spektri" were closed down. On September 17 the office of an independent weekly "7 Dghe" ("7 Days") was raided by eight gunmen, who said it was a retaliation for criticizing the National-Democratic Party. The raiders beat up male journalists, insulted the females and shot at computers. The same day *Iberia* agency spread a statement of the Press-Center of the National-Democratic Party saying that "from now on the party would answer any libels and insults the way it considered necessary" and that it "would no longer rely on an imperfect Law on Press". The "Free Media" association (uniting eight independent newspapers) published a statement accusing National Democrats of introducing a partisan censorship on free media. Later the NDP denied any participation in the raid.

Registered crime relatively subsided in September after rise in August (1352 offenses against 1408 in August). However, since the territory controlled by the current government kept shrinking, it is hard to speak of any improvement. The crime rate might be estimated as stabilized at a high level.

The first *Golden Eagle* film festival of the Black Sea Basin countries took place in Tbilisi on September 19-26. It was the first international film festival in Georgia (the first festival of the same title took place last fall, but it had comprised only Georgian films). Because of the deterioration of situation, the number of guests and participants was curtailed, mass festivities were canceled, and the festival acquired a more businesslike and at the same time politicized nature.

The decision of the European Football (Soccer) Association to expel *Dynamo* Tbilisi from European Champions' Cup was yet another blow to the Georgian public. The popular Georgian club, which successfully returned to the European scene in August having defeated *Linfield* of Northern Ireland in two matches, was accused of having offered a \$5,000 bribe to Turkish referees. The leadership of the club assessed it as a misunderstanding, arising from the failure of the UEFA to specify the amount of per diem to be paid to the referees, and spent \$120,000 in lawyer's fees to prove its innocence, but all in vain.

## PUBLIC OPINION

According to the polls conducted by the *Resonance* newspaper in Tbilisi, dramatic events in September brought drastic changes in the ratings of some major Georgian politicians. The last poll took place on 2-4 October, when, given the loss of Abkhazia and a very uncertain situation in regards to the demoralized army, many inhabitants of Tbilisi came to consider the possibility of pro-Gamsakhurdia forces taking over the capital to be quite realistic. Despite the defeat in Abkhazia, Mr. Shevardnadze's courageous behavior during the assault on Sukhumi helped him maintain his high approval rate: it was 61,9% against 64,2% in the beginning of September. The main loser in ratings was the leader of Ajaria Aslan Abashidze (No.1 in the beginning of September): he dropped from 72,3% to 22,4%, while his disapproval rate rose sharply from 7.4% to 44.1%. It was for the most part due to his uncertain position in relation to pro-Gamsakhurdia forces, his image of 'Moscow's man', and the insignificant help that the government troops had received from Ajaria when fighting in Abkhazia. Approval rate of J. Ioseliani, a controversial military leader with criminal, as well as artistic and intellectual background, which vacillated around 20% during the month, now rose sharply to reach the point of 47.2%, which undoubtedly was due to the fact that after a severe defeat in Abkhazia the paramilitary formation of *Mkhedrioni* was regarded as almost the only reliable force to deter Gamsakhurdia. Speaker of the Parliament Vakhtang Goguaдзе got "penalized" for being the first politician to publicly propose the idea of joining the CIS with his disapproval rate increasing from 32.8% to 52.2% (his approval rate also increased,

but insignificantly: from 14.0% to 17.1%). The ratings of Nodar Natadze, leader of the Popular Front, who was in Abkhazia, away from political battles during the second half of the month, increased to 57.9%, which made him the second most popular political figure. Leaders of the National Democratic Party I.Sarishvili and G.Tchanturia, who had demonstrated an especially strong support to Mr.Shevardnadze on the day of his resignation and comeback, gained respectively 15 and 21 points: this time 46.5% and 33.8% approved of their activities. The disapproval rate was led by the adversaries of the Head of State: 76.6% disapproved of ex-President Gamsakhurdia (69.0% in the beginning of September), 77.6% -- of the most radical opposition figure in the Parliament Irakli Tsereteli (there were rumours of his having reconciled with Z.Gamsakhurdia), 75.6% -- of the former Defense Minister Kitovani.

The public did not meet the idea of Georgia joining the Commonwealth of Independent States too enthusiastically. In the poll conducted by the Scientific Center of the Applied Psychology on September 22-24 (after the first announcement by V.Goguadze) 28% supported the idea of joining the CIS, with 60% not supporting it and 12% undecided. Another poll conducted by the Informservice Center on September 28 (after most of the members of the Cabinet of Ministers expressed their support) showed a changed attitude: 38% supported the idea with 48% rejecting it. However, commentators predicted the possibility of drastic change of the public opinion in case E.Shevardnadze expressed his support to the idea.

27.0% of those polled by the *Resonance* newspaper considered Germany as the best strategic ally of Georgia. The USA were given preference by 23,0%, Russia -- by 17,0%, Ukraine -- by 7.7% and Turkey -- by 6.0%.

## **THE ECONOMY**

The pace of inflation of the Georgian coupon, which continued to hold the status of the only legal payment tender in the country for the second month running, was at high level: at the Interbank Currency Exchange on September 30 the average price of one American dollar was 12,629 coupons against 8,066 on August 27. Within a week between September 4 and September 11 the price of a dollar skipped from 9,170 to 15,175. According to commentators, it was due to the doubling of salaries in September, as well as to another wave of large credits (in cash) given out in by the National Bank, which had received the banknotes of new denominations from France (the first part of coupon bills had been printed in England). There still was a gap between "live" and deposited coupons: a dollar cost 17,000 "non-cash" coupons on September 2 and 25,000 coupons on September 27. From the time of its introduction in April (initially it had been regarded as a surrogate currency to substitute rouble bills) the purchasing power of the coupon dropped 12 times. Although the coupon had been declared the only payment tender, the Russian rouble and the American dollar were also in circulation (especially for larger deals). The position of the coupon was particularly weak in border regions.

Food prices increased by more than one dollar: at the end of the month a normative food basket cost 227,000 coupons against 179,000 in the beginning of September, or, in dollars, the price rose from \$19,62 to \$21,81. Within the same period the price of one kilogram of beef rose from \$1,58 to \$1,97, sunflower oil -- from \$1,31 to \$1,67, potatoes -- from \$.27 to \$.30, etc. Petrol prices vacillated between \$0.80-\$1 (in August -- \$0.70-\$0.80). Since the wages were also doubled from September 1, in the beginning of the month the cost of the food basket comprised only 19.6 normative minimal wages against 30 at the end of August; however, at the end of September it became 30 minimal wages again.

The production volume dropped in the first eight months of the current year by 31 per cent relative to the same period last year. Among 76 items of industrial products, the manufacturing of 11 of them increased, that of 59 items decreased, with 7 items not produced at all. Although a general decline of production continued in August, there was some increase in 29 items. Wholesale prices rose disproportionately: while the products of heavy engineering and ferrous metal industry went up 3-5 times on the average, the prices of construction materials increased about 30 times. This, as well as the problems of transportation, brought the construction industry to an almost complete standstill.

Production value in the state sector of agriculture sharply declined. It was due not only to privatization of a part of the and, but also to the reduction of productivity. The productivity of live-stock, as well as cattle-breeding were also on the decline. During the first eight months of the year, the state sector produced 2 kilograms of meat, 6 liters of milk and 6 eggs per capita. 460 liters of milk were received per heifer during the same period.

Although no exact data were available, an indirect research of the State Committee of Social-Economic Information showed that the private sector of agriculture was quite active, so that the countryside still provided itself and to a certain extent, the inhabitants of cities as well.

Commodity circulation in the state and cooperative (old system) trade systems during the first eight months of the current year dropped twice as compared to that of the same period last year. The population became much more dependent on *bazaar*, newly emerged flea markets and private shops.

According to the data of the Committee of Social-Economic Information, if earlier the share of wages in citizens' incomes amounted to about 72 per cent, it had now dropped to 47 per cent. The poll conducted by the "Informservice" Center at our request revealed that for 52,7% of the inhabitants of Tbilisi the wages received from state organizations constituted their only source of income, with 15.2% solely depending on private sector and 8.1% -- on both of them. 22.1% defined themselves as 'unemployed' (according to official data 5% of labor resources are registered as unemployed). 5.8% considered themselves as "well-to-do", 42.0% assessed their standard of life as "average", 38.4% "on the brink of poverty", and 13.8% --"beyond the poverty line". 27% of the "well-to-do" citizens had only private incomes, 49% -- both state and private incomes, with 19% relying on state salaries only.

The Cabinet of Ministers adopted a resolution on the creation of a Coordinating Council and Territorial Councils that are to introduce privatization vouchers.

As was stated in the letter of the Chairman of the Commission of European Communities Jacques D elors to Eduard Shevardnadze, the EC decided to grant Georgia a credit of 70-80 million ecus.

35 trading companies of Iran sold their products in the Central Department Store of Tbilisi with great success. Iran plans to expand its presence on the Georgian market.

## APPENDIX

### THE CABINET OF MINISTERS OF THE REPUBLIC OF GEORGIA

|                |                            |
|----------------|----------------------------|
| Prime Minister | <i>Otar Patsatsia</i>      |
| Vice-Premier   | <i>Zurab Kervalishvili</i> |
| Vice-Premier   | <i>Amiran Kadagishvili</i> |
| Vice-Premier   | <i>Avtandil Margiani</i>   |
| Vice-Premier   | <i>Irina Sarishvili</i>    |
| Vice Premier   | <i>Nikoloz Lekishvili</i>  |

#### **Ministers:**

|                                   |                              |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Labor and Social Security      | <i>Vazha Gujabadze</i>       |
| 2. Justice                        | <i>Tedo Ninidze</i>          |
| 3. Defense                        | <i>Giorgi Karkarashvili</i>  |
| 4. Communications                 | <i>Pridon Injia</i>          |
| 5. Industry                       | <i>Vladimer Kereselidze</i>  |
| 6. Health Care                    | <i>Irakli Menagarishvili</i> |
| 7. Education                      | <i>Tamaz Kvachantiradze</i>  |
| 8. Culture                        | <i>David Maghradze</i>       |
| 9. Foreign Affairs                | <i>Alexandre Chikvaidze</i>  |
| 10. Environmental Protection      | <i>Shota Adamia</i>          |
| 11. Economy                       | <i>Mikheil Jibuti</i>        |
| 12. Finance                       | <i>David Iakobidze</i>       |
| 13. State Property Management     | <i>Avtandil Silagadze</i>    |
| 14. Commerce and Supplies         | <i>Murtaz Zankaliani</i>     |
| 15. Agriculture and Food Industry | <i>Giorgi Kvesitadze</i>     |
| 16. Internal Affairs              | <i>Eduard Shevardnadze</i>   |

#### **Chairmen of the State Committees:**

|   |                            |
|---|----------------------------|
| 1. International Economic Relations       | <i>Tengiz Geleishvili</i>  |
| 2. Human Rights and Interethnic Relations | <i>Alexandre Kavsadze</i>  |
| 3. Refugees and Re-settlement             | <i>Valerian Vashakidze</i> |
| 4. Architecture and Construction          | <i>Guram Mirianashvili</i> |
| 5. Science and Technology                 | <i>Levan Japaridze</i>     |

#### **ORGANIZATIONS SUBORDINATE TO THE CABINET OF MINISTERS:**

##### **1. Departments:**

|   |                            |
|---|----------------------------|
| 1. Material Reserves                      | <i>Mikheil Gvishiani</i>   |
| 2. Youth Affairs                          | <i>Tedo Isakadze</i>       |
| 3. Standards, Metrology and Certification | <i>Omar Khoperia</i>       |
| 4. Sports                                 | <i>Kakhi Asatiani</i>      |
| 5. Tourism                                | <i>Konstantine Salia</i>   |
| 6. Rescuers' Corps                        | <i>Giorgi Gelashvili</i>   |
| 7. Forestry                               | <i>David Gigauri</i>       |
| 8. Customs                                | <i>Irakli Kadagishvili</i> |
| 9. Land Resources and Land Cadastre       | <i>Zurab Gegechkori</i>    |
| 10. "Saknavtobi" ("Georgia-Oil")          | <i>Revaz Tavadze</i>       |
| 11. "Sakgazi" ("Georgia-Gas")             | <i>Karlo Nikoleishvili</i> |

12. "Sakenergo" ("Georgia-Power)
13. "Saknakhshiri" ("Georgia-Coal")
14. Air Transport
15. Sea Transportation of Georgia
16. Rail Transport

*Iuri Tchedia  
Aliosha Botchorishvili  
Zurab Tchankotadze  
Bichiko Varshanidze  
Remi Vashakidze*

**2. Inspections, Agencies:**

1. Inspection of Taxation
2. Inspection of Technical Supervision

*David Salaridze  
Archil Ghoghoberidze*

**3. State Corporations, Concerns:**

1. Corporation of Cereal Products
2. Corporation of Poligraphy and Publishing Affairs
3. TV and Radio Corporation
4. Concern "Navtobproductebi" ("Oil Products")
5. Concern "Sakavtogza" ("Highways of Georgia")

*Omar Katsitadze  
Viktor Rtskhiladze  
Archil Gogelia  
David Zubitashvili  
Boris Salaridze*

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