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ABKHAZIA UNDER THE CONDITIONS OF THE DIVISION OF THE WORLD

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During the last years, irreversible changes have taken place in the world. First of all there was the collapse of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, and Ethiopia, the unification of Germany, and the emergence of a number of so-called independent states which have received international recognition. The arch of instability, which originally extended from the Balkans to the Caucasus, now extends from the US to Korea.

Only after the last ten years is it possible to outline the approximate contours of the most complex and dramatic period of contemporary history which should be examined in the context of the impetuous processes of globalization and world-wide unrest. After the split of the Soviet Union, Abkhazia went through several stages under the conditions of the division of the world. The first stage covers the period from December 1991 to September 1994, and is closely connected with the first division of the post-Soviet space in Transcaucasia (or South Caucasus), which was a part of the world-wide division. This first stage had the following peculiarities:

- (1) Monoplist hegemony of Russia in Transcaucasia;
- (2) The management of the Georgian-Abkhazian War and its manipulation during 1992-1993;
- (3) Practical non-intervention of the United States and European countries in Russia's policies in its neighboring foreign countries (*blizhnee zarubezh'e*);
- (4) Underestimation by the Georgian leadership of the geopolitical factor in 1993 and, accordingly, accession of Georgia into the CIS to return to the sphere of Russian influence.

The second stage in Transcaucasia covers the period from September 1994 to the autumn of 1999 (or September 2001) and is characterized as a relatively peaceful period when all conflicts in this region were temporarily frozen. In September 1994, Western oil

companies signed with the Azerbaijan government the “contract of the century” on the supply of Caspian oil bypassing Russia and Iran simultaneously. In September 1994, the United States and European countries frankly declared their strategic interests in Transcaucasia in connection with the large deposits of oil and gas reserves and rejected to recognize this region as Russia’s exclusive sphere of influence.

By the end of 1994, processes for political regulation of conflicts had been worked out in all conflicting places in Transcaucasia. On the other hand, secret rivalry between Russia and the US continued in the region, in particular on the questions of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, the transportation of Caspian oil, and the Eurasian transportation corridor through Georgia (TRASESA).

From the autumn of 1999 or from September 11, 2001, the political history of Abkhazia entered into the third stage and, at the same time, the second division of the Southern Caucasus under the conditions of the global division of the world began.¹

THE “ROSE REVOLUTION” IN GEORGIA IN THE CONTEXT OF THE POST SEPTEMBER 11 WORLD

After the end of the Georgian-Abkhazian War in 1993, the Yeltsin administration began to run a hard-line policy in regard to Abkhazia, again declaring against this *de facto* independent state a complete blockade including financial-economic and informational aspects from September-December 1994 up to the autumn of 1999. With the advent of V. Putin, the policy of the “stick” run by Yeltsin was replaced by a policy of the “carrot” which was undoubtedly caused by the anti-Russian behavior of Tbilisi in a number of problems of military-strategic character.

The decisive change of Russian policies in advantage of Abkhazia took place after the tragedy of September 11, 2001 in the US and the Kodori Incident in October 2001.² The next stage was the negotiation of Putin with

¹ Stanislav Lakoba, *Abkhaziia – de-facto ili Gruzii de-iure? O politike Rossii v Abkhazii v postsovetskii period 1991-2000 gg.* (Sapporo, 2001).

² In October 2001, a detachment of Chechen militants intruded from the Pankisi Canyon of Georgia to the Kodori Canyon of Abkhazia with the help of Shevardnadze.

Bush in Moscow in May 2002 on the agenda of which the Abkhazian question was included. In direct testimony of this were the massive requests by the multi-national population of Abkhazia in June 2002 for obtaining of Russian citizenship. During the summer of 2002, Russian policies in regard to Abkhazia became even more active. In August, a delegation from the Kremlin visited Abkhazia. The presence of the delegation itself symbolized the territory as being under Russia's protection.

At present, the US and Russia are "enforced" allies. It is obvious that the US needs Russia's support in regard to Afghanistan, Iran, North Korea, and, of course, Iraq. The caricatured behavior of Shevardnadze in this geopolitical context, his attempt to make the US conflict with Russia, and his double-dealing caused additional irritations. Washington became more and more conscious that it is impossible for it to dispense with regional support by Russia, which had been weakened but was quickly recovering power. The new Russian pragmatists, seemingly, finally made their will not only toward Abkhazia. Every event taking place in this part of the world today reminds us of the past great struggle for the Caucasus.

On September 11, 2001 the substantially new second stage of the division of Transcaucasia began. The strategic task of the US and the European Union was to consolidate its holding of Caspian oil in the region and secure its transportation to the West; Russia's task is to renew its control over this territory (which is of life-or-death importance for the security of Russia's southern flank) for the keeping peace in the Northern Caucasus.

It should be remembered that during the period 1917-1921, Russia temporarily but completely lost control over Transcaucasia where at first German and Turkish and afterwards Anglo-French armies dominated. At that time the countries of the entente, which were also attracted by "west Baku oil," were similarly disappointed. "The path to Baku goes through Batumi - Tiflis," Lev Trotsky wrote in the 1920s. "This last point (Baku - S.L.) is the strategic focus of Transcaucasia ... The struggle continues because of oil and manganese. It makes no difference for oil companies how to reach oil: through Denikin, through the Muslim party *Musavat*, or through the gates of 'national self-definition'."³

³ L. Trotskii, *Sochmenia*, Vol. 12 (Moscow, 1925), pp. 241-242.

Obviously, history is being repeated or is what is happening a new improvisation?

Even before the events of the November “Velvet Revolution” in Tbilisi, Abkhazian observers came to the conclusion that “the United States will tactically sacrifice Shevardnadze, giving him hope by words and sending warm letters ...”⁴ It is also necessary to note that already for the third time in Georgia a situation is emerging which Western experts characterized as an “uncompleted state.” The first was after the defeat in Abkhazia in 1993 and the second was after the military conflicts in Gali (southern Abkhazia) in May 1998.⁵

Facing difficulties in global issues, which are becoming more and more visible, and scattering its military-political forces and financial-economic resources all over the world, the US as a superpower began to experience difficulties. For example, the new “Desert Storm” turned into a real “storm” in Europe and NATO, when France (Jacques Chirac) and Germany (Gerhard Schroeder) openly spoke against the war in Iraq. A devoted ally, Tony Blair, was experiencing serious difficulties in the British parliament and with public opinion. The operation in Iraq is disturbing Turkey which is seriously anxious about the problem of a united Kurdistan as well as the plans for the federalization of Iraq giving Kurds a wide range of autonomy. The actual position of a number of influential Arab states in regard to Israel’s military actions against the Palestinians needs no further comment. Particular unease was caused by the might of Islamic fundamentalism and the energetic development of China. On this problem, with well-grounded preoccupation, Charles Krauthammer remarked: “The hard fact is that war on many fronts is consuming and containing American power. While America spends blood and treasure in faraway places like Baghdad, China builds the economic and military superpower of the future.”⁶ In this context of global politics, Russia will transform more and more from an enforced ally of the US into an ally indispensable to Western civilization.

⁴ *Sbornik materialov respublikanskoi konferentsii, posviashchennoi 9-letiiu Pobedy i provedennoi 26 sentiabria 2002 goda* (Sukhum, 2002), pp. 54-55.

⁵ Known as the “Six Day War.” Georgian troops intruded into Gali District of Abkhazia, neighboring Georgia, but were defeated within six days.

⁶ *Time*, 163:2 (12 January 2004), p. 45.

It is no secret that Russian gas and oil magnates assembled in Texas in 2002, where remarkably they discussed the question of contemporary politics and whether the West would rely exclusively upon Russia's supply of oil and gas, rejecting the service by the Arab world.

Washington addresses Russia for help not only in regard to the acute problem of Iraq but also for the difficulties connected with Afghanistan, Iran, and North Korea, and with nuclear weapons. The interaction of Russia and the US and their coordination are being devised through the example of Transcaucasian policies. It is well known, for instance, that in the summer of 2003 the US and Russia had secret consultations about the future of Transcaucasia, including Abkhazia, as well as about the demarcation of spheres of influence and cooperation in this region. Thus, the Abkhazian public unexpectedly experienced a very important incident with not so much economic as political characteristics: on July 31, 2003 two important agreements were concluded. The Russian Gazprom and the Georgian government signed an agreement on strategic cooperation in the gas sphere with a term of 25 years and the President of the American corporation, AES, declared that his corporation sold the controlling share of stock (75 percent) of the Tbilisi Power Supply Company, TELASI (ТЭЛАСИ), to "United Energy System of Russia" (PAO "ЕЭС"). In 1998, when the American AES bought TELASI shares for US\$ 25 million, its arrival in Georgia was regarded as an important political decision and a strategic step. This time it was Russia that made an important political step. In fact, the US already at that time had forsaken Shevardnadze. This was done with apparent ease and the ubiquitous Anatolii Chubais, visiting Tbilisi on August 15, 2003, made the whole event public.

Russia became the monopolist in the sphere of Georgian energy and obtained the main gas pipeline. The leading expert of the Institute for the Economic Development of Georgia, Niko Orvelashvili, stated that: "In fact, an overturn happened. In general, actually, the 11th Russian Army (the military unit that occupied Georgia in 1921 - S.L.) is already not necessary, it is enough to advance 'United Energy System of Russia' and Gazprom to the south."⁷ By all appearances, it was in this summer of 2003 that the Americans eventually decided to replace

⁷ *Panorama*, No. 6 (August 2003), p. 2.

the corrupt Shevardnadze. This was testified to by the two-day visit of the former US Secretary of State, James Baker, to Tbilisi at the beginning of July. Baker brought a new scheme of parliamentary elections to Georgia on November 2. Interestingly, the “friend” of Shevardnadze did not behave at all friendly, proposing a new electoral code and the formation of electoral commissions at all levels. The new chairman of the central electoral committee of Georgia was separated from the influence of President Shevardnadze and the OSCE received the right to appoint the office. On July 24, 2003, the parliament of Georgia, after heated debate, adopted the bill of the electoral code, which was a serious defeat for Shevardnadze.⁸

Generally, for Transcaucasia as a whole that autumn turned out to be a hot time. As already mentioned, along with cooperation, latent or sometimes demonstrative rivalry between Russia and the US continued. Among the three recognized states in Transcaucasia, only Armenia continues to be Moscow-oriented, but the presidential elections there have already been held. In regard to the presidential elections in Azerbaijan, apparently, the US and Russia agreed on the son of Geidar Aliev. It would seem that a similar Russian-American compromise existed also in regard to Georgia in which the change of leadership was prepared.

Besides, it is quite symptomatic that, in Yalta in September 2003, on the eve of the meeting of the representatives of the US and Russia at Camp David, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia, Igor Ivanov, blocked the question raised by Georgia to discuss its statement on Abkhazia. Shevardnadze had never been so coldly accepted by the Russian leadership. “Do you know how difficult it was to adopt the Statement in Yalta? It was very a difficult situation,” – said Shevardnadze later in Tbilisi.⁹

At the press conference held in Yalta on September 19, President V. Putin did not refer to the “territorial integrity of Georgia.” He responded to a Georgian journalist: “In the post-Soviet space, unfortunately, there are still many conflicting points. One of the most acute is Abkhazia and we all wish that this and other problems with similar features would be regulated with justice on the basis of international law and the realities in which we live, so that these

⁸ *Soiuznaia gazeta*, No. 10 (September 2003), p. 10.

⁹ *Svobodnaia Gruziiia (SG)*, 23 September 2003, p. 1.

problems can be regulated with justice for the advantage of all peoples who live in the territories of the conflicting regions.”¹⁰

Participating in the meeting of the leaders of CIS countries in Yalta, Shevardnadze understood that he was placed in a very difficult situation, in particular after Baker’s visit and his capitulation in energy affairs before the “United Energy System of Russia” and Gazprom. Under these conditions the President of Georgia decided to perform one more somersault. At a reception in Yalta, he proposed a toast in Putin’s honor, for which he would be forced to apologize in Tbilisi, saying that this toast did not have any groveling, but the Russian and Georgian mass media compared his speech to his own famous phrase from Soviet times: “For Georgia, the sun is shining from the north.” The President of Georgia called Putin “accessible, communicable, decent, and amazingly understanding of the nuances of today and the future.” He said that he was “proud that Russia is headed by such a strong and responsive leader. All of us should be convinced that we are with Great Russia and the Russian people.”¹¹

Feeling that the West had turned its back on him, Shevardnadze decided to improve relations with Moscow again, despite his overtly Russophobic speeches in the recent past. This could not but be exploited by the opposition. The people were discouraged with such quick changes by their president. But just around the corner, the parliamentary elections in Georgia and the cold winter were very close. Therefore, there was no alternative but to make friends with Russia again. Georgia was not able, despite the enormous sum of Western credit, to create its own security in energy affairs without which all the conversations about “independence” remained empty. On the eve of the election, the Ambassador of the US, Richard Miles, suddenly declared: “In Georgia, we have an unfavorable investment environment.”¹² All over the world, the opinion that Georgia was an undesirable partner became widespread.

Following Yalta, in September 2003, the negotiations of Presidents George Bush and Vladimir Putin were held in the US. The meeting at the highest level at Camp David was, according to Shevardnadze, a logical continuation of the Moscow meeting in May 2002. It continued

¹⁰ *SG*, 29 September 2003.

¹¹ *Versiia*, No. 37 (2003), p. 8.

¹² *Sakartvelos Respublika*, 30 October 2003.

for about two hours and during this conversation the issue of conflicts was mainly discussed, including the Georgian-Abkhazian, Transnistrian, Nagorno-Karabakh and other conflicts. The head of the Georgian state remarked: "I regard it as very important that the presidents of two large states discuss the questions of regulating conflicts." Motivated by this remark, a TV announcer threw out the following comment: "The confrontation of interests between these two countries may possibly squash Georgia."¹³

The events which took place after Camp David testified that the US changed to a stricter position in regard to the official Georgian authorities. For example, the representative of the US State Department, Thomas Adams, when he left Shevardnadze's office, expressed dissatisfaction with the reforms conducted in Georgia and suggested that "Georgia will be left without the help of the United States."¹⁴

Anxiety in regard to the coming elections was expressed by the famous American politicians, militaries, and diplomats who visited Georgia: the former Secretary of State, James Baker, Senator John McCain, General John Shalikashvili, the former First Deputy of the State Secretary, Stroub Talbot, the President of the NATO project "Transition Democracy," Bruce Jackson, and others.¹⁵ On the very eve of the elections, TV journalist Liuba Eliashvili asked about the many Western politicians and diplomats who "unanimously declared that the realization of democratic elections will be a decisive factor for the country." Eduard Shevardnadze answered in a somewhat perplexed manner: "And I often think why do they show their special interest toward Georgia? All of us remember Baker's visit to Georgia and the plan proposed by him. ... The election campaign should be organized in accordance with these points. Later other visitors came too." Very sluggishly and even with unease, he also remarked that he knew how generously the opposition was financed by several foreign countries.¹⁶

On the very eve of the elections, on October 31, 2003, the US President sent a special message to the head of Georgia in which he reminded him of the agreement with James Baker on the question of

¹³ SG, 3 October 2003, p. 2.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ SG, 14 October 2003, p. 2; SG, 29 October 2003, p. 1.

¹⁶ SG, 31 October 2003, pp. 2, 3.

the conduct of the elections on November 2. As always, Bush supported the consolidation of independence and the territorial integrity of the country and proposed to work for the resolution of the conflict in "Abkhazia or other conflicts in the region ..."¹⁷

After his enforced resignation, Shevardnadze gave a number of interviews to Western and Russian mass media in which he accused the US of being committed to his resignation. For example, the Canadian newspaper *The Globe and Mail* described the fact of the support by the financier and billionaire, George Soros, of oppositional forces to which a significant sum of money was paid. With his help, the leaders of the "nationalist movement" and Georgian students underwent special courses in Serbia in which they learnt how to conduct a "bloodless revolution." (November 27, 2003). The British *Daily Telegraph* reported, based on the former president's words, that his resignation was organized by the West, which Shevardnadze accused of ingratitude and betrayal. He did not hide his disappointment caused by the American Ambassador in Georgia, Richard Miles, who supported the opposition. "When he needed my support in regard to Iraq, I gave it. What has happened now, I can't explain," – remarked Shevardnadze (November 27, 2003).

As is well known, foreign policies have many dimensions and there have been a number of unexpected difficulties between Russia and the US. One of these stumbling blocks is Georgia. By all appearances the two super-powers were interested in the replacement of Eduard Shevardnadze, which actually took place after the elections as a result of the "Rose Revolution" on November 23, 2003. In many points, because of the coordination and joint actions in Georgia it was possible to limit the events to a bloodless course— although a coup did take place. However, they pursued different aims, as would be confirmed by the further development of events.

Actually, from that moment leap-frogging in the relations between Russia and the US began. A new situation developed because, as a result of the replacement of the leadership, a pro-Western triumvirate came to power: M. Saakashvili, Z. Zhvaniia, and N. Burdzhadze. Such an overturn in events did not satisfy Moscow at all. As a result, in Georgia

¹⁷ SG, 4 November 2003, p. 1.

a peculiar dual power arose: figuratively speaking, the US controlled Tbilisi, while Russia controlled the regions of Georgia which fell to pieces from the bottom. Ajaria unified with the *de facto* independent republics of Abkhazia and the South Osetia. Its leader, Aslan Abashidze, and the parliament declared the state of emergency in Ajaria the same day the revolution started, November 23.¹⁸ Following the events in Tbilisi, Russia demonstratively had consultation with leaders from Ajaria, Abkhazia, and the South Osetia in Moscow. Speaking at a meeting of the Council of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the OSCE in Maastricht, N. Burdzhnashvili remarked that such actions might lead to harm in the relations with Moscow and strengthened the intention to remove the two Russian military bases remaining on Georgian territory.

However, as is well known, the supply of power and natural gas to Tbilisi depends on Moscow. It is worthwhile for Russia to cut the supply in winter; then all the euphoria emerging from the arrival in power and the removal of "Shevardnadze's dictatorship" will evaporate like mist only after several days and dark, cold nights. Tbilisi is not able to afford to pay completely for the energy while the debts grow continually.¹⁹ The financial situation in the country is just catastrophic. Georgia's budget deficit on December 1, 2003, amounted to \$135 million, while foreign debts were more than \$1.5 billion.

A number of influential Western publications regard the events in Georgia as problematic. For example, Shevardnadze turned out to be the second president of the country who was replaced before the end of his term. Would this not become the norm for Georgia and the whole Caucasus?

Considering economic factors (electric power, gas, and more than one million Georgians living in Russia and sending their relatives in Georgia more than \$1 billion each year), political factors (the former autonomies), and military factors (Russian bases), the influence of Russia on Georgia may even increase because of the recent events. "Washington should act quickly to prevent the strengthening of the Russian Federation's influence on Georgia," remarked the *Wall Street Journal* (November 25, 2003).

¹⁸ [www.toprbc.ru/25 November 2003](http://www.toprbc.ru/25%20November%202003)

¹⁹ [www.toprbc.ru/1 December 2003](http://www.toprbc.ru/1%20December%202003)

The *Kommersant* writes that Russia threatens the new Georgian authorities by the possibility of establishing a “protectorate” over Abkhazia, Ajaria and the South Osetia if the events will not develop according to the Russian scenario. Moreover, arguably, Russia took the responsibility to defend not only the population of these semi-states (among them there are large number of owners of Russian passports), but also their territories.²⁰

GREAT GAME AROUND THE TRANS-CASPIAN PIPELINES

Global military-political games in the Southern Caucasus and, in particular, in Georgia and Abkhazia are combined with the strategic rivalry of the US and EU with Russia in regard to a series of most important political-economic directions. Russia, as the legal successor of the USSR, does not wish that the West take away the significant reserves of energy resources from the Caspian region, namely from under its nose. In addition, in the post-Soviet period, a stable resource orientation with an emphasis on oil and gas became consolidated in the Russian economy. The weight of oil and gas composes more than 34 percent in the present structure of Russian exports. Russia pumps across valuable resources from the Kazakhstani part of the Caspian Sea by the Tengis-Novorossiisk pipeline and Russia is not interested in competition, namely in the construction of alternative oil and gas pipelines which can avoid its territory. It is exactly such an East-West energy corridor that Georgia is trying to get support of the US, Turkey and the EU countries, which seriously threatens the national security of Russia. Therefore, Russia cannot but be anxious about: (1) the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline being built avoiding Russia; (2) the project of the South Caucasian Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline; (3) the problem of the Eurasian transportation corridor through Georgia (TRASESA).

If these projects are realized, Russia will be in danger of losing the export of gas and oil completely, particularly to EU countries. The

²⁰ *Kommersant*, 29 November 2003, p. 1, 4.

explosive situation covering not only Georgia and Abkhazia but also a significant part of the Caucasus, the Caspian Sea, the Persian Gulf, Iraq and so on, can be largely explained by these geostrategic circumstances. It is exactly this broad region stretching from the mouth of the Volga to the Sultanate of Oman that received the name "the Caspian-Persian energy ellipse."²¹ It is estimated that this region has more than two-thirds of the known world reserves of oil and more than 40 percent of the natural gas. In the Persian Gulf there are more than 600 billion barrels of oil and 1600 trillion cubic feet of gas. Several sources estimate the Caspian reserves at 200 billion barrels of oil, though 90 billion barrels is considered a more realistic figure. The attractiveness of the Caspian region in terms of energy is that it is the continuation of the oil deposits of Iraq and the whole Middle East.²² The Caspian region is called the energy storeroom of the twenty-first century. However, a fundamental problem of the Caspian region is how to transport oil to the outside markets. At this point, an ancient geopolitical principle is working: those who control the main routes will control the whole contents of the politics. The secret of the predominance of the British Empire was its control over key transition points of the world: Gibraltar, Malta, the Suez Canal, and so on.

Under new conditions the number of internal and external players in the Caspian region has increased (in the nineteenth century there were only two active players, the Russian and British Empires). The main focus of their battle is oil and gas resources. If, in the nineteenth century, it was regarded that everything in the region was decided by the network of railways, current perspectives of strategic predominance in the region depends on the construction of pipelines which carry the oil and gas of the region to external markets. Arbakhan Magomedov remarks: "The paths of potential oil pipelines for export, more than anything else, will be determined by the constellation of local political interests and the direction of external influence. Where the future oil pipelines will go – north, south, east or west – will determine how this influence will affect the future. Thus, namely, along oil pipelines one may see how the

²¹ Arbakhan Magomedov, "Kapiiskaia neft' i rossiiskie regiony: meniaiushchiasia priroda lokal'nykh interesov vdol' nefteprovoda Tengiz-Novorossiisk. Sravnitel'nyi analiz," *Acta Slavica Iaponica* 19 (2002), pp. 21-23.

²² Magomedov, "Kaspiiskaia neft'," pp. 22-23.

constellation of big money, large ambitions, and the large egos of giant oil companies, political leaders and ruling groups is formed.”²³

The Caspian Pipeline Consortium (KPC) Tengiz-Novorossiisk (in which the governments of Russia, Kazakhstan, and the Sultanate of Oman participate and which has a length of 1580 km) was created in 1992 for the purpose of consolidating the Russian dominance over the Caspian – Black Sea territories. The KPC keeps Kazakhstan and Central Asia under the transition pressure of Russia which continues to have the status of the main “controller” of Caspian oil.

Literally a few days before the parliamentary elections of Georgia, Eduard Shevardnadze, as if he were muttering to himself, reflected about energy independence: “I still have one and a half years of presidency, or a little more. I wish the business to build the gas pipeline goes to the extent that there should be no way to return. Not to the north, not to the south, not to the other directions ...”²⁴ Shevardnadze referred to the project of the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline, in the case of the realization of which Georgia will, at best, receive natural gas by the end of 2006. Its construction will require one billion dollars but until then Georgia should exist only on the basis of Russian gas, which cannot but influence its political situation.

Generally, the question of energy resources, their supply to Georgia, especially to its capital, causes very stormy, negative reactions in the Georgian society. In autumn and winter people are practically deprived of power and heating. On the eve of the elections, an official newspaper *Svobodnaia Gruziia*, raised most actively the topic of the future energy independence of the country. Thus, for example, it reported that the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline was going successfully since Georgia had already received 236 km of pipes (of the necessary 248 km) produced in Japan.²⁵

Russia was far from delighted when Shevardnadze, completely confused in his orientation between the Kremlin and the White House, personally participated in Tbilisi on October 30, 2003 in the signing of an agreement between the management of the South Caucasian Gas Pipeline Company Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum and the Georgian International

²³ Magomedov, “Kaspiiskaia neft’,” pp. 24-25.

²⁴ SG, 31 October 2003, p. 1.

²⁵ SG, 28 October 2003, p. 3.

Oil Corporation to supply natural gas to Georgia. This project anticipated the completion of the construction in 2006. It was reported that: (1) As a transitional fee Georgia will receive 5 percent of the total transported gas volume (1.5 billion cubic meters of gas each year) for free; (2) In the following 20 years, Georgia will be allowed to buy 500 million cubic meters a year from the investors at a fixed price of US\$55 for 1000 cubic meters; (3) Georgia will receive seven billion US dollars for the whole period, namely on average 175 million dollars each year.²⁶

Such a supply of Caspian natural gas through Georgia and Turkey to Europe could never be coordinated with the Russian political-economic strategy. In my view, plans of this kind accelerated the development of political events in Tbilisi and resulted in the removal of Shevardnadze before the end of his term.

It is necessary to note that a Georgian publicist, Giia Lomadze, dedicated an article to this important problem. According to him, certain forces in Russia "always think about the reanimation of the Soviet Union" and they arguably have a plan according to which they operate in the former Union republics. The purpose of these forces is the renewal of the sphere of influence of Russia, for which the Russian political elite began to use the term "liberal-imperialism." The accent is placed on economic annexation. G. Lomadze argues that, "external forces were activated in particular in realizing projects of international scale. I imply this to mean the "Great Silk Road," TRASESA, the oil pipeline Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan, gas main. If Russia gains control over these grandiose objects, it will obtain a key to the gates of Europe and Asia ..."²⁷

This kind of comment is not new from a historical point of view. For example, at the very beginning of the twentieth century the renowned Georgian jurist and specialist of international relations, Z. Avarov (Avalishvili), noted that, "the incorporation of Georgia to Russia was a political event of first-rate importance. It was from the time of this incorporation that Russia stood on the way which will possibly lead it to the shores of the Persian Gulf."²⁸

One of the famous politicians of Georgia, Irina Sarishvili-Chanturiia, in a heated period of electoral passion in Tbilisi, declared

²⁶ SG, 30 October 2003, p. 5.

²⁷ SG, 31 October 2003, p. 5.

²⁸ Z. Avalov, *Prisoedinenie Gruzii k Rossii* (St. Petersburg, 1906), p. 3.

officially that destabilization was indispensable for Russia for the purpose that the route of international oil and gas pipelines should be changed and not lead through Georgia but through Armenia which was friendly toward Moscow. For several Georgian politicians such a scheme completely fits the concept of so-called Russian liberal imperialism. The suspicion of Tbilisi on this matter became particularly tangible after A. Chubais's visit in August to Georgia and the meeting of the leaders of CIS countries in Yalta in September, in which the "single economic space" was documented. Observers interpreted the single economic space as Russia's new policy to hold the situation in the post-Soviet territories under its control for the purpose of exploiting the questions of economic cooperation for political purposes.²⁹

For the successful realization of the project of the "East-West" energy corridor through Georgia, it was above all necessary to regulate the conflicts in Transcaucasia, including the Georgian-Abkhazian, for the purpose of the safe functioning of pipelines. To resolve the Georgian-Abkhazian problem and realize Russia's interest in terms of the smooth export of oil to Turkey and on to Europe, avoiding the Straits of Bosphorus and Dardanelles, the construction of a "connection" between the western branch of Baku-Supsa (western Georgia) and the northern branch leading to Novorossiisk was proposed in 1997.³⁰ This proposal was made despite the fact that experts regarded the former military port Ochamchira in Abkhazia as having clear merits as a terminal in comparison with Supsa (in Georgia) and Novorossiisk (in Russia). However, all hopes collapsed immediately when the "Six Day War" broke out in Gali Raion of Abkhazia, bordering Georgia, in May 1998.

It was on the eve of the elections in Azerbaijan and Georgia in the autumn of 2003 that the topic of the Novorossiisk-Supsa pipeline (through Abkhazian territory) and further to Ceyhan was raised again. The Georgian ambassador in Azerbaijan, Z. Gumberidze, commented: "This is an independent pipeline through which Russian and Kazakhstani oil would be able to be exported from Novorossiisk to the Turkish port Ceyhan on the Mediterranean Sea, avoiding the

²⁹ SG, 24 September 2003, p. 3.

³⁰ One of the initiators of this plan was the then secretary of the Security Council of Russia, Boris Berezovskii (Lakoba, *Abkhazia - de-fakto*, pp. 98-99).

Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits.”³¹ The ambassador remarked as if the question of the incorporation of the Novorossiisk-Supsa pipeline into the pipeline Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan had not been discussed between Russia and Georgia.

INTENSIFYING RIVALRY BETWEEN RUSSIA AND THE US AFTER THE “ROSE REVOLUTION”

Many politicians in Georgia and Abkhazia have become conscious that the substantial reason for conflicts was the redivision of spheres of influence in the Caucasus. A leader of Georgian refugees, T. Nadareishvili, remarked: “This process has not been completed; for some reason during the last ten years we don’t have any results. Though it is possible to suppose today that this division is coming closer to completion, the Caucasus region was left. And now the second stage has arrived – the regulation of conflicts. Because of the mutual compromises between Russia and the US, these two countries can achieve a certain agreement which satisfied the two parties...”³²

As already mentioned, the cooperation of the main players in the region – the US, Russia, and the EU countries – has experienced elements of latent, sometimes demonstrative, rivalry. This is characteristic also for other conflict zones within the borders of the CIS, but the US reacts with extraordinary anxiety to the attempts to regulate conflicts in Moldova-Transnistria and Georgia-Abkhazia. For example, the almost finished compromise project for the regulation with Transnistria on the basis of the asymmetrical federalization of Moldova was cancelled literally the day before its signature. The OSCE and the US in a literal sense cut off the possibility to regulate the confrontation according to the Russian scenario and postponed the resolution of the problem for years. All of these things, I would note, took place in parallel with the change of government in Georgia.

The first deputy minister of foreign affairs of Russia, Viacheslav Trubnikov, remarked on the improvement of mutual relations between

³¹ SG, 7 October 2003, p. 2.

³² SG, 17 October 2003, p. 4.

Russia and the US on the eve of the elections in Azerbaijan and Georgia. According to him, “[This improvement] will affect the political situation in the Southern Caucasus positively.” Nevertheless, there are quite a few problems and contradictions between them, in particular in the military aspects. These problems include the debate over the realization by Russia of obligations which it promised at the Istanbul summit of the OSCE in 1998 in regard to the removal of military bases from Georgian territory, and Georgia’s strange anti-terrorist operation in Pankis which was made public two weeks before it was carried out (Trubnikov suggested that Georgia gave Chechen militants the time for dislocation). As for the education of 2000 Georgian soldiers by the Americans according to the so-called “Education and Equipment” program, the position of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs is that it welcomes the “unification of two thousand professionally trained fighters in the struggle against terrorism.” But there is a danger that they will be used “to resolve internal problems of Georgia. Of course, I mean Abkhazia.”³³

Russia regards that it fulfilled its obligations required by the Istanbul Agreement by dismantling its bases in Vaziani and Gudauta. As for the bases in Batumi and Akhalkalaki, it will not be possible to remove them sooner than nine-eleven years later though Georgia insists on a term of three years.

On September 30, 2003, while staying in Moscow, the Speaker of the Georgian parliament, Nino Burdzhanadze, spoke about the contradictions in Russo-Georgian relations. She emphasized that as early as a year before, Russia and Georgia stood on the brink of war, at first because of the events in the Pankis Canyon and afterwards because of the events in Abkhazia and the Kodori Canyon, when Russian paratroopers landed there.³⁴

Russian influence on the Abkhazian problem causes serious discontent in Georgia. For example, there is debate over the associative relations of Abkhazia with Russia, the prompt acquisition of Russian citizenship by as much as 80 percent of the population of the multinational, unrecognized republic (this is interesting also in the context of the recently declared new military doctrine of Russia foreseeing

³³ SG, 7 October 2003, p. 4.

³⁴ SG, 2 October 2003, p. 2.

preventative damage and the defense of its citizens), railways connections between Sochi-Sukhum, the restoration of the Inguri railway bridge, the construction of a pedestrian bridge over the border river Psou, and many other questions.

Georgian politicians are irritated when Moscow talks about the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of Russia and, at the same time, introduces a non-visa regime at first for Abkhazia and the South Osetia and, after the "Velvet Revolution" in Tbilisi, for Ajaria as well. In this manner, the practical division of Georgia is taking place and this process will be enhanced by the uncompromising attitude of Tbilisi "democrats." Recently, voices requesting the autonomy of Javakhk (bordering with Armenia), where Armenian settlements are concentrated, can be heard more and more loudly. The populous communities of Azerbaijanis (almost 700,000 people) also express their discontent. It is exactly through these settlements that a main oil pipeline Baku-Ceyhan runs. The relations with Ajaria worsened to the extreme. It is not by chance that people began to compare Georgia to Yugoslavia.

After military specialists of Western countries, in particular the US, began to educate several Georgian battalions according to the NATO program, Russia began to pay more attention to Abkhazia. For example, the former director of the Service of International Intelligence, one of the leaders of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia, Viacheslav Trubnikov, said more or less that the Georgian military trained by the Americans might possibly be used in Abkhazia. "Namely this makes us anxious. If our anxiety is justified, we will not welcome such steps by Georgia."³⁵

It is necessary to emphasize the unprecedented activity of the US administration in Central Asia and the Transcaucasia after the events of September 11. The fight against international terrorism and the Taliban in Afghanistan resulted in the stationing of American military bases, arguably on a temporary basis, in a series of former Soviet countries in Central Asia. Similar plans of Washington are brought forward in regard to Transcaucasia as well. One should not underestimate that the "Afghanistan pretext" for the consolidation of its presence and military bases could be repeated in detail here, for

³⁵ SG, 7 October 2003, p. 2.

example, in the case of certain new military operations or military-political pressure on Iran.

In this context, how is the interest of Washington toward pro-Russian Armenia, which has grown extremely strong recently, to be explained? And why was the enormous territory of nine hectares with a garrison of 500 required for the American embassy in Yerevan (the largest embassy of the US in the world which can be transformed into a military base at any moment)? Several experts interpret that the purpose of the US activities in Armenia is neighboring Iran and the expansion of the sphere of US interests to the Caucasus, as far as the border with its ally, Turkey.³⁶ It was not by chance that the prime minister of Turkey remarked in January 2004 that Washington will deliver a military attack on Iran and Syria in the near future.

A significant activation is being observed in the Caspian region as well. American military and naval forces are working out operations to guard oil platforms together with the Azerbaijanis. There is a testimony that the US is planning to station an air force base in Azerbaijan.³⁷

During the recent period the US made a serious attempt to consolidate its presence in Georgia. As a result of the "Rose Revolution" in November 2003 and M. Saakashvili's coming to power, the US expressed overt interest in supporting the new regime. For example, the ambassador, R. Miles, overtly declared in January 2004 that the American military in Georgia was indispensable to guard the Baku-Tbilisi oil pipeline.³⁸ The Secretary of State, C. Powell, in Tbilisi frankly spoke in favor of the removal of Russian bases from Akhalkalaki and Batumi. It is true that the Secretary of State softened his position after his meeting with President V. Putin at sea and gave his word that there will be no US military bases in Georgia. However, everyone well understands the price of these words – once "new circumstances" arise Russia will be faced with a *fait accompli*.

Moscow perceives with great anxiety whatever is happening in its neighboring countries, in particular in the Caucasus, which Russia regards as a zone of its national security from ancient times. A Spanish

³⁶ www.regnum.ru/allnews(5 February 2004)

³⁷ *The Daily Telegraph*, 9 January 2004.

³⁸ www.abkhazeti.ru/news (24 January 2004)

newspaper reports: "On the chess board which at present is the substance of that zone, the interests of various players in the international arena, not only Russia and Georgia are clashing. But the US is busy with Iraq, the Middle East and Afghanistan and the US influence has not been established in any of these zones and therefore does not have the possibility to spare the necessary endeavors to resolve the Georgian question. All the measures adopted by the US remind us more of the desire to play off the interests of many sides than an attempt to find a real solution to the problem. As a matter of fact, the desire of Russia to maintain stability in the post-Soviet space, to some extent is advantageous for the Europeans and Americans."³⁹

However, Washington is trying to remove Russia from the Transcaucasia by all possible means. In this sense, Georgia was assigned a certain "locomotive" role. The accumulation of political passions and black PR around Transcaucasia coincide with the coming presidential elections in Russia (March 2004) and the US (November 2004). By all appearances there are influential forces which desire to undermine the position of V. Putin on the eve of the elections and accordingly to raise George Bush's authority, which has become somewhat shaky, through "successful" actions in the Caucasus.

Moreover, Georgia, which is bankrupt in the political and economic sense, continues to receive unprecedented aid from Western countries. On January 25, 2004, at the inauguration in Tbilisi, Colin Powell declared that the US spared 166 million dollars for Georgia. Following this, about 100 units of heavy armored vehicles were unloaded at Port Poti. The NATO program, which was previously planned to last for two years, was prolonged. American instructors of all kinds of troops visited Georgia. Against this background, the new Georgian leaders did not cease to state revengeful declarations addressed to Abkhazia, the South Osetia and Ajaria.

The Chancellor of Germany also declared his support of M. Saakashvili and Germany spared 12 million Euros for aid and promised an additional 26 million Euros. Furthermore, G. Schroeder promised Tbilisi Germany's support in military affairs, remarking that Georgia is playing a key role in the conflicted Caucasus region and,

³⁹ *Rebellion*, 23 January 2004.

therefore, Germany supports this country.⁴⁰ Such an interest of Germany is again combined by all appearances with the supply of oil. In addition, with the new main pipeline through Georgia, Ukraine, and Poland to Germany, avoids not only Russia but also Turkey, because another “politicized” version Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan remains problematic since it completely depends on the stability in the region of Central Asia – Caucasus and in Turkey. With this new pipeline Georgia and Ukraine pretend to play a key role in the transportation of the hydrocarbons of the Caspian region to Europe. This new plan will transport the resources along the Baku (Azerbaijan) – Supsa (Georgia) branch and by tankers through the Black Sea to a terminal built in Odessa and further transported by the Odessa – Brody (Ukraine) – Plotsk (Poland) pipe to EU countries. Thus, at the end of January 2004, the American company Chevron-Texaco proposed to the Ukrainian government to use the Brody pipe to run six millions tons of oil each year for German manufacturing.⁴¹ In this context, it is interesting to note that M. Saakashvili’s first official visit after the “revolution” was to Ukraine, while his first official visit as president was to Germany.

One may have the impression that these international players are encouraging the new president of Georgia into military adventures which will possibly bring all Georgia into the arena of military actions. The purpose of this provocation is to force Russia to retreat from the Caucasus. However, such a policy of pressure may have the opposite result. It is obvious that in this case the “winning small war” will not take place. Such actions will only make the international situation more complex and the confusion will not be limited to regional conflicts.

The geostrategic intentions of Washington are fairly understandable. This superpower hurries to “mark” borders in this region of life-or-death importance in world affairs, i.e. the “Caspian-Persian energy ellipse,” surrounding it by military bases from all directions. The task of the US is to remove Russia from it and prevent the presence of vigorously developing China in Central Asia, as well as in the Caucasus in the near future. However, it is very unlikely that Washington will be able to control the enormous space of Central Asia

⁴⁰ *Dilis gazeti*, 31 January 2004.

⁴¹ www.utro.ru Article by Ivana Tregubova, 9 February 2004.

independently, without Russia's assistance. Likewise, Russia will not be able to remain, as before, the guarantor of security in this vast territory without the support of the US. Only by joint endeavor will this superpower and regional power be able to contain the pressure of China which is becoming manifest.

Today there are 13 various main pipelines of energy resources in the Caspian region, not only to the west but also to the east.⁴² Two large projects are combined with China. While Moscow and Washington severely compete in the region of Central Asia and the Caucasus, Beijing silently stole forward and without fuss tries to realize important geostrategic projects. Here I mean the Kazakhstan – China oil pipeline and the Turkmenistan – Uzbekistan – Kazakhstan – China gas pipeline.⁴³ Among the 13 main pipelines, four projects are operating now: the Tengiz (Kazakhstan) – Novosibirsk (Russia) oil pipeline; the Baku (Azerbaijan) – Novorossiisk (Russia) oil pipeline; the Baku (Azerbaijan) – Supsa (Georgia) oil pipeline; and the Korpeje (Turkmenistan) – Kurtkui (Iran) gas pipeline.

In addition, there are other variations which could be realized in the near future but they depend directly and unconditionally on the constellation of geopolitical powers in the region: the Kazakhstan – Turkmenistan – Iran oil pipeline; the Kazakhstan – Turkmenistan – Afghanistan – Pakistan oil pipeline; the Baku – Tbilisi – Ceyhan oil pipeline; the Shakh-Denis (Azerbaijan) – Tbilisi – Erzurum (Turkey) gas pipeline; the Trans-Caspian gas pipeline through Turkmenistan, the bottom of the Caspian Sea, the Caucasus and Turkey; the Turkmenistan – Iran – Turkey gas pipeline; and the Dovletabad (Turkmenistan) – Afghanistan – Pakistan gas pipeline.

Not only China but also Japan participates actively in the projects to transport Caspian oil. Japanese giants such as Itochu and Impex are interested in the investment and construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, while Sumitomo has already supplied Georgia with the necessary volume of special pipes.

⁴² Miki Wajima, "Kasupi kai shuhen no tennen shigen [Natural Resources around the Caspian Sea]," Tomohiko Uyama, ed., *Chuo Ajia wo shiru tameno 60 sho* [Getting to Know Central Asia in 60 Chapters] (Tokyo, 2003), p. 275.

⁴³ Ibid.

Obviously, the process of globalization and the new world order imagined after the collapse of the Soviet Union could not but strain the military-political situation in the Transcaucasia as a whole and the Georgian-Abkhazian relationship in particular. It appears that the period of protracted, almost ten-year rivalry between Russia and the US in this important region (1994-2004) is being replaced by a period of "rivalry-cooperation" and of absolute uncertainty.

For large states, the Georgian-Abkhazia conflict has unfortunately the peculiar applicative characteristics determined by the transit corridor of oil and gas pipelines. In this sense, unsurprisingly, the fate of Abkhazia as well as Georgia will eventually be determined after a clear demarcation and definition of spheres of influence of Russia and the US in this part of the Transcaucasia. Without this most important condition, under the continuing onslaught of globalization and the process of redivision of the world, it is impossible to resolve the problem of regulating the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict and any isolated approach seems misleading. By all probabilities one of the two parties will be forced to compromise its interests (possibly partially) in the region to the advantage of the other, but it is indisputable that Georgia and Transcaucasia are of much greater importance for the national security of the Russian federation than of the US.