



Frozen conflicts in the post-Soviet space




Current state of conflicts in the South Caucasus


a region where big powers meet and compete,
and which is now a major energy corridor.

- 
- Nagorno-Karabakh
 - Abkhazia
 - South Ossetia

Conflicts with different intensity,
different methods and tools used for
mediation



Severely impacted by the situation in and around Ukraine and the relations between the Russian Federation and the European Union.



The political environment puts significant limitations on the willingness and/or ability of actors to engage in conflict resolution.



Nagorno-Karabakh



GEORGIA

CASPIAN SEA

AZERBAIJAN

ARMENIA

Nagorno-Karabakh

Baku

Yerevan

Lake Sevan

Merakert

Agdam

Martuni

Imishli

Araks

Lacin

Stepanakert

Susa

Kura

Lacin corridor

Araks

AZER.

Nakhichevan

IRAN

- ARMENIAN-OCCUPIED TERRITORIES
- LINE OF CONTACT

Nagorno-Karabakh

legal status

- The territory is internationally recognised as part of Azerbaijan, which has not exercised power over most of the region since 1991.
- Representatives of the governments of Armenia and Azerbaijan started to hold direct peace talks.

Nagorno-Karabakh

- The official peace process has been unable to reach a peaceful settlement so far.
- However, it is a process that is simultaneously in place, Internationally recognised and used by all participating parties.

Nagorno-Karabakh

- Appearance of an old dispute caught up in historical resentments and a military standoff reminiscent of World War I trench-warfare
- Changing dynamics have produced however an increasingly fluid and unpredictable situation in an already tense region

Nagorno-Karabakh

- Karabakh is not a “frozen conflict.” It is not Cyprus, where the situation could easily stay in the same place for a number of years and there is almost no chance of new fighting
- Here there are a number of factors that keep this conflict “stably unstable” and suggest that the status quo must break at some point – in favor of either peace or war

Nagorno-Karabakh

- The sides view the conflict through radically different prisms
- In Azerbaijan the sting of defeat has been replaced in recent years by renewed confidence
- The rise of AZ as a petro-state much wealthier than Armenia. Its GDP has risen more than 20 times and now stands at \$75 billion (2014)

Nagorno-Karabakh

- The passage of time has also altered Armenia's view of the conflict.
- The occupied territories are increasingly referred to as the “liberated territories”
- The distinction between NK and the surrounding regions is gradually blurring on the ground.

Nagorno-Karabakh

situation on the ground

- Confrontation, low-intensity but volatile, between Azerbaijan and Armenia has entered a period of heightened sensitivity.
- An immediate concern is military miscalculation, with implications that could far exceed those of a localised post-Soviet frozen conflict.

Nagorno-Karabakh

situation on the ground

- Frequent clashes along the Azerbaijani-Armenian frontier far from Nagorno-Karabakh, the conflict's original focus.
- The recent use of 122-mm artillery pieces for the first time since the signing of the 1994 ceasefire agreement and artillery strikes on infrastructure represent yet another step towards full-scale hostilities.

Nagorno-Karabakh

situation on the ground

- The possibility of internal political unrest in both countries increases the uncertainty.
- Unrest at home might tempt leaders to deflect attention by raising military tensions or to embark on risky attempts to capitalise on their adversary's troubles.

Nagorno-Karabakh

- Frequent provocative acts on both sides cause that the near-term threats to stability are increasing
- Acute need to lessen chances of violent escalation during coming months
- There is a risk that rising expectations and the gap between AZ's self-perception and its continued lost territory, could trigger a new conflict

Nagorno-Karabakh

- Time is neither side's ally.
- The arms race is putting pressure on what is perhaps the most militarized zone in Europe, the so-called Line of Contact north and east of Karabakh that marks the ceasefire line between the two sides.
- Azerbaijan relies on energy exports for the vast majority of state revenues
- Armenia's economy has long lagged far behind, and stagnation continues.

Nagorno-Karabakh

- Diplomacy should stress need for a quiet period during which both sides dial down rhetoric.
- Intensified regular contacts as well as meetings between ministers and parliamentarians should be supported.

Nagorno-Karabakh

search for a solution

- A crisis hotline should be reestablished between Yerevan and Baku to lessen chances of a military escalation.
- Diplomacy should act more decisively to broker an agreement. It could advance this by achieving a suspension of arms supplies to both sides.

Nagorno-Karabakh

search for a solution

- The officially designated mediators from the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Minsk Group – led by Russia, the U.S. and France – can deliver results.
- The problem could be resolved only on the basis of compromise and mutual concessions. Without mutual concessions, there can be no solution.

Nagorno-Karabakh

search for a solution

- As political tensions recede in both countries, there should be a concerted effort to restart negotiations, backed by pressure from international actors.
- Firmly and consistently, the sides need to be brought back to the table before someone decides the time has come to use their expensive new weapons.

Conflicts in Georgia

- South Ossetia and Abkhazia
- Both have many common features but also substantial differences
- The solution will probably need many years



Conflicts in Georgia

In the Georgian context several partially conflicting trends could be observed:

- So called treaties signed between the RF and Abkhazia on "Strategic Partnership and Integration"
- And between the RF and South Ossetia on "Alliance and Integration"

Their respective signing and ratification processes dominated the recent period and created a rather confrontational climate

Conflicts in Georgia

Installing additional and very prominent so called border signs along the South Ossetian administrative boundary line was perceived as a provocative step by Georgian government, disregarding and disrespecting the conciliatory steps taken by the Georgian side inter alia through the contacts between Special Envoy Abashidze and Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Karasin.

Conflicts in Georgia

Negative climate has affected the situation on the ground in the two entities - and the prospects for longer term conflict resolution - in particular by increasing restrictions and a climate of intimidation of civil society actors engaged in confidence building activities.

Conflicts in Georgia

Overall, a environment of uncertainty and insecurity has increased in the entities, which is not conducive for efforts directed towards longer term conflict resolution.

Conflicts in Georgia

While this is making efforts in line with the EU's non-recognition and engagement policy more difficult, it is important to continue to support those societal actors that are open minded.

Moves by the Russian side to now implement steps through the back door that the Abkhaz had rejected to include in the treaty or to go even beyond that – e.g. in the context of property rights and oil exploration - should also be seen in this context.

Conflicts in Georgia

Secondly and in parallel to this development, the Georgian government - driven to a large degree by Deputy Foreign Minister David Dondua, who took over the position as Chief Negotiator since the 30th round of Geneva International Discussions in December 2014 - started reviewing the Georgian approach to the entities.

While this has not led to any significant steps so far, it has already impacted on the climate of the discussions, where more of an exchange across the table - if heated at times - started to take place.



South Ossetia



South Osetia

Where do we stand?

- The short sharp war of August 2008 changed the political scene drastically.
- Immense structural damage has been caused, and refugees are unable to return home.

South Ossetia

Where do we stand?

- The situation around the administrative boundary line of South Ossetia remains tense.
- The shock has been contained, but this persisting conflict reminds us that the risk of regression remains.
- The existing tensions weighs heavily on the populations who live close to the separation lines.

South Ossetia

Russian involvement

- RF recognized its independence, contrary to the quasi-totality of the international community, including its closest allies inside the CIS.
- Russia stations around 5000 soldiers in the region of South Ossetia

South Osetia



South Ossetia

ABL borderisation

- Continuing 'borderisation' to the detriment of the local population, particularly those intending to cultivate their fields.
- On September the de facto authorities of South Ossetia terminated simplified procedure for crossing points with TAT.

South Ossetia



South Ossetia

borderisation

- During the last months, ‘borderisation’ has become particularly visible.
- In response, the GEO police started ad hoc patrolling to provide greater security and to ensure TAT farmers’ access.
- Occurance of security incidents is more likely.

South Ossetia

borderization

- Out of the 70 kilometres of the SO ABL that is easily passable, over 50 percent is now fenced.
- Other 'borderisation' activities included the attachment of motion sensors to surveillance pylons.

South Ossetia

borderisation

The installation of multiple surveillance cameras suggests a desire to maintain a continuous watch over this section of the ABL, where TAT and SO populations live in close proximity.

South Ossetia

borderisation

With insufficient infrastructure in the village and the poor road conditions people fear a loss of livelihood as they will no longer be able to take goods into TAT (Tbilisi Administered Territory) for sale or access markets, health care or education facilities on TAT due to the restrictions.

South Ossetia

possible consequences

- In several cases commuters had difficulties crossing ABL onto TAT with their goods.
- In the Akhalgori valley the announced restrictions allegedly raise concerns, as the valley will become fully dependent on Tskhinvali and the RF for the supply of goods.

South Ossetia

type of incidents

- The RF BG (border guards) hotline-holder in SO informed the EUMM that some individual(s) from TAT had crossed the ABL from TAT into SO and removed 90 fencing poles along the ABL.
- On the same day, the EUMM met RF BG representatives at the location and observed that fencing poles had indeed been removed.
- The RF BGs asked the GEO MIA to investigate and provide a response.

South Ossetia

military buildup

- Opening of a new training facility within the RF AF 4th Military Base in SO.
- Periodical rather extensive military training activities in SO
- Recorded explosions and shooting from the direction of SO military bases.

South Ossetia

- According to Z. Abashidze while Georgia had made “dramatic mistakes” in August 2008 it was still a victim of RF aggression.
- The only existing option was to re-establish bilateral relations through a step-by-step approach on non-conflict issues.

South Ossetia

- Former GEO Minister of Defence, I. Alasania, said that the gradual improvement of relations with the RF would create space “for GEO to deal directly with the Abkhaz and South Ossetians”.
- He added that “nobody has any illusion that anything will change this decade...so we have to be patient”.

South Ossetia

conclusions

- On-the-ground reality of ‘borderisation’ and other difficult bilateral issues (such as GEO’s NATO aspirations) make any short-term resolution unlikely.
- In late August Mr Medvedev seemed to backtrack on his earlier comment that the future of ABK and SO “lies with..the Georgian people and the leaders they elect”.

South Ossetia

conclusions

- According to Mr Medvedev the RF would continue building economic, security and socio-political relations with the “two states” of ABK and SO on the basis of “mutual respect and equality”.
- He pledged also to protect both breakaway regions from any “potential conflict or even disappearance”.



Abkhazia



Abkhazia

- Contradicting situation at place
- New more conciliatory GEO approach
- Inward-looking Abkhazia, especially since 2011

Abkhazia

- Abkhazia is cut off from mainstream international politics
- Pushes back against Western countries that have traditionally supported Tbilisi.
- The Abkhaz government has stopped access to foreign diplomats accredited in Tbilisi,

Abkhazia

- Some Europeans have proposed projects in Abkhazia under the EU's strategy of "engagement without recognition,"
- These proposals were rejected by de facto ABK authorities on the ground that they were offering merely a fraction of what Abkhazia gets from Russia.

Abkhazia

- Georgia now has its most progressive government team dealing with the two breakaway territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia
- A minister named Paata Zakareishvili, who has two decades of experience in working with Abkhaz and Ossetians in the nongovernmental sector, holds this portfolio.

Abkhazia

- The previous government, led by Mikheil Saakashvili's United National Movement, had re-cast the conflicts as purely Georgian-Russian disputes
- They downplayed the local origins of them in the late 1980s and early 1990s and the role extreme Georgian nationalism had played in triggering them.

Abkhazia

GEO new approach

- Since taking office, the new government has worked to reverse previous practices. “Saakashvili was always looking for an opportunity to say no to Abkhaz and South Ossetians,” said Zakareishvili. “We are looking for reasons to say yes—while always taking into account of course the state interest of Georgia.”

Abkhazia

GEO new approach

- The results of the new approach have been small but significant
- More commercial traffic across the Inguri, and two new crossing points were opened
- The fear persists that the border will be tightend

Abkhazia

GEO new approach

- The two sides are finally working together properly on the important issue of the missing, both the dead from the war and the living who are detained.

Abkhazia

contradictions

- Ahead of the 7th anniversary of the conflict, conciliatory statements by both GEO and RF political leaders
- These were not, however, adequately supported with positive conciliatory actions on the ground.

Abkhazia

Russian involvement

- Throughout August the RF AF have been conducting training in ABK, starting with training of about 2,000 servicemen from over 200 sapper (military engineer) units of the southern military district.

Abkhazia

Russian involvement

- Further military exercises of the RF AF Southern Military District in ABK focussed on motorised infantry, signals, artillery and intelligence training.

Abkhazia

- GEO former Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili stated that although conflict resolution is a long-term process, “we will eventually settle our relations”.
- He noted that GEO government “remains firm on the return of occupied Abkhazia and South Ossetia”.

Abkhazia

Conclusions

- Abkhazia continue to be a protracted conflict where the irresistible force of Russian protection collides with the immovable object of widespread international recognition that Georgia holds sovereignty over the republic.
- A game-changing move is needed.

Abkhazia

Conclusions

- One of the possible moves is to rebuild the broken railway line around the Black Sea connecting Sochi, Abkhazia, western Georgia and Armenia
- If the railway were to be rebuilt, the benefits would be massive to the whole region.

Abkhazia

Conclusions

- The new Tbilisi government floated the idea last fall, but it met resistance from Azerbaijan and the Georgian opposition.
- Lukewarm reaction from de facto authorities and Russia

Abkhazia

Conclusions

- It is striking to see how many people are either resisting or failing to support a big regional project that could reconnect broken parts of the region.
- It illustrates how everyone has grown comfortable with a status quo that is still producing long-term discomfort to Abkhaz, Georgians and others.







October 16

Involvement of main stakeholders
(EU / USA, Russia)
different approaches
and interest