

The Army and Society in Georgia

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Although quite a bit of time has passed since the well-known May 19-26 engagement between Abkhaz and Georgian forces in the Gali district of Abkhazia (the so-called "six-day" war), it still arouses a lot of interest. Besik Kurtanidze, a Georgian reporter who witnessed the entire conflict, gives his account of the event.

Guerrillas Keep On Fighting

By Besik Kurtanidze

The fruitless five-year Georgian-Abkhaz peace talks have goaded Georgian refugees into taking up arms out of frustration. Small guerrilla units gradually united and soon formed the White Legion in 1996. The Legion has taken responsibility for subversive actions in Abkhazia since then. A new unit - Forest Brothers - was created some time later and has turned into one of the strongest Georgian guerrilla units so far. Of course, 200-300 guerrillas could hardly take control of Abkhazia, but they extremely alarmed the Abkhaz separatists. The guerrillas penetrated deep into Abkhazia bombing targets. Last year's explosion in a passenger train in Gagra was their most distant operation. They blew up vitally important objects - pump stations, grids, airfields - in Sukhumi, Ochamchire and Tqvarcheli. Last autumn they spoiled local elections in the Gali district and riddled polling stations with gunfire throughout the whole Abkhazia. So far, 40 Georgian guerrillas have been killed in Abkhazia, including six of them lost during the May 19-26 engagement in Gali. Paradoxically as it is, just the May fighting is viewed as one of their most successful operations. According to various sources, Abkhaz forces suffered 357 casualties. Despite such losses, they, however, managed to take control of the Gali district.

This spring guerrillas engaged Abkhaz punitive troops and destroyed more than a half of them. Prior to the "six-day war" (May 19-26) Abkhaz authorities has lost control over the so-called "down zone" of the Gali district (the left bank of the Gali Channel). Some Georgian top officials (their names remain unknown) considered that there were enough resources to restore, without much difficulty, the Georgian jurisdiction over the district by May 26 - Independence Day of Georgia. On May 9 MP Bezhan Gunava of the Citizens' Union of Georgia, MP German Patsatsia of the Abkhazia parliamentary group and Murman Tchelia, Georgian "gamgebeli" (head of local administration) of Gali, visited the Gali district and organised the folk holiday "marula" (Georgian national horse-race) with a raising of the Georgian state banner. Meanwhile, Tamaz Nadareishvili, the chairman of the Tbilisi-based Supreme Council of Abkhazia, kept claiming that Abkhaz forces would be incapable of withstanding a Georgian offensive in case of a new war.

Georgian authorities encouraged the guerrillas, promising them armaments and stand-by troops. The guerrillas, therefore, left their hidden bases and took open positions around the Georgian villages in the Gali district. At the same time the relations between the guerrillas and the authorities were somewhat strained. According to informal sources, some of the guerrillas participated in the February 9 assassination attempt against the president in Tbilisi and hostage-taking in the village of Djikhashkari some time later (four UN observers were taken hostage). This time the guerrillas came to believe the Georgian officials who told them that Georgia was ready to wage a large-scale war against the Abkhaz separatists. Their positions in Gali, however, were tactically weak. It would have been much better if they had deployed their forces along the Gali Channel (Abkhaz troops did it later on).

To back the guerrillas, several Interior Ministry detachments of the Mukhrovani Brigade (formerly it belonged to the Security Ministry) and the "Delta" Task Force of the Security Ministry, as well as some servicemen from the Kutaisi and Gori battalions of the Internal Troops and the Telavi battalion of the MOD were deployed in the Gali district on May 18. According to some informal sources, the operations of these troops and guerrillas were co-ordinated by a single staff with participation of MP Irakli Batiashvili, former chief of the information-analytical bureau (now Security Ministry) and a member of the Security Council of the Tbilisi-based Supreme Council of Abkhazia. However, Georgian regular units in fact proved to be of little help as they were armed only with light weapons and had no heavy armaments (artillery, tanks or carriers). Tbilisi, meanwhile, publicly disapproved of a new war in Abkhazia and declared later that the Internal Troops had been deployed in Gali only to maintain an "evacuation corridor" for civilians.

On May 19 Georgian forces successfully withstood an Abkhaz offensive, having seized some heavy armaments and surrounded about 70 Abkhaz servicemen. In the following two days, they fought also quite well. Journalists who visited Gali at that time found the guerrillas and local Georgian residents in high spirits. All of them expected Georgia's sovereignty to be restored in Gali on May 26. The guerrillas did not eschew the cameras and willingly agreed to interviews with journalists.

Russian peacekeepers greatly contributed to the outbreak of hostilities in Gali. They allowed both conflicting parties to deploy their forces in the 12-km safety zone. Earlier, they had sold weapons in the region at rather low prices. The guerrillas remembered that prior to the conflict the Russian Peacekeeping Force (RPF) Command pleaded rotation of personnel and asked them not to block fresh peacekeeping troops which were to be deployed in Georgian villages. In retrospect, however, it is easy to see that instead of rotation the RPF in fact amassed its strength in the "down zone" of the Gali district. Afterwards, in the guerrillas' words, Russian and Abkhaz forces joined and attacked Georgian positions together. "We warned Russian peacekeepers against moving their troops to the village of Tagiloni since we had mined local roads. It's noteworthy that the Abkhaz launched no offensive in this direction. It seems that they were informed by the Russians", one of the guerrilla leaders said. Georgian units, meanwhile, were gradually running out of ammunition. Worse still, the White Legion had been weakened over time by the conflict (due to confrontation between its leaders and Tamaz Nadareishvili, the chairman of the Tbilisi-based Supreme Council of Abkhazia, the unit had been supplied with few ammunition and armaments) and lacked co-ordination with other units. When deploying Internal Troops on the front line, leaders of the White Legion failed to warn other guerrilla units. These last took the Internal Troops for Abkhaz forces and fired upon them. Fortunately, there were no casualties.

"Helicopters of the Russian Peacekeeping Force were making regular reconnaissance flights over our positions. We knew that they collected intelligence for the Abkhaz but there was no possibility to shoot them down as they were protected by Russian fighters. We have never seen such a determined enemy. The more Abkhaz we killed the more of them joined the battle until they finally reached our trenches", one of the guerrillas said. According to

guerrilla sources, Abkhaz forces and North Caucasian mercenaries altogether amounted to 2,500-3,000 men, while guerrillas and Georgian regular units totalled some 1,500 men.

On May 24 Abkhaz troops amassed their strength and launched one more offensive. Following the guerrillas' order, local civilians started to flee the region. One of the armoured personnel vehicles that led Abkhaz forces was later seen in front of the RPF Headquarters in Zugdidi. In an attempt to protect the Enguri Hydro - the largest hydroelectric power plant of Georgia - the Tbilisi-based Interior Ministry of Abkhazia deployed 80 of its servicemen there on May 25. Pridon Indjia, the Georgian minister for mail and communications, was said to be in charge of supplying this unit. After Abkhaz and Georgian delegations reached a truce in Gagra on May 25, Georgia pulled out its Internal Troops and MOD units from the Gali district so that Georgian villages of the Zugdidi district on the left (Georgian) bank of the Enguri river (actual Georgian-Abkhaz border) also appeared protected by only the guerrillas. Despite the truce, Abkhaz forces continued their assault and, ironically, occupied Gali, having swept out all the Georgian population and burned down their houses, right on May 26.

"We must do something about it in the near future as the final loss of Gali means the loss of Abkhazia. There are no civilians in Gali now, so we may operate freely. A lot of embittered people have joined our ranks since the Gali tragedy. For the time being we'll abstain from actions as it is a better tactics at present. Our warriors, however, have set their heart on getting back to Abkhazia and we have great difficulty making them stay quiet", one of the guerrilla leaders said.

Just recently, two health resorts have been bombed in Bitchvinta. It suggests that Georgian guerrillas keep on fighting.

APPROACHING THE WEST

The rubric covers increasing contacts between Western and Georgian public interested in security studies, and the Georgians' attitude towards Western experience of solving defence and security problems.

Is Meddling Of The Military In Politics Unavoidable?

By David Darchiashvili

On July 2 the Centre for Civil-Military Relations and Security Studies of the Caucasian Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development organised a seminar "Comparative Analysis of the Soviet and American models of Civil-Military Relations". The report was presented by a visiting researcher, Ph.D. Stuart J. Kaufman, Associate Professor of the University of Kentucky, who used to study civil-military relations of the former USSR for years and taught this discipline in the University of Kentucky. He visited Georgia to learn the ongoing political processes and especially local ethnic conflicts.

Mr. Kaufman's report covered such topics as participation of the military in political, strategic and economic decision-making, and the society's attitude towards the armed forces. He highlighted peculiarities of the military-industrial complexes in the USSR and USA. Mr. Kaufman emphasised that although pure military issues should be separated from political or economic ones, even democratic societies, let alone autocratic regimes, have difficulty putting this principle into practice. Ideally, the military should stay away from politics

and must be fully loyal to the country's political leadership. However, even in democratic America's recent history the top military have often publicly disapproved of the president's decisions. For instance, General Colin Powell criticised the president's conflict resolution policy in Bosnia. Like any other human being, the military have also their own interests, sympathies or antipathies. It is, therefore, rather difficult for them to be fully immune from civil affairs.

Mr. Kaufman underlined the role of business and groups of economic interests in the army-building policy. He recalled an old American anecdote: funds to manufacture a good fighter can be voted through only if its components are produced in all the electoral districts of America.

At the same time, Mr. Kaufman said there was a way to keep the military a safe distance from politics. To this end, it is necessary to strengthen democratic institutions of the country's governing system, impose an effective civil control over the armed forces, while the military should observe their professional ethics. It is also important if the society respects the military. This may become possible only by mutual efforts and a lasting dialogue between the society and the army.

The Georgian audience was especially interested to learn how to improve the prestige of military service and to compare voluntary and conscription systems of the service. Mr. Kaufman suggested that it would be a rather expensive luxury to shift the whole army to a voluntary basis. He was asked whether the USA applies double standards in its military and foreign policy. For instance, in some cases, such as the Gulf War, America strained to achieve its goals, while in others backed out like, say, in Somalia. In Mr. Kaufman's opinion, it is not quite relevant to use the notion "double standards" here. For American policy, in his words, it is very important whether the vital U.S. interests are threatened in a concrete case or geographical location.

Mass Media And National Security

*By Capt. Koba Liklikadze,
the head of the MOD Press-Centre
Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany*

The George Marshall Centre for Security Studies based in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany, held a seminar on June 22-27 for the representatives of the signatories to the NATO Partnership for Peace program who are in charge of relations with mass media. Organisers of the seminar provided enough materials to prove that independent reporters and officials responsible for governmental strategy may well find common language and co-operate with each other. In other words, it is quite possible to solve the dilemma: national security or freedom of press. Mass media need to obtain and publish comprehensive information as soon as possible. The government, and first the military leadership, often consider it irrelevant to make certain events public. Neglect of security requirements on the part of the media may lead to negative consequences. For instance, during the conflict in former Yugoslavia the Serb TV reported that a Croatian bomb missed a target in Serb positions by 200 meters. On the next day, Croats hit the target.

On the other hand, the army's obsession with secrecy may also bring about detrimental effects. One of the participants of the seminar, Alexey Simonov, a Russian human rights activist, presented an analysis of the Russian federal government's information policy during the war in Chechnya. Russia denied mass media access to the information save the "Kraznaya Zvezda" (Red Star), a periodical of the Russian MOD. This extremely aggravated relations between Russian journalists and the military. On the contrary, Chechen authorities did

not restrict reporters. As a result, Russia lost the information war to Chechnya.

Democratic countries, too, may face such kind of problems. During the Vietnam War American generals were unwilling to reveal details of the army's operations. The resultant antagonism between the American mass media and the military is viewed by many analysts as one of the reasons for America's defeat in Vietnam. Fortunately, relations between mass media and the government in western countries display a lot of positive aspects and samples of balanced interests.

Some problems may be solved if mass media accept the necessary minimum of self-censorship. For instance, ABC abstained from reporting the mission to free American hostages in Iran until the operation was completed. Such behaviour was conditioned by the worry about safety of real people. "Had the NATO prestige been endangered, the broadcasting company would have hardly held back", John Random, a journalist who witnessed this case, said at the seminar. CNN, too, refrained from covering some operations during the Gulf War in order not to jeopardise their success. In exchange for such conscious behaviour, the government should satisfy journalists' needs. A group of 20 journalists visits Pentagon every day. They have a right to interview any military official in a corridor, a dining room or a cabinet.

The Pentagon's planning policy provides for contacts with society, as Pentagon comprehends the importance of communication aspects for achieving its goals. From this viewpoint, the Pentagon's experience is unique. It relies on the first amendment to the American constitution - the freedom to express views without censorship. Do not treat mass media as an enemy but honestly and frankly - this is a slogan of the Pentagon's democratic leadership based on long experience. The Pentagon sticks to the idea that information should be released in detail and in time to allow society, mass media and Congress to check precisely and timely problems of defence strategy and national security. There is an acknowledged principle - information cannot be kept secret or limited in order to protect the government from criticism.

German experience is also noteworthy. On December 12, 1994, the German federal defence ministry ordered all its officials to co-operate with society. Commanders of arms and heads of departments take the greatest responsibility for the issue. Pentagon and the army are very concerned about their positive image. To this end, they hire independent reporters. Although the American daily newspaper Stars and Stripes is financed by Pentagon, it enjoys the freedom of press and can censure any military commander.

Criticism is especially strong when journalists receive no answers to their questions and when they are regarded as enemies and non-professionals. Unfortunately, post-Soviet republics still lack such perception. Their press is divided between governmental clans and the boom in "pocket" journalism goes on.

Military Chronicle

Georgian press reports

Abkhazia

A car of the UN observers exploded at a mine in the Gali district of Abkhazia on June 8, injuring two observers who were hospitalised in Sukhumi. The UN Observer Mission in Georgia may completely cease its activities in the Gali district since the wide use of mines seriously threatened safety of its personnel, informal sources said. Meanwhile, Tbilisi has formally demanded to withdraw Abkhaz armed forces from the district according to the May 25 cease-fire agreement signed in Gagra. Tbilisi also censured Russian peacekeepers for their failure to block movements of Abkhaz troops across the district.

"Sakartvelos Gazeti" No. 14, June 10, p. 2

Unidentified gunmen fired at a helicopter of the Russian Peacekeeping Force (RPF) near the village of Barghebi, the Gali district, on June 11. As a result, the helicopter had to make an emergency landing in the neighbouring Zugdidi district. No casualties have been reported. Georgian guerrillas denied their involvement in the incident. It was a provocation staged by Abkhaz separatists who were eager to spoil the ongoing Georgian-Abkhaz negotiations in Moscow, one of the officials of the Georgian Security Ministry said on condition of anonymity.

"Resonance" No. 157, June 12, p. 2

In his interview with the Sukhumi-based Abkhaz TV Gen. Sergey Korobko, C-in-C of the Russian Peacekeeping Force (RPF) in Abkhazia, claimed that the RPF kept out of the May 19-25 fighting in the Gali district. During these events, in his words, about 150 Georgian elders and children found shelter at the RPF check-points and some of them are still there. Russian peacekeepers had always honestly carried out their mission and would always do, Korobko said.

"Akhali Taoba" No. 166, June 19, p. 3

Eduard Shevardnadze met Gen. Sergey Korobko and Gennady Iliychoy, a Russian envoy, in Tbilisi on June 17. According to Vakhtang Abashidze, the president's press-secretary, their closed-door meeting with participation of Irakli Menagharishvili, the Georgian foreign minister, David Tevzadze, the defence minister, Nugzar Sadjaia, National Security Council secretary, and Vazha Lortkipanidze, the ambassador of Georgia to Russia, was focused on the problems of peacekeeping mission in Abkhazia. The Georgian president underlined that the RPF must follow through its new mandate approved at the last CIS summit. Otherwise, Tbilisi would demand to withdraw the RPF from Abkhazia. Mr. Shevardnadze reminded that so far the RPF Command had failed to fulfil the Russian president Boris Yeltsin's order to co-ordinate the new mandate with Tbilisi and Sukhumi. Mr. Iliychoy said unless repatriation of refugees began in the near future a new peacekeeping mission under the aegis of the UN would be put on the agenda. According to the latest reports, the RPF decided to open 5 new check-points in Gali.

"Sakartvelos Respublika" No. 150, June 18, pp. 1, 2; "Resonance" No. 163, June 18, pp. 1, 2

Gunfire burst out at the Enguri river (actual Georgian-Abkhaz border) on June 22. Some 30 Abkhaz militiamen fired upon the village of Khurcha of the Zugdidi district (the Georgian bank of the river) using machine guns and grenade launchers. The gunfire lasted about 40 minutes, wounding two servicemen of the Georgian Internal Troops deployed in the village.

"7 Dge" No. 73, June 24-25

Although both parties seemed willing to solve the main problem - repatriation of the refugees from the Gali district of Abkhazia - the last Georgian-Abkhaz talks in Moscow reached deadlock, Gen. Sergey Korobko said in his interview with the newspaper. Tbilisi demanded to complete the repatriation in a month, while Sukhumi said the process would take much more time - till the end of the year. Abkhaz authorities, in Korobko's words, pledged not to persecute refugees after they got back and even allow some of them to enlist the Gali militia. In exchange, Sukhumi demanded to lift economic sanctions against Abkhazia but Tbilisi refused. As to refugees, a part of them have already returned to Gali on their own and Russian peacekeepers are doing their best to protect them, Mr. Korobko claims. For the last three weeks, in his words, there have been five acts of terrorism in the Gali district which killed six and wounded 13 people, including 11 peacekeepers. On the whole, 56 servicemen of the RPF have been killed in Abkhazia since 1994 [this number reached 61 on July 12 after five more peacekeepers were killed in the Gali district]. Mr. Korobko blames these acts of terrorism on the White Legion, a Georgian guerrilla unit, but Abkhaz gunmen, in his opinion, must also take their share of the blame. Just recently, 20 of them have been arrested in the Gali district by Russian peacekeepers when plundering houses of local Georgians. Although the RPF is often criticised, it seems that both conflicting parties are interested in the Russian military presence in Abkhazia, Mr. Korobko argues. But for the RPF, in his words, Abkhaz and Georgian

forces would have used heavy armaments during the May engagement in the Gali district and the casualty list would have been much larger. Although the last CIS summit indeed authorised the RPF to facilitate repatriation of refugees (Tbilisi's demand) and suppress terrorists in the Gali district (Sukhumi's demand), these missions have to be co-ordinated with Georgian and Abkhaz authorities. However, there has been no such co-ordination so far. "Zakavkazskie Voennye Vedomosti" (Transcaucasian Military News - a periodical of the Russian defence ministry) No. 75, July 2, pp. 1, 4

Hostilities between Abkhaz and Georgian forces may renew, if Russian frontier guards in Abkhazia were replaced by Georgian troops, Astamur Tania, advisor of the Abkhaz leader Vladislav Ardzinba, commented on Tbilisi's plans to take control of the Georgian home waters beginning on July 16. "I hope Georgia perceives such a danger", he said. The problem, in his opinion, may be solved only through a dialogue between the Georgian and Abkhaz leaders. Sergey Shamba, the Abkhaz foreign minister, also said Sukhumi would not allow Georgian frontier guards to take control of the Abkhaz marine frontier (now controlled by Russian frontier guards) after Russian frontier troops withdrew. The Abkhaz frontier troops, in his words, are going to replace the Russian military.

"Meridiani 44" No. 75, July 3-6, p. 2

"Resonance" No. 178, July 3, p. 7

Col. Djemal Kutateladze, the former military commandant of Tbilisi and commander of the Georgian peacekeeping battalion in Tskhinvali, has been appointed commander of the Georgian military observer mission in Abkhazia.

"Sakartvelos Gazeti" No. 27, June 23

The Army Life

In one of its recent issues, the Orioni newspaper - the only independent periodical of the Samtskhe-Djavakheti region of Georgia - published an anonymous interview with a Georgian soldier about homosexuality in the Georgian army. Just afterwards, the newspaper became a target for authorities. At first, the Military Procurator's Office demanded Amiran Meskheli, the publisher, to account for his activities. After he refused, one of the investigators, Dato Khachidze, visited the editorial office of the newspaper several times being drunk and abused female personnel. There are several military units in Akhaltsikhe but only one of them - the 22nd Brigade - was especially angered at the article. Khatuna Gozanashvili, the editor of the Orioni, temporarily resides in her relative's apartment in Akhaltsikhe (she is Borjomi-dweller). After the interview was published, unidentified persons broke into the apartment. They stole nothing but evidently searched the flat for documents to find out the soldier's name. Despite law-enforcement authorities' pressure, Mr. Meskheli refused flatly to reveal the soldier's identity. On May 18 he was arrested by the police and some officers of the Saburtalo district enlistment office of Tbilisi for refusal to serve in the army, though, in his words, he had received no call-up papers. During enlistment medical examination Meskheli pleaded health problems but was declared fit for the military service and sent right to the 22nd Brigade. His demand for alternative service was rejected by Revaz Gakhokidze, the military commissar of the Saburtalo district: "There is no alternative service in Georgia!". Formally he is right, Levan Alapishvili, senior expert of the parliamentary defence and security committee, comments. Although the parliament passed the law on alternative service last October, there are still no mechanisms of its implementation the main of which - a state commission for alternative non-military conscription - has yet to be set up. Due to such pressure, Meskheli got worse and was hospitalised in Tbilisi. However, law-enforcement authorities threaten to sue him for slander. Some time later, he had a meeting with generals Sokhadze and Razmadze who offered him to publicly disavow the interview but Meskheli refused. One of the officers of the Saburtalo enlistment office told journalists on condition of anonymity that it was the president's representative in the Samtskhe-Djavakheti region who made them arrest Meskheli. At present the newspaper is no longer published, while the

command of the 22nd Brigade is impatiently waiting for Meskheli to be released from hospital.

"Resonance" No. 169, 172; June 24, 27, pp. 7, 11

The Supreme Court of Georgia has sentenced Roin Tzereteli and Paata Kaladze, servicemen of the Koda-based 11th Brigade of the MOD, to 18 and 16 years' imprisonment respectively. The court found them guilty of killing, while drunk, their fellow serviceman, Gia Morbedadze, last December.

"Sakartvelos Gazeti" No. 30, June 26, p. 3

In December 1992 Russia withdrew all its warships, armaments and equipment from the Poti naval base save one landing ship as its captain, Pipia (ethnic Georgian), refused to fulfil Moscow's order. On February 12, 1993, the Georgian state banner was raised at the ship. The Poti Joint Naval Brigade was created at almost the same time. It consisted of several boats, a battalion of marines, an artillery division and a communication detachment. The Brigade has been enlarged since then, first of all thanks to foreign countries which granted Georgia several coast guard boats. However, it now suffers from the sharp deficit of finance. Although Greece has granted the Brigade military uniforms, a lot of the servicemen are still dressed in civilian cloths. Officers face similar problems. In fact, they have to purchase their uniforms on their own salaries. Sanitary conditions in the Brigade are disastrous - sewerage and the fresh water system have been out of order for quite a long time. So far the Brigade managed to escape an outbreak of epidemics but nobody knows how long such a situation will last. There are also navigation problems in the port. When leaving Georgia, Russian forces sank four their warships offshore which now greatly impede movement of vessels. Even Greek experts, who specially arrived in Poti some time ago to help lift them, failed to succeed in their mission.

"Droni" No. 65, June 11-13, p. 5

The Army Building

David Tevzadze, Defence Minister, launched a meeting on June 6 to discuss the current situation in the Georgian army. Addressing the meeting, Johnny Pirtskhalaishili, the Chief of the General Staff of the Georgian Armed Forces, said 150 crimes have been committed in the army since the beginning of the year, including several murders, stealing of weapons, etc. Besides, there were four suicides. Ammunition and foods supplies remain too meagre, while some commanders merely ignore their obligations. This may be regarded as anti-state subversive activities, Mr. Tevzadze said. Staff changes in the MOD, in his words, will continue.

"7 Dge" No. 66, June 8-9, pp. 1, 2

Although the MOD worked out a draft law on the status of military servicemen/servicewomen as early as in 1996, it was brought in the parliament only at the spring 1998 session and nobody can explain the reasons for such a delay. According to the draft, the state guarantees freedom of expression (save state secrets), freedom of consciousness, social and legal security of the servicemen/servicewomen. Officers and soldiers can participate in non-commercial activities and are eligible to vote at general and local elections. On the other hand, they are forbidden to join political parties, take part in rallies, etc. According to Article 18 of the draft, servicemen/servicewomen have a right to "partake the cultural life of the country". Working hours per week in the army are the same as in civil governmental agencies according to the Georgian legislation, while the terms of vacations for soldiers and officers are the same as in the Soviet army. The draft has introduced some novelties. For instance, if a soldier or an officer is lost when fulfilling his/her military obligations, his/her family will get compensation - 10 yearly salaries. The draft defines 10 years as the minimal term of service for Georgian commissioned officers (previously they had to serve at least 25 years). At the same time, there are some unclear notions such as "inadequacy to the military service" or "extremely hard family conditions" - both are defined as legal grounds for relieving from the service. One more provision of the draft gives Georgian

servicemen/servicewomen a right to sue their superiors or governmental agencies for unlawful orders, though they have to obey such orders anyway. According to the draft, inferiors shall not be held responsible for implementing an unlawful order [the law on the status of servicemen/servicewomen was passed at the end of June and published - i.e. come into force - on July 16].

"Droni" No. 64, June 9-11, pp. 5, 8

According to Major Aleko Tzitlauri, the head of MOD department of fuel and lubricants, due to the lack of finance, fuel is in rather short supply in the Georgian army. The situation, in his words, is gradually getting worse. When ceding its military objects to Georgia, Russia left behind the stockpile of lubricants which appeared enough to satisfy the Georgian army's needs over the last 3-4 years. These resources, however, have already run out. As to fuel, the current defence budget allows to purchase only 23% of its required amount.

"Alia" No. 102, June 11-12, p. 2

At the June 15 sitting of the MOD Board Gen. Johnny Pirtskhalaishili reported the results of the recent re-organisation in the MOD. Particularly, the following new bodies have been created: a special staff for the NATO Partnership for Peace program (led by Grigol Katamadze, deputy defence minister), a department of military policy and strategic studies, a training centre for Georgian peacekeepers (the last two are supervised by David Tevzadze and Mr. Pirtskhalaishvili) and a special missions division (at present it is made up of former deputy defence ministers Nodar Tatarashvili, Zaur Uchadze and Tamaz Dumbadze). Revaz Adamia, the chairman of the parliamentary defence and security committee, liked the reforms in the MOD: "David Tevzadze seems aiming to create a Western-type ministry". In 1998 Georgia has to participate in 50 exercises in the framework of the NATO individual partnership program which requires \$600,000 - 80% of the money will be covered by NATO, the other 20% by the U.S. Embassy in Tbilisi.

"Svobodnaya Gruzia" No. 153, June 16, p. 3

"Sakartvelos Gazeti" No. 20, June 17, p. 2

According to the MOD press-centre, David Tevzadze has appointed Vice-Colonel George Gogashvili head of the MOD Main Military Inspectorate. General Gudjar Qurashvili, the former commander of the MOD ground troops, was appointed head of the MOD department of training centres, while the minister himself will temporarily hold the office of the commander of the ground troops. Shalva Kupatadze was assigned as the head of the newly created MOD department of military policy and strategic studies. Teimuraz Kunchulia was appointed head of the apparatus of the defence minister.

"7 Dge" No. 67, June 10-11, p. 2

At his last press-conference Valeri Chkheidze, the chairman of the Frontier Department of Georgia, said the Georgian Coast Guard was ready to take control of the country's home waters, including the Abkhaz sector, starting on July 16. To avoid provocation, Mr. Chkheidze is ready to meet with Vladislav Ardzinba, the Abkhaz leader. Besides, in Chkheidze's words, the Department has worked out several plans, "in co-operation with Moscow", which may enable the Georgian Coast Guard to take control of the Abkhaz marine frontier. So far, the Georgian home waters have been controlled by Russian frontier guards in accordance with the 1994 February 3 Georgian-Russian agreement which, however, has not been ratified by the Georgian parliament. That was why Georgia and Russia had to sign a new border agreement, Chkheidze said. In his words, the Department will gradually take control of the whole state frontier of Georgia. At the first stage, the Georgian Coast Guard will start patrolling home waters. In September-October Georgia will take over the Akhaltsikhe sector of the Georgian-Turkish frontier, while next year the rest of the frontier. The schedule was approved at the June 27 Georgian-Russian border talks in Moscow. Both countries agreed that Russian frontier troops would be gradually pulled out of Georgia. However, some problems have yet to be solved. Russia agreed to cede the barracks of its frontier troops and buildings of its check-points. As to armaments and equipment, the issue is still on the table. Besides, Georgia needs 8-10 thousand frontier guards to defend its borders independently. It has currently less than

a half of them, let alone the lack of professionals. From this viewpoint, foreign aid may be very helpful. Ukraine has already trained 16 Georgian frontier officers and some more of them are now being trained in seven Russian military colleges, including the Federal Academy of Frontier Service. Commenting on the Adjarian leader Aslan Abashidze's June 16 statement (see below), Mr. Chkheidze said it would be all right if the frontier troops in Adjara were manned only by locals. Such a practice has been already established in mountainous regions and proved a success. All the frontier troops of Georgia, however, should be under the central command of the Frontier Department.

"Resonance" No. 175, June 30, pp. 1, 2

"Akhali Taoba" No. 177, June 30, p. 6

Visits. Negotiations. Co-operation

A platoon of the Joint Military Academy of Georgia led by Major Kakhaber Goglidze took part in the June 2-20 NATO Partnership for Peace (PFP) exercise "Neighbour-98" in North Carolina, USA. The exercise aimed to train the tactics of humanitarian operations - evacuation of civilians, defence of vital objects, transport convoys, etc.

"Svobodnaya Gruzia" No. 142, June 2, p. 3

On June 2 David Tevzadze met an American delegation led by Stefan Sestanovich, Advisor of the U.S. State Secretary for the CIS. The talks were focused on the Georgian-American military co-operation and ongoing reforms in the MOD of Georgia. Military relations between the two countries were developing quite efficiently and successfully, Edward Warner, U.S. Deputy Defence Minister and a member of the delegation, said.

"Svobodnaya Gruzia" No. 143, June 3, p. 3

Revaz Adamia, the chairman of the parliamentary defence and security committee, has met a delegation of the U.S. Aviation Agency. Both parties agreed to develop their co-operation in the fields of anti-aircraft defence and aviation management. Mr. Adamia met also the British military attaché in Georgia and a group of British naval experts. The talks were focused on the prospects of British assistance in developing the Georgian Coast Guard and on the two countries' co-operation in defence issues.

"Akhali Taoba" No. 156, June 9, p. 4

Cadets of the Joint Military Academy of Georgia took part in the PFP exercise "Cooperative Osprey 98" in the Camp-Lejeune, USA. The exercise that started on June 2 and involved about 2,000 participants from 16 countries simulated peacekeeping missions - control of check-points, anti-smuggling operations, protection of civilian population, mine cleaning, convoys, etc. Besides, a group of Georgian officers took part in another PFP exercise - "Cooperative Banish 98" - in the Netherlands on June 15-26 which was focused on mine-cleaning operations. Meanwhile, the Georgian MOD is actively preparing grounds to create a Georgian peacekeeping force. On the basis of a Georgian-Ukrainian preliminary agreement, the two countries have worked out regulations of a joint Georgian-Ukrainian peacekeeping battalion which must be formed soon.

"Sakartvelos Gazeti" No. 19, June 15, p. 1

"Droni" No. 64, 67; June 9-11, 16-18; pp. 8, 5

Two Georgian coast guard boats and a platoon of marines participated in the PFP naval exercise "Cooperative Partner 98" in Romania. On the way to Romania, one of the Georgian boats - Iveria - was damaged by a storm and passed the rest of the way on tow. In Konstantsa she was repaired and put in order. The exercise aimed to train mine-cleaning operations, rescue and embargo missions. Reportedly, Georgian marines led by Capt. Badri Ghoghonadze performed quite well, though their equipment and armaments were obviously inferior against that of the other participants. On the whole, the Georgian servicemen did their best and their efforts were highly appreciated by the command of the exercise. At the same time, there were some problems. As it appeared, Georgian sailors - commissioned and warrant officers, and the ranks - have yet to improve their

skills and, no less importantly, knowledge of English. From this viewpoint, the two-week exercise was rather helpful.

"Droni" No. 65, 67, 76; June 11-13, 16-18; July 7-9; pp. 1, 2, 5

According to a recently signed Georgian-Turkish military co-operation agreement, Turkey will grant the Georgian MOD almost \$5.5 million this year. The money will be spent on two programs: personnel training and repairs of the barracks. In particular, the MOD is going to reconstruct the Gori training centre which is to train the first Georgian peacekeepers in the near future, and purchase equipment and communication devices for its would-be peacekeeping troops. Besides, some of the money will be spent to buy navigation equipment for the Navy. Ankara also offers to train 50 Georgian officers in Turkish military colleges. Georgia has become the first country to get such kind of Turkish assistance.

"Resonance" No. 157, June 12, p. 2

David Tevzadze took part in a regular session of the Council for Euroatlantic Partnership in Brussels. In his speech he highlighted the ongoing reforms in the Georgian MOD and the problem of Abkhazia. While in Brussels, Mr. Tevzadze and Igor Sergeev, his Russian opposite number who also participated in the session, held their first-ever talks to discuss a development strategy for the two country's military co-operation. "The talks were productive and rather positive", Sergeev said adding that it was not time yet for him to visit Georgia. Tbilisi and Moscow, in his words, should first work out all the necessary documents. Not only the military but politicians also must take part in this process, he said. Mr. Tevzadze blamed "some political forces" and mass media for intending to spoil the Georgian-Russian relations. The parties abstained from discussing the problem of Abkhazia. According to the MOD press-centre, both ministers agreed to set up a joint group of experts to work out the co-operation strategy.

"Alia" No. 103, June 13-14, p. 1

"Sakartvelos Gazeti" No. 16, 23; June 12, 19, pp. 1, 2

The U.S. Congress has approved a program to aid the Georgian frontier defence. In the framework of the program Georgia will be granted \$18 million in 1998. To discuss the program implementation, a delegation of the U.S. Customs arrived in Tbilisi on June 22 for a three-day visit. The program aims to improve control on the Georgian borders and provides for three main directions: purchase of equipment, personnel training and consultative services.

"7 Dge" No. 73, June 24-25, p. 5

Miscellany

The Vaziani airfield is the only Russian military one in Georgia with the landing-strip fit for all kinds of aircraft, Vice-Colonel George Uabov, the head of the airfield, says in his interview with the newspaper. Russia can no longer maintain this object. So 200-300 skilled Russian servicemen deployed there at present will be either relieved or sent to other units. For its part, Georgia has neither enough finances nor adequately trained personnel to take over the airfield. It means that the airfield is going to stop operations as there will be in fact nobody to maintain safety flight measures. It will take Georgia two or three years to train its own specialists. But by that time all the valuable equipment of the airfield may be plundered.

"Alia" No. 101, June 9-10, pp. 1, 15

Conscription and frontier defence should be based on a regional principle, Aslan Abashidze, the Adjarian leader, said at his June 16 press-conference in Batumi. Frontier troops in Adjaria must be, in his opinion, manned only by locals. Besides, Batumi wants to exercise the frontier control independently from Tbilisi. "Historically, we have always defended this frontier and will always do", he said about the Adjarian sector of the Georgian-Turkish border. Mr. Abashidze is proud that Adjaria, in his words, has more and better trained frontier guards than the rest of Georgia combined, and enough patrol boats to control the Adjarian marine border on its own.

"Sakartvelos Gazeti" No. 20, June 17, p. 1

On June 18 still unidentified gunmen fired from the Ingushetian territory upon a Russian-Ossetian joint check-point at the Russian-Georgian border. As a result, several cargo vehicles were burned down in the neutral zone. No casualties have been reported.

"7 Dge" No. 71, June 19-21, p. 1

According to Lt. Gen. Sultan Sosnaliyev, former defence minister of Abkhazia, the Abkhaz army stems from a regiment of internal troops led by Viktor Kakalia, an Afghan war veteran. On September 6, 1992, Kakalia was appointed deputy chairman of the state defence committee of Abkhazia. In October 1993 Vladimir Arshba was appointed defence minister. After being wounded, he was succeeded by S. Sosnaliyev. Sultan Sosnaliyev (Kabardinian by ethnicity) was born on April 23, 1942. He has graduated the Syzran military aviation college and Zhukov Academy (both in Russia). In 1961-93 he served in the USSR Air Force, commander of a regiment being his last position. In August 1992 he was assigned as the head of staff of the Abkhaz militia. In October the same year he was appointed head of the general staff and deputy defence minister of Abkhazia. In May 1993 he was assigned as acting defence minister, while in December 1993 he was awarded the rank of Lieutenant General. Speaking about the Georgian army which "invaded" Abkhazia in 1992, Mr. Sosnaliyev described it as "motley units which hardly reminded of a regular army". Artillery and armoured troops were the strongest points of the Georgian army, while infantry the weakest one as soldiers were afraid to fight in close contact. During the battle of Sukhumi Abkhaz intelligence services managed to intercept Georgian radio communications and taking advantage of their knowledge of the Georgian language managed to deceive the Georgian military several times so that they once shot down a Georgian aircraft. Most of its armaments the Abkhaz army seized from the Georgian troops, Sosnaliyev claims. For instance, after the battle of Gagra Abkhaz forces captured 40 armoured vehicles and 70 more of them in September 1993.

The Abkhaz Air Force was created by Viyacheslav Eshba. August 27 is celebrated in Abkhazia as Aviation Day. That day in 1992, the first Abkhaz combat planes - several sport Soviet-build Yak-52 armed with machine guns - took off. Later on, Abkhazia managed to get some helicopters. During the war the Abkhaz Air Force made 400 flights.

In September 1992, Lev Katiba, the captain of a civil ship, began to build up the Abkhaz Navy. He transformed several tourist boats into battle ships having armed them with machine guns and grenade launchers. The Navy launched its first combat operation at the battle of Gagra when it provided fire support and carried out a landing mission. Afterwards, the build-up of the navy was continued by R. Nanba and I. Achba. The former was a warrant officer of the USSR Navy, while the latter a reserve officer. In January 1993 I. Achba was appointed commander of the Abkhaz Navy. Capt. Ali Aliyev, chairman of the parliament of the Confederation of Highland Peoples, also contributed greatly to the navy-building in Abkhazia. The Abkhaz Navy proved a decisive factor during the battle of Sukhumi in 1993. Abkhaz warships armed with surface-to-air missiles actually blocked the Sukhumi airport and downed three Georgian aircraft.

Abkhaz artillery troops date from September 1992. The first artillery battery was made up of two Alaziani meteorological guns. During the war, Abkhaz forces seized 80 artillery systems from the Georgian army, including 5 Grad missile systems, 120 and 88 mm grenade launchers - 42 altogether, anti-aircraft guns Zu-23-4 and Zu-57, etc.

"7 Dge" No. 72, June 22-23, p. 3 (reprinted from "Abkhazia" No. 5, a periodical issued in Russia)

Abkhaz armed forces launched three-stage manoeuvres on June 16 focused on amphibious operations and airborne landing. Vladimir Mikanba, the Abkhaz defence minister, said he was satisfied with the results of the manoeuvres which ended on June 19.

"Alia" No. 108, June 22, p. 3

The Supreme Court of Georgia has sentenced Akaki Djavakhishvili (born in 1957), the former head of the MOD Commercial Department, to 12 years' imprisonment for embezzlement. He was found guilty of having embezzled 1,223,779 GEL (about \$900,000). Two his accomplices - Vasil Bedoidze (born in 1964) and Paata Gantsemlidze (born in 1965) - were sentenced to 2 years' imprisonment each. "Sakartvelos Gazeti" No. 31, June 27

The so-called 10th Training Centre of the USSR Navy used to be a unique Soviet military object. About 450 cadets from 36 countries - Romania, Bulgaria, Vietnam, Libya, Cuba, Nicaragua, Iraq, Cambodia, Guinea-Bissau, India, Ethiopia, etc. - were trained there every year. In 1992 Russia withdrew almost all the equipment and armaments from the Centre. The rest of the property was plundered by provisional administrations that succeeded each other in Poti so that there are in fact only half-ruined barracks in the Centre nowadays. All the officers of the Centre - 220 altogether - were forced to resign (only 6-7 of them are now serving in the Georgian navy), including its last commander, Capt. Gennady Sitnikov, even though he was willing to take office in the Georgian navy and persuaded the Russian military to leave behind some of their armaments. A good chunk of the territory is now in the possession of refugees. Hundreds of them are now dwelling in the Centre so that the Poti naval brigade deployed there has great difficulty carrying out its missions.

"Droni" No. 72, June 27-29, p. 3

The first international inspection to control quotas of the CFE agreement (Conventional Forces in Europe) in the Georgia-based Russian troops has completed its work. The inspection was made up of 9 experts from USA, Turkey and Greece who inspected the 62nd Russian military base (Akhalkalaki) and found no violations there.

"Zakavkazskie Voennye Vedomosti", No. 74, June 30, p. 1

The international agency of nuclear energy is going to finance construction of a temporary depository for radioactive wastes in Vaziani (20 km east from Tbilisi). The project costs \$1.5 million. Besides, the agency has delivered \$200,000 worth of equipment for an ad hoc state commission to examine the problem of radioactive contamination in Georgia. The equipment will be mainly used to examine radioactive situation in Georgian military units. Eduard Shevardnadze decreed to create the commission last year, after 11 Georgian frontier guards of the Lilo training centre had developed a skin disease linked to radiation (caesium 137). The commission has already inspected 30 military units and revealed radioactive wastes almost in all of them.

"Resonance" No. 177, July 2, p. 4

Press Digest

The government's plans to take control of the Georgian-Turkish border and the country's home waters has become the subject of much debate in the press.

Although Georgia is a seaside country, there are no traces of an ancient Georgian navy - a rather thought-provoking fact - in the history, the Meridiani 44 (No. 74) remarks. In the modern world, however, a country's sovereignty and independence, it is argued, depends just on its ability to control the frontiers, including the marine border, independently. That is why the Georgian government is so anxious to take control of the state frontier of Georgia, more precisely, of the Georgian-Turkish border and the country's home waters (currently controlled by Russian frontier guards). Unfortunately, Georgian naval forces - the Navy (MOD) and the Coast Guard (Frontier Department) - are made up of only small boats. Nevertheless, Valery Chkheidze, the chairman of the Frontier Department of Georgia, feels hopeful that his department with 11 coast guard boats has enough sea power. If Russian frontier troops are indeed replaced by the Georgian Coast Guard, the geo-political situation in the region will

change completely, giving added weight to Georgia, the article points out. The Kremlin will hardly like such development of events. On the other hand, the West seems likely to negotiate geo-political problems with Georgia only after the country meets at least elementary requirements. Independent frontier control is one of them. Under the circumstances, the Meridiani 44 claims, Abkhazia may prove the main Russian trump-card. Sukhumi has already warned that Abkhaz forces will sink every Georgian warship in Abkhaz home waters. These are not mere words. The Abkhaz navy performed rather impressively during the war in Abkhazia. Not long since Abkhaz forces were just about to deal a blow to Russian frontier guards after these last attempted to block the Sukhumi sea port - a clash was avoided only narrowly. They will surely not hesitate to fire at Georgian patrol boats. If Georgia had large warships, there would be no worry. But there are no such. It is extremely doubtful, therefore, that Georgia will be really able to take control of the Abkhaz sector of its marine border. In all likelihood, the Georgian Coast Guard will carry out a more feasible task - control the rest of the marine border - while Turkish ships freighted with foods, fuel and "some other goods" will continue to visit freely Sukhumi and Gagra, the Meridiani 44 concludes.

The problem of Abkhazia, as usual, remains in the focus of the press. The more so, the mandate of the Russian Peacekeeping Force is approaching its deadline - July 31.

The Georgian government will hardly demand to withdraw the Russian Peacekeeping Force from Abkhazia even though it actually did nothing to prevent the recent engagement between Abkhaz and Georgian forces in the Gali district of Abkhazia, Meridiani 44 (No. 68) argues. Implicit in Tbilisi's position is the fact that Georgia still lacks resources to wage a large-scale war against Abkhaz separatists. The army-building in Georgia, in the author's opinion, has yielded few practical results so far. In case of a new war, there is no guarantee that military operations will not expand over the whole western Georgia. Besides, if Russian peacekeepers are pulled out, their armaments may "surprisingly" appear in the possession of Abkhaz forces. It seems, therefore, the Meridiani 44 suggests, the withdrawal of the RPF will make sense only if the Georgian leadership is ready for a serious compromise. At the same time, the Meridiani 44 (No. 72) continues the debate, Georgia has a rather effective tool against Sukhumi - a large-scale guerrilla warfare. It is in fact the only thing Abkhaz authorities really fear. Of course, Abkhaz forces may hit back by sending their commandos over the Enguri river to bomb targets on the Georgian territory. But if Georgia fails to check such an attempt, the newspaper argues, it must be no longer regarded as an independent and sovereign state. Georgian guerrillas, in the newspaper's opinion, may seriously jeopardise the current Abkhaz regime provided they get enough finances and armaments from Tbilisi. At best, they should cross the Gali Channel so that the Gali district will break away from the rest of Abkhazia. Guerrillas may also regularly bomb Tqvarcheli, Ochamchire and Gulripshi districts but they should abstain from terrorising civilians. Sukhumi must perceive that guerrilla warfare will never cease unless it agrees to compromise, the journalist of the Meridiani 44 concludes.