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October-November events in Georgia from the viewpoint of civil-military relations

By David Darchiashvili

In late October-early November Georgia saw political events that were important from the viewpoint of civil-military relations. A serious confrontation has broken out recently between independent mass media and some Georgian generals. The latter came under intense critique from mass media, which accused the agencies, led by those generals, of corruption, illegal business activities, wide-spread violation of human rights, connections with criminal clans of the Pankisi Gorge, involvement in drug trafficking, and planning a risky raid of Chechen guerrillas in the Kodori Gorge.

These generals are not military men in its strict sense. They represented the highest authorities in the MIA and MSS. However, their reaction, as well as their real status and power, makes the problem relevant to civil-military relations. These agencies are directed by police and security generals, and fall into the category of paramilitary structures, in accordance with an old Soviet tradition, which is still alive in Georgia. Besides, several thousand servicemen of the Interior Troops, which are subordinated to the MIA, simultaneously constitute a part of the country's military forces. At the same time, some public statements of General Kakha Targamadze, former interior minister, gave a strong impression that freedom of speech, as well as the constitutional order and supremacy of civil government in general, did not mean much for him, as far as his personal positions and influence were concerned. Targamadze's position and influence were impressive. Despite negative attitude of a large number of MPs and the justice minister's allegations that the police general, as well as the security minister, and his team were involved in lots of criminal activities, the president has been rather wary of carrying out any serious staff changes in power agencies until recently.

Even when the chairman of the parliament demanded to dismiss Kakha Targamadze amidst large-scale protest rallies of thousands of citizens angered by the policy of power ministries, and the government in general, Shevardnadze said resignation of the interior minister would mean that of the president. In such a situation Targamadze's status reminded of the military during

praetorian regimes. Moreover, the chairman of the parliament compared him with generals of some Latin American countries ruled by powerful cartels.

Thousands of protesters crowded in front of the parliament on November 1, while the above-mentioned Georgian paramilitary leaders and the procurator general run the gauntlet of criticism from MPs. As a result, the interior minister was forced to step down. The security minister resigned some time before. Resignation of the procurator general looked as a tragicomedy. Lagging behind the events, the president made up his mind and sacked the entire government. Such an outcome was largely facilitated by a statement of the chairman of the parliament who stated that he obviously disagreed with the president's policy and promised to resign if the odious ministers and the procurator general also resigned.

From the viewpoint of civil-military relations these events raise certain hopes. Wealth, weapons, and clannish relations of influential people proved useless against public indignation and people's aspiration for law and order. Suddenly, it was revealed that praetorian and clannish structures are not rooted in Georgia as deeply as they seemed before. It must be mentioned also that the list of odious ministers did not include the defence minister. There are strong grounds to assume that the army might have been ready to check any Targamadze's attempts to use force. Some analysts consider this aspect a crucial element of the above-described chain of events. In addition, Georgia's western partners did not put much confidence in either the interior or security minister, and their attitude also made impact on the president who has always tried to balance democracy and values of the Soviet past.

However, this is only one step towards improvement of the Georgian security sector. It is hard to say whether the newly appointed ministers will be able at least to reduce the lawlessness so widely spread in their agencies. System reforms need the president's and the parliament's unequivocal support, while the society must be ready for a long and daily struggle for the rule of law and justice. It remains to be seen whether the October-November 2001 "revolution" heralded a new era in the country's life or new dangers will challenge Georgia in the future. It is not unlikely that those governmental structures, which are apparently not interested in democracy and the rule of law, will strike back.

Are weapons illegally transited through Georgia?

By Koba Liklikadze Radio Liberty

UN experts of drugs control have increasingly often focused their attention on Georgia and Caucasian countries in the context of illegal drugs trade. Worse still, they already speak about the so-called "Caucasian Route", a channel to smuggle huge amounts of drugs to Turkey and further to Europe, according to a respective UN commission. Now there is a real danger that the same Caucasian Route may soon be involved in illegal weapons trafficking, unless Georgian security services take efficient counter measures.

It is a common knowledge that criminal cartels controlling illegal drugs and weapons trade seek transit routs just in countries plagued with such problems as political instability, terrorism, ethnic conflicts, economic crisis, and social tensions. Obviously, Georgia perfectly fits the bill. Illegal weapons trafficking is also the case here, though it has not reached the international scale yet

being limited to the Caucasian region only, thanks to the difference between Soviet and western calibres of weapons.

It must be mentioned that transit routes for weapons trafficking opened up in Georgia mainly in 1992. This development was greatly facilitated by the outbreak of conflicts in Abkhazia and Nagorny Karabakh, while Russian troops in the region and their commander General Fedor Reut were the main actors of the illegal trade. Not surprisingly, the defence committee of the Russian Duma investigated the general's activities and accused him of having illegally sold almost one million USD worth of military equipment. It must be mentioned that some Georgian high-ranking officials were also involved in the business. They used the war in Abkhazia as a shield to cover their "black business". The military police revealed a hidden depot in one of the houses at the Ninoshvili Street in Tbilisi in 1995 with dozens of rocket launchers, submachine guns, explosives, radio devices, and other equipment. The case was investigated and commanders of artillery and air defence units were indicted.

Irakli Aladashvili, a military observer of the Kviris Palitra newspaper, looked into the problem. "There were quite a few instances when "Grad" missiles were shipped to Bosnia by a commercial jetliner - I think it was Tu-154 - as early as during the war in Abkhazia. There is also some evidence that weapons were supplied to the Armenian army by train during the war in Karabakh. On one occasion, in 1994, the authorities detained a column of vehicles smuggling shells for 130mm howitzers to Azerbaijan". Russian officials deny involvement of the Russian military in weapons trafficking. At present Russian politicians and especially mass media put a lot of effort into criticising Georgia and trying to shift public attention to western weapons. According to a Georgian political analyst Ramaz Klimiashvili, the Russian embassy in Georgia made an official protest in June, claiming that the Georgian office of the Red Cross had received 1,000 military first-aid kits from Estonia, which were then supplied to Chechen guerrillas through the Pankisi Gorge. It is hard to say whether it was wrong of the Red Cross to provide medical aid to wounded guerrillas but in their protest Russian diplomats openly pointed to a route, which, in their opinion, was used to smuggle weapons to Chechnya. For the last two months there have been several reports about Chechen guerrillas using US-made shoulder-launched anti-aircraft "Stinger" missiles, which were allegedly delivered to Chechnya from the Georgian territory. It is noteworthy that the emphasis was laid just on American anti-aircraft weapons.

The main point at issue is that the US government has removed the arms embargo from Georgia this year and is now going to develop a program of piecemeal military assistance to Georgia. In the framework of the program, the Georgian army is expected to get American military equipment. However, there is a strict precondition for the American military assistance: the US equipment should not fall into hands of terrorist groups or illegal paramilitary units. No doubt, once US-supplied military equipment is smuggled to Chechnya, the Russian media will launch a fierce propaganda campaign, which may be even worse than Russian media coverage of the Kodori incident or purchase of Czech-made tanks.

So Russian officials will always try to find fault with the Georgian government and blame it for illegal arms trafficking in order to spoil international assistance programs. Under such circumstances, the Georgian government has the only right choice - it must impose strict arms

control mechanisms to ensure that Georgia does not transform into a transit route for weapons smuggling, just as it happened in case of the drugs trafficking.

MILITARY CHRONICLE

Conflict zones

Three hooded gunmen attacked the commander of the Georgian guerrilla unit "Forest Brothers" David Shengelia's house in Zugdidi on September 2, killing his mother- and father-in-law and wounding his brother-in-law. Shengelia himself escaped being killed only by chance. Official Georgian sources blamed the incident on Abkhaz terrorists, though it remains unclear how these last managed to penetrate into Zugdidi. "Akhali Taoba" No. 243, September 4, p. 2

Tensions escalated greatly in Abkhazia after Chechen and Georgian guerrillas reportedly took control of the Giorgievskoe village of the Gulripshi district of Abkhazia on October 3, some 50 km from Sukhumi. Abkhaz sources said one Abkhaz serviceman was killed and 6-7 local dwellers were missing. Abkhaz officials claimed to have retaken the village next day and captured two guerrillas - a Chechen and a Georgian - who were conveyed to Sukhumi for questioning. Diter Boden, the UN envoy to Georgia, confirmed the information. For their part, Georgian authorities denied the news saying that there had been no clashes in Giorgievskoe or elsewhere in Abkhazia. They also denied the presence of Chechen guerrillas in Abkhazia. Later, however, George Baramidze, the chairman of the parliamentary defence and security committee, said a 400-strong unit of Georgian and Chechen guerrillas had entered Abkhazia through the Kodori Gorge and clashed with Abkhaz forces in the Gulripshi district of Abkhazia. The Georgian security minister also acknowledged that a unit of Chechen guerrillas infiltrated into Abkhazia, though he said he had no idea how they reached Abkhazia. Informal sources claimed that Chechen guerrillas were transported to Abkhazia from the Pankisi Gorge (at the Russian-Georgian border) by vehicles of the Georgian interior troops. Tbilisi fiercely denied the allegation.

Engagement between Abkhaz troops and joint Chechen-Georgian guerrilla units continued through the first weeks of October. Being alarmed by the development of events, the Abkhaz separatist government announced mobilisation, while Russia reinforced its troops in Abkhazia and deployed additional patrols of peacekeeping troops in the Zugdidi and even in the Mestia district, i.e. outside of the safety zone. David Tevzadze, the Georgian defence minister, said the Russian military command did not coordinate these moves with the Georgian MOD. There were also reports about concentration of Russian troops near the border with Abkhazia, in Sochi and Adler. As a part of their counter measures, Abkhaz government officials said they were preparing documents, which envisage Abkhazia's "associative union" with Russia. They said the issue might be settled through a referendum.

A Mi-8 helicopter crashed near the Amtqeli village of the Gulripshi district of Abkhazia on October 8, killing all nine people on board: three crewmembers, five members of the UN military observer mission (UNOMIG), including the head of the observer mission in the conflict zone, and a local interpreter. The helicopter was making an inspection flight over the Kodori

Gorge. The Abkhaz authorities said it was shot down by Georgian guerrillas. For their part, the guerrillas denied responsibility, claiming absence of anti-aircraft weapons in their arsenal.

Several Russian Su-25 fighters bombed vicinity of the Sakeni and Omarishara villages of the Kodori Gorge in early October 9 morning. No casualties were reported. Following the air strike, the Georgian MOD fortified its troops in the Kodori Gorge in order to protect local Georgian population.

The Georgian media reported in mid October that Georgian and Chechen guerrillas made a successful advance on the Abkhaz capital, Sukhumi, and even took control of its TV tower. Later, however, both Abkhaz and Georgian officials denied this information. For their part, Abkhaz sources claimed significant success in curbing guerrilla activity in the Kodori Gorge. Abkhaz defence ministry said its forces had surrounded a group of 200 Georgian and Chechen guerrillas in the Kodori Gorge, who suffered heavy casualties from strikes by Abkhaz helicopter gunships.

Meanwhile, in a briefing on October 15 Eduard Shevardnadze told journalists that Georgia was not going to rebuild its territorial integrity by force. Military solutions to the conflict can be considered, in his words, only as "the last resort option when all other means prove inefficient". The president expressed readiness for direct talks with the Abkhaz leadership at any convenient time.

Some time later Abkhaz authorities announced that Chechen and Georgian guerrillas were surrounded in the Kodori Gorge with no chances to break away. According to Georgian sources, 16 Abkhaz troops were killed and 40 wounded in gunfire by that time. As to Georgian casualties, nine Georgian guerrillas were reportedly wounded and hospitalised in a local hospital in the Kodori Gorge, while the authorities were looking for ways to transport them to Tbilisi. Some 60 Chechen guerrillas were also wounded, Georgian sources said.

On October 16 the Chechen rebels led reportedly by Ruslan Gelayev, a notorious Chechen warlord, managed to break out from the encircled Kodori Gorge and moved in the direction of the Marukhi Pass at the Russian-Georgian border in an apparent attempt to flee to Russia. Abkhaz sources said the Abkhaz troops were hunting down the rebels and killed some 20 of them. Having failed to reach the border, Chechen guerrillas were forced to retreat to the Gorge.

Su-25 fighters and military helicopters bombed the Kodori Gorge and the Marukhi Pass on October 17. Georgian officials claimed that Su-25 fighters flew from the Russian territory, while helicopters approached from Sukhumi. The air strike killed reportedly 10 Chechen guerrillas and one Abkhaz POW, and wounded three Georgian and three Chechen guerrillas. In addition, several Georgian border guards were said to be missing. Local Georgian population fled to adjacent forests in panic. Georgian officials claimed later that one of the helicopters was downed in mountains. The next day, on October 18, Su-25 fighters targeted the Gorge again, dropping a dozen of bombs in mountainous areas. No casualties were reported this time. The Marukhi Pass came under attack again on October 28. Reportedly, four Su-25 and six helicopter gunships bombed the area for some 20 minutes. No casualties were reported. Air strikes resumed the next day, on October 29: several Su-25 and Mi-24 helicopters dropped bombs in the Marukhi Pass

and in the Kodori Gorge. Such frequent bombing forced the Georgian government to close all schools in the Kodori Gorge and suspend the educational process indefinitely. "Resonance" No. 246, 253, 258; September 21, October 5, 10; pp. 2, 3, 5 "Akhali Taoba" No. 274, 277, 279, 281; October 5, 8, 10, 12; pp. 2, 3 "Akhali Meridiani" No. 2, October 12-15, p. 2 "Sakartvelos Respublika" No. 251, 254, 266; October 12, 16, 29; pp. 1, 2, 3 "Dilis Gazeti" No. 227, October 16, p. 1 "Resonance" No. 268, 275; October 19, 30; pp. 1, 6

The Georgian parliament passed a resolution on October 11 with 154 votes against 2, demanding to pull out Russian peacekeeping troops from Abkhazia. The same day refugees from Abkhazia gathered in the centre of Tbilisi, in front of the State Chancellery, to show solidarity with Georgian guerrillas. They also demanded to withdraw Russian peacekeepers and required the government to take steps to regain Abkhazia. In a rather seldom gesture Shevardnadze came out of the building to address the people directly. He assured that he assumed full responsibility for the issue. "We are now closer to victory than ever", he said. In late October, however, Georgian officials toned down their position. Particularly, while on official visit to Moscow on October 27-29, Zurab Zhvania, the chairman of the parliament, told Russian journalists that the issue of the Russian peacekeeping forces was not solved yet and required further consultations. In his words, Russia remained a priority country for Georgia and the conflict in Abkhazia could not be solved without Russian mediation. "Resonance" No. 273, October 27, p. 2 "Sakartvelos Respublika" No. 251, 254; October 12, 16; pp. 1, 2, 3

Georgia extradited 13 North Caucasian nationals to Russia on October 7. They were detained on June 6 for illegal trespass on the Georgian territory. "Akhali Taoba" No. 277; October 8; p. 2

15 Georgian residents of the Gali district of Abkhazia, including women and children, were taken hostage by Abkhaz militiamen on October 23. All of them were released several days later. At the same time, Abkhaz authorities arrested several Georgian guerrillas in the Gali district. One of them was reportedly executed. Informal sources said also that Georgian guerrillas had earlier kidnapped several Abkhaz residents. "Resonance" No. 273, 275; October 24, 30; pp. 1, 2

Denma Jakhiaia, a 13-year-old resident of the Gali district of Abkhazia, was severely beaten by a drunk serviceman of the Russian peacekeeping force on October 24. He escaped being killed only by jumping from a window at the second floor. The boy was seriously wounded and underwent medical treatment in hospital. "Resonance" No. 274, October 25, p. 1

Abkhaz police arrested 8 Georgian residents in the Kvemo Bargebi village of the Gali district on October 23 for alleged complicity in guerrilla activities. "Sakartvelos Respublika" No. 262, October 25, p. 1

Aziz Khalilov, a 21-year-old Georgian resident (ethnic Azeri), was kidnapped on October 4 by unidentified gunmen who reportedly conveyed him to the Pankisi Gorge in a car. Some time later, abductors released him after his father voluntarily replaced his son in captivity. Khalilov appeared wounded and was treated in hospital. Informal sources said he might have been wounded by the police who reportedly fired at the car, when unsuccessfully trying to stop it. Vepkhvo Margoshvili, a notorious local criminal leader frequently accused of kidnapping and drug trafficking, was killed by an explosive device in unclear circumstances in the Pankisi Gorge

on October 17. "Resonance" No. 253, 2254; October 5, 6; pp. 1, 5 "Kviris Palitra" No. 41, October 8-14, p. 5

Armed forces of Abkhazia:

MOD Minister for Defence - Vladimir Mikanba Head of General Staff - Vladimir Arshba
Personnel - some 3,000 servicemen

MOD forces are structured as follows:

- Ground Troops - Air Force - Navy - Air Defence

There are also a guard company and a communications company subordinated directly to the minister.

The guard company: 60 servicemen, 4 APC (BTR-70), and one self-propelled anti-aircraft artillery system 3CU-23-4 "Shilka" The communications company: 50 servicemen, and military vehicles P-142 (4) and P-145 (1)

Ground Troops

motorifle battalions - 5 rapid reaction unit - 1 reconnaissance battalions - 2 armoured battalions - 2 artillery units - 3

Equipment:

MBT (T-54, T-55, T-66) - 35-40 APC/AIFV (BTR-70, BMP-1, BMP-2, BRDM-2) - 80 Artillery (D-30, D-44, C-60, KC-19, T-12, BM-21 "Grad" MRLS) - 100

Ground Troops are deployed in three territorial command zones:

Eastern Direction

Equipment:

APC/AIFV (BTR-70, BMP-1, BMP-2, BRDM-2) - 30 Anti-aircraft artillery - 1 82mm rocket launchers - 4 100mm anti-aircraft artillery - 1

Central Direction

Equipment:

MBT (T-55) - 18 APC/AIFV (BTR-70, BMP-1) - 44 82mm rocket launchers - 3

Western Direction

Equipment

APC/AIFV (BMP-1, BRDM-2) - 4

Air Force

Personnel - 250

Aircraft

MIG-21 - 1 Su-25 - 1 L-39 - 2 Yak-52 - 1

Helicopters Mi-8 - 2

Navy

First Division (HQ in Sukhumi)

Personnel - 70

Equipment

Patrol boat (Grif-type) - 2 Fishing vessels (Volga-type) - 9 Motorboat - 1

Second Division (HQ in Bitchvinta)

Personnel - 25

Equipment

Civil boats - 8 Howitzers (85mm D-44) - 2 APC/AIFV (BRDM-2) - 1

Air Defence

First Division (HQ in Ochamchire) Personnel - 90 (actually 50)

Equipment:

Anti-aircraft artillery (ZU-23-2) - 9 100mm anti-aircraft gun - 1 Shoulder-launched surface-to-air missiles ("Strela", "Igla") - some 10

Second Division (Agudzera)

Personnel - 160 (60)

Equipment:

Self-propelled anti-aircraft artillery (ZSU-23-4 "Shilka") - 4 100mm anti-aircraft gun - 2
Shoulder-launched surface-to-air missiles ("Strela", "Igla") - some 12

Third Division (Bitchvinta)

Personnel - 70

Equipment: Anti-aircraft artillery (ZU-23-2) - 3 57mm anti-aircraft gun (S-60)- 3 Shoulder-launched surface-to-air missiles ("Strela", "Igla") - some 8

The source - "Kviris Palitra" No. 44, October 29-November 4, p. 9

Political crisis

Thousands of angry protesters took to the streets of Tbilisi after agents of the MSS attempted to raid the office of the country's main private TV company, Rustavi-2, on October 30. The authorities accused the company of tax evasion and said the agents had a court warrant to search for respective evidence but people viewed the incident as an apparent crackdown on freedom of speech. The company has been widely respected in Georgia for its outspokenly critical programmes about Shevardnadze's policy and alleged corruption and other abuses by the authorities. Although Shevardnadze tried to reassure the public that the freedom of speech was under no threat, and promised to investigate the legitimacy of the raid, the protesters, mainly students of Tbilisi universities and institutes, demanded the government's and the president's resignation. The security minister, Vakhtang Kutateladze, offered his resignation the next day after the raid but his move did not calm the protests and Shevardnadze was ultimately forced to sack the entire government. First deputy ministers were assigned as acting ministers. However, the situation was somewhat different in the MOD. Unlike other ministries the MOD has no office of first deputy minister and, therefore, the Military Board was placed in charge of the country's defence. The Military Board is made up of all senior military officials, including leadership of the General Staff, heads of all MOD departments and the defence minister himself, so Tevzadze continued to take part in the decision making as a member of the Board. The Military Board is chaired by the chief of the General Staff, Johnny Pirtskhalaishvili. In November Shevardnadze re-nominated David Tevzadze as defence minister and the parliament approved the candidacy. No other law-enforcement minister was reappointed. On November 21 Valerian Khaburdzania was appointed new security minister, while Koba Narchemashvili replaced Kakha Targamadze as interior minister. "Akhali 7 Dge" No. 45, November 9-15, p. 3

Border defence

An OSCE delegation visited its monitoring mission in Shatili at the Russian-Georgian border (Chechen sector) on October 14. At talks with the Georgian leadership the next day, Liviu Bota, the head of the delegation, said the OSCE was contemplating a possibility to expand its monitoring mission over the Ingush sector of the border. "Resonance" No. 266, October 17, p. 2

Air Defence

At present Georgian Air Defence has several military radar stations (P-15 and P-18) inherited from the Soviet air defence troops. They are deployed in Poti, Kopitnari, Marneuli, Makhati and Kvishiani. Normally, they must operate round-the-clock. In reality, however, they fail to do so for a lack of fuel and electricity. In contrast, two navigation radar stations of the Civil Aviation Department are capable of implementing 24-hour control. They are deployed in Senaki (western Georgia) and Kvishiani (near Tbilisi), and are equipped with US-made radars covering almost entire Georgian air space. There is, however, one important aspect: these radars can detect an aircraft only if its onboard identification device is on. If it is off, an incoming aircraft may safely sneak up on Georgia. To eliminate such security loopholes and improve efficiency of air defence, military experts propose to build up an integrated radar control system, which will accumulate and analyse data from radars of the Civil Aviation, Navy, Coast Guard and Border Troops in real time. Timely detection of aircraft is only one part of the problem. Enemy fighters must be downed by air defence troops. From this viewpoint, Georgia is also ill prepared. First of all, it has no interceptor fighters at all and must rely only on ground-based artillery and missiles. At present Georgian air defence troops are equipped with rather aged ZU-23 anti-aircraft artillery and S-60 automatic artillery systems, and more effective ZSU-23-4 self-propelled anti-aircraft artillery system ("Shilka") and S-125 surface-to-air missiles. In addition, Georgian air defence troops have a number of shoulder-launched anti-aircraft missiles "Strela-2M" and "Igla". "Kviris Palitra" No. 42, October 15-21, p. 9

Army building

An L-29 "Dolphin" training plane of the Georgian Air Force crashed near Bolnisi during a training flight on September 21, killing the pilot David Tskhovrebadze. Investigation revealed that a bird was accidentally sucked into the jet engine triggering the crash. The Georgian Air Force purchased 10 L-29 planes in Ukraine in 1998. It was the third crash of the Georgian military aircraft so far. On December 23, 1996, Yak-58 crashed near Bolnisi killing the pilot Oleg Tsatiashvili, while Mi-8 helicopter of the Interior Troops crashed near Gori on August 27, 1998, fortunately, without casualties. "Kviris Palitra" No. 39, September 24-30, p. 9 "Akhali Meridiani" No. 7, October 24-26, p. 2

A new light military vehicle of the Georgian army - DELGA-1 - was tested at the Yaglutzha training ground on October 3. Originally designed by a Georgian engineer David Khositashvili for tourist trips in forested and mountainous areas, the vehicle attracted interest of the Georgian MOD, and the state scientific centre "Delta" embarked on developing its military modification. The DELGA-1 is equipped with two machine guns, anti-tank weapons and/or grenade launchers. It is operated by a three-member crew. According to preliminary calculations, the retail price of the vehicle may average \$7-8 thousand. Despite its financial problems, the MOD plans to purchase a number of these vehicles for the army. "Dilis Gazeti" No. 217, October 4, p. 9 "Kviris Palitra" No. 41, October 8-14, p. 9

The president issued Decree 406 on October 12, 2001, on the draft to the armed forces. According to the decree, 7,295 conscripts shall be drafted into the Georgian Armed Forces in the autumn 2001 (10,670 conscripts were drafted in the spring 2001), including: - the MoD - 3,730 (6,000) - Interior Troops - 1,750 (2,550) - SBDD - 1,600 (1,800) - State Guard Service - 100 (300) - MSS - 75 (20) - State Intelligence Department - 40 The draft will last from October 15

till December 31. Able-bodied male Georgian citizens between the ages of 18 and 27 years, provided they are not deferred from the military service by law, are liable to conscription. The decree ordered to create ad hoc district and city drafting commissions under respective military commissars, which shall begin to operate on October 10. The central drafting office is to coordinate activities of the district and city commissions, while the MoD is in charge of the whole drafting process. The Ministry of Health Care is ordered to assign specialists and equipment to drafting medical commissions. Expenses of medical examination shall be covered at the expense of the state health care program. "Sakartvelos Sakanonmdeblo Matsne" No. 112, October 19, pp. 3, 4

Foreign military relations

Turkey granted two UH-1H helicopters to the Georgian Air Force. The granting ceremony took place in the Alekseevka airfield (near Tbilisi) on September 24. Turkey also promised to provide technical maintenance of the helicopters. Other six UH-1H helicopters were granted to Georgia by USA on October 23 in the framework of the US military assistance to Georgia. An American delegation led by Otar Shalikashvili, deputy defence secretary, attended the October 23 granting ceremony at the Alekseevka airfield. As a part of the project, USA also trained 11 Georgian helicopter pilots, 21 ground maintenance crew, and two ground control navigators. The total cost of the project is estimated at \$10 mln. "Svobodnaya Gruzia" No. 109, 114; September 25, October 6; pp. 1, 3 "Dilis Gazeti" No. 234, October 24, p. 9

The Georgian patrol boat "Kutaisi" took part in the BLACKSEAFOR naval exercise in Turkey, September 27-October 16. The exercise was focused on mine cleaning, rescue and humanitarian operations. "Svobodnaya Gruzia" No. 109, September 25, p. 3

Johnny Pirtskhalaishvili, the chief of the General Staff, took part in the September 27 council sitting of the CIS chiefs of staffs in Moscow. The Georgian delegation participated with a guest status since Georgia withdrew from the CIS Collective Security Treaty in 1999. "Svobodnaya Gruzia" No. 110, September 27, p. 1

A newly reconstructed hospital of the SBDD was inaugurated on October 1. Earlier it belonged to the Russian border troops in Georgia. The SBDD took it over after their withdrawal but the hospital appeared almost completely devastated. The reconstruction was carried out with US financial assistance. "Resonance" No. 250, October 2, p. 3

Vasily Saneblidze, deputy head of the anti-terrorism centre of the MSS, took part in the October 1-2 council sitting of the CIS security services in Dushanbe, Tajikistan. Participants reportedly discussed joint measures, including information exchange, to counter international terrorism. "Svobodnaya Gruzia" No. 112, October 2, p. 1

According to Irakli Menagarishvili, the Georgian foreign minister, Georgia opened its air space for US aircraft flying to Afghanistan in the operation against al-Qaeda terrorist network. However, he stopped short of going into details. "Svobodnaya Gruzia" No. 112, October 2, p. 1

Russia announced early in November that it had withdrawn military hardware from the Gudauta base and disbanded it in accordance with the resolution of the OSCE summit in Istanbul (November 1999). Only some 600 Russian servicemen remain at present in the base for guard mission. However, Georgian authorities complained that the process was not transparent and demanded that the base should be inspected by an international verification mission. Informal sources reported an incident during the withdrawal. Particularly, Abkhaz militiamen seized a railway train on October 24 with Russian military equipment, including "Buk" anti-aircraft artillery systems, despite armed resistance from Russian servicemen. No casualties were reported. The train was revealed several days later by Russian officials in one of the tunnels in Abkhazia. After talks with Abkhaz authorities, the train was allowed to leave for Russia on November 3. "Sakartvelos Respublika" No. 272, November 6, p. 1 "Dilis Gazeti" No. 246, November 7, p. 3

PRESS DIGEST

A one-week conflict in Abkhazia ended without any practical results, except that lots of Georgian residents of the Kodori Gorge have fled the region for fear of air strikes, the Dilis Gazeti (No. 233) reports. According to the newspaper, Chechen guerrillas remain in the area and some alarming indications suggest that they are rather angry at how the Georgian government handled the crisis, and how some Georgian guerrilla units acted in conflict. Informal sources claim that Georgian and Chechen guerrillas had initially prepared a plan of joint guerrilla warfare in Abkhazia but it failed because several Georgian guerrilla units yielded to the government's pressure and backed out. As a result, Chechen guerrillas had to retreat to the Kodori Gorge and holed up there. It is hard to say now what the Chechen guerrillas plan to do in the future, the newspaper deems.

After October 9 bombing of the Kodori Gorge Georgian officials made rather strict statements promising to get tough measures against any similar attacks, the Akhali Meridiani (No. 5) reported. However, the Gorge was bombed once again on October 17 without any response from Georgian troops. Worse still, the Georgian official structures were rather confused as their reports included contradictory information. They obviously failed to identify the exact number and type of the hostile aircraft. The MOD reported about two Su-25 fighters, Georgian troops deployed in the Gorge claimed Mi-24 military helicopters to be responsible for attack, while the National Security Council announced that the Gorge was attacked by six Su-25 fighters, which entered the Georgian air space from the Russian territory. Some time later the MOD acknowledged that its troops in the Gorge had no anti-aircraft weapons due to financial problems. Although it pledged to deploy such weapons in the area in the near future, one must assume, the newspaper argues, that the Georgian air space will remain almost entirely unprotected for quite a long time to come.

Despite the parliamentary resolutions and some official rhetoric, Georgia will hardly push for withdrawal of Russian peacekeeping troops from Abkhazia, the Akhali Meridiani (No. 4) claims. If Russian peacekeepers really pull out from the region, Georgia will inevitably plunge into a new large-scale war, even though the Georgian government disapproves, at least at present, of military solutions to the problem. In the newspaper's opinion, withdrawal of the Russian peacekeepers will be followed by increased activity of Georgian guerrillas in the Gali district of

Abkhazia. Abkhaz forces will most likely respond with artillery bombardment of the Zugdidi district and a new war will break out. Fortunately, the Georgian government seems well aware of such a danger. That is why it has somewhat softened its stance recently. For instance, at talks with an OSCE delegation led by Liviu Bota the president Shevardnadze said Georgia did not seek withdrawal of peacekeepers but rather a change of the format of the peacekeeping mission. Particularly, in his words, Georgia would welcome deployment of multinational peacekeeping forces in Abkhazia under UN or OSCE aegis. It is obvious, the newspaper argues, that either UN or OSCE will be hardly able to deploy their peacekeeping troops in Abkhazia, first of all because Russia will undoubtedly veto such a decision. But the process will take two or three years, including negotiations and consultations with the OSCE or UN leadership and the countries (Ukraine for instance) which are likely to send their "blue helmets" to the region. Of course, Russian peacekeepers will remain in Abkhazia for all this period but the Georgian government will be able to repulse the opposition's accusations of inefficient policy in Abkhazia by saying: "Negotiations on replacement of Russian peacekeepers with international forces are under way".