

The Army and Society in Georgia

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The Centre for Civil-Military Relations and Security Studies (CCMSS) of the Caucasian Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development (CIPDD) has had the opportunity to renew the publishing of the bulletin "The Army and Society in Georgia" in 1998. Introduced in 1994, the bulletin is the only English-language periodical covering the process of military-building and civil-military relations in Georgia. It is even more important given the country's poor record of defence studies and research on civil-military relations. The CCMSS welcomes comments from readers.

The First Decade of Army-Building in Georgia

David Darchiashvili

Since its origins about 10 years ago, the process of army-building in Georgia has been inseparable from the country's wobbly state developments. The current Georgian military forces have few achievements and many problems. Such a situation stems from the erratic route of the country's political course. This article, however, provides a brief chronicle of the process of building a military rather than an analysis of the latest events in Georgia.

History

The starting-point of Georgia's military-building process was about 10 years ago. It was sparked by the onset of various ethnic conflicts and strongly affected by the surging national movement which held rallies protesting the drafting of Georgians into the Soviet armed forces. In these circumstances, the first stage of army-building was marked by the emergence of paramilitary units - usually poorly-armed and -trained groups of 20 to 30 men - in 1988. Governmental structures had little control over the process until 1990.

In 1990 army-building became a part of state policy. Under the reign of Givi Gumbaridze, the last Communist ruler of Georgia, one of the paramilitary units, Mkhedrioni ("Warriors" or "Horsemen"), received legal status and was transformed into the Rescue Corps. Its leaders regarded it as a training base for the country's future armed forces. While the law on alternative labour service, adopted at the same time, provided certain legitimate grounds for refusing to serve in the Soviet military, a special commission initiated by Gumbaridze, then first secretary of the Georgian Communist Party and the Supreme Council chairman, put forward the idea of restoring ethnic Georgian units that existed in the Soviet army until 1956. The so-called "national opposition", meanwhile, continued to amass its own paramilitary forces. In the autumn of 1990 estimates

of the total number of troops in the motley militias ranged from 1,000-2,000 to 6,000. In October 1990, anti-Communist political forces carrying the slogan of national independence won the first multi-party elections in Georgia. On 20 December 1990, the parliament adopted the law "On Internal Troops - National Guards". The Guards' mission was defined as defence of the "nation's interests" - more precisely the country's "territorial integrity". The government started forming regular armed forces on the basis of conscription. In April 1991, after the first call-up was completed, there were 12,000 enlisted soldiers and officers in the National Guards.

The first Georgian legal military forces lacked weapons and professional troops. Most commanders were either Georgian reservist officers of the Soviet army or civilian enthusiasts. The Guards were divided into battalions and deployed in various regions around the country. Later the battalions were named after the cities or districts where they were deployed. At the same time, the Guards set about creating its first brigade (based in Tbilisi) and Chologashvili regiment. At first, several bodies were in charge of command and control over the Guards: the commander-in-chief, who was approved by the parliament, the government defence commission, and the interior ministry. The presidential rule enacted simultaneously with the 1991 declaration of independence put the Guards under increasing presidential control in the spring of 1991. Anxious to dissolve all the units that were not part of the Guards, the government of the first Georgian president, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, outlawed the opposition Mkhedrioni. However, some informal units (such as the armed groups of the Merab Kostava Society) continued to function.

In the autumn of 1991 the government set up the defence ministry and unveiled its army-building plans, which made the fate of the Guards unclear. The winter 1991-92 anti-Gamsakhurdia coup that took place with the active participation of officers from the National Guards put an end to the government's plans and resulted in the ousting of the president.

In 1992-93 military-building was based on quickly-shifting plans, largely determined by the course of the intensified ethnic conflicts, political anarchy and civil war, rather than carefully elaborated long term programs. In February-March 1992 the defence ministry was formally reorganised, while the army structure was defined as battalion-brigade-corps. The National Guards existed as an independent body for some time and were transformed into a Rapid Deployment Force thereafter. The Guards' organisation, as well as that of the armed forces on the whole, was changed many times. Some units were only formally responsible to the defence ministry or entirely independent like the restored Mkhedrioni/Rescue Corps. The interior ministry and state security service had their own armed units.

By the spring of 1994, the number of the defence ministry's units had reached 50 with officially about 50,000 enlisted soldiers and officers. However, the lack of discipline and established militia traditions led to substantial "leakage" of personnel so that the real number of servicemen was likely to be much lower.

The continuing domestic crisis made a strong impact on developing civil/political control over the army. Despite a number of laws believed to increase the efficacy of such control, the government's authority over the army remained largely on paper.

At that time, after the break-up of the USSR and the allotment of the former Soviet arsenal to the newly independent states, the Georgian army received many weapons - notably dozens of tanks and several combat aircraft and helicopters.

A new stage of military-building started after Vardiko Nadibaidze, a former Soviet general, was appointed defence minister. His appointment coincided with the end of hostilities and the beginning of political stability. In 1994-95, the Defence Ministry carried out structural and personnel reforms in the army. The practice of conscription, which had withered away by that time, was renewed, along with the autocratic command and strict subordination to the Ministry. At

the same time, the army has become patterned upon the former Soviet one. In 1995, the Georgian army began a trend towards closer integration with the CIS. The process was paralleled by the disbanding of the independent paramilitaries on the one hand, and the creation of armed structures similar to the army but subordinate directly to the political leadership on the other. The Frontier Department was separated from the Defence Ministry and became an independent body in 1994. The government guard service was created in the same year. There were also Interior Ministry troops and a special forces brigade of the state security service (later known as the Security Ministry). In 1997, the brigade was shifted to the Interior Ministry.

In 1996-97 the Georgian military forces took a new course. Although the Defence Ministry remained oriented towards tight military co-operation with Russia, its influence in politics was reduced, while its contacts with other countries strengthened. This process was initiated by the country's political leadership. In addition, there were attempts to fill the legislative and conceptual vacuum regarding army-building.

In 1996 Georgian servicemen first took part in NATO's Partnership for Peace (PFP) peacekeeping manoeuvres in the United States. Military co-operation with the West, especially with the U.S. and Germany, substantially widened on the basis of the PFP programme. The U.S. also provided substantial assistance to the Frontier Department.

At the same time, the Georgian army is still suffering from a dearth of funding and professionals, especially NCOs. Capped with social problems, these difficulties cause a high desertion-rate. Georgia's armaments are significantly lower than the quotas allowed in the CFE (Conventional Forces in Europe) agreement. The military also needs to be able to forge modern programs/plans in line with contemporary standards for defence policy. As to effective civil control based on the principles of a democratic society, only the beginning of such a practice can be seen.

Current Strength, Structure, Deployment and Command of the Armed Forces

The 1995 constitution serves as the basis for army-building. In addition, the process is regulated by the laws on general military service, defence and martial law. The military doctrine approved by the parliament in 1997 is also notable.

The constitution and the above mentioned documents define the Georgian military forces as a network of executive bodies responsible for the country's defence. The military forces include the troops under the Defence Ministry (the so-called "Armed Forces"), Frontier Department, Interior Ministry, and other armed services as permitted by the law. These last include a special unit of the government guard service, a special unit of the Security Ministry and an airborne brigade that was recently moved from the Security Ministry to the Interior Ministry. According to the president's 5 February 1997 decree, the overall strength of the armed forces is claimed to be 42,678 servicemen.

According to official data for 1997, the defence ministry has 27,000 personnel, including ground, air force, anti-aircraft, and naval units. The ground troops account for about 85% of the total and comprise 7 motorised rifle brigades and 1 artillery brigade, and a number of various task forces. The navy consists of a single joint naval brigade, while the air force comprises one combat aircraft and one helicopter regiment. The anti-aircraft troops consist of one radio-technical and two missile brigades, though all three are still being formed.

Frontier troops total 5,500, Internal Ministry troops 7,178, while the airborne brigade and the government guard service total 3,000-3,500 soldiers and officers.

Male citizens and permanent residents from 18 to 27 years old are liable for conscription. University/institute students are deferred from service until 24 years of age. Emigrants of conscription age permanently working abroad have to pay a special tax to be freed from service.

The Defence Ministry's troops are deployed as follows:

- Defence Ministry headquarters, Brigade 1, Artillery Brigade - Tbilisi;
- Brigade 2 - Senaki (western Georgia);
- Brigade 3 - Gombori (eastern Georgia);
- Brigade 11 - Koda (south of Tbilisi);
- Brigade 21 - Kutaisi (western Georgia);
- Brigade 22 - Akhaltsikhe (southern Georgia);
- Brigade 25 - Batumi (Adjara);
- Combat Aircraft Regiment - Kutaisi (Kopitnari airfield);
- Helicopter Regiment - Telavi (eastern Georgia);
- Joint Naval Brigade - Poti.

Internal troops are deployed in Tbilisi, Kutaisi and other regions. The airborne brigade of the Interior Ministry is deployed dozens of kilometres east of Tbilisi.

The president has the rank of Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. He approves the structure of the military forces, chairs the National Security Council, and heads the Main Military Inspectorate. The parliament is responsible for state defence policy. It approves the overall strength and funding of the military forces.

Martial law can be declared by the president, who must submit his decision to the parliament for approval within 48 hours. The president himself and the Security Council command the armed forces in case of war.

Finally, despite certain reforms in the military command and political control over the armed forces, stipulated in the constitution and the law, there are still problems to be solved:

1. The legislation is nascent and its efficacy remains to be seen. There is no clear division between the army-building concept and the military doctrine (both to be approved by the parliament) on the one hand, and the army-building plans and the armed forces structure (the president's prerogative) on the other. Furthermore, the legislation does not specify any body responsible for the composition of the military forces or a type of document to define it, though the constitution refers the issue to the law. It is not quite clear what a difference is between the structure of the armed forces (approved by the president) and their organisation (to be defined by law).

2. Civil control seems subjective (by Samuel Huntington's definition) as the parliament and the president each try to put the armed forces under their total control. This is often linked to the political situation rather than to the military's professional needs. The competence of the military forces, too, has still no clearly defined limits. The defence ministry still has no regulations and there are in fact no such structures as general staff or joint chiefs of staff. It is, therefore, difficult to distinguish politics from purely military field.

3. The military doctrine of Georgia is a rather general document, while national security and army-building concepts have yet to be developed. Further still, there are no laws on the organisation of the military forces. As a result, the military forces lack a theoretical and legal underpinning

Interview with Revaz Adamia, the chairman of the parliamentary defence and security committee

Lela Djandjalashvili

How do you assess the past year (1997) with regard to military developments?

The question requires a comprehensive answer but I'll try to outline the main events. The last year was rather important concerning legislative activities. The parliament adopted several essential laws and the military doctrine. Being rather general, this last, however, clearly illustrates the country's military and political structure and shows our stance towards the military and security systems and our country's role in the world security system. Another significant document, the law on general military service, regulates the conscription procedures, provides a basis for contract military service and defines the ways and routines of military service. The parliament has also adopted some other essential legislative acts, including that on martial law and on a state of emergency. Although both had existed before, the parliament made them correspond with the constitution. This year the parliament debates a bill on state frontiers. If adopted, it will enable Georgia to take long hoped-for control of its borders. Politically, the problem has been already solved, first of all regarding defence of the country's home waters. [Currently, Russia patrols the Black Sea coast and the border with Turkey.] Earlier, we were unable to carry out the task. Now, I think we have already enough potential to control our home waters, coastline and economic zone independently. We got such an opportunity just last year, thanks to our friendly states - Ukraine, USA, Germany, Turkey - and assistance, though minor, from Russia. As to last year's other significant events, I attach great importance to the Georgia-USA and Georgia-Germany talks - the so-called "security dialogue". Their first round revealed ways to develop security co-operation between our countries.

These are positive events. What can you say about negative ones?

Regrettably, there were such as well. First of all I mean corruption - a general malady afflicting our society, including the military system. Widespread corruption in the armed forces cannot be cured only by prompt actions. The whole system needs structural reform. It's as yet hard to specify what kind of reforms should be carried out. No country in the world has ever defeated corruption by a single blow. The law on general military service is surely a step in the right direction, since it has substantially reduced the number of citizens liable for military service, narrowing the gap between the required number of draftees and available resources. The past year also revealed such flaws in the current Georgian army as a high desertion-rate, and poor food and ammunition supplies. These problems require special analysis. The parliamentary defence and security committee has initiated some special measures. Regular, thorough examinations of all military units will start this year, in January to be precise. The examination results will be submitted to the parliament and the president.

Conditions in the Georgian army are extremely harsh. Is it possible for 18-year-old men to return from the army without health problems or psychological disorders, in contrast to the past?

It's quite possible. Let's consider, say, the special commando unit of the security ministry. There have been no deserters among its 1,500 soldiers and officers so far. On the contrary, conscripts seem eager to serve in this unit.

Do you think the country's budget provides enough finances for military needs?

It's a matter of close analysis. In my opinion, if we are unable to supply 30,000 servicemen with enough food and ammunition but can keep, say, only 15,000 of them well supplied, it would be better to draft just 15,000 conscripts. However, the defence ministry and the minister himself differ over the issue. Let's wait and see whether they will change their mind after the examinations are completed. By the way, there are already some examples of well-equipped and -supplied units, for instance the Akhhaltsikhe frontier base. On the other hand, there is also the Akhhaltsikhe Brigade 22, distinguished by poor discipline and other shortcomings. Such a situation may be linked to the flaws of the whole system and the incapability of those in charge.

Is there currently any indoctrination for would-be soldiers in Georgia?

Unfortunately, there is anti-indoctrination instead, aimed against the army. Of course, our military officials should share the blame, because no state indoctrination mechanisms have been developed so far. This, too, accounts for the bitter defeat in Abkhazia.

Do those unwilling to serve in the army have the right to opt for alternative service?

The parliament has already adopted the law on alternative service. It is to be enacted this spring, by the next call-up, which will show the efficacy of the law.

As far as I know, the Defence Ministry disapproves of the new law.

Yes, the ministry and the minister himself were against it. Later on, however, they have come to agree with us, since freedom of conscience is one of the basic principles of our country. Nevertheless, there are still a lot of hurdles in the way of the new law as it requires social and economic employment programs. But there are few job opportunities in Georgia nowadays.

Returning to last year's events, how do you evaluate the development of Russian-Georgian relations?

There have been no positive changes in relations with Russia. In 1997 we openly claimed our share of the Black Sea Fleet but our claim (by the way, Georgia has been making it since 1992) was flatly rejected. Later on, however, Moscow made some promises but nothing has changed in reality. The situation seems somewhat better with regard to officer training. Several Georgian students are now learning in Russian military colleges, though under rather poor conditions. This field has declined in Russia. Besides, Moscow charges money for training. Georgia lacks the finances and, consequently, sees its debt gradually growing. Further still, I admit that some of the students may come back as Russian secret agents.

What can you say about Georgia's relations with other former Soviet republics?

Ukraine is a real help in ammunition supplies and personnel training. Georgian servicemen are being trained in Ukraine on the one hand, while visiting Ukrainian instructors provide great assistance in Georgia on the other. However, there are some financial problems as Ukraine lacks the money to cover all the expenses. We have also good relations with Uzbekistan. There are actually more resources available than Georgia can currently use. Azerbaijan, too, is actively co-operating with Georgia, despite a lot of its own urgent internal problems.

What about NATO member states?

Germany and the USA provide great support to Georgia. Of late, Great Britain has also grown quite helpful. In some time to come, six officers will be sent there first to learn English and then to undergo military training. We enjoy some seats at the West Point Academy. Everyone in the Georgian armed forces can take part in selection competitions. Every year, 5-6 men have an opportunity to learn at the Marshall Centre which is focused on high-ranking officer training. We are actively participating in the Partnership for Peace program that helps change our military's mentality and NATO's image as a hostile organisation. To the contrary, NATO is among the first to help Georgia. Our officers will surely benefit by learning NATO standards. If we are able to train 100 officers in the USA, the situation in our army will fundamentally change. To this end, I and others have done a lot of work in the US Senate and House.

Georgia and Greece have signed a military co-operation agreement...

Greece seems increasingly interested, though there have been no practical moves yet.

What is the neighbouring Turkey's position?

Turkey offers significant assistance programs. I may specially visit Turkey this year to examine the issue. At the same time, Russia is obviously bothered by Turkey's willingness to co-operate with Georgia. As a result, there are some problems with our defence ministry

What do you mean?

I mean the defence minister. I do believe that the minister is more Russia-oriented today than he should be. Of course, relations with Russia must be maintained. But if Russia fails to perceive that it needs a friendly rather than a subservient Georgia, I think its positions in the Caucasus will be steadily weakening

What kind of army are we building and where are we going? Do we have any overall concept?

To work out the country's up-to-date, proper and NATO-standard concept, we have proposed creating an international military council for Georgia which will include NATO and some other countries' high-ranking officers and security experts. The Baltic states have already gained such an experience. We'll follow the same way. We have already come to terms with a British general, Sir Gary Johnson, who will chair the council. A number of other officers, too, have agreed to participate. The council is to come up with recommendations on the most suitable-for-Georgia security systems. Maybe the defence ministry will not be irritated by such top professionals, like it does, as ever, when advised by civilian specialists. The defence ministry has brought in the parliament an army-building concept but I regard it as inappropriate. In my opinion, the international military council for Georgia will work out a much more workable concept.

Finally, let's speak about the year 1998. Will the newly adopted laws work in practice?

This is a fundamental and rather serious problem. It rests with the parliament to find solutions. I feel sure that we will succeed in building a strong state system and the laws we approved will not be neglected.

Military Chronicle

based on the Georgian press reports

The Problem of Abkhazia

In 1998 the Russian peacekeeping troops in Abkhazia would be manned predominantly by servicemen of the Gudauta-based Russian paratroop regiment 345 which actively backed the Abkhaz forces' 1993 assault on Sukhumi, Tamaz Nadareishvili, the chairman of the Tbilisi-based Supreme Council of Abkhazia, said. Nowadays, Russian instructors are, in his words, training Abkhaz commandos, who may be allegedly sent on subversive missions in various parts of Georgia or punitive operations against Georgian residents of the Gali district of Abkhazia.

"Shvidi Dge" No. 2, January 7-8, p. 2

Mr. Tamaz Nadareishvili fears that the Russian peacekeeping troops may stay in Abkhazia after January 31 (the deadline of their mandate) as the next CIS summit

first scheduled for January 23 was postponed till March. The peacekeepers, in his opinion, will have to leave the country, provided the Georgian parliament passes a respective resolution. As to the Council, it has already formally demanded the Russian peacekeeping troops to withdraw for their complete failure in carrying out the peacekeeping mission. Their deployment in Abkhazia has become, in Nadareishvili's words, senseless.

"Resonance" No. 11, January 16, p. 8

The Army Life

The Georgian frontier guards, who developed an unknown skin disease allegedly linked to radioactive wastes stored at former Soviet military bases last year, were still undergoing medical treatment in France and Germany, Suliko Kosiashvili of the anti-sepsis centre said. One of them, Pavle Eliauri, however, was back to Georgia on January 14 to take a rest from 11-month taking of strong medicines. Some time later he will be sent to France again for surgery.

"Akhali Taoba" No. 13, January 16, p. 2

Two soldiers have died - one of alcohol poisoning, while the other, Gia Mordebadze, was killed - in the 11th brigade of the Defence Ministry (Gen. Kvaraia, the commander) since the beginning of the year. The military procurator's office is investigating the incidents. Koba Kobiashvili, the Tbilisi military procurator, said Mordebadze's killers were already known and would be arrested soon. He also considered it necessary to sue Gen. Kvaraia for criminal negligence as he took no measures, though the soldier had been absent for some weeks. It must be mentioned that just the 11th brigade had the highest death-toll last year.

"Alia" No. 11, January 20-21, p. 1

According to Mr. Djaqeli, deputy chairman of the parliamentary defence committee, a good deal of the Georgian officers seem little interested in servicemen's family conditions, problems or concerns. They do not know their names calling them merely "soldier". But even in the former Soviet army Georgians took such treatment painfully. So Georgian commanders should be more careful, Djaqeli argues. The Defence Ministry, meanwhile, pays no attention to the high suicide-rate and increased inter-subethnic clashes in the army, where Megrelians humiliate Svans, these last abuse Kakhეთians, and so on (Megrelians, Svans, Kakhეთians - Georgian subethnic groups).

"Alia" No. 4, January 8-9, p. 13

The Army-building

The pace of army-building in Georgia should be higher, George Djaqeli suggests in his interview to the newspaper. He agrees with Vardiko Nadibaidze, the defence minister, about the need for more professional officers, blaming, however, the Defence Ministry for its failure to apply available resources, for instance the Afghan war veterans some 40% of which, according to Mr. Djaqeli, are now unemployed. He wonders why the army suffers from the lack of finance, while, say, frontier troops or the National Guards do not, though all the three are financed equally. Quite meaningfully, he points out, most profitable offices of the Defence Ministry - foods supplies, building, etc. - are held chiefly by Nadibaidze's relatives.

"Alia" No. 4, January 8-9, p. 13

According to General Tengiz Razmadze, the head of the mobilisation department of the Main Staff of the Defence Ministry, the autumn call-up (ended on December 25) has drafted 95% of the planned number of conscripts. The defence minister's December 29 order demobilised those soldiers who are deferred from the army by the newly adopted law on general military service. On the other hand, state enlistment offices, in his words, had difficulty completing the call-up which started on September 25, two days before the law was enacted (September 27). The

law obviously harassed the Defence Ministry. Deferring "single sons", the law freed too many conscripts from the army, Razmadze complains. The Ministry is especially dissatisfied with the provision of the law which defers the university/institute students. Nowadays, there are some 300 private institutes and universities in Georgia, Razmadze says. Worse still, few of them are responsible to the Ministry of Education and none has fixed entrance examination deadlines. As a result, a good deal of the conscripts profited by such a situation to avoid the military service. Therefore, the military propose creating a joint commission of the Defence Ministry, Ministry of Education and Taxation Department to examine all such educational institutions. Finally, after the results of the call-up are thoroughly analysed, Razmadze says, the Defence Ministry will bring in the parliament some amendments to the law.

"Akhali Taoba" No. 9, January 12, pp. 3, 7

Negotiations

A Russian military delegation led by General Leonid Ivashov, the head of the foreign department of the Russian Defence Ministry, arrived in Tbilisi on January 4 for the talks on Georgia's share of the former Soviet military property. Georgia claims about 40 military objects built in the country in Soviet times, including the headquarters of the Russian troops in Transcaucasus. At first, Russia was willing to cede 10 of them, selected, according to Gen. Guram Nikolaishvili, deputy defence minister, by the Russian military themselves from the list drawn up by the Georgian Defence Ministry. Some time later, however, Russia backed out and refused to relinquish 3 of them: the Alekseyevka military airfield, the Tbilisi sport centre and medical repositories. At the talks, Russia refused to compensate Georgia for the \$10 billion worth of Russian armaments illegally, as Tbilisi claims, taken out of the country. There was no use speaking about compensations as Georgian paramilitary troops robbed lots of armaments from Georgia-based Russian military units in 1991-92, General Ivashov said. The delegation has visited Batumi-based Automobile Repair Works of the 12th Russian military base (stationed in Adjara), the Akhalkalaki anti-aircraft base and the Vaziani military airfield. The first two are ranked among the Russian military objects that may be ceded to Georgia by the end of the year. A ceding agreement, as well as the compensations issue, will be on the table during the Russian defence minister Igor Sergeev's coming visit to Georgia (expected in February or March). Mr. Ivashov's visit, which lasted till January 8, has resulted in signing the 1998 plan of the Russian-Georgian military co-operation.

"Shvidi Dge" No. 3, January 9-11, p. 2

"Resonance" No. 3, January 6, p. 2; No. 5, January 10, p. 2

Vardiko Nadibaidze visited Greece, the first NATO member state to host the Georgian defence minister, on January 8-10. After their January 9 talks, the two countries' defence ministers signed a military co-operation agreement and the 1998 Georgian-Greek military co-operation program. Besides, General Tsoganis (?), the chief of the Greek General Staff, and General Vano Gurgenidze, deputy defence minister of Georgia, signed a protocol on further developing the Greek-Georgian military partnership, which, as both ministers said at their press-conference after the talks, aims to maintain security and reduce conflicts in the region. The same day, Mr. Nadibaidze had talks with the Greek president and foreign minister. The Georgian delegation has also visited two military factories producing artillery shells and other explosives. The results of the visit seem quite satisfactory. Greece pledged to grant Georgia a coast guard boat, reportedly, by the end of February. According to the Georgian Defence Ministry press-centre, the Greek military would provide special equipment to pick up the vessels sunk around the Poti sea port. Besides, the Georgian army will get 1000 uniforms and 800 pairs of boots from Greece. A Greek military delegation is going to visit Georgia for learning the Georgian navy problems this May.

"Akhali Taoba" No. 9, January 12, pp. 3, 7

"Shvidi Dge" No. 4, January 12-13, p. 2

Vardiko Nadibaidze, the Georgian defence minister, and Sergey Korobkov, the newly appointed C-in-C of the Russian peacekeeping troops in Abkhazia, discussed the Abkhazian problem at their January 17 meeting. Mr. Korobkov, 50, the former commander of a Transcaucasus-stationed Russian division (1984-90) and a high-ranking officer of the Russian military inspectorate, has replaced Gen. Dolia Babenkov as the peacekeepers' commander.

"Akhali Taoba" No. 14, January 17, p. 2

A Georgian delegation has recently visited NATO headquarters in Brussels for talks with NATO secretary general, military leadership and committee chairs. The delegation also visited a NATO air force base and the U.S. Embassy in Holland. Interestingly, the delegation members' comments vary widely on results of the visit. For instance, Akaki Asatiani, the leader of the Union of Georgian Traditionalists, said NATO would hardly make more friendly move and it was high time for Georgia to respond actively. Georgia, in his opinion, may join NATO much earlier than some other likely candidates, while according to Vakhtang Rcheulishvili, the leader of the Socialist Party, NATO praised Georgia for the most successful democratic developments among the former USSR republics and emphasised Russia's role in the country's national security. When in Brussels, the delegation raised the issue of the Abkhazian problem, i.e. whether there was a possibility of applying the "Bosnian model" of peacekeeping (Georgian political forces began to discuss actively the so-called

"Bosnian model" after Eduard Shevardnadze spoke about the idea in one of his recent interviews to the Georgian Radio). Reportedly, NATO agreed to "consider" the idea, provided it was formally proposed by Georgia and approved by all the NATO member states, OSCE and UN.

"Droni" No. 4, January 17-20, pp. 1, 2; No. 8, January 27-29, pp. 1, 2

Details of the Georgian-Chinese military co-operation agreements, being currently drafted by the two countries' experts, were discussed at a recent meeting between Vardiko Nadibaidze and Jiang Yung Ciyen (?), the ambassador of China to Georgia. Mr. Ciyen invited Nadibaidze to visit China, while the Georgian minister, for his part, asked to deliver his invitation to his Chinese opposite number, who may visit Georgia by the end of the year.

"Svobodnaya Gruzia" No. 17-18, January 21 p. 2

According to a draft agreement reached at the Russian-Georgian January 16-17 border talks in Moscow, the Georgian frontier troops will gradually take control of the Turkish-Georgian frontier (277 km altogether) currently patrolled by Russian frontier guards by 1999, while Georgia's coast guards are expected to start patrolling the country's home waters already this July (the check-points "Poti-port", "Batumi-port" and "Batumi-airport" have to be under Georgia's control by July 1). The whole process will be scheduled by a joint commission to be created this spring. At their January 20 press-conference, the members of the Georgian delegation - Michael Ukleba, deputy foreign minister, and Valeri Chkheidze, C-in-C of the Georgian frontier troops - said the commission would also make a full inventory of the Georgia-stationed Russian frontier bases. Reportedly, there are now 3,500 Russian frontier guards in Georgia. Their real estate will be completely ceded to Georgia, while the armaments divided equally between the two countries. The ceding process must be civilised and "transparent", Mr. Ukleba said. However, until complete withdrawal, Russia demands Georgia to pay 40% of the Russian frontier guards' expenses under provisions of the 1994 agreement, though the latter has not been ratified by the Georgian parliament yet. On the other hand, according to Mr. Chkheidze, Russian frontier guards have illegally taken out of the country lots of their armaments and Tbilisi now presses for compensations which are believed to neutralise Russia's demands. It must be mentioned that the 1998 budget of Georgia provides no finance for the Russian frontier guards. Interestingly, Mr. Chkheidze claimed that Georgian frontier guards would control the whole area of the country's home waters, including Abkhazia. The frontier defence did not mean confrontation, he said, having abstained from more details. The control procedure, in his words, has been thoroughly developed. As to the draft agreement, being patterned upon the Russian-Azerbaijani one, it provides both parties with equal rights. To

defend its frontiers independently, Georgia, however, needs to enlarge its frontier troops, which, quite logically, will require more finance. According to some informal sources, Mr. Chkheidze is going to demand 4 mln GEL (about \$3 mln) in addition to already allocated budgetary finance. Without the money, Georgia will be hardly able to control its home waters, as only 60% of its Poti naval base are manned and equipped. Besides, in 1999 Georgia is going to open new frontier check-points and technically reorganise some old ones. Remarkably, the Georgian president visited Adjara on January 17, just after the talks ended. Earlier, Mr. Abashidze, the Adjarian leader, used to claim Russian frontier guards to be guarantors of stability in the region. This time, however, he professed loyalty to the central government. Adjara, in his words, will obey Tbilisi's will. After Georgia began to control its frontiers by itself, Russia may well rely on the Georgian frontier defence being not wary of its southern borders, Eduard Shevardnadze said.

"Droni" No. 5, January 20-22, p. 3

"Resonance" No. 16, January 21, pp. 1, 2; No. 22, January 27, pp. 1, 2

"Akhali Taoba" No. 18, January 21, p. 2

"Meridiani 44" No. 8, January 26-28, p. 2

At their January 21 meeting, Vardiko Nadibaidze and Col. Bruce Leonard Grifitz (?), Canadian military attache, discussed various aspects of the NATO Partnership for Peace program. According to Mr. Nadibaidze, a Georgian peacekeeping battalion, currently being manned and equipped, will take part in the next PFP manoeuvres. Creating its own peacekeeping units, Georgia applied Canada's experience, he said, emphasising the need to strengthen contacts between the Georgian and Canadian military.

"Svobodnaya Gruzia" (Free Georgia) No. 20, January 23, p. 2

Miscellany

Georgia may well defeat Abkhazia in case of a new war, provided the Abkhazian armed forces get no external support, Vardiko Nadibaidze, the Georgian defence minister, claims in his interview to the newspaper. The minister is ready to solve the Abkhazian problem by force but: "I don't know whether politicians are". Nadibaidze hopes for Russian assistance against Abkhazia. Just Russia, in his words, really aids the Georgian army, while the West has provided not a "single bayonet" so far. The minister feels sure that Georgia has already built quite a strong army, though at the expense of high defence spending. At the last anti-aircraft manoeuvres, the Georgian army, in his words, applied 5 surface-to-air missiles, while the Soviet army used to launch only 20 a year when training. Commenting on his son's military career in the Russian armed forces, Mr. Nadibaidze claims that he will get back but only after gaining enough experience and professionalism in the Russian army. Nadibaidze admits that poor service conditions and the lack of professional officers and NCOs account for high desertion-rate in some Georgian military units. But the situation will soon improve, he believes. As to alternative service, Georgia, in his opinion, is still not ready for such one. "I usually abstain from interviews because I must first get through with my mission... I cannot reveal future army-building plans", the minister concludes.

"Akhali Taoba" No. 2, January 5, pp. 1, 3

Ethnic conflicts in Georgia will last until the country integrates into Russia as its autonomous republic, an officer of the South Ossetia-stationed Russian peacekeeping troops says on condition of anonymity in his interview to the newspaper. Given Georgia's geo-political position, the Russian troops, in his words, will stay in Georgia and, particularly in South Ossetia, regardless of whether the conflict ended or not. It is no use commenting illusions, he says, when asked about some countries' readiness to take part in the peacekeeping missions in Georgia. No country, in his words, will be able to set foot in Georgia, as long as there are the Russian troops in the country: "This region will be always controlled by Russia".

"Shvidi Dge" (Seven Days) No. 6, January 16-18, pp. 1, 5

The Central Election Commission has turned down a proposal of the opposition "Round Table - Free Georgia" to hold a referendum on Russian military bases in Georgia. Although law experts of the Commission claim such a referendum to be quite legitimate, the CEC considered it inexpedient to settle the problem by a referendum, emphasising that the bases issue is subject to parliamentary ratification. In response, the "Round Table - Free Georgia" has brought a lawsuit against the CEC in the Supreme Court.

"Droni" No. 4, January 17-20, p. 2

"Resonance" No. 23, January 28, pp. 1, 3

Russian customs officials and frontier guards are going to start joint operations to control cargo transits from Georgia at the "Nizhny Zaramag" check-point on February 1. Such a measure is believed to put an end to the "alcohol war" between Georgia and Russia, triggered by last year's Russian ban on alcohol transits from Georgia.

"Akhali Taoba" No. 14, January 17, p. 5

The Georgian Defence Ministry demands all the Russian military bases in Georgia, including the Abkhazia-stationed paratroop regiment 345, to be under the command of a single Tbilisi-based staff. Otherwise, Georgia will have difficulty fulfilling the requirements of the CFE (conventional forces in Europe) agreement which provides for regular inspections of military units. So far, the regiment has kept out inspectors, claiming itself to be under Moscow's direct command.

"Akhali Taoba" No. 23, January 26, p. 2

Georgian officials checked six Russian ammunition-loaded vehicles late at night on January 27. The Russian military were reportedly going to transport their armaments from the Akhalkalaki base to Armenia but were forced back. The Georgian Defence Ministry press-centre, however, has abstained from commenting on the incident.

"Kavkasioni" No. 7, January 29, pp. 1, 3

Revaz Adamia, the chairman of the parliamentary defence committee, met Mahmed Ali Ortemdjelik (?), Turkish deputy foreign minister, on January 28. The latter agreed with Mr. Adamia's proposal on creating a Black Sea peacekeeping battalion with participation of Turkey, Georgia and Ukraine. He also said Turkey was ready to assist Georgia in the army-building.

"Kavkasioni" No. 7, January 29, p.

Press-digest

based on the information of the Georgian press

Small wonder the Kremlin changed its mind, the Droni remarked, reporting Russia's refusal to relinquish three (the Alekseyevka military airfield, the Tbilisi sport centre and medical repositories) out of the 10 Russian military objects which Moscow had promised to pass into to Georgia's possession earlier. Reportedly, the sports centre yields rather high incomes, while the airfield provides excellent services being adjacent to the Tbilisi airport. As to the objects that Georgia seems likely to get, the Akhalkalaki base is considered the most important of them, allowing the Georgian anti-aircraft defence system to control a vast area along the country's southern borders. The Batumi-based Automobile Repair Works, too, will benefit the Georgian army which has to fit about 2,000 out-of-order military machinery. Going to relinquish the Akhalkalaki base, Russia surely pursues its own interests as the Russian anti-aircraft defence system currently fails to provide early warning of attack from the south, the Resonance reports. Besides, Georgia, Armenia and Central Asia - members of the CIS collective anti-aircraft defence - are launching joint air control right this year. All the other claimed Soviet military objects are either devastated or occupied by private enterprises (like the House of Officers in Tbilisi). Experts say Russia will hardly cede its most important (such as the Tbilisi Tank Repair Works) or expensive (like the headquarters of the Adjaria-stationed Russian military base) Georgia-based strategic objects. The Akhali

Taoba reports the Vaziani military airfield, another strategic object to remain in Russia's possession, "potentially able to threaten the country's national security", while the Tbilisi-based Russian units dangerous and humiliating alike. For instance, one of them, stationed on the Kakheti highway, controls strategically vital area, whereas the headquarters of the Russian troops in Transcaucasus, located in the centre of Tbilisi, "shadows" the Georgian Defence Ministry so that the latter "cannot feel safe from a possibility of bombing attack from the neighbouring building". So the Georgians will most likely have to wait quite a long until "Russian occupants" leave the country for good, the Akhali Taoba concludes.

Such a breakthrough in the border issue seems to have been triggered by the former director of the Russian federal frontier service Andrey Nikolayev's resignation, the Droni argues, commenting on a Russian-Georgian draft border agreement, allowing the Georgian frontier troops to take control of the Turkish-Georgian frontier and the country's home waters. And maybe out of envy at the NATO-Georgia co-operation programs, the newspaper deems, Russia also promised to assist Georgia in creating 6-month training courses for frontier officers (to be opened in the town of Akhalkalaki) and grant the Georgian frontier troops some armaments. Interestingly, Russian frontier guards will leave the Abkhazian territory too and this is another headache to the Georgian government: the Russian military must cede their property to Georgia, on the one hand, while Tbilisi wants to be sure that the Abkhaz separatists will not seize the Russian armaments, on the other. Anyway, withdrawal of the Russian frontier troops will benefit Georgia much more than their further deployment, the Droni remarks, recalling a "small war" between Russia and Turkey at the Georgian-Turkish frontier last October (Turkish frontier guards fired a Russian helicopter after it flew too close to the border). In the newspaper's opinion, Russia and Georgia seem to have agreed on the border issue too quickly, as the 1998 budget of Georgia provides the Georgian coast guard with no finance to start patrolling the countries home waters on the agreed date, this July. The vessels sunk around the Poti sea port, if picked up and sold as scrap metal (Greece has already promised the necessary equipment), may arguably prove a solution to the problem, though there is no reliable information about how many vessels are on the sea bed there. Worse still, the Droni argues, the deal may prove a bone of contention between various Georgian governmental bodies, as well as between Greece and USA, since all of them are anxious to take part in the "sunk vessels" operation. There are also some other ways to raise money. For instance, during Shevardnadze's last visit to the USA, the U.S. government promised to credit Georgia \$10-12 mln. Reportedly, just the Frontier Department is working out the most promising project for this money.

"Droni" No. 5, January 20-22, p. 3; No. 8, January 27-29, p. 1

"Resonance" No. 3, January 6, p. 2; No. 5, January 10, p. 2; No. 16, January 21, pp. 1, 2; No. 22, January 27, pp. 1, 2

"Akhali Taoba" (New Generation) No. 2, January 5, p. 2; No. 4, January 7, p. 5; No. 18, January 21, p. 2

"Meridiani 44" No. 8, January 26-28, p. 2