

The Army and Society in Georgia

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THE SOUTH CAUCASUS MAY TURN INTO A HUB OF INTENSE CONFRONTATION

By Irakli Aladashvili

It is common knowledge that during the Cold War the Caucasus, particularly the South Caucasus, used to be an extremely militarised area. At the end of the 80s five different Soviet armies were deployed across a relatively small territory of the South Caucasus (two field armies, one army corps, an air force and an air defence armies), while underground-launched middle- and long-range ballistic missiles equipped with nuclear warheads were located in the North Caucasus.

The break-up of the USSR created a great opportunity to gradually demilitarise the South Caucasus which might have put an end to armed conflicts in already independent South Caucasian states (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia). However, these hopeful prospects did not come true. Nine years after the USSR collapsed a new wave of militarisation triggered by strategic interests of great powers began in the region and in the neighbouring areas. One of these powers - the USA - has been always interested in gaining a "foothold" in the Caucasus. In the 80s - during the Soviet era - the goal could have been achieved only by war but the situation is gradually changing now. As to Russia, despite a severe economic, political and military crisis, Moscow is still extremely anxious to preserve its influence in the South Caucasus.

At the beginning of the 90s due to the Kremlin's imperial policy supporting, formally or informally, separatist movements in independent Georgia and Azerbaijan (in Georgia - Tskhinvali and Abkhazia, while in Azerbaijan - Nagorny Karabakh), Tbilisi has grown somewhat cool towards Moscow, let alone Baku which is apparently unfriendly. Just for these and some other reasons, Armenia is in fact Russia's only stronghold in the South Caucasus nowadays. By the way, official Yerevan is greatly exhilarated by such a situation.

The word "stronghold" is being used here in its original meaning as for the last two years Russia has been amassing its tactical-operational armaments right in Armenia. In such a way Moscow hopes to protect its strategic interests in the region. The fact that in 1996-97 Russia ceded \$1 billion worth of its armaments and ammunition to Armenia was kept secret for quite a long time but it has finally come out into the open. At the beginning of 1999 without any secrecy (on

the contrary, with some advertisement) Russia deployed five most modern (the fourth generation) MiG-29 fighters in its Erebuni air force base in Armenia (five more of them are expected there in the near future). More importantly, Moscow plans to station a regiment of the latest anti-aircraft SAM systems C-300 in Armenia. This will fundamentally change the military-political balance not only between Armenia and two other South Caucasian republics - Georgia and Azerbaijan - but between Armenia and its NATO neighbour - Turkey - as well. The list of armaments currently deployed in Armenia (no matter whether they belong to the Russian military base in Gyumri or the Armenian army since both Moscow and Yerevan declared the creation of coalition forces last year) is suffice to illustrate what a dangerous force has been concentrated there:

- 8 tactical-operational mobile SSM systems R-300 "Scud" with 32 ballistic missiles (with liquid fuel) capable of carrying mass destruction (including nuclear) warheads. Their range amounts to 300 km;
- 5 fighters MiG-29 (5 more are expected some time later) carrying 2-3 tons of bombs/missiles and capable of destroying any air or ground target within a range of 700 km;
- 6 fighters MiG-23 (re-deployed to Armenia from Leningrad MD three years ago) that belong to the air defence system of the Russian base;
- a regiment of the anti-aircraft SAM systems C-300 capable of destroying aircraft within a range of 75-100 km and ballistic missiles within a range of 40 km.

Thus the armaments already stationed or to be deployed in Armenia have the operation range of 75-700 km that gives an enormous advantage. Such a range has strategic rather than tactical-operational importance.

Maybe this fact accounts for the USA's recent decision to deploy three "Patriot" SAM systems in the Incirlik air force base in Turkey. They are capable of checking Armenia-stationed MiG-29 and "Scud" missiles and can also fulfil additional defence missions since Saddam Hussein, the Iraqi leader, threatened to destroy the Incirlik base after it was used by American and British aircraft for air strikes against Iraq.

The Pentagon tries to take the initiative by means of preventive actions against Moscow. While the Azerbaijani president was paying a visit to one of the foreign countries, his advisor for foreign relations publicly suggested that as long as Russia was arming Armenia, Azerbaijan should consider a possibility of deploying American or NATO bases on its territory. This statement came as a severe blow to the Kremlin as if NATO bases are indeed deployed in the South Caucasus, Russia may finally lose not only that region but the whole Caucasus. However, such a possibility seems a distant prospect. Nowadays, U.S. military strategists are basically concerned with persuading Baku to close Russia's strategic military object on the Azerbaijani territory - the Gabal radar station which is used for early warning of ballistic missile attack from the south. By the way, during air strikes against Iraq just these station provided the Russian MoD with information about American and British aircraft bombing Baghdad.

It seems that the beginning of the 21st century will be hardly a still period in the South Caucasus as the balance of powers has yet to be achieved in this strategically important region of the world.

GEOSTRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS OF THE CAUCASUS REGION

By Vakhtang Maisaia

In the early 90s severe and bloody conflicts evolved in the Caucasus caused by territorial disputes over former Soviet lands. More than 40 ongoing or potential ethnic and territorial clashes have made the region one of the most unstable zones in the world. The Caucasus has been in the focus of international attention due to numerous conflicts in the region originated from the "new

tribalism" which is characterised by extreme nationalism based on ethnic intolerance, sense of ethnic superiority and, more importantly, on considerable military capabilities of contesting parties. Being located on the boundary line of the European security system, the region poses a great danger.

One of the dominant recurring features of the bloody conflicts in the Caucasus has been uncontrolled militarisation of the region. This is primarily the result of the recognition of geostrategic and operational values of the Caucasus. Therefore, some significant points should be emphasised.

In the east and in the west the Caucasus is edged with the Black and Caspian seas. Although both are considered "closed" water systems, the role of the region as a maritime territory is great. From the viewpoint of military strategy, a "closed" maritime zone has a unique possibility to achieve fair balance of power and ability of a littoral state with sufficient naval forces to deter potential aggression of neighbouring states. At present such a balance is regulated by the regional maritime powers - Russia, Ukraine and Turkey. Previously, the Russian-Ukrainian dispute over the former Soviet Black Sea Navy broke regional stability in favour of Turkey, infuriated Russia and threatened its national interests. This reinforced Russia's desire to increase its military strength in the region. In addition, from economic and security perspectives the Caucasus is a conjunction of three geostrategically important communication systems which connect the Black and Caspian seas with three world oceans (and with each other). They are vitally important for naval force operations, especially given the fact that the Black Sea remains unfrozen for the whole maritime season. The systems themselves can be categorised as follows:

- 1) Black Sea-Aegean Sea-Dardanelles-Mediterranean Sea-Atlantic Ocean;
- 2) Black Sea-Aegean Sea-Dardanelles-Suez Canal-Red Sea-Indian Ocean;
- 3) Caspian Sea-Volga Basin-Arctic Ocean (this system was applied by the USSR in 1942 for transporting its Navy to the Arctic).

By and large, considering these communication systems in conjunction with continental ones, the strategic "value" of the region increases several times. Particularly, it can serve as the shortest way for rapid deployment of troops to conduct military operations in the southern and south-eastern Europe, as well as in the Middle East, or vice versa to reach the "hinterland" of the Eurasia, internal territories of Russia and the Central Asia through the Caspian Sea, and the eastern Europe through the Black Sea. The location of the region offers strategic advantages not only to regional but also to major world powers. For instance, the flat coastlines of the Caucasus provide a natural ability to defend against air attacks. Thus regional powers, and eventually great powers, will be interested to deploy modern air defence systems in the Caucasus. Suffice it to say that the Soviet air forces had 11 airfields in the region (6 in Azerbaijan and 5 in Georgia) with tactical and operational aircraft (such as Su-24 and Su-27 fighters, etc.) against 12 American airfields in Turkey. Besides, 95 strategic bombers Tu-95M were deployed at the Mozdok airfield. Favourable geographical and acoustic conditions of the coastline help set up an efficient early warning system against missile attacks at strategic level and allow to detect and check tactical air attacks or smuggling operations at tactical level. For example, during the war in Abkhazia several Georgian Su-25 fighters were downed by Abkhaz forces which got information from Russian air defence centres. There are two such air defence centres (former Soviet ones) which continue to operate near Gudauta (Abkhazia) at the Black Sea and near Baku (Azerbaijan) at the Caspian Sea. The former covers the Mediterranean Sea and the Middle East, while the latter the Persian Gulf and Asia (via satellite communicational devices).

On the other hand, the Caucasus is an extremely rugged mountainous region providing a lot of natural barriers against ground military operations. If deployed properly, a relatively small military force will be able to successfully resist massive offensives. Besides, the rugged terrain favours both guerrilla warfare and low intensity conflicts. So locally trained regional

troops will have a distinct advantage in combat against massive and even more advanced enemy forces.

In conclusion, the Caucasus may be regarded as a "zone of turmoil" at present. Let alone ongoing conflicts, there are a lot of "hidden" hot spots that may "explode" in not a distant future. Strong paramilitary formations operating across the North Caucasus (for instance in Chechnya) threaten stability of the whole region. Despite limitations imposed by the CFE (Conventional Forces in Europe) agreement, the Caucasus is facing a new surge of arms race. For instance, just recently Russia has deployed four modern MiG-29 fighters in Armenia in order to reinforce its military strength in the region.

However, there is enough potential for sustainable development so that the Caucasus may turn into a "zone of peace". First of all, the region seems going to become a new vital source of crude oil in the next century as, according to international experts, the Caspian Sea contains an estimated 200 billion barrels of crude oil, i.e. more than the combined oilstock of the North Sea and Alaska. That is why the Caspian Sea attracts attention not only of western oil companies but also of regional powers - Russia, Turkey and Iran - and the USA. The Caspian oil prospects have raised the region's geostrategic importance but just this importance may prove a factor of further destabilisation. There is a danger that the region will become not an area of regional and international co-operation but a zone of rivalry between regional, as well as great, powers anxious to protect their interests in the region. This may lead to instability and result in a spiral of confrontation, leaving the region with a gloomy prospect of peace in the future.

Military Chronicle

Georgian press reports

Conflict zones

The Georgian Internal Troops deployed in the village of Orsantia, Zugdidi district (left bank of the Enguri river), were fired at from the other side of the river on January 6. No casualties were reported. Allegedly, the gunfire was opened by drunk Russian peacekeepers of the 208th RPF post situated in the Otobaia village, Gali district of Abkhazia.

"Meridiani 44" No. 2, January 8-11, p. 3

According to Otar Djagmazia, the head of the intelligence department of the Abkhaz Navy, three vessels illegally entered the Abkhaz home waters on January 7. Two of them managed to flee, while the third was arrested by the Abkhaz Coast Guard. Abkhaz officials confiscated about 3 tons of fish and all the fishing equipment. The captain of the vessel said the ship belonged to a private Turkish firm which had contracted with the Georgian company "Kolkhida" for fishing.

"Droni" No. 1, January 9, p. 3

In accordance with the December 21 (1998) agreement, Georgian, Russian and Abkhaz units started to jointly patrol the Khurcha village, Zugdidi district, on January 10. No incidents have reportedly occurred there ever since. Nowadays, 80-90 Georgian families reside in the village. At the end of January the Young Citizens' of Georgia presented the Khurcha-stationed Georgian Internal Troops with cigarettes and warm socks.

"Resonance" No. 6, January 11 p. 1

"Akhali Taoba" No. 22, January 25, p. 2

"7 Dge" No. 9, January 25-26, pp. 1, 2

A group of the Abkhaz gunmen reinforced by heavy armaments of the Russian Peacekeeping Force entered some Georgian villages of the Gali district of Abkhazia on January 5. On January 7 they robbed two Georgian families, while residents of the Charcha village were threatened with deportation unless they pay a monthly tribute - 500 Russian Roubles and foods. The gunmen also robbed

lots of cattle in the Tagiloni, Kvemo Bargebi and Zemo Bargebi villages. To escape robbery, dozens of local residents crossed the Enguri river and fled to the Zugdidi district. The Abkhaz gunmen reportedly mined some areas of the Gali district with the help of Russian peacekeepers.

"Resonance" No. 7, January 12, p. 2

"Meridiani 44" No. 4, January 13-15, p. 2

"Svobodnaya Gruzia" No. 7, January 13, p. 1

Gela Khutsishvili, deputy chairman of the SDFD, and Astamur Tarba, the Abkhaz security minister, met in Gagra (Abkhazia) on January 12 to discuss frontier defence problems. The talks yielded no positive results as both parties stick to their position: Tbilisi aims to take full control of the Abkhaz coastal waters (from the Psou to the Enguri rivers), while Sukhumi flatly rejects these plans, claiming Abkhazia to be an independent state.

"Dilis Gazeti" No. 4, January 14, p. 5

According to Irakli Menagharishvili, the Georgian foreign minister, Georgia will not agree to prolong the mandate of the Russian Peacekeeping Force in Abkhazia, unless it is revised "in order to correspond with the current realities in Abkhazia". Georgia, in his words, is ready to discuss the issue at any kind of negotiations, including CIS summits.

"7 Dge" No. 5, January 15-17, p. 4

In one of its last reports the Amnesty International said the Georgian guerrilla units White Legion and Forest Brothers (manned mainly with refugees from Abkhazia) had intensified their operations in the Gali district of Abkhazia. Although the Georgian government has officially denied any relationship with the guerrillas, the AI doubts this statement since guerrillas openly walk around Zugdidi and are easily interviewed by Georgian and foreign journalists.

According to the AI, Zurab Samushia, the commander of the White Legion, told the Guardian (UK) daily newspaper that the Legion had executed more than 40 Russian peacekeepers so far (Some time later, however, Samushia refuted this information and denied that he had been interviewed at all). The AI also points to the relations between some Georgian politicians and the guerrillas. For instance, when raising the Georgian state banner in the village of Pichora, Gali district, on May 9, 1998, MPs Bezhan Gunava and German Patsatsia were accompanied by the Forest Brothers. Their action ultimately resulted in the well-known "six-day war" (May 21-26) in the Gali district.

"Droni" No. 4, January 16-19, p. 2

According to some informal sources, Dato Shengelia, the commander of the Forest Brothers and a former Mkhedrioni member, is going to surrender to Abkhaz authorities in an attempt to escape prosecution in Georgia. Facing the danger of arrest, he has allegedly fled to Russia. However, the head of the Samegrelo regional police denied that Shengelia is wanted by the Georgian law-enforcement authorities. For his part, Astamur Tarba, the Abkhaz security minister, said he doubted this information. Shengelia had committed serious crimes and would be prosecuted in Abkhazia, if captured, he said. In Tarba's words, Shengelia has already come back from Russia and is now in Zugdidi.

"Alia" No. 18, February 2-3, p. 2

"Resonance" No. 32, February 6, p. 2

According to Revaz Adamia, the chairman of the parliamentary defence and security committee, several Russian military aircraft have recently landed on the Gudauta military airfield (Abkhazia) without Tbilisi's permission. In his words, every aircraft to land in Georgia must pass the Georgian frontier and customs control. So the Russian military has in fact violated the Georgian state sovereignty. As to the information that the aircraft delivered goods for the RPF, Adamia says the Russian peacekeepers must use the Senaki and Kopitnari airfields (both in western Georgia) to this end. This problem demonstrates that no foreign country must have its military bases in the conflict zone, he says.

"Dilis Gazeti" No. 12, January 23, p. 2

Army building

According to the MoD press centre, David Tevzadze, the defence minister, Tamaz Dumbadze, deputy defence minister, and Johnny Pirtskhalaishvili, the chief of the General Staff of the Georgian Armed Forces, inspected Western Direction troops at the beginning of 1999. The inspection included the Kutaisi-based 21st MRB, the Khoni-based Reconnaissance Battalion, the Senaki Battalion, the Poti-based Marine Battalion and the Batumi-based 25th MRB of the MoD. The 21st MRB and the Marine Battalion proved the best of all. "We consider the Western Direction the most important", Tevzadze said. On January 3 he held closed-door talks with Aslan Abashidze, the Adjarian leader.

"Alia" No. 2, January 5-6, pp. 1, 2

"Akhali Taoba" No. 2, January 5, p. 8

According to Badri Bitsadze, Main Military Procurator, there are 3,367 deserters in Georgia nowadays: 2,496 of them escaped from the MoD units, 469 from the SDFD and 402 from the Internal Troops. The situation is especially worse in the 11th MRB of the MoD - there are 585 deserters; 384 servicemen have deserted the Kutaisi 21st MRB, 215 the Senaki-based 2nd MRB and 130 the National Guards. For the last six months, the Military Procurator's Office instituted 2,701 legal proceedings on desertion. According to the newspaper, the main reason for desertion must be found in flawed conscription procedures. At present, the army enlists conscripts predominantly from poor families. A lot of them are unhealthy and even mentally ill. Many poor families intentionally send their sons with health problems to the army in the hope that they will get free medical treatment there. Short food rations and the lack of uniforms only add to these problems.

"Sakartvelos Respublika" No. 6-7, January 10-11, p. 3

Paata Khizanishvili was appointed head of the MoD Department for Personnel Breeding and Psychological Training in January 1999. He was born in the village of Gomareti, Dmanisi district, in 1956; in 1979 he graduated Engineer-Economic Faculty of Tbilisi State University; his track record includes positions of an officer of the anti-terrorism department of the KGB (1980-91) and lecturer, deputy dean and finally head of the Psychology Department, Academy of State Security (1991-99). In his interview with the newspaper he refutes press reports about numerous facts of violence in the Akhaltsikhe-based MRB of the MoD. In his words, only three servicemen have been lost there so far: one died of cancer, another committed suicide due to personal problems (he had huge debts) and the third died in an accident. As to desertion, its main roots, in his opinion, must be found in improper conscription procedures: drafting offices call up mainly physically and psychologically weak conscripts most of which have serious health problems. According to Khizanishvili, in the future the MoD is going to perfect the system of reserve officers and to enlist women in the army - a special female military college will be created to this end.

"Dilis Gazeti" No. 10, January 21, p. 7

According to the newspaper, the military commissariats (drafting offices) carried out an operation in Tbilisi on January 24 against draft-dodgers. Officers were patrolling public places, especially underground stations, and demanded male citizens of conscription age to proceed their IDs. However, officials of the Main Military Commissariat said they knew nothing about such an action. Military officers, in their words, have no right to check IDs or convey conscripts to a drafting office.

"Dilis Gazeti" No. 12, January 23, p. 5

In its last report, Amnesty International expressed concern with facts of violence against recruits in the Georgian military units. Recruits are ordered to carry out most hard and dirty work. This is often accompanied by beating and leads to suicides. Poor sanitary conditions and short supplies only add to these problems. According to the Amnesty International, 160 deserters are currently serving their sentences in the Rustavi colony. Almost of all them plead violence, short rations, poor sanitary conditions and corruption and say they prefer prison to the army. Sometimes officers instigate violence against recruits viewing it as a tool to maintain discipline.

"Meridiani 44" No. 5, January 15-18, p. 6

The Cadet Corps of the MoD has taken patronage of the Telavi Orphanage. After graduating the ninth form, male pupils of the Orphanage may join the Corps. However, according to Simon Zerekidze, the head of the Cadet Corps, three years ago the Corps attempted to enlist some pupils of the Surami Orphanage but they displayed rather low level of education. Such pupils cannot learn in the Corps, he says. Every year about 200 cadets enter the Corps. Since September 1998, 30 of them have been dismissed for the failure to meet the requirements of the educational program. Graduates of the Corps may enter the Joint Military Academy of Georgia and Russian or Turkish military colleges, provided they have recommendation of the Corps Command. To this end, they have to score only 4 and 5 marks. Others will be called up for the general military service as soon as they reach the conscription age. Last year 18 graduates of the Corps entered military colleges in Turkey, 5 in Greece, 60 in Russia, and 4 entered the Georgian high schools with military departments.

"Dilis Gazeti" No. 10, January 21, p. 15

On January 9 the president cancelled his Decree 612 (October 1998) that granted the Army Support Society exclusive rights for supplies of the army. The president's decision might have been caused by the parliament's discontent with decree as it in fact violated the anti-trust legislation and the Law on State Budget, in accordance to which all the deals requiring budgetary financing over 10 thousand GEL (about \$4.35 thousand) shall be settled through tenders. Such a tender (for supplies of the army) was organised by the Ministry of Economics in 1998 but its winners appeared without orders and consequently suffered losses since the MoD contracted the Society. Besides, Decree 612 contradicted also one of the president's earlier decrees (1997) which banned the army to import such goods that may be produced by domestic industry. However, the Society imported about 5\$ mln worth of goods altogether: \$3.5 mln foods, \$1 mln uniforms and \$500 thousand fuel.

"Resonance" No. 16, January 21, p. 3

Visits, negotiations, co-operation

Great Britain has granted two PFC and some navigation equipment to the Georgian Coast Guard. The ceding ceremony took part in the Poti sea port on January 14. Although these craft are rather small (each weighs 750 kg), their maximum speed - 120 km/hour - makes them the fastest ones of the Georgian Navy. The craft can carry 10 people - 2 crew and 8 marines - and are suitable for commando operations. They will be mainly used to patrol the Poti sea port and neighbouring coastal areas.

"Sakartvelos Respublika" No. 8, January 12, p. 1

"Kviris Palitra" No. 3, January 18-24, p. 9

General Aphanasios Dzoganis, the chief of the General Staff of the Greek Armed Forces, visited Tbilisi on January 17-19 for talks with David Tevzadze and some other officials. He also delivered Greek's gift: 5,000 uniforms and 20 computers. No documents were signed during the visit. According to General Johnny Pirtskhalaishvili, the USA has also granted some computers and a satellite TV aerial to the MoD but they were installed in the parliament. He hopes that the parliament will return this equipment after a computer centre is opened in the MoD.

"7 Dge" No. 6, 7; January 18-19, January 20-21; pp. 2, 3

The January 21-22 meeting of GUAM (Georgia-Ukraine-Azerbaijan-Moldova) defence ministers in Baku (Moldova did not participate in the meeting) examined, among other things, David Tevzadze's proposal to set up a multi-national Black Sea peacekeeping force with participation of the BSEC countries. Supposedly, it may be assigned the mission of carrying out peacekeeping operations in conflict zones and protecting the Europe-Asia transport corridor. Western countries promise their assistance to achieve the goal. For instance, Turkey has already granted some equipment for would-be peacekeepers. However, the meeting abstained

from making a final decision on the issue and resolved to continue discussions at the next meeting in Ukraine this July.

"Resonance" No. 19, January 24, p. 3

General Guram Nikolaishvili has been appointed representative of Georgia in the CIS military co-operation staff. General Vladimir Chikovani, his predecessor, has reached the retirement age. During his career Nikolaishvili has held almost all the top offices in the MoD except that of defence minister. Traditionally, the Georgian representative in the CIS staff is at the same time Georgia's military attache to Russia. The peacekeeping force in Abkhazia is formally subordinated to this staff (formally it is the CIS Collective Peacekeeping Force to Maintain Peace in the Conflict Zone in Abkhazia but actually it consists entirely of Russian troops) and, therefore, Nikolaishvili has to deal, together with other personnel of the staff, with the issue of the peacekeeping mandate (which expired six months ago). He is also responsible for the problem of Georgian cadets in Russian military colleges. In 1998-99 Russia offers to train 170 Georgian cadets but due to the lack of finance the MoD will send only 90 of them, mostly for several months' or one-year courses. In the future David Tevzadze is going to reduce the number of Georgian cadets in Russia to zero. Georgia now owes Russia \$22 mln for education of Georgian cadets.

"Droni" No. 7, January 23-26, pp. 3, 6

Vasil Davitaia, the head of the MIA material-technical and financial department, refuted recent Russian press reports about the ministry's plans to purchase Czech-made T-55 tanks. He acknowledged, however, that last summer representatives of the Czech company "Tomaz CZ" held negotiations with the MIA leadership on possible purchase of machine guns, pistols and ammunition. According to Grigol Katamadze, deputy defence minister, the MoD has negotiated the prospects of purchasing Czech-made modernised T-55 AM2 tanks with this company. Some experts say political motives must be seen behind the deal: if Georgia manages to fill its CFE (Conventional Forces in Europe) quotas, Russia will have to reduce its Georgia-based armaments. Earlier, Georgia temporarily ceded half of its quotas to Russia but with the provision that the Russian armaments will be reduced as soon as Georgia fills the quotas. As by the end of 1998, Georgia has 79 MBT, including 48 T-55 and 31 T-72, while Russia has 141 T-72 tanks in its three Georgia-stationed military bases (Akhalkalaki, Vaziani and Batumi). The CFE quota limits the number of tanks in Georgia to 220 (exactly, 141 plus 79). So if Tbilisi imports the Czech-made tanks, Russia will have nothing for it but to withdraw a respective number of its tanks from Georgia. The situation is similar with APC/AIFV: Georgia - 111, Russia - 493, i.e. Moscow has already violated the quota (also 220). If Georgia fills it, Russia will have to withdraw all its APC/AIFV. The 100mm and over artillery systems: the quota - 285; Georgia - 92, Russia - 173 (265 altogether).

"Resonance" No. 360, January 4, pp. 1, 2

David Tevzadze met a Romanian military delegation led by Simion Bonku, the head of the foreign relations department of the Romanian MoD, on January 26. The talks were focused on the prospects of the two countries' military co-operation. The delegation also visited the Tbilisi Aircraft Works and Joint Military Academy.

"7 Dge" No. 10, January 27-28, p. 2

Eduard Shevardnadze has approved the 1999-2000 plan of individual partnership between Georgia and the NATO. The MoD, MIA, MFA and SDFD are ordered to work out their own detailed co-operation plans by February 10, 1999. The state co-ordination commission for the partnership with NATO has to co-ordinate all the activities and report results to the NSC once in every six months.

"Svobodnaya Gruzia" No. 16, January 27, p. 1

Miscellany

In 1999 the Tbilisi Aircraft Works (TAW) will continue a program of complex reforms started last year. About 70 percent of the TAW's equipment is morally

and physically out-of-date. The TAW has huge debts to the budget (10 mln GEL - about \$4.4 mln - as by June 1998) and arrears of salary. Last year, Vazha Tordia, the TAW director general, resolved to sell out the stock of non-ferrous metals as its 80 percent was out-of-date and unfit for the aircraft production. The raised money enabled to pay off 95 percent of the arrears of salary. Financial difficulties forced the TAW to cede a whole range of organisations that used to be financed by the TAW budget: TAW fire brigade was transferred into possession of the Tbilisi Fire Department, while the TAW Housing Foundation and three kindergartens to the Tbilisi Municipality. Besides, its trading centre, agricultural farm, fish-breeding farm, medical facility, sports centre, transport and building services are filed for privatisation. As a result of the reforms, the TAW will be divided into several independent facilities which will operate on the basis of financial self-sufficiency: assembling, mechanical, founding, metallurgical, etc. Afterwards, each of them will be transformed into independent enterprises and further into joint-stock companies. The TAW plans to focus on the production of spare parts for modernised Su-25 and MiG-21 fighters. The production is expected to be sold mainly in the CIS and East Europe.

"Resonance" No. 361, January 5, p. 9

Unidentified gunmen fired at the defence minister's car on the road between Tbilisi and Tzqneti governmental residence early in the morning on January 2. No casualties have been reported. According to Merab Baghaturia, the head of the criminal division of the Vake district police station, the president's VOLVO was hit by only one "casual" bullet. Neither the minister himself nor any of his family members were in the car at the time of the incident (David Tevzadze was in western Georgia at that time). Investigation of the incident is still under way.

"Meridiani" No. 2, January 8-11, p. 2
"Akhali Taoba" No. 5, January 8, p. 2
"Droni" No. 1, January 9, p. 5
"Resonance" No. 3, January 9, pp. 1, 2

In accordance with the law, Georgian high ranking officials have submitted declaration of incomes. Particularly, David Tevzadze, the defence minister, assesses his apartment in Tbilisi at 30 thousand GEL (about \$13.6 thousand). His family library cost the same. Two members of his family - his spouse and one son - work in the MoD. The latter has also a car which, according to the minister, costs 5 thousand GEL (about \$2.3 thousand). Tevzadze's personal income has totalled 1840.82 GEL (about \$836.70) since the time of his appointment, while his spouse and son have got 480 GEL (about \$218.2) each for the same time. The minister has also a collection of hunter guns. Two of them cost 500 GEL (about \$227.3) and one 800 GEL (about \$363.7).

"Alia" No. 5, January 11, p. 3

The debt of the Russian Troops in Transcaucasus to the Georgian company "Elektrokavshiri" (Electric Communication) for the rent of communication lines totalled 70 thousand GEL (about \$31.8 thousand) at the end of 1998. The company has already threatened to switch off the communication, unless the debt is paid off. The Georgian air transport department also demands the Troops to pay off its debt - \$40,123.00 - for air navigation service of its flights from/to Georgia. If the debt is not paid off, the department will ban Russian military aircraft to enter the Georgian air space. For its part, Russia blames Tbilisi for violating a previous agreement and imposing a 20 percent customs duty on goods imported to Georgia by the Russian military. As a result, by the most optimistic prognoses the Troops will have to spend more than 50 percent of its entire budget on imports of only subsistence materials this year.

"Zakavkazskie Voennye Vedomosti" No. 4, January 16, pp. 1, 4

According to Gigla Baramidze, the state commissioner of the Samtskhe-Djavakheti region, for the last two years there have been four attempts to smuggle armaments from the region to Armenia. Nikoloz Nikolozishvili, the ambassador of Georgia to Armenia, thinks that the Akhalkalaki-stationed Russian military base is directly connected with the case.

"7 Dge" No. 10, January 27-28, p. 2

At his January 20 press-conference, Aslan Abashidze, the leader of the Adjarian autonomy, blamed the leadership of the SDFD for collecting intelligence information in Adjaria without approval of Batumi. Besides, the SDFD, in his words, is trying to win over officers of the Adjarian security forces. Abashidze claims to have got a documentary evidence that some high ranking officials in Tbilisi were plotting a conspiracy to break stability in Adjaria. Valeri Chkheidze, the SDFD chairman, has abstained from commenting on this statement. "Droni" No. 6, January 21-23, p. 3

ABBREVIATIONS :

AGM - air-to-ground missile
AIFV - armoured infantry fighting vehicle
APC - armoured personnel carrier
ATGW - anti-tank guided weapon
FGA - fighter, ground-attack
MBT - main battle tank
MD - military district
MG - machine gun
MoD - Ministry of Defence
PFC - fast patrol craft, coastal
PFP - Partnership for Peace program
SAM - surface-to-air missile
SID - State Intelligence Department
SLM - sea-launched missile
SSM - surface-to-surface missile
CIS - Commonwealth of Independent States
MIA - Ministry of Internal Affairs
MRB - motor rifle brigade
MSS - Ministry of State Security
NSC - National Security Council
RPF - Russian Peacekeeping Force
SDFD - State Department of Frontier Defence
SSS - State Safeguard Service

Press Digest

Almost nothing has changed in the army for ten months that passed since David Tevzadze was appointed defence minister, the Droni (No. 9, the author - Tengiz Gogotishvili) argues. Tevzadze began with structural reforms in the MoD: he reduced the number of his deputies from 12 to 4 and created the general staff of the armed forces under General Johnny Pirtskhalaishvili. However, these innovations have not led to any improvement. Worse still, the current food rations in the army are even more meagre than in the time of Tevzadze's predecessor Vardiko Nadibaidze. In the newspaper's opinion, the absence of military concept must be viewed as the main reason to account for such a situation. There are no analyses of external threats, potential aggressions and possible ways to check them. It remains also unclear whether the country needs an army at all and, if yes, what kind of the army it needs. Without a military concept it is impossible to define the size of the army, its structure and armaments, location and mission of military units. The concept, the newspaper suggests, must be also supplemented by some normative acts such as, for instance, the mobilisation law - at present few know how many reservists and armaments must be mobilised in case of a war. No document clarifies whether the army may be used to put down internal disorder (this has already caused a constitutional crisis during the October 19 mutiny in western Georgia when the president ordered the army against rebelled units without declaring the emergency law as required by the constitution) or how the railway and air transport departments should carry out large-scale and rapid transportation of troops (for instance, the air department is now demanding the MoD to pay 30 thousand GEL - about \$13.7 thousand - for transporting governmental troops from

Tbilisi to Kutaisi during the October 19 mutiny, though the current legislation says nothing about what an agency shall pay in such cases). To date, there have been no professional analyses of the reasons for Georgia's defeat in Abkhazia. Neither were examined the wars in Chechnya and Afghanistan. Although, in the newspaper's opinion, both vindicated that small 5-10-men well-armed groups could defeat Russian divisions, the Georgian army is patterned upon the Russian one. True, Tevzadze has resolved to reduce the army from 30,000 to 25,000 servicemen but this decision has been justified neither scientifically nor financially. The International Security Advisory Board (ISAB) recommends that the Georgian army should not exceed two brigades. This may be justified financially because the 1999 state budget will hardly allow to maintain a larger army. But on the other hand such an army will be unable to check any serious aggression, the newspaper claims. Tevzadze suggests that Georgian officers should learn foreign languages but he does not clarify what for. Until recently Georgia has never officially stated that it may join NATO. Without such an intention, in the newspaper's opinion, it is hard to understand why, say, logistical officers must waste time drilling Past Perfect Continuous Tense, etc. As to common statements that Georgia should build a western-style army, they are not enough and mean only that Georgia no longer likes a Russian model. But there is no indication what a model Georgia likes. The MoD leadership still have no idea about whether Georgia needs a professional army. Most of the experts agree that elements of professional military service should be first introduced in technical arms - panzer troops, artillery, air defence and air force. The term of service also must be changed. Given the country's current capabilities, the newspaper suggests, it should not exceed one year - quite enough to learn thoroughly present equipment and armaments of the Georgian army. On the whole, it seems that David Tevzadze may fall victim to his own staff policy in not a distant future. For instance, his deputy for combat training and ideology, Omar Lekveishvili, has little experience of combat and is strictly against any contacts with mass media. Appointment of such a person looks rather strange in the light of Georgia's declared plans to build a western-style army. It must be mentioned also that a lot of recently appointed officers of the MoD come from the police and security services. This causes dissatisfaction among the cadre military. However, the staff policy, though co-ordinated with the NSC, is the second reason. The absence of military concept is the first, the Droni concludes.

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Apart from positive aspects, the idea of a multi-national Black Sea peacekeeping battalion with participation of all the BSEC countries discussed at the January 21-22 meeting of GUAM (Georgia-Ukraine-Azerbaijan-Moldova) defence ministers in Baku has some negative ones as well, the Droni (No. 8) comments. Firstly, in the newspaper's opinion, the Russian military will hardly like standing together with its Turkish counterpart. So attempts to avoid Russia's negative reaction are doomed to fail. Secondly, this battalion may be used for protection of the Europe-Asia transport corridor that is supposed to pass through Georgia. However, there are at least two countries which strongly dislike this route. Besides, proposed missions of the battalion cause a lot of questions. For instance, the newspaper argues, it is doubtful that it will be really able to protect transport communications from terrorist attacks - such a mission seems more suitable for security services. The protection will also require coast guard and air defence units. As a result, the peacekeeping force will in fact look like a separate army rather than a battalion. Meanwhile, Azerbaijan and Ukraine have expressed their readiness to create a three-party (Georgia-Ukraine-Azerbaijan) peacekeeping force - they have already prepared a package of all the necessary documents: regulations, a draft status, a two-year training program, etc. Georgia, however, preferred not to join them. The Georgian delegation at the meeting, according to the Azeri mass media, actually violated previous agreements with Ukraine and Azerbaijan and signed only several documents out of the whole package. Obviously, it is not the defence minister David Tevzadze who must be blamed for such a decision, the newspaper suggests. The Georgian foreign policy is an exceptional prerogative of the president and Georgia's position at the meeting certainly mirrored the president's will, the Droni concludes.

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After withdrawal of the Russian frontier troops from Georgia, few doubt that Tbilisi will sooner or later demand to pull out all the Russian military bases from the country, the Meridiani 44 (No. 7) remarks. Nowadays, there are no legal grounds for the Russian military presence in Georgia. Neither the Georgian nor the Russian parliament have ratified the Russian-Georgian October 1995 agreement on military bases so far. Georgia signed this agreement on condition that Moscow would help solve the problem of Abkhazia and assist in the army-building. But Russia failed to fulfil both. The Kremlin believes the Russian military presence in Georgia may be secured merely by preserving status-quo in Abkhazia. This belief, in the newspaper's opinion, must be ruined and just the Georgian parliament should make the first step. There is no need to specify concrete terms of the withdrawal of Russian troops, the Meridiani 44 suggests. It would be quite enough for the parliament to state something like: "...the government shall start negotiations with the Russian Federation on the status and presence of Russian military bases". Such a serious move, in the newspaper's opinion, will come as a severe blow to the Kremlin. Moscow feels sure that Tbilisi will never dare even to begin negotiations on this issue. But if it does, Russia will have to choose: either to make real changes in Abkhazia or lose its military stronghold in Georgia. As Russia will hardly do the first, it will have to make the second, the newspaper argues. The process will take a couple of years and Moscow will have no opportunity to object as Georgia will be a member of the Council of Europe by that time, the Meridiani 44 concludes.