

The Army and Society in Georgia

April 1998

Published by the Center for Civil-Military Relations and Security Studies; the Caucasian Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development

Co-financed by:

- the European Community, TACIS Democracy Programme
- the European-Caucasian Economical Consulting

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A Soldier's Fortune In Georgia

by Lela Djandjalashvili

A strong army may prove a decisive factor for a newly emerged independent country, which has lost a good chunk of its territory. From this viewpoint, Georgia surely has little reason to feel at ease. Georgian army problems topped the agenda of a joint press-conference held in Tbilisi on April 27 by the Society for Georgian Soldiers' Rights, the Centre for Civil-Military Relations and Security Studies (Caucasian Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development) and with members of the European Council of Conscript's Organisations. The press conference again educated the public on the present state of the Georgian armed forces, which are called to defend the country's security. In reality, however, people themselves should raise the issue of soldiers' rights since Georgian soldiers appear to have bad fortune. According to Nodar Epremidze (Society for Georgian Soldiers' Rights), even the elementary needs of soldiers are not satisfied. Reportedly, they are chiefly fed on "borsch" (cabbage soup) and stewed cabbage with no meat for months, though the budget allocates 59 GEL (about \$45) per month to each soldier's meal - quite enough for substantial nourishment. Officers, too, are in dire straits - the money they get for meals are taxed so that 48 days a year they find themselves to have run out of money. Servicemen do not have enough soap, which results in lice being easily spread among the ranks. As to their uniform and boots, because of low quality, they do not last long and soldiers then have to purchase new ones out of their own meagre salaries. Mr. Epremidze wonders why the MOD complains about the lack of uniforms when they are freely available on the "black" market. This is not the only curiosity concerning the Georgian army. For instance, the Akhaltsikhe based military unit is supplied by cabbage through a rather strange procedure: cabbage is sent from Akhalkalaki (a town in southern Georgia) to Tbilisi via Akhaltsikhe and then is distributed back to the Akhaltsikhe unit.

Mr. Epremidze emphasised one more problem at the press conference - the spring call-up of reservist officers. This year, he said, 313 reservists under 30 years of age - graduates of higher educational institutions with military departments - had to be drafted. In practice, however, enlistment offices issued five times as many call-up papers and this factor spurred corruption. The Society offered an alternative solution to the problem: the call-up, it was argued, should have been carried out through a contest - given the high unemployment rate there

would have been a lot of volunteers ready to enlist in the army, while the contest would have allowed the military to select the best candidates. As a result, the army could have got committed officers instead of those who were coerced into the military service and, therefore, had little willingness to serve.

Representatives of the mass media and NGOs who attended the press conference were already well aware of corruption and extreme service conditions in the army. On the other hand, they attended in order to learn some new things - relations between the army and the society, between military structures and political leadership; democratic control of the country's political leadership and the society over the military; the public attitude towards the military; and factors that determine whether these attitudes are positive or negative. These issues in Georgia are studied by the NGO "Centre for Civil-Military Relations and Security Studies". Its director, David Darchiashvili, believes that to solve the problems of the Georgian army it is necessary to employ opinions of political scientists and specialists on civil-military relations. Otherwise, new military legislation adopted by the parliament may just exist on paper - not a rare thing in Georgia. Speaking about such a problem of civil-military relations as the dilemma of compulsory military service, on the one hand, and the right to avoid this service, on the other, Mr. Darchiashvili stressed that the government, in particular, should respect liberal democratic ideals and the Georgian youth's current values, and change the legacy of a Soviet past - military regulations determining the army life and the terms of military service. He said also that the hierarchy of command and control over the armed forces needed more precise defining. That there must be a distinct division between the competencies of politicians and the professional military, while the rights and responsibilities of the president, parliament and, most importantly, the Ministry of Defence, have to be clearly stated.

Representatives of the European Council of Conscripts' Organisations, Willem Pekel and Jan Coolen (Netherlands), and Gottfried Pingitzr (Austria), spoke about their countries' experience. Small wonder that today's problems of Dutch or Austrian soldiers may make Georgian servicemen (and not only them) feel envious. One of the Dutch experts said that Holland had faced the same problems some 30 years earlier. During the press conference, the public once again learned that nobody would hand Georgia an easy life on a silver platter. So, there seems to be only one way for Georgia to build an army adequate to the democratic ideals it is committed to: the country must carefully learn from other countries' experience and employ the real possibilities offered by these countries, while, what is more important, society should become more concerned about the army's problems.

The organisers of the press conference issued a press release.

PRESS RELEASE

April 27, 1998

The present standing and future of armed forces - one of the most important attributes of a country - are the vital issues of state developments in Georgia. The process of building a modern Georgian army has seen both failures and achievements. Nowadays, a significant problem of civil-military relations - particularly, civil control over the armed forces - seems to have been already solved: the army no longer poses the threat of a coup and servicemen do not menace civilians.

However, the Georgian armed forces are still far from being an efficient and essential element of the country's national defence system. The lack of discipline and professionalism, and desertion remain uncured. Under the circumstances, it is doubtful whether the armed forces are able to follow through their constitutional mission efficiently and there is also no guarantees

that the "armed man" will not endanger, rather than defend, the civilian population.

The problem of building an army in Georgia has greatly to do with financial difficulties that the government finds itself in. We think, however, that even the current limited defence budget could have been used more effectively, had some other problems - social-political, legal or organisational - been settled. Of late, the Georgian parliament has adopted several laws aimed at creating a legal base for the army building program, but the need to fill the legal vacuum in this sphere still exists.

The Georgian legislation does not define clearly the hierarchy of the armed forces command and the military-political or sheer military competence of the president, parliament, defence ministry and top military command. Current military regulations of the Georgian army were translated from abolished old Soviet manuals and do not take into account the military doctrine of Georgia adopted after these regulations had been put in practice. The military doctrine itself is rather vague and specifies neither real threats facing the country nor the means by which Georgian soldiers and officers should defend their homeland.

The psychology and the system of values of modern Georgian youth have substantially changed if compared with the Soviet mentality of the middle of the century. Unfortunately, military regulations of the Georgian army do not reflect these changes.

Professional officers, especially of low ranks, have always been the backbone of any army. As long as the Georgian armed forces suffer from a sharp deficit of professional officers, an increase in the number of servicemen alone will only worsen discipline and deepen desertion rather than improve the army's combat efficiency.

To convince the citizens of the adequacy of even the limited defence budget and to ensure young men's compliance with the law on general military service, it is necessary to fill the legal and conceptual vacuum in the army building program. The present problems of the Georgian armed forces should be discussed publicly with participation of all the concerned organisations, including NGOs.
Centre for Civil-Military Relations and Security Studies
Society for Georgian Soldiers' Rights

Ecological Threat Posed By Military Units

By David Khetsuriani

Due to the present geo-political standing of Georgia, environmental problems should be placed among the issues of top priority. Further still, the economic crisis and recent social-political developments even more aggravated the ecological situation in the country. The Georgian environment is facing the threat of radioactive, toxic and bacteriological pollution - reality has many times born out the existence of such a danger.

Things are especially bad for the territories, which used to be occupied by former Soviet military units and now belong to the Georgian armed forces. It appears radioactive and toxic materials in these units were kept committing serious violations of safety measures which consequently led to leakage and environmental pollution. Here are some examples.

In 1992, having taken over a former Soviet military unit in the town of Zestaponi, Georgian authorities discovered 40 containers of radioactive materials, which are now stored at the Mtskheta nuclear reactor. Another radioactive material - caesium - was found in the town of Poti in 1996 and is now isolated. Fifteen sources of radiation (caused by caesium) were identified in the Lilo training centre of the Frontier Troops (nearby Tbilisi) in 1997.

They were scattered around in the unit without any precautionary measures and, as a result, injured ten servicemen. The same year caesium was found in one of the military units in Tbilisi. About 100 square meters of a military unit compound in the village of Vaziani is polluted by another radioactive material - americium. Radioactive contamination has been also registered in the military units deployed in the villages of Djvari and Anaklia, and in the town of Gori. It must be mentioned that protocols to cede these Soviet units to Georgia say nothing about radioactive materials on their territories. Altogether, 48 servicemen of the Georgian armed forces have developed radiation sickness.

Radioactive pollution was also revealed on the grounds of Hospital 8 in Tbilisi. In Soviet times there was a medical lab, which worked for the Military Medical Academy of Leningrad, testing the impact of radiation on animals. The bodies of dead animals were buried on hospital grounds instead of being properly disposed of. One more source of radiation was found in the village of Saakadze.

The situation is equally severe concerning the stockpile of toxic materials kept in the military units. Some components of missile fuel left behind by the former Soviet army are still stored in half-rusted tanks in the village of Meria. Toxic leakage may occur at any time and result not only in environmental pollution but, if the components come in contact, an explosion. The case was brought before both the Georgian government and the Headquarters of the Russian Troops in Georgia but nothing has been done about the problem so far.

It seems reasonable to assume that many toxic and radioactive contaminated areas may yet be uncovered throughout Georgia. In October 1997, the Georgian president issued a decree to examine the ecological situation in all military units. A special commission was set up to this end. The MOD and the Ministry of Environmental Security and Natural Resources are involved in the examination. Only a few units have been examined thus far. Finances allocated to this task are not enough to avoid the threat in time. Meanwhile, all suspicious objects need immediate radioactive and toxic examination, while the contaminated lands should be promptly purified. Another urgent task is to map all the toxic and radioactive contaminated territories. According to security requirements, the population should be informed about the symptoms of toxic poisoning and radiation injuries, and about alleged areas of contamination.

Georgia is gradually developing into a transit country. This trend poses a threat for illegally transited radioactive, toxic and chemical materials to flourish. To carry out effective security measures, the state services controlling the frontier should be manned by specialists and equipped with the necessary devices.

New Defence Minister: Likely Reforms In The Georgian Military-Political Policy

*by David Darchiashvili,
Centre for Civil-Military Relations and Security Studies, Director*

On April 28, former defence minister Vardiko Nadibaidze's four-year service came to an end. The parliament approved David Tevzadze - the sixth defence minister in Georgia's recent history - for the post. Such staff changes in Georgia have always had a deeper meaning, open or hidden political implications, but the April 28 case bears exceptional political significance: it gives birth to hopes for essential correction of the national security policy and the onset of a new era in civil-military relations.

In recent years Georgia's political orientation has often been contradictory. In analysing the decision-making process in the country, it was not always clear whether it related to "balance" policy or the lack of definite orientation and political principles. Such a contradictory nature of the country's course was displayed, alongside with the deficit of political documents to determine this

course, in an obvious difference between activities or political priorities of the Parliament and Foreign Ministry on the one hand, and the Ministry of Defence on the other. The situation is altering nowadays. Vardiko Nadibaidze - a straightforward supporter of co-operation with Russia - was replaced with the graduate of an U.S. military college, who took up his military career only after the break-up of the USSR. Quite naturally, the new minister will much more easily find common language with the Foreign Ministry and the parliamentary defence and security committee, which are oriented towards co-operation with NATO and the European Union. This will contribute to developing a coherent course of Georgia's security policy. To some extent, we may concur with one of the MP's opinion that Georgia displayed its real orientation, having appointed David Tevzadze as defence minister.

As to the likely influence the new minister may have on civil-military relations, a few positive aspects should be underlined: Tevzadze's appointment showed his popularity to be far ahead than that of the other power ministers. Given Tevzadze's positive image in western military-political circles, it is argued, the Georgian army must get more support from the government and foreign partners. At the same time, Tevzadze's nomination may improve the attitude of the society towards the army. Unlike Nadibaidze, he comes from the Georgian cultural and intellectual elite. Besides, he has a certain charisma. Consequently, the image of the army may improve and the public could grow more interested in the military service.

So after Tevzadze took command of the army, favourable grounds emerged for reforming the military and harmonising civil-military relations, and for developing national security policy. But no real progress in this-full of problems-field may be achieved without the joint efforts of the country's leadership - with the MOD playing the exceptional role - and unless a special program is designed and completed.

During parliamentary debates and committee hearings, Tevzadze rather briefly outlined his future plans: he called for reforms in the MOD and the army. His idea that the Georgian defence system should become a part of the global security scheme indicates the new minister's orientation towards Euroatlantic co-operation. The minister confirmed that he well comprehended the need for establishing democratic control over the army and, to this end, transforming the MOD into a civil agency. So far, David Tevzadze has proposed no concrete army-building program or that of reforms in the army. The newly appointed minister said he would start with a thorough examination of the current situation in the armed forces. Naturally, any new program requires some time for preparatory measures. The Georgian armed forces have been vainly trying to find their own image, functions and adequate structure for almost a decade. So hardly any major breakthrough may be expected within days or even months to come. However, in compliance with the theory of civil-military relations, the army building, as well as democratic control over the armed forces and the need to separate pure military functions from military-political ones in their command, requires that the competence and the responsibilities of the defence minister himself should be quickly defined.

The defence minister's position has been ambiguous in recent times: being in charge of operational as well as administrative command on the one hand, he took part in developing and implementing the country's security policy on the other. This last point revealed itself first of all in the minister's contacts in Moscow. Alongside with such a situation, legislative practice tended to restrict the minister's competence, making it rather vague. The Frontier Troops were removed from the MOD system, while co-ordination of the country's military forces, military-political and a lot of military-operational functions appeared within the president's sphere of influence. The 1997 law on defence specifies the area of the MOD's responsibilities in one common phrase: the MOD is defined as the command body of the armed forces (i.e. of a part of various Georgian military forces - D.D) responsible for "...carrying out their defence mission". The inner regulations and structure of the MOD have been constantly changing so

that even the military and political leadership has now no clear idea about the essence of this issue.

Of course, certain political reasons account for these events. They were conditioned by the necessity to retain authority during instability and tactical moves of the president who was anxious to control some state structures and individuals. Not long ago, however, it seemed that the other power ministries were higher on the country's list of priorities, while the MOD was doomed to atrophy. Relatively promising and adept officers used to opt for related structures.

After David Tevzadze took office, the MOD has been able to breathe freely again. But, as mentioned above, until the army problems are solved and a homogeneous security policy is developed, there is an immediate need to define the legislative framework and limits of competence of the MOD and its new leader. And here we confront an axiomatic question of civil-military relations - whether the defence minister is a political or a military position.

The frequently cited discipline of political science - civil-military relations - regards the defence minister as a political figure. It does not matter whether candidates for the post have pursued a military career. Even in democratic America generals were sometimes elected presidents, let alone defence ministers. Above all, a minister is one of the country's leadership and his or her major function is to institute democratic political control over the armed forces. In democratic countries defence ministers are in charge of developing and advocating the army building policy. This policy goes far beyond the competence of military professionals and involves numerous foreign political, social, cultural and economic aspects. Essentially, the defence minister is both deputy leader of a country and advisor for national security policy and, therefore, he/she cannot act simply like a performer standing aloof from politics, as required by military professional ethics.

David Tevzadze is a general and, more importantly, a war veteran. His experience will surely help him look into the army problems. But while in office he should give up one element of military professional ethics, which lays emphasis on corporate loyalty and demands the military to obey orders implicitly. If David Tevzadze partners the parliamentary defence and security committee, the Foreign Ministry, and the National Security Council, and initiate creative ideas for defence and security policy, he will contribute greatly to reforms in the army. But if he remains a mere performer focused only on the arts of war - military tactics and operational planning - the reformation of the armed forces may lose one of its adherents and most experienced "architects".

In his first speech at the sitting of the MOD Board, the new minister said in the presence of the president that he belonged to the military and needed to be clearly tasked by politicians. In our opinion, the process of developing civil-military relations and political control over the armed forces will benefit much more if the new minister himself acts as a designer of such tasks.

Military Chronicle

Georgian press reports

Nadibaidze Gives Way To Tevzadze

Vardiko Nadibaidze, the former defence minister, resigned on April 27 after the failure of the Air Force to escort the president's plane. On April 26 Eduard Shevardnadze paid one-day visit to Turkey. On his way back home he found himself unprotected as both escort aircraft appeared out of order, although there had been some intelligence about the possibility of a new assassination attempt against the president. The presidential plane with Shevardnadze and some 60 high ranking officials - members of the Georgian governmental delegation - had to land in Tbilisi without safeguard with all lights switched off for fear of a

"stinger" attack. "I stood scared to death until the president's plane landed", Zurab Zhvania, the chairman of the parliament, said on the next day. The practice to escort (within a height of 2000 metres) the presidential plane by two Su-25 combat aircraft was established in Georgia right after the February 9 assassination attempt against Shevardnadze. The aircraft are kept on the Aleskeevka airfield which belongs to the Russian Troops in Georgia. The Georgian MOD is allowed to use the airfield since Russia is expected to cede it to Georgia soon. Georgian officers take care of the aircraft by day, while the Russians by night. On April 26 the aircraft failed to take off - examination revealed some sand in their engines. "It was not an accident. It was an intentional damage", Gen. Zurab Meparishvili, Chief of the MOD Main Staff, said. The Military Procurator's Office has instituted legal proceedings against Valeri Naqopia, C-in-C of the Georgian Air Force. However, experts say the incident was the final straw but not the only reason for Nadibaidze's resignation. The former minister fell victim to widespread corruption in the armed forces and inability to cope with numerous problems of the army.

"Droni" No. 46, April 28-30, pp. 1, 2;

"Resonance" No. 112, 114, April 28, 30, pp. 1, 2, 4;

"Akhali Taoba" (New Generation) No. 114, April 28, pp. 1, 2

Better late than never, Irina Sarishvili-Chanturia, the leader of the National Democratic Party, commented on Nadibaidze's resignation. Shevardnadze, in her opinion, seems aiming to kill two birds with one stone: he attempted to improve relations with Aslan Abashidze, the Adjarian leader, who has been increasingly critical towards Nadibaidze in recent times and got rid of the inefficient minister. However, she thinks that Nadibaidze must not be merely dismissed but prosecuted for deeply rooted corruption in the army.

"Resonance" No. 112, April 28, pp. 1, 2

On April 27, at the sitting of the National Security Council, Shevardnadze proposed the candidature of Col. David Tevzadze, the chief of the Main Military Inspectorate, for the post of defence minister. On April 28 the parliament unanimously approved the candidature by 161 votes to 2. MPs did not conceal their hope that Tevzadze would carry the day in case of a new war in Abkhazia. On the other hand, Shalva Natelashvili, the leader of the Labour parliamentary group, emphasised that the new minister alone would hardly improve the situation in the army unless the armed forces were cardinally reformed. On April 30 Eduard Shevardnadze signed an order to award Mr. Tevzadze the rank of general.

"Resonance" No. 114, April 30, p. 4

On April 30 Eduard Shevardnadze introduced the newly appointed defence minister at a sitting of the MOD Board. In his speech the president once again stressed that despite "some mistakes" Vardiko Nadibaidze, the former minister, should be praised for evident achievements in the army building. However, there could be no excuse for the April 26 incident, Shevardnadze said. The 1998 defence budget, in his words, provides sufficient money - 75 mln GEL (about \$57.7 mln) - to satisfy the army's need for foods and ammunition. To ensure "healthy psychological climate" in the armed forces, the president suggested that servicemen should be able to get all the necessary information. The army lacks professionals and, in his opinion, Joint Military Academy of Georgia must take a leading role in training officers. The MOD has also to take charge of military industry - Georgia is quite able to produce certain classes of weapons instead of importing them. Besides, Shevardnadze criticised the MOD for its failure to participate efficiently in the NATO Partnership for Peace program. He pointed out that Georgia had signed military co-operation agreements with about 20 countries but the pace of their implementation still fell short of satisfactory. As to Russia, the president tasked Tevzadze to make every effort and get the best of the Russian defence minister Igor Sergeev's forthcoming visit to Georgia. At present, Georgia could not afford a large army, Shevardnadze said, so it must be small but efficient and with strong reserve. A gala meeting was held in the Officers' Palace on the same day to celebrate the 7th anniversary of the Georgian army. Mr. Tevzadze made no formal speech at the ceremony but Col. Tamaz Nikolaishvili, deputy head of the MOD personnel department, announced the minister's order to award some Georgian officers with military ranks.

"Svobodnaya Gruzia" (Free Georgia) No. 118, May 1, p. 1

"Akhali Taoba" No. 117, May 1, p. 2

"7 Dge" (7 Days) No. 50, May 1-2, p. 3

David Tevzadze, Ph.D. in Philosophy, member of New-York Science Academy, born in Sukhumi in 1949, graduated Tbilisi State University in Psychology and Philosophy (1971), Foreign Language Pedagogic Institute of Tbilisi and completed post-graduate studies at the Philosophy Institute of the Academy of Science of Georgia. He is the author of about 20 scientific publications in Georgian, Russian and English. In 1992 he voluntarily enlisted the National Guards and has been serving in the Georgian armed forces ever since. His track record includes positions of the commander of Orbi (Eagle) Battalion, First Brigade of the Rapid Reaction Force, the 11th Brigade and the head of the MOD Foreign Relations Department. In 1993 he was awarded Vakhtang Gorgasali First Class Order for bravery during the Abkhazian war. In 1994-97 he studied in the NATO Defence College in Rome, George Marshall Centre of Strategic Studies and Defence Economy in Germany and the U.S. Army General Staff College. In 1997 he was appointed Chief of Main Military Inspectorate. Mr. Tevzadze is married and has six children.

Badri Bitzadze, Main Military Procurator of Georgia, said the Headquarters of the Russian Troops in Georgia, too, was investigating the incident with two presidential Su-25 escort aircraft but it did not co-operate with Georgian authorities, who have difficulty carrying out investigation at the Russian base - the Aleskeevka military airfield. Meanwhile, according to Paata Djakhutashvili, the head of the investigation division of the Main Military Procurator's Office, Valeri Naqopia, C-in-C of the Georgian Air Force, testified that the escort aircraft were kept on the Alekseevka airfield according to Nadibaidze's oral order. For his part, the former defence minister explained that Russian servicemen, in his opinion, took care of the aircraft better than Georgians. Investigation has yet to find out the truth so both Nadibaidze and Naqopia will be summoned to testify again, Djakhutashvili said.

"Resonance" No. 119, May 5, pp. 1, 4

"Akhali Taoba" No. 117, May 1, p. 2

The Army Building

The Frontier Department has set up its branch office in Poti and appointed Revaz Gabunia its head. A unit of the Frontier Troops - 60 frontier guards - was deployed in Maltaqva (neighbourhoods of Poti). The unit is reportedly well supplied with foods and ammunition and is distinguished by high discipline.

"7 Dge" No. 39, April 3-5, p. 4

Ivan Rybkin, then Russian Security Council Secretary, visited Tbilisi on April 10 to discuss, among the other issues, the problem of former Soviet military property. Mr. Rybkin said Georgia might soon take over 10 Georgia-based former Soviet military objects (which now belong to the Russian troops) but the ceding process, in his opinion, should be implemented gradually. According to one of the officers of the Russian Defence Ministry, however, Georgia will get only buildings but not armaments or military equipment. The combat efficiency of the Russian bases in Georgia the officer said, must not be reduced.

"Resonance" No. 97, April 12, p. 2

According to some informal sources, the MOD is going to cut its female personnel. We faced such a danger every six months, one of the women employed in the MOD said on condition of anonymity. In her words, she would not be surprised if fired one day without any explanations. On March 24 Gen. Z. Meparishvili issued Order 17 which required to "recalculate" the staff of the MOD services. Teimuraz Kavtaradze, the head of the MOD personnel department, has abstained from commenting on the order. However, some officials of the MOD said that there would be re-organisation rather than mere dismissals - incompetent employees would be replaced with professionals. They said also that women would be most likely deprived of their current military ranks and stay in the MOD as

civilians. As a result, their monthly salary will drop from 90 to 30 GEL (about \$70 - \$23).

"Resonance" No. 97, April 12, p. 2

Official ceremony to grant Georgia the U.S. coast guard boat, specially built at the Arkansas shipyards for the Georgian Coast Guard, took place in Poti on April 26. A few days before, a U.S. plane delivered to Tbilisi \$1.3 mln worth of ammunition for the Georgian Frontier Troops, including equipment for the granted boat. One more American boat and a German ship will be granted this summer.

"Resonance" No. 111, April 27, pp. 1, 2

According to the MOD press-centre, after completing two-week course at the MOD training centre in Vaziani, about 300 reservist officers drafted by the recent presidential order were sent to various military units. Most of them enlisted the army voluntarily and had professions the army needed most of all, the press-centre said. The training, however, did not avoid incidents. On April 27 an intense scuffle broke out between the reservist officers and soldiers (all were allegedly drunk) of the centre. As a result, some of the officers were wounded, while about 60 of them left the centre on the next day and refused to get back. The MOD had nothing for its but to end the training before the appointed time. Some sources say the officers had to live in half-ruined barracks under poor sanitary conditions and without enough foods. Col. Zurab Baksadze, the commander of the centre, considers such training a mistake. Reservist officers, in his opinion, must be trained in special units without any contact with soldiers until they take their command positions.

"7 Dge" No. 47, April 24-26, p. 2

"Akhali Taoba" No. 116, April 30, p. 9

"Resonance" No. 114, April 30, pp. 1, 4

Visits. Negotiations. Co-operation

A delegation of the Greek Defence Ministry visited Georgia on April 7 to discuss a draft Georgian-Greek co-operation agreement on military personnel training. According to George Giorgobiani, the head of the MOD foreign relations department, the two countries' defence ministers are expected to sign the agreement by the end of the year.

"7 Dge" No. 42, April 10-12, p. 2

Gen. Ismail Khakky Karaday, Chief of the General Staff of Turkey, visited Georgia on April 15-17. After their one-hour t^ate- -t^ate meeting on April 15 Vardiko Nadibaidze, then defence minister, and Mr. Karaday signed the "Memorandum on Military Co-operation between the Ministry of Defence of Georgia and General Staff of the Armed Forces of Turkey", while Guram Nikolaishvili, deputy defence minister of Georgia, and Bahtiyar Turkerey, the head of the personnel department of the Turkish General Staff, signed the 1998 Georgian-Turkish co-operation program in the fields of military education, science and equipment. Turkey had steadily supported Georgia since the country re-gained its independence and would always do, Gen. Karaday said at his talks with Eduard Shevardnadze the same day. Both parties expressed willingness to expand their military co-operation. In the framework of the Partnership for Peace program Georgian officers will be sent to a new training centre to be opened in Istanbul this year. The two countries will co-operate in frontier defence launching joint anti-smuggling and anti-drugs operations and cleaning land anti-personnel minefields laid along the Georgian-Turkish border in times of Cold War. Tbilisi and Ankara are also going to develop a common regional security system to maintain stable oil and cargo transits from the Caspian sea and Central Asia. To this end Turkey will help Georgia equip a peacekeeping battalion which may serve as police force for TRACECA (Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia). Besides, Turkey promised to grant Georgia a coast guard boat, train Georgian marines, provide equipment for military orchestra, etc. Altogether, the Turkish aid may exceed \$2 million.

"Svobodnaya Gruzia" (Free Georgia) No. 103, April 16, p. 1

"Droni" No. 42, April 16-18, pp. 1, 2

The Georgian Foreign Ministry has made a special statement after the Russian Duma decided on debates over the Russian prime minister Sergey Kirienko's decree to cede 10 former Soviet military objects to Georgia. The Ministry emphasised that all the Georgia-based former Soviet military units are the country's legal property which only temporarily remain in Russia's possession. Despite the Georgian government's efforts, the Ministry said, Moscow still avoided the compensations issue - the Russian Troops in Georgia neither pay rent for buildings and land (altogether 18 thousand hectares) of their bases nor cover expenses for environmental protection. Besides, Russia illegally took out of Georgia lots of armaments of the former Soviet Black Sea Navy, anti-aircraft and communications troops, etc. Unlike the other former USSR republics, Georgia has got only a small part of these armaments. At the 1997 December 8-9 sitting of the Russian-Georgian Commission for Economic Co-operation and 1998 January 4-8 talks between delegations of the two countries' defence ministries, Russia agreed to pass 10 military objects into Georgia's possession. Under the circumstances, the Russian Duma's decision looked at least strange and might be regarded as an attempt to impede the process of rapprochement in military relations between Georgia and Russia, the Ministry said.

"Svobodnaya Gruzia" No. 95, April 7, p. 1

On April 8-9 the Russian Duma debated Kirienko's decree and voted it down. Russian MPs demanded that Georgia must first ratify the agreement on Russian military bases. According to Kakha Chitaia, the chairman of the parliamentary foreign committee, the Duma had no rights to abolish the decree as, by international law, agreements between countries have priority over these countries' parliamentary resolutions. Further still, Article 18 of the Vienna Convention says that when a country falls apart, its property must be divided between those new states which emerge on its former territory. It must be mentioned that there are two Georgian-Russian agreements on military bases - signed in October 1993 and September 1995. Both declare all the assets of the Georgia-stationed Russian bases Georgian legal property. However, none of them is valid as both have yet to be ratified by the Georgian parliament. The Duma claimed that if Georgia got these 10 military objects, even though most of them are either devastated or occupied by private enterprises, the Russian military strength in the region may weaken.

"Resonance" No. 94, April 9, pp. 1, 2

The parliamentary defence and security committee has issued a statement denouncing the Russian Duma's resolution to deny Georgia 10 former Soviet military objects. Such a decision seems rather absurd, the committee said, in the light of earlier agreements: Russia and Georgia first settled the issue as early as in December 1997 and confirmed the deal this January during a Russian military delegation's visit to Georgia. The committee hoped that the Duma would "realistically assess the situation" and make positive steps.

"Svobodnaya Gruzia" No. 101, April 14, pp. 1. 3

According to Col. Gaiyoz Mikirtumov, the head of the agreement department of the Headquarters of the Russian Troops in Georgia, Russia has ceded the following armaments to Georgia by now: 120 tanks, 308 combat armoured vehicles (BMP), 76 artillery systems of over 100 mm calibre and 187 ones of lower than 100 mm calibre, 40 anti-tank artillery systems, 210 anti-tank missile systems, 436 anti-aircraft artillery systems, more than 4,5 thousand automobiles, 4 combat helicopters, 33 combat aircraft and over 1 thousand vans of ammunition.

"Zakavkazskie Voennye Vedomosti" (Transcaucasus Military News - the periodical of the Headquarters of the Russian Troops in Georgia) No. 46, April 16, p. 3

Turkey and Georgia launched their first-ever joint naval manoeuvres in Batumi and Poti on April 30-May 2. Each country was represented by two warships which simulated rescue operation to detect and lift sunken ships.

"Resonance" No. 115, May 1, p. 2

The Army Life

In a week after being drafted George Tombulov, a Georgian recruit, was hospitalised for health problems. In a while he left the hospital (without permission) for home due to, in his words, the lack of care and poor medical treatment. About a month and a half later, one of his commanders visited him at home and warned that he would be prosecuted for desertion unless voluntarily got back. Although Tombulov obeyed and returned, he was arrested and sentenced to 3 years' imprisonment. This would have been a rather ordinary story for the Georgian army, if not one significant aspect - it appeared Tombulov was drafted in breach of law. He suffers from hypertension and, therefore, must be freed from the military service at all. His lawyer is now going to bring the case before the Court of Appeal.

"Droni" No. 41, April 14-16, p. 3

The Main Military Procurator's Office has instituted legal proceedings against Gen. Gudjar Qurashvili, C-in-C of the MOD Infantry Troops, and Gen. Valeri Kvaraia, the former commander of the Koda-based 11th Brigade of the MOD (currently commander of the MOD artillery and missile troops), for neglect of duty (Article 274 of the Criminal Code). Examination of the brigade this January revealed that they allowed demobilisation of 219 deserters from the brigade and thus violated the defence minister's earlier order which demanded deserters, provided they voluntarily got back, to catch up on the time they were absent to be demobilised.

"Resonance" No. 103, April 18, pp. 1, 2

Despite medical treatment in France and Germany, four out of the 11 Georgian frontier guards, who developed unknown skin disease in 1996 allegedly linked to radioactive wastes stored at former Soviet military bases, have got worse again. That is why the Frontier Department of Georgia sent them to a special clinic in Obninsk (Russia) focused on just radiation diseases. Amiran Gamqrelidze, deputy minister for public health care, has launched a briefing to clarify the issue. This did not mean, he said, that German and French physicians failed to cure the soldiers efficiently. Quite the contrary, Georgia is deeply grateful to the German and French governments for their help. Georgian experts say the frontier guards underwent excellent medical treatment in France and Germany but their disease appeared chronic and will take long time to heal.

"Resonance" No. 109, April 25, p. 3

"Sakartvelos Respublika" (Republic of Georgia) No. 100, April 29, p. 2

Miscellany

On April 15 two drunk Russian peacekeepers - Lieut. Ivanov and Sergeant Dobrodnik - opened gunfire and killed, accidentally, Mindia Mindiashvili, a resident of the village of Tamarasheni, the Tskhinvali region (South Ossetia). Both were arrested and the investigation is now under way. Georgian peacekeepers replaced the Russian military at the post near the village. Gen. Yuri Yurov, C-in-C of the Joint Peacekeeping Force in the region, abstained from commenting on the incident.

"Meridiani 44" No. 43, April 17-20, p. 1

Russia is going to transform its Gudauta-based (Abkhazia) 345th Airborne Regiment which from now onward will be titled as the 50th Base. Its 1,700 troops will not be reduced and directly subordinated to the Headquarters of the Russian Troops in Georgia. Earlier the regiment used to be under the Russian Airborne Forces Central Command (in Moscow). The process should be completed by May 1, while by the end of the month Igor Sergeev, the Russian defence minister, is expected to visit Georgia. The issue of the new Russian base will be on the table (though the Russian-Georgian agreement on bases is still not ratified by the Georgian parliament) alongside with the problem of former Soviet military property. There are 2,264 former Soviet military objects in Georgia nowadays.

"Droni" No. 41, April 14-16, p. 3

Col. G. Mikirtumov said 11 international commissions would inspect Russian bases in Georgia in 1998 according to the CFE (Conventional Forces in Europe)

agreement. During last such examination in October 1997 no breaches were registered.

"Svobodnaya Gruzia" No. 102, April 15, p. 3

In 1992 Gen. Feyodor Reut, then C-in-C of the Russian Troops in Transcaucasus, ordered to form a special commando unit - "Bats" (Letuchie Myshi) - in Vaziani (a Russian military base about 20 km east from Tbilisi). It seems that he was interested to keep special force in the region as at that time Russia pulled out of Georgia its 21st Combat Airborne Brigade (deployed in Kutaisi) and 104th Airborne Division (deployed in Kirovabad). The "Bats" was set up on the basis of the reconnaissance detachment of the 157th Training Centre and Lagodekhi-based Special Force. The former was a part of the Tbilisi-based 100th Division (Lev Rokhlin, the chairman of the defence committee of the Russian Duma, was one of its last commanders). At the outset, the "Bats" was made up of about 100 commandos. According to some informal sources, their number has reached 300 by now. Reportedly, they are distinctively well trained and armed with most up-to-date weaponry. Officially, the unit's mission is defined as reconnaissance but informal sources say it is also able to carry out subversive operations. The Georgian authorities, however, do not seem concerned with the presence of such a force near the Georgian capital. "We cannot interfere with the inner structure of Russian bases", Guram Nikolaishvili, deputy defence minister of Georgia, said.

"Resonance" No. 106, April 22, p. 2

Press Digest

The April 27 incident with presidential escort aircraft was none but a pretext for Nadibaidze' resignation, the Resonance (No. 112) claimed. The real reasons, in the newspaper's opinion, must be found in the current army building problems of Georgia as well as in the Georgian-Russian military relations. Nadibaidze has in fact created "the army of hungry and half dressed soldiers", while corruption in the armed forces reached an unprecedented level, let alone the alarming rate of suicides and violence in the army. It must be mentioned also that Audit Chamber of Georgia has revealed a lot of financial breaches in the MOD so that the case was brought before the Procurator's Office. When appointing Nadibaidze to his post four years earlier, Shevardnadze, the Resonance deems, hoped that the former minister would take advantage of his relationship with then Russian defence minister Pavel Grachyov (Nadibaidze's godson) and succeed in getting Georgia's share of the former Soviet military property. These hopes, however, proved vain. Paradoxically as it is, the Droni (No. 46) commented, Nadibaidze had to resign just for the same reason he was appointed defence minister - good relations with the Russian military. According to the Meridiani 44 (No. 47, 49), Shevardnadze himself indirectly pointed to the core of the problem - the escort aircraft were kept on a Russian base and that was Nadibaidze's main fault rather than their being out of order. Nadibaidze's resignation suggested that Georgia and Russia had failed to reach a "geo-political compromise" in the South Caucasus, the newspaper wrote. In 1994, when Nadibaidze took office, Shevardnadze and a good chunk of the Georgian intelligentsia did believe (though some of them still do believe) that "acquiescence" in relations with Russia was the best strategy for Georgia. It did not, however, and could not yield any positive results. Thus the era of "romantic Russiaphilia" in Georgia seems going to end, the Meridiani 44 concluded.

Nadibaidze might have been also too cautious of the president, the Resonance (No. 112) argued. With such a defence minister Georgia could have built the only kind of army: permanently inefficient but unable to stage a coup. The Droni (No. 46) claimed that although Nadibaidze used to be rather straightforward in his activities, despite opponents' censure, the question is whether he was efficient enough. Efficiency of statesmen, however, has been always judged by Shevardnadze only. The president, therefore, must take his share of the blame for the fact that the modern Georgian army is entirely patterned upon the Russian one and has actually nothing to be proud of. Nevertheless, in the newspaper's opinion, Nadibaidze has certainly achieved some progress. In about an year after his appointment he managed to dissolve lots of paramilitary units the army had

incorporated by that time, and took stock of all the armaments and ammunition. But since 1995 the army-building in Georgia has been in fact stagnated. A few coast guard boats granted by western countries and some large-scale manoeuvres could hardly change anything, the Droni remarked. The situation was obvious for everyone, including the head of the country - the president. Another question is why the country's leadership have only now remembered the MOD's failure to take efficient steps after the February 9 assassination attempt against Shevardnadze or why there has been no adequate reaction to violence and crime in the Georgian army so far. Georgian officials often enjoy such a "luxury" as to act freely until their "sins" finally exceed a level critical in the president's opinion. From this viewpoint, Shevardnadze's logic is not always clear for the public. As to the defence minister, his resignation will hardly make sense, unless the MOD itself undergoes cardinal reforms and, more importantly, the Georgian military stop looking up to "the northern neighbour". It does not mean that Georgian soldiers should immediately replace their Kalashnikov submachine guns with M16. But the army's top command must comprehend that to build a Russian-like army is the same blunder as to keep presidential escort aircraft on the base of a "potential enemy", the Droni concluded.

All the Georgian periodicals welcomed Shevardnadze's decision to assign David Tevzadze as new defence minister. A well trained and experienced officer (during the Abkhazian war he commanded the 11th Brigade) he can be hardly blamed for pursuing personal lucrative interests, they wrote. Tevzadze's appointment clearly showed that Shevardnadze was quite independent in his staff polity, the Akhali Taoba (No. 115) argued. It seems, in the newspaper's opinion, that "the Georgian locomotive" successfully escaped from the hands of Russian generals and rushed towards the European Union. But, on the other hand, Georgia's CIS membership makes the country's foreign policy orientation more vague than ever. MPs rather seldom display such unanimous vote as they did debating Tevzadze's candidature, the newspaper underlined. This fact once again reflected MPs' distaste for Nadibaidze. It's better when the office of defence minister is held by a military philosopher than a philosophising military, Zurab Zhvania, the chairman of the parliament, said hinting at Tevzadze's civil education. The change in the MOD leadership has surely troubled a dozen of Nadibaidze's deputies who now have to ponder over their future - whether they will be dismissed or not. According to the law, the Droni (No. 48) pointed out, Nadibaidze's "team", too, offered their resignation. As a result, the fate of almost 15 generals remains unclear, while the whole MOD is waiting for tomorrow with growing unease. As to David Tevzadze, he is known as Mr. "No Comment". Only God and maybe the Supreme Commander - the president - know his future plans. Everybody, however, have the feeling of impending serious reforms. The current 30,000-men Georgian army may not be reduced but it surely will never grow to have 50,000 servicemen as Nadibaidze planned. The problem is whether the president will interfere with the new minister's staff policy and appoint deputy ministers against Tevzadze's will. Let's hope he would not, the newspaper remarked, all the more so he had never done this in Nadibaidze's times. Today, the president is laying great emphasis on the need for co-operation between the MOD, Frontier Department, Internal Troops and Security Ministry. It seems that he is making ready grounds for creation of a general staff of the armed forces. Almost all the developed countries have such a structure but it requires that the ministry of defence be a civilian agency. Meanwhile, Tevzadze has been recently awarded the rank of general. This suggests that Georgia still falls short of this requirement. However, some high ranking officers of the MOD say such a situation will not last for long and the Georgian military will be under civilian control one day.