

The Army and Society in Georgia

July 1999

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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THE CHECHEN ARMED FORCES: CONTEMPORARY CASE

By Vakhtang Maisaia

The development of events in the Caucasus, especially in the northern part of the region, has attracted great attention. After a relatively stable period - 1996-97 - the situation in Chechnya and Dagestan (eastern part of the North Caucasus) has again reached a critical edge. A future scenario seems likely to repeat the November-December 1994 variant and reflects the looming threat of a new Caucasian war. Russian federal forces and unidentified gunmen regularly clash along the Chechen-Dagestani border, using heavy armaments and airpower. At the same time, the situation in western part of the North Caucasus - Qarachai-Circassia - has aggravated as well, threatening with destabilisation in the whole Caucasus.

The Chechen republic is a certain "epicentre" of the Caucasian instability. As a result of the last Chechen-Russian war, the republic severely suffers from hard social and economic problems, and displays some elements of political chaos. The post-war Veinakh Chechen republic has transformed into a place of uncontrolled armament. Its legitimate government still has great difficulty exercising efficient control over paramilitary units. The overall personnel strength of the republic's official, semi-official and unofficial forces amounts to 14,200 men. In addition, there are some relatively small unregistered paramilitary units which remain beyond any statistics. Below, there is a brief description of these forces.

Official forces

The official armed and paramilitary forces of the Chechen republic consist of the National Guards, Sharia Guards and Presidential Guards, State Security Service and the Ministry of Internal Affairs, as well as several power agencies directly or indirectly subordinated to these two services (for instance, anti-terrorism centre, intelligence department, etc.). President Aslan Maskhadov is the supreme commander-in-chief of the armed forces. The armed forces are coordinated and commanded by the general staff which consists of five departments: combat training, procurement and transport, personnel, ideology and religion, and reconnaissance. There is also a maintenance/management battalion under the general staff. The staff is located in the Hankala military airfield.

The National Guards is the biggest official unit - 2,500 servicemen. Its recruitment is based on the principle of all-volunteer contract service. The term of the contract service amounts to five years. The staff of the Guards is situated in the former "Severny" airfield. Structurally, the National Guards is made up of six motorifle battalions deployed in Grozny (Hankala and "Severny" military bases), Gudermes and Naurus. A separate tank regiment is deployed in Shali. There are also artillery and engineer battalions, and a reconnaissance-subversion unit. The Guards pays great attention to ideological training (along with combat training) which is reflected in thorough learning of Sharia principles and norms. Friday is a rest-day for the Chechen military.

The Presidential Guards is the second large official unit - 300 servicemen - and the most elite one. Its main mission is to maintain safety of the president and those members of the government who have no bodyguards. Its recruitment is based on special selection tests or direct patronage of the Guards command.

The Sharia Guards - 500 servicemen - is responsible for maintaining internal law and order in Chechnya. Its missions include also enforcement of the Sharia law. Nominally, combat units of the Sharia Guards constitute a part of the National Guards - a special task Islamic regiment (300 servicemen) and about one hundred servicemen of the former Islamic Regiment. The latter used to be a first-strike force of the Sharia Guards but after last year's July 15-16 armed conflict in Gudermes the president Maskhadov actually dissolved the regiment.

The Sharia Ministry of State Security, a strictly secret body, is one of the strongest official governmental structures. After the Sharia constitutional order was declared in Chechnya in 1998 then national security service was transformed into the Sharia Ministry of State Security. All republican agencies responsible for the problems of national and Sharia security were subordinated to the ministry. This reorganisation was also caused by the Gudermes incident and by the fact that some former leaders of the Sharia security had joined the religious and political opposition - Shura. The HQ of the ministry with about 900 personnel is situated in Grozny. The ministry is directed by the president Maskhadov's relative and a well-known commander Atgeriyev. Russia claims him to be a dangerous criminal. Structurally, the Sharia Ministry of State Security is made up of a co-ordination staff responsible for internal and foreign security of the republic, an intelligence department, a counter-intelligence department and an anti-terrorism centre (counter-kidnapping operations are among main tasks of the centre). It has also a 80-men commando unit "Tornado" to carry out special missions within the republic, its own investigation department and preventive detention wards. The ministry's local offices function in all the regions of Chechnya. It must be mentioned that the founder and the first director of the anti-terrorism centre was a well-known Chechen commander General Israpilov. After the Gudermes incident he resigned from the office and joined the Sharia political organisation - Shura - in opposition to the president Maskhadov.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs of Chechnya is not less influential structure. Its personnel totals 5,000 men. The ministry consists of the staff, a personnel and procurement department, the criminal police, state automobile and fire services. The ministry's local offices are deployed in every district centre. Besides, the ministry embodies a public security department with a special task regiment.

The Customs Department, Taxation Department and Frontier Service are relatively "manageable" official agencies. Their personnel total some 500 men altogether.

Despite their manpower and good organisation, official structures have difficulty fighting against hard crime situation in the republic. First of all, it relates to the problem of kidnapping. This may be explained mainly by the fact that governmental groups and structures are still in the process of development and, therefore, cannot effectively fulfil their constitutional responsibilities. On the other hand, local traditions, such as "vendetta",

seriously impede operations against various criminal groups which belong to the same Veinakh ethnic groups. Besides, the total potential of unofficial units (including semi-official forces) almost equals (if not exceeds) that of official governmental forces. Under such circumstances, small wonder that Maskhadov and his adherents are so "passive" in maintaining law and order in Chechnya.

According to the "established rule", 20% of the lucrative places (markets, oil refineries, etc.) in Chechnya are controlled by semi-official and unofficial units.

Semi-official forces

This category consists of quite large and strong units under those commanders who used to hold governmental offices before. These half-legal units function in "autonomous" regime and enjoy a certain political immunity. Among such influential commanders, one must note the following persons (they are listed in accordance with the potential strength of their units):

- 1) General Salman Raduyev, former mayor of Gudermes and the first Chechen president Djokhar Dudayev's son-in-law; currently, the commander of General Dudayev Army;
- 2) Colonel Shamil Basayev, former acting prime-minister (twice in 1997-98), the chairman of the Shura of Ichkeria;
- 3) General Anri Barayev, former commander of the Islamic Regiment and former deputy commander of the National Guards;
- 4) Colonel Hattab, the most influential and popular foreigner (he has Chechen origins and come from Jordan or, by other sources, from Saudi Arabia) in Chechnya; during the Russian-Chechen war he was a chief consultant of the Chechen armed forces.

All of them command their own quite strong units which may be briefly ranged as follows (in accordance with the above specified order).

1) General Dudayev Army (commander - Salman Raduyev) - about 1,000 men, including 200 in permanent alert (the others are considered reservists). It is deployed in south-eastern Chechnya and controls the territory from Gudermes to the Chechen-Dagestani border. The army HQ is situated in Grozny. Raduyev controls also the TV channel "Marsho". A reconnaissance-subversion college located in the village of Kadi Yurt is subordinated to Raduyev as well. The college teaches special combat operations and religion. Raduyev claims that if necessary he can muster some 5,000 men. His unit has some heavy armaments (three T-72 tanks and five of six armoured personnel carriers) and is considered the strongest and most experienced one in Chechnya. It is manned basically with former servicemen of General Djokhar Dudayev's special commando forces and the former president's adherents. Raduyev is regarded as an independent political figure in Chechnya. By the way, he took responsibility for the February 9, 1998, assassination attempt against Eduard Shevardnadze.

2) Shamil Basayev is maybe the most influential Chechen commander who managed to reach a high position (the office of prime-minister). At present he is in opposition to the president Maskhadov and chairs the Shura of Ichkeria. He got combat experience in Afghanistan, having visited this country twice in 1995 to master combat training programs (before, he actively participated in the 1992-93 war in Abkhazia as the commander of the northern direction of the Abkhaz armed forces). So did 40 gunmen of his units who have passed a full course of combat training in Afghanistan. Basayev's units are deployed in the Vedeno district. He commands about 1,000 gunmen, including 300-400 of them residing in Grozny. While in office of prime-minister, Basayev officially set up a special task unit with a mission to assist governmental structures, when necessary, in maintaining law and order. His units are armed with five armoured personnel carriers, six tanks, two self-propelled artillery systems and several combat vehicles. Basayev is the second most influential politician of Chechnya after the president Maskhadov (and his weight is gradually increasing). He has also initiated the so-called "Caucasian Peacekeeping Battalion" - 600-700 servicemen (along with the Chechens

there are some foreigners as well) - the battalion held its exercise on July 3, 1998. Basayev personally took part in the establishment of the joint Congress of Chechen and Dagestani Peoples. Just this Congress has recently declared the creation of an independent Islamic state in the occupied territories of the Tsumadin and Botlikh districts of Dagestan.

Sheikh Mansur reconnaissance-subversion colleges in Vedeno and Dargin districts, as well as that near the village of Samashki, are also subordinated to Basayev. The training process there lasts from 45 to 75 days dependent on speciality. Approximately 30-50 cadets are trained during this period in each of the colleges by Pakistani, Saudi Arabian, Jordanian and Turkish instructors. Just Basayev commands the pro-Vahhabist military operation in Dagestan.

3) Anri Barayev from the town of Urus Martan commands about 1,000 gunmen and controls northern and north-western Chechnya.

4) A foreigner Ahmad Hattab, nicknamed "Black Arab", is the most dangerous and influential commander. There are two legends about Hattab's origins:
a) he has Chechen origins and was born at the beginning of 60s in Amman, Jordan; he is a military professional and has graduated the academy of Amman and served in King Hussein's "Circassian Guards"; after Soviet troops invaded Afghanistan he retired from the military service and joined Afghan "modjaheddins"; in 1993 he arrived in Chechnya and took the command of the "Djamaat" battalion which consists mainly of foreign gunmen (most of them come from Arabian countries);
b) he was born in 1962 in El Ri'ad (Saudi Arabia); in 1979 he volunteered, with the support of Saudi Arabian security services, to join Afghan "modjaheddins" and appeared first in Peshawar (Pakistan) and then in Afghanistan; he completed a whole course of combat training in Peshawar in mining/subversion speciality; in 1994-95 he arrived in Chechnya (it seems that friendship between Hattab and Barayev traces back just to that time - they are "sworn brothers") and actively participated in the Chechen war against Russian federal forces.

The village of Dargin and some neighbouring territories are under Hattab's control. His HQ is located in the village of Surzhen Yurt. There is also the training centre "Caucasus" which includes three camps with about 1,000 cadets. In addition, some 300 gunmen with heavy armaments - several tanks, three armoured personnel carriers, and three combat vehicles - are permanently deployed in the centre. Cadets learn the Arabian language, the Sharia law and military specialities, including the tactics of guerrilla warfare, alpine and urban combat operations, mining, subversive activities, etc. The training course lasts 3-6 months dependent on speciality. Hattab is in kinship with some Chechen residents of Dagestan and has certain ambitions there.

According to some sources, Hattab is the top international terrorist Usam Ben Laden's representative in the Caucasus and his goal is to promote the process of "Islamisation" in the region. The following aspects are noteworthy:

- a) Hattab's military training centre is similar to Ben Laden's one in Afghanistan;
- b) Usab Ben Laden initiated the "Arabian-Islamic People's Congress" or the so-called "Green International" led by an Algerian military commander Hassan At Turabi; in Chechnya, Hattab contributed to the creation of the "Congress of Chechen and Dagestani Peoples" or the "Caucasian Green International" that adheres to the idea of an independent Islamic state - Shamil Basayev has become the leader of this organisation;
- c) for the last six months, Usab Ben Laden has provided Hattab with \$15 mln in kind of aid; the spending of the money is supervised by inspectors from the Near East; recent events in Dagestan may suggest how the money is spent.

Unofficial forces

As a rule, personnel strength of such units fluctuates between 100 and 200 men. Their commanders are less characterised by great political ambitions and usually run ordinary "business" (for instance, kidnapping, security of transport

convoys, racketeering, etc.) From this viewpoint, General Ruslan Harhariyev, an ethnic Ingush and a bearer of the highest Chechen order "Komense" (Nation's Honour), is considered the most influential commander of unofficial units. The core of his forces - 150 men - is deployed mainly in Bamut. Among the other unofficial leaders, one must note such commanders as Alkhoyev, Mogurayev, Veloyev (former chief of the state security department), Movsayev, Velikhanov, brothers Yamadayevs, Israpilov, etc. Their units total from 50 to 100 gunmen each.

Military Chronicle

Georgian press reports

Conflict zones

Three buildings in Sukhumi and the office of the Gali district administration were bombed on July 9 and 12 respectively. No casualties were reported. Sukhumi blamed the incidents on Georgian terrorists.

"Resonance" No. 187, 188; July 12, 13; pp. 1, 2

On July 11 unidentified gunmen fired at a car near the village of Pokveshi, Ochamchire district, killing two and taking hostage two other passengers.

"Resonance" No. 188, July 13, p. 1

A governmental delegation including Avtandil Djorbenadze, the minister for health care, and some high ranking officials of the Tbilisi-based Abkhaz government - Londer Tsaava, the chairman of the Council of Ministers, Mamuka Natchqepia, the interior minister, and Anzor Latsuzbaia, the procurator general, and some others - were taken hostage in the Kodori Gorge (a territory of Abkhazia still controlled by the Georgian government) on July 9 by unidentified gunmen. Several of them were severely beaten. The delegation was going to deliver humanitarian aid and learn local social problems. The kidnapers demanded that the Gorge should not be under the Tbilisi-based Abkhaz government but under direct presidential rule. After several hours of negotiations, the hostages were released. According to some informal sources, the incident was caused by confrontation between Ivery Tchelidze, the state commissioner of the Gorge, and the Tbilisi-based Abkhaz government. Later on, the Tbilisi-based Supreme Council of Abkhazia accused the Kodori-deployed battalion of the MoD of being involved in the incident. As a result, Colonel Emzar Kvitsiani, the commander of the Kodori Direction Troops of the MoD and Tchelidze's deputy, offered his resignation but it was turned down by the defence minister, while the MoD made an official statement denying the accusation.

"Akhali Taoba" No. 189, July 12, p. 3

"Droni" No. 74, July 10, p. 1

"Sakartvelos Respublika" No. 187, July 15, p. 1

"Dilis Gazeti" No. 169, July 27, p. 5

"Kavkasioni" No. 29, July 28-August 3, p. 7

The self-proclaimed South Ossetian republic celebrated the 7th anniversary of the peacekeeping operation in the region. According to Colonel Anatoly Lyubochkin, commander of the Russian Peacekeeping Battalion, the battalion consists of 480 servicemen at present.

"Sakartvelos Respublika" No. 185, July 13, p. 1

The army life

Reportedly, some servicemen of the Akhaltsikhe-based 22nd MRB of the MoD escaped from the unit in protest against poor rations. In their words, they had not been fed for several days. However, the chief of the Akhaltsikhe garrison staff denied the fact saying that the brigade had enough foods and there was the only problem - power supply had been cut off for huge debts. For his part, David

Tevzadze, the defence minister, claimed mass media reports about the incident to be complete misinformation and assured that the unit had a 15-day storage of foods. However, several days later commander of the Akhaltsikhe brigade was dismissed and replaced with Colonel Soso Karchadze. According to Gogi Gogashvili, the head of the MoD military inspectorate, despite some problems, the food situation in the army is not so catastrophic as reported by the press. At present, in his words, about 80% of the defence budget are allocated to foods, ammunition and salary.

"Resonance" No. 189, July 14, p. 1

"Droni" No. 76, July 15, p. 2

"7 Dge" No. 82, July 16-18, p. 6

"Svobodnaya Gruzia" No. 159-160, July 16, p. 1

The MoD press centre made a statement claiming that despite a recent court decision to excise 2.16 mln GEL from the MoD budget in payment for last years' debts of the ministry, the MoD leadership does its best to maintain food supplies to the army on the required level.

"Svobodnaya Gruzia" No. 158, July 15, p. 2

The army building

Valeri Chkheidze, the chairman of the SDFD, inspected the Akhaltsikhe frontier base on July 3. According to the SDFD press centre, the inspection revealed some violations and resulted in staff changes: the commander of the base, Grigol Laziashvili, retired from the SDFD and five officers were dismissed. Colonel Besik Zurabishvili was appointed new commander of the base.

"Dilis Gazeti" No. 150, July 5, p. 2

"Alia" No. 105, July 6-7, p. 2

In accordance with the last year's Russian-Georgian agreement, the withdrawal of Russian frontier troops from Adjara was completed on July 10. The SDFD took over the Sarpi check-point on that day.

"Svobodnaya Gruzia" No. 155, July 10, p. 1

According to Valeri Chkheidze, there are no subordination problems between the SDFD and its regional Adjarian bureau - all the normative acts and orders are issued by Tbilisi (earlier, Batumi used to demand that Adjara would patrol its borders independently). The head of the bureau, Tengiz Kontselidze (former deputy chief of the Adjarian security service) was nominated by the Adjarian leader Aslan Abashidze himself. Abashidze also re-subordinated patrol boats of the Adjarian security service to the bureau and they constituted the 1st division of the Coast Guard (the 2nd division is deployed in Poti). The SDFD Adjarian bureau is manned entirely with local residents who had served in Russian frontier troops.

"Droni" No. 79, July 22, p. 6

According to Givi Lekishvili, the director general of the state scientific centre "Delta", the state enterprise "Orioni" may soon begin production of ammunition. In his words, at the first stage raw materials for the production may be imported from abroad. The issue was examined at the July 2 sitting of the NSC. In Soviet times the "Orioni" was focused on military-related production. At present, however, it works only at 10% of its full capacity.

"Dilis Gazeti" No. 150, July 5, p. 4

In July 116 cadets graduated the Joint Military Academy, including 48 motorifle, 22 artillery, 25 tank, 10 frontier officers and some others. "For us a strong army is an efficient tool of the peaceful policy to restore territorial integrity and resolve conflicts", Eduard Shevardnadze said at the graduation ceremony on July 13. It was the third graduation in the history of the JMA. The first one took place in 1997 - 76 cadets graduated the JMA at that time. At present, 600 cadets study in its five faculties - general arms, artillery, tank, internal and frontier troops. Among the problems of the JMA one should note the lack of professional teachers, foods and uniforms, and hazing. Some problems

have been solved by foreign aid - the USA, Great Britain and Turkey granted computers and literature for foreign language courses.

"Droni" No. 77, July 17, p. 3

"Sakartvelos Respublika" No. 185, 186; July 13, 14; pp. 1, 2

On July 18 Georgian air defence units equipped with C-125 SAM systems launched an exercise in Poti and successfully demonstrated their ability to destroy air "targets". The first such exercise took place in December 1997 after several out-of-order C-125, which remained in Georgia since the break-up of the USSR, were repaired with the help of Armenian, Byelorussian and Ukrainian specialists. However, the air defence system of Georgia is still rather fragmented and, most importantly, has no interceptor aircraft.

"Kavkasioni" No. 28, July 21-27, p. 7

The Georgian parliament passed a bill on peacekeeping forces and peacekeeping operations on July 20. According to Zurab Zhvania, the chairman of the parliament, a Georgian peacekeeping platoon may take part in the peacekeeping operation in Kosovo.

"Dilis Gazeti" No. 163, July 20, p. 5

Visits, negotiations, co-operation

Georgia got a Ukraine-built missile craft (Project 206MP) on July 6. She has become the first Georgian craft with sea-launched missile systems and the fastest one (maximum speed - 42 knots). Earlier she belonged to the former Soviet Black Sea Navy and is also armed with AK-176 (76.2mm) and AK-630 (30mm) artillery systems. However, she is not equipped with missiles (but only with missile launchers) as Georgia lacks respective storage and testing facilities. The craft constituted a part of the U.S. assistance program aimed to strengthen the Georgian Coast Guard. To carry it out, the USA allocated \$35 mln for last two years. As a result, Georgia has got a new frontier base - barracks, depots, etc. - a new patrol aircraft (Mercury type) produced by the Kutaisi aircraft works, one helicopter, 31 cars, four small patrol boats, etc. The completion of the first stage of the program was celebrated in Poti on July 10.

"Dilis Gazeti" No. 149, July 3, p. 2

"Akhali Taoba" No. 189, July 12, p. 5

"Resonance" No. 186, July 11, p. 2

"Kviris Palitra" No. 28, July 12-18, p. 9

A Greek delegation led by Dimitrios Apustolakis, deputy defence minister, paid a three-day visit to Georgia for talks with the Georgian leadership (the state minister, the chairman of the parliament, the defence minister) on the prospects of the Georgian-Greek military co-operation. The delegation visited the Tbilisi Aircraft Works and Joint Military Academy. Reportedly, Greece may soon grant Georgia one more patrol craft (the first one was granted last year) and provide the Georgian military with more training opportunities. Members of the delegation, some businessmen affiliated with the Greek military-industrial complex, expressed their interest in joint production of ammunition, optic sights, etc.

"Dilis Gazeti" No. 162, July 19, p. 2

"Kavkasioni" No. 28, July 21-27, p. 7

"Svobodnaya Gruzia" No. 164, July 22, p. 3

The Georgian parliament ratified the Georgian-American agreement on U.S. military assistance to Georgia.

"Akhali Taoba" No. 201, July 24, p. 3

David Tevzadze visited Tel Aviv on July 25-29. He has become the first defence minister of a former Soviet republic to visit Israel. The two countries signed a military co-operation memorandum. According to some informal sources, Israel is interested in co-operation with the Tbilisi Aircraft Works. The TAW is reportedly going to sell eight its Su-25 fighters to one of the African

countries with mediation of a Israeli private company. The contract may total about \$30 mln.

"Resonance" No. 189, July 14, p. 1

"Dilis Gazeti" No. 169, July 27, p. 5

A multi-national verification group (Bulgaria-UK-Denmark) visited Georgia on July 27 to inspect Georgian military units in accordance with the CFE agreement.

"Kavkasioni" No. 29, July 28-August 3, p. 7

General Vitaly Gritsan, the chief of the CIS co-ordination service of frontier troops, visited Georgia on July 27 for talks with Valeri Chkheidze on the ongoing reform of the service. It aims to develop CIS co-operation plans to fight against terrorism, illegal migration, drug trafficking and weapons smuggling, and also provides for creation of the institute of liaison officers in the service.

"Dilis Gazeti" No. 171, July 29, p. 5

The Georgian military leadership and foreign military attaches attended the July 7 ceremony in Poti on occasion of the Navy Day.

"Sakartvelos Respublika" No. 180, July 8, p. 1

State security

According to Revaz Adamia, the chairman of the parliamentary defence and security committee, foreign security services may be taping telephone conversations of Georgian politicians, while the Georgian counterintelligence service lacks special equipment to check such attempts.

"Dilis Gazeti" No. 162, July 19, p. 2

According to Mamuka Areshidze, the chairman of the parliamentary subcommittee for relations with North Caucasian nations, the Chechen sector of the Georgian-Russian border is almost entirely uncontrolled. The Georgian frontier troops, in his words, lack manpower and equipment to control the situation there. As a result, the so-called Pankisi Gorge, a Georgian territory neighbouring to Chechnya and populated mostly by ethnic Chechens, has become a transit route for drug- and weapon-smuggling. Besides, Chechen gunmen often kidnap people in Georgia and convey them to Chechnya through this region. However, Valeri Chkheidze, the SDFD chairman, denied Areshidze's information and claimed that the Georgian frontier troops fully control this sector of the border.

"Droni" No. 82, July 29, p. 5

"Dilis Gazeti" No. 171, July 29, p. 4

Miscellany

At its July 5 sitting the trade union of the central military hospital demanded the government to pay salary which had not been paid for seven months. However, Major Levan Pipia, the chairman of the trade union, emphasised that the military had no rights to go on strike and the problem must be solved in legal framework, i.e. the union might bring an action in court. The hospital employs about 600 personnel, their average monthly salary amounts to 90 GEL.

"Dilis Gazeti" No. 151, July 6, p. 5

Colonel Djemal Kutateladze, the commander of the Georgian peacekeeping force in Abkhazia, died of a long-lasting illness. His deputy, Rogmed Tsertsvadze, was appointed acting commander of the force.

"Dilis Gazeti" No. 169, July 27, p. 5

About 60 Georgian cadets who have been learning in Russian military colleges are reportedly unable to get back home for the lack of finance. They have not been paid their salary since February, and the MoD lacks money to pay for their tickets.

Press Digest

The Tbilisi Aircraft Works has signed a contract with Turkmenistan to repair 46 Su-25 fighters (the first six of them must be repaired by September 10) of the Turkmen air forces, the Kviris Palitra (No. 29) reports. The fighters which remained after the break-up of the USSR (they were a part of the Soviet air force in Afghanistan) are quite out-of-date and repair of each cost about \$1 mln. The contract, in the newspaper's opinion, may allow Georgia to improve its aircraft production and enter international weapons market. However, both the USA and Russia seem unlikely to welcome such prospects, the Kviris Palitra argues. Russia is concerned with its Ulan-Ude aircraft works which is also focused on repair/production of Su-25 fighters and, thus, is a rival of the TAW. As to the USA, its negative attitude may be explained by the fact that most of the countries which have Su-25 fighters - Iran, Iraq, North Korea, Angola - are considered by the U.S. state department as non-democratic and threatening national interests of the USA. So Washington will hardly approve of Georgia's contacts with them, the newspaper concludes.

According to the Kviris Palitra (No. 27), Russia is amassing its armaments in Armenia: eight R-17 missile systems "Scud" (with 32 missiles), up to 17 MiG-29 fighters, several C-300 anti-aircraft systems, eight Chinese MRL systems "Tayfun", about 200 MRL systems BM-21 ("Grad") and big calibre howitzers, five Su-25 ground attack fighters and one MiG-25 - this is an incomplete list of the Russian armaments deployed in Armenia. Further still, the latest information of Azerbaijani security services suggests that Moscow is going to deploy about ten MiG-31 fighters in Armenia. If so, the newspaper argues, the balance of forces in the region will change substantially as MiG-31 is greatly superior to MiG-29 - its radars can cover Georgia, Azerbaijan and pose problems to even the Turkish air defence system. One should wonder, the Kviris Palitra deems, what Moscow and Erevan are getting ready for.

At present, the Georgia Coast Guard is able to control the Abkhaz coastal waters only from outside of a 15-mile zone, the Kavkasioni (No. 28) and the Droni (No. 78) emphasise. It is also noteworthy, the newspapers point out, that although Georgian radars are capable of checking vessels bound from Turkey, they fail to detect vessels from Russia. To date, three Turkish vessels that were going to enter the Sukhumi sea port without permission of Tbilisi have been already detained by the Georgian Coast Guard. Some Georgian officials claim that Turkish vessels transport weapons and drugs to Abkhazia but it does not seem to be a reality, the Kavkasioni argues. Drugs can be easily smuggled directly into Georgia or Russia and there is no necessity to transit them through Abkhazia. As to weapons, they are available in Abkhazia-stationed Russian military bases. Besides, it seems unlikely, in the newspaper's opinion, that weapons smuggled from Turkey would be cheaper than those smuggled from Russia. So in all likelihood Turkish vessels transport foods, fuel and other goods to Abkhazia in exchange for timber and scrap. But just this trade allows Abkhazia's budget to generate the biggest income. That is why, the newspaper suggests, operations of the Georgian Coast Guard may substantially undermine the economic strength of Abkhazia.

ABBREVIATIONS

MRB - motorifle brigade
NSC - National Security Council
MoD - Ministry of Defence

SDFD - State Department of Frontier Defence
JMA - Joint Military Academy
SAM - surface-to-air missile
MRL - multiple rocket launcher