

## INTERNAL POLITICAL CONFLICT IN RUSSIA AND THE WAR IN ABKHAZIA (1992-1993)<sup>1</sup>

რუსეთის შიდაპოლიტიკური დაპირისპირება და ომი აფხაზეთში (1992-1993)<sup>2</sup>

LASHA CHANTLADZE

PhD student in History at Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University,  
№1 Chavchavadze ave, Tbilisi, Georgia  
Orcid.org/0009-0003-0105-0624  
[chantladze.lash@gmail.com](mailto:chantladze.lash@gmail.com)

**Abstract.** Russian and Abkhazian historiography concerning the war in Abkhazia primarily focuses on the internal political conflict in Russia in 1991-1993, characterized by the confrontation between Boris Yeltsin's reformist alliance and radical-conservative entities. While armed clashes did occur, culminating in October 1993 when Yeltsin decisively subdued the opposition led by Supreme Soviet Chairman Ruslan Khasbulatov and Vice President Alexander Rutskoi, critiques by Russian and Abkhazian scholars, suggest fundamental inaccuracies in their assessment of the underlying internal political issues. According to their analyses, Russian politicians lacked a unified strategy concerning the conflict in Abkhazia, and in some instances, Boris Yeltsin even supported Eduard Shevardnadze.

This article reviews the internal political conflict in the Russian Federation in 1992-1993 and provides an analysis of the crucial turning points in the Abkhazian war within this context. In general, President Boris Yeltsin's administration during this period was primarily focused on modernizing the Russian economy and liberalizing its foreign policy (integration into Western political structures). Understandably, the conservative and militaristic political factions expressed dissatisfaction with these developments. However, when considering the facts and outcomes, it becomes clear that the ongoing discontent and controversies had no effect on the final results of the conflict in Abkhazia. The course of events indicated that the prevailing imperial mindset remained steadfast throughout. Even Andrei Kozyrev, the most liberal and influential foreign minister at the time, shared the imperial ideology, advocating for the post-Soviet states to remain within Russia's economic and political sphere of influence. This viewpoint was clearly illustrated by Russia's involvement in the overthrow of Zviad Gamsakhurdia's government during the Georgian Civil War and its active support for separatists in the Abkhazian conflict.

**Keywords:** Internal political conflict of Russia; War in Abkhazia; Yeltsin; Khasbulatov; Rutskoy;

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## ლაშა ჩანტლაძე

თბილისის ივანე ჯავახიშვილის სახელობის სახელმწიფო  
 უნივერსიტეტის ისტორიის სადოქტორო პროგრამის სტუდენტი,  
 საქართველო, თბილისი, ჭავჭავაძის №1  
 Orcid.org/0009-0003-0105-0624  
[cantladze.lash@gmail.com](mailto:cantladze.lash@gmail.com)

**აბსტრაქტი.** აფხაზეთის ომის ირგვლივ გამოცემულ რუსულ და აფხაზურ ისტორიოგრაფიაში დიდი ყურადღება მახვილდება 1991-1993 წლებში რუსეთში არსებულ შიდაპოლიტიკურ დაპირისპირებაზე, სადაც ერთმანეთს უპირისპირდებოდნენ ბორის ელცინის რეფორმატორთა ალიანსი და რადიკალურ კონსერვატიული გაერთიანებები. არსებულ დაპირისპირებას მართლაც ჰქონდა ადგილი, რომელიც 1993 წლის ოქტომბერში დაგვირგვინდა კიდევაც შეიარაღებული შეტაკებებით, როდესაც ელცინმა საბოლოოდ გაანადგურა უზენაესი საბჭოს თავმჯდომარე რუსლან ხასბულატოვისა და ვიცე-პრეზიდენტ ალექსანდრე რუცკოის მეთაურობით შექმნილი ოპოზიციური ნაწილი. თუმცა არსებულ შიდაპოლიტიკურ საკითხებთან დაკავშირებით ნამდვილად არასწორია ის შეფასებები, რომელსაც რუსი და აფხაზი მეცნიერები აკეთებენ. აღნიშნული დასკვნების მიხედვით, რუს პოლიტიკოსებს შორის არ არსებობდა ერთიანი სტრატეგია აფხაზეთში არსებულ კონფლიქტთან დაკავშირებით და რიგ შემთხვევებში ბორის ელცინი მხარსაც უჭერდა ედუარდ შევარდნაძეს.

მოცემულ სტატიაში განხილულია 1992-1993 წლებში რუსეთის ფედერაციაში მიმდინარე შიდაპოლიტიკური დაპირისპირება და ამის ფონზე გაანალიზებულია აფხაზეთის ომის გარდამტეხი მონაკვეთები. ზოგადად პრეზიდენტ ელცინის მმართველობა, თეორიულად მოიცავდა კიდევაც რუსეთის ეკონომიკის მოდერნიზებასა და საგარეო პოლიტიკური კურსის ლიბერალიზაციას (ინტეგრაცია დასავლურ პოლიტიკურ სტრუქტურებში). ბუნებრივია, აღნიშნული კონსერვატიულად და მილიტარისტულად განწყობილი პოლიტიკური ჯგუფების უკმაყოფილებას იწვევდა. თუმცა ფაქტებისა და შედეგების გათვალისწინებით შეგვიძლია დავასკვნათ, რომ აფხაზეთში მიმდინარე ბრძოლებისას, არსებულმა უკმაყოფილებამ და დაპირისპირებამ არანაირი გავლენა არ მოახდინა შედეგზე, როგორც განვითარებულმა მოვლენებმა გვაჩვენა იმპერიული ფსიქოლოგია უცვლელი დარჩა. ყველაზე ლიბერალურად განწყობილმა და გავლენიანმა საგარეო საქმეთა მინისტრმა ანდრეი კოზირევმაც კი, გაიზიარა იმპერიული კონცეფცია და მიიჩნია, რომ პოსტ-საბჭოთა სივრცე რუსეთის ეკონომიკური და პოლიტიკური გავლენის სფეროში უნდა დარჩენილიყო. რაც გამოვლინდა საქართველოს სამოქალაქო ომში ზვიად გამსახურდიას ხელისუფლების დამხობითა და აფხაზეთის კონფლიქტში სეპარატისტების აქტიური მხარდაჭერით.

**საკვანძო სიტყვები:** რუსეთის შიდაპოლიტიკური დაპირისპირება; ომი აფხაზეთში; ელცინი; ხასბულატოვი; რუცკოი;

**Introduction.** The objective of this research is to explore the political developments in Russia during 1992-1993 and assess whether the domestic political crisis at that time influenced the war in Abkhazia. The article also examines the key turning points of the conflict in Abkhazia and delves into the details of Russia's involvement in the war.

According to renowned American scholar Francis Fukuyama, the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, Humanity has not only reached the end of a distinct post-war historical period, but also an ideological and evolutionary culmination, wherein liberal democracy is envisioned as the ultimate form of human government. (Fukuyama, 1992:15-16). This was shared by the Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev, who believed that the United States was a natural ally of democratic Russia and an enemy of the totalitarian Soviet empire. He characterized the Soviet Union as "wrongly" and "illegally" developed. (Козырев,1995:16). Needless to say, all this contributed to the revival of the myth of two Russias both in the Western world and in Georgia. Unfortunately, the political elites did not realize that the existence of two Russias was an illusion, which was clearly confirmed by the processes that developed in Abkhazia in 1992-1993. The visions of Eduard Shevardnadze, who placed the responsibility for the situation created by Russia not on Boris Yeltsin and the democrats in the presidential apparatus, but on the head of the Supreme Council Ruslan Khasbulatov and the military, turned out to be completely wrong. Although Khasbulatov himself openly opposed Yeltsin on issues of power distribution and economic reforms, their strategy regarding the ongoing events in Abkhazia was openly anti-Georgian.

Georgian historiography has generated numerous works delving into Russian imperial policy in Abkhazia, with notable contributions from scholars such as Zurab Papaskiri, Jemal Gamakharia, and Dazmir Jojua, whose works were consulted during the preparation of the aforementioned article. However, it is imperative to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the situation in Russia during that period to address the accusations presented in Russian and Abkhazian historiography effectively. The relevance and novelty of this topic lies in the fact that it not only examines the events in Abkhazia, but also directly examines the context of Russia during that period. It should be noted that for the first time in the Georgian historiography, the issues of the newspaper "Republic of Abkhazia" for 1992-1993 were used for the analysis of the ongoing processes.

In examining Russia's internal political conflict, it's important to acknowledge the valuable contributions of esteemed authors such as Andrei Tsygankov, a professor at the University of San Francisco, who has written several comprehensive monographs on Russia's domestic and foreign policy. In addition, Harvard University Professor Serhii Plokhy's work "The Lost Kingdom" deserves attention as it meticulously examines the pivotal moments of Russian history, with a special focus on the post-Soviet era. In particular, the final section of the book discusses in detail the state of Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Furthermore, Donald Murray's "A Democracy of Despots" provides

a detailed account of the conflict between the executive and legislative branches of the Russian government in 1992-1993.

**Methods.** From a methodological perspective, this article falls within the realm of qualitative research. The content analysis method was used to review primary sources such as press articles and memoirs, and the discourse analysis method was applied to analyze secondary sources consisting of academic literature related to the research topic. In addition, the process tracing method was employed to elucidate the cause-and-effect relationships of historical events.

**Discussion and results.** After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian society and political circles were actively debating the political course of the new Russian state. The Kremlin leadership under Boris Yeltsin was gearing up for economic reforms. In January 1992, Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar, appointed by Yeltsin, announced the main directions for the transformation of the Russian Federation. These included the complete liberalization of domestic and foreign trade, the abolition of price controls, and the privatization of wholesale trade (Trenin, 2019:135-136). Simultaneously, defining the identity of the Russian state became a crucial agenda item. While economic reforms were intended to correct the country's financial situation, the concept of the new state required thorough analysis, which was no easy task given the prevailing thinking of the time. Kozyrev and his followers believed that Russia's identity, damaged by the Soviet legacy, should be restored not from an imperial standpoint but rather from a civic perspective (Plokhy, 2017:313).

One of the most prominent advocates of this theory was the historian and ethnologist Valery Tishkov, who for a time headed the State Committee of the Russian Federation on Nationalities. Tishkov believed that the idea of civic nationalism should be given priority and that a "federation of Russian citizens" should be formed, regardless of their cultural and religious differences. In addition, Tishkov argued that the notion of "Russian civilization" was appropriate alongside the idea of the Russian nation (Tishkov, 2023:21). Despite initial backing, this theory eventually found little acceptance among both the ruling elite and the autonomous republics within the Russian Federation, some of which sought independence (Chechnya) while others aimed to strengthen their legal status (Tatarstan).

The Yeltsin-Kozyrev-Gaidar wing faced opposition from both within the government and across the broader political spectrum. Notably, their policies were challenged by the Russian Defense Ministry and the Presidential Security Council. The ministers responsible for power, security, and intelligence often espoused a conservative-centrist view of Russian identity, with the military being particularly prominent in this regard. On several occasions, they even went as far as to disregard directives from the President of the Russian Federation (Hopf, 2017:702). Thus, for example, in May 1992, Boris Yeltsin openly declared that the reorganization of the 14th Army stationed in Transdniestria should commence soon, to which the Minister of Defense, General Pavel Grachev, responded that Russian divisions would leave Moldova after the conflict situation in the country was resolved, and the commander of the 14th Army, General Lebed, publicly declared his intention to actively use his mandate against the leaders of

the Moldovan government and to protect the ethnic Russian population (Tsygankov, 2019:92). The position of the influential military leaders was supported by figures such as the writer Alexander Prokhanov, the founder of the National Bolshevik Party Eduard Limonov, and Sergei Beburin (one of the leaders of the Russian nationalists in the Supreme Soviet). They held the view that the collapse of the Soviet Union was a significant catastrophe and were openly resistant to Russia's integration into Western institutions, including the International Monetary Fund (IMF). A key figure in the debates about the IMF and economic policies was the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet, Ruslan Khasbulatov. He argued that policies like accelerated privatization, the shutting down of industrial enterprises, and the reduction of agriculture's share in the economy would render the economic situation dire. (Хасбулатов, 2011:14). Yeltsin was warned of possible destabilization by Vice President Alexander Rutskoi, who approved the draft economic reform submitted by Khasbulatov to the Supreme Legislative Body in December 1992 (Майоров, 1994:112).

The opinions of the above-mentioned persons were shared by relatively more moderate figures - academician Andranik Migranyan and Yevgeny Ambartsumov (Chairman of the Committee on International Relations). They believed that South Ossetia, Karabakh, Crimea, Transnistria and other regions were part of the Russian Empire long before they joined the newly independent republics, so the Russian Federation should have full legal right to control these and other regions. (Sagramoso, 2023:28). This position was shared by Sergei Stankevich, an advisor to President Yeltsin. The latter believed that the Russian Federation should develop its own "Monroe Doctrine", according to which the post-Soviet space should remain within Russia's sphere of exclusive influence (Stent, A 2007:418). Boris Yeltsin officially endorsed this perspective on February 23, 1993, when he declared that the international community should recognize Russia as the guarantor of peace and stability in the former Soviet space and acknowledge its "special" status (Human Rights Watch in 1995:9). Against this backdrop, it becomes apparent that the overarching aim of various political factions within Russia was to exert complete control over the post-Soviet space. This ambition aligned with the concept of Russia's fragmented imperialism, a legacy of the Soviet era, where employing the ancient tactic of "divide and conquer" to maintain power was deemed acceptable. This policy meant that the separatist aspirations of the autonomies within the pro-independence union republics were to be used against the republic themselves (Бакатин, 1992: 23-24). This imperial strategy became widespread across the Russian Federation. Although rivalries between Russian political factions were prevalent, disagreements were not focused on the imperial style or strategy of the country. No matter which group held power, their collective aim was to reshape imperial Russia. To substantiate this conclusion further, it is essential to revisit the dynamics within Russia's supreme legislative body.

By the end of 1992, there were 10 factions in the Supreme Soviet, divided into two main groups: the first faction was "Russian Unity," which comprised about 300 members who opposed Yeltsin's reforms and his policies in general. This bloc consisted mainly of Russian communists and nationalists. The second union was formed by the "Bloc of Centrists", which was represented by such political groups as

"Union of Workers", "Free Russia" (it should be noted that the mentioned group was originally formed by Alexander Rutskoi) and the Leftists. A large number of centrists supported strong executive power and reforms, but due to unproductive communication between them and Boris Yeltsin, the president was unable to create an effective foothold in the legislature (Murray, 1996: 165). In counterbalance to this, the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet Ruslan Khasbulatov formed a rather powerful coalition, supported by Vice President Alexander Rutskoi. In December 1992, at the Congress of People's Deputies of Russia, opposition-minded deputies sought to limit Boris Yeltsin's power according to which Russia should be gradually transformed into a parliamentary republic. Members of Yeltsin's inner circle and advisors (including Gennady Burbulis, whose name is associated with supporting anti-state forces in the "Tbilisi War" and the overthrow of President Zviad Gamsakhurdia) openly told journalists that the congress was planning a "legal putsch". Although the deputies were unsuccessful in curbing the president's authority, the decisions made at the congress placed the executive in a challenging position. In an extraordinary resolution, the deputies condemned the economic program and forced Yegor Gaidar to resign as prime minister, to be replaced by the former head of Gazprom, Viktor Chernomyrdin. Despite this setback, Boris Yeltsin was soon able to strengthen his position. In a referendum in April 1993, Russian voters supported the president's rule and the content of his economic programs. In light of these results, Yeltsin was able to propose a constitutional amendment that would give the executive branch a clear advantage over the legislative branch. In his speech at the opening session of the Constituent Assembly, the Russian president urged the people not to choose the path of anarchy and to save Russia, comparing the Russian Congress and the Supreme Soviet to the Bolsheviks who had dissolved the democratically elected Constituent Assembly in 1917 and seized power by force. The parliamentary delegation led by Ruslan Khasbulatov was not allowed to respond, which led to a verbal confrontation in the assembly hall (Murray, 1996: 173-174). The analysis of the ongoing conflict makes it clear that it was impossible to find a compromise between the parliament and the president, making the escalation of the conflict inevitable. Yeltsin perceived the only solution to the existing problem as a show of force and the complete disarmament of the deputies. By a decree dated September 21, 1993, the Russian Congress was officially declared dissolved. This decision was disobeyed by 150 deputies, who called an extraordinary session of the Supreme Soviet. At this session, Yeltsin was declared dismissed and Alexander Rutskoi was appointed as his successor. Ruslan Khasbulatov called on the Russian people to disobey. The deputies were reinforced in the White House, and Alexander Rutskoi also appointed new Ministers of the Interior and Defense, however Yeltsin turned out to be better prepared. Defense Minister Pavel Grachev and Interior Minister Viktor Yerin expressed full support for the Russian president, which ultimately decided the fate of the conflict. The support of the power ministers and military personnel for President Yeltsin once again refutes theories suggesting that the president lacked control over military commanders, who, according to these theories, acted independently in the war in Abkhazia and disregarded Moscow's official stance. Finally, on October 4, after 14 days of tension, the Russian army surrounded the parliament building and a few hours later began shelling the White House. In the afternoon, special forces completely occupied the building and detained those who were fortified there.

Despite the controversy, it is undeniable that both factions recognized the necessity of upholding the imperial agenda, the cornerstone of which involved ensuring full staffing of the CIS and the smooth operation of military bases outside Russia. Even a weak and internally conflicted Russia retained the capacity to intervene effectively in the Abkhazian conflict against Georgia. Supporting the separatists presented a viable opportunity to preserve and expand Russian imperialism. Clear evidence of this is the fact that actions against the Georgian state occurred even before the onset of the war in Abkhazia

The putsch that began in Moscow in August 1991 posed a threat to political stability in Georgia. Communists opposed to the signing of the "New Union Treaty" in Russia began an armed rally against Gorbachev; however, their struggle ended without achieving any results, Boris Yeltsin was able to fight back against the forces of the "State Committee on the State of Emergency" („ГКЧП“) which significantly increased his influence and popularity. The arrest of Anatoly Lukyanov, one of the main organizers of the putsch, had a negative impact on the separatist movement. The point was that Lukyanov was closely cooperating with the radical conservative "Soyuz" union, which opposed Gorbachev's reforms and aimed to support separatism in the allied republics for the sake of preserving the Soviet Union. The failure of the putsch and Lukyanov's arrest forced the Abkhazian side to refrain from taking drastic actions and remain faithful to the Electoral Agreement signed on July 9, 1991, which included ethnic quotas in favor of Abkhazians. Alongside the unfolding events in Russia, the situation in Georgia similarly intensified. Zviad Gamsakhurdia agreed to the request of General Shuravliov of the „ГКЧП“, which implied the subordination of the Georgian National Guard to the structure of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The decision to change the structure of the National Guard was not accepted by the commander Tengiz Kitovani, who withdrew his units from Tbilisi and declared disobedience to the authorities (Zürcher 2006:124). This process ended with the overthrow of Zviad Gamsakhurdia's government. Did members of the Russian security services participate in the fighting against President Gamsakhurdia? Chairman of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Georgia (1991-1992) Akaki Asatiani believes that the overthrow of the national government orchestrated directly by Yeltsin and coordinated by his confidant Gennady Burbulis (it should be noted that Burbulis was involved in similar processes in Tajikistan and Azerbaijan). Georgian historiography also suggests that Abkhazian separatists maintained direct contacts with "Burbulis's committee" (Jojua 2017: 136). For a more detailed analysis of the conflict, it is essential to identify several pivotal moments in the Abkhazian war that clearly demonstrate the uniformly anti-Georgian stance adopted by all political associations in Russia.

The war in Abkhazia provided Russia with an opportunity to strengthen its position in the South Caucasus. As Defense Minister Pavel Grachev himself pointed out, having military bases in Georgia was of paramount importance to official Moscow, as it was crucial for maintaining control over the eastern part of the Black Sea (Lynch, 2000: 137). Under these circumstances, the inclusion of Georgia's territorial integrity as a non-negotiable aspect in the September 3, 1992 agreement was undoubtedly a political victory for the Georgian side. However, it also raises questions about the motives behind Russia's agreement to this provision. It could be perceived as a kind of concession, with the expectation

that Georgia would join the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and that the operation of Russian military bases would remain unthreatened. However, when Boris Yeltsin saw that no concrete steps were being taken to meet these demands, he devised a new coordinated strategy to punish the Georgian side, which was clearly demonstrated by the attack on Gagra. An Abkhazian force of some 3,000 to 4,000 fighters massed near the Bzipi River (Human Rights Watch, 1995: 26). The head of the Confederation of Mountain Peoples, Musa Shanibov, stated that up to 5,000 Caucasian volunteers had participated in combat operations since the beginning of the conflict in Abkhazia. He further asserted that their numbers would be increased if necessary to halt the advance of the Georgian army (Terekhov, 1992:3). In addition to the North Caucasian warriors, units of the Russian regular army were also involved in the aforementioned military operations, all under the overall command of General Staff Commander Mikhail Kolesnikov (Papaskyri, 2007:384). Chechens, Cossacks, and Russian mercenaries took part in the battles for Gagra along with the Abkhazians. Gia Karkarashvili, the commander of the Georgian military units in Abkhazia, recalls that during the attack on Gagra, Russian military boats blocked a part of the coast, which deprived the Georgians of the possibility of a landing to reinforce the Gagra garrison. In addition, the enemy used modern radio-electronic suppression devices, and most importantly, the northern border was opened for the transfer of Caucasian confederates (Gamakharia, 2011: 472-473). During this military operation, the Abkhazians, who had previously (e.g., during the fighting near Sukhumi) complained about a lack of weapons, were already well armed: the separatists had both light and heavy artillery, as well as T-72 type tanks (Human Rights Watch, 1995:26-27). Needless to say, only the Russians could have supplied the Abkhazians with such an arsenal, and by occupying Gagra they achieved the crucial logistical objective of securing the existing line of communication to Gudauta (the Russian military base) and opening the border at the Psou. This strategic move was intended to play a decisive role in facilitating the transportation of military and "humanitarian" cargo to the Abkhazians. From the Georgian perspective, these actions were perceived as open aggression against Georgia and a flagrant violation of the commitments made on September 3 ("Because of Boris Yeltsin's Statement," 1992:1). In addition to direct involvement in military operations, active propaganda efforts were undertaken. For example, several articles were published in the Russian Defense Ministry's newspaper "Krasnaya Zvezda," in which the authors advocated increased military aid packages to the Abkhazians, both in terms of military equipment and manpower. In addition, the Abkhazians sent appeals to "UNESCO" and the Russian Patriarch Alexy II, urging them to provide immediate assistance to the "victims" of Georgian aggression ("Москва.Святейшему Патриарху всея Руси Алексию", 1992:31-32). This reflects a deliberate policy of information warfare aimed at portraying the Abkhazians as victims and the Georgians as aggressors. Naturally, such a well-coordinated and strategic campaign raises suspicions of Russian intelligence involvement in aiding the separatists. The fact that Russian media outlets were also implicated further bolsters these suspicions. For example, from March 1992 to September 1993, Alexander Lyubimov hosted the Red Square television program. During one episode, his guest Anri Jergenia (the future prime minister of Abkhazia), openly stated that fighters who enlisted as volunteers in Abkhazia would be duly rewarded (Tsikarishvili, 2003:393-394). Svetlana Chervonnaya highlights the detrimental role played by



television and the press, emphasizing that through mass communication channels, propaganda was actively disseminated portraying Georgians as imperialistic oppressors of "freedom-loving" Abkhazians (Chervonnaya, 1994:6). Compounding this situation was the open expression of the Abkhazian press, asserting that Russia had no grounds for complacency while Shevardnadze openly displayed sympathies for the North Atlantic Alliance (Щария, 1992:69).

This policy yielded results. Starting in the fall of 1992, the Russians significantly increased aid to Tkvarcheli, which was blockaded by Georgian military units. In November-December, they conducted several air strikes against Georgian positions. Prior to the airstrikes, the Russians shot down two Georgian Su-25 military aircraft on October 18. In addition, regular attacks were launched from the territory of the Eshera laboratory, from where Russian paratroopers actively participated in various military operations aimed at destroying Georgian positions ("Statement of the Parliament of Georgia," 1992:1). On December 17, 1992, the Parliament of Georgia issued an official resolution reiterating the need for a peaceful settlement of the existing conflict and pointing out the continuing violations that hindered the stabilization of the situation. Russia was accused of interfering in Georgia's internal affairs and of being responsible for the events in Gagra. The document meticulously analyzed the compelling evidence of Russian military intervention from October 5 to December 10. In addition to direct military involvement, cases of arms and ammunition smuggling were thoroughly documented. Subsequently, on December 25, the Russian legislature responded by attributing the violation of the agreement to the Georgian side and recommending sanctions against Georgia to address the situation (Papaskiri, 2007: 390). Along with these developments, evidence of direct Russian intervention in the conflict continued to mount. A report prepared by an international human rights organization explicitly stated that the Russians were actively supplying the separatists with heavy artillery and shells. Despite Pavel Grachev's denials, international observers backed up the allegations by confirming that the airstrikes were indeed carried out by the Russian side. This is substantiated by the fact that the SU-27 shot down by the Georgians on March 19, 1993, was piloted by Major Vatslav Shipko, and the special unit "Tapir", staffed by Russian officers, directly participated in the battles for the capture of Sukhumi in March 1993 (Gobechia: 1992:1). In addition to military action, the Russian government was also active on the diplomatic front, directly or covertly supporting the separatists. A vivid example of this is the agreement of May 14, 1993, in which Boris Yeltsin promised to stop air strikes on Georgian positions and to withdraw Russian heavy equipment from Abkhazia. Instead, as early as mid-June, the Russians began actively supplying the Abkhazians with both military ammunition and manpower. These actions were the first steps of a broader plan, which was the capture of Sukhumi. This operation was orchestrated by Russian officers who played a significant role in its execution, as evidenced by the deployment of Russian warships for the Tamishi landing, the involvement of Russian soldiers in the conflict, and the utilization of advanced military resources during the battle. Despite fierce resistance, Georgian military units successfully repelled the Tamishi landing. However, this significant victory, which prevented the immediate fall of Sukhumi, made it apparent that the attack on Tamishi was not the separatists' primary assault. The main offensive commenced on the Gumista front, where the

Abkhazians captured strategic heights around Sukhumi and subsequently gained control over the Ochamchire-Sukhumi highway (Svante, 2001: 160).

The grave military situation repeatedly put the issue of a new ceasefire agreement on the agenda. On July 27, 1993, a ceasefire agreement brokered by Russia was signed between the Georgian and Abkhaz sides in the city of Sochi. According to the agreement, the use of aviation, artillery, and other military and technical means of combat was prohibited as of 12:00 a.m. on July 28. In addition, heavy equipment of both sides was to be withdrawn from the conflict zone. The ongoing demilitarization process was intended to facilitate the deployment of international observer groups to the combat zone, with positions to be established along the Gumista, Psou, and Enguri rivers ("On the Ceasefire in Abkhazia," 1993:1). The Sochi Agreement received a negative response within the Georgian political landscape. However, it should be acknowledged that many politicians and military officials of the time, recognizing the difficult circumstances, considered the signing of such a compromise document to be necessary. Zurab Papaskiri notes that during the meeting of the Defense Council convened in Sukhumi, none of the high-ranking military or civilian officials present objected to the signing of the July 27 document (Papaskiri, 2007: 406). In addition to the existing complex strategic conditions, it was impossible to replenish the critically depleted ammunition, which made it impossible to conduct both offensive and defensive operations. This vulnerability provided the Abkhazian side with a favorable opportunity for achieving success. On September 16, in violation of the Sochi peace agreement, the separatists launched an offensive. In parallel, on September 17, Eduard Shevardnadze, Irakli Batiashvili, and Gia Karkarashvili held talks with Pavel Grachov in Adler. The Russian defense minister guaranteed that Sukhumi could be saved if two Russian divisions entered Abkhazia. From the very beginning, however, the Supreme Command of the Georgian Armed Forces strongly opposed this initiative. Agreeing to the Russian initiative was a strategically unjustified decision, since according to this plan the Russian military would occupy only Georgian positions, after which the available divisions would be deployed both in Georgia and in Azerbaijan. Eduard Shevardnadze reflects in his memoirs that he was fully aware of Grachev's underlying objective, which was to occupy the western part of Georgia with a Russian military contingent and subsequently impose a blockade on the country. Such a scenario would give Yeltsin considerable leverage in the future (Shevardnadze, 2006: 426). It is noteworthy that instead of proposing the intervention authorized by the Sochi Agreement, which could have been supported by ample resources including the operational group of Russian troops in Abkhazia (commanded by Lieutenant General Chindarov), Russia insisted on deploying two special divisions based on an additional military agreement. This insistence effectively amounted to the de facto occupation of a certain part of the territory (Jojua, 2007:200-201). Volunteers from the Caucasian Confederation actively participated in the ongoing fighting alongside Russian regular army units, while the Russian Black Sea Fleet blockaded Sukhumi (Gamakharia, 2011: 478). Despite the heroic resistance of Georgian forces, the last bastion, the Sukhumi Council of Ministers building, fell at 13:00 on 27 September. Subsequently, taking advantage of the complete demoralization of the Georgian military

units, the Abkhazian forces occupied the Gali district by September 30 and advanced to the Enguri River.

**Conclusions.** During 1992-1993, Russian intervention was a pivotal factor in the conflict in Georgia, significantly influencing the hostilities and ultimately tipping the balance in favor of the Abkhaz separatists. For both President Yeltsin and Chairman Khasbulatov, securing international recognition of Russia as the guarantor of peace and stability in the former Soviet Union was crucial. This objective aligned with the broader imperial strategy aimed at maintaining the Caucasus within Russia's sphere of influence.

The strategy of fragmented imperialism, developed before the Soviet Union's collapse, significantly shaped the Russian Federation's objectives in the ongoing conflict in Georgia. This approach exploited that the separatist aspirations of the autonomies within the pro-independence union republics were to be used against the republic themselves. Despite public disagreements between Khasbulatov and Yeltsin on power-sharing and economic reform, their approach to the situation in Abkhazia was distinctly anti-Georgian, reflecting a unified stance on this aspect of foreign policy. During the final stages of the conflict, Vice President Rutskoy and Speaker Khasbulatov actively supported airstrikes that extended beyond the immediate theater of hostilities, targeting areas as far as Tbilisi. The analysis of these actions underscores the continuity of Russia's imperial mindset, with the ultimate objective not to acknowledge Georgia as an independent and sovereign state. In this context, the war in Abkhazia was utilized effectively as a means to punish and weaken Georgia. The consistency of this approach suggests that irrespective of which political faction controlled Russia during 1991-1993, the outcome would have likely remained the same.

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