

International Center on Conflict & Negotiation

Edisher KHOSHTARIA-BROSSET

HISTORY AND TODAY

**THE ABKHAZIAN PROBLEM
IN THE LIGHT OF CONFLICT STUDIES**



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FROM THE PUBLISHER

Abkhazia remains a number one problem for Georgians. Subjectively, the Abkhazia issue pertains to the recent experience of war, loss and defeat, and became the most sensitive issue for absolute majority of the Georgian society, probably, the most traumatic experience for many Georgians since World War Two. The conflict has also been a traumatic experience for Abkhaz, spreading isolationism and victimization in this relatively small ethnic group. Objectively, Abkhazia identifies one of the most complicated conflict situations in the world, still waiting for its long-sought solution. The Abkhaz-Georgian war of 1992/93 produced over 250,000 of so-called internally displaced persons, almost all of them ethnic Georgians expelled from their permanent residences in Abkhazia. Most of them still suffer from hardships and uncertainty in the places of their temporary settlement, and dream of a peaceful return to their homes.

The battle is over, hopefully forever. Sisyphus-style negotiations are periodically resumed, yet the stone is still there. The main precondition to the success of any political solution of the conflict is restoration of a minimum confidence and understanding between the parties, building human bridges, promoting track-two diplomacy measures. This also requires the exchange of opinions between scholars on both sides, based on comparative analysis of clearly formulated and documented versions of the popular standpoints.

With this book the International Center on Conflict and Negotiation starts a series of research publications which will hopefully help substantiate, clarify, or discard the existing standpoints with regard to the Abkhazian and other problems, satisfy a public interest to the subject, and bring the parties to round table scholarly discussions. Hopefully, scholars, specialists, professional people can understand each other much better than lay persons, however painful it may be to hear and analyze each others' positions. We would like to encourage any feedback and welcome any remarks made with regard to this book.

George Khutsishvili, Ph.D.
Director of ICCN

The book is written by Prof. Dr. Edisher KHOSHTARIA-BROSSET, Doctor of Historical Sciences (Section "Problems of the Ethno-Political History of Abkhazia in Antiquity" - in co-authorship with M.P. Inadze, Doctor of Historical Sciences) on the basis of the following publications:

On Misinterpretation of the Georgian-Abkhaz Relations (Reply to the authors of the "Abkhaz Letter"). Tbilisi, 1991 (a group of authors);

G. Zhorzholiani, C. Lekishvili, L. Toidze, E. Khoshtaria-Brosset. Historical, Political and Legal Aspects of the Conflict in Abkhazia. Tbilisi, 1995;

M.P. Inadze. Problems of the Ethno-Political History of Ancient Abkhazia. Bulletin "Matsne", the History series... Nos 1,2, 1992 (in Georgian).

A.M. Menteshashvili. From the History of Relationships between the Georgian, Abkhaz and Ossetian Peoples (1918-1921). Tbilisi, 1990;

L. Toidze. On the Problem of Political Status of Abkhazia (pages of history), 1921-1931, Tbilisi, 1996;

E.V. Khoshtaria-Brosset. Abkhazia in the Middle Ages and the Problem of Ethnic Consolidation of the Abkhazians. Journal "Mnatobi", No.4, 1992 (in Georgian). Also by the same author: Inter-Ethnic Relations in Georgia - Causes of Conflicts and Ways of Resolving Them. Tbilisi, 1993.

PREFACE

Nowadays, when there are so many political conflicts in the world, interwoven with ethnic problems giving rise to confrontation of ethnic groups and whole peoples, it's important to find ways to constructive solution of inter-ethnic problems, prevention or resolution of ethno-political conflicts.

Many current phenomena, including inter-ethnic relations, are often rooted in the ancient times.

The thing is that by virtue of historical destinies, representatives of different ethnic groups or entire peoples lived and are living side by side (as neighbours) or intermingled on the same territory and in the same historically determined political (state) formation. In such cases, internal and external political and economic factors create conditions for inter-ethnic friction and even confrontation, which sometimes result in ethno-political conflicts, armed clashes and even wars.

Conflicting sides, to be more exact, forces whose interest in confrontation is explained by their ambitions or venal political and economic purposes, often refer to history. However, they resort to falsification, distortion of history in order to stir up inter-ethnic conflicts and achieve their separatist goals.

Actions carried out by the separatist forces in Abkhazia and the former South Ossetian Autonomous Region, to stir up animosity between the Georgian, Abkhazian and Ossetian populations of these regions can serve as an example.

However, the unbiased, fair covering of the Georgian history, in particular of Georgia's primordial integral parts, Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region (Inland Kartli), where the South Ossetian Autonomous Region was formed early in the 1920s, provides substantial evidence not to oppose the Georgians and representatives of other peoples living there, in particular Abkhazians and Ossetians, against one another, as destructive forces want it, but on the contrary, to find a common language between them and draw them closer to one another, as it was in the remote and recent past. The emphasis should be placed on those things which brought the peoples together, not divided them. It's inadmissible to resort to fabrications to estrange representatives of different peoples and place them at odds with one another.

EPILOGUE

The historically determined destinies of the Georgians and Abkhazians leave no other choice to these peoples than to live on one land, where they have co-existed for more than two dozens of centuries. So, in spite of the causes and consequences of the conflict and war, former relations, joint creative economic and political activities to the benefit of the future generations should be resumed.

Challenge of the time is elimination of negative stereotypes artificially imposed into the minds of people to separate and antagonize them, creating image of enemy and prepare them for the conflict.

Since historical realities were widely used to this end (often falsified by both sides), the task of the historians today is not only to cover the historical processes impartially or to show what divided peoples, but also to focus attention on what they had in common. The history of Georgia with Abkhazia as its an integral part provides a lot of materials for this, both for the covering of the history of Abkhazia proper and Georgian-Abkhaz relations.

The presented book does not claim to solve all the problems, posed and covered in it. Its aim is to start a dialogue hindered for a long time by officials and avoided by the sides - the Georgian and Abkhaz historians, politologists. Such unfavourable trend greatly contributed to the deepening of the confrontation resulted in conflict.

If the book somehow encourages such a dialogue its goal would be considered achieved.

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Calendar of Events with ICCN Participation

Map of the Conflict Zones in the Caucasus Region



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