



# **The Russia-Ukraine War and the Prospects of Conflict Resolution in Georgia**

**Policy Paper**

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As part of the GPPAC South Caucasus Dialogue Programme 2023, the International Center on Conflict and Negotiation (ICCN) continues to develop and present Policy Papers intended for both peace organizations, government agencies, and the wider audience. In the light of the War and consequent developments in Ukraine in 2022, the Policy Papers are mainly devoted to this topic in both a regional and national context. The contents of the publication are the sole responsibility of the authors and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the International Center on Conflict and Negotiation.

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## **Introduction**

One of the most important consequences of the Russia-Ukraine war is probably the fact that Russia is losing its geopolitical influence in the post-Soviet space, which Russia officially called the "near abroad", that is, the sphere of its geopolitical influence. In this direction, it should be noted that the role of Russia as a "mediator" and "peacemaker" in the field of various conflict resolution is weakening. An example of this is that Russia's role in mediating between Armenia and Azerbaijan is weakening, and therefore in solving the Nagorno-Karabakh problem. It is well known that in November 2020, it was Russia that presented us as the main "guarantor" for the settlement of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan around Nagorno-Karabakh, when it seemed that Russia stopped hostilities in Nagorno-Karabakh and deployed its own "peacekeeping forces" - 1,980 military personnel for the conflict - separation of forces. in the zone, although the fact is well known that in August-September 2022, Azerbaijan (taking into account Russia's involvement in the war in Ukraine) carried out a military attack in the area of responsibility of Russian "peacekeepers" and occupied a strategic area in the direction of the Lachin corridor. In addition, during a meeting with the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan, the EU expressed its readiness to deploy its monitors on the Armenia-Azerbaijan border.

Also, the Russia-Ukraine war actualized the problems of the Russian-occupied and separatist regions of Abkhazia, the former South Ossetia Autonomous District (Georgia), and Transnistria (Moldova). After the end of the Russia-Ukraine war, the issue of solving the problems related to the mentioned occupied regions will be on the agenda of the international community, however, before the development of this process, it is important to discuss the fundamental problems and perspectives related to the occupied territories in Georgia, which will allow us to develop specific recommendations. In the direction of peaceful de-occupation of two historical regions of Georgia.

### **The current situation in the occupied regions of Georgia**

As expected, a large part of the population, both in Abkhazia and the former South Ossetia Autonomous Region, justified Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The main reasons for this are the following: both regions receive information (or rather misinformation) mainly from Russian mass media; Also, according to the residents of the occupied regions, the start of the military operation by Russia was morally justified based on the opinions that "the West left Russia no other option" and "Russia was protecting the civilian population of Donbas and Luhansk in Ukraine." was involved as much as possible. In addition, it should be emphasized that after 2008 (and before that - from the 90s of the last century), Russia is perceived by the population of both regions as a "defender of oppression and justice, as well as by Georgians". Moreover, the Kremlin's propaganda constantly repeats that it was Russia that saved the "Ossetian and Abkhazian peoples from genocide by the Georgians".

At the same time, it is important to note that a different opinion regarding the war in Ukraine was more pronounced in Abkhazia, which can be explained by the existence of a relatively developed civil society in this historical part of Georgia. There were also pragmatic reasons to justify the start of the war. The population of both Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions has gotten used to the fact

that every new war started by Russia in recent years was followed by a strengthening of Moscow's geopolitical positions (the aggression against Georgia and Ukraine in 2008 and 2014, respectively, the military campaign in Syria in 2015-2017, or even placing Russian "peacekeeping forces" in the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict zone, etc.). Every strengthening of the "ally" or "protector" of the Sukhumi and Tskhinvali regions is welcomed by the majority of the occupied territories and perceived as further strengthening of their security.

However, there are also different views related to the ruling elites of the de facto annexed regions. In particular, the Abkhazian side was relatively more skeptical of Moscow's actions, which manifested itself in certain issues. First of all, it was related to the recognition of Donetsk and Luhansk regions as "independent states". A part of the society of Abkhazia (both at the level of the ruling elite and ordinary residents) was relatively dissatisfied with this fact, the reason for which is that the emergence of new separatist regions recognized by Russia in the former Soviet space may not be entirely desirable for the Abkhazians, because it means a kind of loss of exclusivity for them. , the emergence of "competitors" and, accordingly, the redistribution of funds allocated from Moscow to other regions supported by the Kremlin, and therefore, the expected decrease in funding from Moscow for Abkhazia. As for the Tskhinvali region, the recognition of Donetsk and Luhansk did not cause any significant reaction here. The reason for this is that the ruling elite of the former autonomous district and the majority of the population are less aware of themselves as an independent territorial unit and, unlike the Abkhazians, do not have a significant claim to sovereignty. As for funding, the "economy" of the Tskhinvali region is largely tied to the Russian military base illegally deployed in the former autonomous region, and therefore, the region was not threatened with a special decrease in funding until recently.

At the same time, the failures of the Russian armed forces in Ukraine changed the perception of events in both regions to some extent and the so-called fear of "Georgian revenge" was raised again. This is confirmed by the fact that during the Russia-Ukraine war, Tbilisi again took the place of the enemy's icon for both Sukhumi and Tskhinvali. In addition, discontent is growing in both occupied regions due to the recruitment of ethnic Abkhazians and Ossetians to the front. Many inhabitants of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region were killed in this war, which caused a feeling of protest against the official Kremlin in the families of the dead. At the same time, it should be emphasized that the existing complaints against the official Moscow policy in the Tskhinvali region will most likely not radically change the situation due to the main reason that the ruling elite is sharply focused on Moscow. The recent events, when the de-facto government of Tskhinvali once again raised the issue of joining Russia, are a clear confirmation of this. At this stage, to justify the mentioned step, along with everything else, it is the possible start of military operations by Georgia. In addition, the activation of the given topic in the former South Ossetia Autonomous District, the so-called It coincided with the "elections" and, therefore, it, along with everything else, can be seen as a constituent part of the internal political controversy. However, most likely, Tskhinvali received the appropriate signal from Moscow this time as well. This assumption is supported by the fact that the Tskhinvali region's governing forces activated the issue of joining the Russian Federation, and Abkhazian society took a sharply negative position towards the same topic. As a version, that can be presented that the Kremlin discussed with the leaders of both regions at the same time the issue of more difficult integration with the Russian Federation, or the so-called Kremlin needs the current request of "South Ossetia" to Russia to join the "Republic" in the Russian Federation to blackmail Georgia. In particular, if Georgia does not

pursue a foreign political course acceptable to Russia, it will put the issue of the entry of Russia's "South Ossetia" into the Russian Federation on the agenda. As another version, it is possible to consider the fact that when Russia needs it, to "compensate" for the Kremlin's failed war in Ukraine, so-called South Ossetia should be included in Russia. However, the aforementioned cannot change either the de-jure or the de-facto situation, because the de-jure international community certainly still recognizes the territorial integrity of Georgia and, accordingly, the Tskhinvali region as a constituent part of Georgia, and as for the de-facto situation, Russia today has Tskhinvali. The region is already not only occupied but also de facto annexed.

At the same time, the statements made by the de-facto government and society of Abkhazia once again made it clear that the Abkhazian side, as before, manages to maintain a certain distance from Russia. Moscow is well aware of this, and in exchange for receiving the coastal part of Bichvinti, to intimidate the Abkhazians, the Kremlin "gifted" A. Lukashenko's visit was organized. At the same time, the so-called stated position on the inadmissibility of the "South Ossetian" scenario gives a reason to assume that a part of the Abkhaz society had some questions with the Kremlin leadership immediately after the Russian invasion of Ukraine (however, they did not dare to state this publicly).

The fearful reactions from both the Abkhazian and Ossetian sides once again made clear the fact that there is still no trust in the Georgian side. As a result of the work of the Russian propaganda machine, it is difficult for the population of both regions to believe that Tbilisi will avoid the use of force at the first opportunity to restore territorial integrity and that the main goal of Georgia is to resolve the conflict peacefully. In addition, various unrealistic statements about the West's desire to drag Georgia into the war lead to the fact that a significant part of the Abkhaz and Ossetian society not only does not trust the Georgian state but also considers Georgia to be too dependent on external forces. The Kremlin's disinformation campaign is aimed at portraying Georgia as a puppet of America, the European Union, and NATO in the eyes of the residents of the occupied territories, and the Western democratic world as an aggressive entity, which seems to be ready in every possible way to violate the rights of the citizens of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region as much as possible. On the other hand, these reactions also prove that Sukhumi and Tskhinvali no longer hope for full-fledged protection from the Russian side. After 2008, the deployment of Russian military bases and deployment of military equipment in both regions should have dispelled the fears of the residents of the occupied regions, but the first failures of the Russian armed forces on the Ukrainian front in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region caused considerable concern. The reason for this is that Russia did not appear as a stable and strong partner - rather as a protector, because the so-called second army of the world not only failed to achieve its goals, but it was necessary to recruit Abkhazians and Ossetians to the front line and even protect Moscow from the rebels led by Prigozhin. Most probably, the recruitment by Moscow the inhabitants of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali district into the Russian army was more of a political and symbolic act, but it did not make a positive impression on Sukhumi and Tskhinvali. Several opposition "politicians" of the occupied regions have made statements about the threat of "destruction of the gene pool", the basis of which is, to some extent, the relevant attitudes of the population. Abkhazian civil society members openly called for the end of the war. It is also not excluded that, especially in Abkhazia, they follow with fear the brutal actions of the Russian troops against the civilian population of Ukraine. The aforementioned inhumane actions most likely raised the fear in the Abkhazian society itself that Russia is capable of taking repressive measures against the population of Abkhazia if necessary,

for example in the case of a more independent policy in Abkhazia from Russia (for example, the opposition of the Abkhazian society to the transfer of part of the Bichvinti coastal area to Russia on the issue, etc.) there will be an attempt. That is, the Kremlin can be merciless towards any nation that does not share Moscow's policy, especially since part of the Abkhazian society is well aware of the genocide that the Russian Empire committed against ethnic Abkhazians and Circassians (as well as other nationalities of Abkhaz-Adyghe origin) in the 19th century. It was implemented in the 50s and 70s (Kldiashvili, Vacharadze, 2022).

### **Problems related to the occupied regions**

Taking into account all the above-mentioned realities, it should be noted the existence of the following problems in the occupied regions:

- As a result of the information propaganda of the official Kremlin, there is a clear lack of trust and people-to-people relations between the people living in the territories under the control of the central government of Georgia and the de facto authorities of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region, as well as representatives of various target groups. In particular, due to Russia's policy, today there are practically no prospects for establishing direct contacts between Georgian non-governmental organizations and civil society representatives of separatist regions;

- It is well known that first, the Russian Empire, and then the Soviet government and the Russian Federation implemented the policy of "divide and rule" in Georgia. As a result of agitation-propaganda (television programs, newspaper articles, Internet sources, distribution of "historical documents", etc.) the absolute majority of residents of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region (former South Ossetia) believe that neither Abkhazia nor "South Ossetia" historically They were a constituent part of Georgia and they were forced into Georgia during the Soviet period on the initiative of Stalin and Beria, etc. carried out;

- The new generation of Georgia is not sufficiently familiar with the main causes of conflicts and even the history of separatist regions, etc. For example, in several higher educational institutions of Georgia, the subject: "Negotiations and conflict resolution" is taught, but any subject that should be directly focused on the conflicts in the territory of Georgia is not included in the programs of the relevant faculties of different Georgian universities (eg: political sciences/international relations). Therefore, the most problematic is the fact that the majority of the population of Georgia is somewhat accustomed to the situation in the occupied regions, and the largest part of the society (despite Russia's failure in the Russia-Ukraine war) does not believe in the prospect of restoring the country's territorial integrity even at the current stage. For example, according to the public opinion survey of the International Republican Institute, one of the most authoritative organizations in the world, which was conducted in Georgia at the beginning of 2023, 36% state the economy and unemployment as the main problems facing the country, 19% state the costs of living and high prices, 6%-6 % to poverty and other economic problems, and only 5% to internal conflicts (Civil.ge, 2023).

- Although there have been various studies related to the main causes of the worsening conflicts in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region and the history of the conflicts, there are relatively fewer studies and other materials - which should be prepared by relevant public, educational, and private

structures and non-governmental organizations, related to the vision of the future And regarding the deep analysis of specific recommendations, namely, what are the main internal and external factors, political, legal, economic, humanitarian, informational, etc. issues that should play a decisive role in promoting the process of peaceful restoration of territorial integrity, taking into account the interests of all parties involved in the conflict;

- There is a lack of relationship between civil society and relevant government agencies responsible for conflict resolution. For example, in the case of Georgia, such cooperation is limited to meetings that are held not very often (once every 2-3 months) between the Office of the Minister of State and non-governmental organizations in matters of reconciliation and civil equality. These meetings are limited to the exchange of information only. At the same time, it is necessary to have more involvement of civil society in the development of specific recommendations for government agencies on conflict resolution issues.

## **Recommendations**

### ***The role of the Georgian government in resolving the conflict***

The Georgian authorities should probably weigh that today, when Russia is playing a destructive role in resolving the conflicts on the territory of the country, the positive and negative sides should be discussed, within the framework of which not Russia, but the Abkhazian and Ossetian sides will be the main negotiating party, as This was until August 2008, when there were certain contacts and negotiations between the central government of Georgia and representatives of the de facto government.

### ***The Role of civil society in conflict resolution***

To de-occupy the two historical regions of Georgia, maximum involvement of Georgian civil society is necessary. In particular, various non-governmental organizations and research institutes should carry out an in-depth review of the current situation related to the conflicts in the territory of Georgia and, based on it, analyze in detail what are the main internal and external, as well as political, economic, legal, humanitarian, informational, etc. Factors that should contribute to the restoration of mutual trust between the people in the territories under the control of the central government and in the separatist regions. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct various studies related to conflict resolution and to hold seminars, workshops, and conferences, which should mainly be focused only on the future;

- Books and articles related to the current situation in the conflict zone and the prospects of conflict resolution in the territory of Abkhazia and the former South Ossetia Autonomous Region should be published on the issues of conflicts, and the mentioned materials should be provided to the residents of the occupied regions in electronic and other forms, for example;

- Taking into account the importance of raising public awareness about conflict resolution - it is necessary to organize training courses related to the future perspective of conflict resolution at one of the leading universities of Georgia. The said university should share these ideas with its colleagues from other higher education institutions to organize the mentioned lecture courses in as many higher education institutions as possible;

- It is necessary to create an information portal for political, economic, legal, humanitarian, educational, etc. conflicts settlement. To discuss the aspects. Publication of relevant articles and studies by representatives of civil society will contribute to the exchange of experiences and views and raise public awareness of conflict resolution issues in Georgia and beyond;
- To increase mutual trust between the population under the control of the central government and the separatist regions, it is of the utmost importance to establish contacts with the relevant target groups in the separatist regions to share positions on peace initiatives and share articles, studies, etc. publication. Accordingly, the purpose of the mentioned recommendation is to suggest colleagues from Abkhazia, South Ossetia to prepare opinions and positions on the future perspectives of conflict resolution and mutual trust restoration.

As a result of considering the above factors, the following recommendations can be developed by the Georgian government and civil society in various fields, namely:

***Information campaign:***

- Discussions on both the governmental and non-governmental levels should be intensified regarding the fact that the primary goal of Georgia is to resolve the problems of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions only in a peaceful way, and the Georgian side is always ready for dialogue. Based on the above, it is necessary to expand and activate contacts through various channels not only with civil societies but also with the de facto ruling elites, if possible. In the absence of the mentioned, solving the problem will become even more difficult in light of the pressure from Moscow and the creation of anti-Georgian sentiments;
- through various electronic or print media, primarily through the public broadcaster, most likely in Russian, but also in Abkhazian and Ossetian languages - strengthening the information campaign, within the framework of which Georgia will be presented as a democratic, peace-loving and peace-loving country, which has various projects through it can become an economically developed country with a European perspective;
- It is necessary to prepare appropriate programs and articles, blogs, as well as to create a "YouTube channel", etc. which will be spread by various means in the occupied regions, where relevant sources will be presented that both Abkhazia and the territory of the former South Ossetian Autonomous District have always been part of Georgia, which is confirmed by numerous maps published in different centuries, and Georgians and Abkhazians, as well as Georgians and Ossetians, have always lived Side by side, both the Abkhaz and Os peoples have made a great contribution to the strengthening of the Georgian state. For example, ethnic Abkhazians and Ossetians have always served in the Georgian army, and there are many examples of joint fighting against a common enemy. For example, the joint battle of Georgians and Abkhazians against the Arab army headed by Murvan, the joint campaign of Georgians and Alans on the territories of the Party and the Roman Empire under the command of King Farsman Kveli of Kartli, the battle of Didgori held in 1121, etc. Also, our fellow citizens in the occupied regions should be given concrete examples that the rights of both the Ossetian and Abkhazian peoples have always been protected in Georgia. For example, during the existence of the Soviet Union, more than 60% of schools in the South Ossetian Autonomous District of the Georgian SSR were Ossetian (students studied in Ossetian until the fourth grade, and then, due to problems related to literature, in Russian) (Kvanchilashvili, 1989). At the same time, not a single Ossetian school functioned in

Orjonikidze, the capital of the Autonomous Republic of North Ossetia (today's Vladikavkaz), a part of the Russian Soviet Socialist Federal Republic, that is, the deliberate Russification of the Ossetian people was taking place in Russia. As for Abkhazia, in this case, it is also necessary to note that, for example, according to Article 107 of the Constitution adopted by the Democratic Republic of Georgia in 1921, Abkhazia had wide autonomy within Georgia. And during the period of communist rule and in the first year of Georgia's state independence, namely in 1992, i.e. before the war, ethnic Abkhazians constituted 17% of the population of Abkhazia, and Georgians 44%, although in the Supreme Council of Abkhazia Abkhazians had 28 deputies, and Georgians - 26. (Chitadze, 2011). In addition, not a single nation of the former Soviet Union, whose number did not exceed 80 thousand, had its university, television, radio, newspaper, theater, etc. And in this case, the only exception was Abkhazians living in Georgia. It is also necessary to emphasize the fact that the Russian Empire was the state that in the 19th century expelled more than 100 thousand ethnic Abkhazians from their native heartland and exiled them to the Ottoman Empire, and until 1907 the Abkhazians were assigned the status of "criminal nation" by the tsarist regime ( Lortkipanidze, 1990);

- The occupied regions should be provided with information on how the rights of ethnic minorities are protected in Georgia and what kind of multi-ethnic and tolerant country Georgia is;

- It is important to raise the awareness of the residents of the controlled territory of Georgia on the issues of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region;

- In Georgian society, work should be carried out in the direction that the conflicts existing in the territory of the country are understood in a new way, in particular, the government should be able to take active and courageous peace steps about the regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali as soon as possible. Part of the mentioned communication strategy should be the destruction of several stereotypes, such as, for example, that the conflicts in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region are only a part of the Georgia-Russia conflict and the local population has no role there;

- Appropriate videos and other materials about Adjara should be prepared, in particular, how the autonomous rights of Adjara are protected within united Georgia and what kind of infrastructural and other types of projects have been implemented in the Adjara region. Our compatriots across the occupation line should see the difference between the development of the autonomous republic of Georgia and the occupied regions;

- We must convince both Abkhaz and Ossetian societies that neither side is the winner in the current situation. In particular, Georgia is defeated because it cannot control 20% of its territory, Abkhazia and so-called South Ossetia does not have any de-facto independence, and under the influence of Russia, their national identity is gradually being lost, etc. and the main priority of conflict resolution should be the victory of each party involved in the conflict.

### ***Georgia and the International Democratic Community***

- Cooperation with Western partners in the regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali should be intensified to activate the involvement of the international community and increase its influence. New initiatives should be presented to our partners to the effect that the Georgian side is thinking about conflict issues in a new way, including stopping the annexation, and that at the modern stage



official Tbilisi resources will be spent much more effectively in the direction of conflict transformation;

- It is important to activate cooperation with the representatives of the Western democratic world, in the direction of prevention of annexation, first of all, the annexation of Tskhinvali region. In particular, it is necessary to develop a specific plan together with the partner states of Georgia, which will, first of all, take into account the further tightening of the political and economic sanctions already imposed on Russia. It is necessary to convince the Western partners how important the de-occupation of the two historical regions of Georgia is for the West itself, one of the main reasons for which is the fact that as a result of the imposition of sanctions on Russia, the transit functions of Georgia are significantly increasing (for example, in 2022, cargo transportation through the Middle Corridor increased by 2.5 times, etc.) and settlement of conflicts and establishment of a stable environment in Georgia - will create an important prerequisite for Georgia to more actively play the role of a transport corridor between the West and the East (in carrying various cargoes or energy resources).

-Georgia must convince the West that until the de-occupation of the two historical regions of Georgia takes place, it is necessary that under no circumstances should the sanctions imposed on Russia within the framework of the Ukrainian war be eased and canceled at all if Russia withdraws its troops (more precisely, it will be forced to withdraw) from Ukraine and accordingly, the final prerequisite for the lifting of sanctions for Russia (in the long term) should also be the resolution of the conflicts on the territory of Georgia (and Moldova), including the fact that Georgia was the first country that suffered Russia's direct aggression after the collapse of the Soviet Union;

-Georgia should continue its integration into the European and Euro-Atlantic structures as much as possible, especially against the background when the Russian economy is increasingly isolated and weakened due to international sanctions. Accordingly, it will be more and more difficult for Russia to deal with Abkhazia and the so-called Financial support of South Ossetia. Therefore, fewer and fewer people in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region will want to move to live and find work in Russia. Accordingly, the European perspective of Georgia should become more attractive to the Abkhazian and Ossetian peoples. Among them, taking into account the existing visa-free regime between Georgia and the European Union, more residents of the occupied territories may want to receive a neutral passport issued by Georgia or the Georgian authorities (a neutral document is a document of a humanitarian nature, which allows the population of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region to receive social services and travel abroad freely allows movement).

- It is necessary to maintain and develop contacts with healthy and progressive forces operating in Russia or abroad. In this case, we can consider those political scientists or public figures who realize the price of normal relations with Georgia and express their readiness to conduct a dialogue on the restoration of territorial integrity. Famous representatives of electronic and print media, the artistic elite, and intellectual circles have such views. Many of them are restricted by Russian censorship, and many have left the country. That is why it is important to get in touch with these individuals and to participate in the process of forming public opinion in different ways.

### ***Domestic political issues***

- It is necessary to reduce the confrontation between different political forces inside the country because both Ossetian and Abkhaz community representatives are monitoring and receiving information regarding the ongoing processes in the territory of the rest of Georgia, and the radical confrontation between the Georgian government and the opposition cannot be a good example for the residents of the Tskhinvali region and Abkhazia. Naturally, representatives of the society of the occupied territories may ask the question that if the Georgian side talks about the peaceful integration of the Abkhazian and Ossetian peoples based on the statements, how can a compromise be reached between Georgians and Abkhazians, as well as Georgians and Ossetians, if there is constant conflict and enmity between the Georgians themselves, which is manifested not only among political elites but also among supporters of different political parties and people with different political orientations;
- The development of democratic institutions in Georgia and the strengthening of the rule of law should be one of the main guarantees of solving the problems of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region.

### *Economic aspects*

Of course, the economic development of Georgia should be one of the main prerequisites for conflict settlement. In today's conditions, when, despite the economic sanctions introduced against Russia, Russia's GDP per capita is more than twice the GDP per capita of Georgia, Russia will still be a more attractive country for the Ossetian and Abkhazian peoples, especially since as a result of the Russia-Ukraine war, Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region. The dependence of the population on Russia has increased (most likely - temporarily), as an example of which is the fact that, due to the war in Ukraine, cargo transportation through Abkhazia has tripled in 2022 (Jam News, 2022). However, in the future, an economically strengthened Georgia will be able to arouse more interest in the Abkhazian and Ossetian communities. In this case, we should not lose sight of the example of Cyprus, where in 2004, when the issue of joining the Greek part of Cyprus to the European Union was on the agenda, a referendum was held in both the Turkish and Greek parts of the country, where 65% of the population of the separatist part of Cyprus supported the unification of Cyprus (UN, 2005). Such a thing would have been unthinkable just 10 years ago. The unification of Cyprus could not take place, because the Greek part of the country was against the unification. In general, the mood of the population of the separatist region was determined by the rapid socio-economic development of the territory under the central government of the country to the point that Cyprus met all the standards of the European Union, and finally, without the occupied territory (39% of the country's territory), it became a branch of the mentioned organization;

- The issue of opening a free economic zone on the territories controlled by the Georgian side in the vicinity of the administrative borders with Abkhazia and the former South Ossetia Autonomous District should be discussed, which will facilitate the migration of ethnic Abkhazians and Ossetians to the controlled territory of Georgia and their employment, especially in the light of the current socio-economic situation in Russia. getting worse day by day;
- The issue of the construction of the Anaklia deep-water port near the administrative border of Abkhazia is very important, which will be able to process up to 40 million cargoes per year;
- To distribute electricity fairly, the joint exploitation of the Enguri hydroelectric power station by the Georgian and Abkhaz sides should be continued;

- On the other hand, in the vicinity of the Tskhinvali region, it is possible, for example, to open fruit or grain processing enterprises within the framework of the "Produce in Georgia" program;
- It is necessary to further facilitate the transfer of ethnic Abkhazians and Ossetians, as well as ethnic Georgians and representatives of other nationalities living in the occupied regions to the territory controlled by the Georgian side, to provide them with free treatment (as we know, the project has been implemented for many years) and the prospect of employment in various companies;
- It would be good to increase the attractiveness of the "Step towards a better future" initiative. First of all, it is necessary to eliminate the reasons preventing the full implementation of the initiative. In this regard, it is important to reduce bureaucratic barriers and significantly increase the volume of financing for the promotion of trade and business.
- To successfully develop the economy of Georgia, it is important to maximize the use of water resources (26,060 rivers, 850 lakes, 43 reservoirs, and aquifers) (Davitashvili, Elizbarashvili, 2014) for the construction of new hydroelectric power stations (including the Khudon HPP located relatively close to the administrative border of Abkhazia) and the international to market electricity and freshwater (one-third of the world's population today does not have adequate access to fresh water) for export.

### ***Education issues***

Prerequisites should be created for both Ossetian and Abkhazian youth to expand the opportunities to receive education in Western higher education institutions with the Georgian quota. In addition, Russian-speaking sectors should be opened for Abkhazian and Ossetian youth to master the required specialties in higher and vocational schools in Georgia.

### **Conclusion**

The full-scale war waged by Russia in Ukraine is the biggest geopolitical event, the result of which will affect the entire Black Sea region, as well as the current situation in Georgia, including its occupied territories. The victory of Ukraine and the international democratic forces in the war will in turn create a favorable condition for the de-occupation of the two historical regions of Georgia in a peaceful way, within which the Georgian, Ossetian, and Abkhazian peoples will remain the same winners.

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