

Frozen Conflicts, Frozen Analysis

Peter Rutland

Wesleyan University

International Studies Association,

Chicago, IL, 1st March 2007.

(very preliminary draft)

Fifteen years ago, four mini-states emerged from the collapse of the Soviet Union: the republics of Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Pridnestrovie (also known as Trans-Dniester). They prevailed in bloody wars with their host government, and have been able to maintain control over their own block of territory. But they have been denied recognition as sovereign states by the international community.

As of 2007 they continue to obstinately cling to their unrecognized existence, defying international efforts to bring a lasting solution to the conflicts that accompanied their founding. Their persistence is not just an intellectual affront to an international system based on the idea of sovereign states, but it is also an urgent practical problem, preventing the return to normal life in the regions in question. This burden falls most heavily on the million-plus refugees that were dislodged from those conflicts, and who have still been unable to return home.

The situation has produced a kind of stable instability. Apart from the occasional border skirmish, no large-scale fighting has broken out since 1994. A “frozen peace” is preferable to an unfrozen war, but the status quo is still the second or third best solution for all involved. Most if

not all of the principal actors have adjusted to the status quo. Political and economic processes continue to unfold around and beneath the “frozen” conflicts. Trade routes are established, legal and illegal; and taxes or tribute are levied. People move back and forth, though given the general collapse of the region’s economies there is more outflow than inflow. Between one quarter and one third of the labor force in all these countries have migrated out of the region in search of work, with Russia as the main destination. This process is characteristic of both the secessionist enclaves and the host countries. This migration signifies that there has been social adaptation to the status quo, for good or ill. Corruption and criminalization are endemic – but again, one wonders whether the difference between enclave and host is one of kind, or merely degree.

After so many years the conflicts are not so much frozen as forgotten, largely ignored by Western public opinion and policy elites alike. After all this time, and after multiple studies by academics and international organizations, is there anything new to say about them? Perhaps not. But it is worth taking stock of the state of knowledge in the field, if only because developments in Yugoslavia could lead to a renewal of diplomacy around the frozen foursome. Montenegro declared its independence after a referendum on 21 May 2006, and February 2007 saw the presentation of the Ahtisaari plan for Kosovo, which offers de facto statehood in return for autonomous majority-Serb enclaves; a veto for non-Albanians in the Kosovo Assembly over certain laws; and a continuing international police presence to protect minority rights.¹

Russia has made it clear that efforts to strip Yugoslav sovereignty from Kosovo would have implications for the frozen conflicts in the former Soviet Union. For example, in January 2006 President Vladimir Putin called for the application of “universal principles” in handling these cases, telling a press conference that “If someone thinks that Kosovo can be granted full independence as a state, then why should the Abkhaz or the South-Ossetian peoples not also have the right to statehood?”²

¹ Fatmire Terdevci, “Ready to blow,” *Transitions Online*, 20 February 2007.

² 31 January 2006, www.kremlin.ru

Similarities and differences

The four secessionist regions under study have some commonalities. All four are ostensibly ethnic conflicts, involving a people's struggle for self-rule. They all cite the principle of self-determination against the principle of the integrity of sovereign state borders. They are all creatures of Leninist-Stalinist federalism, having been given some political autonomy in the Soviet Union but denied the status of "union republic" which became the main criterion for international recognition as a sovereign state post-1991. They now find common cause in being spurned by the international community, and relying on Russia for military and diplomatic support.

Another common feature is that in their quest for self-determination, they have all violated the rights of other ethnic groups who resided on their territories. The Karabakh Armenians drove out Azeris not only from the Karabakh region but also from the seven districts of Azerbaijan that they conquered and occupied in the course of the 1992-94 war, and which they continue to hold as a buffer zone/bargaining chip. The Abkhaz managed to expel 250,000 Georgians from Abkhazia – a group more than twice the size of the Abkhaz themselves. In the West one hears little of the plight of these Caucasian refugees, despite the fact that numerically they outnumber the Palestinians expelled from Israel in 1948. Notwithstanding these tragic events, the international community has mostly avoided leveling accusations of ethnic cleansing against the warring parties, on the implicit understanding that it would be counter-productive to the search for peace. (The phrase did creep into the OSCE Lisbon declaration in 1996, pertaining to the Abkhaz case.)

But there are also some important structural differences between the cases, in terms of the character of the ethno-nationalist movement in question. Karabakh is distinctive in having the strong support of neighboring Armenia, a sovereign state in its own right (albeit one that is in desperately weak economic condition). Despite formal denials of any intent to merge with

Armenia, in practice the two countries act as one. (Armenian President Robert Kocharian first served as president of Karabakh; Armenian conscripts rotate through Karabakh; etc.)

Karabakh/Armenia can also call upon the support of the strong international Armenian diaspora, and can invoke the powerful narrative of the 1915 genocide. The Armenian diaspora has of course been crucial in checking the pro-Azerbaijan oil lobby in the US.

None of the other secessionist regions has a state-sponsor equivalent to Armenia, nor any international diaspora. South Ossetia comes closest to Karabakh in this regard, since it was divided from North Ossetia (part of the Russian Federation) by Stalin, and seeks not independence but unity with its northern half. But North Ossetia is not a sovereign state, meaning that South Ossetia's external sponsor is the Russian Federation. And Russia is much less interested in the rights of Ossetins than is Armenia for Karabakh. Also, South Ossetia is a patchwork of Ossetin and Georgian villages and does not have as clear a territorial demarcation as the other three regions.

Abkhazia is largely on its own. The Cherkess diaspora of the late 19th century has not kept strong ties to the Abkhaz. Abkhazia did win substantial support from fellow Caucasian Moslem peoples during its war with Georgia – but it also drew support from Christian Caucasians, Russian Cossacks, and the Russian army. The syncretic character of Abkhaz religious belief, a mixture of Islam, Christianity and pagan traditions, makes it stony ground for Islamic fundamentalism – as does its heavy dependence on Russia for its political, economic and military survival.

Pridnestrovie is the odd man out in terms of standard self-determination narratives. The Abkhaz, Ossetins and Karabakh Armenians all conform to the standard picture of ethno-nationalist movements: they have a strong sense of ethnic identity based on a common language and sense of common descent. Pridnestrovie in contrast is a multi-ethnic polyglot whose common identity has grown within the boundaries of the province carved out by Stalin in the 1920s along the left bank of the Dniester, facing off against capitalist Romania. According to a local census in

2004, of Pridnestrovie's 555,000 inhabitants 32% were Moldovans, 30% Russians, and 29% Ukrainians.³ Despite the lack of a primordial ethnic identity based on language, descent or religion, the secessionist movement there did begin with a dispute over a classic ethnic marker, that of language. The region, predominantly Russian-speaking, reacted against moves by Moldovan nationalists to restore the Moldovan language and even promote unification with Romania.

But moving beyond this initial negative reaction, the leaders of Pridnestrovie have been trying to create a new ethnic identity based on the character and history of the territory in question. These moves are roundly ridiculed by Western observers, who portray the region as a Soviet "Jurassic park" ruled by a mafia clique. However, it would be unwise to dismiss out of hand the possibility of a new identity group forming. The pattern may be similar to what has evolved in Belarus, when Alexander Lukashenko has managed to forge a new post-Soviet Belarusian identity that does not rely on traditional markers of ethnicity such as language and a shared primordial history.⁴ Pridnestrovie did not see large-scale ethnic cleansing, though some rights of resident ethnic Moldovans have been under threat (eg efforts to close Moldovan language schools).

In all four regions, language has been critical in the gestation of conflict. The Abkhaz did not want to live in a country where Georgian, a language almost none of them spoke, would be the official language of politics, education and business. Likewise the Pridnestrovie residents and Moldovan language, and the Karabakh Armenians and Azeri language (though more of them spoke Azeri than Abkhaz spoke Georgian). A comparison with the Russians in Estonia and Latvia can provide supporting evidence for both sides of the argument. The embattled minorities of the Caucasus will note that the Baltic Russians were denied citizenship and obliged to learn Estonian and Latvian in order to naturalize. The ruling majority groups will note that the basic civil rights

³ RFE/RL 15 September 2006.

⁴ On this, see Leshchenko.

of the Baltic Russians were mostly protected, and the younger generation of Russians living there are learning the new languages and assimilating to the new reality. (It helps that they are now members of the European Union and experiencing an economic boom.)

Competing narratives

These conflicts are viewed through the prism of three conflicting or at least distinct narratives.

1) Evil Russia

The dominant view in Western policy circles is to regard the four frozen conflicts as evidence of the lingering (or resurgent) threat of Russian imperialism. The conflicts arose because of Soviet imperialism, which involved a contradictory and ambiguous federalism, going back to Stalin's arbitrary boundary-drawing in the 1920s. In the early 1990s Russian military interventions tipped the balance enabling the outnumbered secessionists to win the wars, and to this day Russian meddling is still the main explanation for the persistence of the frozen conflicts. Russia maintains a military presence in those regions in the guise of peace-keeping; keeps economic ties with the regions that enable them to stay afloat; has been generous in offering Russian citizenship (or at least travel rights) to their denizens; and offers diplomatic cover for the break-away regions, cooperating with their leaders and vetoing international peace plans that might challenge the status quo post-bellum.

It is argued that Russia is using these enclaves to subvert the independence of the newly independent states of Moldova, Georgia and Azerbaijan, and to deter them from falling into the Western orbit, through NATO membership for example.

Apart from their indulgence of the enclaves, Russia shows plenty of other disturbing signs of reverting to an imperialist mindset – from domestic authoritarianism through to

aggressive energy price hikes and asset seizures. So it is easy enough to slot the frozen conflicts into the Russia resurgent paradigm.

The problem with this approach is that it denies agency to the denizens of the secessionist enclaves. It also tends to gloss over the fact that Russia, as a status quo power facing secessionist movements of its own (notably, Chechnya) is extremely reluctant to endorse any infringement of the territorial integrity of sovereign states. Even the Russian parliament, which has been a vocal defender of these pro-Russian enclaves, recognizes this point. In 2001 the State Duma passed a law allowing Russia to include other territories, but only with the consent of the sovereign government, a point confirmed in a Supreme Court opinion of July 2004. The secessionist leaders are themselves wary of Russia's motives and fearful of betrayal. A complicating factor is the incorporation of the secessionists into Moscow's weird political scene, Their cause is championed by elements in the Russian military and by politicians from Sergei Baburin to Mayor Yuriy Luzhkov. Opinions differ as to whether these political actors are surrogates for the Kremlin, or merely a lunatic fringe (or both).

2) Tragic misunderstanding

The second approach, prevalent amongst international non-governmental agencies, is to portray these conflicts as irrational, almost accidental developments, that arose because of mutual misperceptions, inflamed by power-hungry local politicians.

The argument is that the conflicts were a product of the unique period of chaos and uncertainty that accompanied the Soviet break-up and the end of the Cold War. Now that the dust has settled, there is no reason that cool heads should not prevail. Inattention from the international community is the main reason for the failure to find workable solutions.

Adherents of this view are keen to debunk the idea that “ancient hatreds” lie behind these conflicts.⁵ Indeed, it is true that the cultural similarities outnumber the cultural differences between the warring ethnic groups. The peoples of the Caucasus have similar lifestyles, similar dances, similar foods; but they all give these practices different names in their own languages, and claim them as their own. Similarly, it is true that these peoples had formerly lived at peace for decades; that intermarriage was not uncommon; that they had common identity as “soviet men” and now “post-soviet men,” and so forth.

Although just about all the above was true and is true, the fact remains that when political power was up for grabs in 1988-92, we saw rapid polarization along ethnic lines, over the issue of which ethnic group would wield power over the state apparatus, and to what ends.

The tragic misunderstanding approach assumes that a solution to the conflict can be found, that in principle any two peoples can coexist amicably if the right institutions and the right leadership are in place. It assumes that the ethno-nationalist paradigm that interprets self-determination as the right of each people to have its own state is tragically flawed, in a world where there are more ethnic groups than states, and where each state has multiple ethnicities present on its territory.

The path to peace lies through intervention by an international broker (or committee of brokers) which is thought essential to forging the package of mutual concessions which will be the path to peace. This package will be sweetened by the promise of economic reconstruction aid, and international security guarantees to assuage the existential fears of endangered minorities on both sides. In theory, this makes sense. In practice, there are all sorts of hurdles to be overcome. The Armenia-Azerbaijan peace process has been actively pursued, with more than 20 personal meetings between the two countries’ presidents. But it cannot seem to get out of the starting gate because of a chicken and egg dilemma. Baku wants a step-by-step approach, with proof of

⁵ The classic statement of ancient enmities is Kaplan, in regard to the Balkans, for a rebuttal in regard to the Caucasus, see Kaufman.

Armenian cooperation proved by willingness to withdraw from the occupied territories outside Karabakh. Armenia instead insists on a package approach, they refuse to give up any of their bargaining chips without agreement on the fundamental question of Karabakh's status.

Evidence for the possibility of progress is provided by the cases of the Gagauz in Moldova and Ajaria in Georgia. Ajaria is the region around Batumi which, like Abkhazia and South Ossetia, had managed to carve out autonomy from Tbilisi rule. President Mikheil Saakashvili successfully brought the province back under the control of the central government in 2004 the wake of the Rose Revolution.

In practice such deal-making faces near-impossible hurdles. It is not simply the lack of trust between the two sides, it is the fundamental clash of interests – interests that go to the heart of the existential identities of the warring parties. “Two peoples, one territory,” the phrase used to characterize the Israel-Palestine conflict, fits the bill all too well. Sovereignty is not easily shared when it comes with an ethnic face: two objects cannot easily occupy the same space at the same time.

The “tragic mistake” approach underestimates the reality of ethnic identities in conditions of rapid political change and large-scale political violence, and overestimates the capacity of international actors to forge a lasting peace. It also skips over the moral hazard problems that follow in the wake of international intervention. The participation of external actors increases the level of uncertainty, as each side starts to calculate how the participation of new international actors could influence the balance of power in the negotiations. The Russian sponsored Kozak Memorandum for Pridnestrovie came close to acceptance in 2003: the problem was it would have locked in a Russian military presence and the existing Pridnestrovie leadership. At the eleventh hour Moldovan president Vladimir Voronin, formerly close to Moscow, was persuaded by

Western intermediaries (from the US embassy to George Soros) to drop the plan.⁶ No peace, it seems, was better than peace on Moscow's terms.

The tragic mistake school is ambiguous on the question of democracy. Ideally, of course, all these countries should be democracies – that is the best guarantee of individual rights, and the best guarantee against a renewed outbreak of war (the democratic peace theory). However, in the short term the quality of democracy in these countries leaves a lot to be desired – both in the host countries and, still more, the garrison state enclaves. As of 2007 Freedom House ranked Armenia 5 for Political Rights and 4 for Civil Liberties; Azerbaijan 6 and 5; Georgia 3 and 3; and Moldova 3 and 4. They scored Abkhazia 5 and 5; Transnistria 6 and 6; and Karabakh 5 and 5 (better than Kosovo, which was 6 and 5). Peace cannot wait until the process of democratic transition is completed. So the international community seems willing to press ahead with peace negotiations between less than democratic leaders.

There is also a feeling, rarely stated explicitly, that it may be easier to win the painful compromises necessary for peace by arm-twisting a dictator, behind closed doors, than by selling such a peace agreement to a democratic electorate. Such a process would leave the peacemaker vulnerable to electoral challenges from ethnic outbidding by nationalists crying sell-out, not to mention vulnerability to an assassin's bullet (the fate of Yitzak Rabin).

3) Struggle for self-determination

The leaders of the break-away republics, and some proportion of their followers, view their struggle for sovereignty as a legitimate expression of their struggle for survival. They are adamant in asserting their right to self-determination, a right introduced into international law by Woodrow Wilson, and reaffirmed by the United Nations (in the context of the break-up of colonial empires). They complain that Stalin's exercise in border-drawing in the 1920s denied

⁶ Tolkacheva.

them the right to self-rule, and their group’s identity was threatened by decades of assimilationist pressure during the Soviet era. This was followed by actions by the newly-independent host republics in 1988-91 stripping them of some of the meager protections they had enjoyed under the Soviet Union.

Skeptics may argue that these countries are too small to aspire to sovereignty. The secessionists argue in return that 35 of the 193 countries in the contemporary world have less than 500,000 people, and that their enclaves has already established de facto statehood, in the traditional form of authorities wielding a monopoly of physical force in a given territory.

	Area (km2)	population
Pridnestrovie	4,163	555,000
Nagorno Karabakh	4,400	145,000
Abkhazia	8,600	216,000
South Ossetia	3,900	70,000

How serious was the threat to the respective group’s existence in the early 1990s? The case is probably strongest for the Abkhaz. Unlike the Ossetins or the Karabakh Armenians, they do not have a neighboring state where their ethnic group’s existence can be maintained. Threats were in the air, and military actions were being taken that gave some grounds for believing that the threats might turn into reality. “The Commander-in-Chief of the Georgian forces in Abkhazia, Colonel Giorgi Karkarashvili, in an address to the population of Abkhazia broadcast on Sukhum television on 25 August 1992, warned that ‘Even if the total number of Georgians - 100,000 - are killed, then from your [Abkhazian] side all 97,000 will be killed,’ and he advised the Abkhazian

leader V. Ardzinba ‘not to act in such a way that the Abkhazian nation is left without descendants.’”⁷

Whatever the reality of the threats perceived 15 years ago, the experience of war itself hardened attitudes and forged new identities. The contemporary Abkhaz, Azeri or Karabakh identity is just as powerfully shaped by the traumatic experiences of 1988-94 as by memories of past historical wrongdoing. Fear and insecurity have become structurally embedded; the Karabakh elation in victory is matched by the Azeri despair in defeat.

It is common to hear the argument among Western observers that in this post-modern age self-determination, nationalism and the nation-state are redundant concepts, that the clock of history cannot be turned back to the 1920s. But to the secessionists, these arguments smack of hypocrisy. The post-modern interpretation is usually advanced by people with a passport in their pocket granting them rights of citizenship in a well-established nation-state, one whose leaders come from the same ethnic group and speak the same language as they do. The secessionists follow closely recent developments such as the achievement of sovereignty in East Timor or Eritrea, and ask “if them, why not us?”

Peace improbable, war unlikely

Periodic efforts to bring about a solution lead to a surge of hope, followed by disappointment, failure and recrimination. More often than not, these abortive peace plans seem to agitate the international partners, who exchange mutual recriminations; and anger local activists who unleash political attacks on the leaders willing to consider compromises.

In an effort to avoid such dire consequences, negotiations are often conducted in secret (as has been the case, throughout, for the Minsk Group tackling the Karabakh problem). This in turn fuels conspiracy theories and rumors of a sell-out by the leadership. The main case in point is

⁷ Cited by Viacheslav Chiribka, “In search of ways out,” ch. 3 in Coppieters (ed).

the fall of Levon Ter-Petrossian in 1997, after it became clear that he was willing to consider some kind of territorial exchange with Azerbaijan as part of a peace process.

The basic framework for the solutions proposed by OSCE, International Crisis Group, etc is a return to the status quo ante bellum – preservation of the pre-existing state borders and return of all refugees, supplemented by provision for ethnic group rights, to be guaranteed by the international community.

One can imagine solutions lying in one of several directions.

First, it could well be that peace will come through victory in war – this is the most common, and longest lasting, path to peace in these kinds of intra-state conflicts world-wide. And victory does not always go to the biggest battalions.⁸ The constraining factor here is that the international powers do *not* want to see a resumption of hostilities in the region. The question here is whether the US will be able to restrain the revanchist tendencies in Saakashvili's government in Georgia, and whether President Ilham Aliev in Azerbaijan will be able to avoid bending to the opposition nationalists' demand to do something to reclaim the 14% of their territory under Armenian occupation. Azerbaijan's growing oil wealth, and the utter deadlock in the peace process, makes a rematch a few years' hence look increasingly likely. If either of these situations does revert to war, the question will then be whether Russia is willing to stand by and see one of its clients potentially lose. Russia still has enough military assets in the area to prevent a Georgian or Azerbaijani victory.

The most optimistic spin one can put on this state of affairs is the "Sadat variant," drawing the analogy with President Anwar Sadat's willingness to make peace with Israel in 1979 after making war with them in 1973. The argument is that if Azerbaijan fights again, its honor will have been satisfied, even if it loses. Both sides can then declare the war a victory, and make peace.

⁸ Arreguin-Toft calculates that between 1800 and 2003 strong states, defined as those having a 5:1 power advantage over their adversary, have lost in 29% of all conflicts. (n=200)

Second, one can imagine some creative constitutional crafting, where skilled diplomats come up with fancy new categories and institutions that fudge the sovereignty question while giving everyone just enough to make the deal palatable. For all of the obsession with sovereignty, there are plenty of anomalies in the international community: territory whose citizens live a good life without enjoying full self-rule: Taiwan and Hong Kong, Puerto Rico, Andorra, the Aland islands, the Faroe islands. (Unfortunately, all of these examples are islands, with the exception of Andorra. And there are no islands in the Caucasus.)

Third, in an ideal world the solution would probably lie in some sort of shifting of the constitutional order at regional level. Given the common problems facing the three states and three secessionist enclaves of the Caucasus, it might make more sense if they agreed to pool their sovereignty and come up with common rules protecting the political rights of ethnic minorities throughout the region. Given that the Soviet Union is not around, and Russia is neither trusted nor capable of crafting such a deal, the best chance for brokering such an overhaul of the region's political order may be the European Union. This is science fiction, but such an exercise could possibly provide some pointers for a way out of the current morass.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

British Helsinki Human Rights Group, "Transnistria 2006: Is regime change underway?" 11 December 2005, www.bhhrg.org.

Jonathan Cohen, "A question of sovereignty: The Georgia-Abkhazia Peace Process," Conciliation Resources, September 1999.

Bruno Coppieters, Ghia Nodia and Yuri Anchabadze (eds.), *Georgians and Abkhazians. The Search for a Peace Settlement* (Brussels: Vrije Universiteit, 1998)
<http://poli.vub.ac.be/publi/Georgians/>

Georgi Derluguian, *Bourdieu's Secret Admirer in the Caucasus: A World-Systems Biography* (University of Chicago Press, 2005).

Thomas Goltz, *Azerbaijan Diary* (ME Sharpe, 1999); *Georgia Diary* (ME Sharpe, 2006).

International Crisis Group, "Abkhazia: Ways Forward," January 2007.

International Crisis Group, "Nagorno-Karabakh: A Plan For Peace," October 2006.

International Crisis Group, "Georgia: Avoiding War in South Ossetia," November 2004.

Robert D. Kaplan, *Balkan Ghosts, A Journey Through History* (St. Martins, 1993).

Stuart Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds: The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War* (Cornell University Press, 2001).

Charles King, *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia and the Politics of Culture* (Hoover Institution, 2000).

Evgeny M. Kozhokin "Georgia-Abkhazia," in Jeremy Azrael and Emil Payin (eds.), *US and Russian Policy Making With Respect to the Use of Force*, (Rand, 1996), ch. 5.

Natalia Leshchenko, "A fine instrument: two nation-building strategies in post-Soviet Belarus," *Nations and Nationalism*, vol. 10, no. 3, 2004, pp. 33-52.

Dov Lynch, *Managing Separatist States: A Eurasian Case Study* Institute of Security Studies, West European Union, 2001. <http://iss.europa.eu/occasion/occ32e.html>

Dov Lynch, "Separatist states and post-Soviet conflicts," *International Affairs*, October 2002 vol. 79.

Dov Lynch, *Engaging Europe's Separatist States* (Washington D.C.: US Institute of Peace, 2004).

Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, "The conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh region dealt with by the OSCE Minsk Conference," report prepared by David Atkinson, Political

Affairs Committee, 29 November 2004.
<http://assembly.coe.int/Documevnts/WorkingDocs/doc04/EDOC10364.htm>

Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, "Functioning of democratic institutions in Moldova," report prepared by Josette Durrieu and André Kvakkestad, Monitoring Committee, 16 September 2005. <http://assembly.coe.int/Documents/WorkingDocs/doc05/EDOC10671.htm>

Nicu Popescu, "Democracy in secessionism: Transnistria and Abkhazia's Domestic Politics," Central European University, August 2006.

Nicu Popescu, "Abkhaziya i Yuzhnaya Osetiya: nezavisimost ili vyzhivanie?," *Pro et Contra*, vol. 10, no. 5, September 2006, pp. 40-52.

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, "Nagorno-Karabakh: Timeline of the long road to peace," 10 February 2006.

Ivan Arreguin-Toft, *How the Weak Win Wars* (Cambridge University Press, 2006).

Anna Tolkacheva, "Evropeiskii vybor Moldavii," *Pro et Contra*, vol. 10, September 2006, pp. 53-64.

Marius Vahl and Michael Emerson, "Moldova and the Transnistrian conflict," *Europeanization and Conflict Resolution: Case Studies from the European Periphery* in *Journal of Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe*, Flensburg, July 2004. <http://www.ecmi.de/jemie/>

Thomas de Waal, *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan Through Peace and War* (New York University Press, 2004).

TIMELINES

AZERBAIJAN – NAGORNO-KARABAKH

1988 – February The Nagorno-Karabakh National Council votes to become part of Armenia. Clashes lead to refugee flows; 26 Armenians and six Azerbaijanis were killed in the Azerbaijani town of Sumgait.

1990 – Soviet troops occupy Baku, killing 130 people and injuring hundreds more.

1991 – Parliament votes to restore Azerbaijan's independence. Communist leader Ayaz Mutallibov becomes president. Heydar Aliyev becomes leader of the Azerbaijani exclave of Nakhichevan.

The leadership of Nagorno-Karabakh declares the region an independent republic.

September – Armenia votes to secede from the Soviet Union, in October Levon Ter-Petrossian is elected president.

1992 – Hostilities develop into full-scale war over Karabakh. Over 600 Azerbaijanis are killed as they flee an Armenian attack on the Karabakh town of Khodzhalay. Ethnic Armenian forces break through Azerbaijani territory to create Lachin corridor linking Armenia to Karabakh. Over the next two years temporary cease-fires yield to renewed offensives. 20-30,000 die in the fighting; 750,000 Azerbaijanis flee Karabakh and Armenia while 280,000 Armenians flee Azerbaijan.

March – the CSCE (now OSCE) create the “Minsk group” to seek a peaceful resolution, consists of 11 states and chaired by France, Russia and the US. Arguments over whether Karabakh residents and Azerbaijani refugees should be represented at the talks.

President Ayaz Mutallibov resigns. Abulfaz Elchibey, leader of the nationalist Popular Front, becomes president in Azerbaijan's first contested elections.

1993 – Rebel army commander Col Surat Huseynov takes control of Gyandzha and marches on the capital. Heydar Aliyev returns to Baku and is elected leader of parliament. President Elchibey flees Baku. Aliyev wins a presidential elections boycotted by Elchibey's Popular Front.

1994 May – Russia, through the CIS, brokers a cease-fire accord in Bishkek. Ethnic Armenians remain in control of Karabakh and seven surrounding districts equal to 14% of Azerbaijan. From 1995 OSCE monitors start to observe the cease-fire. Sporadic clashes along the “Line of Contact” continue to claim 100 lives a year. Azerbaijan maintains an economic blockade of Armenia.

September – Azerbaijan signs what the “contract of the century” with a consortium of international oil companies for the exploration of three offshore oil fields.

1995 – Azeri government troops crush a rebellion by the special police force. The New Azerbaijan Party, led by President Aliyev, wins the majority of seats in independent Azerbaijan's first multi-party elections, which are less than fair.

Karabakh holds legislative elections. Robert Kocharyan becomes executive president and is elected in 1996.

1996 Jan-March – peace talks in Moscow fail to produce results.

December – OSCE Lisbon summit affirms territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and proposes security guarantees and autonomy for Karabakh within Azerbaijan – unacceptable to Armenia.

1997 – Kocharyan becomes prime minister of Armenia and Arkadiy Gukasyan is elected president of Karabakh. Gukasyan survived an assassination attempt in 2000 allegedly planned by his former defense minister Samuel Babayan, and is re-elected in 2002

May – Minsk Group comes up with new proposal, accepted with reservations by Aliev and Ter-Petrosian but rejected by Karabakh in August.

October – At Council of Europe summit in Strasbourg Kocharian and Aliev reportedly moot territorial swap (Lachin corridor for Meghri corridor), but nothing transpires.

1998 – Ter-Petrosian, re-elected in 1996, resigns after his own Security Council opposes his acceptance of the OSCE's "step-by-step" proposal. Kocharian is elected president of Armenia in March.

October – Heydar Aliyev is re-elected president of Azerbaijan.

November – A Minsk Group "common state" proposal is rejected by Azerbaijan.

1999 October – Gunmen open fire in the Armenian parliament, killing the prime minister, parliamentary speaker and six other officials.

The New Azerbaijan Party wins majority of seats in multi-party legislative elections, that are not deemed not fair and fair by observers.

2001 January – Azerbaijan and Armenia become full members of the Council of Europe, despite doubts about the quality of democratic institutions in both countries.

April – US-brokered talks on Nagorno-Karabakh are held between the Azerbaijani and Armenian presidents in Florida and Paris, but without result.

BP suspends work on one of the Caspian oilfields after an Iranian gunboat chases a research vessel out of waters claimed by Iran. Talks between five littoral states on ownership of the sea continue all year but are inconclusive. Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey reach agreement on oil and gas pipelines linking Caspian fields with Turkey.

August – Azerbaijan officially shifts to the Latin alphabet for the Azeri language, the fourth alphabet change in a century.

September – Putin becomes first Russian president to visit Armenia since independence, agrees to expand Russian military base.

2002 January –The US suspends Section 907 banning direct government-to-government aid to Azerbaijan, in return for Azerbaijan's cooperation in the war on terror post-9/11.

2003 March – Kocharian is re-elected president of Armenia, after heated election in which 250 oppositionists were detained.

August – Aliyev appoints his son, Ilham, as prime minister.

October – Ilham Aliyev wins victory in presidential poll determined not fair by international observers. Heydar Aliyev dies in December.

2004 February – the European Parliament rejects a proposal by its chief South Caucasus rapporteur, Per Gahrton, that Armenian forces evacuate the occupied territories in return for Azerbaijan's lifting of its economic blockade of Armenia.

April – presidents meet in Warsaw.

August opposition Movement 88 leader Eduard Aghabekian wins election as mayor of Stepanakert.

2005 January – The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted a resolution criticizing Armenian occupation of Azerbaijani territory and the “large-scale ethnic expulsions” that resulted from the conflict “which resemble the terrible concept of ethnic cleansing.”

June – Parties loyal to Gukasyan win 30 of 33 seats in Karabakh parliament election, the Dashnak opposition cries fraud.

July – Azerbaijan starts direct flights from Baku to Turkish Republic of North Cyprus.

November – Ruling New Azerbaijan Party wins majority in unfair parliamentary elections

2006 Feb – talks between the Azeri and Armenian presidents in Paris, followed by in June on the fringe of the Black Sea Forum in Bucharest. U.S. co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group, Matthew Bryza the deal involves Armenian withdrawal from the occupied territories followed by a referendum in Karabakh.

July – BTC pipeline starts operations.

December – referendum on independence in Karabakh wins 98%

GEORGIA – SOUTH OSSETIA AND ABKHAZIA

1989 July – street clashes in Sukhumi, Abkhazia leave 15 dead.

November – South Ossetia parliament declares intent to unite with North Ossetia.

1990 August – Abkhaz Supreme Soviet declares sovereignty.

September – South Ossetia declares independence, hold elections in December, fighting ensues.

December – Vladislav Ardzinba elected president of Abkhaz Supreme Soviet.

1991 April – Georgian parliament declares secession from USSR after pro-independence referendum, Georgian is declared sole state language.

May – Gamsakhurdia is elected president by more than 85% of the votes cast.

September – elections to Abkhaz parliament with ethnic quotas.

November – South Ossetian parliament declares secession from Georgia.

1992 January – Gamsakhurdia is deposed after fierce fighting in Tbilisi between govt troops and opposition militias.

March – Shevardnadze is appointed head of the newly formed State Council.

August – Fighting in Abkhazia region between Georgian government troops and separatist forces.

October – Shevardnadze is directly elected chairman of parliament.

1993 July – UNOMIG monitoring force established.

September – Georgian troops and 250,000 refugees driven out of Abkhazia by separatist forces.

October – Insurrection by Gamsakhurdia supporters in western Georgia is suppressed after Georgia agrees to join the CIS and receives help from Russian troops.

1994 May – Shevardnadze and Abkhaz separatists sign a ceasefire agreement, paving the way for the deployment of a Russian peacekeeping force in the region in July, with UN approval. (Quid pro quo for US-led intervention in Haiti.)

1995 November – Shevardnadze wins elections to the restored post of president, re-elected April 2000.

1997 August – Tbilisi meeting between Shevardnadze and Abkhaz leader Vladislav Ardzinba fails to find agreement.

1998 Primakov mission to proposed confederation – rejected by Tbilisi.

2001 March – Georgia and Abkhazia sign an accord pledging peace and the safe return of refugees.

June – Russia hands Vaziani military base over to Georgian authorities. A dispute erupts over second base at Gudauta which Russia is also due to close.

September – Accord signed with Azerbaijan on terms for the transit and sale of natural gas from a pipeline which will run from Azerbaijan through Georgia to Turkey.

October – UN helicopter shot down by unidentified assailants over Abkhazia, killing nine passengers.

November – Police raid privately-owned Rustavi-2 TV station.

2002 April – US special forces arrive to train and equip Georgian forces for counter-terrorism.

June – fairly free local elections see competition between potential Shevardnadze successors and poor showing by pro-Shevardnadze Citizens' Union of Georgia.

September – Russia threatens action over Chechen militants hiding in Pankisi Gorge. In response Georgian troops move into the gorge, some Chechens are extradited to Russia.

2003 May – Work begins on Georgian section of Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline.

Youth group Kmara (Enough) create network to push for fair elections. Opposition is led by former Shevardnadze allies – notably former justice minister Mikheil Saakashvili, who broke with him in 2001-02.

November – Voting irregularities in Nov. 2 parliamentary elections lead to opposition vigil, then storming of new parliament when it convenes on Nov 22. Shevardnadze resigns.

2004 January – The opposition unites behind a single candidate for the presidential election, Saakashvili. He wins with 96.2% support. He promises to battle corruption and to reunify Georgia. Among his first acts is a new Georgian flag. He amends the constitution to increase presidential powers.

March – The autonomous region of Ajaria does not recognize the authority of Saakashvili, Tbilisi closes the border with Ajaria.

Saakashvili's National Movement-Democratic Front wins overwhelming majority of seats in re-run of parliamentary elections.

May – Ajarian leader Aslan Abashidze claims Georgian forces about to invade and blows up bridges connecting the region with the rest of Georgia. After tense stand-off, Abashidze resigns and leaves Georgia.

May – South Ossetia holds parliamentary elections, unrecognized by Tbilisi.

June-Aug – Tensions flare in border clashes between Georgian and South Ossetian forces.

Oct – Abkhaz presidential elections, not recognized by Tbilisi, end in chaos. Tension between ostensible winner Sergei Bagapsh and supporters of his Moscow-backed rival, Raul Khadzimba.

2005 Jan – Sergei Bagapsh wins rerun of Abkhaz presidential elections after promising to make Raul Khadzhimba his vice president.

January – Saakashvili offers new autonomy plan to South Ossetia, whose leaders reject the proposal. Autonomy will only be offered to Abkhazia if the 250,000 Georgian refugees who fled fighting in 1993 are allowed to return.

May – President George W Bush visits Tbilisi, proclaims Georgia a “beacon of liberty.”

July – Russia starts to withdraw its troops from two Soviet-era bases under the terms of a deal reached in May. The pull-out is due to be completed by late 2008.

December – OSCE in Vienna endorses Saakashvili peace plan for South Ossetia, rejected by Ossetian authorities.

December – EU High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana met with the foreign ministers of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, promised greater EU involvement in tackling the region's conflicts. Because of Cyprus protests, the talks were treated as "informal."

2006 Jan – Explosions on Russian side of border damage electricity and gas pipeline.

Mar – Russia suspends imports of wine from Moldova and Georgia on health grounds.

May – Russia bans mineral water imports.

July – Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline starts operations.

July – In press conference Putin calls for common principles in Kosovo and the South Caucasus.

July – Georgian operation against militia led by Emzar Kvitsiani in Kodori gorge, announce plans to establish Abkhaz government in exile there.

September – Georgian helicopter carrying Defense Minister Okruashvili is fired on over South Ossetia. De jure Abkhaz government moves from Tbilisi into Kodori gorge in Upper Abkhazia.

September – Georgia detains four Russian army officers on spying charges. Russia recalls ambassador.

November - South Ossetians vote in favor of independence in an unrecognized referendum, while opposition held rival election.

MOLDOVA – PRIDNESTROVIE

1989 – In Moldova, Romanian is reinstated as the official language. The Latin script is adopted to replace the Cyrillic script (Russian).

1990 – Moldova declares its sovereignty. The Muslim Gagauz people in the south-west declare their independence, followed by the Pridnestrovie region in September. The central power in Moldova annuls the declarations, but local elections are held nonetheless.

1991 – Moldova declares its independence, joins the Commonwealth of Independent States. Some nationalists want merger with Romania.

1992 March – An upsurge in fighting in Pridnestrovie leads to a state of emergency being re-imposed. More than 700 die in the fighting. After a ceasefire agreement in July Russian 14th Army takes on role as peacekeeper.

1994 – A new constitution proclaims Moldova's neutrality, grants special autonomy status to Pridnestrovie and the Gagauz region, and declares Moldovan to be the official language.

1996 – Petru Lucinschi elected president.

1997 – Negotiations resumed with Pridnestrovie. Agreement is signed granting further autonomy.

1998 – Elections see communists emerging as biggest party, but a centrist, reform-minded coalition forms the government.

1999 – OSCE summit in Istanbul sets end of 2002 as deadline for withdrawal of Russian troops and ammunition from Pridnestrovie.

2000 – Moldovan parliament fails to agree on a successor to President Lucinschi. Parliament is dissolved.

2001 February – Election sees the communists under Vladimir Voronin win just over 50% of the vote. Voronin is elected president in April.

2002 January – Plan to make Russian an official language shelved after popular protests.

September – Pridnestrovie authorities allow resumption of Russian troop withdrawal, suspended in December 2001, in exchange for a Russian promise to cut gas debts.

2003 November – At last minute, under opposition and Western pressure Voronin withdraws from federalization plan proposed by Dmitrii Kozak.

2004 July – Dispute over closures of Moldovan-language schools in Pridnestrovie using Latin rather than Cyrillic script. Moldova imposes economic sanctions on region and pulls out of talks on its status.

2005 March – Communist Party again wins Moldovan parliamentary elections.

July – Moldovan parliament approves a Ukrainian-backed plan for Pridnestrovie regional autonomy.

December – Renewal party, opposed to President Smirnov and backed by Sheriff corporation, wins majority in Pridnestrovie parliament elections.

2006 January – Russian gas supplier Gazprom cuts off gas, forced price increase.

EU monitors begin observing Pridnestrovie-Ukraine border to monitor smuggling.

March – New rules requiring food imported from Pridnestrovie to have Moldovan customs stamp causes trade blockade. Russia blocks import of Moldovan wine.

September – Referendum backs independence from Moldova with a view to joining Russia, 97% in favor.

December – Igor Smirov re-elected for his fourth five year term as president of Pridnestrovie.

Sources for the timelines: BB World News, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, and others.