

# THE CAUCASIAN AND THE RUSSIAN IN CONTEMPORARY GEORGIAN NATIONALISM

Maxim KIRCHANOV

*D.Sc. (Hist.), Assistant Professor,  
Chair of Regional Studies and Economics of Foreign Countries,  
Department of International Relations,  
FGBOU VPO Voronezh State University  
(Voronezh, the Russian Federation)*

## ABSTRACT

**T**he author analyzes the recent and traditional political and ideological trends in Georgian nationalism. He points out that it is based on a fairly mature political tradition and is largely developing as a civil movement. Its present polarization and fragmentation are an inevitable outcome of the political debates about the role Georgia is playing in the region and its relations with Russia.

**KEYWORDS:** *Georgia, nationalism, identity, civil nationalism, the Caucasus, the Russian-Georgian relations.*

## *Introduction*

The nation-state has been and remains the central actor of international relations; this is confirmed by the growth of nationalism all over the world, the Soviet Union's disintegration, and the ethnic and religious conflicts that dot the globe. The talk about the end of the "epoch of nationalism" and the end of a nation-state is premature and, worse still, politically wrong.

The parties and movements brought to the fore by nationalism, which has been raised high on the world's agenda, are very visible, especially in countries with no considerable experience of political independence, Georgia being one of them.

A country with an old and highly developed political tradition, Georgia nevertheless has a fairly short history of independent sovereignty (which it restored in the early 1990s). Its regained independence was an important stage in the development of Georgian nationalism, which affected, to no mean degree, the political dynamics and other processes unfolding in the country. The political transformations of the latter half of the 2000s have brought nationalism into even bolder relief in the country's public, cultural, and intellectual life.

Today, the Georgian nationalist discourse is geared toward several targets of fundamental importance both for the country's intellectual community and its political class.

Here the author concentrates on the Caucasian and Russian images of political ideology of contemporary Georgian nationalism as presented by the media.

## Political Image of the Caucasus as Presented by Georgian Nationalism

The Caucasus and related subjects have been and remain in the center of Georgian national ideology. Georgian intellectuals,<sup>1</sup> mortified by accusations of a lack of solid scholarly foundation and excessive politicization of the problem coming from their Russian colleagues, stress the fact that the country has acquired several national schools studying the languages, traditions, and cultures of the North Caucasian peoples.

Firmly convinced that their country has not yet tapped its regional potential to the full (as one of the sides in the Nagorno-Karabakh settlement, among other things),<sup>2</sup> the Georgian nationalists insist on the narrative of the common history of the peoples of the Caucasus.<sup>3</sup> They go even further to describe all the Caucasian peoples as a collective victim of the Russian and, later, Soviet policies. It is no wonder that the Georgian nationalist-minded experts and intellectuals indulge in talking about the problems of the Caucasus and its Northern part.<sup>4</sup> They do not hesitate to blame Russia and its policy (invariably described as “punishing”<sup>5</sup> or “neo-colonialist”) for the numerous regional and national contradictions.

The anti-colonial narrative that took shape in the early 2010s in Georgian nationalism proved fairly popular. Georgian authors criticized Moscow’s policy in the Northern Caucasus: the federal center was held responsible for the economic crisis of the 1990s that killed the region’s industry and caused a massive outflow of the Russian population to Central Russia. They are convinced that Moscow’s latest efforts<sup>6</sup> to move Russian speakers to the Caucasus are nothing more than demagoguery of a neo-colonialist and imperial nature typical of Russia, which is striving to weaken the national elites of the North Caucasian republics. More likely than not, Georgian intellectuals are reducing what Russia is doing in the Northern Caucasus to the use of force and diplomatic gimmicks,<sup>7</sup> as well as forced assimilation, massive deportations, and persecution of the national languages and cultures.<sup>8</sup>

The Georgian nationalists prefer to talk of the Northern Caucasus as a “victim of Russian policy,” which created numerous social, economic and political problems.<sup>9</sup> This explains why in the latter half of the 2000s, Georgia, partly out of solidarity with the North Caucasian peoples and partly

<sup>1</sup> See: S. Kiladze, “Relations between Georgia and the Northern Caucasus: “White Spots” of History,” available at [[http://expertclub.ge/portal/cnid\\_12567/alias\\_\\_Expertclub/lang\\_\\_ka-GE/tabid\\_\\_2546/default.aspx](http://expertclub.ge/portal/cnid_12567/alias__Expertclub/lang__ka-GE/tabid__2546/default.aspx)], 5 June, 2013 (all sources are in Georgian unless otherwise stated).

<sup>2</sup> See: “Georgia Should Be Involved in the Nagorno-Karabakh Settlement,” available at [<http://pirweli.com.ge/?menuid=14&id=32182>], 5 June, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> See: T. Sheuzheni, “A New Step in Georgian-Circassian Relations,” available at [<http://kavkasia.ge/index.php?action=more&id=275&lang=geo>], 5 June, 2013.

<sup>4</sup> See: L. Lomidze, “The Northern Caucasus Today,” available at [<http://kavkasia.ge/index.php?action=more&id=329&lang=geo>], 5 June, 2013.

<sup>5</sup> G. Chemia, “The Russians are Tired of Putin,” available at [<http://kavkasia.ge/index.php?action=more&id=328&lang=geo>], 7 June, 2013.

<sup>6</sup> See: G. Guniava, “The Northern Caucasus without Caucasian Peoples: The Final Stage has Begun,” 28 March, 2012, available at [[http://expertclub.ge/portal/cnid\\_11460/alias\\_\\_Expertclub/lang\\_\\_ka-GE/tabid\\_\\_2546/default.aspx](http://expertclub.ge/portal/cnid_11460/alias__Expertclub/lang__ka-GE/tabid__2546/default.aspx)].

<sup>7</sup> See: M. Tkavashvili, “Measures of the Government of Russia in 1859-1861 Designed to Stem Repatriation of the Mukhajirs,” available at [[http://expertclub.ge/portal/cnid\\_13271/alias\\_\\_Expertclub/lang\\_\\_ka-GE/tabid\\_\\_2546/default.aspx](http://expertclub.ge/portal/cnid_13271/alias__Expertclub/lang__ka-GE/tabid__2546/default.aspx)], 6 June, 2013.

<sup>8</sup> See: T. Beridze, “Split of the Circassian Diaspora and Certain Other Questions,” available at [<http://kavkasia.ge/index.php?action=more&id=315&lang=geo>], 5 June, 2013.

<sup>9</sup> L. Lomidze, “The Northern Caucasus—A Victim of Russia’s Policy,” available at [<http://kavkasia.ge/index.php?action=more&id=291&lang=geo>], 8 June, 2013.

because of unrealized political ambitions, demonstrated much more interest in its Caucasian neighbors and the North Caucasian entities of the Russian Federation. The Georgian intellectual community, deeply interested in the region and the Northern Caucasus as its part, has been talking for some time about the possibility of a Caucasian Union.<sup>10</sup> It is commonly believed that Georgia stands a good chance of becoming a desirable partner and a regional leader if it learns the lessons of Russia's policy, which is described as being absolutely wrong.

Georgian experts are especially irritated with Russia, which seeks a firmer grip on the national movements by setting up alternative national organizations<sup>11</sup> loyal to Russia despite the region's past and the problems created by the Caucasian War, up to and including the demographic changes in the region.

In Georgia, this is seen as an attempt to save the empire.<sup>12</sup> Georgian authors are convinced that this irritates the local population and encourages alternative national movements<sup>13</sup> and separatism, which the Georgians prefer to call the Resistance Movement.<sup>14</sup> Nationally minded Georgian experts are very skeptical about the prospects for Russia's policy in the Northern Caucasus and talk about its imminent failure.<sup>15</sup>

Solomon Lebanidze, for example, is convinced that "the Northern Caucasus is a kind of bouquet of potential and real conflicts that Russia cannot resolve, while Georgia, in turn, has no resources to deal with them. It may, however, become a rostrum from which these problems can be described... The North Caucasian strategy of Georgia is absolutely peaceful and well-balanced."<sup>16</sup>

Georgian intellectuals are seeking the status of a European country for Georgia and want to present it as a country that will protect the Caucasian peoples from "imperialist and autocratic Russia."<sup>17</sup>

By criticizing Russia's policy in Chechnia, where Moscow applied the "divide and rule" principle,<sup>18</sup> Georgian intellectuals are repeating the systemic errors borrowed from the Russian matrix of the Caucasian strategy.

The Kremlin elite habitually pushes aside theoretical and methodological considerations to insist on Russia's messianic role. The Georgians, in turn, overestimate the political role of Georgia in adjusting the region to European/Western political values. The region is ready for neither.

The Georgians prefer to ignore this; they concentrate on Georgia's initiatives in restoring "historical justice" and insist on an "objective" (read, negative) assessment of Russia's policy.<sup>19</sup>

Georgian experts disagree with the Russian nationalists and point out that "the government of Russia conceals its criminal acts that caused the genocide and deportation of Circassians and deny its

<sup>10</sup> See: G. Ardazishvili, "The Caucasian Union," available at [<http://www.apsny.ge/analytics/1287010572.php>], 5 June, 2013 (in Russian).

<sup>11</sup> See: I. Margvelashvili, "Moscow Tries to Mobilize Alternative Circassian Organizations," available at [<http://kavkasia.ge/index.php?action=more&id=276&lang=geo>], 5 June, 2013.

<sup>12</sup> See: I. Margvelashvili, "A Frantic Attempt to Save the Empire," available at [<http://kavkasia.ge/index.php?action=more&id=300&lang=geo>], 7 June, 2013.

<sup>13</sup> See: I. Margvelashvili, "The Balkars are Drawn into the Process of Self-Determination," available at [<http://kavkasia.ge/index.php?action=more&id=297&lang=geo>], 9 June, 2013.

<sup>14</sup> See: I. Margvelashvili, "The Hot Spots of Daghestan and the Northern Caucasus," available at [<http://kavkasia.ge/index.php?action=more&id=345&lang=geo>], 6 June, 2013.

<sup>15</sup> See: I. Margvelashvili, "The Kremlin Project for the Northern Caucasus Is Doomed to Failure," available at [<http://kavkasia.ge/index.php?action=more&id=290&lang=geo>], 5 June, 2013.

<sup>16</sup> S. Lebanidze, "Outlines of the North Caucasian Policy," available at [<http://apsny.ge/articles/1352589077.php>], 8 June, 2013 (in Russian).

<sup>17</sup> I. Margvelashvili, "Georgian-Circassian Relations Continue," available at [<http://kavkasia.ge/index.php?action=more&id=342&lang=geo>], 7 June, 2013.

<sup>18</sup> See: L. Lomidze, "Chechnia is Waiting for a New Government," available at [<http://kavkasia.ge/index.php?action=more&id=346&lang=geo>], 9 June, 2013.

<sup>19</sup> I. Margvelashvili, "Georgia and the Circassian Question," available at [<http://kavkasia.ge/index.php?action=more&id=268&lang=geo>], 6 June, 2013.

involvement in them. The Russians call this voluntary emigration and blame the Turks, who did nothing to prevent the loss of life in the process.”<sup>20</sup>

The Georgian intellectuals who have embraced the topics relating to national memory banned under Soviet power are only too glad to exploit the contradictions and objective errors of Russia’s policy to largely revive the set of “Caucasian” narratives in the political and national imagination of the Georgians. The intellectual community is diligently building a negative image of Russia as an aggressor and oppressor and of Georgia as an ideal to be emulated.

The intellectuals have done a lot to push to the fore questions related to Russia’s national policy invariably tagged as “imperialist.”<sup>21</sup>

On the other hand, Georgia’s position proved wobbly. Mikhail Saakashvili, for example, insisted that Russia was guilty of the Circassian genocide<sup>22</sup> (very much in line with the efforts to revive the Circassian question<sup>23</sup> in the Georgian political discourse). Bidzina Ivanishvili, on the other hand, favors Georgia’s earlier position on the issue.

While being positively disposed toward the national movements in the Northern Caucasus spearheaded against Moscow, the Georgian intellectuals should demonstrate caution lest the Circassians ally with the Abkhazian separatists, for example.<sup>24</sup> This will make Georgia just as vulnerable as Russia in coping with national and regional separatism (which might be intellectually sponsored and encouraged by the Georgian elites).

## Russia as Depicted by the Georgian Nationalists

The “image of the other,” the role ascribed to Russia, plays a central role in the development of nationalism in Georgia.

The image of Russia is excessively politicized, which is especially clear in the assessments of the events of August 2008<sup>25</sup> that caused, according to Georgian authors, a cold war between the two countries.<sup>26</sup> In fact, Georgian nationalism has demonized all Russia-related images: Russia is the country “that organized the economic blockade of Georgia, sent terrorists to its territory, expelled our compatriots, bombed our cities and killed our citizens.”<sup>27</sup>

These narratives exist side by side with statements by the Georgian political elite that relations with Russia should be improved.<sup>28</sup> So far, nothing more has been done.

<sup>20</sup> I. Margvelashvili, “International Organizations Become Interested in the ‘Circassian’ Question,” available at [<http://kavkasia.ge/index.php?action=more&id=301&lang=geo>], 8 June, 2013.

<sup>21</sup> I. Margvelashvili, “Georgia and the ‘Rebirth’ of Circassian Genocide,” available at [<http://kavkasia.ge/index.php?action=more&id=279&lang=geo>], 7 June, 2013.

<sup>22</sup> See: “The Georgian Government Should Take Care of the Country’s Image in the Northern Caucasus,” available at [<http://apsny.ge/interview/1357366415.php>], 5 June, 2013 (in Russian).

<sup>23</sup> See: “Circassian Organizations and Decisions of the Parliament,” available at [<http://kavkasia.ge/index.php?action=more&id=272&lang=geo>], 7 June, 2013; I. Margvelashvili, “Consolidation around the problems of the Circassian nation,” available at [<http://kavkasia.ge/index.php?action=more&id=314&lang=geo>], 5 June, 2013.

<sup>24</sup> See: L. Kiknadze, “The Circassians and the Abkhazian Plan of Reconciliation [[http://expertclub.ge/portal/cnid\\_12060/alias\\_Expertclub/lang\\_ka-GE/tabid\\_2546/default.aspx](http://expertclub.ge/portal/cnid_12060/alias_Expertclub/lang_ka-GE/tabid_2546/default.aspx)], 5 June, 2013.

<sup>25</sup> See: I. Aladashvili, “There is No Need to Discuss the War,” available at [<http://www.kvirispalitra.ge/military/16656-ratom-unda-gamovidziot-agvistos-omis-detalebi.html>], 7 June, 2013.

<sup>26</sup> See: S. Kiladze, “Georgia-Russia: Diplomatic Paradoxes,” available at [[http://expertclub.ge/portal/cnid\\_11310/alias\\_Expertclub/lang\\_ka-GE/tabid\\_2546/default.aspx](http://expertclub.ge/portal/cnid_11310/alias_Expertclub/lang_ka-GE/tabid_2546/default.aspx)], 8 June, 2013.

<sup>27</sup> D. Shashkin, “The West or Russia,” available at [<http://24saati.ge/index.php/category/opinion/blog/2013-06-02/38421>], 8 June, 2013.

<sup>28</sup> See: Prime Minister Ivanishvili: “Some People Might Not Like This, But Relations with Russia are Changing,” available at [[http://saqinform.ge/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=14703:2013-05-31-10-04-38&catid=98:politics&Itemid=457#axzz2VN26vyRS](http://saqinform.ge/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=14703:2013-05-31-10-04-38&catid=98:politics&Itemid=457#axzz2VN26vyRS)], 7 June, 2013.

Some authors think that the current state of Georgian-Russian relations is best described as an “information war.”<sup>29</sup> This is an apt description because the majority of what is said on both sides is highly emotional and highly politicized.

Georgian nationalist experts and intellectuals are shifting the blame for the war onto Russia and the imperial ambitions of its leaders. Practical issues of economic and logistic nature (restored railway communication is one of them) are also highly politicized.<sup>30</sup>

Economic problems figure prominently in the process: the theoreticians of contemporary Georgian nationalism tend to describe Russia’s policy as economic imperialism<sup>31</sup> designed to restore the U.S.S.R. and liquidate the newly gained sovereignty of the post-Soviet states.

Georgian authors who write about the Kremlin’s imperial ambitions not only describe its foreign policy as inflexible, unpredictable, and ill-advised,<sup>32</sup> but also point to the wide gap between the country’s plan and its possibilities, which are limited by numerous problems. There are problems of a systemic nature: the consistently shrinking size of the Russian population amid unfolding Islamization,<sup>33</sup> corruption, the de facto absence of democratic elections (this attracts a lot of attention),<sup>34</sup> the demographic crisis, and the steadily growing alcoholism and drug abuse.<sup>35</sup> In short, Georgia depicts and perceives Russia as nothing short of a “failed state” with an oligarchic regime, a puppet of big business.<sup>36</sup>

On the other hand, the nationalists deem it necessary to warn that a “weakened” Russia is very dangerous. Amid the national catastrophe of the early 2010s when Tbilisi lost control over some of the regions, the Russian narratives merged with the conspiracy theory. Natia Megrelishvili has written, for example, that “external and internal enemies have moved onto the battlefield together.”<sup>37</sup>

In this context, Russia is seen as an external enemy, while the role of an internal enemy belongs to the Georgian Dream coalition, which is too pro-Russian in the eyes of the intellectuals.

The intellectual community has planted the traditional narrative of the imperial nature of Russia’s statehood and its foreign policy in the people’s minds. It is no wonder that Russia is seen as an aggressor that consistently violates human rights and its troops described as “occupational” forces<sup>38</sup> stationed in the territories of “Abkhazia” and the “Tskhinvali Region” detached from Georgia.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>29</sup> T. Belkania, “Information War,” available at [[http://expertclub.ge/portal/cnid\\_\\_12144/alias\\_\\_Expertclub/lang\\_\\_ka-GE/tabid\\_\\_2546/default.aspx](http://expertclub.ge/portal/cnid__12144/alias__Expertclub/lang__ka-GE/tabid__2546/default.aspx)], 5 June, 2013.

<sup>30</sup> See: A. Mikeladze, “The Georgian-Russian Railway: Myths and Reality,” available at [<http://kavkasia.ge/index.php?action=more&id=361&lang=geo>], 5 June, 2013.

<sup>31</sup> See: D. Tsiklauri, “The Third Elected President and Russia’s Disappointments,” available at [<http://kavkasia.ge/index.php?action=more&id=338&lang=geo>].

<sup>32</sup> See: “David Jalagania: ‘We Should Not Expect Goodwill from Russia,’” available at [<http://geotimes.ge/index.php?m=home&newsid=44081>], 5 June, 2013.

<sup>33</sup> See: D. Tsiklauri, “A Crescent in the State Emblem is Not Far Away,” available at [<http://kavkasia.ge/index.php?action=more&id=274&lang=geo>], 7 June, 2013.

<sup>34</sup> See: G. Chemia, “Putin has Risen! Glory to the Czar!” available at [<http://kavkasia.ge/index.php?action=more&id=269&lang=geo>], 8 June, 2013.

<sup>35</sup> See: I. Makashvili, “The Policy Pursued by the Putin-Medvedev Tandem is Pernicious for Russia,” available at [<http://kavkasia.ge/index.php?action=more&id=305&lang=geo>], 7 June, 2013; G. Chemia, “Vladimir Putin’s nationalism is growing contrary to his will,” available at [<http://kavkasia.ge/index.php?action=more&id=317&lang=geo>], 6 June, 2013.

<sup>36</sup> See: “Even though the Latter is Absolutely Amazing, I Believe in It,” available at [[http://expertclub.ge/portal/cnid\\_\\_11678/alias\\_\\_Expertclub/lang\\_\\_ka-GE/tabid\\_\\_2546/default.aspx](http://expertclub.ge/portal/cnid__11678/alias__Expertclub/lang__ka-GE/tabid__2546/default.aspx)], 7 June, 2013.

<sup>37</sup> N. Megrelishvili, “An Open Letter to the National Movement,” available at [<http://apsny.ge/articles/1362269335.php>], 5 June, 2013 (in Russian).

<sup>38</sup> I. Tsitishvili, “Russian Myths-Abkhazian Echo,” available at [[http://expertclub.ge/portal/cnid\\_\\_12047/alias\\_\\_Expertclub/lang\\_\\_ka-GE/tabid\\_\\_2546/default.aspx](http://expertclub.ge/portal/cnid__12047/alias__Expertclub/lang__ka-GE/tabid__2546/default.aspx)], 5 June, 2013; E. Khoshtaria, “Settling Relations with Russia,” available at [<http://www.apsny.ge/analytics/1362109745.php>], 9 June, 2013 (in Russian).

<sup>39</sup> See: E. Tkeshelashvili, “New Powers and Occupied Territories,” available at [<http://www.apsny.ge/analytics/1360709381.php>], 5 June, 2013 (in Russian).

Georgia's political imagination presents both areas not as detached territories, but as regions, the elites of which cannot, for certain reasons, cope with the social and economic headaches.<sup>40</sup> On the one hand, the regimes created by these elites are based on clans<sup>41</sup> and are, therefore, authoritarian, undemocratic, and corrupt<sup>42</sup>; they rely on the shadow economy and completely depend on Russia. On the other hand, their rulers know that any changes will undermine the clan system, something which (according to Georgian experts) neither Russia nor the regimes dependent on it can afford.

Georgian intellectuals and experts are very irritated by the Tskhinvali separatists determined to revise the past<sup>43</sup> and promote a version very different from that current in Georgia. It comes as no surprise that Georgian historians accuse their Ossetian colleagues of falsifying history, consistently mythologizing it, and creating politically biased and absolutely false interpretations of history.

Moreover, Georgian intellectuals are convinced that Russia's excessive foreign policy activity in the Caucasus threatens the interests of Georgia and other states, Turkey being one of them.<sup>44</sup> They predict clashes between Russia and Turkey in the future.

At the same time, the intellectual community is fully aware of the positive image of Russians at the grass-roots level, which they interpret as an echo of Soviet times.

On the other hand, Georgian intellectuals are convinced that Russia refuses to treat Georgia as an equal partner and, therefore, is still guided by imperial political stereotypes.<sup>45</sup>

Not infrequently, Georgian experts stress that these countries are developing according to two very different models. Dmitry Shashkin, former defense minister of Georgia, has written: "An analysis of the last three centuries of Russia's history reveals that the ideological component remains the same. Regimes and leaders may change, but not the state idea ... oppression of others is the only road to salvation for Russia... Russia is an Asian country; it is a country that at all times looked at the enemy's free will and concessions as weakness and a sign of its complete destruction. Until the state idea of Russia changes, it will remain the main threat to Georgia and its main enemy."<sup>46</sup>

Georgia, convinced that it belongs to the European political space, deliberately places the image of Russia in a different system of coordinates. The Russian Federation is seen as a predominantly non-European state tending toward protectionist and conservative strategies of development and existence and encouraging the criminalized and corrupt political regimes in the Tskhinvali Region and Abkhazia<sup>47</sup> and, therefore, unable to embrace Western democratic values. Abkhazia is seen as a clas-

<sup>40</sup> See: L. Kiknadze, "Masterclass from Ankvaba," available at [[http://expertclub.ge/portal/cnid\\_\\_13306/alias\\_\\_Expertclub/lang\\_\\_ka-GE/tabid\\_\\_2546/default.aspx](http://expertclub.ge/portal/cnid__13306/alias__Expertclub/lang__ka-GE/tabid__2546/default.aspx)], 7 June, 2013.

<sup>41</sup> See: M. Macharashvili, "Bagapsh has Died. What Next?" available at [[http://expertclub.ge/portal/cnid\\_\\_8746/alias\\_\\_Expertclub/lang\\_\\_ka-GE/tabid\\_\\_2546/default.aspx](http://expertclub.ge/portal/cnid__8746/alias__Expertclub/lang__ka-GE/tabid__2546/default.aspx)], 8 June, 2013.

<sup>42</sup> See: K. Bendelani, "Let Us Not Deceive Ourselves: Much Also Depends on Ankvaba," available at [[http://expertclub.ge/portal/cnid\\_\\_9610/alias\\_\\_Expertclub/lang\\_\\_ka-GE/tabid\\_\\_2546/default.aspx](http://expertclub.ge/portal/cnid__9610/alias__Expertclub/lang__ka-GE/tabid__2546/default.aspx)], 6 June, 2013.

<sup>43</sup> See: S. Kiladze, "Falsification and its Specifics," available at [[http://expertclub.ge/portal/cnid\\_\\_10997/alias\\_\\_Expertclub/lang\\_\\_ka-GE/tabid\\_\\_2546/default.aspx](http://expertclub.ge/portal/cnid__10997/alias__Expertclub/lang__ka-GE/tabid__2546/default.aspx)], 5 June, 2013.

<sup>44</sup> See: A. Devadze, "Turkish-Russian Relations," available at [<http://kavkasia.ge/index.php?action=more&id=360&lang=geo>], 5 June, 2013.

<sup>45</sup> See: A. Adamia, "Abkhazia and So-called South Ossetia—A Challenge for the New Government," available at [<http://kavkasia.ge/index.php?action=more&id=359&lang=geo>], 5 June, 2013.

<sup>46</sup> Dm. Shashkin, "Russia Respects Nothing but Force," available at [<http://www.apsny.ge/analytics/1368212965.php>], 5 June, 2013 (in Russian).

<sup>47</sup> See: A. Adamia, "Russia's Global Interests in the Caucasus: Political Elites and Deceived Peoples," available at [<http://kavkasia.ge/index.php?action=more&id=326&lang=geo>], 5 June, 2013; B. Khubulovi, "Tibilov as Deliberate Choice," available at [<http://kavkasia.ge/index.php?action=more&id=344&lang=geo>], 7 June, 2013; idem, "Elections in South Ossetia—double numbers X," available at [<http://kavkasia.ge/index.php?action=more&id=327&lang=geo>], 8 June, 2013.

sical example of a “Russian colony”<sup>48</sup> and a “failed state”<sup>49</sup> that imitates democratic institutions<sup>50</sup> while living under a clan regime that tramples on human rights.

The Georgian media write about Abkhazia in derogative terms: it is not a state, but a “collection of paradoxes.”<sup>51</sup>

The “blame” for the destruction of the Georgian cultural and religious heritage is heaped on the Abkhazian separatists; what is more, they are accused of spreading paganism.<sup>52</sup> The Georgian nationalists cannot reconcile themselves to this: they regard Christianity as one of the systemic elements of the Georgian identity.

Georgian experts believe that confronted with numerous social, economic, and demographic problems,<sup>53</sup> so-called independent Abkhazia failed to develop into a state and became, instead, a source of criminalization of the entire region.<sup>54</sup> They are convinced that Russia made a bad blunder by recognizing Abkhazian independence; the negative effects of this political blunder will be felt across Russia’s South.

Georgian authors point out that throughout the 1990s-2000s Russia was deliberately detaching Abkhazia from Georgia and that it intends to liquidate its “fictitious independence” by joining it to the Russian Federation as part of the Krasnodar Territory.<sup>55</sup>

There is a fairly widespread opinion that Russia’s policy regarding the breakaway regions not only ignores the interests of Georgia and violates the regulations of international law, but also refuses to accept the leaders of the separatists as equal partners by treating them as second-rate partners.<sup>56</sup>

In May 2013, some of the electronic media published an interview with Vakhtang Kikabidze (a film actor equally popular in Russia and in Georgia), in which he called what had happened in the Tskhinvali Region a “national disgrace.”<sup>57</sup> Georgian society seems to be of the same opinion about the territories, the formal control over which was lost after the August 2008 war.

Consistent destruction of Georgia’s cultural heritage justifies those who write about Russia’s policy in Abkhazia as “barbarian.”<sup>58</sup>

Those Georgian intellectuals who promote and develop the narrative of Russia’s non-European nature pay special attention to the state of human rights and freedoms in Russia. The nationally ori-

<sup>48</sup> “Abkhazia: Sovereignty Russian Style,” available at [[http://expertclub.ge/portal/cnid\\_\\_10120/alias\\_\\_Expertclub/lang\\_\\_ka-GE/tabid\\_\\_2546/default.aspx](http://expertclub.ge/portal/cnid__10120/alias__Expertclub/lang__ka-GE/tabid__2546/default.aspx)], 5 June, 2013.

<sup>49</sup> S. Kiladze, “Abkhazia as a Phantom State and Civil Society,” available at [[http://expertclub.ge/portal/cnid\\_\\_11758/alias\\_\\_Expertclub/lang\\_\\_ka-GE/tabid\\_\\_2546/default.aspx](http://expertclub.ge/portal/cnid__11758/alias__Expertclub/lang__ka-GE/tabid__2546/default.aspx)], 7 June, 2013.

<sup>50</sup> See: “Illusions of ‘Abkhazian Democracy’,” available at [[http://expertclub.ge/portal/cnid\\_\\_12469/alias\\_\\_Expertclub/lang\\_\\_ka-GE/tabid\\_\\_2546/default.aspx](http://expertclub.ge/portal/cnid__12469/alias__Expertclub/lang__ka-GE/tabid__2546/default.aspx)], 6 June, 2013.

<sup>51</sup> “The Abkhazian ‘State’ or a Collection of Paradoxes,” available at [[http://expertclub.ge/portal/cnid\\_\\_12512/alias\\_\\_Expertclub/lang\\_\\_ka-GE/tabid\\_\\_2546/default.aspx](http://expertclub.ge/portal/cnid__12512/alias__Expertclub/lang__ka-GE/tabid__2546/default.aspx)], 5 June, 2013.

<sup>52</sup> See: I. Bagaturia, “The Pagans of the 21st Century,” available at [[http://expertclub.ge/portal/cnid\\_\\_12398/alias\\_\\_Expertclub/lang\\_\\_ka-GE/tabid\\_\\_2546/default.aspx](http://expertclub.ge/portal/cnid__12398/alias__Expertclub/lang__ka-GE/tabid__2546/default.aspx)], 8 June, 2013.

<sup>53</sup> See: I. Tskitishvili, “The Abkhazian Demographic Nightmare,” available at [[http://expertclub.ge/portal/cnid\\_\\_12291/alias\\_\\_Expertclub/lang\\_\\_ka-GE/tabid\\_\\_2546/default.aspx](http://expertclub.ge/portal/cnid__12291/alias__Expertclub/lang__ka-GE/tabid__2546/default.aspx)], 5 June, 2013.

<sup>54</sup> See: I. Kiknadze, “‘Abkhazian Jamaat’ in Russia,” available at [[http://expertclub.ge/portal/cnid\\_\\_11813/alias\\_\\_Expertclub/lang\\_\\_ka-GE/tabid\\_\\_2546/default.aspx](http://expertclub.ge/portal/cnid__11813/alias__Expertclub/lang__ka-GE/tabid__2546/default.aspx)], 7 June, 2013.

<sup>55</sup> See: I. Tskitishvili, “Moscow has Retreated on Its Recognition of Abkhazia’s Independence,” available at [[http://expertclub.ge/portal/cnid\\_\\_11353/alias\\_\\_Expertclub/lang\\_\\_ka-GE/tabid\\_\\_2546/default.aspx](http://expertclub.ge/portal/cnid__11353/alias__Expertclub/lang__ka-GE/tabid__2546/default.aspx)], 6 June, 2013.

<sup>56</sup> See: A. Adamia, “Abkhazia: Is It an Independent State or a Russian ‘Military Station’?” available at [<http://kavkasia.ge/index.php?action=more&id=321&lang=geo>], 5 June, 2013.

<sup>57</sup> “Vakhtang Kikabidze: ‘Everything Going on in South Ossetia is a National Disgrace,’” available at [<http://www.kvirispalitra.ge/public/17355-buba-kikabidze-rac-akhla-samačabloši-khdeba-eris-sirckhvilia.html>], 8 June, 2013.

<sup>58</sup> A. Adamia, “Cultural Values Cannot Be Abolished Even by Barbarians,” available at [<http://kavkasia.ge/index.php?action=more&id=340&lang=geo>], 5 June, 2013.

ented authors insist on a boycott of the Olympic Games in Sochi<sup>59</sup> because of increased corruption among the Russian officials<sup>60</sup> and the use of “slave labor.” Today, nationally oriented intellectuals and experts regard Vladimir Putin<sup>61</sup> as the central anti-hero.<sup>62</sup> They say in chorus that the Olympic Games 2014 is an outcrop of his imperial complexes and unhealthy personal ambitions.

Many of the Georgian intellectuals tend to analyze the relations between the two countries in the categories of cultural-historical oppositions. Leyla Naroushvili, for example, has written that “Georgia wants to become a genuinely independent country that builds its state according to its wishes and values; it wants to integrate into international organizations of its choice. This explains Russia’s aggressive actions against Georgia.”<sup>63</sup>

The Georgian political class has accepted the dichotomy Georgia as Europe/the West, Russia as East/Asia as a universal and probably systemic element of political identities in the process of construction.

When interviewed by Levan Chitanava, Vasil Rukhadze of Jamestown Foundation (U.S.A.) said: “The Russia Federation has not yet abandoned its imperial ambitions in its foreign policy and, therefore, excludes a combination of normal relations with Georgia and its Euro-Atlantic integration. Russia has repeatedly stated in so many words that it looks at the former Soviet space, the Caucasus in the first place, as its sphere of influence. I don’t know what else Russia should say or do to drive home to the Georgians that Russia looks at their country as a subjugated political unit.”<sup>64</sup>

It should be said that this conventionally “anti-Russian” rhetoric is nothing but a form of political (civil) Georgian nationalism—this does not mean that it grows gradually more ethnic.

Georgian nationalists play off the civil political nation of their country against Russia (which is traditionally associated in the minds of Georgians with more archaic and predominantly imperial institutions. This became even more obvious after 2008).

### *Conclusions and Prospects for Further Study*

To sum up, I would like to stress, once more, several factors associated with the development of contemporary Georgian nationalism. First of all, there are Russian and Caucasian narratives in the Georgian nationalist discourse.

They are closely intertwined in the program of Georgian nationalism. Russian-Georgian relations have added weight to Georgia’s role in the Greater Caucasus as a regional power. The

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<sup>59</sup> See: I. Margvelashvili, “The Sochi Olympic Games are Moving toward Disaster,” available at [<http://kavkasia.ge/index.php?action=more&id=322&lang=geo>], 5 June, 2013; idem, “The Olympiad in Sochi: Real Dangers,” available at [<http://kavkasia.ge/index.php?action=more&id=309&lang=geo>], 5 June, 2013.

<sup>60</sup> See: I. Margvelashvili, “A Russian Olympiad?” available at [<http://kavkasia.ge/index.php?action=more&id=349&lang=geo>], 5 June, 2013.

<sup>61</sup> See: I. Margvelashvili, “Slave Labor Is Used in Sochi at the Olympic Construction Sites,” available at [<http://kavkasia.ge/index.php?action=more&id=351&lang=geo>], 5 June, 2013.

<sup>62</sup> See: G. Chemia, “The Next Victim of Comrade Putin,” available at [<http://kavkasia.ge/index.php?action=more&id=337&lang=geo>], 5 June, 2013.

<sup>63</sup> L. Naroushvili, “Irresponsible Attitude toward National Security May Cause Anti-State Repercussions,” available at [<http://apsny.ge/interview/136666754.php>], 5 June, 2013 (in Russian).

<sup>64</sup> “Not Infrequently Nations are Hit by Amnesia after a Long and Protracted Occupation’—Vasil Rukhadze,” available at [<http://apsny.ge/interview/1366141152.php>], 5 June, 2013 (in Russian).



positions of the Georgian nationalists and their Russian opponents are diametrically opposite. The Russian elites guided by historical memory and relying on the mythologized and ideologically “adjusted” conscience consider the Caucasus to be an exclusive sphere of Russian political, economic, and cultural influence. This explains its role of regional leader, something which the Georgian experts and intellectuals concentrating on the idea of political independence find hard to accept.

A large share of them is convinced that their country cannot develop while Russia continues to dominate. They point to Russia’s open support of the corrupt and politically untenable regimes in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region as evidence of Russia’s intention to destroy Georgia’s territorial integrity.

In fact, the political lines of Moscow and Tbilisi in the Caucasus are very similar, albeit pursued with different resource potentials. Russia supports the breakaway regimes in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region, while the Georgian nationalists are discussing the possibility of siding with the national movements of the North Caucasian peoples. So far neither country has scored any victories.

Russia is dealing with regimes corrupt to the extent that the millions of Russian money poured into Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region will not buy it more or less great success. Georgia, in turn, can extend only moral and intellectual support to the movements dissatisfied with Moscow’s national and regional policies.

The Russian and Caucasian narratives within the framework of the Georgian nationalist imagination will go on developing, yet the trajectory is hard to predict. After a while, for example, the Russian theme in the Georgian nationalist conscience will function as predominantly political, based on the cultural and intellectual opposition of two diametrically different development patterns.

Russia will remain the East, a universal “anti-Europe” and “anti-West,” while Georgia will remain on the margins of the West, as an inalienable part of the European cultural, historical, and political space.

On the other hand, the Russian narratives may gather certain ethnic overtones. This will transform the Russians from political into ethnic “aliens,” although this looks highly improbable.

The Caucasian narratives may gather ethnic dimensions through more active scholarly Caucasian studies in Georgia as an alternative to Russian paternalist aspirations.

It can be expected that, in the future, the intellectual community will play a smaller role in the development of Georgian political (and ethnic) nationalism. The nationally orientated intellectuals and experts will find it harder to compete with the political parties as the professional vehicles of nationalism and identity.

This means that studying the latest transformations of Georgian nationalism in the ideological programs and activities of political parties should continue.