Diffusion of Ideas of Ethnic Mobilization in Minority Regions: Cases of South Ossetia and Abkhazia

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Abstract

The fight for independence during the collapse of the Soviet Union prompted a chain reaction in the union republics as well as within the most of autonomies of those republics. The transition period was the most dramatic and complicated in the South Caucasian countries and especially in Georgia, which faced a civil war and two ethnic conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. These turned into war simultaneously in 1988-1993, and the conflicts have yet to be resolved to this day. From the timing it seems that there is some interconnection between the South Ossetian and the Abkhazian conflicts. In this thesis, I investigate whether and to what extent these conflicts were causally linked. This will help address the broader theoretical question: *how can the ideas of ethnic mobilization diffuse from one ethnic group to another within a state?* In order to explain the timing of regional independence movements and why they often follow each other in close succession, I concentrate on diffusion theory of ethnic mobilization. I modify Beissinger's linear model of mobilization and devise my own model of ethnic mobilization in *minority regions*. To test the staged model, I use process-tracing within the South Ossetian and Abkhazian cases in the 1988-1992 time frame to see how the stages progress. To test for diffusion, I also trace the connections between the cases as well as those with the central government. I conclude that the conflicts in Georgia have influenced each other, and ethnic mobilization in these minority regions underwent complicated stages of mobilization with the diffusion elements of a cyclical character.

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INTRODUCTION

Independence movements in the Former Soviet Union took the form of a chain reaction not only in union republics, but in most of the autonomous units within those republics by the end of 1980s. While fighting their own battles for independence, some of the states faced internal wars and ethnic conflicts. The South Caucasus region underwent such a transition in the most complicated and dramatic way. From three Caucasian counties, Georgia is the most multi-ethnic, with five major minorities and two ethnic conflicts that turned into war: the Georgian-Ossetian and Georgian-Abkhazian conflicts have yet to be resolved to this day. The Georgian-Ossetian conflict escalated in 1988, reached its military phase in 1990 and was temporarily settled in 1992. Tension between Georgia and Abkhazia increased in 1989, followed by a severe armed conflict in 1992, which was settled a year later in 1993. From this timing it seems that there is some interconnection between the South Ossetian and the Abkhazian conflicts. In this thesis, I investigate whether and to what extent these conflicts were causally linked. This will help address the broader theoretical question: *how can the ideas of ethnic mobilization diffuse from one ethnic group to another within a state?*

Generally, studies of the international relations of ethnic conflicts are in their infancy[1] and there is much that is still unknown about the phenomenon of ethnic conflict. In the literature, several scholars have addressed issues of ethnic conflict and tried to explain violent internal conflict focusing on a variety of variables. For example, Monica Toft, in her book "The Geography of Ethnic Violence: identity, interests and the

[1] Stephen M. Saideman and Erin K. Jenne, "The International Relations of Ethnic Conflict" in Manus I. Midlarsky (ed). *Handbook of War Studies III,* forthcoming

indivisibility of territory," develops a theory of indivisible territories and explains why some ethnic conflicts turn violent while others do not. According to her theory, when two sides in the conflict view the territory as indivisible, the conflict is likely to happen.[2] Toft fails, however, to explain the timing issue of the conflicts. Henry Hale deals with ethnofederalism and state collapse focusing on ethnic minority separatism. Hale argues that ethnofederal states might avoid the problems when any dominant ethnic group is institutionally divided or when there are no core ethnic groups.[3] Cornell, too, argues that the institutions of autonomous regions promotes secessionism because institutionalizing and promoting the separate identity of titular group increases that group's cohesion and willingness to act, and establishing political institutions for the group increases the ability of that group to act.[4] Stuart Kaufman focuses on elites. He distinguishes two paths of ethnic conflicts leading to the war: mass-led and elite-led patterns. The former begins with mass hostility when the masses choose belligerent leaders and engage in actions which provoke a security dilemma resulting in war. The elite-led pattern begins with belligerent leaders who come to government, use their power to encourage the growth of mass hostility and provoke a security dilemma, which eventually leads to war.[5] All these authors I have cited address the issue of what leads to mobilization and they touch on important factors explaining the Georgian conflicts in particular. However, none of them explain specifically the timing of regional independence movements and why they often follow each other in close succession.

[2] Monica Duffy Toft, *The Geography of Ethnic Violence: Identity, Interests and the Indivisibility of Territory* (Princeton University Press, 2003)
[3] Henry E. Hale, "Divided We Stand: Institutional Sources of Ethnofederal State Survival and Collapse," *World Politics*, Vol. 56, No, 2, (2004), 165-193
[4] Svante Cornell, "Autonomy as a Source of Conflict: Caucasus Conflicts in Theoretical Perspective," *World Politics*, Vol. 54, No. 2, (2002), 245-276
[5] Stuart J, Kaufman, "Spiraling of Ethnic War: Elutes, Masses, and Moscow in Moldova's Civil War," *International Security*, Vol. 21, No. 2, (1996), 108-138

To get at the timing of the conflict we need to address the diffusion of conflicts from one to another. David Lake and Donald Rothchild, in "The International Spread of Ethnic Conflict: Fear, Diffusion, and Escalation," talk specifically about diffusion of ethnic conflict from one state to another. The authors are good at explaining the diffusion of conflicts between states but do not address diffusion within states. Mark Beissinger gets closer to explaining diffusion within states because he looks at diffusion of independence movements between union republics in the Soviet Union. In his book "National Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet Union," Beissinger discusses how the tide of nationalism evolved and spread throughout the former Soviet republics during the glastnost' period, causing one nationalist mobilization after another. However, Beissinger's diffusion model still can not adequately explain mobilization in minority regions because of the regions he is looking at are all quasi-states, for which mobilization for independence is a far more straightforward and linear process.

Both theories are a good foundation for my research, but do not specifically address *intrastate* conflicts. Therefore, my research question asks whether it is possible that ideas of ethnic mobilization diffuse from one ethnic group to another *within* a single state. Beissinger himself looked at diffusion between the Soviet Union republics, which already had state apparatuses, making this closer to diffusion *across* states that within them. In contrast, the objects of my analysis are minority regions, which suggest a within-state mechanism of diffusion; this may mean that process of diffusion is different and more difficult. The literature generally does not provide a specific theory that might explain ethnic mobilization of various ethnic groups *within* a state. That is why I came up with my own model for explaining intrastate processes of ethnic mobilization.

The objects of testing my theory are the South Ossetian and the Abkhazian conflicts. These conflicts were both situated in Georgia, which was itself in the process of nationalist mobilization influenced by the tide of nationalism sweeping the Soviet Union during the glastnost period. The cases of South Ossetia and Abkhazia show how the tide of national mobilization in the Soviet Union affected autonomous groups within the republics. Many of these groups underwent the process of ethnic mobilization in a similar way, often resulting in war. South Ossetia and Abkhazia seem to have mobilized in isolation for own reasons in their own way. However, when analyzing distinct periods of ethnic mobilization within these regions, an obvious link emerges. Besides the main question of the thesis which concern diffusion theory, the thesis will address a second question: *How did ethnic mobilization take place within minority regions? Did this happen differently than in the Soviet Union republics?* In order to answer this question, I have developed a model of national mobilization that describes both the South Ossetian and Abkhaz cases. This model is case specific and covers the period from 1988 to 1993, starting with the moment when the minority regions mobilized, went into the war and ending with the ceasefires.

This thesis has both theoretical and practical implications. As for the theory, I hope to contribute to theory of ethnic mobilization that Beissinger develops, which in my opinion has not been adequately generalized beyond the union republics. I also compare two cases: the case of the minority regions of South Ossetian and Abkhazia, which will be analyzed using Beissinger's diffusion theory in a modified way. Finally, I develop and test ethnic mobilization model for minority regions, which is distinct from Beissinger's model of mobilization. This model modifies Beissinger's theory by showing that where groups do not have state-like apparatuses, their mobilization is not linear, but

cyclical, depending on multiple interactions with the state that constitute "mobilization cycles."

In order to test the viability of my model of diffusion of ethnic mobilization across minority regions, I use intensive *process-tracing* in the two case studies. I analyze this mobilization through the prism of the ethnic mobilization model, which I developed specifically for minority regions without state apparatuses. I have chosen the time frame from 1988 till 1993, when both ethnic groups mobilized intensively. I analyze the extent to which each case follows the seven different stages displayed in ethnic mobilization model. These seven phases are: Window of Opportunity – Diffusion of Ideas – Development of Core Political Organization - Militarization - Legalization - Succession - War. To test the diffusion, I will also trace connections between the cases as well as with the central government. After analyzing each section, I draw conclusions concerning the diffusion effects of South Ossetian mobilization on the ethnic mobilization of the Abkhazians and vice versa.

The cases of South Ossetian and Abkhazian cases provide excellent test of the ethnic mobilization model for minority regions. South Ossetia, an autonomous oblast and Abkhazia, an autonomous republic, both underwent multiple stages of ethnic mobilization discussed above, starting from the late 1980s till the early 1990s, when the temporary cease-fire was agreed on. South Ossetia and Abkhazia are perfect tests for the theory because they are two minority regions that a) do not have quasi-state institution, b) have the same government in the same state, c) are being traced during the time of collapse of the Soviet Union, when there are multiple opportunities for diffusion of ideas and resources and d) have been examined by many competing theories – I do this analysis to show why my theory is better than alternative explanations at accounting for

these movements. That is why they are well-chosen cases for testing the diffusion theory as well. I will compare the conflicts to each other stage by stage, and determine if the movements in one region got its inspiration from the other one and how.

The thesis is divided into five major parts: Theoretical Framework; Overview of the Conflicts; the South Ossetian Case; the Abkhazian Case; and the Conclusion. In the first chapter, I introduce Beissinger's diffusion theory of national mobilization, which demonstrates how the tide of nationalism evolved and diffused across the Soviet Union. Then I discuss what diffusion is and how the ideas of ethnic mobilization diffuse across state boundaries. The last section of the chapter depicts Hroch's model of nationalist mobilization, which is one of the best-known and the basic framework of his staged model of mobilization helps me build my own model; afterwards I present my own model of ethnic mobilization for minority regions, explaining how it builds on and modifies Beissinger model. The second chapter gives an overview of the conflicts and the political developments in Georgia. The third and fourth chapters explore the two case studies showing how the mobilization model can explain these cases. Each case is analyzed using the method of process-tracing. I will look at the effect of diffusion on the actual movements -- how one movement got its inspiration from the other movement within the same state. A concluding section presents the findings of the research where I will summarize the effects of each movement on the other to determine the extent of diffusion of ideas between the regions and the extent to which they explain the ethnic mobilization of the South Ossetian and the Abkhaz regions in the late 1980-early 1990s.

CHAPTER I: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1. The Tidal Wave of National Mobilization

As Mark Beissinger states, it was foreseeable that the Soviet Union disintegrated with the effects of a tidal influence of one nationalism on another. When Gorbachev began his economic reforms, most initial protests were organized around economic and environmental (ecological) issues. Later, these protests developed into nationalist mobilization centered around demands for freedom of movement, increased autonomy and linguistic and cultural rights, following closely the liberalization and reformist spirit of *glasnost'*. Gradually, the newly-emergent nationalist movements began to mobilize around demands for secession. In the Baltic republics, the drive for independence was initiated by the popular fronts that emerged in the Baltic Republics in the summer of 1988. These political organizations took their agendas to the street and played an important role in mobilizing independence movements in the neighboring Baltic Republics as well.[6] These fronts primarily took a national form, despite the vulnerable position of the republican elites. The Baltic reformists thus used a nationalist frame as a base for the development of civil and political society.[7]

By the fall of 1989, the nationalist revolt against the Soviet Union emerged in the East European satellites, collapsing communist regimes with astonishing speed as the reform movements asserted sovereign control over their states vis-à-vis the Soviet empire. In turn, the end of communism in Eastern Europe further radicalized and spread

[6] Mark R. Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 48-58

[7] Valerie Bunce, *Subversive Institutions: the Design and the Destruction of Socialism and the State* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 89

nationalist revolt within the USSR. Consequently, a powerful tide of nationalism that came into being in Eastern Europe quickly diffused across the Union itself.[8]

Within the Soviet block, by the spring of 1987, small groups of hippies, ecologists, Jewish refuseniks[9], Russian nationalists, and Baltic dissidents began taking their politics to the street, engaging in small-scale demonstrations while testing the ground for further actions. For the most part, the police watched them closely but did not interfere. This unrepressed mobilization by Jewish refuseniks, Russian hippies and nationalists influenced the decision of the Crimean Tatar dissidents to conduct a protest campaign, which inspired Baltic dissidents to organize their own demonstrations, which provoked similar behavior on the part of Armenian activists, and so on down the line. Conflict within the hard-line leadership of the Soviet state and the success of some protest acts raised public expectations, leading to the escalation of demands from quality of life issues to more direct challenges of the parameters of the national order.[10]

Gradually, these demonstrations started to assume a uniform pattern. The linkages between the issues and the groups that were protesting, the ways in which these groups communicated and copied each others' actions and the methods the authorities were using to maintain order created "a sense of interconnectedness" that had vital importance in giving rise to a "tide of nationalism" across the USSR. By June 1988, representatives of Ukrainian, Armenian, Georgian, Lithuanian, Latvian, and Estonian nationalist movements had initiated contact with one another, establishing a coordinating committee. The activists elsewhere in the Soviet Union drew on the Baltic experience, borrowing their tactics of contestation, even copying directly from the documents of the

[8] Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State,* 60
[9] These people were not allowed to travel abroad or serve in the military
[10] Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State*, 68

Estonian Popular Front. Nationalism assumed the form of tidal wave in the ways in which nationalist models were consciously exported and borrowed transnationally, organizational resources were shared, and challenger groups sought inspiration from the actions of one another. In the wake of the events of the summer of 1989, Gorbachev's chief advisor came to the conclusion that at least a partial break-up of the Soviet state – specifically, the departure of the Baltic republics – had become inevitable.[11] In this, he was not mistaken. By 1990, the Baltic States had begun to secede from the Soviet Union; they were followed by other union republics, which also declared independence. The Georgian Republic found itself on opposite ends of two tidal waves of mobilization – one for union republics and the other for autonomous republics. In other words, as the national reformers rode the tidal wave of independence of union republics against Moscow, its minority regions were riding their own wave of mobilization against the Georgian government. Tbilisi sought to stem the tidal wave of national mobilization on its territory, resulting in two bloody ethnic wars on Georgian soil.

1.2. Diffusion of Ethnic Conflicts

What Beissinger described as a tidal wave of national mobilization mainly involved the diffusion of ideas between the republics of the Soviet Union. Diffusion theory of ethnic conflict holds that conflicts are contagious and can be transmitted from one place to another. One way of spreading the conflict is indirectly, or, as Lake and Rothchild put it, through "lessons learned" from one conflict to another. As Rogers notes,

[11] Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State*, 87

the process of diffusion is a special type of communication, concerned mainly with new ideas.[12]

According to Kuran, conflict diffuses when a group from one country inspires another to seek greater demands. For example, if one group observes another similar group's successful independence movement, it might increase its own agitation and demands. Kuran argues for the importance of "demonstration effects" in stimulating ethnic dissimilation abroad. Similarly, ethnic conflict elsewhere may cause groups to update their beliefs about the likely demands of other groups in their own country. Even in the absence of any change in the underlying political power of groups against the center or in the claims they make, if the groups believe others are now more likely to challenge their existing ethnic contracts, their best response may be to strike preemptively before the others increase their level of mobilization. In this case, ethnic conflict can evolve out of nothing, "literally materializing out of thin air".[13] Ideas and information can jump borders easily and diffuse widely. Whether this happens, as mentioned above, depends upon local conditions, the initial beliefs of groups on the scene, and the lessons that are drawn by the copycat groups.[14]

1.3. Model of Ethnic Mobilization in Minority Regions

Among the many models of ethnic mobilization, one of the best-known is Hroch's model of nationalist mobilization in Central Europe. Hroch identifies three fundamental phases of national movements: Phase A is the purely cultural one, involving a few scholars and other enthusiasts, when poets, artists, historians contribute to the

[12] Everett M. Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations* (New York: Free Press, fifth edition, 2003), 5-18
[13] David A. Lake and Donald Rothchild, editors, *The International Spread of Ethnic Conflict: fear, diffusion, and escalation* (Princeton University Press, 1998), 26
[14] Ibid.

'discovery,' creation and formalization of national culture[15]; Phase B is the period of patriotic agitation, when the movement begins to acquire a social character and political program, what Hroch calls "the most important phase"; and Phase C is the rise of the mass national movement, which usually leads to full nationhood.[16]

Beissinger notes that Hroch "has largely ignored how and why the emergence of nationalist elites leads to mass national movements (Phase C)". Although Hroch noted that "Phase B was not necessarily destined to pass over into Phase C," his assumption was that nationalist action is not worth intensive examination, since what occurs during phase C is largely determined by the ways in which national identities are formed prior to action."[17]

In my opinion, Hroch's model is too general for predictive utility; his three phases may be usefully divided into distinct sub-phases. The same can be said about Beissinger. Beissinger's model is also too linear and should be generalized to minority regions since mobilization was not confined to the union republics. Beissinger mainly concentrates on the diffusion of nationalistic mobilization across quasi-states, which are the units in a federation that already had a legal status as separate entities. In my thesis, I deal with entities that are one layer down -- minority regions that lack a state apparatus. This absence of state apparatus makes mobilization much more difficult for the regions, and justifies why they must pass through the legalization stage in my model, also, explains why the process is more cyclical than linear involving multiple interactions with the state.

[15] Eric Kaufman and Daniele Conversi, *Ethnic and Nationalist Mobilization,* http://www.pacte.cnrs.fr/Recherche/RC14/1-1-Kaufmann-_Conversi_draft3.pdf
[16] Miroslav Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe (*London, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 22-24
[17] Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State*

Another thing that distinguishes my model from Beissinger's is the multiple stages of mobilization, which are missing in Beissinger's. I argue that ideas of ethnic mobilization might diffuse at different stages of mobilization and not in a linear fashion, but rather back and forth. For example, ideas of mobilization can be borrowed by the Abkhazis from the South Ossetians at one stage, and vise versa -- by the South Ossetians from the Abkhazis at another stage. Because of these differences I came up with my own model that is adapted to a different set of units – minority regions.

I have identified seven different periods of mobilization, from the start of mobilization until war breaks out: Window of Opportunity → Diffusion of Ideas → Development of Core Political Groups → Legalization → Militarization → Succession → War

Table.1

Window of Opportunity	**Diffusion of ideas**	**Development of Core Pol. Groups**	**Legalization**	**Militarization**	**Secession**	**War**
Existence of conditions for ethnic mobilization/ Windows of opportunity	Definition and creation ideology of "otherness"	Creation of an ethnic mobilization nucleus: clan leaders, prominent individuals, capable of high-level verbal influence	Windows of opportunity for "legalizing" ideological claims: "open letters" to higher authorities/international community; statements; adoption of laws	Accumulation, possession and (re)distribution of arms among small groups	Final pre-war stage: secession/ irredentism claims	Military actions

When developing my model, I chose aspects which, in my opinion, are both necessary and sufficient for the mobilization process. With the *windows of opportunity* stage I refer to the conditions that give a basis for group mobilization. Those conditions can be historical grievances or some other types of factors that give the push for the start of mobilization. The second stage is *diffusion of ideas,* which is probably one of the most

important phases of the model, when the ideas of mobilization diffuses from outside and the ideology of "otherness" is created, which increases the probability of the future progression of the mobilization process. The third section is the nucleus of the strife, when mass mobilization gathers around actual personalities or specific groups. Next is the 'legal' section, comprising of various statements and the adoption of laws, which gives the 'rebellious' side a legal basis for mobilization. *Militarization* is characteristic of violent ethnic conflict and attributable to the contention, as well as the last two sections: *succession* and *war*.

CHAPTER 2: OVERVIEW OF THE CONFLICTS

Before discussing each of the stages of ethnic mobilization in the autonomous regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, I present a general introduction to the conflicts. First, for a better understanding of the dynamics of the conflicts, I introduce the political situation in Georgia from the end of the 1980s till the beginning of 1990s, covering the Georgian nationalist mobilization, which was happening in parallel with the mobilization of the minority regions. I then give a brief overview of the historical background of the conflicts. I conclude by giving the summary of the political situation in Georgia during the national mobilization in accordance with the minority region of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

2.1. Nationalist Mobilization in Georgia (1989-1993)

Georgia was one of the pioneer republics of the Soviet Union which used the *glasnost'* policy of Mikhail Gorbachev to call for independence at the end of 1980s. However, during national mobilization, Georgians had to face internal problems with their own national minorities. There are three autonomous regions in Georgia: the autonomous republics of Adjaria and Abkhazia and the Autonomous Oblast of South Ossetia. The Abkhazians and Ossetians pursued the most aggressive countermobilizations, and the most serious violence occurred in the autonomous regions. Countermobilization among ethnic minorities was virtually simultaneous with that of the Georgians against the Soviet Union.[18]

[18] Shale Horowitz, *Identities Unbound: Escalating Ethnic Conflict in Post-Soviet Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, and Tajikistan,* in "Ethnic Conflict and International Politics: Explaining Diffusion and Escalation," ed. in Steven E. Lobell and Philip Mauceri, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 62-64

Notwithstanding the multiethnic composition, Georgia remained peaceful under Soviet rule until late 1980s. The country's ethnic problems evolved together with Georgia's nationalist mobilization and struggle for independence from the Soviet Union. The first opposition groupings in Georgia, "Ilya Chavchavadze Society" appeared in late 1987, in response to the open atmosphere accompanying Gorbachev's reforms. At the same time, the foreign literature specialist and former dissident activist Zviad Gamsakhurdia[19] created the Helsinki Union, which was based on the Helsinki Watch Group that had been established in 1977 in Georgia. The agenda of these groups mainly concerned the preservation of Georgian national culture and was not openly political.[20]

The more radical groupings, like the Society of St. Ilya the Righteous, or the National Democratic Party, were initiators of the subsequent mass demonstrations, one of which was the November demonstration in 1988 against the proposed constitutional changes, where around 200,000 people participated. From the liberal intelligentsia evolved a Popular Front similar to those formed in the Baltic republics. This front had not even had time to hold its founding congress when the April tragedy happened.[21] The leaders of Georgian "irreconcilables" -- Gamsakhurdia, Tsereteli and other former political prisoners, had close contacts with radicals from other Soviet republics, such as the "Democratic Union" in Russia and radical nationalist groups in the Baltic republics, Ukraine and Armenia, although, only in Georgia "irreconcilables" mentality dominated

[19] On Gamsakhurdia see Stephen Jones, *Populism in Georgia: The Gamsakhurdia Phenomenon*, in *Nationalism and History: the politics of nation building in post Soviet Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia*, ed. by Donald, V. Schwartz and Razmik, Ranossian. (University of Toronto: Center for Russian and East European Studies. 1994)

[20] Jonathan Wheatley, *Georgia from National Awakening to Rose Revolution: Delayed Transition in the Former Soviet Union* (England: ASHGATE, 2005), 42

[21] Ibid., 43

the opposition. Elsewhere, the mainstream opposition movements accepted the rules of the political game, set by Gorbachev.[22]

On 9 April 1989 peaceful demonstrators advocating Georgia's independence from the Soviet Union outside the Georgian parliament were attacked by the Soviet troops using toxic gas and sharpened shovels. As a result, there was dozens of wounded and 19 dead, of which 16 were women. The 9 April demonstration originally began in protest of the declaration made in March by Abkhazians in Lykhni demanding recognition as a full union republic, separate from Georgia.[23] At the demonstration, few painted banners or chalked slogans mentioned Abkhazia; however, the main focus was still Georgian independence.[24]

In Jonathan Wheatley's words, 9 April was a "critical phase," as it instigated a path-dependent sequence of events that were crucial in the further development of Georgian political life. The April massacre in a sense united the Georgian nation against Soviet rule. As opinion polls held five months after the tragedy showed, 89 per cent of Georgians supported Georgian independence.[25] In addition, most opposition parties were united in viewing non-Georgians as "foreigners, recent arrivals living on authentically Georgian land, and as more loyal to Russian power than to Georgian."[26] Soon Gamsakhurdia and his bloc "Round Table – Free Georgia" started gaining more and more popularity among Georgians with his nationalistic rhetoric. On October 28, 1990, multi-

[22] Ghia Nodia, *Political Turmoil in Georgia and the Ethnic Policies of Zviad Gamsakhurdia*, in *Contested Boarders of the Caucasus*, ed. by Bruno Coppieters (VUB University Press, 1996). http://poli.vub.ac.be/publi/ContBorders/eng/ch0201.htm
[23] Ibid.
[24] Stephen Jones, Georgia: Nationalism from under the Rubble, in *After Independence: Making and Protecting the Nation in Postcolonial and Postcommunist States*, ed. by Lowell W. Barrington (US: The University of Michigan Press, 2006), 248-279. http://www.press.umich.edu/pdf/0472098985-ch10.pdf
[25] Wheatley, *Georgia from National Awakening to Rose Revolution*, s41-43
[26] Toft, *The Geography of Ethnic Violence*, 92-94

party and democratic parliamentary elections were held in which Gamsakhurdia's bloc won impressively, gaining almost 70 per cent of the seats. After the victory, Gamsakhurdia became the head of the Supreme Council of the Georgian Republic.[27] Instead of participating in Gorbachev's referendum in March 1991, Gamsakhurdia organized a separate referendum on Georgian independence, which was supported by 98.9 per cent of Georgian voters. On the second anniversary of the April Tragedy, the Georgian parliament passed a declaration on the independence of Georgia from the Soviet Union.[28]

Gamsakhurdia was elected the first president of the Republic of Georgia on May 26, 1991 with 86 per cent of the vote. However, in the aftermath, Gamsakhurdia was widely criticized for his unpredictable style of government. The first crisis that Gamsakhurdia faced was the war in South Ossetia in 1990, where the president annulled the Ossetians' declaration of independence and abolished their status of an autonomous region on 11 December, 1990. A tense political and especially economic situation, caused by the economic blockade declared to the Soviet Union by Gamsakhurdia, worsened by the large amount of ex-Soviet weaponry available to the growing power of paramilitary groups.[29]

Gamsakhurdia's main headache was the *Mkhedrioni* (horsemen) paramilitary grouping uniting around 5000 men, who were subsisting mostly on robberies and drug smuggling. Their leader, Jaba Ioseliani, denounced Gamsakhurdia in February 1991 and

[27] David Losaberidze, *The Problem of Nationalism in Georgia*, (Tbilisi: The Caucasus Institute, June 1998) http://www.nato.int/acad/fellow/96-98/losaberi.pdf
[28] *U.S. Library of Congress*, "Rise of Gamsakhurdia," http://countrystudies.us/georgia/16.htm
[29] George Anchabadze, *History of Georgia: Post-communist Georgia 1990-2003*, last update 25 December, 2006. http://www.aboutgeorgia.net/history/index.html?page=12

announced the formation of a new party.[30] In August of the same year, after a split in the "Round Table – Free Georgia," the biggest part of the National Guard led by their commander Tengiz Kitovani, rose against the president, and with the support of almost the entire political opposition, demanded that Gamsakhurdia resign. So, the military was not under the control of the president. The conflict turned into an armed confrontation in fall 1991. The end of 1991 and the beginning of 1992 is known as the "Tbilisi Winter," when after a two-week battle in the center of Tbilisi, Gamsakhurdia was overthrown[31] and fled to Chechnya.

In fact, Gamsakhurdia never renounced his presidency and even from outside the Georgian borders the first president encouraged his supporters in Georgia to rebel against the existing government. This escalated a civil war of pro and anti-Gamsakhurdia demonstrators throughout the whole country. Kitovani and Ioseliani, who headed the Military Council of Georgia, understood that they were incapable of controlling the situation. In March 1992, they invited Eduard Shevardnadze to return to Georgia and become the head of a State Council – in effect, the president.[32]

2.2. Minority Regions during the Georgian Independence Movement

Meanwhile, the situation in the autonomous regions was escalating; the weakness of the Georgian government served as an opportunity structure for them to mobilize. According to most Russian and many foreign scholars, it was Gamsakhurdia and the slogan he came up with, "Georgia for (ethnic) Georgians," that led to ethnic mobilization.[33] Gamsakhurdia's extreme nationalism, his objective of homogenizing

[30] Wheatley, *Georgia from National Awakening to Rose Revolution*, 55
[31] Losaberidze, *The Problem of Nationalism in Georgia*
[32] Anchabadze, *History of Georgia: Post-communist Georgia 1990-2003*
[33] Nodia, *Political Turmoil in Georgia and the Ethnic Policies of Zviad Gamsakhurdia*

Georgia culturally if not ethnically, and his extremist overstatements toward minorities thus exacerbated Georgia's ethnic problems.[34] Nodia writes, The Georgian Independence movement did not have time to do anything anti-Abkhazian or anti-Ossetian before these communities expressed their separatist ambitions. The Abkhaz and Ossetians reacted negatively to the first actions by the Georgian independence movement because, as they said, the flag of Georgian republic, which was before changed by the Soviet one, and during the mobilization was raised again, reminded them of their past hatred of the Georgian center.[35]

By the time of Gamsakhurdia's removal on January 1992, the war in South Ossetia had been going on for exactly a year. Even after Shevardnadze's coming to power there was an escalation of violence, and only on 24 June was a ceasefire agreed on, after Shevardnadze and Yeltsin met near Sochi and sent joint peacekeeping forces to the South Ossetian region.[36]

South Ossetia occupies 1/6th of Georgia's territory bordering North Ossetia (Alania), which forms the Russian Federation. Unlike Abkhazia, South Ossetia was never distinguished by its resources or infrastructure. However, the region is an important economic transit route and a strategic pass on the Caucasus Mountain Range, serving as a significant and income-generating means for the majority of the local population. Ossetians are scattered throughout the region and their villages are intermixed with Georgian villages. This intermixture is explained by the fact that until 1922, when Ossetians were granted the status of autonomous region, they had no territorial status and were dispersed around the country. As for the population, Ossetians

[34] Shireen T. Hunter, *The Transcaucasus in Transition: Nation-Building and Conflict* (Washington D. C.: the Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1994), 122-124
[35] Nodia, *Political Turmoil in Georgia and the Ethnic Policies of Zviad Gamsakhurdia*
[36] Wheatley, *Georgia from National Awakening to Rose Revolution*, 70

in the region outnumbered local Georgians, comprising 66.2 per cent of the population in the region before the conflict.[37] According to the 1989 Soviet census, there were 164,000 Ossetians (roughly 3% of the population of Georgia) of which some 65,000 lived in the Autonomous Oblast of South Ossetia, while some 99,000 lived in other parts of Georgia.[38] The history of relations between Ossetians and Georgians was one of the key issues of the conflict. Both sides had a controversial view of the other. The groups lived together for the last two or three centuries in the northern part of Georgia, which is connected to the Russian Federation, through a single tunnel.[39]

Abkhazia constitutes almost 12.5 per cent of the Georgian territory; it is situated on the Black Sea and borders Russia to the North. Because of its tourist resorts, well-developed economic infrastructure, rich agriculture and mineral resources, access to the only rail service and an important road to the north, Abkhazia has crucial strategic and economic importance for Georgia.[40] Furthermore, Abkhazians, like the South Ossetians, are people of a different ethnicity than Georgians, having kinship ties to the people in the North Caucasus. The language of the Abkhazians is different from Georgian; it is written in Cyrillic script as opposed to the Georgian script.[41] In 1989, more than 93.5 % Abkhazians considered Abkhaz their primary language, and 78.8% claimed Russian as their second language. According to the 1979 estimate, almost 25% of Abkhaz and 44% of Georgians living in Abkhazia could not communicate with one another.[42] In 1989, the Abkhazians of the FSU numbered 105,308, (i.e., they made up just 1.8% of the

[37] Ketevan Tsikhelashvili, *The Case Studies of Abkhazia and South Ossetia*, draft Chapter, (30 September 2001), http://www.ecmi.de/cps/download/Abkhazia_SouthOssetia.pfd
[38] Nikola Cvetkovski, *The Georgian – South Ossetian Conflict*, Danish association for Research on the Caucasus, (2005), http://www.caucasus.dk/chapter2.htm
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.
[41] The Georgian is the original script among 19 scripts in the world. http://www.omniglot.com/writing/georgian2.htm
[42] Toft, *The Geography of Ethnic Violence*, 92

population of Georgia).[43] Unlike Ossetians, Abkhazians were a minority in the region when the conflict started. In Abkhazia itself, according to the Soviet census of 1989, the population of Abkhazia comprised 17.8% Abkhazians, and 45.7% Georgians; the rest were Russians, Armenians, Greeks and others.[44]

There is a dispute between Georgians and Abkhazians over which group inhabited Abkhazian territory first; a similar dispute existed in South Ossetia. One thing is clear from the history: however Abkhazians lived in Abkhazia, Georgians had also lived there. On 31 March 1921, Abkhazia was given the status of independent Soviet Socialist Republic of Abkhazia. It kept this status until December 1921, when the SSR Abkhazia joined the Georgian SSR under the Treaty of Union. This status lasted until 1931, when the Abkhazian Republic was incorporated into Georgia as an autonomy.[45]

As for the Abkhazian Autonomous Republic, a separatist dispute escalated when government forces and paramilitaries were sent into the area to repress separatist activities, following the 23 July incident, when the Supreme Soviet of Abkhazia passed a law, which restored the 1925 constitution, similar to how Georgians had reinstated the 1921 constitution five months before. The Abkhaz initiated military action, backed by paramilitaries from Russia's north Caucasus regions and directly from the Russian military base on its territory.[46] Shevardnadze managed to remove Kitovani and Ioseliani from the Defence Council in May 1993, while fighting Gamsakhurdia's supporters as

[43] Ibid., 93
[44] Tsikhelashvili, *The Case Studies of Abkhazia and South Ossetia*
[45] Alexei Zverev, *Ethnic Conflicts in the Caucasus 1988-1994* ed. in *Contested Borders in the Caucasus*, (Brussels: VUBPRESS, 1996). http://poli.vub.ac.be/publi/ContBorders/eng/ch0103.htm
[46] Anchabadze, *History of Georgia*

well,[47] who seized their weapons against Shevardnadze. With Russian support, after accepting the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) membership, Shevardnadze managed to defeat the first president's supporters. Gamsakhurdia himself, who had returned to Georgia the previous year, was militarily defeated and soon after was reported to have committed suicide.[48] The war ended with the Georgian government's catastrophic defeat by the Abkhazians. Around 14,000 people died and another 300,000 were forced to flee the region.[49]

To conclude, the situation in Georgia -- political, economic or ethnic relations -- was extremely complicated by the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s. Georgia had undergone the path of nationalist mobilization in a dangerous and uncompromising way, with strong nationalist rhetoric, not taking into account the multi-ethnic composition of the country. As Mearsheimer noted, in the late 1980s, hypernationalism and the atmosphere of ethnic intolerance aggravated the mobilization of the minority regions in Georgia, which later increased the minorities' resistance to Georgian independence.[50] This was the right moment for ethnic minorities like the South Ossetians and Abkhazians, who seized the opportunity of the chaotic situation in Georgia to countermobilize. Their mobilization resulted in war, which ended with Georgia's defeat in both cases. The next two chapters specifically analyze how the Abkhazians and South Ossetians undertook the ethnic mobilization stages and whether and to what extent these conflicts were linked.

[47] Most Georgians living in Abkhazia were supporters of Gamsakhurdia, as most Georgians living in Abkhazia are Mengrelians (Mengrelia – one of the regions of Georgia) as was Gamsakhurdia himself. see at Toft, "The Geography of Ethnic Conflict," 102

[48] John M. Cotter, "Cultural Security Dilemmas and Ethnic Conflict in Georgia," *The Journal of Conflict Studies*, Vol. XIX No.1, (spring 1999).
http://www.lib.unb.ca/Texts/JCS/bin/get4.cgi?directory=spring99/&filename=cotter.htm

[49] Anchabadze, *History of Georgia*

[50] John Mearsheimer, "Back to the Future: instability in Europe after the Cold War," *International Security*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (summer 1990), quoted in Alexei Arbatov and others, *Managing Conflict in the Former Soviet Union*

CHAPTER 3 – SOUTH OSSETIA

In this chapter I present the ethnic mobilization in South Ossetia in 1988-1993. I analyze the mobilization process through the seven stages presented in the ethnic mobilization model: Window of Opportunity → Diffusion of Ideas → Development of Core Political Groups → Legalization → Militarization → Succession → War. The parallels between the South Ossetian and the Abkhazian cases will be drawn together with analyzing the Abkhazian mobilization in the fourth chapter and the similarities will be summarized in the concluding part of the thesis.

3.1. The Window of Opportunity

South Ossetian ethnic mobilization started at the end of the 1980s, in the context of massive nationalism and political chaos in Georgia. Furthermore, the glastnost policy envisaged to encourage participation in demonstrations and "it was becoming less and less dangerous" to participate in public protests.[51] So, the South Ossetians started the ethnic mobilization when they had favorable conditions for it and were given the "golden opportunity"[52] to mobilize. The leader of the nationalist movement, later the first president of Georgia, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, obtained popularity through a nationalistic agenda which was mainly directed against the Soviet/Russian communist rule but took a form of anti-minority politics. At the same time, there was a civil war over central government between Gamsakhurdia and the opposition. It was therefore the right time -- 'window of opportunity' for minorities to mobilize against the Georgian government.

[51] Stuart J, Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds: the Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001), 90
[52] Wheatley, *Georgia from National Awakening to Rose Revolution*, 72

Generally, the main problem of the Ossetians was fear for and grievances towards the Georgians. Their main dissatisfaction was rooted in the administrative status of South Ossetia, which was lower than that of North Ossetia – an autonomous Republic on the other side of the border within the Russian Federation. Ossetians also comprised a larger share of the region's population than did Abkhazians in the Abkhazian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. They therefore felt that they were entitled to a territorial status on the same level as Abkhazia. The turning point in the relationship between Tbilisi and Tskhinvali (the capital of South Ossetia) came with the introduction of the 1988 law on strengthening the position of the Georgian language on the territory of Georgia.

Another grievance of the Ossetians towards the Georgians had to do with the economic situation. The region of South Ossetia was much more disadvantaged economically than Abkhazia. A relative share of the state budget for the region was declining more and more in the 1980s, and Ossetians expressed their dissatisfaction because of their lower living standards in contrast to other regions in Georgia. These economic issues came on top of other problems like ethnic balance or political issue. Overall, the Ossetians' mobilization was more a reaction to Georgian nationalism than to the existing economic discrimination.[53]

3.2. Diffusion of Ideas

According to Nodia, most of the Soviet Union republics consisted of one or more autonomous regions or republics, which gave the Soviet federation the structure of "Matrushka." Those autonomies, many of which were created on an ethnic base, had a lower political status than the union republics; however, they were ideologically primed

[53] Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds*, 99-100

for secessionist movements. In the case of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the Georgian independence movement raised the question of secession from Georgia: "If Georgia wants to be independent of Russia, why can't we be independent of Georgia?"[54] From this, it is evident that the Ossetians saw themselves as a separate nation, which deserved independence from Georgia. It seems that the autonomies were looking at other states for clues as to their future status even at Georgia. Examples were both union states and some of the autonomous regions which also started mobilization during the glastnost period. For instance, conflicting regions by the end of 1980s were Transnistria in Moldova and Nagorno-Karabakh, which were mobilizing for independence and the Georgian regions could copy ideas from them.

It must be noted that the South Ossetians preserve kin ties with the North Ossetians and aim at uniting with them. In the condition of the Soviet Union, there was no distinct line separating North Ossetia from the South, as they both were ruled by Moscow. But when the Union started collapsing, the Ossetians saw that Georgian independence would cause the lose their ties with the North Ossetians, and seized the opportunity to mobilize their forces in order to preserve the Soviet Union or join North Ossetia, which means separating from Georgia. Russia put all its efforts into supporting the Ossetians in order to weaken the secessionist drive in Georgia. Consequently, Ossetians were creating an image of Georgians as their enemies, constructing a sense of "otherness." This helped them to mobilize the South Ossetians against the newly reemerging nation-state of Georgia.

[54] Nodia, *Political Turmoil in Georgia and the Ethnic Policies of Zviad Gamsakhurdia*

3.3. Core Political Groups

Already in 1988, a small group of Ossetians had started mobilizing in the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast (SOAO). When the Ossetians could not attain redress for their disadvantaged economic status from the Georgian officials, they started looking for answers among non-official organizations, which were organized according to national membership. Thus, in early 1988, a national movement of Ossetians "Adamon Nykhas" (in translation: Popular Shrine, A.N.) was formed in the Autonomous Oblast (region) of South Ossetia of the Georgian Supreme Soviet. It operated under the leadership of its main ideologue, Alan Chochiev, who was teaching History at the Tskhinvali Pedagogical Institute.[55]

As Vladimir Pryakhin, a Russian researcher, writes, in the beginning, Ademon Nykhas was mainly organized around economic problems in the beginning. However, the talks gradually turned to national politics, as the South Ossetian researchers found that the standard of living in the region per person was lower than in the rest of Georgia.[56] As Pryakhin says, the problem was not that South Ossetians earned less than Georgians, or that Georgians earned less than North Ossetians, but that the system was incapable of guaranteeing an increase in the living standards of the citizens across the state.[57]

Already in early 1988, popular protest was building in South Ossetia due to a typhoid epidemic, which was attributed to the city's water system, which suffered from poor administrative management. At first, the local Ossetian communist authorities were

[55] Svante E. Cornell, *Autonomy and Conflict: Ethnoterritoriality and Separatism in the South Caucasus – Cases in Georgia* (Sweden, Stockholm: Uppsala University 2002), 191
http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/inside/publications/0419dissertation.pdf
[56] Vladimir Pryakhin, *Regionalnie konflikti na postsovetskom pronstranstve: Abkhazia, Yuzhnaya Osetiya, Nagornii Karabakh, Pridnestrove, Tadzigistan* (*Regional Conflicts in Ex-USSR: Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh, Trans-Dniestria, Tajikistan*) (Moscow: 2002), 132-204
[57] Ibid.

held responsible for the epidemic. This changed by the mid 1980s, when Georgian chauvinism began to gain strength with regard to its small ethnicities. Hence, attention shifted towards the Georgians, who were blamed for the poor living conditions of the Ossetians.[58] The South Ossetian movement for improving living conditions soon took an anti-Georgian character. Besides, the Georgian print or mass-media was held responsible for spreading fear of Georgian chauvinism in the mentality of ethnic minorities'.[59]

At this point, the Ossetian Popular Front A.N. still had no territorial claims in Georgia. Its primary goal was to preserve the minority culture and language traditions in the region. Ademon Nykhas was the first attempt by Ossetians to bring material concerns (economic or political) to the national level. In the early stages, the organization could not claim widespread support in the SOAO. There was no charismatic leader who could mobilize Ossetians around the issues raised by the popular movement. This moderate position could also be explained but the unwillingness of the local population to participate in activities that would challenge Soviet rule.

Soon tensions between the Ossetians and the Georgians increased considerably due to a supportive letter from the Ossetians to Abkhazians. Alan Chochiev, the leader of the A.N. wrote a letter in an Abkhaz newspaper in April 1989 saying that the Ossetians sympathized with the Abkhazian efforts at autonomy and hoped that their success would set a precedent for other regions that wished to join the Russian Republic. As Kaufman notes, this letter framed the conflict as a contest for national dominance: the Ossetian

[58] Nikola Cvetkovski, *The Georgian – South Ossetian Conflict* (Danish association for Research on the Caucasus, 2005), http://www.caucasus.dk/chapter2.htm
[59] Pryakhin, *Regional Conflicts in Ex-USSR*, 132-204

popular front wanted secession from Georgia and dominance over local Georgians, while Georgian nationalists wanted to abolish South Ossetia's name and autonomy.[60]

3.4. Legalization

In 1989, the first request to upgrade the Ossetia's status from autonomous oblast to autonomous republic was made to the Georgian Supreme Soviet by the A.N. As already mentioned, in the spring of 1989, Alan Chochiev, the leader of Ademon Nykhas, in an open letter, expressed his group's support for the Abkhaz campaign against the opening of a Georgian branch of Tbilisi University in Sukhumi, the Abkhazian capital. This letter triggered the first clashes between Ossetians and Georgians in South Ossetia. On 26 May, as Georgians celebrated the anniversary of their declaration of independence in 1918, clashes between irregular groups of Georgians (encouraged by Zviad Gamsakhurdia) and local Ossetians took place. But full-scale fighting between the Georgians and the South Ossetians was still ahead.[61]

In August 1989, the Central Committee of Georgian SSR issued a decree on the State Program on the Georgian Language, declaring Georgian to be used in all public spheres of society; it envisaged securing and organizing the creation and publication of all types of scientific and educational papers in Georgian. Also, efforts should be put into creating favorable conditions in all enterprises and establishments for learning Georgian by those citizens residing in Georgia who had no command of Georgian.[62]

The plan, which called for making Georgian the only language for public life, was condemned by Ademon Nykhas as "anti-democratic and discriminatory," as most of the

[60] Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds*, 85-127
[61] Cvetkovski, *The Georgian – South Ossetian Conflict*
[62] *Communisti*, No 196, 25 August, 1989, ed. in Tamaz Diasamidze, "Regional Conflicts in Georgia – the Autonomous Oblast of South Ossetia, The Autonomous SSR of Abkhazia (1989-2006)." the Regionalism Research Center. GCI: Georgia, Tbilisi, 2003-2005. www.rcc.org

Ossetians had a poor working knowledge of Georgian.[63] The South Ossetians responded by issuing a decree on "the State Program on Ossetian Language" on 4 September. The first Deputy Chairman of the South Ossetian Oblispolcom Comr. Sanakoev M.G desired to add the following sentence to Article 75 of the constitution of the Georgian SSR: "In the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast the state language is Ossetian".[64] This decree was rejected by both Tbilisi and Moscow.

In September 1989, the South Ossetian movement for unification with North Ossetia gained momentum. The Ademon Nykhas had sent a petition to Moscow, claiming that it was politically and economically absurd to divide the small Ossetian people into two administrative units within the Soviet Union.[65] The appeal contained the following statement:

> "It seems to us politically and economically absurd that within the framework of a democratic state the small Ossetian people should be divided into two administrative units; and we demand that the question of the unification of North and South Ossetia be examined at the CPSU Central Committee Plenum on nationality questions."[66]

As the leader of North Ossetia of that time, A. Galazov, thought that before the collapse of the Soviet Union, the border between North and South Ossetia was fragile; after the collapse, of course, the problem became greater. The question of the unification of north and south was high on South and North Ossetia's agenda.[67] Some attempts were made to defuse the crisis by organizing public forums for both Ossetians and Georgians.

[63] Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds*, 107
[64] *Sovetskaia Ossetia*, No 188, 28 September 1989, ed. in Tamaz Diasamidze, "Regional Conflicts in Georgia – the Autonomous Oblast of South Ossetia, The Autonomous SSR of Abkhazia (1989-2006)." (GCI: Georgia, Tbilisi,the Regionalism Research Center. 2003-2005). www.rcc.org
[65] Pryakhin, *Regional Conflicts in Ex-USSR*, 132-204
[66] Svante E, Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers: a study of ethnopolitical conflict in the Caucasus* (UK: CURZON Caucasus World, 2001), 165-166
[67] Pryakhin, *Regionalnie konflikti na postsovetskom pronstranstve*, 145

Moreover, concerns over the problem were publicly discussed at ad hoc community forums organized spontaneously in Georgian-populated and mixed villages.

In September 1989, a leader of the National Independence Party, Irakli Tsereteli, declared: "… a nation should have its autonomy only if it is rooted settlement – neither Abkhaz, nor Ossetians represent them." A month later, on 10 November, 1989, the regional council of the South Ossetian autonomous oblast decided to upgrade its own status to an Autonomous Republic within the Georgian Supreme Soviet. The Georgian side declined this decision, and several thousand Georgian citizens marched to Tskhinvali, the capital of South Ossetia, in order to support the Georgian settlement on the Ossetian region with peaceful demonstrations. They were stopped by armed Ossetians on 23 November. The first armed conflicts began at this point, lasting till the beginning of 1990.[68]

3.5. Militarization of the Ossetians

Militarization is a very delicate issue when discussing conflict. The Georgian conflicts are no exception. This issue is probably the vaguest, as nothing can be declared for sure because of the unofficial nature of the arming both fighting sides possessed. The militarization issue had a great importance in the further progression of the ethnic mobilization in the minority regions, since both conflicting sides were militarily assisted by a third party. The third party involvement or external leverage of minority radicalization is emphasized by E. Jenne. Among other things the third party or lobby actor can be a military alliance and/or kin state.[69] In the case of South Ossetia, the

[68] Pryakhin, *Regional Conflicts in Ex-USSR*, 145
[69] Erin K. Jenne, *Ethnic Bargaining in the Balkans: Secessionist Kosovo Versus Integrationist Vojvodina*, (Ethnic Bargaining: The Paradox of Military Empowerment. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007)

militarization was connected exactly to these kinds of lobby actors, namely, the Russian Federation.

According to Tishkov, militarization in both autonomies of Georgia happened through illegal paramilitary formations or 'armies,' 'national guards', or 'defence battalions', which led to an abundance of small weapons among civilians. Not only in Georgia, but in most of the republics of the former Soviet Union, the question of arms control and smuggling was problematic. And because of illegal access to a profusion of arms, ethnic groups were able to start the war.[70] Furthermore, the Georgian government under both presidents acquired a large proportion of the Soviet Army arsenal; otherwise, they would never have been able to unleash a violent movement against local minorities. In turn, the Ossetians and the Abkhazians organized armed resistance with weapons smuggled from Russian military garrisons and other outside sources.[71]

3.6. Secession

The situation between the Georgians and the Ossetians worsened in summer 1990, when the Georgian Supreme Soviet adopted an election law barring regional parties from running in the parliamentary elections in Georgia. This was and could only be interpreted by Ossetians as a way to cut Ademon Nykhas out of the system. In response, the region proclaimed its status as a union republic within the USSR on 20 September 1990. The 14th Session of the Oblast Council of the People's Deputies of the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast of the 20th Convocation decided to reorganize the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast into the Soviet Democratic Republic of South Ossetia.[72]

[70] Valery Tishkov, "Ethnic Conflicts in the Former USSR: The Use and Misuse of Typologies and Data" *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 36, No.5. (Sep., 1999), 571-572
[71] Tishkov, "Ethnic Conflicts in the Former USSR"
[72] *Sovetskaia Ossetia*, No. 180, (22 September 1990), www.rcc.org

When the nationalist 'Round Table' came to power in Georgia, the South Ossetian leadership held its own parliamentary elections on 23 December. Gamsakhurdia cancelled the election results, and the autonomous oblast was abolished on 11 December 1990, with the Gamsakhurdia leadership blaming Ossetians for political separatism. On the 12th of December in Tskhinvali and Java, a state of emergency was announced.[73]

3.7. War

In the first days of 1991, the Supreme Council of Georgia passed a law on the formation of the National Guard of Georgia. A few days later, on the night of 5 January, several thousand Georgian troops entered Tskhinvali, and fighting with casualties started.[74] Already two months after the confrontation, the damage was considerable: more than 20,000 people became refugees in North Ossetia or IDPs (Internally Displaced People) in Georgia. According to official statistics, 53 people died on the Ossetian side and more than 230 were injured. Furthermore, the economic and social structure of the region had been significantly destroyed.[75]

In late December, internal fighting erupted in Tbilisi between the opposition and government forces. Georgian military attention shifted towards the capital. Gamsakhurdia was ousted from power and an interim state council was created, which in March 1992 appointed Eduard Shevardnadze as chairman. In the spring of 1992, the fighting escalated, with periodic Russian involvement.[76] During the fighting in May and June, Russian troops periodically assisted the South Ossetians with the encouragement of

[73] Mark Bliev, *Yuzhnaya Osetiia: v kolliziakh rossiisko-gruzinskikh otnoshenii* ("South Ossetia: In Clash of Russian-Georgian Relations"), (Moscow: Europe, 2006), 406
[74] Cvetkovski, *The Georgian – South Ossetian Conflict*
[75] Edward Ozhiganov, "The Republic of Georgia in *Managing Conflict in the Former Soviet Union: Russian and American Perspectives* by Alexei Arbatov, and others. (London, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1997), 356
[76] Cvetkovski, *The Georgian – South Ossetian Conflict*

the Soviet center and Russian militants, though the Russians played a decisive role in brokering a ceasefire. On 24 June 1992, Shevardnadze and Russian President Boris Yeltsin met to discuss the question of South Ossetia and a cease-fire. A cease-fire was agreed upon, and on 14 July 1992, a CIS peacekeeping operation began, consisting of a Joint Control Commission and joint CIS -Georgian - South Ossetian military patrols.[77]

To summarize, the ethnic mobilization in South Ossetia underwent all the seven stages of the mobilization model. Having in background the ethnic grievance and economically disadvantaged position, the South Ossetians seized the opportunity during the glastnost period and started mobilization in 1988. Encouraged by their kins in North Ossetia and Russian military assistance, the South Ossetians announced so called "the war of laws" to the Georgian government and asked for the status upgrade. After the abolishment of the Autonomous Oblast of South Ossetia by Gamsakhurdia, the Ossetians made secessionist claims, which caused the armed clashed between the Ossetians and Georgians and resulted in war; it was stopped by a ceasefire and Georgian side was defeated by the Ossetian side. The next chapter will cover the ethnic mobilization in Abkhazia in 1988-1993. The seven stages of the ethnic mobilization model will be employed to the Abkhazian case and discussed separately. The parallels between South Ossetia and Abkhazia will be drawn in the concluding section.

[77] Shale Horowitz, "Explaining Post-Soviet Ethnic Conflicts: Using Regime Type to Discern the Impact and Relative Importance of Objective Antecedents," *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 29, No.4, (2001), 633-660.

CHAPTER 4 – ABKHAZIA

4.1. The Window of Opportunity

During the era of perestroika, autonomous entities started seeking greater autonomy. In Tbilisi, the cause of "Georgia for Georgians" intensified, despite the fact that a good portion of the inhabitants of Georgia was neither Georgian nor Christian. The Georgian minorities felt threatened and mobilized in response, struggling against what they saw as a "Tbilisi for Georgians." One of the vocal minority groups was the Abkhazians.[78]

The Abkhazians always had historical grievances against and always thought that the Georgians had been given better jobs and better houses. Gamsakhurdia's political dominance unnerved the ethnic minorities. His earlier dissident writings often invoked the peril of the Georgian nation and blamed both Moscow and the minorities for the destruction of its land, language and culture. So his slogan "Georgian for Georgians" was interpreted as a battle cry for the suppression of minorities.[79]

First, the Abkhazis used the window of opportunity for ethnic mobilization – Georgia was weak, focused as it was on its own struggle for independence, and therefore did not have time for its own minorities or other internal affairs. As Nodia explains, "the ethnic Abkhaz faction of the Abkhazian leadership, under Ardzinba, saw a window of opportunity in the breakdown of authority and legitimacy in Georgia."[80] The collapse of the Gamsakhurdia government and the evolved civil war in Tbilisi gave the Abkhaz

[78] Toft, *The Geography of Ethnic Violence*, 94
[79] Ibid., 96
[80] Ghia Nodia, "Conflict in Abkhazia" cited in Jonathan Wheatley, *Georgia from National Awakening to Rose Revolution*, 72

another 'window of opportunity' to act, which was the restoration of the constitution and the outbreak of violent conflict.[81]

4.2. Diffusion of Ideas

Abkhazia had always enjoyed some form of autonomy within Georgia, starting in the 18th century. As already mentioned in the second chapter, after the Russian annexation of Georgia in 1921, Abkhazia was proclaimed a Soviet Socialist Republic. In 1925, Abkhazia adopted its own constitution, which claimed that Abkhazia was "United with the Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia on the basis of a special union-treaty."[82] In 1931, the status of Abkhazia was diminished to that of an Autonomous Republic within Georgia. During the Soviet rule, the Abkhazians constantly organized public demonstrations or strikes in 1931, 1957, 1965, 1967 and 1978, demanding the transfer of Abkhazia to the Russian republic instead of Georgia. As a response, Abkhazia was given extra finances for various Abkhaz programs, such as the creation of an Abkhazian State University, and Abkhazian-language television broadcasting.[83]

Furthermore, the politics of Stalin and Beria, both Georgians by ethnicity, drastically undermined relations between the two communities, fostered strong anti-Georgian feelings among the Abkhazians and finally settled the image of the enemy: in the face of Georgia in Abkhaz mentality. The Abkhazians accused Stalin of intentionally implementing a "Georgianization" policy through the settlement of Georgians in Abkhazia and for reducing the ethnic share of the latter within the total population.[84]

[81] Wheatley, *Georgia from National Awakening to Rose Revolution*, 73
[82] See Potier, Tim, *Conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia: A Legal Appraisal*, (Hague, the Netherlands: Kluwer law international, 2001), 11
[83] Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds*, 85-127
[84] Tsikhelashvili, *The Case Studies of Abkhazia and South Ossetia*, 8-9

At the time of collapse of the Soviet Union, there was a quite unambiguous element in the Abkhaz mentality: Georgians were the enemy of the Abkhaz. They had always had the sense of "otherness", but by the late 1980s this feeling was intensified. "As the Abkhazians obtained independence in the Soviet Union, the Abkhaz nationalist vision confined to their status within the Russian Empire/Soviet Union".[85] Despite the fact that the Abkhaz were the minority in the Abkhaz region, they were given the status of a titular minority in 1931. Once they were given the status, they came to believe that they deserved it. That is why during the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Abkhazians mobilized when the union republics called for independence. Moreover, the ideas could diffuse from other autonomies of the former Soviet Union; especially, the Autonomous Oblast of South Ossetia might have had a great influence on Abkhazian mobilization, as the Ossetians mobilized almost simultaneously with the Abkhazians -- preceded the Abkhaz with the mobilization against the Georgian government slightly – over half a year. This fact could have increased the Abkhazians' chances for success, as the 'enemy' in the face of Georgia would have to fight simultaneously on two fronts: with the Ossetians and the Abkhazians.

4.3. Core Political Groups

In 1988, the initiative for creating an Abkhazian national-political organization came from a group of activists that was representing the intelligentsia of that time, made up of scientists, artists, and writers. In November 1988, the members of this group were invited for a conversation to the Abkhazian Oblast Committee (Obcom) of the Communist Party of Georgia. The meeting established the Forum of Abkhazian Nations

[85] Ghia Nodia, *The Conflict in Abkhazia: National Projects and Political Circumstances*, http://www.abkhazia-georgia.parliament.ge/Publications/Georgian/ghia_nodia_1.htm

(People's Forum of Abkhazia, PFA) "Aydgylara," ("Unity" in translation), which was joined by writers, editors, the deputy rector of the Abkhazian State University, the Choreographer of State choir of Abkhazia, the director of the Union of Abkhaz writers, and the director of the state museum. The Forum was led by the writer A. Gogua, uniting eleven important people.[86]

The program "Aydgylara" was drafted by the Abkhaz Obcom, which authorized a meeting of the Constituent Assembly on 13 December, 1988. At the Assembly, there were discussions over the status of Abkhazia, the regulation of migration, language development and other issues. Like the Ossetians, the Abkhaz were greatly concerned by the language law introduced by the Georgians, as the Abkhaz were afraid for their cultural survival. Accordingly, the Abkhazians started publishing the newspaper "Aydgylara" in 1989, in both the Abkhazian and the Russian languages.[87]

Aydgylara came out in favor of the Soviet Union and Communist party. It opposed the Georgian liberation movement by defending the ideas of the October Revolution and Leninism. Under the authority of Aydgylara, members of the popular front collected information about Georgian families and their activities and Georgian organizations in Abkhazia; they also collected money and built up armaments and a future strategy. In short, with the establishment of Aydgylara, the Abkhazians mobilization took an organized form.[88]

The Abkhazians also began the publication of another anti-Georgian newspaper called "Bzibi," which had a very small circulation, as Georgians living in Abkhazia could not access it. "Bzibi" published the extended version of the famous "Abkhaz letter,"

[86] G. P. Lezhava, *Mejdu Gruziei i Rasiiei* (Between Georgia and Russia) (Moscow 1997), 230-334
[87] Vakhtang Kholbaia, *Labyrinth of Abkhazia*, (Tbilisi: Parliament of Georgia, 1999). http://www.abkhazia-georgia.parliament.ge/Publications/Georgian/labyrinth_of_abkhazia.htm
[88] Ibid.

which ended with the following words: "The struggle imposed by Georgian nationalists brought inter-ethnic relations to the absurd and made impossible the existence of Abkhaz ASSR within Georgian SRR. The present situation can not ensure equality between Abkhaz and Georgian nationals".[89]

On 18 March, 1989, on the initiative of the PFA, 30,000 people rallied in the village of Lykhny in the Gudauta district of Abkhazia. The PFA sought to restore the 1921-31 status of Abkhazia as a Soviet Socialist Republic -- a status equal to Georgia's. On March 25 of the same year, a counter-rally was held in Sukhumi attended by 12,000 Georgians living in Abkhazia.[90] Overall, the Abkhazian popular front managed to rally about one-quarter of the entire Abkhaz population, including thousands of non-Abkhaz.[91]

If we draw parallels between the formation of core political groups in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, we can see that the Ademon Nykhas preceded Aydgylara by several months. In addition, both groups had the similar strategies of communicating with the center and were concerned with the same kind of issue, like the language law and a cultural survival.

4.4. Legalization

During the late 1980s, ethnic tensions peaked, culminating in violent demonstrations. The Abkhaz elites and politicians regularly wrote letters to Moscow to protest the subordinate status of Abkhazia. For instance, Abkhaz Communist officials addressed an open letter to the Twenty-ninth Conference of the Communist Party of the SU, detailing Abkhaz grievances against Georgia and demanding the right to secede and

[89] Ibid.
[90] Toft, *The Geography of Ethnic Violence,* 95
[91] Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds,* 103

join Russia.[92] The letter was signed by 60 people.[93] These letters were widely blamed for precipitating interethnic violence. The Georgian government found it necessary to protect the rights of Abkhaz Georgians against increasing chauvinism of the Abkhaz. The tensions peaked in 1989, when the Georgian Supreme Soviet decided to turn the Georgian section of the Abkhaz University into a branch of the Tbilisi State University. [94] The Georgian sources claimed that they needed to obtain control over it and that Aydgylara was behind the growing tension around the university issue. The Abkhaz protested severely and the confrontation led to the first violent clashes among students in Sukhumi, with eleven Georgians and five Abkhazians killed.

At the beginning of 1990s, the conflict shifted again to the political arena between the Abkhaz and the Georgian authorities, which engaged in a "war of laws". On 28 October, 1990, general parliamentary elections were held in Georgia. Six nationalist blocs ran in the elections against the Communists; the Abkhaz and Ossetian party candidates were prohibited from participating in the elections. As mentioned before, Gamsakhurdia's Round Table won the elections, and Gamsakhurdia himself was elected chairman of the Supreme Soviet. [95] In 1990, the Abkhaz parliament adopted an amendment to the constitution, establishing largely disproportionate ethnic quotas and reserved seats in the local Abkhazian Assembly; 28 seats were reserved for Abkhaz deputies, 26 for Georgians and 11 for other minorities.[96] Georgia responded by adopting the election law prohibiting regionally-based parties from participation in the pending parliamentary elections, which targeted the Abkhaz Popular Front and Ademon Nykhas.

[92] Toft, *The Geography of Ethnic Violence* , 94
[93] Lezhava, *Mejdu Gruziei i Rasiiei*, 235
[94] Tsikhelashvili, *The Case Studies of Abkhazia and South Ossetia*, 9
[95] Toft, *The Geography of Ethnic Violence*, 96
[96] On power-sharing see Bruno Coppieters, *Central Asian and Caucasus Prospects: Federalism and Conflict in the Caucasus* (London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2001), 20-29

In response, the Abkhaz Supreme Soviet, disregarding the boycott of the Georgian deputies whose participation would be necessary for the required minimum of 2/3 of votes to pass the law, declared the sovereignty of Abkhazia on 25 August, 1990.[97] The declaration was annulled by Georgians on the next day.[98] On the 4th of December, the resumed 10th session of the Supreme Soviet of the Abkhazian ASSR elected Vladislav Ardzinba, (a historian by profession) as the elected chairman of the Supreme Soviet.[99]

To summarize the legalization stage of mobilization, the diffusion of ideas between three parties: the central government, South Ossetia and Abkhazia is strongly evident. The adoption of mutually exclusive laws on state language happened in close connection with each other: The Georgians adopted the law on the Georgia language in August 1989; the South Ossetians did the same in September 1989. The following month, in October 1989, the Abkhazians adopted the same kind of law on the Abkhazian language. This chronology is a strong indication that the ideas have diffused from one group onto another.

4.5. Militarization of the Abkhazian Forces

As in the case of the South Ossetians, militarization played a great role in the further mobilization of the Abkhazians, as it would be risky to rally without a hope of self-defence or external assistance. In the Abkhazian case, there were people of various nationalities fighting the Georgians because of various reasons. One of the main players were the 'boeviks' from the North Caucasus. Most of the North Caucasian fighters were volunteers who felt obliged to help the Abkhazians with whom they felt strong kinship.

[97] Tsikhelashvili, *The Case Studies of Abkhazia and South Ossetia*, 9
[98] See Diasamidze for further details
[99] Svetlana Chervonnaya, *Conflict in the Caucasus: Georgia, Abkhazia and the Russian Shadow* (Somerset: Gothic Image Publication 1994), 154

Their support came from the Confederation of the Peoples of the Caucasus (CPC), which was set up on 11 November 1991 by representatives of 16 Caucasian peoples gathered in Sukhumi. Its initial affiliation to Abkhazia was shown both by the admission of the Abkhazians into CPC and by the decision that the Abkhazians' capital Sukhumi would be the new center of the Confederation.[100]

The Abkhaz leader, Vladislav Ardzinba, mobilized his forces from the Confederation of Caucasus People, with Chechen fighters playing a major role in subsequent operations. The Abkhaz also benefited from Russian military support, channeled through Russian bases in Abkhazia at Gudauta and Bombora.[101] Informally, support from local Russian units and volunteers and supplies from Russia included an important contingent led by the Chechen leader Shamil Basayev, who later fought against the Russians. Basayev's help was crucial in leading Abkhaz forces to a total victory after months of bitter fighting.[102] Officially though, there is no factual evidence as to how many armaments were transferred or who authorized it.[103]

The Russian role had both a stabilizing and a destabilizing effect. There is no clear evidence of Russian support to the Abkhazians in the first months of the conflict. However, if one considers the number of fighters on both sides, the Georgians defeat is hard to explain. According to Shubladze, even if the Georgian army was poorly disciplined and badly trained and equipped, 3.5 million Georgian people should have

[100] Sopiko Shubladze, *Responding to Conflict in Georgia: A Need for Prevention?* in "Preventing Violent Conflict: Issue from the Baltic and the Caucasus," ed. by Gianni Bonvicini, Ettore Greco, Bernanrd von Plate, Reinhardt Rummel, (Nomos Verlagsgeselleschaft, Baden-Baden, 1998), 172

[101] Edmund Herzig, *The New Caucasus: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia* (New York: The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1999), 77

[102] Shale Horowitz, "Explaining Post-Soviet Ethnic Conflicts: Using Regime Type to Discern the Impact and Relative Importance of Objective Antecedents," *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 29, No.4, (2001), 633-660

[103] Russia also equipped the Georgian forces. Local Russian forces and their commanders, as well as generals in Moscow, made ad hoc decisions based on personal preferences and local loyalties, with scant regard for official policy

been able to protect their territory against a minority comprising less than 100,000, which had a total troop strength was around 5,000, including the fighters from the North Caucasus. [104]

For Catherine Dale, it is impossible to explain the victory of only 97,000 Abkhaz over the Georgian army without intensive assistance from outside. But given the rocky landscape of Abkhazia, and Georgia's poorly disciplined armed forces, it may have been possible for the Abkhaz to have achieved some success by themselves. However, during the war, eyewitnesses noted Russian military participation; Russian SU-25s were observed taking off from and returning to Abkhaz-controlled territory, and in March 1993, a Russian SU-27 flown by a Russian major was shot down by the Georgians. Abkhaz officials now confirm that Russia provided officers and training in addition to weapons.[105]

The Abkhazians themselves were mainly armed with hunting weapons, which was common on all sides of the conflict. During the protests, there were some occasions when the Abkhazians 'attacked' the militia or police posts to get access to weapons, and in all cases, because of the widespread sympathy for the demonstrators, the Abkhaz militia failed to resist these 'attacks.' As early as December 1991, Ardzinba signed orders asserting Abkhazian control over Soviet military units stationed in Abkhazia. Russians during Soviet rule retained the control of the troops. These troops were later substituted with the ethnic Abkhazians, who voted to establish a National Guard.[106]

[104] Shubladze, *Responding to Conflict in Georgia*, 173-174
[105] Catherin Dale, *Abkhazia and South Ossetia: Dynamics of the Conflicts*, in "Conflicts in the Caucasus," edited by Pavel Baev and Ole Berthelsen, (Oslo (PRIO): International Peace Research Institute, 1996), 13-24
[106] Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds*, 103-105

During the war in Abkhazia, the Abkhazian side used no less than 1,000 railway car loads of arms and ammunition, mainly from Russian arsenals.[107] Another party that was fighting in the Abkhazia war was the Armenian side. Bruno Coppieters mentions the General Baghramian Battalion, which was better organized and had greater public support than the Armenians fighting on the Georgian side.[108]

The process of diffusion can be traced on militarization stage as well. Both in case of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, both conflicting sides were assisted by the third party, sharing the same source of militarization, which was mainly the Russian Federation or the paramilitary formation of different North Caucasus people. The participation of the North Caucasians in both wars on Georgian territory is seen as the Russian involvement, because of the uncontrolled border with Georgia from the Russian side.

4.6. Secession

On March 17th, 1991, the Abkhaz parliament took the decision to participate in a Georgian-boycotted referendum on preserving the Soviet Union, out of which 98.4% voted for 'yes,' [109] despite the Georgians' prohibition against participating in the referendum. After this, events in Georgia developed very fast: on March 31, in a republic-wide referendum, 91% of Georgians voted to secede from the Soviet Union; on April the 9th, the Georgian Supreme Soviet declared independence from the SU; on May

[107] Valery Tishkov, "Ethnic Conflicts in the Former USSR: The Use and Misuse of Typologies and Data," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 36, No.5. (Sep., 1999), 571-591
[108] Bruno Coppieters, *Central Asian and Caucasus Prospects: Federalism and Conflict in the Caucasus* (London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2001), 20-29
[109] Tsikhelashvili, *The Case Studies of Abkhazia and South Ossetia*, 10

26, Gamsakhurdia won the presidential election; during the elections due to continued unrest, polling stations remained closed in sections of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.[110]

The new government of Georgia after the ouster of Gamsakhurdia restored the 1921 constitution. In an expected counter-move, the Abkhaz representatives also reinstated the 1925 constitution, which meant being within Georgia under the Treaty of Union, and joined the North Caucasus Confederation.[111] On July 23rd of 1992, the Abkhaz Supreme Soviet declared full sovereignty. With a simple majority of votes (36 out of 65) the Supreme Soviet of Abkhazia adopted a Resolution on the abrogation of the Constitution of the Abkhazian ASSR of 1978 and the restoration of the 1925 constitution. It underlined the tendency towards secession from Georgia and the preservation of the Soviet Socialist system in Abkhazia.[112] The Abkhazian Parliament declared that it would communicate with Georgia on the basis of negotiations between two sovereign states and decided on its own state symbols, a flag and a coat of arms and proclaimed itself as the Republic of Abkhazia.[113]

Diffusion of secessionist ideas can be traced when drawing parallels chronologically between the secessionist claims made by the parties. The Abkhazians first declared independence from Georgian in March 1989 in Lykhny; the Ossetians did the same on 20 September 1990; on 9 April, 1991 the Georgian Parliament passed a declaration on the independence of Georgian from the Soviet Union; then again there was another declaration of independence from the Abkhaz followed by the war on 23 July 1992. Again, the process of the secessionist claims has a cyclical and iterative character.

[110] *Chronology for Abkhazians in Georgia*, http://www.cidcm.umd.edu
[111] Tsikhelashvili, *The Case Studies of Abkhazia and South Ossetia*, 10
[112] Chervonnaya, *Conflict in the Caucasus*, 157
[113] Arbatov and others, *Managing Conflict*, 378

4.7. War

Unlike South Ossetia, the war in Abkhazia was larger in scale. The armed conflict in Abkhazia started on 14 August, 1992 and lasted for more than fifteen months.[114] The reason for the start of the war was that the Georgian forces advanced to Abkhazia in search of the minister of the Georgian government, who had been kidnapped by Zviadists (the supporters of Zviad Gamsakhurdia). According to Cornell, Kitovani acted without Shevardnadze's approval and made the Abkhazians retreat to the northwest of Abkhazia from Sukhumi.[115] The Abkhazians in response launched an offensive backed by the volunteer North Caucasians, like the Chechens, Cossacks acting on behalf of the Commonwealth of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus. Therefore, the Abkhaz troops, which where armed with T-72 tanks and other arsenal, made the Georgians believe that the Russians were involved in the conflict.[116]

According to Human Rights Watch, the evolution of the war in Abkhazia happened with the constant violation of human rights on both sides. In the first weeks of war, many Abkhaz left Sukhumi, and only civilians, mostly Georgians, remained in the city during the heavy bombings. There were several ceasefire agreements between the Georgian and Abkhazian, but all of them were broken. On 27 July, 1993, both sides agreed to a ceasefire when the United Nations enforced. The UN deployed around fifty military observers in the conflict zone. However, the fight continued between the central government under Eduard Shevardnadze and Gamsakhurdia's supporters, which had been inactive during the previous fighting. On 16 September, the Abkhazians broke the ceasefire because of their mistrust of the Georgians and opened a full frontal attack. On

[114] *Chronology for Abkhazians in Georgia*, http://www.cidcm.umd.edu
[115] Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers*, 171
[116] Ibid.

27 September 1993, after eleven days of fighting Sukhumi was in the hands of the Abkhaz.[117]

The war was devastating, especially for the Georgians. It led to around 10.000 deaths, and more than 200,000 people were internally displaced to other regions of Georgia.[118] Within two weeks of the fall of Sukhumi, Shevardnadze -- facing huge economic problems and a refugee crisis -- attended a meeting with Yeltsin, along with the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan. He agreed to join the CIS in order to establish peacekeeping force to stabilize the situation in Georgia. By that time, it was evident that neither the UN nor the OSCE would agree to deploy their own peacekeeping missions, Thus, Shevardnadze agreed to introduce Russian peacekeepers in the conflict region.[119]

[117] Human Rights Watch Arms Project, "Georgia/Abkhazia: Violations of the Laws of War and Russia's Role in the Conflict" *Helsinki: Human Rights Watch*, Vol. 7, No. 7, (March 1995) http://www.hrw.org/reports/pdfs/g/georgia/georgia953.pdf
[118] Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers*, 174
[119] Arbatov and others, *Managing Conflict*, 388-389

CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis was to determine whether ethnic mobilization can diffuse from one ethnic minority group to another within a single state and if yes, how it happens. I also examined how ethnic mobilization takes place in minority regions and whether it is different from the union republics. In the theoretical framework I introduced Beissinger's models of ethnic mobilization. Beissinger explains diffusion of ideas of ethnic mobilization between states but does not address diffusion *within* states. He looks at the diffusion of independence movements between union republics in the Soviet Union. However, his diffusion model cannot adequately explain mobilization in minority regions, because the regions he is looking at are all quasi-states, for which mobilization for independence is a far more straightforward and linear process. That is why I modified Beissinger's model and I devised my own model of ethnic mobilization in minority regions.

I presented a staged model of minority region mobilization that takes into account the diffusion element that Beissinger speaks of. However, both the diffusion and the process of mobilization in my model are less linear than in Beissinger's model, because the regions have fewer means of achieving independence. Therefore, their movements are more iterative, involving interplay with the central government and other minority regions. In order to build this model, I exploited the basic framework of Hroch's model of mobilization. However, my model is made up of more stages, which represent the more complicated, less linear process of mobilization for independence among minority regions. After giving the general historical background of political situation in Georgia and the regions during the collapse of the Soviet Union, I tested the cases of South Ossetia and Abkhazia according to the seven stages comprising my model: Window of

Opportunity → Diffusion of Ideas → Development of Core Political Groups → Legalization → Militarization → Succession → War, and analyzed the mobilization through these stages. After testing the cases, the following conclusions can be drawn.

In the first stage of mobilization, the window of opportunity, both minorities had the same opportunity for mobilization. This opportunity was the weakness of the Georgian government, which was preoccupied with nationalist mobilization against the Soviet rule. In the background of the mobilization, South Ossetia and Abkhazia had similar grievances, which were economic disadvantages for the Ossetians and demographic issues for the Abkhaz. In addition, both regions also had a fear of cultural and linguistic extinction because of growing Georgian nationalism, which took an anti-minority character.

A parallel can also be drawn in the diffusion of ideas in both cases in the second stage of mobilization. The tide of nationalism during the glastnost period affected the autonomies within Georgia, which were looking at the examples of the union republics and at other minorities mobilizing in the former Soviet republics. The Ossetians and the Abkhaz saw themselves as distinct from the Georgians, based on previous experience: the Abkhazis had enjoyed a short experience as an independent republic, and the Ossetians enjoyed the fragile border to their kin – North Ossetians – during the Soviet regime. Therefore, both regions had support of a vital importance by the third party – the Russian Federation, which "used" the separatist regions to counter the movements of the breakaway Republic of Georgia. These created in minorities the ideology of "otherness," deserving the same status as what the Georgians fought for. In addition, the South Ossetians and the Abkhaz had formed the same idea of being worthy of statehood as

other soviet republics, namely, Georgia, and some of there moves and tactics were same as for the Georgians.

The next phase is the mobilization of core political groups. The formation of the popular fronts -- Ademon Nykhas in South Ossetia and Aydgylara in Abkhazia – showed how the ideas of ethnic mobilization can diffuse within a state. If we look at the diffusion of these ideas, the first one was the A.N., created in early 1988, and then Aydgylara in November 1988. Evidence for a connection between the two is the open letter that Alan Chochiev addressed to the Abkhaz movement on behalf of Ademon Nykhas in the spring of 1989. This letter was reprinted on May 5, 1989 in *Literaturuli Sakartvelo.*[120] In this letter, as noted above, the Ossetians expressed their support to the Abkhazis in their hope that the Abkhaz success would be a precedent for other regions. This letter shows the interconnection between the two movements -- that they were watching each other and taking or borrowing tactics and ideas.

Another example of diffusion is during the legalization stage, concerning the law on State Language programs. The adoption of mutually exclusive state programs for the development of the state language can be traced chronologically. The Georgians adopted the law on the Georgia language in August 1989; the South Ossetians did the same in September 1989. The following month, in October 1989, the Abkhazians adopted the same kind of law on the Abkhazian language. This chronology shows that there was a diffusion of ideas in the legalization period.

The process of diffusion can be traced through the next three stages of mobilization. The conflicting parties shared the same source for the militarization of their forces. In both cases, they were assisted by the Russian Federation and the

[120] Cornell, *Autonomy and Conflict*, 191-193

paramilitary formations from the Northern Caucasus, which had ties with Russia. Another similarity is in the secessionist declarations. The Abkhazians first declared independence from Georgian in March 1989 in Lykhny; Georgians' demonstration on 9 April, 1989 had secessionist statements against the Soviet Union; the Ossetians made a secessionist claim from Georgian on 20 September 1990; on 9 April, 1991 the Georgian Parliament passed a declaration on the independence of Georgian from the Soviet Union; then again there was another declaration of independence from the Abkhaz, followed by war on 23 July 1992. Both regions at the first stage expressed their willingness to remain a part of the state, which meant part of the Soviet Union, and later, when the collapse of the Soviet Union appeared inevitable, they declared their sovereignty. Finally, both autonomous regions experienced bloody wars, which were temporarily "resolved" in a similar way, with the same outcome. At present, they constitute de facto states and are so-called "frozen conflicts" in Georgia.

To conclude, the Autonomous Oblast of South Ossetia and the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia underwent seven stages of ethnic mobilization in a similar way, with the diffusion of ideas in each stage, copying each others' ideas of mobilization of core political groups, making the same legal statements and secessionist declarations. The fact that the core political groups in South Ossetia and Abkhazia are similar, as are the strategies of dealing with the center and responses to the actions of the center, is a strong indication that the movements have influenced each other. It the end, I conclude that the ethnic mobilization in minority regions goes through the complicated stages of mobilization with the diffusion elements of a cyclical character.

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