

**POWER POLITICS AND RECOGNITION
IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS:
THE CASE OF ABKHAZIA**

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This study titled **‘POWER POLITICS AND RECOGNITION IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS: THE CASE OF ABKHAZIA’** prepared by Salimat AKHBA is found to be successful after the defense exam conducted in accordance with the related article of the Graduate Education and Training Regulation of Eskişehir Osmangazi University Institute of Social Sciences. The thesis has accordingly been accepted by the under listed Jury members and the Department of International Relations as Thesis.

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Salimat AKHBA

ABSTRACT

POWER POLITICS AND RECOGNITION IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS: THE CASE OF ABKHAZIA

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This thesis aims to analyze the recognition of new states and the role of international law and geopolitical considerations in the process. This study considers Abkhazia, a *de facto* state recognized by only Russia and six other UN members and is a region of a frozen conflict as understood by the rest of the international community. Through discussion, the place of state interests in the recognition process will be evaluated. This study will consider why some members of the international community recognize Abkhazia, whereas others persist in their non-recognition policies. The decisions of great powers are significant as they affect the decisions of other states to recognize Abkhazia or not. Thus, the recognition of Abkhazia has been thoroughly evaluated through the goals and policies of the USA, the EU, and Russia. The decision to recognize Abkhazia, according to this study, is a part of the geopolitical rivalry between the West and Russia, rather than just a result of different interpretations of international law.

This work does not aim to question the statehood of Abkhazia or the basis of its struggle for recognition. However, it is briefly discussed to understand Abkhazia's position in regional and global politics. One goal of this work is to underline the uncertainty of some principles of international law. The Great Powers use the vagueness of international law to pursue their geopolitical goals. Subsequently, today, Abkhazia is, on the verge of *de facto* and *de jure* statehood, due to its partially recognized status.

First, this work discusses the theory of recognition. In the second chapter, the historical background of the will of Abkhazians to find their own state is explained. The last chapter discusses the relationship between Great Power politics and the current political situation of Abkhazia, a disputed territory that tries to convince the international community about its statehood.

Key words: Recognition, Power Politics, International Law, Abkhazia, Russia, EU, USA.

ÖZET

ULUSLARARASI İLİŞKİLERDE GÜÇ MÜCADELESİ VE TANI(N)MA:

ABHAZYA ÖRNEĞİ

AKHBA, Salimat

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Danışman: Dr. Öğr. Üyesi İbrahim KÖREMEZLİ

Bu tez yeni devletlerin tanınma/tanınmama sürecini ve bu süreçte uluslararası hukuk ve jeopolitik değerlendirmelerin rolünü analiz etmektedir. Rusya ve diğer altı BM üyesi için yeni bir devlet fakat uluslararası toplumun kalanı için donmuş bir bölgesel problem olan Abhazya bu çalışmanın konusunu oluşturmaktadır. Uluslararası toplumun bazı üyeleri tanırken diğerlerinin tanımaması sorusu çerçevesinde tanıma ile devlet çıkarları arasındaki ilişki değerlendirilecektir. Büyük güçlerin karar ve politikaları diğer devletleri de etkilediği için önemlidir. Bu yüzden ABD, AB ve Rusya'nın hedef ve siyasetleri derinlemesine ele alınmaktadır. Abhazya özelinde tanıma ya da tanımama kararı, bu çalışmaya göre uluslararası hukukun farklı yorumlanmasından ziyade Batı ve Rusya arasındaki jeopolitik rekabetin bir sonucudur.

Bu çalışma Abhazya'nın devlet olup olmasını ya da kısaca değinilse de tanınma mücadelesini sorgulamayı amaçlamamaktadır. Bu çalışmanın hedeflerinden biri uluslararası hukukun muğlaklığının altını çizmektir. Büyük güçler bu muğlaklığı kendi jeopolitik çıkarları doğrultusunda kullanmaktadır.

Bu çalışma öncelikle tanıma teorisini ele almaktadır. İkinci bölüm Abhazların kendi devletlerini inşa etme isteklerinin tarihçesine değinmektedir. Son bölüm ise büyük güçlerin dış politikası ile uluslararası toplumu devlet olduğu hususunda ikna etmeye çalışan Abhazya'nın şimdiki siyasi durumu arasındaki ilişkiyi tartışacaktır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Tanıma, Güç Siyaseti, Uluslararası Hukuk, Abhazya, Rusya, AB, ABD.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS:

AGTRK	:Abkhazian State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company
ANS	:Abkhazian People's Council
ASSR	:Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic
CASC	:Caucasus-Abkhaz Solidarity Committee
CCI	:Chamber of Commerce and Industry
CEE	:Central and Eastern Europe
CIS	:Commonwealth of Independent States
CONIFA	:Confederation of Independent Football Associations World Cup
CPSU (B.)	:The Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks)
CSCE	:Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe
ENP	:European Neighbourhood Policy
EU	:European Union
EUSR	:The European Union Special Representatives
G8	:Great 8
GSSR	:Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic
NATO	:North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OSCE	:Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
RNP	:Russian Neighbourhood Policy

SSR	:Soviet Socialist Republic
UN	:United Nations
UNESCO	:United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNOMIG	:The United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia
UNPO	:Unrepresented Nations and Peoples' Organisation
USA	:United States of America
USSR	:Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WAC	:World Abaza Congress
WTO	:World Trade Organization
WWI	:World War I

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“The only homeland is life”, says an Abkhazian aphorism. It shows how important homeland and state are in the minds of Abkhazians from time immemorial that they call in Abkhazian - Apsny - a country of the soul. The struggle for self-determination of Abkhazians historically was based on the context of the Great Powers’ competition that affected their fate. This study has attempted to give a different perspective on the Abkhazian issue that would be useful to understand the aspirations of the Abkhaz people.

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INTRODUCTION

By the second half of the 20th century, the international system had witnessed some recognition problems which stem from secessionist movements. Global geopolitics has dramatically changed with the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union (USSR). The South Caucasus, a region where the Great Powers have been competing from time immemorial, was not immune from political upheaval. Ethnic conflicts here led to the formation of new political entities, which still wait to join the international community as independent states. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, three disputed territories in the South Caucasus, i.e., Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabakh, emerged. Their future depended mainly on the position of the Great Powers, and the geopolitical considerations of different neighboring parties.

The emergence of unrecognized (or partially recognized states) in the second half of the 20th century was linked to the decolonization process when the world saw an unprecedented number of new states. Of course, in the process of recognizing each individual political entity, legal justification plays an important role. Thus, the rhetoric from the political plane smoothly passed into the legal plane. As Reus-Smith argues, “[t]he discourse of politics is now replete with the language of law and legitimacy as much as *realpolitik*, lawyers are as central to military campaigns as strategists, legal right is as much a power resource as guns and money, and juridical sovereignty, grounded in the legal norms of international society, is becoming a key determinant of state power.” (Reus-Smith, 2009:2). The emergence of new states paralleled the development of international law. Thus, two of its basic principles which govern the process of recognition, self-determination and territorial integrity were developed. The main feature of the international law is the absence of a coercive mechanism. Because of the lack of priority of one principle over another, the international law has considerable flexibility which, has politicized the recognition process. The voluntary nature of the recognition has led to the emergence of partially recognized or totally unrecognized states. By unrecognized certain entities, the parent-state and the Great Powers aim to prevent the participation of the wannabe states in the international community.

The case of Abkhazia is one clear example of how great powers employ recognition through their foreign policy goals. Since 1993, international recognition has been the primary goal of Abkhazian

foreign policy. Today it is recognized by only seven UN members. One of them is Russia, a particularly influential actor in the international system.

There are no adequate mechanisms in the international system that consider the rights of national minorities. Thus, the legitimacy of recognition is determined by the eyes of the beholder. Since international law cannot clearly determine which political entities will be accepted, they maintain their actual existence as part of the regional policies of the Great Powers. Using the political support of global actors, they are trying to take their own position to survive.

For that reason, this thesis asks such questions as: a) how did international law and recognition process develop over last decades; b) what is the place of state interest in the recognition process; c) what are the policy and arguments of a wannabe recognized state (Abkhazia). Thus, it is important to understand the motives of the Great Powers, whose attitude towards *de facto* entities are not always consistent. To this end, this thesis analyzes the actions and interests of Russia and the Western powers which affected the current political situation of Abkhazia. The position of Russia as a neighbor and global player is revealed, and the changes in its attitude to the Abkhazian issue are traced. Its activity in the Georgian-Abkhazian negotiation process is shown. Along with Russia, the West also pursued certain goals in the Caucasus but showing little interest in what is happening in Abkhazia. Although the issue of recognition is a matter of Great Powers politics, Abkhazia also pursued its own foreign policy to reiterate its position.

This work explains the reasons for Abkhazia's refusal to be a part of Georgia and its effort to be an equal member of the international society as an independent state. To this end, Georgian-Abkhazian relations were studied in detail up to the August War in 2008. Sources in Russian, Abkhazian, Turkish, and particularly English are employed to write this thesis. The literature on *de facto* states, the Abkhazian issue, and geopolitics of the Caucasus in the context of the August War were exhausted.

The works of Pegg, Kolstø, Caspersen, O'Loughlin, and Kolossov, Bartmann, Geldenhuys are important to understand the phenomenon of *de facto* state. These works aim to reveal the origins of *de facto* formations, the state-building efforts, and the complexity of their political situation. Some argue that the lack of international recognition does not inhibit state-building, but, on the contrary, only spurs

it. For example, Caspersen (2012: 105) notes that the struggle for recognition is “a powerful incentive for building an effective entity; an entity which can defend itself and which is deemed internationally acceptable.” The democratization processes among de facto states are also noted as tools to legitimize their position and thereby facilitate the recognition process (Caspersen, 2009: 48; Kopeček et al., 2016; Broers, 2013: 64).

Earlier works on de facto states concentrate on their nature and overlook the context of the Great Powers politics. This situation can be explained through the features of each de facto state that began to manifest over time and under the influence of geopolitical changes. However, works written later, particularly after 2008, are more case focused. More and more works are devoted to Kosovo, South Ossetia, and Abkhazia (Harzl, 2010; Slomanson, 2010; Ryngaert & Sobrie, 2011; Asatiani, 2013; Nunner, 2016). These three cases are often considered together since all three are united by the status of their partial recognition either by the Western world or Russia. Some authors find the arguments of Abkhazia and South Ossetia for independence to be quite legitimate (Markedonov, Asatiani). Some authors even find them more compelling than those presented by Kosovo (Harzl). According to Harzl, “[e]ven if the right to remedial secession is not justified, both Abkhazia and Kosovo can claim that their de facto statelets are existing realities. In the case of Abkhazia this is even more clear ...” (Harzl, 2010: 217). Others defend the uniqueness of Kosovo (Ryngaert & Sobrie 2011; Sterio, 2013).

In connection with the practice of recognition, more and more works began to be devoted to international law in the context of power politics. Reus-Smith (2009) analyzes the complex relationship of politics and law in modern international relations and notes the discrepancy with established ideas about them. He notes the importance of international law in international relations and considers this a source of real power in planning any strategic actions (Reus-Smith, 2009:2). The importance of international law in the hands of superpowers in the context of the recognition of de facto states is also noted in the works of Riegl & Doboš. They underline that “the fate of the secessionist entities is decided by the role of the (super)power(s) in the region and its/their international acceptance and recognition is based both on the role of the patron state and the normative criteria.” (Riegl & Doboš, 2017: 89). The significant role of geopolitics in interpreting and employing international law and, in particular, the recognition process is discussed in the works of many political scientists (Toal, 2017; Mouritzen & Wivel, 2012; Cornell & Starr, 2015; Sterio, 2013). Sterio argues that the right to self-determination does

not play a special role and the recognition process for superpowers is only an instrument for achieving its strategic goals, in connection with which “[t]he great powers’ rule may play a determinative role in the field of recognition, and may ultimately prevent secessionist movements from attaining statehood” (Sterio, 2013:155). Ó Beacháin et al. (2016: 451) states that “because ‘recognition remains the highest prize’ in an international system populated by ‘sovereign states and . . . little else’, base states must be vigilant in obstructing the efforts of the breakaway republics to enhance their status.” Recognition that is contrary to the interests of one or more superpowers involves the use of various techniques to prevent or inhibit the further recognition of a partially recognized state. These techniques are covered in sufficient detail in the works of Ker-Lindsay. He notes Russia, the USA, Great Britain, France, and China as the main world states that influence the recognition process (Ker-Lindsay, 2012: 109).

The literature in the Russian and Abkhazian languages is mainly devoted to the history and statehood of Abkhazia and the difficulties of Abkhazian-Georgian relations. Among the works in Russian, the works of Markedonov (2010, 2012, 2015), Petrova & Kvacheva (2017), Samutina & Yumatov (2015) are worth noting. In his works, Markedonov, analyzes the origins of the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict in detail. He notes that the current status of Abkhazia as a partially recognized state is a direct consequence of Georgian policy (Markedonov, 2012; 50). Abkhazian scholars hold the same opinion (Shanava, 2010; Akaba & Khintba, 2011). Akaba & Khintba noted that “[t]he Abkhaz see Georgian policy on Abkhazia as an attempt to put an end to the very existence of the Abkhaz nation.” (Akaba&Khintba, 2011: 8). The background of the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict is covered thoroughly in the works of Avidzba (2012), Sharia (1993), and Lakoba (2001). Lakoba’s work also covers the transformation of the Georgian-Abkhazian negotiation process, which is further developed in Akaba & Khintba (2011). This work gives a clear chronology of the negotiation process.

At the same time, in the works of Abkhazian scholars, one finds a pronounced legal shift, in contrast to Russian works. Among them, special attention should be paid to the works of Chirikba (2009) and Shamba & Neproshin. These works provide a detailed analysis of the history of Abkhazian statehood and the principles of international law which are legitimately applied regarding the recognition of Abkhazia. Both sets of scholars emphasize the antiquity of Abkhazian statehood. In this context, Abkhazia coexisted with Georgia within the framework of the Soviet state only briefly. Moreover, from a legal point of view, this fragment of history, has no legal force because Abkhazia exercised the right

to self-determination with the collapse of the Soviet Union. In support of this opinion, Chirikba notes that “according to the Soviet law of 1990, [On the Procedure of the Settlement of Questions Connected with the Withdrawal of a Union Republic from the USSR] Abkhazia had a legal right to secession from Georgia, although it did not get a chance to realize it because of the disbanding of the Soviet Union.” (Chirikba, 2009:2). The thesis of the antiquity of Abkhazian statehood and the right to self-determination is also supported in the works of British scholars Hewitt (1993, 2008, 2013, 2019) and Shenfield (2008). Hewitt also emphasizes the necessity of the Abkhaz people to live separately from the Georgians, noting that “[o]nly one just solution beckons — full independence for Abkhazia.” (Hewitt, 2008).

Based on the above-mentioned literature, this thesis is composed of three chapters with an introduction and a conclusion. In order to create the most objective picture, the first chapter starts to discuss the diversity of state formations striving for *de jure* independence in different periods of history and the terminology applied to them. The literature showed that these entities are not static and develop over time; this history explains the variety of approaches to classify both these entities and the disputes over the status of Abkhazia.

Then this thesis highlights the basic principles of international law, their contradictions, and their application as norms operating in the recognition process including the tendencies of recognition of recent years, the motives guiding them, their influence on the world map in general and the fate of peoples are particularly noted. The features of international law and associated problems caused by the law’s inconsistencies with the changed realities of modern international relations are shown. In this regard, the question arises in which direction it should be improved to minimize conflict situations and prevent possible controversial interpretations of international law in the future.

The second chapter aims to answer the question based on which grounds Abkhazia seeks for recognition, whether they are sufficient according to international law and what is the best solution for Georgian-Abkhazian conflict. This chapter gives the history of the case. The background and features of the Abkhazian question are analyzed in detail to understand all the nuances related to the issue. It ends with providing analysis on the transformation of the Georgian-Abkhazian negotiation process and a change in the positions of the Great Powers. This chapter also discusses the question of whether the UN missions are practically capable of solving the issues where the principles of territorial integrity and self-

determination come to a contradiction. The chapter concludes chronologically on the eve of the August War.

The third chapter reveals the motives of the Great Powers regarding the South Caucasus region in general, and the recognition of Abkhazia in particular, which is most clearly seen in the context of the August War and the subsequent recognition of Abkhazia. This chapter also aims to reveal the meaning of Abkhazia's partial recognition in regional and international politics. The chapter concludes with coverage of the non-recognition policy applied by Georgia and the West to Abkhazia. And Abkhazia's efforts to overcome the international isolation through successful nation-building and the establishment of diplomatic relations with states that recognize it. This thesis concludes that Abkhazia's lack of full recognition is a direct result of Power Politics struggle.

CHAPTER 1

RECOGNITION AS A THEORY AND PRACTICE

By the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, the problem of recognition began to attract the attention of scholars. However, there is still the problem of the recognition procedure, since there is no principle of prioritizing one principle of international law (the people's right to self-determination) over another (principle of territorial integrity). This background creates a space for maneuvers, thanks to which, today, there are a considerable number of political entities seeking recognition. Traditionally, the Great Powers are inclined to not recognize the new entities that do not meet their interests directly. Thus, political scientists continue to argue about what place these structures occupy in the world community, by what terms to define them, and what legal mechanisms the recognition process has.

1.1. A CONCEPTUAL DISCUSSION ON *DE FACTO* STATES

The literature on *de facto* states is quite extensive. There is a variety of terms that have superseded one another over time. The literature uses terms such as “quasi-states” (Kolstø, 2006; Jackson, 1990), “unrecognized states” (Caspersen, 2011, 2012), “contested states” (Geldenhuis, 2009), “states-within-states” (Kingston and Spears, 2004), “pseudo-states” (O'Loughlin and Kolossov, 1999), “de facto states” (Pegg, 1998; Bartmann, 2004; Caspersen, 2012), “break-away territories” (Cooley and Lincoln, 2009), “partially recognized states” (Markedonov, 2010), “separatist states” (Lynch, 2004). With rare exceptions, the authors propose a term in which the second part consists of the word “state”. The first part of the expression usually indicates the perspective, in the context of which the case is analyzed. In most cases, these terms are interchangeable. The authors refer to the same things. However, the angles and the purposes of these studies sometimes vary. The meanings and usages of these terms should be discussed to understand which particular term responds better to the questions which this work asks.

The concept “quasi-state”, which was first proposed by Jackson (1990), had been widely used in the 1990s. He applied the concept to sub-Saharan entities in the post-colonial period. In his opinion, this

label is a completely new type of statehood, which has “legal sovereignty outward”, but does not have “empiric sovereignty inward”. According to Jackson, this kind of statehood is supported by more external forces than internal capabilities. He used this term as a peculiar approach to sovereignty. He believes that there are certain territories, which exist only because of financial support. They are also legitimate under international law. This concept more or less corresponds to the trends of the time associated with decolonization. The end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union lead to the creation of a qualitatively new type of state entity.

Another popular term is “pseudo-state”. One of the first to use this term is Kolossov and O'Loughlin (1999: 2), who argue that such states are involved in bloody wars as a result of the failure of the political system. Their very existence is “one of the basic and long-term features of the contemporary world geopolitical order” (Kolossov, 2001:87). These are areas in which “scarcity, crime, overpopulation, tribalism and disease are rapidly destroying the social fabric of our planet”. States in which arms trafficking and money laundering occur. Kolossov and O'Loughlin (1999: 155) also distinguish four kinds of pseudo-states based on origin and the way they can operate. Those are: “a) self-identification of an area with a specific nationality; b) the splintering of an empire or large multi-national state; c) areas of conflict with no permanent control as a result of a civil war and/or a foreign military intervention; and d) effective pirate states based on criminal-terrorist activities” (Kolossov & O'Loughlin, 1999: 155-156). Pseudo states are “islands of ‘transitional’ or ‘incomplete’ statehood” (Kolossov & O'Loughlin, 1999: 151). Their main goal is international recognition, which is expressed through “membership in the UN, political sovereignty and economic autonomy; a distinctive national culture that is both primary and primordial; political development and separation over time” (Kolossov & O'Loughlin, 1999:156).

As for the applicability of this term to Abkhazia, Ó Beacháin (2016), Kopeček et al. (2016), and Caspersen (2009) believe that the democratization process can successfully be carried out even in the conditions of international isolation and lack of recognition. So, the scholars emphasize the high level of state apparatus and its competitive political institutions guarantee the inhabitants of Abkhazia a completely enough level of liberty.

In the literature, one of the first complete works devoted to these formations was Scott Pegg (1998). He employed the term *de facto* state to analyze such states as Eritrea (before it won its independence from Ethiopia), Somaliland, Northern Cyprus, Taiwan, and Tamil Eelam. The value of this work lies in an in-depth theoretical analysis of each case. According to Pegg, “*the de facto state is a secessionist entity that receives popular support and has achieved sufficient capacity to provide governmental services to a given population in a defined territorial area, over which it maintains effective control for an extended period of time.*” (Pegg, 1998: 26). Pegg proposes several characteristics typical for a *de facto* state. This entity is where, “an organized political leadership” that “receives popular support” shows “capacity to provide governmental services to a given population in a defined territorial area”, where it exercises “effective control” lasting “for an extended period of time”, and “views itself as capable of entering into relations with other states” thus looking for “international recognition as a sovereign state”. But despite all efforts, it is still “unable to achieve any degree of substantive recognition and therefore remains illegitimate in the eyes of international society”. Further, the author concludes that if we compare *de facto* states and sovereign states, the former may sometimes exceed the latter in their state potential (1998:47).

Charles King, in his work (2001), noted that the newly formed *de facto* states of the 1990s began their state-building only a decade earlier. King pays special attention to this process in the context of civil wars. He proposes the definition of a “state-like entity”. According to the author, this political association is in a certain territory with population and functioning government; however, unrecognized by the world community. As King (2001: 525) puts it, the entity is “without the imprimatur of international recognition”. The umbrella concept of “state-like entity” unites unrecognized states, *de facto* states, and even quasi-states. According to King, “in Eurasia the conceptual bar for statehood cannot be raised too high, for many of the qualities that define relatively well functioning states in central Europe do not exist farther east ...” (King, 2001:525).

The term “de facto” in connection with recognition was used by Barry Bartman (2004). He noted the existing contradictions in the international community in that some states are “persistently maintained in spite of conditions on the ground”, while the recognition of others is “stubbornly withheld even though the realities on the ground themselves expose the legal fictions which the international community

supports in defense of the principle of territorial integrity” (Bartmann, 2004: 12). Bartmann (2004: 13) also notes that the international community is “one of the egregious double standards” with sub-Saharan Africa a clear example of it as a case in which not fully functioning states still exist in the international system because of their legal recognition. The author differentiates the terms “legality” and “legitimacy” and argues that these terms are the main characteristics that determine the *de facto* state. Some political entities are considered illegal in the eyes of the world community, even if they are internally legitimate.

“States-within-states” – this concept is another idea that can be found in the literature (Kingston and Spears, 2004). Kingston and Spears chose this term because it is broader than the “de facto state” proposed by Pegg and allows for a wider range of political power to be considered. For this purpose, the cases of state erosion in Colombia and the fall of Lebanese Militia cantons were selected. According to the authors, not all cases can be defined as a *de facto* condition, since “most of the states-within-states... exhibit severe imbalances in their institutional development” (Kingston, 2004: 7). The main focus is on weak states, but not on entities whose ultimate goal is independence. According to Kingston, most of the analyzed entities lack the qualities of the state defined by Weber, which is a legal monopoly on the use of force in a certain territory.

Ian Spears (2004) does not entirely agree with this statement and believes that these entities are fully able to control their own territory. They have certain institutional powers to collect taxes and provide certain services to the population, but they still are, as Spears calls them, “political subunits”. In some cases, they may be more effective than even the states from which they are trying to secede. The basic idea is that despite their effectiveness, they do not enjoy recognition. Spears also explains five political objectives of a state-within-state: “protection against a hostile ‘foreign’ government”; way stations for getting political independence or power; “serve as showpieces used to persuade the outside world that the movement is capable of governing competently”; “vehicles for resource realization and the accumulation of personal wealth”; and “interim strategy in the management of civil conflict” (Spears, 2004: 27-29). Pegg (2004:36) notes that in many respects, their opinions coincide, but he argues that the main goal is independence. They exist and struggle only for the sake of independence, although they may accept other options, such as autonomy.

In 2006, Kolstø used the term “quasi-states” with a completely different meaning. The term quasi-state was used as a synonym for the *de facto* state by Kolstø. The approach of Kolstø is opposite to Jackson’s approach. It applies this term to entities that are not recognized by international law. He agrees with Jackson that they are “on the margins of the international system of states and challenge basic assumptions of this system” (2006:725). Kolstø (2006:725) believes that the Jackson type quasi-states can be applied to failed states, while quasi-state can only be used for unrecognized states. Kolstø gives a wider explanation of these formations and gives three criteria that they must meet: the state, the struggle for independence, and the temporal criterion. The first criterion means control over the majority of the claimed territory (Kolstø, 2006:725-726). Secondly, they are fighting, but have not yet gained independence. The last criterion defines the timeframe, which should be at least two years.

With it, there is another relatively new definition for quasi-states put forward by Stanislawski (2008) in the *International Studies Review*. It lists two categories of quasi-states: “as-if-states” and “almost-states”. According to him, (2008: 367-368), “as-if-states” are quasi-states that are internationally recognized, but in fact, they can hardly control themselves, external forces control them. As for the “almost-states”, then the situation is reversed. The international community does not recognize them, but they can pursue their own policies, control their own territory and population.

Geldenhuis suggests the term “contested state” to show the contradictory nature of the unrecognized states (Geldenhuis, 2009:26-27). He defines them as “*the small group of aspirant states that has been turned away by those on the inside find themselves condemned to a twilight existence at the margins of the international community*”. In his opinion, this state should function for at least three years (2009:4). In addition, the main feature of such states is the lack of recognition (2009:7). For such states, the ultimate goal is recognition and, as a result, UN membership (Geldenhuis, 2009)

Caspersen (2012; 2011) gives a similar interpretation of Pegg’s definition of *de facto* states, but in turn, uses the term “unrecognized states”. In her book (2011: 3), she defines them as entities that meet the following criteria: first, the ability to control the territory and manage it for two years, which differs from separatist entities; secondly, they have not received international recognition, even if some states recognize them; third, they demonstrate a desire for *de jure* independence through referendums or other

actions that demonstrate their aspirations. The work describes the relationship between recognized and unrecognized states and the possibilities for resolving conflicts.

Focusing further on the domestic conditions of these formations, in the following edition of the book (2012), Caspersen adds more specific conditions. First of all, “an unrecognized state has achieved *de facto* independence, covering at least two-thirds of the territory to which it lays claim and including its main city and key regions”. Secondly, “its leadership is seeking to build further state institutions and demonstrate its own legitimacy”. Thirdly, “the entity has declared formal independence or demonstrated clear aspirations for independence, for example through an independence referendum, adoption of a separate currency or similar act that clearly signals separate statehood”. Fourthly, “the entity has not gained international recognition or has, at the most, been recognized by its patron state and a few other states of no great importance”. The last criterion is the duration of existence, which is determined by a period of two years. In this thesis, the term unrecognized state is used just for those entities which are literally not recognized by any other state.

Later in 2018, another interpretation of this concept was given by Martin Riegl (2018). He cites in his work such concepts as *de facto* and *de jure* state. According to him, “a *de facto* state is a (quasi-) independent territorial entity capable of a (at least limited) self-government and attempting to receive international recognition. A *de jure* state is an internationally recognized entity unable to govern its territory and survive only due to the rigid international structure—so-called juridical statehood.” (Riegl, 2018:444).

Although the terms “*de facto* state” and “unrecognized state” have widespread usage, there are also opponents of these terms. For example, Crawford notes that “there is no such thing as a *de facto* state” (Crawford, 2013: 464). The state either exists or not. As for the term “unrecognized state”, many of those entities defined by this term have achieved a certain degree of recognition. According to Ker-Lindsay, the most appropriate term applicable to such kind of states is “partially recognized states”, which is noted by the author in his book *The Preventing of the Recognition of Contested States* (2012: 20).

The term “partially recognized states” is not so widely used, although its usage has begun to gain momentum. It is used in the works of many scholars (Geldenhuis, 2012; Markedonov, 2012; Czachor, 2015; Harzl, 2010; Ker-Lindsay, 2012). It is, in fact, entirely appropriate in the light of recent events following the recognition of Kosovo as part of the international community. So, what is partial recognition? Deon Geldenhuis, as mentioned above, provides a rather clear explanation of this term: “Partial recognition means that a wannabe state receives *de jure* recognition from a minority of existing states and lacks UN membership” (2012:25). Markedonov agrees with this interpretation of this term. He adds that despite these factors, they show high compliance with all standards for international recognition, and the number of recognizers does not matter much. It is wrong to proceed from quantitative indicators while analyzing the progress of international recognition. There are also no specifics about the recognizing states. Should it be the majority of sovereign states, the great powers, or the hegemonic power.

What makes partially recognized states different from *de facto* states is the bilateral treaties which exist with states that have recognized them. It makes them different from *de facto* states, and formal recognition and considerable political support from the Russian Federation are important achievements for Abkhazia. The rest of the UN members that followed Russia expanded the status from “unrecognized” to “partially recognized” (Toal, 2011: 2; Czachor, 151). Such a definition for Abkhazia (and South Ossetia) can be found in many works, even including those published by Georgian political scientists (Kereselidze, 2015:19; Aslanov et al., 2017: 261). Nagorno-Karabakh and Transnistria belong to the category of *de facto* states: they have suspended sovereignty and successfully started the process of state-building but are not recognized by any UN members (Czachor, 2015: 152).

Thus, the disagreement of various authors can be traced about what Abkhazia is, which declared its independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the war with Georgia. Nevertheless, one thing is clear; for the most part, the literature of recent years mostly defines it as a *de facto* state. The *de facto* state is, therefore, a “state that fulfils all the criteria set in the Montevideo Convention but lacks sufficient recognition from fellow states” (Toomla, 2014: 58). In terms of viability, Abkhazia took place as a *de facto* state. After all, this means that it is functioning as a state.

However, if we classify *de facto* entities, according to the degree of recognition and capacity and existence of bilateral relations with recognized states, the opinions of political scientists differ. Some continue to see them still unrecognized (Riegl), approaching this issue only from international law. Other analysts argue in favor of the term “partially-recognized” having differentiated these entities by their position in international politics (Markedonov, Czachor, Ker-Lindsay). Harzl (2010: 118) notes that Abkhazia, being *de facto*, is also partially recognized. *De facto* states are rather heterogeneous: despite some similarity of strategic goals, there are qualitative differences in the dynamics and degree of development of political institutions and the peculiarities of the formation of external relations. But according to Marta Magnusson (2014), it is “...no longer ‘de facto’ state in Pegg’s definition”. She argues that it might instead be defined as a partially recognized state.

It can be concluded, having studied the above literature, that the main task for political scientists in the 1990s was to determine the very essence of the phenomenon of state formations that arose as a consequence of the collapse of Yugoslavia and the USSR. The focus was on the premises of separatist movements and conflict resolution options. One can observe a shift in the emphasis of these works over time from the nature of these political entities towards the practice of recognizing them. More and more work began to be devoted to the processes of state-building. The term *de facto* does not indicate the degree of recognition.

Furthermore, the terms “de facto state” and “unrecognized state” are not able to reflect the political intentions of the Great Powers while the term “partially recognized state” can reveal the international politics dimension of recognition. Because the main topic of this work is the process and practice of recognition in the context of Power Politics (which is the purely political case), it is logical to use the term partially recognized along with *de facto* state. This term also shows not only as a transitional status in obtaining full recognition but, at the same time, reflects the politics of the Great Powers. Thus, Abkhazia enjoys at least the support of a great power in the struggle for recognition.

1.2. THEORIES OF AND CRITERIA FOR RECOGNITION

According to Akaba, recognition is “a unilateral act by which a state expresses its readiness to enter into juridical relations with another state or entity under international law, and to conduct full diplomatic, consular or other relations with it.”(Akaba, 2011: 8). As known, with the collapse of the colonial world after World War II and the end of the Cold War, a large number of states appeared in the world seeking recognition. Practice shows that some new political entities are recognized, while others are still in search of recognition. Thus, the world community is faced with the problem of recognition, since the lack of specific rules make it impossible to determine whether it is better to recognize new states or not. Political and geopolitical interests affect the process of recognition significantly.

The international doctrine has developed several approaches to the recognition of newly created states. There are two conceptually opposing views - declarative and constitutive approaches - on the recognition of a state in international law. Proponents of constitutive theory (Lauterpacht, 2013; Oppenheim, 1955) consider recognition as the demarcation line denoting states and making them distinctive from other entities. Lassa Oppenheim notes that a “state is and becomes an international person through recognition only and exclusively.”(Oppenheim, 1955: 125). In addition, it is believed that recognition should be a purely public matter of each recognizing state. This judgment may be a unilateral decision. According to constitutive theory, recognition is a tool of Realpolitik since the political interests of the recognizing party play a significant role in the process of recognition (Coggins, 2006: 40). This perspective can be criticized in some respects. First, the legal personality of the recognized state is made dependent on the existing states, which violates the principle of sovereign equality. Second, no international legal norms are establishing the necessary number of states that should express recognition.

Supporters of the declarative theory (Martens, 2008; Brownlie, 1977) are convinced that the state is subject to international law by the fact that it exists. As Dugard (1987: 7) notes, the declaratory theory points out that recognition only recognizes the fact of an existing state, while the constitutive theory declares that the act of recognition creates the state. According to them, the existence of a state does not depend on the status of recognition. Once a state with all its signs exists, it is already a subject of international law (Briely, 1963: 54-56). However, in practice, they do not deny that recognition is still necessary for each new state to enter into official relations with other states. Proponents of the declarative

theory, in contrast to the constitutive theory, consider that it is in favor of moral and legal recognition. The recognition should be based on state capacity and capabilities. They argue that the recognition is only a reaction to the already accomplished fact of the existence of a state (achieved internal sovereignty and statehood).

In this way, two opposing theories take place in modern international law. The constitutive theory considers the recognition as a necessary and conclusive attribute of statehood. Freedom to make such decisions has led to the fact that it has turned the international community into a kind of elite club of great powers. The declarative theory appeared as a response to a constitutive perspective, eliminating the need for international recognition as a requirement for obtaining statehood, and introducing object-specific standards, called the Montevideo criteria. The theory suggests matching some standards at which we can expect recognition. The idea of these standards is to make a distinction between appropriate (object and explicit), and inappropriate (subjective and illegal) uses of recognition (Coggins, 2006: 40).

There are cases in history when states were not recognized for ideological reasons. For example, the USSR was formed in 1917 but was recognized by Great Britain only in 1927 (Shaw, 2003: 382). Sometimes this happens not only in newly emerged states because of internal conflicts or unrest (civil war, revolution, or coup d'état). Under this scenario, the international community decides whether to recognize the new government or the regime. This type of recognition does not mean recognition of the state itself since it is already recognized. This concept applies only to its government (Murphy & Stancescu, 2017:9) The People's Republic of China, which survived a change of power and, thus, temporarily lost UN membership, is another example of this phenomenon.

The form of state recognition is another important issue because it shows how a state is legally recognized. As John Fischer Williams notes, recognition can be divided into two: *de jure* and *de facto*. According to him, "Recognition *de facto* ...is the acceptance of such facts as that a State exists" (1934: 781). "But recognition *de jure* is a very different thing. To recognize that a State has a lawful existence... implies a right to refer the conduct of those who have founded the State or those who govern it to some legal standard, and to pass upon that conduct accordingly". It must be a question of international law. As he further notes, "[t]o admit the existence of a fact or to agree that a claim is accepted, is one thing: it amounts at most to a statement of a personal attitude. It is quite another thing to pronounce that a claim

is lawful and thus to assume a judicial position”. There is a significant distinction between *de facto* and *de jure* recognition. *De jure* recognition is legal recognition given to a State which formally fulfils the requirements of statehood under international law. As Lauterpacht (1944: 385) noted, “[i]n the absence of an international organ competent to ascertain and authoritatively to declare the presence of requirements of full international personality, States already established fulfill that function in their capacity as organs of international law.” This approach always leaves room for personal or political perception.

However, statehood is a less politicized concept than recognition. Those entities that exist and function in the international community, and also meet the criteria of Montevideo, possess statehood. In 1933, a convention was signed in Montevideo to determine what such a state is from a political and legal point of view. According to the convention, the state must have: “(a) a defined territory; (b) a permanent population; (c) a government; and (d) the capacity to enter into relations with other states”. Similar in meaning to the Montevideo criteria, these criteria were used by the Badinter Committee (the Arbitration Commission of the Conference on Yugoslavia) in 1991. According to it: “the state is commonly defined as a community which consists of a territory and a population subject to an organized political authority; that such a state is characterized by sovereignty” (Murphy & Stoica, 2015: 220).

First, this entity must have a specific territory. This territory is necessary because an effective and stable government cannot exist without defining its boundaries. Although they tend to change, it is necessary to define the boundaries within which the state exists. That is, the state “must have some definite physical existence that marks it out clearly from its neighbours” (Nassar, 1991:14). Sometimes borders are drawn without regard to demographic divisions. Unfortunately, there is no such rule, according to which state and ethnic boundaries would coincide (Nassar, 1991:18). On the African continent, where the colonial borders were drawn despite the ethnic composition of populations a high number of examples of this situation can be found. The same picture can be observed in the post-Soviet space, which has led to innumerable conflicts. In international law, there is no rule specifying the minimum or maximum size of a state. As we know, the 20th century was marked by the anti-colonial movement, which, on a global scale, led to a redistribution of territories. In the background of these processes, the General Assembly decided that the modesty of the size of the dependent territory does not affect its right to sovereign statehood. The Assembly “[e]xpresses its conviction that the questions of

territorial size, geographical isolation and limited resources should in no way delay the implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples” declared in Resolution 2709 by December 1970 (Khalidi, 2006:165).

Second, the territorial entity must have a permanent local population. Also, international law does not prescribe any level of readiness of the population for independence, according to criteria such as education or the economy, as indicated in the UN Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples of the 1960s. The absence of any framework has meant that the population in modern states varies greatly. There is no concept of an upper and lower figure defining a population standard (Visoka et al., 2019:50). For example, the largest country in the world, China, has a population of approximately 1.5 billion people, or the smallest, Vatican City has a population of about 1000 people.

Third, the functioning of an effective government. The basis for the possibility of entering into international relations is the existence of an effective government. According to Shaw, a state ruled by a government capable of maintaining stability and enjoying the support of the majority of the population, as well as controlling most of its territory, should be recognized (Shaw, 2003:377).

What is an effective government? Crawford concludes that “[t]he only requirement is that the State must consist of a certain coherent territory effectively governed – a formula that suggests that the requirement of territory is rather a constituent of government and independence than a distinct criterion of its own” (Crawford 2006: 52). First of all, it should be noted that the state can be understood as an entity that the government has general control of its territory, to the exclusion of other entities. It is worth noting that there are no requirements for the nature of this kind of government and the degree of control. It must maintain some degree of law and order (Crawford, 2006:59). Its external relations are determined by its ability to defend its interests in international relations.

An effective government is perhaps the main criterion in the opinion of many political scientists, but practice shows the opposite. An example is the initiative of Somalia, that did not have an effective government, which can even be called anarchic, but is still a UN member. At the same time, Somaliland, effectively managing its territory and ensuring order to its population, is still separatist. What is so

relevant about the form of government? The development of international law and human rights contributed to the fact that Western-style liberal democracy is the only acceptable form (Geldenhuis, 2009:13). Another interesting case is the situation that led to the recognition of Bangladesh by India in 1971. However, Bangladesh did not have an independent, functional government - the main criterion for statehood. Thus, it was a purely political recognition dictated by the 1972 Simla Agreement Pakistan. According to it, the recognition was declared in exchange for Pakistani prisoners-of-war (New York Times, 29 August 1973). Alternatively, on the contrary, the case of Taiwan, which has an effective government, but is recognized as part of China, since China itself considers Taiwan to be part of China (Visoka et al., 2019: 51). As a result, the lack of recognition significantly limits the participation of the political entity in international relations.

Perhaps one of the most controversial criteria is the fourth one - the capacity to enter into international relations. Capacity “depends partly on the power of internal government of a territory, without which international obligations may not be carried into effect, and partly on the entity concerned being separate for the purpose of international relations so that no other entity both carries out and accepts responsibility for them” (Crawford cited in Visoka et al., 2019). Nevertheless, this fact does not mean the absence of any pressure as such from another state, since there is practically no such state (Visoka et al., 2019: 51).

The state must be recognized to enter into official diplomatic relations, another inconsistency with this condition. So how is it best to understand whether the state can enter into a relationship or not? There is an opinion that the applicant state, which has no formal international recognition at all, is not able to demonstrate its ability to enter into relations with the rest of the states and, thus, from a functional point of view, cannot be characterized as a state. A contrary opinion holds that international law will not be against their own state that is not a full-fledged member of the international community. The state is not able to fully implement these state rights and obligations at the international level (Kegley & Wittkopf, 2004:165). According to Zadeh, the fourth element is not a requirement for the existence of the state, but its consequence. “If an entity meets the first three criteria (a territory, a population and a government) it can be considered a State and therefore has the ability to enter into relations with other States” (Date Unknown: 19). Logically, a non-existent state cannot enter into relations with other states.

Therefore, the last two criteria are in essence, considered two sides of the same coin. They define sovereignty, both externally and internally. The state should implement both legal and political order in its domestic policy. The international level must exercise its rights and fulfill its obligations, like any other state, in accordance with international treaties (Murphy & Stancescu, 2017: 7).

As cases show, in practice, even if a public entity meets all the criteria of Montevideo, doing so is not a direct ticket to recognition. Dugard notes that “there is an unresolved debate among legal scholars as to whether a political community that meets these requirements automatically qualifies as a ‘State’ or whether, in addition, it requires recognition by other States to endow it with international legal personality” (Dugard, 1987: 7). However, the reality shows that recognition is a process where legal arguments are inferior to political ones regardless of the Montevideo criteria. The recognition is the result of relations between states, and not the fact of compliance with the criteria of statehood (Mehmeti, 2016:32).

Nevertheless, Oppenheim believes that “[w]hile the grant of recognition is within the discretion of states, it is not a matter of arbitrary will or political concession, but is given or refused in accordance with legal principle” (Raic, 2002: 91). One of the reasons for this scenario may be the consequences that this decision may carry. These consequences may call into question the principles of maintaining peace and security. However, the unresolved issue leads to even more significant questions. The ability to ignore the Great Powers cases in which they are politically insufficiently interested for various reasons, leaving many peoples to their fate leading to ethno-political conflicts, where the parent state goes to great lengths to pacify the protesting people, believing that the international community will a priori support territorial integrity. From the preceding information, it can be summed up that recognition is a legal process, but its embodiment is political (Mehmeti, 2016: 33). The United States recognized Israel only 11 minutes after the declaration of its independence, which can be a sign of initial coordination and conspiracy. As we can see, this case is strong evidence that it is still more a matter of policy or result of relations than of international law.

According to Geldenhuys, recognition is a factor capable of confirming statehood. In his opinion, it is necessary to add to the criteria of statehood, along with sovereignty. As we know, the foundations of modern state sovereignty were laid with the Treaty of Westphalia. Its significance has not changed

significantly since then: state sovereignty relies on a functioning government that is recognized as independent and legitimate over a certain territory and its inhabitants. But there is a conceptualization of its various aspects as analyzed by many scholars (Jackson, 1990; Krasner, 1999; Holsti, 2004; Crawford, 2006).

Stephen Krasner (1999) divides sovereignty into two levels: internal and external. He notes in his work that “the basic rule for international legal sovereignty”, which is a part of external sovereignty, “is that recognition is extended to entities, states, with territory and formal juridical autonomy” (Krasner, 1999: 14) and the recognition sovereign states give it. According to Krasner, this question is very ambiguous since there may be political reasons behind it (Krasner, 1999: 16). Possessing international legal sovereignty brings many benefits. This issue concerns the security of external borders, the possibility of entering into contracts, creating alliances, and granting diplomatic immunity to state representatives.

Nevertheless, it is wrong to consider that unrecognized states cannot get these benefits. Many unrecognized states are invited to negotiate. He believes that the only problem is that recognition allows avoiding any kind of uncertainty and guarantees territorial integrity.

The term “sovereignty” used in political science can be considered as an equivalent to the term “independence” in international law (Crawford, 2006: 89). The legal significance of sovereignty can be attributed to the consequences of statehood as an opportunity to compete in the international arena, rather than to the criteria of statehood. Thus, it is necessary to determine what independence is, in the opinion of political scientists. According to Crawford, there are two types of independence - formal and actual. Formal independence “exists where the powers of a government are vested in the separate authorities of the putative State” (Crawford, 2006: 67). Concerning factual independence, which he defined as “the minimum degree of real power at the disposal of the authorities of putative State that is necessary for it to qualify as ‘independent’” (Crawford, 2006: 72). He also believes that the element of formal independence dominates the actual state (Crawford, 2006: 88-89).

To sum up, it can be concluded that the political considerations of states drive recognition. The recognition theory is a kind of prism through which this process can be observed. In this process,

international law is of no small importance, the principles of which are referred to by the parties. However, it is necessary to point out the absence of the priority of its principles. Thus, it seems important to discuss the inconsistencies in the basic principles of international law regarding recognition. The next section is going to shed light on the basic contradictions of international law regarding the recognition process.

1.3. CONTRADICTIONARY PRINCIPLES OF INTERNATIONAL LAW CONCERNING RECOGNITION

The recognition process is a very complicated one, as the confrontation between Great Powers goes into the legal field. Usually, this process takes place within but not limited to the framework of two fundamentally contradictory principles of international law: self-determination and territorial integrity. Since 2008, namely, with the recognition of Kosovo, the right to remedial secession has been added to the discussion.

The principle of self-determination dates back to the French and American Revolutions. In time, this principle has transformed. Although it is a legal principle, its political essence cannot be denied (Cassese, 1999:11). A later repetition of the principle after the WWI (World War I) is connected to Woodrow Wilson's fourteen-point speech addressed to the US Congress. But the speech was criticized for excessive idealism because it was based on the consent of the authority (Asatiani, 2013:7).

According to the UN Charter, by 24 October 1945 only by equal rights in the form of self-determination can be successfully achieved the primary goal of living in a peaceful world. However, this principle could not be binding, since a reference to a political goal is insufficient to produce an established international legal right and obligation (Shaw, 2001: 252). Despite this, during the active phase of decolonization, the UN General Assembly in 1960 adopted two resolutions (1514 and 1541) that establish the principles by which states should be guided in determining the states that should be recognized. The Declaration on the Granting of Independence to the Colonial People declared, "All Peoples have right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development." (United Nations, 1976: 173)

The expression “All Peoples” is imprecise without specifying the criteria of a nation. Based on the preceding information, it can be concluded that self-determination in its modern development is formulated as a “right”, that is, a “general application” rather than a practice in a limited colonial context. The absence of mandatory mechanisms in international law may consider it unjustified or not enough justified in the context of current international relations. The end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the USSR and Yugoslavia caused many conflicts in which ethnic minorities need protection by international law.

The practice of recent years has shown that it is necessary to rethink this principle and bring clarity to it, so it can be applied to modern realities. The principle of self-determination of peoples has gone far beyond the colonial world and has become permanent. According to prevailing opinion, this principle assumes the right to representativeness, the security of one’s personality, culture, and, as a limited exceptional measure, may imply secession. The right to self-determination can also contribute to the development of democratic processes in states (Asatiani, 2013: 10). With the end of colonialism and the emergence of new states, there was a tendency to strive for a certain level of independence, self-identification, or, under some critical conditions, separation.

The main principle in international law that contradicts the right of nations to self-determination is the principle of territorial integrity. Its central concept emerged during the nineteenth century. Heffter first mentioned it in his treatise on international public international law in 1844, as a principle which provides “the right to integrity or inviolability of states”, which is included in the practice of states. In the Paris Peace Treaty of 1856, European powers declared their commitment to “respect the independence and territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire” (Marxsen, 2015: 8). It is one of the first principles of international law, that confirmed in Article 10 of the League of Nations Covenant, protecting states from external aggression.

The UN Charter spells out the protection of territorial integrity, specifically mentioned as an essential component of the prohibition of the use of force, as provided for in Article 2 (4): “All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations.”(UN Charter, Article 2: 4).

The main objective of the principle of territorial integrity is to protect the interests of all peoples in the territory of the state. Thus, the only condition that undermines the primacy of this principle is its failure. The state must ensure the equality of nations. The United Nations World Conference once again declared this item on Human Rights, held in Vienna in 1993(Asatiani, 2013: 21). Nevertheless, this important point remains more on paper than it is practiced.

Recognition is a very complex and controversial institution of the system of international law. Up to now, several conflicts related to the recognition of states need legal regulation. The existing legal norms often cause difficulties and disputes because of the incompatibility of the challenges of modern international relations. What makes the institute of recognition different from the other institutes of international law is its uncodified nature. Mostly it based on international customs, principles, and doctrines. At the same time, the institution of recognition undergoes continuous transformations due to sociopolitical changes, which may even lead to a change in the status of this institution in the system of international law.

Nevertheless, these principles are still not enough to prevent conflicts in the future. Nowadays, the institution of international law needs new norms that refer to recognition. The international practice of recent years in this matter indicates that the main role in recognition of states is played by political or geopolitical aspects, and not by legal norms. Supporting this opinion Ryngaert and Sobrie indicating that after the decision of the International Court of Kosovo, it seems that international law has nothing to do with the formation of a new state and the resulting consequences (Ryngaert & Sobrie 2011: 468).

In international law, the main difficulty in the practice of recognition lies in the contradictions of its main principles and the lack of priority of one principle over another: the right to self-determination of peoples and the principle of the territorial integrity of the state. The latter principle means that the borders of a state cannot be changed without its consent. In order to defend their position, representatives of the central state authority usually cite the assertion about the priority of the principle of territorial integrity regarding the right to national self-determination. Meanwhile, the aim of the principle of territorial integrity is primarily to protect the state from external threats. Moreover, the application of the principle of territorial integrity is, in fact, subject to the exercise of the right to self-determination. Thus, according to the Declaration on the Principles of International Law, in the actions of states, “nothing

shall be construed as authorizing or encouraging any action which would dismember or impair, totally or in part, the territorial integrity or political unity of sovereign and independent States conducting themselves in compliance with the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples as described above and thus possessed of a government representing the whole people belonging to the territory without distinction as to race, creed or colour.” (United Nations, 1970: 8). In other words, the principle of territorial integrity does not apply to states that do not ensure the equal rights of peoples living in it, and not permitting their free self-determination. In this case, the international practice of recent years shows the presence of another important theory – remedial secession.

According to this principle, if the state does not represent the entire people belonging to its territory, which is the result of the ethnic discrimination and violation of the rights of national minorities, the oppressed people can use the theory of remedial secession as a means of ending oppression (Vidmar, 2010; 37). According to this theory, systematic discrimination and oppression of national minorities can lead to the loss of some territories (Vidmar, 2010: 38). It is remedial secession that can become a significant contribution to international law because it will be possible to protect the rights of nations in case of abuse of power by the central authorities. This theory was addressed in recognition of Kosovo, but it can also be cited as an argument in favor of the recognition of Abkhazia. The West’s use of this theory regarding Kosovo and disregard it for Abkhazia may be a sign of double standards. Both Abkhazia and Kosovo suffered systematic violations of their rights. Nevertheless, in the case of Abkhazia, there is a combination of factors such as self-determination according to the rules of the Soviet Union and remedial secession as a result of its prevention by Georgia.

Most of the existing states and leading intergovernmental organizations such as the EU, the OSCE and NATO consider the declaration of Abkhazian independence as a gross violation of international law and, in particular, the principle of territorial integrity enshrined in the UN Charter. At the same time, the question of the legitimacy of recognizing new states was raised not so long ago in connection with the Kosovo case. Furthermore, the position of the leading political “players” in this case cannot be called consistent, which in turn can be explained by the discretionary nature of the institution of recognition (Brownlie, 1977: 153). The contradiction between the two principles - the principle of territorial integrity and the right of the nation to self-determination became the basis for the emergence of contradictions

between Russia and Western countries (and, in fact, the entire world community) in connection with the recognition of Abkhazia.

However, the recognition process, which has transformed over the past century, is always ambiguous. The next section analyzes the milestones of recognition practice.

1.4. PRACTICE OF RECOGNITION

Any state wishing to be recognized, have sovereign state status, and participate in international relations should be recognized by those who already have this status, which is a member of the international community. As Alderson & Hurrell note, “A state’s right to sovereignty or independence is not a ‘natural right’, analogous to the rights of individuals in Locke’s state of nature: it is a right enjoyed to the extent that it is recognized to exist by other states” (Alderson & Hurrell, 2000:149). According to Mikulas Fabry (2012: 662), recognition is the connection between the internal and external sovereignty. Nevertheless, the trend of recent years shows that Great Power support for states wishing to exercise the right to self-determination has declined (Caspersen, 2011: 41) The case of Kosovo can be cited as an exception.

Although politics and law are separate areas of science, they have much more in common when it comes to international relations. As Hans Morgenthau (1997: 13) noted, “[the political realist] thinks in terms of interest defined as power, as the economist thinks in terms of interest defined as wealth; the lawyer, of conformity of action with legal rules; the moralist, of conformity of action with moral principles”. To achieve its goals, a political realist involves all available tools it needs. Thus, as modern history shows, politics operates in the language of the law. Lawyers are now a kind of strategist playing a central role in military campaigns. Constitutional law is the same resource of power as weapons and money. Legitimacy and legal sovereignty based on international law are key elements of state power (Christian Reus-Smith, 2009:1-2).

Some gaps in international law, in particular regarding the recognition of states, make it possible to interpret it through state interests. This issue is one of the essential difficulties of international

relations. International politics are carried out within the framework of rules and norms. Nevertheless, states and other actors define and redefine to make it more fitting their own policy. Thus, international law is an instrument and serves the political goals of the most powerful states which can be considered as the Great Powers. It is used to justify the actions of the Great Powers according to their interests (Zimmern, 1936: 94).

As Carr notes, “law cannot be understood independently of the political foundation on which it rests and of the political interests which it serves” (Carr, 1946: 176). It is understood that the law is mainly political. In relations among states, the content of international law is determined by the dominant states and cannot be supported, in cases contrary to their alleged political interests. One party may appeal to one of the rules of international law, while the other party to the other principle. Furthermore, only the stronger side determines the compliance of actions with international law. This concern in no way means that flaws in international law can justify any action absolutely. Nevertheless, as the practice of international relations shows, some of its contradictions allow Great Powers to ignore the interests of small states, in favor of their national interests, until it becomes profitable.

State recognition is a process in which the areas of law and politics are inextricably linked. Because of the important role that recognition has played in the Westphalian state system due to the lack of central authority in the system, the state can become a part of it only with the explicit or tacit consent of other participants in the system. Consequently, states play a crucial role in the life of the international community and “protect their own interests” by following a smart mechanism according to which they “act as gatekeepers of the system”. Thus, a fundamental contradiction arises between recognition as a “legal act” by which an entity joins the community of states and recognition as a “political act” in favor of promoting the recognition of state’s interests (Ryngaert & Sobrie 2011: 489).

As it is well known, the practice of recognizing new states is based on the principle of self-determination of peoples. As Mikulas Fabry (2019: 41) noted, the practice of recognition itself has undergone changes from negative to positive, the turning point of which can mark the World War II and the process of decolonization. From 1815 to 1945, the idea of independence and recognition was perceived as something necessary only for the people who demanded it. Fabry claims that “Self-determination was expressed through, and externally gauged by, self-attainment of effective control over

a claimed entity to the exclusion of other claimants, most often previous sovereign governments” (Fabry, 2012: 663).

Before World War I, this was a right determined by internal practical capacities. With the end of World War I this became a legal right (Caspersen, 2012: 18). This change was due to two important events that took place in the early 1930s - the refusal of the United States and Western countries in 1931 to recognize Manchukuo, explaining this process as illegitimate (as a process sponsored by Japan)¹ and the signing of the Montevideo Convention in 1933 (Kopeček, 2019: 28). This trend continued after World War II. The idea of self-determination and independence began to be perceived as a positive idea. It has become like something enshrined in international law, and not the result achieved *de facto*. However, the tendency for the politicization of this process and the lack of real domestic potential to influence recognition has led to the phenomenon of *de facto* states.

Starting from the second half of the 20th century, one can speak of a certain sequence in the process of recognition. According to Resolution 1514 (1960) of the UN General Assembly, states were identified that could claim independent status. These are states in which the population lived in the inherited borders of Non-Self-Governing and Trust Territories. According to this resolution and other legal documents, this decolonization was based on the principle of the right of peoples to self-determination. However, the absence of clarity on the formulations of who are those “people” to whom this status is granted or whether it applies to non-colonized peoples, in turn, now creates certain difficulties in interpretation.

The resolution mentioned above states that “any attempt aimed at the partial or total disruption of the national unity and the territorial integrity of a country is incompatible with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations”. Thus, against their will, no state should be divided. It was also enshrined in another important UN General Assembly Resolution 2625, adopted in 1970 (Shaw, 2001: 98-99, 104). The result of this policy was a greater commitment to the principle of territorial integrity, and the people’s right to self-determination became an internal matter. This trend continues to the present, which allows a general ignorance about the rights of ethnic minorities.

¹ Then this position will be accepted by the UN as the Stimson doctrine (US position on Japanese actions in Manchuria)

The extreme relevance of this principle and its priority was emphasized by the United Nations Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali in his report “*Agenda for Peace*”: “If every ethnic, religious or linguistic group claimed statehood, there would be no limit to fragmentation, and peace, security and economic wellbeing for all would become ever more difficult to achieve” (Boutros-Ghali, 1992: para. 17). The basis of the postcolonial right to self-determination was the conviction that the territorial integrity of already existing sovereign states should be respected, and unilateral secession is unacceptable. The reason for this position was the fear that this could lead to endless separation and growth of separatist sentiments (Riegl, 2017:88). The multinationalism of the colonies only complicated this situation. There was a kind of fear of the chaos that could flood into the UN. This situation would lead to the inevitable instability of international borders. Whatever the beliefs in each particular case, only those cases that corresponded to the new paradigms were recognized as independent entities. Moreover, those cases that did not comply did not receive international recognition. For example, Katanga, claiming its right to recognition and secession from Congo, although it considered itself a “sovereign independent nation”, did not receive recognition (Fabry, 2012:664). The legitimacy of the separation was not recognized without the support of the world community, and no state has achieved this support. History knows many entities that claimed recognition, but never reached it: Tibet, Kashmir, Biafra, Karen and Shan States, Chechnya etc.

A global veto on the recognition of many states capable of independent existence persisted. Some of them, despite the lack of support, managed to create *de facto* states capable of effective self-government. Examples include the Republic of Eritrea, Free South Sudan, Tamil Eelam, the Republic of Bougainville, or the Republic of Somaliland (Pegg, 1998). If the matter is not an effective government and the political capacity of an entity in the international community, what matters then?

The basis of recognition has evolved from postcolonial self-determination into a division based on communal identity and historical continuity, often in conjunction with statements of human rights violations. The end of the Cold War can be considered as the turning point in the practice of recognizing states. The collapse of Yugoslavia came at just this moment. The case with the USSR was similar. Since these two cases occurred, the right to self-determination of peoples has been viewed in a completely different light. It went beyond the colonial framework but remained limited. Only the former republics could use this right (Caspersen, 2015: 395). As practice shows, all these states do not appear at once but

declare themselves using the right of the nation to self-determination. The Declaration of Independence of Abkhazia, which was adopted in 1999, states: “We appeal to the UN, OSCE [Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe], and to all States of the world to recognize the independent State created by the people of Abkhazia on the basis of the right of nations to free self-determination”.

Kopeček (2019: 28) also notes that recognition has become more politicized than ever. A vivid example of this is the recognition of Kosovo, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia. Despite the recognition of Eritrea, East Timor, South Sudan, and Montenegro, the recognition of Abkhazia is still limited. The “recognition is a question of policy – or – better to say – it is a question of the political interpretation of international legal principles” (Kopeček, 2019: 29). The recognition of Kosovo showed how important political views are in matters of recognition (Caspersen, 2015: 396). The recognition of Kosovo as a unique case strengthened the domination of geopolitics over international law, and in particular, the exceptional importance of the great powers in resolving such issues can be noted. The great powers played a decisive role in this matter. US support for Kosovo is very significant. At the same time, the veto right in the UN Security Council, which Russia and China have used, has become obstacles to recognition. It is difficult to overestimate the role of Russia in recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, referring to the right of the nation to self-determination but this is also not as simple as used to be discussed (for more details, see Chapter 3).

It can be argued that the recognition of Kosovo finally changed the balance between territorial integrity and the nation’s right to self-determination. However, at the same time, it is worth noting that such political considerations prevailed over the normative ones. Normative standards extended only to arguments available to great powers, unconditionally meeting their strategic interests (Caspersen, 2015: 397)

There is an opinion that Serbia has questioned its legitimacy and the right to govern Kosovo due to massive violations of human rights. At the same time, speaking of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, it is allegedly impossible to say the same, it argued. Thus, according to this opinion, there were no repressions from Georgia, and, as a result, these cases cannot be correlated and compared with each other. There is also an opposite point of view, according to which violations of human rights and ethnic cleansing took place on the part of Georgia too (for more details, see Chapter 2). According to Harzl (2010: 192), such

thinking that there is no oppression applied to Abkhazians is a direct result of the lack of knowledge and interest in a region that is geographically far from European foreign policy. Also important is the question of whether human rights violations are a strong argument for the secession of the state. This question is also controversial.

The West also cites such circumstances as the absence of practical international relations in Abkhazia, which leads to some logical questions. The question whether the lack of global attention and support of a powerful UN administration is a result of a conscious choice on the part of the EU and NATO countries can be raised. After all, “international” cooperation was carried out only if Georgia insisted on it or approved it (Caspersen, 2018: 69). Georgia, as noted by Thomas de Waal, “effectively holds the keys that would grant it access to the wider world” (2018:19). Overall, today, there is a general refusal to recognize the secessionist entity if it fails to receive consent from the mother country (Pegg, 1998a: 128-132). Thus, the Great Powers often play a crucial role in this matter.

Abkhazia is today a partially recognized state. The Great Powers struggle to redistribute spheres of influence in the post-Soviet space. Non-recognition by the West significantly limits Abkhazia’s presence in the international arena. Moreover, the Soviet rule has complicated the relations between Abkhazia and Georgia. The next chapter aims to shed light on the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict, by employing sources in English, Abkhazian, and Russian.

CHAPTER 2

THE ORIGINS OF THE ABKHAZIAN QUESTION

The disintegration of the Soviet Union led to the collapse of the bipolar system of international relations, shaking the balance of power in the world that developed after the end of World War II. Now there was a new division of the world and spheres of influence. In this conjecture, the Abkhazian question has become only part of the geopolitical game of the Great Powers. In order to understand the claims of Abkhazia to be independent and the essence of the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict, it is necessary to study the background of the issue.

2.1. THE ABKHAZ PEOPLE AND THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF ABKHAZIAN-GEORGIAN RELATIONS

An analysis of the ancient history of the Abkhaz people indicates that this nation has roots in the Caucasus dating back thousands of years. Abkhazians lived in Western Transcaucasia, more precisely in the region of modern Abkhazia, at times covering territories from the northern end of the Caucasian ridge to Trebizond, within the borders of present-day Turkey, and to Armenia. The first written sources mentioning Abkhazians can be dated to the 12th century BC. In an Assyrian source (the inscription of Tiglatpalasar), they are indicated under the name “abeshla”. In ancient Greco-Roman sources of the first and second centuries BC “Apsils” and “Abasgs” are also recorded. The ethnonyms “Apsua” (self-designation of the Abkhazians), “Abaza” (self-designation of the Abazins - people akin to the Abkhazians and self-designation of foreign Abkhazians and Abazins), “Abkhazians” of the Georgian and “Obezy” of Russian chronicles indicate the genetic connection of Abeshla with Abkhazians (Lakoba, 2001: 9).

Proto-state entities first appeared with the beginning of the Greek colonization of Abkhazia in the sixth century BC. The first Greek cities appeared, among which Dioscuria (modern Sukhum) played a momentous role in the unification of the region. It was an important economic centre. By the first century AD, several large tribes were located on the territory of Abkhazia: Apsils, Abasgs, Sanigs, Misimians

(Hewitt, Bgazhba, Agrba). In the first centuries AD, the ancient Abkhaz tribes were united in early class formations (Abasgia, Apsilia, Sanigiya), which were a part of the Roman-Byzantine cultural world. In Egypt, there was the First Cohort of the Abasgs as part of Roman cohorts (Lakoba, 2001: 10).

One of the significant periods for Abkhazian statehood is the seventh and eighth centuries that can be characterized by the unification of individual Abkhazian principalities. This process ended with the formation of the Abkhazian nationality and the creation of a single Abkhazian state named the Abkhazian Kingdom. The Abkhazian Kingdom fell under their influence of the Roman Empire and Byzantium because it was a part of these empires from time to time. In particular, Byzantium had a strong influence in the tenth century and it continued to play an important role in the region until the 15th century. Nevertheless, the Abkhazian tribes took advantage of the precarious Byzantine presence, under the leadership of the first Abkhazian king Leon II. By the 8th century, they merged into the single Abkhazian Kingdom (Hewitt, 2013; Shamba & Neproshin, 2005, etc.). The capital of the new state was Kutais, whose geographical position made it possible to manage and dominate in the Western Caucasus more effectively. In its foreign policy, the eastern direction played an active role, in which it competed with Armenia and Kartlia (Western Georgia) for hegemony in the Caucasus. As a result of this policy, in the tenth century, Kartlia (Tbilisi and surroundings) entirely became part of Abkhazia. Only three centuries later, after the invasion of the Mongolian armies, this kingdom disintegrated into many small political entities (Hewitt, 2013: 21-22).

The 14th and 15th centuries are characterized in the history of the region by the revival and deepening of Mediterranean ties. Genoese colonies on the coast of Abkhazia played a special role in this situation, leaving a deep mark on the region. However, soon, the Ottomans replaced the Genoese. After the capture of Constantinople in 1453, the Ottoman Empire aimed to strengthen its control all over the Black Sea coast. The 18th century was marked by the predominant influence of the Ottoman Empire, which used Abkhazia as the main springboard in the conquest of the Western Caucasus. The growth of the Turkish presence in the Caucasus has gradually declined in time, in parallel to the weakening of the Ottoman political and military power (Shamba & Neproshin, 2005: 7).

During the reign of Prince Keleshbey, Abkhazia had to maneuver between the interests of both the Ottomans and the Russians. A real struggle unfolded between Russia and the Ottoman Empire to

influence and control the Caucasus. Moreover, Keleshbey succeeded in pursuing an independent foreign policy. However, shortly after his death, Russia took control of the region. In 1810, Abkhazia was forcibly annexed by the Russian Empire, although the mountainous regions (Dal, Tsabal, Pskhu, Aibga) continued to resist (Lakoba, 2001: 31). This struggle was carried out until the end of the Caucasian War (1817-1864). In 1864, the Russian Empire officially abolished the Principality of Abkhazia.

With the transition of Abkhazia under the auspices of Russia in 1810, and later, with its renaming as the Sukhum military district (*otdel*), direct Russian administrative power was exercised in the country, but the situation remained tense. The more actively Russia tried to subjugate the Abkhazians, the more violently they resisted. By the 1850-60s, many Abkhazians joined the all-Circassian struggle against the Russian conquest. The Abkhazians, who were not reconciled under the colonial policy of Russia, entered the struggle for freedom and national independence. Numerous punitive expeditions and waves of deportations of people to the Ottoman Empire (Achugba, 2018: 95-96) resulted from the policy of Russian tsarism in the Caucasus, against the backdrop of Russian-Ottoman wars. This moment of history is known as “*makhadzhirstvo* – expulsion or deportation” (Dzidzaria, Inal-ipa, Achugba)². According to Abkhazian historians Inal-ipa (1965) and Dzidzaria (1982), there were a total of 10 waves of expulsion, among which the most widespread took place in 1810, 1853-1856, 1864 and 1866-1877. According to the Ottoman records, the deported Abkhaz-Abaza population amounted to 339,345 people (Dzidzaria, 1982: 374). The result was the devastation of Abkhazian lands. This deportation was a signal not only for Russians but also for other peoples (Georgians, Germans, Estonians, Armenians) at the beginning of mass resettlement in Abkhazia. Massive colonization of the region began, in which Georgians succeeded more than others. This success, at some point, began to seriously concern Russia and intensified the Russian settlement in the region to some extent (Dzidzaria, 1982: 434). Since most of the newcomers were Georgians, the confrontation between the Abkhazians and the Russians transformed into a confrontation between the Abkhazians and the Georgians. Both Russia and Abkhazia were worried about the Georgian activity. The demographic changes in Abkhazia brought about during the Caucasian War and afterwards deteriorated relations between the Georgians and the Abkhazians.

² Here, the term is used in the meaning of “forced relocation” or “exile”, proposed by Georgiy Dzidzaria.

Although Abkhazia became a part of the Russian Empire, it still preserved its autonomy to some degree. There was Russia with governorate in the Transcaucasus, military districts, or divisions in the territory occupied by military troops. Nevertheless, it was still considered a principality and ruled by the national princes of Chachba - Shervashidze and retained “autonomous rule” in the Russian Empire until 1864 (Achugba, 2018).

One of the most crucial and debated moments in Georgian-Abkhazian relations is the collapse of the Russian Empire and the formation of the Soviet Union (Achugba, 2018; Shamba & Neproshin, 2005). It is precisely to these events that the dispute over the status of Abkhazia are connected. The Principality of Abkhazia, which, since 1864, was incorporated into Russia as its Sukhum military *otdel* (and even later, the Sukhumskiy *okrug*) with its own local territory, seceded from the Russian Empire in 1917 as a sovereign state entity enjoying the same borders as in 1810.

Thus, until the collapse of the Russian Empire and the formation of the Soviet Union, Abkhazia pursued an independent policy. According to the Georgian perspective, Russia destroyed historically developed fraternal relations between the two nations. However, there is hardly any historical evidence to support this idea. Abkhazia has never been part of Georgia; moreover, Abkhazia even owned a part of Georgian territory in the 11 to the 13th centuries. As Stephen D. Shenfield (2008) argues, the first state to unite most of what now constitutes modern Georgia (along with some areas that out of modern Georgia) was made as a result of the successful diplomatic and military “eastern policy” of Abkhazia itself. Furthermore, the terms “Abkhazia” and “Abkhazians” were used regarding the Abkhaz-Kartvel kingdom and all its inhabitants, including Georgians (Hewitt and Khiba, 1998:173). The history of Abkhazia and Abkhazians developed independently of that in Georgia, and not as a part of Georgia, as is traditionally presented by the Georgian authorities (Akaba & Khintba, 2011:13).

The situation began to unfold tragically for Abkhazia, along with the collapse of the Russian Empire and the process of the formation of the Soviet Union. Abkhazia, in the form of Sukhumskiy *okrug*, joined the Mountain Republic on May 1, 1917. On October 20, 1917, it became a member of the South - Eastern Union of Cossack Troops, Highlanders of the Caucasus and Free Peoples of the Steppes as an independent union state with the right to enter into official relations and agreements with other subjects of international law. Thus, Abkhazia took the opportunity to avoid the influence of both Russia

and Georgia, concentrating on its ethnonational roots. Furthermore, on November 8, 1917, Abkhazia created its state government, headed by the governing body of the Sukhum district - the Abkhazian People's Council, which went down in history as the first ANS (*Abkhazskiy Narodniy Soviet*), the legitimate authority of independent Abkhazia. One of the priority tasks of these structures was the work on the self-determination of the Abkhaz people (Chirikba, 2012: 2).

However, it is worth emphasizing that with the disintegration of the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic and the formation of the Georgian Democratic Republic, the Act of Independence was adopted, which did not define the borders of Georgia. At the time of the proclamation of the Act of Independence of Georgia and its signing, Abkhazia as an independent country was outside the Georgian territory (Hewitt, 2013: 34). In fact, the victory of the Bolsheviks and the establishment of Soviet power in 1921 became crucial for Abkhazia. This change was a kind of liberation from the Georgian troops, which were considered occupiers among the Abkhazian population (Hewitt, 2013: 39). The statehood of Abkhazia was proclaimed in the constitutions of both Abkhazia and Georgia. Likewise, Abkhazia joined USSR as an independent Full Union Republic co-equal in status to Georgia. In the same year, Abkhazia was forced to join a confederate union called the Treaty of Union. It provided for the right to self-separation from the USSR (Hewitt, 2013: 40). The Constitution of the Republic of Abkhazia entered into force in 1925. It included several legislative acts that recognized the territorial integrity and independence of the Abkhazian state with the self-determination of internal troops, flag, and designated borders.

However, Abkhazia did not enjoy the expected freedom from the Georgians under Soviet authorities. On the contrary, it was faced now with Stalin's discriminatory policies. In 1931, the status of Abkhazia changed again. Its status was reduced to an autonomous republic within the framework of the Georgian SSR (Soviet Socialist Republic). Mass protests swept across Abkhazia (Shenfield, 2008). The cruelty of Stalin touched all aspects of the life of the Abkhaz people. For sixteen years, starting in 1937, an active policy of Georgianization was pursued not only for Abkhazians but also for other ethnicities living in Abkhazia (Hewitt, 2013: 42).

The mass resettlement policy was applied to Abkhazia. Its roots go back to the second half of the 19th century when the territory was colonized due to *makhadzhirstvo*, but its actual mass incarnation can be dated to 1936. It is worth noting that this period fell within the time of the Nestor Lakoba, the head of

the government in Abkhazia. The day after he rejected the resettlement policy proposed by Beria, he died under suspicious circumstances. So, the foundation of the mass resettlement policy of Georgia was laid. During these years, mass, sometimes forced, displacement of peasants from Georgia to Western Abkhazia was carried out to dissolve Abkhazians into the Georgian environment (Coppieters, 1999: 92). Even during the World War II, the relocation of Abkhazians intensified. Because of such unnatural mechanical growth, the Georgian population in Abkhazia between the censuses of 1939 and 1959 had radically changed. While the number of Georgians increased by 70 thousand people, the number of indigenous Abkhazians only increased by 5 thousand people. To coordinate and guide this process, a special body, the Abkhazpereselenstroy, was created on June 25, 1938 (Shamba & Neproshin, 2005).

For Abkhazia, the grave consequences of that policy were the illegal displacements and the deployment of national cadres, followed by mass repressions in 1937, 1938, and subsequent years. Two thousand one hundred eighty-six people became victims of repression (Sharia, Ekho Kavkaza, 2017). Another plan was also developed to evict the entire population of Abkhaz nation to Siberia in 1941-1942 and in 1949-1951, which was never implemented (Chirikba, 2009: 7; Nekrich, 1978: 104-105). One of the manifestations of Georgianization was also the widespread adoption of the Georgian language. Thus, Abkhaz writing also underwent changes. Its Latin script was switched to Georgian script.

Along with the resettlement of Georgians in Abkhazia, there were many changes from Abkhazian toponymy and anthroponymy to the Georgian way, a repressive cultural policy (Abkhazian broadcasting ceased). In the fields of science and literature, all Abkhazian schools were closed, as an integral part of the policy of the forced assimilation of the Abkhazians by the Georgian and Soviet authorities. Through the decline in status and the linguistic and ethnic changes brought about by Georgianization began to seriously concern not only Abkhaz people, but also all local people, who were essentially oppressed in their own state (Avidzba, 2012: 34). This danger was recognized by the people back in 1931 when a multi-day national Abkhaz gathering took place in the village of Duripsh, who expressed distrust of the Soviet government. In defense of the rights of the people and Abkhazian statehood in 1947, representatives of the Abkhazian intelligentsia sent a letter of protest to the Central Committee of The Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks) CPSU (B.). Dissatisfaction with Georgian politics continued and even intensified during the periods of Khrushchev and Brezhnev (1950s and 1980s) (Shamba & Neproshin, 2005; Anchabadze, 2006).

The anti-Georgian feelings generated by the Georgian policy of the 1940-50s are a fundamental driving force that led to the escalation of the Georgian-Abkhazian confrontation at the end of the 1980s and the war in early 1990s (Shenfield, 2008). In 1957, 1964, 1967, 1978, and 1989, mass meetings and demonstrations were held demanding the separation of Abkhazia from Georgia. A large-scale political movement for autonomy unfolded in the Soviet regime. The Abkhazian elite and the intelligentsia have written much criticism of Georgian politics. Letters were sent to Moscow, demanding an exit from the Georgian SSR.

To some extent, these steps have become successful (Coppieters, 2002: 94-95). Abkhazian schools reopened and, along with Abkhaz language, began to teach in Russian. However, despite all this progress, as rightly noted by Slider (1985), Abkhazia was significantly inferior to other regions of Georgia in access to higher education and about 40 percent deprivation by the Georgian authorities per capita.

The modern period of the national movement falls on the foundation of the *Aidgylara* - a National Unity Forum in 1988. The organization united not only Abkhaz people but also the entire non-Georgian population (Armenians, Russians, Greeks, etc.). A year later, with the support of this forum in the village of Lykhny, a meeting of the people was organized to review the status of Abkhazia. Greeks, Armenians, and Russians also took part in the action (Coppieters, 2002: 97). Thirty-five thousand people of different ethnicities subscribed to the Lykhnensky appeal, according to which it was required to restore the Soviet Socialist Republic of Abkhazia, which existed from 1921 to 1931.

There was extreme tension during this period. The Confederation of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus was established with headquarters in Sukhum. It was reminiscent of the Mountain Republic already in force in 1917-1918. For Abkhazia, this was, for the first time in a long time, a possible reorientation outside Georgia. Along with it, the decision to close the multilingual Abkhazian State University and open a branch of Tbilisi University in its place was met with sharp criticism and protests from the local population. As Coppieters notes, “the Abkhazian national movement linked the question of a united Abkhazian university to the survival of Abkhazian culture, declaring that its rights as a nation were being ‘strangled on its own soil’”(Coppieters, 2002: 98).

Furthermore, the State Program on the Georgian Language (1989), which provides for compulsory teaching of the Georgian language in all schools of the republic went along with the challenges created for national minorities to access education in their own languages, completely reviving the memory of Stalin's repressions. Passing the test in the Georgian language and literature would now become the necessary qualifications for admission to higher education institutions throughout the Republic. The majority of the population (not only Abkhaz but also other ethnicities) did not speak Georgian. Without any other option, it made access to higher education hardly possible.

2.2. THE GEORGIAN-ABKHAZIAN WAR AFTER THE DISSOLUTION OF THE SOVIET UNION

The events preceding the Georgian-Abkhazian war of 1992-1993, unfolded rapidly. Since November 1989, the Supreme Council of Georgia unilaterally began to adopt legal acts that essentially marked the beginning of Georgia's secession from the USSR, thereby breaking state-legal relations with the Abkhazia. In particular, in the Decree of the Supreme Council of Georgia of March 9, 1990, On Guarantees of the Protection of State Sovereignty of Georgia, it was noted that the Treaty on the Formation of the USSR of December 30, 1922, was illegal regarding Georgia. Therefore, it was necessary to begin the process of restoration of an independent Georgian state. By these decisions, all state structures of Georgia established since February 25, 1921, were declared illegal, and the legal acts adopted by these authorities were declared null and void (Agumava, 2017: 15). Thus, Abkhazia found itself outside of legal ties with the Georgian state, since the Abkhazian ASSR was not provided for in the 1921 Constitution of Georgia (Agumava, 2017: 16).

Another specific event in Georgian-Abkhazian relations in the last years of the existence of the Soviet Union was the split of the Supreme Council of Abkhazia according to nationality. Coppieters also pointed out that "In the Soviet federal structure the status of the Abkhaz national community, as the titular nation of the Abkhaz Autonomous republic, was unequal to that of the Georgian community, the titular nation of the Georgian Union republic – contrary to the principle of national self-determination, which is based on the idea of basic equality between nations, regardless of their size" (Coppieters, 2004:

2). On August 25, 1990, the Abkhaz side, along with the support of “third party” people (including non-Abkhaz and non-Georgian ones), adopted the Declaration on State Sovereignty, which, in turn, was rejected the very next day by the Georgian side. Then, the Georgian-Abkhazian contradictions reached a new, higher level, as can be seen from the two mutually exclusive referenda of 1991 about membership in the USSR. On April 3, 1990, the Law “On the Procedure of the Settlement of Questions Connected with the Withdrawal of a Union Republic from the USSR” was adopted. With the enactment of this law, autonomous units acquired the right to hold their own referendum if the Union Republic, to which they belong, decides to secede from the USSR. This provision was supposed to limit the desire of the Union republics for independence because of the fear of losing their own territories. As events showed, this did not affect Georgia’s decision to withdraw from the union.

On March 17, Abkhazia took part in the referendum on the preservation of the “renewed USSR”. According to the referendum, the majority of the Abkhazians voted for being a part of the renewed USSR. Accordingly, the Supreme Council of Abkhazia adopted a resolution on the termination of the Constitution of Abkhazia in 1978 and on the temporary use of the Constitution of Abkhazia in 1925. Georgia refused to participate in this referendum.

Nevertheless, on March 31, a referendum was held in Georgia on the restoration of state independence, in which Abkhazia did not participate. On April 9, 1991, following the results of this referendum, the Law on the Restoration of State Independence was adopted in Georgia (Chirikba, 2009: 2). As a result, two independent states appeared on the territory of the disintegrated Georgian SSR – Georgia and Abkhazia. This situation meant that the state-legal relations between Georgia and Abkhazia, which arose based on Soviet legislation, broke up on the legal field of the same Soviet legislation. Abkhazia, which did not participate in either the referendum of Georgia (March 31, 1991) or in the presidential election of Georgia (May 26) until the collapse of the USSR, i.e., until December 21, 1991, it remained a full-fledged subject of the Soviet Union. With the abolition of the USSR, it became an independent state (Achugba, 2005).

Thus, as a result of the referendums, Georgia, and Abkhazia made their choice according to which they are both unrelated and independent states. Consequently, the state-legal relations between Abkhazia and Georgia, created by the regulation of Soviet legislation, were also terminated based on

Soviet legislation. Until the collapse of the Soviet Socialist Republic on December 21, 1991, Abkhazia remained its subject. In this capacity, it participated in negotiations on the issue of reforming the USSR. Abkhazia cannot be both a subject of the USSR and independent Georgia (Shamba & Neproshin, 2005; Bartsits, 2009: 47). It follows that by the time Georgia joined the United Nations (UN), it had nothing to do with Abkhazia. Thus, according to the Abkhazian perspective, the recognition of the UN by Georgia within the borders of the former Georgian SSR as of December 21, 1991, had no legal grounds (Shanava & Vozba, 2015: 21).

Indeed, the collapse of the USSR exposed the national contradictions of the Soviet national policy. There was an acute question about which of the nations would receive the right to independence. The parade of sovereignties was a challenge for the international community. In this regard, according to Bruno Coppieters (2018), four positions can be singled out for the recognition of the states of the former Soviet Union. The first position, called the “continuity position”, was traced to the politics of the international community in 1991. According to it, only the Union republics can be recognized as independent, which excludes any other state entities - autonomies and regions - from this list. The main goal of this approach is the stability of the existing formations.

Nevertheless, it does not fulfill the will and interests of ethnicities. The second position, called the “remedial position”, proposes to rebuild the Soviet and post-Soviet political space following reasonable historical requirements, such as liberation from oppression. It proposes to restore historical justice to the right to secession. Russia and the rest of the international community applied this position to the Baltic states in 1991 because of their incorporation into the Soviet Union in 1940 by force. Russia applied the same position to give grounds for recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in 2008.

The third position is called the “choice position”. According to it, every nation or political entity within the framework of the Soviet Union has the right to obtain independent statehood. Indeed, a number of Soviet Union’s documents proclaimed the decision to join the union was based on the free choice of its members. Thus, this position guarantees and extends this choice to all federative formations and nations after its collapse. Some member states’ status changes’ during the Soviet period, has caused ethnic conflicts. For example, Abkhazia had joined the union as an independent state, but Stalin decreased its status.

According to the fourth position, called the “effectivist position”, the main thing in recognition is the actual control of political authorities over the population and territory. Along with that, the interests of the recognizing parties must also be considered.

Each of the positions answers the question of on what basis and to whom the right to self-determination should be given in the post-Soviet space. In the first case, this right is granted to the Union Republics; in the second, it belongs to the population of any territory that was once occupied or oppressed, thereby experiencing a kind of historical injustice; in the third case, the right to self-determination is inherent in the very format of relations between the peoples of the Soviet Union, its voluntary beginning facilitates voluntary withdrawal; and, according to the fourth position, any state entity capable of controlling power possesses this right. The author refers to such definitions only to the post-Soviet space and does not consider it applicable to the rest of the world. However, what position applies to Abkhazia, and how does it refer to itself?

As noted above, the international community unanimously supported the Baltic countries, since they were forcibly incorporated into the USSR. Nevertheless, it is worth noting the violent actions against the Abkhaz people that took place during the reign of Stalin, as well as the lowering of the status of Abkhazia from the Union to an autonomous republic within the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic (GSSR) in 1931. Under the rule of Stalin (an ethnic Georgian), the Abkhazians were systematically oppressed. Periodically, protests by the Abkhazians, successfully ignored by the USSR authorities, flared up. It is quite evident that there was no talk of any equality between Abkhazians and Georgians within the framework of one state (Coppieters, 2004: 3).

In Tbilisi, Zviad Gamsakhurdia’s political support weakened. Soon after his overthrow that occurred in the winter of 1991-1992, Eduard Shevardnadze, the former leader of the Communist Party of Georgia and the Soviet Foreign Minister, went back to Georgia. Despite observing the ceasefire in South Ossetia, he did not stabilize the situation in Abkhazia, where political tension was already at its peak.³ Against the backdrop of all these events, for Abkhazia, the only opportunity for the survival of

³ Georgian authorities have also pursued a policy of suppression in relation to South Ossetia.

an ethnic group was to increase its status from an autonomous republic to a union republic (Coppieters, 2002: 99).

Since the revived Constitution of Georgia in 1921 did not define relations with Abkhazia, the Supreme Council of Abkhazia repeatedly proposed that the Georgian leadership should have restored the interrupted state-legal relations. Having not received a positive answer, on July 23, 1992, the Supreme Council of Abkhazia, in order to protect statehood and overcome the legal vacuum between Abkhazia and Georgia, decided to abolish the Constitution of the Abkhazian ASSR of 1978 and move to the Constitution of the SSR of Abkhazia of 1925. Under this Constitution, Abkhazia was a sovereign state, a subject of international law (Article 5), consisting of contractual relations with Georgia. At the same meeting of the session, the name of the Republic of Abkhazia, the state flag and the state emblem of the Republic of Abkhazia were approved. It was also decided to accelerate work on a draft treaty on the foundations of state-legal relations between Abkhazia and Georgia. A draft federal treaty was soon published (Sagramoso, 2000:179). Abkhazian deputies claimed that this step was taken necessarily as a natural response to unilateral actions of the Georgian parliament to repeal all constitutional acts of the Soviet period and restore the 1921 Georgian constitution, in which the status of Abkhazia was not determined (Coppieters, 2002: 99).

Later, on August 12, 1992, the Supreme Council of Abkhazia addressed the State Council of Georgia with an appeal to restore good relations with Georgia. On August 14, 1992, at a morning meeting, the Parliament began to discuss a draft federal treaty between Abkhazia and Georgia. The Chairman of the Supreme Council of Abkhazia Vladislav Ardzinba indicated that this is not an attempt by Abkhazia to secede from Georgia (Sagramoso, 2000:179). However, it had all the legal rights to do so. The Georgian authorities preferred military force to political dialogue - on the same day, August 14, 1992, Georgia launched a war against Abkhazia (Lakoba, 2001: 30). The Georgian National Guard, with the support of armored cars and combat aircraft under the command of Tengiz Kitovani, the Minister of Defense of Georgia, entered Abkhazia.

Thus, the complications of the ethnopolitical situation in the late 1980s - early 1990s was the inevitable result of the weakening and then the collapse of the Soviet Union. In particular, Georgia, which sought to secede from the USSR, made tremendous efforts to keep Abkhazia as part of the Georgian state

and become the subject of international law. In order to hold Abkhazia under its control, various methods of pressure on Abkhazia and its people were used. All this led to the war between Georgia and Abkhazia - the most bloody and destructive conflict in the history of these two peoples (Achugba, 2005). About six percent of Abkhazian population became victims in this war (Toloraya, 19 March 2016).

While in Abkhazia, the parliament was considering ways to resolve the conflict situation. Even being a part of Georgia as a federation was considered as a possible way for it, an action plan codenamed "Sword" was already being developed in Georgia. Moreover, for direct military action, a pretext was needed. On the eve of the invasion of Abkhazia in neighboring Megrelia, Deputy Prime Minister Aleksandr Kavsadze and Georgian Minister of Internal Affairs Roman Gventsadze were taken "hostage". It was allegedly an action of Gamsakhurdia's supporters. It is worth noting that the confrontation between the "Zviadists" (supporters of the former president of Georgia) and the official authorities of Georgia continued. The Georgian press reported that terrorists transported the "hostages" to the border Gal region of Abkhazia. However, as soon as the Georgian army entered Abkhazia, on the same day, August 14, 1992, Minister Gventsadze appeared in Tbilisi and spoke on Georgian television. He repeated many times that he was "a hostage precisely in Abkhazia". However, for some reason, he called for the city of Tsalenjikha in Megrelia to be the place of his release (Petersen, 2008: 17). This reason was invented hastily in order to justify the actions of Shevardnadze, from whose control the troops allegedly got out.

Another reason for the war was supposedly the protection of the railway and communication lines. Moreover, this pretext was not credible because armed robberies on the railroads to which they referred took place on the territory of Western Georgia, and not Abkhazia. These troops tried to capture the entire territory, with the aim of which they entered Sukhum. Instead of looking for hostages or protecting the railways, Georgian tanks broke into Sukhum and fought with Abkhazian forces defending the city. Under the pretext of releasing several Georgian leaders, and regaining control of transport lines in Abkhazia and Western Georgia, Kitovani moved to Sukhum. The Abkhazian side had nothing but to respond accordingly (Sagramoso, 2000: 179).

The Georgian government stated that it had notified Ardzinba of Georgia's plans to enter Abkhazia, but there was no evidence confirming this circumstance. The fact of the absence of a common position of the Georgian authorities on the official reason for the introduction of troops speaks that it was

far-fetched. The nature of the armed forces controlled by Georgia also refutes the peacefulness of the operation. The convoy of tanks, armored vehicles and artillery clearly exceeded the force needed to search and release the hostages or to protect communication lines. In addition, the nature of the operation itself, the attack on Sukhum and the simultaneous landing in Gagra speaks more about the intention to surround rather than release (Shenfield, 2008). According to various sources, about 2,000-5,000 Georgian National Guard troops crossed the border. They marched to Sukhum, while another 1,000 troops landed in Gagra, in the north-west of Abkhazia, in order to block the border with Russia (Petersen, 2008: 17). Indeed, there was no Zviadist's activity noted in Gagra at all. In addition to this, the real intentions of the Georgian side are indicated by the threat of genocide by the Commander-in-Chief of the Georgian Army Karkarishvili.⁴ The same idea was shared in April 1993 by Giorgi Khaindrava⁵ with *Le Monde Diplomatique* that "there are only 80,000 Abkhazians, which means that we can easily and completely destroy the genetic stock of their nation by killing 15,000 of their youth. And we are perfectly capable of doing this" (Ó Beacháin, 2016: 213).⁶

As for Abkhazia itself, no special preparations were made for the war, so it could not provide any resistance as such at the initial stage; the Kitovani convoy directly followed to Sukhum (Shenfield, 2008). As Chirikba notes, "all this, in the eyes of the Abkhaz people, represents a consistent policy designed at the destruction of their nation in order to render unchallenged the Georgian possession of Abkhazia" (Chirikba, 2009: 8). The expressions of the Georgian commander and the acts of the Georgian army in Abkhazia resulted in the Abkhazian perception that the Georgians not only wanted them to surrender but actually aimed to terminate them as a nation, and this made a lasting peace between two nations almost impossible.

According to Sephia Karta, the behavior of Abkhazia should be interpreted not only from the desire to gain independence from Georgia. The desire for independence of Abkhazia is due to the struggle of the Abkhaz people to preserve their identity, and the only way to do this is to get independence. Thus, this is a consequence of the policies pursued by Georgia (Karta, 2012: 84). Back then, Abkhazia still might make its choice in favor of federal union with Georgia instead of full independence. However, the

⁴ YouTube, 28 October 2008, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XzvtaZIMy98>, 13 March 2020.

⁵ Head of Georgia's wartime administration and minister for conflict resolution in 2004-2006.

⁶ For more details about Georgian attempts for ethnic cleansing. see the next section.

aggressive policy of Georgia made that position impossible. Abkhazia was unsatisfied with its position during its coexistence with Georgians under the Soviet rule. Abkhazians were scared of extermination as a result of a Georgian aggression.

Members of Abkhaz diaspora came to defend their historical homeland as volunteers. They came to help on behalf of the Confederation of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus, of which Abkhazia was a member. Also, the Abkhazians received support from the north, mainly from the Circassians and Chechens, who came to their aid. Once again, the Circassians get united under the danger of extermination. Abkhazia defeated Georgia on September 30, 1993, and gained *de facto* independence (Cornell, 2001: 159).

2.3. THE NEGOTIATION PROCESS: THE GEORGIAN-RUSSIAN FRIENDSHIP AND INDIFFERENCE OF THE WEST (1992-1999)

The Georgian-Abkhazian War, which lasted about a year, ended on September 30, 1993, with the victory of Abkhazia. Traditionally, the end of the military phase of the conflict is followed by the process of its political settlement, which takes place mainly with the participation of international organizations. In Abkhazia, negotiations began during the war in 1992 and continued after the war. So, on November 28, 1993, in Geneva, on the initiative of the UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, in order to intensify the peace process and achieve a comprehensive settlement of the conflict between Georgia and Abkhazia, a multilateral negotiation process was launched under the auspices of the UN with the assistance of the Russian Federation and Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) participation. In the post-war period, Russia played an active diplomatic role as a mediator, exerting significant pressure on one side or the other.

It is worth paying attention to the fact that from the very beginning of the negotiation process, the positions of the conflicting parties were in unequal conditions for some reason. The fact that Georgia was admitted to the UN (July 1992) provided Tbilisi with an international platform (Khashba, 2012: 4). The United Nations, by its charter and nature, could not be objective in this matter, since it assessed the situation only through the prism of the territorial integrity of Georgia and a priori ruling out the option

of full sovereignty for Abkhazia (Coppieters, 2004:12) because of the consideration of Abkhazia as a part of Georgia. This situation created a bias in favor of Georgia in all negotiations regarding the policy of Abkhazia and its status. This situation cast doubt on the ability of the UN as a mediator on this issue, and, “strengthens the perceived dichotomy between the UN and the Russian Federation as [actors]” (Stewart, 2003:14). This restriction is apparent in the consistent failure of Abkhazian officials to obtain a US visa and gain a platform at the UN where they could express their opinion. It should also be noted that Abkhazia came to negotiations under the conditions of the sanctions imposed by Russia on September 21, 1993. At the same time, in October of the same year, the UN Security Council followed Russia’s example, imposing an economic embargo on Abkhazia, while appealing to all UN member states not to render any assistance to Abkhazia.

At the first stages of the peace negotiations, the main goal of the Georgian side was to correct the negative consequences of the military defeat, rehabilitate its position, create conditions for the repatriation of Georgian refugees, and, by all available means, impede the self-determination of Abkhazia. The task of Russia was to strengthen its mediating role, as well as to strengthen the military-political presence on the geostrategic bridgehead - the South Caucasus, which the West European powers tried in every way to counteract, plunging into the negotiation process. On February 22, 1993, Pavel Grachev (Defense Minister of Russia at that time) clearly stated the strategic importance that Russia attached to the Black Sea coast. According to Grachev, Russia should take all necessary measures to ensure that Russian troops remained in the area (Sagramoso, 2000:181).

In August 1993, the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) was established. It was deployed to monitor the ceasefire line between Abkhazia and Georgia following Security Council Resolution 858 from August 1993, and its mandate was expanded under the Moscow Agreement of May 1994 (Frear, 2014:8). Many important provisions and guidelines for resolving existing problems (which are mutually binding on the parties to the conflict) were settled in the Geneva Memorandum of December 1, 1993, aimed at forcing peace and abstaining from the use of military force (Volkhonskiy et al., 2008: 319). Furthermore, a special working group of experts from Russia, Georgia, Abkhazia, the UN, and the CSCE began work on the preparation of a political and legal opinion of a recommendatory type on the possible political status of Abkhazia. Thus, it can be concluded that by the end of 1993, the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict with the participation of third parties in the process of its peaceful settlement acquired

a full-fledged format for negotiations and discussions with leading international players (Markedonov, 2010: 54-62).

In 1993, the Friends of Georgia organization was created to help the United Nations in the negotiation process. It consisted of diplomats from Western countries (USA, Great Britain, France, Germany, and initially Russia). With its actions, it tried to put pressure on the Abkhazian side to support Georgia, where they began to have a noticeable political and economic interest. Starting in October 1994, they tried by any possible action to resolve the conflict in favor of Georgia (Lakoba, 2001:105).

On the eve of the Moscow round of negotiations, in mid-December 1993, a unanimous decision was made to start the Geneva negotiations under the auspices of the UN. The next round of negotiations on the settlement of the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict, which began in February 1994 in Geneva, was completed on April 4, 1994, in Moscow. During this round, a principled statement was adopted in which a political settlement was proclaimed, so the conflicting parties were obliged to obey the principles of the ceasefire strictly. The parties spoke out for the speedy deployment of the peacekeeping contingent in the territory of Abkhazia.

During the next round of Moscow talks held in May 1994, the Abkhazian side presented a document on aggregate measures aimed at resolving relations between Georgia and Abkhazia. It was based on the provision of the declaration of equal-subject political and legal relations, which determined the confederal (union) structure of the two republics (Shamba, 2005: 3). Nevertheless, the draft document was not considered at all because of the inadmissibility and inappropriateness of revising Georgia's international political status. The project went against the key interests and convictions of the Georgian side and its primary (western) partners.

In May 1994, the signing of an agreement on the cessation of hostilities in Abkhazia was initiated. This agreement was reinforced by the introduction of the Russian military peacekeeping contingent under the auspices of the CIS to prevent the escalation of military clashes (Volkhonskiy et al., 2008: 339-340). The demands put forward by international mediators and Georgian parliamentarians denied the Abkhazian state-territorial entity. Most participants in the negotiation process were unanimous in maintaining the territorial integrity and inviolability of the borders of Georgia. Nevertheless, the

agreements adopted framed the settlement of the South Caucasian ethno-political conflict, formulated the format of their bilateral interaction (Tishkov & Shabaev, 2011: 199).

After the first round of Georgian-Abkhazian negotiations in Geneva, consultations continued. They ended on December 21 in Moscow (Lakoba, 2001: 86). For this period of negotiations, the status of Abkhazia remained the most pressing and acute issue because of a contradiction in one of the most important principles of international law – the right of peoples to self-determination and the principle of the territorial integrity of the state, where the preference of one would lead to a violation of the other (Agumava, 2018: 64). The Abkhazian side proposed defining it through a referendum, which was supposed to put forward three options: “1) the autonomy of Abkhazia within Georgia; 2) the confederation of Abkhazia and Georgia; 3) the full independence of Abkhazia”. The Georgian side refused to discuss this issue (Lakoba, 2001: 86). Meanwhile, it is important to emphasize that some of the current UN member states gained their sovereignty precisely as a result of the exercise of their right to self-determination, often through armed struggle.

Representatives of Abkhazia at the negotiations initially noted that the current international legal documents do not imply the supremacy of the principle of the territorial integrity of the state over the principle of the right of peoples to self-determination, paying attention to the fact that at the time of the beginning of negotiations Abkhazia was a sovereign entity that did not have any legal relationship with the Republic of Georgia, referring to several Soviet documents.⁷ At the beginning of negotiations, representatives of Georgia and international mediators tried in every possible way to present this conflict as an intra-Georgian one. That is why, now, this conflict is represented as the violence of Georgia’s territorial integrity. However, the Abkhazian side managed to win a diplomatic victory, securing its delegation as an equal participant in the negotiation process with Georgia (Agumava, 2018: 65).

Russia’s mediation activity in the Geneva talks has markedly increased. Moscow, from the very beginning of the conflict, made it clear to Georgia that any help on its part has a certain price. In exchange for the support of the Georgian government on the Abkhazian issue, it expected Georgia to join the CIS

⁷ For more information, see Law of the USSR dated April 3, 1990 No. 1409-1 “On the Procedure of the Settlement of Questions Connected with the Withdrawal of a Union Republic from the USSR”; Law of the USSR dated April 26, 1990 No. 1457 - I “On the Delimitation of Powers Between the USSR and the Subjects of the Federation” autonomous republics were already called “Soviet socialist states” and “subjects of federations.”

and support in Chechen question. Following this agreement on October 8, 1993, Georgia announced its intention to join the CIS and, in December 1994, allowed Russia to use Georgian airspace (Graalfs-Lordkipanidze, 2015: 133; Mouritzen & Wivel, 2012:13). However, with the final loss of Abkhazia by Georgia, the positions of the parties ceased to be unambiguous. With the end of the war, it became clear that neither Russia nor the UN contributed to the advancement of Georgia's interests in this conflict. Both mediators were not destined to circumvent the interests of the Abkhazian side and return it to Georgian influence, as Georgia had hoped (Graalfs-Lordkipanidze, 2015:133-134). The situation turned out to be a stalemate.

With the end of the acute phase of the Georgian-Abkhazian armed conflict, political and economic blockade against Abkhazia was introduced by both Russia and the international community in general. This action refers to the sea and land blockade, and the prohibition of crossing the border by men from 16 to 65 years old and together with import and export limitations imposed by the Russian government at the end of 1994. It aimed to paralyze Abkhazia economically. Since 1997, Russia has disconnected all telephone lines connecting Abkhazia with the rest of the world, thus establishing an information blockade that was in place until September 9, 1999. All those unbearable conditions were supposed to force Abkhazia to unite with Georgia, and the latter being grateful to Russia would refuse to join North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) (Tuzhba, 2015: 265). All these years, Georgia received free help from various Western organizations, while Abkhazia was isolated, which only added strength to defending its position (Mouritzen & Wivel, 2012: 72).

The position of Georgia also dictated Russia's interests during the Chechen campaign from 1994 to 1996. Thus, during the visit of Russian Prime Minister Chernomyrdin in mid-September 1995, an agreement was reached between Georgia and Russia that Russia would assist in regaining control of Abkhazia in exchange for maintaining five Russian military bases in Georgia for 25 years. However, with the end of the Chechen campaign, Georgia gradually began to move away from Russia and draw closer to the West (Akaba & Khintba, 2011; Chirikba, 2013; Lakoba, 2001). In 1995, during intensive multilateral negotiations between the representatives of Abkhazia, Georgia, and Russia, with the participation of the UN Special Representative Edouard Brunner, a draft protocol was prepared that defines the principles for resolving the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict. Subsequently, the Abkhazian side

excluded its visas from the protocol in connection with the contradictions of the Constitution of the Republic of Abkhazia.

In the meantime, negotiations on the status of Abkhazia were still on the agenda. In 1997, another agreement was developed on the format and measures to resolve the Georgian-Abkhazian ethno-political conflict, which envisaged the formation of a federal union. One of the initiators and lobbyists of this agreement was Yevgeny Primakov, the Prime Minister of Russia. He succeeded in arranging a meeting between the Abkhazian leader and the Georgian leadership in Tbilisi. However, the key document was not re-signed, and the reason for the Georgian side was the lack of a separate article on the territorial integrity of Georgia, which, according to the Georgian side, left open the question of the right to secession (Akaba & Khintba, 2011: 24).

As Bruno Coppieters fairly noted, “the fact that the Georgian military intervention of August 1992 has never been condemned by the international community and that the federal proposals of Georgia do not provide solid guarantees to Abkhazia should any future Georgian government be tempted to repeat such an attempt explain to a large extent the refusal on the Abkhaz side to discuss federal options.” (Coppieters, 1999: 66).

It also left Georgia with freedom of action regarding Abkhazia. Thus, detachments led by Georgian partisans made repeated attacks on the CIS peacekeeping forces and Abkhazian army. On May 12, 1998, the guerrilla unit White Legion and the Forest Brothers once again attacked Abkhazian forces in the Khumukhkuri village region, which resulted in a six-day war on May 19-25, 1998. In response to killing 17 people of the Abkhazian border forces, the Abkhazian side mobilized 1,500 people and launched a counterattack. According to one of the conditions of the agreement signed as a result of it on May 24 in Gudauta, Georgia promised to stop its military activities in the Gal district of Abkhazia. However, all of Georgia's promises of non-use of force were systematically violated by the Georgian side.

Today, the Georgian side insists that all Georgian refugees who left Abkhazia were forced to do so under the threat of ethnic cleansing and that the Abkhazian side is responsible for the exodus of the Georgian population. However, only as a result of the six-day war 30,000 - 40,000 people left the Gal

district (Bartmann, 2003: 151). Moreover, during the Georgian-Abkhazian war, most Georgians left Abkhazia before the arrival of the Abkhazian troops. They were guided by what might happen, and not by the actual threat of violence. A report from *The International Herald Tribune* of 22 October point out that “According to refugees who escaped from Sukhumi, victorious Abkhazian forces committed massive violations of human rights... However, the reporter noted, it is hard to separate reports by witnesses from hearsay and rumors” (Covcas Bulletin, 27 October 1993: 6). Another mission under Unrepresented Nations and Peoples’ Organization (UNPO) (31 October - 8 November 1992) stated that “With respect to human rights violations by Abkhazian and allied forces, the delegation was able to determine that some human rights violations had occurred against Georgian civilians. However, those acts did not appear to be systematic, and they never reached anything like the scale or gross nature of those committed by the Georgian military... The delegation was able to find absolutely no evidence to support two major allegations: one was the story that hundreds of Georgians had been driven into a stadium and killed; the other was that Abkhazian soldiers had gone to the hospital and killed doctors and patients there. What did seem to have taken place was the burning of many houses of Georgians who had fled the area before the Abkhazian advance.” (Ennals et al., 1993: 338) Those are just a few examples of the numerous cases that Georgian side brought up as the evidence of “gross systematic violations of human rights” and “ethnic cleansing” that caused to the massive exodus of Georgian refugees. On the contrary, the following mission under UNPO (29 November – 10 December 1993) reported “gross violations of human rights and humanitarian law by Georgian troops and authorities on a scale not acknowledged so far by the UN or other international organizations.” (Overeem, 1995: 137). A few cases of violation of human rights can take place during the war on any side but systematic gross of it is another context.

As for the Abkhazian side it was trying to prevent the threat of possible violence and reduce the feelings of Georgian nationals, both civilians and officers. They handed out leaflets during the war urging them to comply with norms of international law, protect and spare all those who give up, regardless of nationality. In support of this idea and the attempts of Georgia to ethnic cleansing can be brought the fact that at the initial stage of war the attacks of Georgian army were mostly against of civilians. As Hewitt (2013:145) notes, they “made enemies of all the non-Kartvelian peoples; the Armenians even formed a special battalion, called Bagramian, to protect the Armenian population.” Nevertheless, as Hewitt fairly

states (2013: 147) “the world noticed only the presence of the refugees on the Georgian side of the River Ingur and preferred not to enquire too closely into why they came to be there.” Thus, the already complicated issue of Georgian refugees was systematically complicated by Georgia’s acts of aggression.

The Russian position during this period still remained ambivalent. It was Russia’s actions that led to “unstable-impasse stability”. Dmitry Danilov (1996) argues that the misappropriation of Russian politics is the result of the presence of two different political trends in Russia’s government itself. One of them advocated restoring Russia’s influence in the near abroad by all possible means, including force, while the other advocated retreating from the region. Russian policy in the Caucasus was between these two lines. It is evident that by solving the Abkhazian issue with Russian help will lose its pressure on it. Stephen Blank (1995) claims that the main interest of the applied policy by Russia was to restore its influence over the region. Therefore, Moscow was quite happy with maintaining the status quo in the conflict when both sides remain dependent on it. Having lost ground in the eastern part of the Caucasus, Russia began to build a more thoughtful policy towards Abkhazia and the entire north-western Caucasus, populated by related Abkhaz-Adyghe peoples. Abkhazia, with which Russia was reckoned for tactical reasons, became of greater strategic interest to it as Moscow’s positions in the Caucasus weakened. Abkhazia was a link between the South Caucasus and the Russian North Caucasus (Lakoba, 2001: 97).

Georgia’s attitude towards Russia as a mediator has also changed over time. As Graalfs-Lordkipanidze notes, a mediator should be acceptable to all parties of the conflict. As a strong point, Georgia tried to attract those actors who could meet its own interests. At the initial stage of the negotiations, this was Russia. It would seem that the Chechen question and the threat of separatism in Russia itself will never allow it to take the Abkhazian side. From a Georgian point of view, this choice has fluctuated over the years, depending on the likelihood of whether Georgia will receive a concrete, beneficial settlement through Russian mediation. Both Georgia and Russia had room for maneuver, and only Abkhazia, due to its isolation from international events, did not have the opportunity to choose a mediator (Graalfs-Lordkipanidze, 2015:120).

However, UNOMIG acted in parallel with the international negotiation process known as the Geneva Process. It was launched in 1997 by Liviu Bota, who is the UN Special Representative. With the advent of Liviu Bota’s work on the file, the course of negotiations has changed. The framework of the

negotiation process itself was determined by the Coordinating Council, which in turn was divided into three working groups: the first – “The lasting non-resumption of hostilities”; the second is “Refugees and internally displaced persons”; and the third is “Social and economic problems” (Frear, 2014: 8; Agumava, 2018: 78). The shift in emphasis can also be explained by the absence of any positive dynamics on the status of Abkhazia. At the November session of the Geneva negotiation process in 1997, the need for close and coordinated participation of the Friends of Georgia, an international political mediation working group, established in 1993, was announced. Although members of this structure could participate in meetings, make statements and proposals on various aspects, they have not been represented as parties to the negotiations so they could not sign any documents and somehow qualitatively affect the negotiations (Agumava, 2018: 78).

The status of the Group of Friends was formalized in order to introduce them as permanent participants in the work of the Coordination Council, chaired by the UN Special Representative, established following the Geneva Accords on November 17-19. The main aim of this Council was to develop a common program of action for a full settlement of the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict, for which three working groups were established. Thus, the UN has become more involved in the negotiations. More and more concentrated on the development of integrated measures and a common program of actions to overcome the crisis in Georgian-Abkhazian relations. Nevertheless, the mechanisms put forward did not yield the intended results since they did not meet the interests of either side (Akaba&Khintba, 2011: 25).

Although the Geneva meetings were held on an ongoing basis, it is difficult to call them productive. The reason for this difficulty is the inflexibility of the parties on some fundamental issues. Georgia rejects any possibility of the Abkhazian side participating and against signing any agreements with it (even on the non-use of force), calling Russia a party to the conflict. However, the Russian side claims that it is not a party to the conflict (Frear, 2014: 8).

2.4. THE PATH TO RUSSIA'S RECOGNITION OF ABKHAZIA (1999-2008)

The last point on the status of Abkhazia during the peace negotiations was put as a result of a referendum in October 1999 (Lasaria, 2017: 320) on the adoption of the Constitution, as well as the adoption by the People's Assembly (Parliament) of the Act on State Independence of the Republic of Abkhazia. From that moment, the Abkhazian side refused to discuss the political status of the Republic, thus significantly narrowing the room for negotiations.

The turbulent internal political processes in Abkhazia took place in parallel with the change of the top leadership of Russia. Vladimir Putin replaced the post of chairman of the Federal Security Service of Russia with the prime minister in August 1999. Two main reasons that contributed to the deterioration of relations with Georgia were the Chechen question and the rapprochement between Georgia and the West. In the Pankisi Gorge of Georgia, in the first weeks after the start of the Chechen military campaign, the Georgian leadership granted refugee status to Chechens who fled the conflict zone. Russia accused Shevardnadze of promoting "Chechen terrorism". However, the Chechen war was only an excuse for worsening relations between Russia and Georgia. The real reason was the increased activity of Tbilisi in a "Western" direction. In 1999, negotiations were already underway regarding the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline (Mihalkin, 2004: 152). The United States has increasingly helped to rebuild Georgia's economy and military sector and supporting the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline project. Thus, they expected to reduce energy dependence on Russia (Mouritzen & Wivel, 2012: 13).

In 1999, Georgia withdrew from the collective security treaty with Russia and announced its intention to free itself from any kind of "foreign military presence". By "foreign" primarily meant Russian in the face of Russian military bases in Georgia (Mouritzen&Wivel, 2012:13). In February 1999, the Georgian Parliament's Defense and Security Committee formally requested NATO to "protect Georgia's sovereignty and independence" (Feinberg, 1999:18). In April of the same year, Shevardnadze announced the North Atlantic aspirations of Georgia (Shevardnadze, 25 April 1999). The feeling of the irreversibility of Georgia's turn towards the West was strengthened. In 2002, Georgia and the United States agreed on a joint military training and equipment program. Thus, thanks to the participation of Georgia in the war in Iraq and the US assistance in transforming the defense of Georgia, the relations between the two sides have become deeper. Georgia was one of the ten countries that received the most

financial support from the United States. The US also lobbied for its inclusion in NATO. This fact implies a direct challenge to Russian influence (Mouritzen & Wivel, 2012:2, 13-14).

Thus, the “pro-Western” landmarks of the Georgian leadership eroded the centuries-old friendly rhetoric regarding Russia. Georgia strove for European integration and strengthened cooperation with the military-political bloc of NATO. In response to Georgia’s relations with the West, the Russian position towards Abkhazia has also gradually changed. Although the “turn to Abkhazia” did not find a noticeable expression in the official rhetoric of Moscow, it received practical implementation: facilitating the checkpoint and customs regime on the Russian-Abkhazian border, the beginning of accepting applications for the acquisition of Russian citizenship, preparing for the launch of railway communication, and exempting Abkhazians from the visa regime imposed on Georgia (Khintba, 2011: 26; Lakoba, 2001: 101). The state interests of Abkhazia and Russia began to coincide in many respects (Agumava, 2018: 131). Georgia’s withdrawal from Russian influence allowed it to pay attention to the situation unfolding at its side. Russia, as a Great Power, had to leave the comfort zone, after strictly following the principle of territorial integrity.

Meanwhile, by 2003, a period of crisis was observed in the process of peaceful settlement of the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict. Russia’s interest in stability and security in the Caucasus has justified the actions of the Russian authorities, which seized the initiative of an independent and impartial arbitrator from the UN. The document “Basic Principles for the Distribution of Competences between Tbilisi and Sukhumi” (the Plan for the Settlement of the Georgian-Abkhazian Conflict – “The Boden Plan”), developed by Dieter Boden, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General, failed. This document referred to the “special” and sovereign status of Abkhazia within the Georgian state, as well as the provision that “the separation of powers between Tbilisi and Sukhumi will be determined, inter alia, on the basis of a declaration of measures for a political settlement of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict of 4 April 1994.” Simply saying, this is a federal agreement. As Boden himself noted: “The future status of Abkhazia, as the document says, should be such that Abkhazia will be part of the Georgian state ... The fact is that they [the Abkhazian side] need to explain the concept so that they understand that all the legal requirements that they put forward can be fulfilled as part of such a decision” (Buntman, *Ekho Moskvyy*, 17 May 2002).

The unwillingness to adapt the conditions outlined in the document “Basic Principles for the Distribution of Competences between Tbilisi and Sukhumi” with new realities and along with the toughness of the UN mediation position led the negotiations to a standstill (Frear, 2014: 8). Stewart connects this development with the UN’s inefficiency in such negotiations, where one side is recognized, and the other is not, due to the commitment mentioned above to the principle of the territorial integrity of its members (Stewart, 2003: 25-26). The failure of the “Boden plan” was caused by its inconsistency with the changing realities after 1999, such as the abovementioned referendum in Abkhazia. The territorial integrity of Georgia marked by this document made it unacceptable to the Abkhazian side. It demonstrated the futility of proposing any comprehensive formulas for resolving the conflict against the backdrop of a lack of trust, as well as the Abkhazian side’s sense of vulnerability, which is greatly enhanced by the reluctance of the West to consider Abkhazian aspirations (Akaba&Khintba, 2011: 27). Nevertheless, despite all this, one cannot ignore the fact that the Geneva talks remain useful as the only official high-level dialogue between Abkhazia and Georgia, as well as with the UN, OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe), EU (European Union), and the USA (Frear, 2014:8).

Events in 2003-2004 led to changes in the political structure of the warring parties. As a result of the “Rose Revolution” in November 2003, Mikhail Saakashvili came to power in Georgia. Initially, he announced a closer and warmer relationship with Russia, but these promises did not last long. After only six months, insurmountable contradictions became apparent (Mouritzen&Wivel, 2012:14). Georgians thought that the status quo prevailing since the 1990s must change (Nilsson, 2009: 94). In subsequent years, the Saakashvili administration quite openly showed its intention to return Abkhazia and South Ossetia, as confirmed by the deployment of Georgian military bases in Senaki near Abkhazia and Gori near South Ossetia. Georgia also openly worked to destabilize the situation in South Ossetia and Abkhazia (Mouritzen&Wivel, 2012:15).

In the meantime, change in leadership was also observed in Abkhazia. Sergey Bagapsh won the presidential election after a fierce political competition for the presidency (Lasaria, 2017: 321). The presidential elections in Abkhazia set an example for Georgia, a republic recognized by the international community, in which, since 1991, the highest authority had never passed from one president to another by peaceful and constitutional means. In unrecognized Abkhazia, such a precedent was created. It is

worth noting that the political class of Abkhazia showed the will and willingness to negotiate. So, after the vote count led to a split among the ruling elite and the people of the Republic, Russia began to insist on holding the second round of elections. Thus, it tried to provide a chance of victory for its favor, using the leverage of economic pressure on Abkhazia (Shanava, 2010: 65). However, suddenly a compromise was found - a second round, in which the two leading contenders paired as president and vice president (respectively, Sergey Bagapsh and Raul Khadzhimba). Thus, the Russian candidate did not hold the real power.

At the end of the election, the winner Sergey Bagapsh managed to build constructive relations both with Moscow and with his previous opponents. None of them were subjected to repression and did not leave the political scene (Markedonov, 2010: 74). Ó Beacháin talking about those events said that “Since 2004, Abkhazia has proven capable of holding competitive and unpredictable elections in which real opposition candidates participate and enjoy prospects of success” (Ó Beacháin, 2019: 58). The Abkhazian election has somewhat refuted another perception that unrecognized republics are just puppets in the hands of Great Powers. Indeed, Russia fully supported Raul Khadzhimba as the successor of Vladislav Ardzinba. Moreover, Russia helped him to conduct a campaign against his main rival, Sergey Bagapsh (Markedonov, 2010: 74). Nevertheless, despite Russian support, the people of Abkhazia independently have chosen Bagapsh as their president.

The restoration of political power in Georgia entailed a predictable response from external forces. Traditionally, the European Union did not play a significant role in the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict, since the main actors here have always been Russia, the United States, and the United Nations. An EU official stated that, “[t]he EU cannot send peacekeepers for decades into conflicts which have no prospects of being solved” (Butler et al., 2012:24). During this period, Abkhazia could receive financial assistance from the EU, primarily to maintain the activity of non-governmental organizations and civil society, as well as in the form of infrastructure projects (Frear, 2014: 9).

However, having strengthened organizationally and politically, the EU more and more insistently began to make an application for a place in the process of resolving conflicts in the South Caucasus. The European Union, which previously participated in the negotiation process to resolve the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict as a mediator, began to take a confident position. It actively started showing its

presence since 2003 when it supported the Special Representative (EUSR) in the South Caucasus. The EUSR was offering a potential dialogue mechanism through which the Abkhazian authorities can engage with the EU (Frear, 2014: 9). A breakthrough in strengthening the EU's political presence in the South Caucasus took place in 2004, when ten states of Central and Eastern Europe joined the European community at once, and also became a consequence of this structure entering the Black Sea geopolitical space with the accession of Bulgaria and Romania in 2007.

The “novelty” of Europe as an actor in the Georgian-Abkhazian settlement was its main advantage. If the United States and the Group of Friends of the UN Secretary-General for Georgia, had almost completely exhausted the confidence limit of the Abkhazian side, Europe, with its, at first glance, less tendentious and aggressive position, aroused great sympathy for the Abkhazian side. This fact is reflected, in particular, in the plan of Bagapsh to resolve the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict under the name “Key to the Future”. In his plan, Bagapsh emphasized Abkhazia's interest in the European Neighborhood Policy. Abkhazia wanted to get closer to Europe, but regardless of Georgia (De Waal, 2018: 24). Thus, according to Khintba and Akaba, this plan was “the most important signal so far sent to the West – although it hardly present[ed] an effective recipe for the settlement of the conflict.”(Akaba&Khintba, 2011:26).

The plan suggested Georgia to recognize Abkhazia without offering anything in return. Even such an important issue as the return of refugees has not been resolved. Irakli Alasania (at that time an adviser to the president of Georgia on conflict resolution issues) stated: “No door can be opened with this key”. Meanwhile, the main provisions of the Georgian Peace Roadmap voiced by Alasania himself (Civil Georgia, 9 June 2006) were also rejected by the Abkhazian side. A federal agreement proposed by Alasania contradicted the Constitution of Abkhazia (Akaba&Khintba, 2011: 26).

The intransigence of the key positions of the parties, the lack of progress in strengthening confidence-building measures, the decrease in the dynamics of the peacemaking process, and the activity of the UN in the conflict zone along with the 2006 Kodori events led to the end of the official negotiation process. These events crossed out some positive dynamics that were observed during the preparation of the Agreement on the non-resumption of hostilities (Lasaria, 2017: 321).

In July 2006, Georgia invaded a military contingent to the territory of the Kodor Gorge of Abkhazia. Georgia moved the headquarters of the pro-Georgian Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia from Tbilisi to the upper Kodor Gorge (Siddi, 2012: 11). It argued its actions with the necessary procedure for restoring the constitutional order. Abkhazia regarded this as an act of aggression, which also contradicted with the 1994 Moscow Agreements. The negotiation process has come to a standstill; the Russian-Georgian relations have been minimized at all. For many commentators, this change was dictated by the events in Kosovo, Georgia was afraid to repeat the fate of Serbia; therefore, sought to create a legitimate government controlled from Tbilisi. Thus, in June 2007, Russian President Putin made a sensational statement that the Kosovo problem was no different from the situations in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Transnistria (Pravda, 8 June 2007). The declaration of the independence of Kosovo on February 17, 2008, and the legal recognition of the new state by leading Western countries were perceived in Abkhazia as a “precedent”, while in Georgia, the USA and the European Union declared the “uniqueness of the Kosovo case”. Already in March 2008, Russia was withdrawing from the sanctions regime against Abkhazia, introduced by the decision of the Council of the CIS Heads of State of 1996. In June 2008, it introduced railroad troops to Abkhazia to restore and protect communications. All this happens against the background of a sharp deterioration of the security regime in the region (Akaba&Khintba, 2011:27).

Being scared of the possible consequences of Kosovo’s recognition in 2008, Saakashvili announced his readiness to give a broad autonomy to Abkhazia, of course, in the frame of the Georgian state, in which the post of vice president was also proposed. Nevertheless, in the same year, a Law on Occupied Territories was adopted (See more in Chapter 3), according to which any activity is prohibited on the territory of Abkhazia until the constitutional order will be restored on the whole territory of Georgia (that is, the return of Abkhazia to Georgia). Doubts about the veracity of the proposed options (the abovementioned broad autonomy and a post of vice president) and Saakashvili’s real intentions regarding the protection of Abkhaz rights are expressed by Sterio (Sterio, 2013: 151).

The Abkhazian foreign policy has evolved into a multi-vector one. Despite the “priority” of the Russian direction of foreign policy, it implied a gradual departure from monopoly of Russia’s influence and diversification of foreign policy relations. Indeed, the period from the beginning to August 8 of 2008 was a time of missed opportunities for Western countries. The West was not able to use the chance to qualitatively seize the initiative from Moscow, despite the intensification of visits by foreign delegations.

By 2008, Europe began to show more interest in Abkhazia (De Waal, 2018: 24). In May 2008, ambassadors of 15 EU countries and foreign ministers of several states visited Sukhum at once. In June, EU Special Representative Javier Solana arrived in Abkhazia. Sufficiently positive impressions of the Abkhazian side from these meetings can be traced in the words of the Secretary of the Security Council of Abkhazia, Stanislav Lakoba: “It is felt that certain changes have been outlined in the approaches of the European Union to the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict It is entirely possible that the emphasis on Georgia may be shifted” (Regnum, January 13 2009). However, things did not go further than statements by EU representatives about their readiness to facilitate the Georgian-Abkhazian negotiation process. The accumulated tension and ambiguity around the status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia gave impetus to the well-known events of August 2008. On August 26, 2008, Russia recognized the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. It “became a new landmark in the transformed Georgian-Abkhaz confrontation” (Akaba&Khintba, 2011: 27).

The unproductive peace talks that followed immediately after the Georgian-Abkhazian war can also be explained by the unbalanced policies of Western countries, which blindly supported the territorial integrity of Georgia and refused to study all circumstances in more detail. These policies, to some extent, deprived them of neutrality. All issues were resolved mostly in or through Tbilisi. Nevertheless, over time, the need for direct interaction with Abkhazia became clear, which led to the emergence of a policy of “engagement without recognition”. The activation of the EU certainly could not be carried out without infringing on the interests of Russia, whose area of special strategic interest is the South Caucasus. For Russia, security in this region is an important element in the security of its southern borders (Lasaria, 2017: 321-322).

The policy of the Russian Federation in the South Caucasus has been inconsistent and controversial. The position of Russian President Boris Yeltsin did not differ in clarity and changed under the influence of several factors. Until 1999, Moscow tried, by all means, to return Abkhazia to Georgia. Thus, Russia hoped to return it to the zone of its influence, pushing it in every way to join the CIS. On the other hand, Abkhazia remained the main lever of pressure on Georgia. This situation continued until Vladimir Putin came to power.

By the end of the 1990s, it became evident that Russia had completely lost the strategic key to Georgia, after which it changed its policy in favor of Abkhazia. Russia was also concerned that other countries might intervene. This intervention could help weaken the traditional sphere of influence of Russia. Georgia's growing pro-Westernism that took place in 1993 has also raised additional concerns in the Kremlin regarding the future of Russian-Georgian relations. This circumstance could lead to a weak economic and military presence in the region. Furthermore, Russia had some reasons to consider the Transcaucasian region as a zone of confrontation. One of the reasons to pay closer attention was the ongoing economic support of the West from Georgia and also Georgia's participation in projects to transport Caspian fuel to the West and Turkey (Sagramoso, 2000:181).

Because of the circumstances surrounding the extensive involvement of the U.S. in the Caucasus by the end of the 1990s, which affected the alignment of forces in the region, as well as through gross miscalculations of the Georgian leadership and verified foreign policy of Abkhazia, the situation turned in favor of Sukhum. Over the years, Abkhazia has established itself as a reliable partner of the Russian Federation. It should be noted that if it were not for the strong position of the leadership of Abkhazia, with the start of the reorientation of Georgia towards the West, the geopolitical picture in the South Caucasus would have received a completely different configuration. Abkhazian-Georgian conflict helped Russia maintain its position in the South Caucasus. The firm and consistent position of the authorities of Abkhazia did not allow the United States and its allies to gain a foothold on the Russian borders, where NATO troops and infrastructure could come close, which, of course, would turn out to be big problems for Russia.

Cooley & Mitchell noted that although today Georgia is considered as an internationally recognized state with a legal right over Abkhazia, the post-Soviet Georgia "has never really exercised actual local control over Abkhazia, except for a few months in the early 1990s. Thus, while Georgia may see itself as the rightful ruler of Abkhazia, the view in" Sukhum "has always been quite different." (Cooley & Mitchell, 2010: 69).

The world community is increasingly faced with the choice of whether to make exceptions for peoples seeking self-determination. This question divides it, and geopolitical motives in this matter play a decisive role. In the Balkans, these differences arose over Kosovo, and in the Caucasus over South

Ossetia and Abkhazia. In these cases, a remedial position gets more attention than self-determination. Unsurprisingly, if people do not trust the authorities, an increasingly violent context reduces their confidence in the prevailing order. Given the dissatisfaction of the Abkhazians with their status after 1931 and other aspects of the events in Abkhazia after this date, as well as the parallels in South Ossetia, it is quite natural to use any opportunity for self-preservation, including secession from Georgia (Hewitt, 2013: 55). The fears of Abkhazia about its security are well founded.

The oppression of the people contradicts the principle of remedial secession, which suggested that secession may be the last resort for ending oppression. The last act of aggression was the August War, based on which Russia recognized Abkhazia. According to Medvedev, this option was the last resort, since Georgia could not correct or prevent injustice against the Abkhazians and South Ossetians and ensure stability on the borders of Russia. Representatives of Abkhazia argue that the international community must recognize their existence sooner or later. The former president of Georgia, Eduard Shevardnadze, supported this position, albeit after he left his post. In June 2011, he stated that despite the sensitivity of this decision, Georgia should recognize the independence of Abkhazia (Coppieters, 2018:1009).

CHAPTER 3

THE RECOGNITION OF ABKHAZIA AND GREAT POWER POLITICS

The Soviet period, when Abkhazia was a part of Georgia, was not remembered favorably by the Abkhazians. Since that time, the geopolitical situation and the balance of power in the world in general, and in the Caucasus in particular, have changed radically. Abkhazians are struggling to be a member of international society after they unilaterally declared their independence in 1992. However, regarding Abkhazia, the rhetoric of Georgia has resisted any change. Abkhazian aspirations remain the same but the global politics and parties' interests changed along with its tactics.

3.1. GEOPOLITICAL RIVALRY BETWEEN RUSSIA AND THE WEST OVER THE CAUCASUS UNTIL THE 2008 AUGUST WAR

When the disintegration of the Soviet Union was celebrated as the “end of history” and the triumph of the West, Russia tried to reconcile with the loss of large territory, resources, and power. The dissolution of the USSR “created a black hole in the very centre of Eurasia” (Brzezinski, 1997: 87). Among the chaos and decay, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) was born. Ironically, it was the Russian leadership that influenced the collapse of the Soviet Union. During the first few years after the collapse, Russia seemed to be less interested in Eurasia and more interested in integrating with the West. Andrei Kozyrev, the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, believed that Russia's security could only be achieved through complete coordination with the West. However, Yevgeniy Primakov, the successor to Kozyrev in the foreign ministry from 1996-1998 and Prime Minister from 1998-1999, is known for his ideas about Russia's presence and influence in Eurasia (Barskii, 2016). Thus, Russia, as a stabilizing actor, shifted from European to Eurasian (Bogaturov, 1993: 41).

The collapse of the USSR did not stop the Russian aspiration to retain its power as an important international player. Russia considered the post-Soviet territory as its near abroad, and a special zone of influence. This consideration is the natural result of the centuries-long Russian rule in Eurasia.

Therefore, since the 1990s, Russia has sought to regain its power in the post-Soviet space. Several economic and security projects were initiated to integrate Eurasia under the leadership of Moscow.

According to the Primakov Doctrine, Russia was obliged to renew its stabilizing role in its neighborhood, which aimed to create a Eurasian counterweight to NATO, countering the US influence in the Middle East and Eurasia (Tsygankov, 2003:108). Russia views “itself as a pole of influence in a multipolar world” (Wilson & Popescu, 2009: 318). To fulfill this role, Russia had to remain a great power, without which there would be no stability and peace in Eurasia (Tsygankov, 2003:108).

After the end of the Cold War, Russia consistently sought the position of an equal partner to the United States and NATO. Sometimes it saw itself as a partner and sometimes as a competitor. This ambiguity about its position was clearly expressed in Putin’s words in 2005 that “the demise of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century” (Cecire, 2017:1). Russia’s security strategy documents are usually riddled with references to Moscow’s special role in managing significant crises as a responsible global power (Cecire, 2017:1). In the rivalry with the West over the Caucasus, Russia was mostly irritated by the USA. One of the reasons is the fact that most of the processes after the dissolution of the USSR were directly or indirectly influenced by the US (Suchkov, 2018: 313).

The evolving nature of international politics after the end of the Cold War and the confrontation between Russia and the USA did not help the economic and political progress of the states in the South Caucasus. The struggle for spheres of influence continued, and each party resorted to all available tools to maximize their strength in the region. The South Caucasus are geopolitically important because of the region’s proximity to significant energy resources. Thus, ethnical tensions made it possible for the Great Powers’ to involve in this region to attain their political goals (Mankoff, 2016; Tuzhba, 2015:262; Samutina, 2015:225). Altogether, it became a source of “significant international engagement and concern” (Nation, 2007).

After the collapse of the USSR, Russia has not lost interest in the South Caucasus. Moreover, Russia saw this region essential for its own security. There were also cultural and historical ties between the peoples of the region and the peoples of the Russian Federation. According to Berryman (2018:67), foreign policy decision-making is based not only on power-political calculations but also on historical

relations. The continued importance of the Caucasus for Russia also meant that it would seek to prevent the emergence of any active anti-Russian government, and any foreign power influential in the region.

Russia's policy towards the South Caucasus was not always consistent. In the case of Georgia, Russia's approach has dramatically changed over time. The policy of supporting the territorial integrity of Georgia has transformed into recognizing the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Russia also has a vague attitude about the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. In general, Russia prefers the status quo, which allows Russia to maintain control over Armenia and enjoy a significant impact on Azerbaijan. Hitherto, the conflict has proved profitable for the Russian military industry; it would sell weapons to both Azerbaijan and Armenia (Suchkov, 2018: 317). According to Kremlin policy, the crisis should be under control, and the escalation of hostilities should be prevented, like in 2016.

Russia is, however, unable to exert full control upon the South Caucasus because of the rising Western influence after the end of the Cold War (Antonopoulos et al., 2017: 366-367). With the end of the Cold War, Russia, in every possible way, showed dissatisfaction with the hegemony of the United States and its superpower status. According to Russia, signs of US hegemony could be seen in its ignorance of the United Nations (UN) resolutions and international law. The main reason for the deterioration of Russia's relations with the West, especially regarding the South Caucasus was Russia's perception that the West inadequately assesses its security concerns in the region. For example, at the Munich Security Conference in 2007, Putin considered the US-led enlargement of NATO "unacceptable".

Significant energy resources located in Azerbaijan has made the South Caucasus particularly interesting to the West. The West also endeavored to introduce Western institutions to the South Caucasian states and reduce their dependence on Russia. NATO also expanded to the east toward the former Soviet sphere of influence in the post-Cold War period. Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic joined NATO in 1999; Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, and, most importantly, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia followed them in 2004. This expansion was accompanied by outbursts of discontent from the Kremlin but was ignored by the West (Mouritzen & Wivel, 2012:3). Generally, Russia believes that the West plans to oust it from the South Caucasus. This understanding comes from some statements by the Western authorities. The promise of NATO in 2008 and 2016 about the acceptance of Georgia as a

member is one example. For Russia, this statement clearly shows NATO's aspirations to contain Russia not only from its European neighbors but also from its southern borders (Hunter, 2017: 11). Russia's policy seeks to prevent the growing influence of the West near its borders. It had to adopt "a centrist course of pragmatic realism" in order "to preserve Russia's territorial integrity and enhance its commanding presence within the post-Soviet space" (Berryman, 2018: 70). In these circumstances, Russia is considered by the West and especially by the United States as a state that has neo-imperial ambitions to restore its influence in the former Soviet states (Starr, 197).

Brussels and Moscow both applied their own integration mechanisms to draw the vast Eurasian region into their sphere of influence. For this purpose, Russia offered these countries a Eurasian integration project. Despite Russia's efforts, some of the Eurasian countries were more interested in the Euro-Atlantic alternative presented by the West. It led to a Russian-Western rivalry. Both parties blame each other for subversive activities (Hunter, 2017: 9). The long-term EU projects have become less attractive for some of the countries due to state crises amid economic crises. Russia turns out to be more influential than Europe, relying on "more effective short-term manoeuvring in the shared neighbourhood" (Wilson & Popescu, 2013: 318). Russia began to spread and strengthen its influence in the post-Soviet space actively. Moscow's informality and short-term tactics explain the success of Russia while the excessive formality of the EU bodies in the region is a reason for their failure. (Wilson & Popescu, 2013: 318)

The USA and EU emphasized the negative impact of Russia on the democratization process of the post-Soviet space. However, they sometimes inclined to ignore non-democratic practices and human rights violations when it is more suitable for their own interests (Hunter, 2017: 9). Although the EU is known for its commitment to democratic reforms and the promotion of liberal values, the main driving factor of its activity was the energy sources of the South Caucasus. This fact was evident from its slight indifference to the processes taking place there and activity with the advent of energy resources. Because of its formal structure and absence of hard power tools, the EU reacted more in words than in practice towards resolving conflicts.

Thus, neither the United States nor Europe was particularly productive in resolving conflicts. However, both the United States and France are members of the OSCE Minsk Group which was

established to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. One of the reasons for this failure was identified in the conference document on the EU's policy towards the region: the EU's absence of a common position concerning the conflict. France is the most active member of the EU in resolving ethnic conflicts in the Caucasus which can be explained by the lobbying of the Armenian diaspora in France. However, membership in Minsk Group is not limited to only France. Together the Minsk Group reacted to some internal problems ambiguously. For example, when dealing with Armenia, they preferred the principle of national self-determination as the basis for solving the Karabakh problem and supported the separation of Karabakh from Azerbaijan. Meanwhile, in the case of Azerbaijan, it relied on the principle of territorial integrity and supported the return of the region to Azerbaijan (OSCE, 7 December 2017). These contradictory messages did not force the two states to be more amiable and make compromises to find solutions.

The EU values, i.e., democracy, the rule of law and human rights, formed the core of the Eastern Partnership, founded in 2009 at the Prague Summit. According to the Kremlin, promoting democratic and liberal views, and a free-market economy are not the real goals of the West, especially the USA, in the former Soviet states. The USA just wants to bring anti-Russian governments to power in this region. Thus, the popular movements, the so-called Color Revolutions in Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, and Georgia, are generally perceived as Western-sponsored initiatives to weaken the Russian position in the former Soviet space (Kozłowski, 2016: 136; Berryman, 2018: 70). Russia considers the West's policy, in general, aimed at destabilizing the situation not only in the near abroad but also in Russia itself (Batyuk, 2006: 16). As Rumer argues, "Beyond that, the push by the West to promote democracy inside Russia was declared by Russian leaders as a violation of Russian sovereignty and potentially destabilizing and deeply threatening to the Putin administration itself." (Rumer, 2016: 10).

There was a debate about the current priorities of the EU in the Eastern Partnership, their values or interests. The EU is based on values, i.e., democracy, human rights, the rule of law, and equality. However, there are some doubts regarding the Eastern Partnership since the European Union gives priority to its interests rather than its values. Tolstrup believes that "the picture of the EU as the white knight, consistently promoting freedom and democracy, is not entirely right" (Tolstrup, 2014: 248). In some cases, in the late 1990s up to the 2010s, due to setting aside the democratic considerations, the EU covered the authoritarian moods in some states of the region. Geopolitical motives were the main reasons

for these actions, especially after the most-recent last rounds of EU enlargement. Eastward expansion for the EU is just an opportunity for geopolitical advancement. Through the accession of eight new states to the EU in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), it has moved borders hundreds of miles east of Berlin to Tallinn. The eastward expansion was complemented by the Wider Europe programme, which later was transformed into the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), designed to stimulate in the union the further involvement of bordering European states. With the entry of Romania and Bulgaria (2007), the borders of the Union reached the Black Sea (O'Brennan, 2006: 156). It is difficult to call the ENP successful because it could not change the "political and security picture in the region". (Wilson & Popescu, 2009: 317).

Geopolitical motives play an important role in foreign policies of not only Russia but also the European Union and the United States, which often postpone the promotion of democracy in favor of confronting Russia. The form of government does not matter much when it comes to promoting one's own geopolitical interests (Korolev, 2015: 299). Both Russia and the West, are interested in protecting their interests, which are expressed in strengthening influence in the South Caucasus. Perhaps the NATO expansion towards the Russian borders became the catalyst for the revitalization of Russia and the change in its tactics (Braun, 2008: 1). This change became obvious on the background of the August events which will be analyzed in the next section.

3.2. THE AUGUST WAR AND RUSSIA'S RECOGNITION OF ABKHAZIA

Kosovo unilaterally declared its independence from Serbia on February 17, 2008. Russia refused to recognize Kosovo, while a significant part of the world community supported Kosovo. Russia was frightened that, in this way, NATO, would move further towards Russia's western borders. The events in Kosovo have clearly shown that the international community is seriously divided on the issue of state recognition. International law is insufficient to evaluate the recognition process. The developments in Georgia only a few months later exacerbated the divisions about recognition.

Tensions between Georgia and the republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia have become increasingly serious after Kosovo's recognition. In August 2008, Georgian troops launched an offensive

against Tskhinval, the capital of South Ossetia, and took control within a few hours. Russia immediately responded with a fierce counter-offensive. Moscow declared that this move was a response to the killing of Russian peacekeeping forces by Georgia. At first, Tbilisi explained its actions as a response to increasing attacks on Georgian villages by the South Ossetia militia, later changed to a response to the Russian provocations and the legitimate military operation to control its own territories, i.e., South Ossetia and Abkhazia (Whewell, BBC, 28 October 2008). According to the EU report, Georgia acted irresponsibly, trying to seize South Ossetia by force. In turn, Russia's behavior was also far from perfect, intervening militarily, to prevent the capture of South Ossetian militias and Russian peacekeepers.

The US reaction was cautious and hesitant. Only when it became clear that Abkhazia and South Ossetia were forever lost to Georgia Washington spoke up more actively and called on Russia to abandon military force (Mouritzen & Wivel, 2012: 99-100). The statement of John Beyrle, the US ambassador to Moscow, was surprising since he supported Russia's actions calling them "legitimate" in response to Georgian attacks on Russian troops (Sweeney, Reuters, 22 August 2008). In contrast, Russia's reaction was lightning fast and active. At a meeting with the National Security Council, Medvedev made an official statement that contained three main geopolitical goals. Firstly, he declared Russia's right to maintain its peacekeeping forces on the territory of Georgia, since previous agreements authorized this action. Also, it was noted that "historically Russia has been a guarantor for the security of the peoples of the Caucasus, and this remains true today". Secondly, he pointed out that the actions of Georgia are regarded as "an act of aggression against Russian peacekeepers and civilians of South Ossetia", most of which, moreover, have dual citizenship and are also citizens of Russia. Thirdly, he noted that protecting the life and honor of Russian citizens is his direct responsibility wherever they are (Toal, 2017: 180-181).

Russia stated that Georgia's action was an "aggression against South Ossetia" and Russian compatriots. Thus, Russia explained its intervention through its responsibility to protect it. According to Moscow, it was just a humanitarian intervention to protect the local population from genocide and against Georgian aggression (King, 2009). Then, Russia imposed a naval blockade against Georgia. In response to the Russian action, NATO increased its presence in the Black Sea and started delivering humanitarian aid (Mount, 2008). However, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev argued that this assistance was, in fact, military-technical aid rather than humanitarian aid.

Despite the short war, the consequences and geopolitical justification of the conflict cannot be ignored. On August 26, 2008, Russia officially recognized the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The official statement mainly relates to political motives, such as “Georgian provocations” and “failed negotiations”, but also contains a legal line of reasoning:

“Making this decision, Russia was guided by the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations, the Helsinki Final Act and other fundamental international instruments, including the 1970 Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations among States. It should be noted that in accordance with the Declaration, every State has the duty to refrain from any forcible action which deprives peoples of their right to self-determination and freedom and independence, to adhere in their activities to the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, and to possess a government representing the whole people belonging to the territory. There is no doubt that Mikhail Saakashvili’s regime is far from meeting those high standards set by the international community” (Ryngaert&Sobrie, 2011:481-482).

Three years later, Medvedev described the events of the August War as a successful attempt to prevent the expansion of NATO in the region. Nevertheless, at the same time, it was coincidentally possible by the rush authorization of Saakashvili itself and his methods of solving ethnic problems (Berryman, 2018: 70). As for the actions of the Russian army, they saved the lives of innocent citizens and contained the threat posed by Georgia (Toal, 2017: 190). Medvedev also added that “If ... had faltered in 2008, the geopolitical arrangement would be different now and a number of countries which (NATO) tried to deliberately drag into the alliance, would have most likely already been part of it now” (Dyomkin, Reuters, 21 November 2011). Thus, in the mind of Kremlin, the Russians not only prevented “genocide” but also restrained NATO. The West evaluated Russia’s actions in Georgia as an example of its neo-imperial policy in the post-Soviet space, whereas Moscow regarded its actions in Georgia as defensive. The West did not expect Russia to intervene in Georgia. This surprise was unpleasant, to some extent. The war became a challenge not only to the Western order in the world in general but also in the Caucasus in particular (Mouritzen&Wivel, 2012:2). According to some observers, this war would also expose its ethnic problems and upset the fragile balance in Russia itself, switching to the North Caucasus’ ethnicities (Suchkov, 2018: 312; Hunter, 2017: 11).

Erosi Kitsmarishvili, a former Georgian diplomat, claimed that the Georgian operation in South Ossetia was a carefully planned action. He said that he was warned about an upcoming operation in Abkhazia in April 2008. According to Kitsmarishvili, Georgia decided to start the hostilities in South Ossetia, which would have been expanded to Abkhazia (Vartanyan&Barry, Reuters, 25 November 2008). It was a plan developed by the former Minister of Defense Irakli Okruashvili (2004-2006). Georgia developed a detailed plan to take control over Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Rohan, Reuters, 14 September 2008). In the absence of an agreement on security guarantees and the possibility of military revenge from Georgia, the recognition of Abkhazia made it possible to ensure the safety of Abkhazians.

Moreover, it is worth noting the influence of the West in this matter. At that time there were 130 US advisers in the Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs. The Georgian army was equipped with the latest generation of weapons that it bought from the USA and Israel which were proudly demonstrated on Independence Day (Mouritzen & Wivel, 2012: 71). All this suggests that Georgia was prepared for war but was not ready for the consequences. Former German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder also shared the opinion that it was hardly possible that the US did not know about the plans of Georgia. “[E]veryone knows that these US military advisors in Georgia exist -- a deployment that I’ve never considered particularly intelligent. And it would have been strange if these experts had not had any information. Either they were extremely unprofessional or they were truly fooled, which is hard to imagine.” (Follath & Spörl, Spiegel International, 18 August 2008). This impression was also felt in the interpretation of Russia’s intentions by Georgia: “Friendly Western nations all told us that it is impossible that in the twenty-first century Russia might initiate a direct intervention.” (Felgengauer, 2009: 165). The Georgian army was prepared for just smaller-scale operations rather than a confrontation with Russia (Mouritzen & Wivel, 2012: 71).

Although Georgia expected support from the United States, the United States was hesitant to take any steps. Most importantly, the United States understood the danger of a direct confrontation with Russia. The USA was also satisfied with the status quo since any instability in this region could bring out global consequences. Therefore, the United States preferred to limit its foreign policy to symbolic sanctions against Russia and an expression of discontent. By supporting the story of the unfortunate Georgians who suffered from strong Russians, the USA tried to satisfy the Georgian government not to lose its loyalty to Washington (Mouritzen & Wivel, 2012: 106-109).

The August War and the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh are important signals for instability in the Caucasus. It also shows the strategic importance of the Caucasus for both Russia and NATO. With the collapse of the USSR, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan achieved independence, and in order to further preserve their sovereignty, they are seeking support either from Russia or NATO alliance. Moscow believes that NATO plans to encircle Russia, and thus tries to make it clear that it is ready to take any “defensive” action to counter this threat.

For Moscow, support for Abkhazia and significant investments are not necessarily a sign of Russian expansionist policies, but rather a measure to guarantee the maintenance of a belt of friendly states between the United States and the Middle East. The de facto independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia limited NATO’s geopolitical expansion to the Russian southern borders. Abkhazia is important for Russia because it further strengthens Moscow’s presence on the Black Sea coast, where NATO members Turkey, Romania, and Bulgaria, as well as NATO aspirants, Ukraine and Georgia, are located.

Abkhazia considers Moscow’s recognition as a necessary condition for its survival. Abkhazian journalist Inal Khashig claims, “The outside-world fenced itself off from us... As a result, we took help from where it was offered.” (Tlisova, 2011). In fact, the Abkhazians were realistic, and they did not have any illusion about Russia’s real intentions in the region and Abkhazia. Although geopolitical considerations drove Russia, it was not an attempt to prevent the restoration of Georgia’s territorial integrity. Russia acted in such an unexpected and straightforward way because of the way Saakashvili wanted Georgia’s territorial problems to be solved (Suchkov, 2018: 318).

Both cases are considered unique: Abkhazia and South Ossetia by Russia and Kosovo by the USA. However, the US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice proclaimed that these cases have nothing in common: “I do not want to try to judge motive, but we have been very clear. Kosovo is sui generis, because of the special circumstances out of which the breakup of Yugoslavia came” (Hilpold, 2018:92).

The official explanation of the recognition of the South Caucasus republics by the Russian side, according to the *2008 Russian Foreign Ministry Review*, was a direct threat from Georgia regarding the rights and security of the South Ossetian and Abkhaz peoples. Therefore, they had no other way of realizing the right to self-determination, in contrast to Kosovo Albanians, who proclaimed independence

unilaterally (*Russian Foreign Ministry Review*, 2008). The argument was that Russia was acting as a guarantor of security in the region and tried to protect civilians from the Georgian military. Lavrov fairly noted that “It is unclear why those who literally on every corner talk about the responsibility to protect, about personal security, forgot about this when it came to the part of the former Soviet Union, where the authorities began to kill innocent people, appealing to sovereignty and territorial integrity.” (Lavrov, 2008). Thus, one cannot fail to notice the fact of similarity in attempts of Russia and Western states. Whereas Russia recognized Abkhazia and South Ossetia, European states recognized Kosovo by employing very similar reasons.

As stated by the Russian Duma: “The right of nations to self-determination cannot justify recognition of Kosovo’s independence along with the simultaneous refusal to discuss similar acts by other self-proclaimed states, which have obtained de facto independence exclusively by themselves” (Slomanson, 2010:16). Representatives of Russia insist on the identicalness of the “Kosovo case” with the situation in Abkhazia. In 2006, Vladimir Putin, asked: “If people in Kosovo can be granted full independence... why then should we deny it to Abkhazia and South Ossetia?” (Report of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia, 2009:26-27).

Most of the existing states and leading intergovernmental organizations such as the EU, the OSCE and NATO recognized Abkhazian independence as a gross violation of international law and, in particular, the principle of territorial integrity enshrined in the UN Charter. In turn, the Abkhazian side determined its position and the desire to recognize independence by three factors: “oppression by the majority; illegitimate authority of the Georgian leadership in 1992; right to self-determination” (Chirikba, 2009: 8). The contradiction between the two principles - the principle of territorial integrity and the right of the nation to self-determination became the basis for the emergence of contradictions between Russia and Western countries (and, in fact, the entire world community) in connection with the recognition of Abkhazia.

The question of whether there is a real difference between these two cases is discussed by many political scientists, such as Harzl, Siddi, Slomanson. The justification for expanding the boundaries of international law in one case based on unique circumstances is itself a precedent. However, there are both similarities and differences between these cases, and the balance between them usually depends on

political interests and the interpretation of the interested party (Stepanova, 2008:2). It leads to creation of different and sometimes opposite positions on this question. The next section is going to give a brief description of main states' position on the recognition of Abkhazia and the interests behind it.

3.3. THE GLOBAL RESPONSE TO RUSSIA'S RECOGNITION OF ABKHAZIA

The August War lasted five days after Russia's intervention on 8 August 2008. As a result, Russia recognized the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Russia's military operations ended in early October under a ceasefire with the mediation of French President Nicolas Sarkozy and the European Union. Although scheduled for October 15, international negotiations could only be initiated in November (Stepanova, 2008:1).

Despite sharp political differences between Russia and the West regarding Abkhazia and South Ossetia, especially with regard to the sovereignty of the two republics, a decision was made to reach an agreement. With the mediation of France, a five-point plan was concluded, aimed at a cease-fire and the return of Russian and Georgian troops to pre-war positions.

Despite all attempts to coordinate their actions, the EU failed to apply a united foreign policy regarding Russia and the Caucasus. Because the EU is a union of independent states, the members gave their reactions following their own foreign policy interests. Some members just preferred a milder policy of condemnation in words. The position of Europe and its members can be seen in public speeches and statements by leaders of European countries made immediately after the events. The visits of the leaders immediately after the war have also shown their political perspectives and foreign policy orientations. Some of the leaders visited only one of the parties, thereby showing their position on this issue. (Rettman, EU Observer, 1 December 2010).

The EU leaders regarded the sanctions only as a last option. While rebuilding their relationship with Russia, the West was taken by surprise and was very careful in its actions. The trio of France-Germany-Italy took the softest position. Italian Foreign Minister Franco Frattini even admitted that they "cannot create an anti-Russia coalition in Europe, and on this point we are close to Putin's position"

(Reuters, 2008). The EU's cautious stance and a more balanced approach of its central states may be due to its energy dependence on Russia. So, despite the official position of condemning the actions of Russia and supporting Georgia, nevertheless, the three refused to impose harsh sanctions that could harm their relations with Russia. Despite the efforts of the United States and the visit of its representative, Dick Cheney, Italy turned out to be a kind of mediator in relations between Russia and the West. Noting that this war pushed Georgia away from Europe and urged them not to cancel the designated NATO-Russia Council, Italy sided with Russia (Mouritzen & Wivel, 2012: 119).

Despite disagreements in the EU, Germany was keen to normalize relations with Russia, calling for dialogue and seeking an agreement acceptable to all EU members with Russia. Foreign Minister Steinmeier proposed abandoning hasty steps because of the suspension of negotiations on the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the EU and Russia. He also noted that Russia's membership in the WTO (World Trade Organization) and NATO-Russia Council relations would be in the interests of both parties. Thus, Germany was more focused on the negative consequences that could result from a breakdown in relations with Russia. Germany tried to avoid any kind of direct confrontation with Russia (Mouritzen & Wivel, 2012: 118). Deputy Foreign Minister Gernot Erler noted that Russia's action was an inevitable reaction to Georgia's violation of international law by breaking the ceasefire agreement by 1992. "In this sense, it is also a question of a violation of international law as soon as you start to go down the road of military action" added Erler (Deutsche Welle, 10 August 2008). Despite the position of the Eastern European members, in May 2008, Germany signed a Strategic and Modernization Partnership with Russia, which determines the economic cooperation of both countries and, therefore, interdependence (Horsley, 2015). The new policy was based on the principle of "change through convergence", which provides for mutual blocking and interweaving between Russian and Western institutions. Thus, it becomes evident that for Germany, the events of the August War were hardly noticeable.

Another state that sought to maintain bilateral relations, by all means, turned out to be Norway. National political and economic interests guided it. The Minister noted this fact at a meeting of ambassadors in Oslo, where it was noted that Norway gives importance to the relations with Russia as a neighbor and an ally in NATO. Thus, Norway's apparent desire to balance between the interests of Europe and Norway was evident.

Despite a group of countries, guided more by economic considerations than by geopolitical ones, there were also states that sharply condemned Russian policies (Mouritzen & Wivel, 2012: 118). Thus, Great Britain, together with Sweden, Poland, and the Baltic countries, actively insisted on the adoption of specific sanctions.

The statement by British Foreign Secretary David Miliband was tough enough. He accused Russia of violating the territorial integrity of Georgia and redrawing spheres of influence in Europe: “It is not just the end of the post-cold war period of growing geopolitical calm in and around Europe. It is also the moment when countries are required to set out where they stand on the significant issues of nationhood and international law” (The Guardian, 28 August 2008). He also took the opportunity to recall the need for a more independent energy policy. Sweden also quite sharply commented on the events. Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt considered Russia’s actions as a confrontation to the whole globe in the face of European countries (Shagina, 2017: 78). In support of their position, bilateral Swedish-Russian military cooperation was frozen, including a naval visit (Mouritzen & Wivel, 2012: 117). At the initiative of the Polish nationalist Lech Kaczynski, this group even visited Tbilisi (Mouritzen & Wivel, 2012: 116). Furthermore, the Estonian State Assembly - the Riigikogu - even compared the actions of Russia with the actions of Nazi Germany in Czechoslovakia and Poland (Ergma, 12 August 2008). Condoleeza Rice in turn compare this case with the events in Czechoslovakia in 1968 (Lazarová, Radio Prague International, 15 August 2008).

This comparison, in turn, was commented on by Czech President Václav Klaus, who stated that there was nothing in common between these two events. Also, in an interview for Czech Radio, he made it clear that “in 1968 Czechoslovakia did not attack Subcarpathian Ruthenia and in his view the pro-reform Czechoslovak leader Alexander Dubček did not resemble President Saakashvili in word or deed.” He stated “I refuse to accept this widespread, simplified interpretation which paints the Georgians as the victims and the Russians as the villains. That is a gross oversimplification of the situation.” (Lazarová, Radio Prague International, 15 August 2008).

The August events became indicative and led to the rethinking of their own state policy and world geopolitics as a whole by some states. The Finnish foreign minister said that this is a sufficient reason to reflect on the possible future membership of Finland in NATO. He noted the return of power politics to

international issues and the inefficiency of the UN, which is already unable to meet the challenges of modern international relations.

Thus, one can observe a lack of coherence in the actions of the countries of Europe, which softened its reaction and allowed Russia to get out of this crisis with minimal losses. Britain, Sweden, Poland, and the Baltic countries were strongest in their positions, while a group of friendly people hampered them from France, Italy, Germany. As a result, considering energy dependence, the EU tried to avoid open confrontation, using only diplomatic options and symbolic sanctions (Shagina, 2017:79).

Although there was no consensus among EU leaders, some symbolic sanctions were nevertheless proposed: for example, the abolition of negotiations on partnership and cooperation with Russia, including liberalizing EU visas. Under pressure from Poland and with the support of Great Britain and Sweden, Russia was refused WTO membership, and it was expelled from the G8. In addition, Russian bank accounts along with the NATO-Russia Council were also frozen. Despite all of this, Russia's position was confident in the international arena, and the EU was too weak to impose any real sanctions (Shagina, 2017:77).

The US position on this issue was tougher. The US has pledged that it will use its veto power in the UN Security Council to block any attempts by Russia to recognize Abkhazia. The Bush administration has suspended a civil nuclear cooperation agreement with Russia. Also, Russia's military cooperation with NATO was suspended, and Moscow's application for accession to the WTO was completely frozen. However, these sanctions hardly affected Russian-American relations. In 2010, they signed an agreement on arms control, and the US still was expecting a joint effort on the application of sanctions against Iran (Shagina, 2017:78).

As for the post-Soviet space and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries, in general, the August War and the subsequent recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia by Russia were not received enthusiastically. None of the post-Soviet states has recognized Abkhazia. Why the neighbouring states still did not recognize Abkhazia? The lack of recognized states does not necessarily mean a lack of will. One clear example is Belarus. Belarus initially wanted to recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia but failed to do so because of the pressure from the EU. The EU has warned that in case

of recognition, Belarus would lose its economic support (Winkel, 2018: 39). It is interesting to highlight that speaking of recognition to Medvedev Lukashenko asked for support but Russia was unable or did not want to eliminate the consequences that might have arisen for Belarus. (RIA Novosti, 13 August 2010). Indeed, the situation in which Abkhazia is not recognized by the neighbouring states makes it more dependent on Russia. This is, in turn, quite comfortable for Russia.

The then President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, in his conversation with Vladimir Putin, outlined the illegality of Georgia's actions, although it refused to recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Kazakhstan did not recognize Kosovo either (Esquire Kazakhstan, 23 June 2014). As Sergei Lavrov noted, Abkhazia and South Ossetia had the same right to be independent as Georgia after the collapse of the USSR (Rytövuori-Apunen, 2019: 36). In his interview with the BBC, he also noted that Abkhazia and South Ossetia could only realize their right to self-determination as a result of the August War, although, they raised this issue more than once (BBC, 22 April 2009).

The UN, which has played a significant role in the recognition of Kosovo, has also declined recognition of Abkhazia. This inaction, in turn, gave a corresponding reaction from the Kremlin (Nunner, 2016: 37). They considered that position as "a politically motivated, selective interpretation of international law, based on double standards" (Ryngaert&Sobrie, 2011: 482).

Despite all the debates around the issue of recognition, six more UN member-states followed Russia. On September 5, 2008, Nicaragua recognized Abkhazia. It stated that "[w]hen the US countered by highlighting Nicaragua's refusal to recognise Kosovo, Nicaragua's representative replied that Kosovo should have remained part of Yugoslavia but South Ossetia and Abkhazia were different 'for ethnic, historical and geographic reasons.'" (Ó Beacháin, 2019: 60-61).

Anyway, one way or another Abkhazia gained its recognition and transformed its status from unrecognized to partially recognized. But how did it changed its foreign policy over the years before and after being recognized? Next section is going to shed light on this question.

3.4. FOREIGN POLICY AND PUBLIC DIPLOMACY OF ABKHAZIA

On August 26, 2008, Abkhazia received official recognition from Russia, which transformed it from an unrecognized state to a partially recognized one. This development was the most significant for Abkhazia after its declaration of independence in 1993. Perhaps this is the main reason why Abkhazia does not consider its recognition as a gift offered by Russia in 2008, but a result of its struggle in and after 1993. Abkhazia has designed its foreign policy as an independent state and has rejected any attempts to be treated differently. For instance, Abkhazia has refused the offer of “Georgian neutral travel documents to Abkhaz citizens” and did not step back from using Abkhazian passports (Caspersen, 2015:402).

Even before the official establishment of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Abkhazia (1993), diplomatic functions were carried out by deputies of the Supreme Council of Abkhazia, members of the government, and prominent public figures in the Republic. They worked hard to create a favorable public opinion for Abkhazia, both in Russia and abroad. Meetings were held with representatives of foreign countries, speeches in parliaments, organization of press conferences, briefings, interviews, scientific conferences, and round tables. Abkhazian policymakers think that fresh and reliable information about Abkhazia would contribute to the expansion of the circle of friends and like-minded people of Abkhazia.

Since the time of the Georgian-Abkhazian war measures to establish independent foreign policy relations have been undertaken. Thus, in January 1993, an Agreement on Friendship and Cooperation was signed between the Republic of Abkhazia and Transnistria. In March 1993, by the decision of the Chairman of the Supreme Council of Abkhazia Vladislav Ardzinba, authorized representatives of Abkhazia were appointed in several Republics of the Russian Federation, as well as in the countries of Western Europe and Turkey. Despite the informal status of these missions, they were of great importance, since the missions were carried out in conditions of complete international isolation.

Diplomatic recognition of Russia, global power and a permanent member of the UN Security Council, marked a qualitatively new stage in the development of the Abkhazian state, which opened up opportunities for a better international position and a dynamic internal development. In general, the

condition of being recognized by some other states makes *de facto* states more viable and better prepared to promote their foreign policy program, and this is no exception for Abkhazia (Berg&Vits, 2018: 394).

Abkhazia and South Ossetia differ from other post-Soviet *de facto* states as they have found the chance to develop diplomatic relations with other countries that have recognized them. With recognition, it became possible to open embassies in these countries and thereby have official representatives in them. The difference between Abkhazia and the other three post-Soviet *de facto* states lies in the fact that with a network of embassies and representative offices, it has several honorary consuls (in several regions of Russia, as well as in China, San Marino, and the United Kingdom), and also has representatives from the Abkhazian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCI) around the world. Abkhaz cultural centers operate in Russia and Turkey. Along with this cooperation, mutual high-level visits and agreements promoting trade and tourism have been signed (Berg&Vits, 2018: 395).

It is generally believed that small states are puppets in the hands of Great Powers. Moreover, if we are talking about those that are not recognized by the international community, then we are not talking about any independent policies of these states at all. James Crawford offers four factors that determine whether a particular state is puppet or not: the legitimacy of the origination of entity (by use of threat or external force), support of the local population (refusal or acceptance), presence of external control (high level of interference into the important issues), and stuffing the government institutes by representatives of the dominant states (Crawford, 2006: 80-81).

Although relations with Russia are the dominant economic direction, other factors are not traced in the politics of Abkhazia. Even Russia's military support does not play a special role and does not affect the consciousness of a local resident of Abkhazia. The overwhelming majority of the people of Abkhazia support the complete independence of the state (Frear, 2014: 89). For Abkhazia, Russia – is a temporary element in the country. Its independent policy also made complicated the Russian policy regarding Abkhazia (Suchkov, 2018: 319). The selective rejection of a presidential candidate, backed by Russia in 2004, is further evidence of massive support for a more independent policy (Frear, 2014: 89). The political crisis related to presidential elections in Abkhazia which will be held in March 2020 became a tool for Russian mass media to destabilize socio-political situation in the country. For instance, Russian media has speculated about poisoning of one of the candidates in Russia. Nevertheless, Acting President

of Abkhazia has warned Russian ambassador to control the fake information and investigate the case, and he has claimed: “We will consider the failure of the fulfillment of our demands as an unfriendly action towards Republic of Abkhazia and we will reserve the right to take measures to protect the sovereignty and citizens of Republic of Abkhazia” (Apsnypress, 4 March 2020).

In this regard, it is useful to mention a statement of Caspersen (2012: 109) who notes that external dependence does not necessarily mean the absence of internal. In the Post-Cold War World interdependence has increasingly become a kind of a norm. Many recognized states depend, among other things, on international relations in the interests of defense and economic prosperity, but their sovereign independence is not questioned. Since August 2008, Abkhazian-Russian relations have been built on a legal basis and are of a strategic nature. After the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries, on September 17, 2008, the Presidents of Abkhazia and Russia, Sergei Bagapsh and Dmitry Medvedev signed the basic Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance (Avidzba, Sputnik Abkhazia, 25 September 2019).

In its foreign policy, Abkhazia used the new status to establish official bilateral relations with all states that recognized it. So diplomatic relations with Nicaragua were established a year after recognition, accompanied by official bilateral visits. During the official visit of the Abkhazian delegation in January 2017, several issues related to the further development of bilateral Abkhazian-Nicaraguan cooperation were discussed (MFAApsny, 11 January 2017). On July 18, 2019, the delegation from Abkhazia visited Nicaragua, during the meeting, the possibility of opening a Nicaraguan Embassy in Abkhazia was discussed (MFAApsny, 19 July 2019). Along with Nicaragua, relations with Venezuela also began to gain momentum for economic and cultural cooperation. In connection to that activity, the Abkhazian delegation paid a visit to Caracas in March 2017. The result was the signing of two agreements - an intergovernmental agreement on cooperation in the field of culture and an agreement between AGTRK (Abkhazian State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company) and the Latin American television station TeLesur (MFAApsny, 9 March 2017).

Representatives of recognized countries also visited Abkhazia as part of working visits. Thus, in November 2017, negotiations were held between the leaders of Nauru and Abkhazia. At the beginning of 2018, a delegation of the Republic of Abkhazia, led by Minister of Foreign Affairs Daur Kove, visited

the Republic of Nauru. During the meeting, an agreement on inter-parliamentary cooperation was signed (MFAApsny, 1 February 2018).

Abkhazia also gave special attention to its ties with *de facto* states such as Nagorno-Karabakh and Transnistria. There are regular reciprocal visits. In August 2017, an official visit of the delegation of Abkhazia headed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs to the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic took place during which extensive negotiations on trade, economic and humanitarian cooperation were held. As a result, the first official document was signed between the two republics - a Memorandum of Understanding between the foreign ministries of Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh on cooperation in the field of international relations (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Artsakh, 23 April 2018).

Interstate relations with Transnistria are also strengthened. About thirty different interstate and interdepartmental agreements have been signed. Work under these agreements covers a wide range of urgent goals and objectives, including cooperation in the economic, humanitarian, law enforcement, and social spheres. Relations are also developing in the field of youth policy and sports and culture (Tania & Shanava, 2018: 61). In June 2017, a working visit of the head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Abkhazia to Tiraspol took place. Special attention was paid to the current process of preparing the draft of the updated Treaty on Friendship and Cooperation between Transnistria and the Republic of Abkhazia. During the visit, the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Partnership between the Republic of Abkhazia and Transnistria was signed, bringing the relations of the two countries to a new level of bilateral cooperation. An updated agreement between Abkhazia and Transnistria was signed on September 29, 2017, in Sukhum (Tsvizhba, Apsnypress, 29 September 2017). With this document, both sides have to take measures to ensure the free entry of citizens of both states and recognize documents issued by competent authorities (Tania & Shanava, 2018: 62).

The Republic of Abkhazia promotes peace and security in the Caucasus region by taking an active part in the Geneva international discussions on security and stability in the South Caucasus. Within the framework of the Geneva Talks, the Republic of Abkhazia is in favor of signing a legally binding agreement on the non-use of force with Georgia. It has launched initiatives on various humanitarian issues.

Syria also has an important place in Abkhazian foreign policy. In August 2017, a delegation headed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs visited the Syrian Arab Republic, and discussed the possibility of establishing economic, cultural, and humanitarian ties. The consequence of these negotiations is the recognition of Abkhazia by Syria on May 29, 2018. Relations between the two republics are being established. On April 19, 2019, within the framework of the V Yalta International Economic Forum, the parties announced the ratification by the parliaments of the “Agreement on cooperation between the Government of the Republic of Abkhazia and the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic in the field of trade promotion and economic cooperation” (MFAApsny, 19 April 2019).

As for the southern maritime neighbor Turkey, the situation is ambiguous. Although Turkey does not officially recognize Abkhazia, nevertheless this does not prevent it from maintaining an increasingly consistent and close economic relationship with Abkhazia. For example, visits to Turkey have significantly increased after its recognition by Russia. This process was bilateral, Turkish authorities also began to pay official visits to Abkhazia. Thus, an official visit to Abkhazia was paid by Ünal Çeviköz, the Deputy Under-Secretary to the Turkish Foreign Minister. The meeting was held on September 8-9, 2009, in Sukhum. Nurdan Bayraktar Golder, the head of the South Caucasus Department of the Turkish Foreign Ministry, also visited Abkhazia in April 2010 and had a meeting with then-Prime Minister Sergei Shamba and Foreign Minister Maxim Gvindzhia to demonstrate the importance of Abkhazia for Turkey.

The importance of the Turkish-Abkhazian relations was also demonstrated by President Bagapsh’s first visit to Ankara in April 2011, the purpose of which was to improve and expand the business and cultural ties with the diaspora. Using his visit to answer international accusations that Abkhazia is, in fact, a part of the Russian Federation, Bagapsh said: “Such a thing is unacceptable. Abkhazia has to maintain its bilateral relations as an independent state.” The Turkish direction is important, and Abkhazia tries to strengthen bilateral relations. The main goal is to open consular and other diplomatic missions in Ankara and Sukhum (Frear, 2017: 10).

These visits have contributed greatly to enhancing commercial ties. Mostly because of the diaspora, Turkey is currently the second largest trading partner of Abkhazia after Russia, the trade turnover between the two countries today is \$ 26 billion, which is 16 percent more than in 2016-2017 (Tsvizhba, 2019).

The Republic of Abkhazia also tries to improve relations with the countries of Europe. Despite all attempts by Georgia to isolate Abkhazia from communication with the outside world, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Abkhazia is exploring ways to establish new and strengthen existing multi-level relations and contacts with government and non-governmental institutions of the European Union. The official relations of partially recognized states with the outside world are complicated. Therefore, informal levers such as cooperation projects, mainly in the economic, cultural, or social sphere, are usually employed (Berg&Vits, 2018:402).

The practice of public diplomacy of Abkhazia has received particular success in Italy. Modern contacts between Abkhazia and Italy originate from visits of delegations of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Abkhazia to various regions of Italy to establish direct links with regional governments and municipal authorities of such regions as Veneto, Lazio and, in particular, Apulia (Tania & Shanava, 2018: 81). An important direction in foreign policy is the attraction of foreign investment to Abkhazia. In Italy, an organization was registered under the name “Diplomatic representation of the Republic of Abkhazia in Italy and EU countries”. Although this office has no diplomatic functions, it plays an important role - protecting the rights of citizens of the Republic of Abkhazia residing in the territory of the European Union, promoting the positive image of Abkhazia, language, culture, and traditions (Abkhazia-Inform, 29 November 2017).

Along with it, there are such organizations as the Europe-Abkhazia Association, the Abkhaz Cultural Institute, the first UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) Club Abkhazia, as well as the quarterly newspaper *Abkhazia Today*, published in Abkhazian, Russian, Italian and English (Apsnypress, 17 June 2016). The uniqueness of the Europe-Abkhazia Association is that this is the first organization in the European Union, during the registration of which the passports of the Republic of Abkhazia were used (a citizen of Abkhazia Dmitry Kortava was appointed general secretary). There were also visits to France and meetings with the deputy of the National Assembly of France, Nicolas Dupont-Aignan. The possibilities of establishing contacts in several other countries and regions are also actively being worked out (Tania & Shanava, 2018: 45). The establishment of informal ties contributes to some extent to the de-isolation of Abkhazia.

Another step towards establishing international relations for partially recognized states is the partnership of their cities with the cities of recognized states. It promotes cultural collaboration and interaction. Although some of these agreements have been concluded since the Soviet period, there are still new ones. For example, in Abkhazia, Gagra became a twin city with several Italian cities, and Sukhum became a sister city with cities in Scotland, Turkey, Italy, Greece, Guadeloupe, and more than 20 partner cities in the former Soviet Union. Another way for cooperation actively used by Abkhazia is the so-called sports diplomacy in which it is quite successful. In 2016, Abkhazia, in particular, hosted the Confederation of Independent Football Associations World Cup (CONIFA). The decision was made after the visa scandal. The teams of Abkhazia and South Ossetia were denied entry visas to Hungary, where the 2015 European Football Cup CONIFA was held (Berg&Vits, 2018:402).

The Abkhaz diaspora, in turn, represents rather serious support for Abkhazia, which it implements by lobbying its interests and promoting business and political contacts. This diaspora, in cooperation with the rest of the Caucasian diaspora, was an active supporter of the independence of Abkhazia. Thus, Abkhazia was a member of the International Circassian Association during the 1990s. Once again, the unity of Circassians was demonstrated during the Georgian-Abkhazian war 1992-1993 when representatives of the Association took part in the war on the Abkhazian side. Interaction with the Circassian world continues to play an important role in the politics of Abkhazia because the diaspora is actively lobbying quite successfully abroad (Frear, 2017: 12). The most prominent organization of the Abkhaz diaspora is the World Abaza Congress (WAC). This organization was created on October 7, 1992, in Lykhny (Abkhazia), originally under the name “World Association of the Abkhaz-Abazin (Abaza) People”. It played an important role in mobilizing the peoples of the North Caucasus during the Georgian-Abkhazian war. The main aims of the organization are to preserve the Abkhaz-Abaza culture and to help the resettlement of diaspora in Abkhazia, to strengthen ties between compatriots abroad, and to disseminate information about Abkhazia and Abkhazians (Tania & Shanava, 2018: 88-89).

Another organization actively promoting the interests of Abkhazia abroad is the Caucasus-Abkhaz Solidarity Committee (CASC). It was founded as a humanitarian aid organization on August 23, 1992. After the war, Abkhazia established relations with the Circassian republics of the Russian Federation. Since the Georgian-Abkhazian War, the repatriation of Abkhazians was a principal concern of Abkhazia, so Parliament of the Republic of Abkhazia passed a Law on Repatriation in 1993. Later in

2002, it led to the establishment of the State Committee on Repatriation (Frear, 2017: 12), renamed as the Ministry of Repatriation in 2018.

The Abkhaz diaspora is considered the most numerous in Turkey, in 2010 where its representatives founded the Federation of Abkhaz Cultural Centers. Many representatives of the Abkhaz diaspora in Turkey are notable public and political figures so they can foster the positive image of the Republic of Abkhazia in Turkey (Tania & Shanava, 2018: 81). The attraction of foreign investors to Abkhazia is also significant to the economy of Abkhazia. The diaspora is also very active on the Internet. With their assistance, news websites and Facebook pages were launched in Turkish and Arabic to inform ethnic relatives in the Middle East about the events in Abkhazia and bring them back to their homeland (Ó Beacháin et al., 2016: 450). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Abkhazia is also active on social media. The Foreign Ministry's Information Department reports that Internet traffic to these sites, mainly Turkish, tends to be visited very actively. It plays its role as a tool of a sophisticated policy of soft power (Frear, 2014: 87). Establishment international relations outside of one's own state is a complicated and costly practice that hardly brings in short-run any benefit. Efforts needed for this policy require a very high level of motivation that Abkhazia has shown it.

Abkhazia also pursues a multi-vector foreign policy. Despite the difficulties caused by its partial recognition, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Abkhazia actively participating in various events and meetings with local authorities all over the world. Strong ties are established with Italian cities (Ó Beacháin et al., 2016: 451). In addition to providing Abkhaz enterprises with networking opportunities, these agreements play an important role in the foreign policy of Abkhazia (Frear, 2014: 86). Abkhazia's activities are aimed at increasing international cooperation and participation of Abkhazia in international processes, overcoming isolation. Furthermore, although official recognition requires the deliberate action by the central government, representatives of the Foreign Ministry seek to organize meetings with local authorities and establish official relations that imply recognition of Abkhazia as a sovereign state. Sometimes these events lead to protests from Georgia and other countries opposing the recognition of Abkhazia. However, the counter-recognition policy itself includes several activities related to various aspects of international relations, and protests are only one of the tools to express one's position (Ó Beacháin et al., 2016: 451).

3.5. THE WESTERN POLICY OF COUNTER-RECOGNITION

Practice shows that not all self-proclaimed states achieve the status of a recognized state. Because of the absence of a strict regulatory framework, international recognition of new states is laden with political and legal contradictions. Along with sovereign states, international and supranational organizations also play their role in the process of state recognition. Influential states, such as the United States, China, and Russia, mostly take on opposing parties to recognition cases. It led to the creation of several new states that have only partial participation in the international community. In practice, although legal doctrine regulates the provision of statehood and interaction among states, the process by which some subjects become recognized states and others do not, is largely political. Thus, international recognition increasingly depends on politics rather than law (Newman & Visoka, 2018:761).

Lauterpacht (2013) believes, that the collective coordination of state recognition can be useful to avoid one-sided interpretations of the principles of international law dictating the recognition of states and will strengthen the global legal order. Under this unified rule or principle will solve the problem of partial recognition. Partial recognition would prevent the Great Powers from ignoring the will of de facto states to be recognized when it is politically unprofitable.

The results of the struggle for international recognition can differ from collective recognition and non-recognition to bilateral recognition. Collective non-recognition is based on the conviction that “states are under an obligation not to recognize, through individual or collective acts, the purported statehood of an effective territorial entity created in violation of one or more fundamental norms of international law” (Raic, 2002: 442).

States decide on an individual basis, whether explicitly or implicitly. They may openly express their protest or quietly not express their opinion, but also not recognize. There are several reasons for their position: long-standing feud, unresolved issues that need to be resolved. Sometimes states just wait for the reaction of other members of the global community. Nevertheless, even if there is a generally accepted opinion on the issue of recognition, there are those who disagree with this opinion. For instance, Israel, which is being a UN member, is not recognized by all its members (Ker-Lindsay, 2012: 13).

In the case of Abkhazia, on the one hand, the Western powers support Georgia, which they consider a potential ally of NATO in the Caucasus. On the other hand, Russia is very skeptical about any influence of the West on the Black Sea and, therefore, in the Caucasus (Sterio, 2013: 152). Thus, the principle of collective non-recognition in international politics is widespread. This reaction happens when a group of states, often very active within the framework of international politics, makes a joint decision not to recognize a subject as an independent recognized state. Thus, even a state that has all the attributes of statehood can be blocked on the way to recognition by the group of Great Powers. For the first time, a practice of joint non-recognition was applied by the League of the Nation (to Manchukuo) (Ker-Lindsay, 2012: 13). Today it is practiced by the UN. Different types of pressure and sanctions are usually taken against states that run counter to the organization's generally accepted decision (Ker-Lindsay, 2012: 14)

One of the tactics to counteract recognition is the entry of the parent-state into bilateral cooperation and the strengthening of its ties with "important" states. The potential threat of recognition from any state makes the parent-state strengthen cultural and economic relations with them. This approach requires gaining a large number of diplomatic missions abroad by which they try to make strong allies. Sometimes they provide humanitarian assistance through international agencies to countries vulnerable to the temptations to admit. Therefore, reciprocal recognition is indicating that cash is usually required to ensure non-recognition. This situation is especially true in regions where powerful allies can manipulate the situation by using their power. In this regard, the remarkable activity of the West in the face of the EU and NATO represents the bright example of how Great Power exercise its power on the support of one's side, namely Georgia (Ó Beacháin et al., 2016: 453). As Ó Beacháin et al. point out "At the UN and around the globe, Georgian diplomats embarked on a sustained campaign – aided by the EU and US – to discourage countries from recognizing Abkhazia." (Ó Beacháin, 2019: 61).

Georgia strengthened its policy of opposing recognition and, to this end, opened a large number of new embassies and established diplomatic ties, especially in Latin America, the Pacific, and Africa more than ever had before. It happened not without the help of its allies, namely the USA (United States of America) and the EU (Ó Beacháin et al., 2016: 454). For instance, Abkhazia was expecting its recognition from the Dominican Republic, even the deputy prime minister from the Dominican Republic has visited Abkhazia, but immediately after that, the president of the Dominican Republic was called to

New York by private plane provided by the USA. Later then-minister of Foreign Affairs of Abkhazia reported that he does not know “what they did to him, but after that he was even afraid to answer my e-mails” (Ó Beacháin, 2019: 62).

Nevertheless, two Latin American states recognized Abkhazia. Abkhazia believes that “opportunities for diplomatic breakthroughs were enhanced by the fact that as a faraway region that knew little of inter-ethnic disputes in the South Caucasus and cared less, it had few preconceived ideas about the conflicts and might be more open to persuasion. The Georgian government had virtually no diplomatic presence in the region.” (Ó Beacháin, 2019: 60). Another tactic to counter recognition is the use of special terms for states seeking international recognition. States use any available tools to try to emphasize that *de facto* states are not equal to them. For this reason, they use the word “self-proclaimed” or “so-called” before the name of the *de facto* state.

In its policy of opposing the recognition of Abkhazia, Georgia actively reacted to the developments in Abkhazia. Although the Georgian government failed to prevent the opening of polling stations in Turkey and Russia during the presidential elections in Abkhazia in 2014, diplomatic pressure forced the Turkish government to deny any state support and claim that the votes were taken in private premises (Ó Beacháin et al., 2016: 453).

After the August War Georgia took a “hard-line position” to isolate Abkhazia by claiming it as an occupied territory (Cooley & Mitchell, 2010: 69), due to fears of further international recognition of Abkhazia, Georgia is doing its best to isolate it from the outside world, referring to several documents adopted after August 2008. Following the Law on Occupied Territories adopted by President Saakashvili in 2008, engagement in any economic or commercial activity in Abkhazia or South Ossetia is prohibited without the consent of the Georgian government. Thus, in 2009, the Italian brand Benetton opened a store in Sukhum but was soon forced to close it under the threat of sanctions from Georgia. Furthermore, since it was opened by a Turkish distributor, a note with threats of economic sanctions was sent at the official level to Turkey too (Ó Beacháin et al., 2016: 454).

With the adoption of Law on Occupied Territories, Georgia confused negotiations with Abkhazia, in every possible way, since it directly designated Russia as an occupier. Despite the disagreement with

the position of Russia regarding the recognition of Abkhazia, the international community was not yet ready for such drastic steps. It is no accident that in the report of the International Commission on the Events of August 2008, a large share of the responsibility for the outbreak of hostilities was assigned to Georgia.

There were also questions about the Law in terms of international standards. According to the results of the Commission, dated February 3, 2009, in the Law was a noted obstacle to the work of international organizations in access to conflicted territories and the difficulty of providing humanitarian assistance to them, which contradicts the norms of international law. Thus, the Commission recommended that the Georgian authorities consider the Law as a transitional document, which is recommended to be periodically reviewed (Kvarchelia, 2011: 44-45).

Remarks from the Commission to the Georgian authorities regarding the Law on the Occupied Territories, as well as the promulgation of the report of the International Commission on the Events of August 2008, outlined a new trend in relations between the international community and the current leadership of Georgia when the latter's actions were criticized quite seriously. In order to avoid further accusations of an unconstructive position, the Georgian leadership came up with a new concept, State Strategy for the Occupied Territories (Kvarchelia, 2011: 45).

Along with assurances regarding a concern about the isolation of the population “in the occupied territories”, a strong protest was expressed at the highest diplomatic level against the sale of Abkhaz adjika in Armenia. McDonald's was also expected to deal with difficult conditions and has never opened in Sukhum because of aggressive diplomatic attitudes taken by Georgia (Ó Beacháin et al., 2016: 454). Foreigners who had marked in their passports about crossing the Russian-Abkhazian border along the Psou river were subjected to arrest and heavy fines.

Tough statements were still made about the participation of representatives of Abkhazia, including children's groups, in international sports events, and creative festivals. Georgia has successfully sought the Western states refusal to issue visas to residents of Abkhazia who have Russian foreign passports. All this happened against the backdrop of failed attempts to sign the Georgian-Abkhazian agreement on the non-use of force in the framework of the Geneva process.

The “new” approach was intended to present the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict in the eyes of the world community, first of all, as Russian-Georgian, reflecting on the possible motivation of the Georgian leadership and the goals of the Georgian Strategy. In all likelihood, the calculation was for the return of Abkhazia through an international coercion operation, or with the help of military force. Based on this logic, the Georgian authorities considered the main obstacle to the “restoration of territorial integrity” neither the peculiarities of the situation associated with the self-determination of former Soviet entities after the collapse of the USSR nor their own aggressive policies (the introduction of troops into Abkhazia in August 1992), but Russia as the guarantor of security in the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict, which tried for many years to maintain the status quo (Kvarchelia, 2011: 42).

Another reason the Strategy appeared was, perhaps, the statement of the EU representatives that the EU will adhere to the policy of “engagement without recognition” concerning Abkhazia. The change of rhetoric towards “non-recognition, but involvement” did not suit Georgia. Georgian authorities are trying to prevent Abkhazia from having direct contacts with other countries or organizations, fearing the possible independence of Abkhazia. As a result of such interactions, the image created by Georgia of the “black hole”, “occupied territory” with the “puppet regime” can be debunked, and, ultimately, Abkhazia's international contacts will expand. Many controversial fears affect the current Georgian position regarding Abkhazia. There is concern that contacts with Europe may affect its recognition and trigger a domino effect of recognition. Nevertheless, in efforts to isolate Abkhazia from the European world, Georgia only reinforces Russia’s influence and moves Abkhazia towards Russia (Kvarchelia, 2011: 51).

The West played a significant role in the fate of Abkhazia. To understand the role of the EU in state recognition, it is necessary to consider legal, regulatory, and political aspects, as well as to study the internal and external factors that shape the practice of recognition. The first case, when the EU adhered to a clear position of collective non-recognition, was the case of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In essence, this policy fit into three main points: a clear statement that no Member State recognizes them; a call for the rest of the world to join this position, and not recognize them; and condemnation of Russia’s position on the issue of recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The European position was clearly expressed at the meeting of the European Council on September 1, 2008 (Visoka & Newman, 2019:275).

In the frames of the collective policy of non-recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the EU issued instructions for EU delegations and diplomatic networks of member countries sent to countries around the world. It also reported that any recognition is detrimental to the core interests of the EU and will have a negative impact on relations with the EU. This case is a kind of aggressive non-recognition policy (Newman&Visoka, 2018:776). The reasons for it might be in the absence of a desire to make any change in the existed international order by supporting the territorial integrity of Georgia and thus preventing the recognition of Abkhazia. Recognition of Abkhazia may create a precedent for other entities which are struggling for recognition. As Caspersen claims, “Outside of the colonial context, the bias against unilateral secession remains strong.”(Caspersen, 2019: 3).

At the same time, however, the EU promoted a policy of interaction with Abkhazia. This policy aims to interact with the breakaway regions on political, economic, and cultural issues, while at the same time pushing aside the issue of international legal sovereignty and diplomatic recognition. Despite the EU’s counter-recognition policy, it provided financial aid for economic development and civil society. The goal of this policy is primarily geostrategic: to reduce the strategic levers of Russian influence on these regions (Newman&Visoka, 2018:776).

The position of the great powers is not a right, but the policy and geostrategic interests of these powerful countries. The right of the great powers in this context has nothing to do with the international law of self-determination but rather focuses solely on politics and the achievement of strategic interests (Sterio, 2013:155). There is no real relation between empirical sovereignty and recognition. As Caspersen states, “regardless of whether these movements have achieved de facto independence and created state-like institutions, they are highly unlikely to achieve their objective of recognized statehood.” (Caspersen, 2019: 3). Western unwillingness to see the consistency of Abkhazian statehood because of its geopolitical significance for Russia was decisive to block any attempt by Abkhazia to be recognized by the international community. The status of Abkhazia was frozen as a result of the struggle of the Great Powers in the Caucasus region. Any reference to deserved sovereignty in the context of the politicization of this issue is not considered since the frozen conflict and the preservation of the territorial status quo was in the geopolitical interests of Great Powers (Sterio, 2013: 178-181). Even the recognition by Russia, who considers Abkhazia’s rights for recognition under Soviet law, took a long time until such a recognition has seen helpful for the Russian interests. Compliance with international law did not play

a significant role in the fate of many other nations, where the lack of interest of the Great Powers prevented any of their attempts (Tibet and West Papua) (Sterio, 2013:181).

CONCLUSION

Recognition is an urgent problem in both international relations and international law. The law and politics, legitimacy, and interests are closely intertwined in this area, thereby, exposing the inconsistency and ambiguity of the process. Today, in order to become a full member of the international community, a state needs to have the support of sovereign states. Any political entity can declare its independence, but as history shows, not all of them have succeeded in the struggle to be full members of international society. The number of sovereign states that are ready to support the breakaway region and, most importantly, the political weight of these states is a critical factor in the recognition process. Thus, the reaction of the international community plays a decisive role. The support of the world community in general, or at least its strongest part, represented by the Great Powers, is important in the formation of a new state.

With the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, three ethno-political conflicts arose in the South Caucasus: Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan, and South Ossetia and Abkhazia in Georgia. These conflicts came at a time when the world was just rebuilding, and the early stages of the escalation of these conflicts were, to some extent, unnoticed by the international community. This inattention could be because of the lack of interest of the West in this region at the very initial stages, which contributed to Russia becoming the main mediator in the negotiation processes.

The Abkhazian issue was brewing long before the collapse of the Soviet Union and escalated as a result of Georgian national policy. The Soviet period remains in the memory of Abkhazians as a period of oppression and ethnic discrimination. The Abkhazians were on the verge of extinction as a result of the war of 1992-1993, when Georgian troops invaded Abkhazia. The motive of Georgia was the fear of losing Abkhazia. In fact, before the hostilities, Abkhazia considered various projects for coexistence with Georgia, with a guarantee of preserving its autonomy, despite its rights for independence. However, because of the fear of losing its autonomy and identity, Abkhazia proclaimed its independence.

This decision of Russia to recognize Abkhazia was not an easy one. Moscow did not always support Abkhazia, as is commonly believed in the West. In the initial period of the Georgian-Abkhazian negotiation process, Russia was Georgia's main ally. However, in time, Russia began to speak more

sharply about the politics of Georgia. One can argue endlessly about Russia's motives; Abkhazia does not build illusions regarding this issue. Therefore, it is trying to pursue a policy independent of the Kremlin. However, for Abkhazia, Russia is the only ally capable of protecting its interests.

Of course, recognition is a legal act, but according to international law, it is a voluntary step, so states do not take it without special requirements. Most countries of the world see this as a threat since it can activate their own territorial problems. Because of this condition of the world, states are trying to ignore this problem for as long as possible until circumstances become critical. Therefore, the US and the European states still do not recognize Abkhazia. The Western approach during this time has changed from indifference to more concern, dictated by an increase in the strategic importance of the South Caucasus. The West has several reasons for this change. The recognition of Abkhazia leads to the formation of another independent state in the South Caucasus, a potential Russian ally. This connection, in turn, contributes to strengthening of Russia in this region, even if Georgia is lost to Russia, a question around which the West has its own views. The interests of the Great Powers in the South Caucasus clash in Georgia, particularly in two territorial conflicts, i.e. Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Thus, the independence of Abkhazia was ignored by the international community. Moreover, an aggressive non-recognition policy is pursued to prevent further recognition of Abkhazia. Georgia pursues the policy on the isolation of Abkhazia with the support of the West. Nevertheless, Abkhazia is effectively building diplomatic relations with the states that recognized it and is trying to overcome international isolation. For Abkhazia, the recognition by Russia has become a qualitatively new stage in the history of its statehood that may lead to further recognition.

The policy of isolating Abkhazia is paradoxical. Hindering the integration of Abkhazia into the international community and isolating it, forces Abkhazia towards Russia. Abkhazia is only trying to establish contact with the outside world, and, by coincidence, Russia has become its only supporter on this matter. The West is pushing Abkhazia in this direction. Nevertheless, it accuses Abkhazia of being too close to Russia. This argument is one of the main points for not recognizing Abkhazia. However, even cooperation with Russia does not prevent Abkhazia from pursuing its own interests. Abkhazia shows sufficient political independence, despite some attempted pressure from Moscow.

Summing up, the West, represented by NATO and the EU, directly involves in the sphere of strategic interests of Russia, supporting Georgia in its efforts to unite with the West. Russia has lost Georgia, one of its most devoted, key allies in the South Caucasus, but its influence has increased in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. With the territorial disputes, Georgia is unlikely to be welcomed into NATO, which impedes the advancement of Western countries in the Caucasus. Abkhazia is trying to guarantee the independence of the Abkhaz people and fight for its recognition. Abkhazia's struggle for independence since 1993 has transformed into a new phase after its recognition by Russia in 2008, and now the Abkhazians wait for their full membership into the international community.

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