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Georgia: Violent events in Sukhumi and Tsalenjikha between April and August 1992; persons in charge of Georgian national security and law enforcement; roles of Colonels Kalandia and Maisuradze in Sukhumi and Tsalenjikha Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa

Following the end of the Soviet Union in 1991, the first years of Georgian independence were marked by political instability and simmering ethnic and regional conflicts related to the status of the Abkhazia Autonomous Republic (Ap'khazet'is Avtonomiuri Respublika) (RIIA 1998, 15). In January 1992, Georgia's nationalist President Zviad Gamsakhurdia was overthrown by an opposition military council and forced to flee into exile (ibid.). Soon after, pro-Gamsakhurdia forces, acting from strongholds in the western Georgia region of Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti began actions against the new regime in Tbilisi (*Third World Quarterly* 1997, 514). In July 1992, the Abkhaz Supreme Soviet (parliament) reinstated its 1925 Soviet constitution implying equal standing between Abkhazia and Georgia (RIIA 1998, 15; Coppieters 2000, 24). Rebellious pro-Gamsakhurdia factions and the Abkhaz bid for independence prompted the Georgian central authority in Tbilisi to respond with force and helped instigate a civil war that lasted until September 1993 (RIIA 1998, 14-15; Suny 1994, 329-331; OSI 1995, 14).

Events in Tsalenjikha, April to August 1992

Tsalenjikha (Tsalendzhika) is a town in the Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti (Samegrelo, Mingrelia) region of western Georgia (Law 12 Dec. 2002; ibid. 22 May 2002; *The World Factbook* 2003 1 Aug. 2003). Lying 21 miles from the regional administrative centre of Zugdidi, the town of Tsalenjikha has a population of 11,000 (NDI n.d.). In March 1992, supporters of former President Gamsakhurdia reportedly attacked the local market and picketed businesses in Tsalenjikha (Radio Mayak 4 Mar. 1992). Later, these forces took control of the town as well as the nearby villages of Kobi, Abasha and Senaki (AFP 30 Mar. 1992). A late June broadcast by Georgian Radio reported that 70 to 100 persons operating in six to eight bandit groups acting from bases in villages near Tsalenjikha were "systematically robbing the population," stealing automobiles and kidnapping people (23 June 1992). According to the report, local law enforcement was unable to apprehend the perpetrators who were described as "well armed and fairly mobile" (Georgian Radio 23 June 1992).

On 6 July 1992, a reported 300 Gamsakhurdian supporters attacked a unit of the Georgian Mkhedrioni paramilitary forces near Tsalenjikha (Radio Mayak 6 July 1992; BBC Monitoring Report 7 July 1992). The Mkhedrioni, or "Horsemen" were under the command of Jaba Ioseliani (Dzhaba Iosseliani) (AFP 3 Sept. 1995) and were the subject of several earlier Responses published by the Research Directorate including, most recently, GGA31722.E of 20 April 1999 and GGA25044.E of 25 September 1996. Georgian officials claimed the attack caused the deaths of 12 people and injuries to 60 others (BBC Monitoring Report 10 July 1992). Although the attackers successfully corralled Ioseliani and a unit of Mkhedrioni in a boarding school, his counterattack, supported by another Mkhedrioni unit as well as Georgian National Guard and Ministry of the Interior (GMVD) forces from Poti, Khobi and Kutaisi, broke the siege (Radio Mayak 6 July 1992). The Associated Press stated that there was "at least one person dead and scores wounded" in the counterattack (6 July 1992). The following day, Mkhedrioni and Georgian National Guard (GNG) units captured Zugdidi and caused heavy casualties to pro-Gamsakhurdia forces (BBC Monitoring Report 10 July 1992). The Research Directorate found no further information concerning violence in or around Tsalenjikha within the time period in question.

Events in Sukhumi, April to August 1992

Sukhumi (Soukhoumi, Sokhumi) is the administrative centre of the autonomous Abkhazian region (Law 12 Dec, 2002; ibid. 22 May 2002; *The World Factbook* 2003 1 Aug. 2003). On 13 August 1992, the GNG entered Abkhazia to secure rail and communication links as well as hunt for several security officials that had been taken as hostages (RFE/RL 14 Aug. 1992). The following day, the GNG clashed with Abkhaz Ministry of the Interior (AMVD) forces in Sukhumi (ibid. 17 Aug. 1992; Billingsley 1998, 147) resulting in 19 dead and 39 seriously wounded (Russia's Radio 16 Aug. 1992). Moscow-based Russia's Radio also reported that Georgian forces detained approximately 200 people on suspicion of participating in "bandit formations" (16 Aug. 1992).

On 18 August 1992, the GNG stormed the Abkhaz parliament, forcing parliamentarians to flee to the neighbouring Abkhaz city of Gudauta (RFE/RL 19 Aug. 1992; RIIA 1998, 15). That day, Georgian forces claimed control over the city, appointed a ruling military council (*Toronto Star* 18 Aug. 1992) and imposed a curfew

enforced by the GNG to control looting (ITAR-TASS 18 Aug. 1992; *Izvestia* 18 Aug. 1992; AP 18 Aug. 1992). Along with the curfew, Georgian authorities banned demonstrations and were granted the right to demand identification papers, search houses and detain people (ibid.). Russia's Radio reported that 50 such detentions took place on 20 August 1992 (21 Aug. 1992). Georgian authorities later tightened their control over Sukhumi, and reports refer to an official order that looters be shot (ITAR-TASS 20 Aug. 1992; AP 20 Aug. 1992). The Research Directorate found no specific reports of looters being shot among the sources consulted; however, a 21 August 1992 report charged that the crackdown on lawlessness resulted in "repressions ... being committed and ... citizens ... being shot" (Ostankino TV 21 Aug. 1992).

On 20 August 1992, GNG units began withdrawing from Sukhumi and were replaced by GMVD police charged with enforcing the Sukhumi curfew (AP 20 Aug. 1992; ITAR-TASS 20 Aug. 1992; RFE/RL 24 Aug. 1992). According to an analysis by regional military specialist Dodge Billingsley, the situation around Sukhumi stalemated in late August 1992 as the conflict shifted to the northern city of Gagra (Billingsley 1998, 147). Between 20 and 22 August 1992, Abkhazia was described as "comparatively calm" (ITAR-TASS 20 Aug. 1992) while Sukhumi began to stabilize (ibid. 22 Aug. 1992). Several reports refer to the death toll in Sukhumi as being at least 50 persons by the morning of 18 August 1992 (*Izvestia* 18 Aug. 1992; ITAR-TASS 18 Aug. 1992; *Toronto Star* 18 Aug. 1992; RFE/RL 18 Aug. 1992) and, according to one source more than 70 people were killed in the month of August 1992 (CNISJ 2 Apr. 1993, 6).

Comments on Human Rights During the Civil War

Several reports accuse both Georgians and Abkhazians of committing human rights violations and undertaking ethnic cleansing and/or extrajudicial killings during the period of conflict (*Accord* Sept. 1999a; Anchabadze 1998, 141-142; CNISJ 2 Apr. 1993). For example, the Research Directorate found eyewitness accounts of the extrajudicial killing of a man by Georgian soldiers after they had beaten him and two of his companions in Sukhumi on 15 August 1992 (*The Herald* 15 Aug. 1992) and an Abkhazian source claimed that Georgian forces were persecuting the Abkhaz intelligentsia (Russia's Radio 22 Aug. 1992). Regional historian Jurij Anchabadze blamed Georgian soldiers for "outrages and persecutions" against civilians beginning 14 August 1992 and cited the existence of Georgian punishment squads that were targeting refugees (Anchabadze 1998, 141-142).

The Caucasus Network, an International Soviet Jewry organization (CNISJ), observed in April 1993 that "[u]ntold numbers" of civilian casualties resulted from military action in the civil war (2 Apr. 1993, 1). The report continued by noting that "human rights missions to Abkhazia have charged Georgians with committing 'gross and systematic violations of human rights,' including the beating, rape, torture and murder of non-Georgians and the looting of their property (CNISJ 2 Apr. 1993, 1). When referring to the Abkhaz environment, the CNISJ described it as "gruesome" and "frightful" in part because of the threat from rampant theft, looting and murder (ibid.).

Georgian State and National Security Authorities in 1992

According to Bruno Coppieters, a specialist on the Caucasus region and associate professor of political science at Vrije Universiteit in Brussels (CIES n.d.), no one political authority was strong enough to impose its will on the territory of Georgia and Abkhazia when the Soviet Union dissolved in 1991 (*Accord* Sept. 1999b). Various military, paramilitary, security and irregular forces were active in Georgia and Abkhazia between April and August 1992, including the aforementioned GNG (RFE/RL 14 Aug. 2003; BBC Monitoring Report 10 July 1992), the GMVD (Radio Mayak 6 July 1992), the Mkhedrioni paramilitary (ibid.; BBC Monitoring Report 7 July 1992), the 1,500-member Abkhazian National Guard (ANG) (RFE/RL 20 Aug. 1992), the AMVD (ibid. 17 Aug. 1992; CIPDD Jan.-Feb. 1993), the pro-Gamsakhurdia Zviadisti (AP 6 July 1992; AFP 3 Sept. 1995) and some 500 irregular military volunteers allied with Abkhazia (RFE/RL 25 Aug. 1992; CIPDD Jan.-Feb. 1993). Some of the latter were subordinate to a regional organization called the Confederation of Caucasus Mountain Peoples (RFE/RL 25 Aug. 1992; CIPDD Jan.-Feb. 1993), which unites 16 different Caucasian peoples, including Abkhaz, Chechen and Ingush, and encourages mutual assistance among ethnicities (JIR Feb. 1997, 65-66).

Furthermore, two sources indicate that there is some question of whether Georgian forces were under Tbilisi's command and control at all times during the conflict (*Accord* Sept. 1999c; Coppieters 2000, 24). Coppieters indicated that "Georgian warlords decided to march on Sukhumi" although they had not received such orders from Tbilisi (ibid.). The Chairman of the Caucasian Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development, Ghia Nodia, called the Georgian troops "unruly militias" and blamed Kitovani for defying political authority with his actions in Abkhazia (*Accord* Sept. 1999c).

Given the disparate forces at play in Georgia during the period in question, specific information outlining the hierarchical structure of the national security organization that linked the central authority in Tbilisi to the local law enforcement in the cities of Tslenjikha and Soukhumi could not be found by the Research Directorate. The following list, however, identifies some of the individuals named in the reports concerning the period in question:

Senior Georgian (Tbilisi) Political Leadership

Gventsadze, Roman - Internal Affairs Minister (Georgian Radio 16 June 1992) and member of the ruling military council in early 1992 (*Postfactum* 22 Feb. 1992)

Nadareishvili, Tamaz - First Deputy Speaker of the Abkhazian parliament then leader of the pro-Georgian military council installed after Georgia's successful attack on Sukhumi in August 1992 (ITAR-TASS 19 Aug. 1992)

Maisuradze, Anzor - State Security Minister and member of the ruling military council in early 1992 (*Postfactum* 22 Feb. 1992)

Razmadze, Vakhtang - General Procurator and member of the ruling military council in early 1992 (*ibid.*)

Salaridze, David - National Security Advisor (AP 18 Aug. 1992)

Shevardnadze, Eduard - President of Georgia after January 1992 (RIIA 1998, 15; AFP 3 Sept. 1995; Suny 1994, 329)

Sharashenidze, Levan - chief military advisor (Georgian Radio 16 June 1992) and member of the ruling military council in early 1992 (*Postfactum* 22 Feb. 1992)

Sigua, Tengiz - Prime Minister (RFE/RL 17 Aug. 1992; *Soviet Analyst* 1993)

Georgian Military Commanders

Akhalaya, Soso - one of three battalion commanders of the Georgian National Guard in Abkhazia in June 1992 under Boris Kakubava (*Nezavisimaya Gazeta* 9 June 1992)

Gulua, Georgy - pro-Georgian commandant general of the Sukhumi police detachment appointed on 20 August 1992 (Ostankino TV 20 Aug. 1992; ITAR-TASS 22 Aug. 1992)

Ioseliani, Jaba - leader of the Mkhedrioni (Horsemen) paramilitary group (OSI 1995, 18; AFP 3 Sept. 1995) and member of the ruling military council in early 1992 (*Postfactum* 22 Feb. 1992)

Karkarashvili, Colonel Giorgi - commander of GNG units in Abkhazia in August 1992 (RFE/RL 26 Aug. 1992; *Soviet Analyst* 1993) and member of the ruling military council in early 1992 (*Postfactum* 22 Feb. 1992)

Kakubava, Boris - former Mkhedrioni leader and commander of GNG battalions in Abkhazia in June 1992 (*Nezavisimaya Gazeta* 9 June 1992)

Kitovani, Tengiz - head of the GNG and later defence minister: (RIIA 1998, 15; AFP 3 Sept. 1995; *Accord* Sept. 1999c; JIR Feb. 1997, 66) and member of the ruling military council in early 1992 (*Postfactum* 22 Feb. 1992)

"Opposition Forces"

Called "Zviadisti" (AP 6 July 1992) loyal to former Georgian Prime Minister Zviad Gamsakhurdia (*Third World Quarterly* 1997, 514)

Ethnic Abkhazian Political Leadership

Ardzinba, Vladislav - Abkhaz parliamentary leader (Suny 1994, 329; RFE/RL 18 Aug. 1992; CIPDD Jan-Feb. 1993)

Ankvab, Aleksandr - Minister of the Interior (RFE/RL 18 Aug. 1992)

Lominadze, Givi - Internal Affairs Minister (Ostankino TV 25 June 1992)

Nadareishvili, Tamaz - First Deputy Chairman (Georgian Radio 16 June 1992)

Ethnic Abkhazian Military Commanders

Kakalia, Viktor - AMVD commander (*ibid.*; RFE/RL 11 Sept. 1992)

Volunteer Forces in Abkhazia in 1992

Baseyev, Shamil - ethnic Chechen field commander (JIR Feb. 1997, 66; Billingsley 1998, 155)

Information concerning the roles of Colonels Kalandia or Maisuradze in the aforementioned events in Sukhumi and Tsalenjikha was not found among the sources consulted. The Research Directorate was unable to find mention of a Colonel named Kalandia; however, two colonels with the last name of Maisuradze were mentioned in reports (Georgian Radio 11 May 1992; ITAR-TASS 17 Sept. 1992). A Georgian air force Colonel Dzhimi (Dzimi, Djimmi, Jim) Maisuradze was identified as the commander of a Georgian helicopter that fired on a Russian passenger hydrofoil carrying tourists and refugees to Sochi from Batumi on 27 August 1992 (*ibid.*; *ibid.* 19 Sept. 1992). One

person died and eleven were wounded in the attack (ibid.). On 27 December 1992, ITAR-TASS reported that Maisuradze was killed when his helicopter was shot down near the village of Vladimirovka in Ochamchir district of Abkhazia (ibid. 27 Dec. 1992). A 1999 article on the Georgian air force also referred to Maisuradze's combat death in Abkhazia (CIPDD Sept. 1999). A second individual, Anzor Maisuradze, was reportedly promoted to the rank of major general and appointed as Georgian deputy defence minister and chief of operations on 8 May 1992 (Georgian Radio 11 May 1992). No further information on Anzor Maisuradze was found among the sources consulted.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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