

Islam and Tolerance

in Wider Europe



Islam and Tolerance in Wider Europe

Edited by Pamela Kilpadi

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p a r t t h r e e

Political Ideology and Religious Tolerance in Russia

Outsourcing De Facto Statehood:

Russia and the Secessionist Entities
in Georgia and Moldova

Nicu Popescu

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Outsourcing De Facto Statehood: Russia and the Secessionist Entities in Georgia and Moldova

Nicu Popescu

Russia has been a player during and after the conflicts in the secessionist entities of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia, the Transnistrian region of Moldova, and Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan. If before 2004 the Russian government was defensive about its role in these conflicts, by 2006 it has taken a more proactive position.

A 2000 assessment of the situation claimed that in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Russia's objective is "to maintain rather than enlarge the Russian presence in the region. Moscow tries to save what it still has, rather than extend its political and military *plazdarms* in its southern neighborhood."¹ The 2000 Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation stated that the top priority of its foreign policy was to "create favorable external conditions for steady development of Russia, for improving its economy."²

This is not the case anymore. In his 2005 annual address, President Vladimir Putin stated that it was "certain that Russia should continue its civilizing mission on the Eurasian continent."³ In 2006 Dmitry Trenin argues that the Russian leadership "came to the conclusion that the withdrawal has ended, and it is time to counter-attack... it is time to re-establish a great power and that the CIS is the space where Russian economic, political, and informational dominance should be established."⁴ Russian officialdom has

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decided that the international and domestic context is now ripe to start moving toward this goal. On the domestic front, authorities calculate that by building an image of a Russia under siege by Islamic terrorists and Western-inspired “orange” revolutionaries, the Russian public will rally around their policies.

The ‘new thinking’ of the Russian Federation was described in an essay for the Wall Street Journal by Sergei Ivanov, Russia’s minister of defence and deputy prime minister. He claimed that Russia’s two main challenges are “interference in Russia’s internal affairs by foreign states, either directly or through structures that they support... [and] violent assault on the constitutional order of some post-Soviet states.”⁵ No distinction is made between non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and networks used to finance terrorist activities in Russia and Western-funded NGOs engaged in democracy promotion. Both are viewed as categories of foreign organizations that seek to destabilize Russia and its “allies.”

President Putin said in the aftermath of the Beslan siege that “the weak get beaten up.”⁶ This is the new prism through which Russia sees its international relations. International affairs are a fight, and in this fight Russia has to re-establish its regional dominance. Russian policies on Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistria are indicators of this new trend and a means for testing a new foreign policy agenda. Quite logically, Russia’s new self-confidence has developed into a new activism that is clearly manifested in its policies towards the secessionist entities in Georgia and Moldova.

In this essay, I attempt to map Russian policies addressing the conflicts in Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistria.⁷ Although these conflicts are not necessarily rooted in religion, their resolution would go a long way toward toning down the current level of overblown anti-Islamic official rhetoric in Russia, not to mention the growth of extremism in uncontrolled regions.

Why does Russia feel strong now?

First and foremost, the state of the Russian **economy** encourages the flexing of its political muscles. Russia has seen steady economic growth since 1999 and a significant inflow of cash from high oil and gas prices. Unlike in the 1990s, Russia is not concerned with a lack of resources for pursuing its foreign policy. The 2000 Foreign Policy Concept bluntly stated that Russia’s capacity to address the challenges it faced was “aggravated by limited resource support for the foreign policy of the Russian Federation, making it difficult to uphold its foreign economic interests and limiting the scope of its information and cultural influence abroad.”⁸ A few years later, Putin claimed that “the growth of the economy, political stability and the strengthening of the state have had a beneficial effect on Russia’s international position.”⁹

A second boost for Russian foreign policy action is the country’s **domestic political climate**. An authoritarian government that does not feel challenged in domestic politics is less compromising in its foreign policy.¹⁰ The current elites in Russia have ensured their nearly indisputable political dominance at the expense of democratic pluralism. There is a certain paradox in the Russian elite’s depiction of their state as strong, dynamic and pragmatic on the international stage, while internally they often portray Russia as weak,

vulnerable and alarmist. In April 2005, the then head of the presidential administration Dmitry Medvedev stated that “if we cannot consolidate the elites, Russia will disappear as a state.”¹¹ Of course such claims of Russia’s existential danger and ever-looming external threats to national security serve to bolster public support for the regime.

Thus, Russia’s centralization of power and open authoritarianism is not only excused and explained, but deemed necessary and legitimate—the only way to preserve the nation. Such discourse succeeds in undermining all legitimate democratic forces that may challenge the dominance of the Putin administration, creating a black and white political landscape with only non-systemic forces—extremist nationalists and Islamic terrorists—as the challengers. In this context Putin is seen as the lesser of evils. Even Mikhail Khodorkovsky claimed from his jail cell that Putin is “more liberal and more democratic than 70 percent of the population.”¹² Thus, the discourse of internal weakness excuses the government’s centralization of power.

A third empowering factor for Russia is the current **international political situation**, which plays into the hands of Russian policymakers. Iraq is in a quagmire. The United States is too busy running around in the Afghanistan-Iraq-Iran triangle. The European Union (EU) is perceived as being in a profound and paralyzing crisis following the rejection of its draft Constitution (many Russians fail to understand that the EU crisis is profound but certainly not paralyzing). Both the US and EU need Russia in their attempts to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear capability for non-peaceful use. In the CIS, the democratic governments that emerged after the ‘Rose and Orange revolutions’ in Georgia and Ukraine respectively perform with great difficulty. Mikhail Saakashvili’s popularity seems to be waning, economic progress is slow, and political centralization seems to be on the rise in Georgia. In Ukraine, Viktor Yushchenko is politically weak, economic performance is declining, and political stability is not yet apparent at the end of the transition tunnel. In contrast to the post-revolutionary states, the regimes in Belarus and Uzbekistan seem as strong as ever.

A fourth factor is **Chechnya**. The defeat of the nationalist secessionist movement in Chechnya means that Russia is no longer fearful of supporting secessionism in other states. Given the strength of the Chechen secessionist movement on its own territory in the 1990s, Russia was at least declaratively supportive of the territorial integrity of other states including Georgia and Moldova. Any precedent of successful secession resulting from violent conflict was seen as questioning the future of Chechnya in Russia. Thus, for most of the 90s Russia hesitated between supporting the secessionist entities in Moldova and Georgia and fears of spillover effects for Russia itself. All this has changed.

The second Chechen war that started in 1999 led to the defeat of the secessionist movement in Chechnya. Certainly, the Chechen guerillas are still a serious security challenge to the internal stability of the Russian Federation, but they are no longer a credible secessionist force. President Putin is right in saying that “there are other regions in the northern Caucasus where the situation is even more worrying than it is in Chechnya.”¹³ The war in Chechnya is no longer a war for or against the independence of Chechnya or even a truly Chechen conflict anymore, but rather a North Caucasus conflict with profound religious, social and security implications. Russia defeated the nationalist secessionist movement in Chechnya, but ended up with a geographically

larger and potentially more destructive security challenge. Whatever the instability in the North Caucasus, Russia feels that the Chechen factor is no longer a constraint on its policies towards the secessionist entities in Georgia and Moldova.¹⁴

Russia and the conflicts

During the 90s Russia's policies towards the conflicts were largely, although not always openly, supportive of the secessionist forces.

Russian support was directed primarily via conflict settlement mechanisms. Russian-led peacekeeping operations have *de facto* guarded the borders of the secessionist entities, freezing a status quo favorable to the secessionist sides. Peacekeepers¹⁵ allowed the secessionist elites to pursue state building projects while deterring the metropolitan states from attempting to regain control of the regions.¹⁶

Russia's role in conflict settlement negotiations has also been questioned. Moldova's assessment of the negotiation format in which Russia played the key role was straightforward. President Voronin of Moldova argued that: "The five-party negotiations and the existing peacekeeping mechanism have proven their ineffectiveness, and are not able to lead to a long-lasting solution. The dragging on of the settlement process contributes to the consolidation of the separatist regime, and the promotion of certain mafia-type geopolitical interests, which are foreign to the interests of the population on the two banks of the Dnestr river."¹⁷ Moreover, a resolution of the Georgian Parliament

The author in the field beside a UN peacekeeping plane in Abkhazia



claims that “the Russian Federation does nothing to promote the process of conflict settlement on the territory of Georgia, in fact, the current situation is quite the contrary. A wide range of steps made by Russia currently strengthens the separatist regimes...”¹⁸

The conflicts in Georgia and Moldova

South Ossetia

The open phase of the conflict in South Ossetia (Georgia) lasted between 1990–1992 and claimed approximately a thousand lives. The conflict ended (following Russian troop intervention) with a ceasefire agreement signed on July 14, 1992, establishing a trilateral peacekeeping operation consisting of Russian, Georgian and South Ossetian troops. A Joint Control Commission (JCC) consisting of Russia, South Ossetia, North Ossetia (a Russian region) and Georgia supervises the security situation and pursues negotiations on conflict settlement. The OSCE oversees the situation, while the EU is an observer in JCC meetings on economic issues.

Transnistria

The conflict in Transnistria (Moldova) lasted for a few months in the spring and summer of 1992. It resulted in some 1000 lost lives and ended with a ceasefire agreement signed on July 21, 1992. The war stopped after the Russian 14th army intervened on behalf of Transnistria and in fact defeated the Moldovan troops. As in South Ossetia, after the ceasefire a trilateral peacekeeping operation was established consisting of militaries from the two conflict parties (Moldova and Transnistria) with Russia as the leading peacekeeper. The OSCE supervises the situation. Negotiations on conflict settlement were pursued in the so-called “five-sided format” which consisted of Moldova and Transnistria as conflict parties and Russia, Ukraine and the OSCE as mediators. In October 2005 the format became “5+2” after the EU and US joined in as observers.

Abkhazia

The conflict in Abkhazia was the most serious of the three as it claimed more than 10,000 lives between 1992–1994. The most intense phase of the conflict lasted from August 1992 to September 1993. The “Declaration on Measures for a Political Settlement of the Georgian-Abkhazian Conflict” was signed in April 1994 in Moscow and an “Agreement on a Cease-Fire and Separation of Forces” (Moscow Agreement) was signed in May 1994.¹⁹ However, outbursts of violence and some guerrilla actions persisted in Abkhazia well after these agreements. There is a Russian-led peacekeeping operation under a Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) supervised by the United Nations (UN Observer Mission to Georgia or UNOMIG).

However, Russia has not always unambiguously supported the secessionist entities, as is often assumed. Until just a few years ago, Russian policies towards the conflicts oscillated between open support for the secessionists and periods of rapprochement with Georgia and Moldova.

Russian support for Abkhazia and to a certain extent South Ossetia waned in the mid 90s due to two main factors. Firstly, the secessionist challenge posed by Chechnya during the 1994–1996 Chechen war and the subsequent de facto Chechen independence threatened Russia’s own territorial integrity. Under such conditions Russia was rather constrained in its potential support for other potentially precedent-setting secessionist movements in the former Soviet Union.

Secondly, in 1994 Georgia joined the CIS, and the CIS Collective Security Treaty and accepted Russian military bases on its territory. Georgia’s implicit expectations were

that, in exchange, Russia would support its efforts to reassert control over Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Russia's understanding of the deal differed. Russia supported Eduard Shevardnadze to assert himself as the leader of the country in the context of the civil war with supporters of the ousted president Zviad Gamsakhurdia, but did not take a proactive stance on the issue of Georgia's reunification.

In Moldova, rapprochement with Russia followed the rise to power of the then pro-Russian Communist party in 2001 and lasted until 2003. Moldova's implicit expectation was that a rapprochement with Russia would ensure decisive support for its efforts to resolve the conflict in Transnistria. Therefore Moldova implicitly agreed to follow Moscow's political line in international relations, create favorable, even preferential treatment for Russian businesses, promote Russian language in Moldova and generally promote closer ties with Russia in political, social and economic terms. In exchange, Moldova primarily expected the withdrawal of Russian support for the Transnistrian authorities and the ousting of Russian citizen Igor Smirnov, Transnistria's self-proclaimed president.

From 2001 until 2003 the situation looked promising for Moldova—it seemed as if Moscow policy favored a reunited, friendly Moldova over a pro-Russian Transnistria and an unfriendly Moldova. Russia moved to limit its support for Transnistria in order to promote a settlement of the conflict. Allegedly, the discussions on withdrawing Russian support for the Smirnov-led authorities culminated with talks between Moldova and Russia about which region Smirnov should be appointed to as governor in order to remove him and pave the way toward a conflict settlement.²⁰ However, this promised withdrawal of support turned out to be only half-hearted. In the end the situation reverted back to square one, with strong Russian support for Transnistria and tense relations with Moldova. The turning point was the failure of the so-called “Kozak Memorandum,” a unilateral Russian plan to settle the conflict on largely Russian terms which was rejected by Moldova in November 2003. Since then, Moldovan–Russian relations have irreversibly worsened.

Whatever the oscillations of Russian policies towards the secessionist entities in the nineties, the status quo of Russian support for the de facto states barely faltered and continues to persist. Periodical rapprochement between Russia and Moldova or Georgia did not lead to conflict settlement, as both sides of the deals had erroneous expectations of each other's intentions. Not only did the deals fail, but their failure further complicated relations between Russia on the one hand and Moldova and Georgia on the other. Given such baggage of mutual frustrations and recent Russian internal developments, Russia oscillating experiences, Russia has begun to re-assert its position.

The new activism: Russia's policies toward the secessionist entities

Russian policies towards the secessionist entities are characterized by a stated recognition of the territorial integrity of Moldova and Georgia coupled with contradictory open support for many of the demands of the secessionist entities in practice. The ambiguity of Russian policies creates strong incentives for the separatists to persist in their quest. They are primarily encouraged by the following forms of Russian support:

Political support

Russia pays high-level political attention to the secessionist authorities and has often acted as a bridge between the three self-proclaimed republics which created a community of their own, informally called SNG-2, or even NATO-2.²¹ The level of institutionalization of SNG-2 should not be overestimated—it has summits, ministerial meetings and cooperation networks. In fact, most of these summits take place in Moscow and the leaders of the secessionist entities are received by high-level Russian officials.²² The Russian Foreign Ministry also typically refers to the leaders of the unrecognized secessionist entities as “presidents,” implying a degree of recognition for the secessionist entities.

Other examples of high-level political support include Russian President Putin’s meeting with Abkhaz leader Sergei Bagapsh and South Ossetian leader Eduard Kokoity. Apparently, Putin even tried to set up a meeting for them with EU High Representative for CFSP Javier Solana²³ in Sochi in April 2005. Similarly, high-level political support was offered to a presidential candidate in Abkhazia’s 2004 elections when the (defeated) candidate Raul Khajimba was campaigning with posters depicting him and president Putin shaking hands.²⁴

Passportization

A visible instance of Russian support is the granting of Russian citizenship to the residents of the unrecognized entities. Some 90 percent of the residents of South Ossetia and Abkhazia are said to have Russian passports.²⁵ The number is considerably smaller in Transnistria, where some 15 percent of the population hold Russian passports. The policy of passportization is a state policy. The passports themselves clearly state that they are issued by the Russian Foreign Ministry.²⁶ The main objective is to build a legitimate case for Russia’s claim to represent the interests of the secessionist entities because they consist of Russian citizens. Thus Russia is creating a political and even legal basis for intervention for the sake of protecting its own “citizens” in the secessionist entities.

The introduction of visa regimes for Georgia in 2001 was another instance of Russian policy driven along the same lines, intended to strengthen the separatist entities while weakening the legitimate states. The residents of South Ossetia and Abkhazia were exempted from the visa regime.

Conflict settlement mechanisms

In the conflict resolution negotiation process, Russia plays a key role, often acting not so much as an unbiased mediator, but rather as an actor negotiating its own interests.

Russia is not opposed to conflict resolution. But it is interested in a settlement that first and foremost serves Russian interests by respecting a number of conditions. The first condition is that the secessionist entities must have a decisive influence over the affairs of the reunified states, even to the detriment of the functionality and viability of an eventual power-sharing arrangement. Second, Russia demands that, in return for serving as the primary external ‘guarantor’ of peace, it maintain its position as the main power



broker in any power-sharing arrangement. Russia also demands a continued military presence.

Interestingly enough, the main Russian-brokered agreement that came closest to solving a conflict—the “Kozak Memorandum” for Transnistria²⁷—met all three of these conditions: 1) high-level influence for the secessionist entity to the point of creating a dysfunctional state, 2) Russia as the main power broker, and 3) continued Russian military presence. When Moldova implicitly accepted these three conditions, progress on a new agreement to settle the conflict had been quick. However, in the end, Moldova backed down due to doubts about the viability of the arrangement, which was clearly highlighted by negative international reactions to the memorandum, including from the US, EU and OSCE. Similarly, Russian proposals to Georgia and Moldova to create “common states” in the late nineties also reflected a level of decentralization that was not likely to work in practice.²⁸

Diplomatic support

Russia often supports the secessionist entities in international affairs. For example, three successive annual OSCE Ministerial Council meetings in 2003, 2004 and 2005 failed to adopt common statements due to disagreements between an overwhelming number of OSCE member states on the one hand and Russia on the other. These disagreements were precisely related to the conflicts in Georgia and Moldova and the withdrawal of Russian troops from these countries.

The issue of unsolved conflicts is more and more prominent on the EU-Russia agenda, including in the Road Map for the Space of Common External Security where resolving conflicts in “adjacent” regions is considered a priority.

Support for State-building

Russia has also been crucial in providing support for state and institution building in the secessionist regions. In fact, some of the security institutions of the de facto states

The author with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Borys Tarasyuk and Zbigniew Brzezinski



are 'outsourced' to the Russian Federation. 'Outsourcing' or 'contracting out' is used in business jargon to describe a situation when organizational functions of an enterprise are transferred to a third party or country. A similar phenomenon is happening with the 'state' institutions of the secessionist entities as they are 'outsourced' to Russia. This is particularly true as regards the 'power structures,' i.e. the ministries of defense and intelligence services.

The local 'security' institutions in Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistria are often headed by Russians or functionaries de facto delegated by state institutions of the Russian Federation. This most often include staff in the local intelligence services and the defense ministries. Examples of Russians de facto delegated to the secessionist entities include ministers of defense Anatoli Barankevich (South Ossetia) and Sultan Sosnaliev (Abkhazia), local intelligence chief Iarovoi (South Ossetia) and minister of interior Mindzaev (South Ossetia).²⁹ Russian presence is also visible beyond the security services. An Abkhazia prime minister in 2004–2005, Nodar Khashba, came from the Russian ministry of emergency situations. Incumbent Prime Minister Morozov in South Ossetia is also from Russia. The 'outsourcing' of the institutions of the secessionist entities to Russia is most important in South Ossetia, somewhat less in Abkhazia, and relatively little (beyond the security services) in Transnistria. Such arrangements are not necessarily welcome in the secessionist entities themselves, especially in Abkhazia and Transnistria, but are allegedly desired mainly by Russians.³⁰

Economic support

Russia plays a key role in the economic sustainability of the secessionist entities. In fact one can credibly make the argument that the '*independence*' of South Ossetia and Abkhazia *depends* on Russia,³¹ which is certainly their most important trading partner. Georgian officials claimed that while some of Georgian exports have been banned from entering Russia on grounds of substandard sanitation, similar goods from Abkhazia and South Ossetia continue to be imported, indicating the political manipulation of trade issues in the region.³²

For years, Transnistrian industry has benefited from Russian subsidies. Transnistria's debt to Gazprom amounts to one billion euros, which means that Transnistria has not paid for its gas consumption in years.³³ In fact, the competitive advantage of Transnistrian industry is based on Russian subsidies.

The socio-economic dimension of Russian support is also important in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The Russian government not only granted citizenship to an overwhelming majority of residents, but also pays pensions in both territories.³⁴ These pensions are higher than pensions in Georgia, creating additional incentives for these regions to join the Russian Federation rather than seek a conflict settlement. Russia defends its practice of paying pensions and granting citizenship by citing its humanitarian concerns about the residents of these regions.

Russia is also the main investor in the secessionist regions. Some investments in Transnistrian industry and in Abkhaz tourist infrastructure are justified on economic grounds. However, it is clear that the conflict regions are far from investment havens and many such investments are driven by political imperatives rather than economic logic.

At least some, if not most, of the Russian investments are made because Russian authorities recommended that Russian businessmen offer such investments as a sign of support for the secessionist entities.³⁵ In a state where businesses are hardly independent from the state, as is the case in Russia, such practices are not difficult to implement.

Economic support for the secessionist entities is coupled with economic pressure on Moldova and Georgia. In 2005, Russia introduced restrictions on meat and vegetables exports from Moldova and Georgia to Russia. In March 2006, Russia banned all Moldovan and Georgian wine and brandy exports to Russia, as well as Georgian mineral water. At the same time, Russia increased gas prices for both countries. Such restrictions did not affect the secessionist entities. In the words of the Russian Ambassador to Moldova: “It is one thing to be a Russian compatriot in Moldova or Kirghizia, and another thing to be a compatriot in Transnistria or Abkhazia.”³⁶ The latter are certainly closer to Moscow than the former.

The status-quo game

Russia’s preferred policy is to preserve the status quo, which provides enough room for manoeuvre to assure Russian interests in the conflict areas. Thus, Russia is likely to prevent conflict resolution mechanisms and Western involvement in such schemes. Its main objective is to ‘freeze’ the conflict, as any attempt to ‘defreeze’ them is dangerous and counterproductive to Russian interests. Unfortunately, the conflicts are not frozen at all,³⁷ but only their settlement. The preservation of the status quo can only lead to the deepening and entrenchment of conflicts, escalating tensions while moving away from possible solutions.

The ‘Kosovo precedent’

In the context of discussing the Kosovo issue, high-level Russian authorities have come closest to acknowledging that Kosovo may constitute a precedent worth considering in Georgia. President Putin stated in 2006 that “If someone thinks that Kosovo can be granted full independence as a state, then why should the Abkhaz or the South-Ossetian peoples be denied the right to statehood? I am not talking here about how Russia would act. But we know, for example, that Turkey recognized the Republic of Northern Cyprus. I am not saying that Russia would immediately recognize Abkhazia or South Ossetia as independent states, but international life knows such precedents ... we need generally accepted, universal principles for resolving these problems.”³⁸ Russia has been moving toward the acceptance of Kosovo’s independence, while trying to extract maximum benefit from this possible precedent in the post-Soviet space.

The Kosovo precedent has certainly infused new trends into the politics of the de facto states. The eventual move of Kosovo towards independence, albeit ‘conditional,’ creates a new *raison d’être* for the secessionist entities to resist any conflict settlement in the hope that, sooner or later, they will follow Kosovo.³⁹ For example, the Abkhaz de facto president openly states that “If Kosovo is recognized, Abkhazia will also be recognized in the course of three days. I am absolutely sure of that.”⁴⁰

De facto annexation

The overall result of the above-mentioned policies is that the secessionist entities of South Ossetia and Abkhazia are moving toward a situation in which they are de facto incorporated into the Russian Federation. In reality, the secessionist entities ‘outsource’ not only some of their institutions, but also control over their entities to the Russian Federation. Most of the population in these regions have Russian passports, pensioners receive pensions from the Russian state, the Russian rouble is the used currency, and many of the de facto officials of the secessionist entities are sent “on missions” by the Russian Federation. In addition, there is a process of legislative harmonization between the legal systems of the Russian Federation and those of the secessionist entities.

Reflecting these developments, Moscow’s policies towards these secessionist regions looks much like Moscow’s policy toward other Russian regions within the Russian Federation. This situation was highly visible during the heavy and high-level intervention of Russia in the Abkhaz presidential elections in 2004. An interviewed expert in Moscow said that “Abkhazia is a de facto continuation of the Krasnodar region” of Russia.⁴¹ The fact that Russia takes over the ‘power’ structures in the secessionist entities also resembles Russian regional politics. In the Russian Federation, control over the ‘power structures’—ministry of defense, intelligence, prosecutor’s office and police—is a competence of the federal center, i.e. Moscow. Russian regions do not control their power institutions, even if they have some degree of self-governance in political and economic matters. The situation in Abkhazia and South Ossetia is similar.

But the secessionist entities are not simply a continuation of Russia. Abkhazia stresses that it wants to be an independent state,⁴² not a Russian region. Abkhaz authorities also stress that in the 2004 Abkhaz presidential elections, the Moscow-backed candidate lost the elections. Transnistria does not have a border with Russia and it would be difficult to imagine how would a second ‘Kaliningrad’ in Transnistria work in practice. Moreover, the interests of the secessionist entities, their domestic policy patterns, and strategic goals may differ from Russia’s preferences. Nevertheless, their rapprochement with Russia is not far from a point of no return, especially in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

International incentives for resolving the secessionist conflicts

In sum, Russia plays a dominant role in the survival and evolution of the secessionist entities in Georgia and Moldova. Despite periods when Russia was rather supportive of the governments of Moldova and Georgia, in recent years Russian policies towards the secessionist entities have become more assertive. This has largely been due to a new feeling of self-confidence among Russian elites inspired by a number of factors, such as economic growth in Russia, consolidation of Putin’s “power vertical,” the defeat of the Chechen secessionist movement, and the West’s problems in Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran. These have all led to a feeling in Moscow that Russia has the resources and the proper international conditions to reassert its dominance in the former Soviet Union. Stepping up support for the secessionist entities is seen as one way to achieve that.

The policies of Russian support for the secessionist entities of the former Soviet Union are a complex web of political, economic, social, humanitarian, security and

military activities. These policies include the maintenance of military forces on the ground—not only peacekeepers but also military bases—the training of militaries, provision of economic subsidies, granting of Russian citizenship and passports (the so-called policy of “passportization”), paying pensions, granting preferential trade regimes, ensuring diplomatic and political support on the international stage, interfering in the domestic politics of the unrecognized entities, using conflict settlement mechanisms to freeze conflict resolution processes, delegating Russian state employees to serve in key posts in the unrecognized governments of the secessionist entities, etc. These policies of support are combined with economic and political pressure on the governments of Moldova and Georgia.

As EU and NATO enlargement brings these organizations closer to these conflict areas, their interest in promoting solutions to these conflicts has increased. The international fight against terrorism raises the spectre that the existence of failed states or uncontrolled areas can have repercussions far beyond their respective regions. The stabilization of the Balkans means that the EU and NATO can pay more attention to conflicts which are further afield in the neighborhood. In conjunction with these new international trends, Moldova and Georgia—two of the countries affected by conflict—have become active *demandeurs* of a greater international role in the conflict resolution processes. At the same time, the lack of progress in conflict settlement for more than a decade raises uncomfortable, albeit legitimate, questions about the effectiveness of existing conflict resolution frameworks. In other words, the international community is entering into a phase of reassessing its policies addressing the secessionist conflicts in the former Soviet Union. But the challenge involves not only helping resolve these conflicts, but also dealing with Russia in the process of contributing to conflict resolution.

Taken together, Russian policies toward the secessionist entities often create serious disincentives for conflict settlement. The policy of strengthening the secessionist regimes and weakening legitimate states creates strong incentives for the secessionist entities to maintain the conflicts.

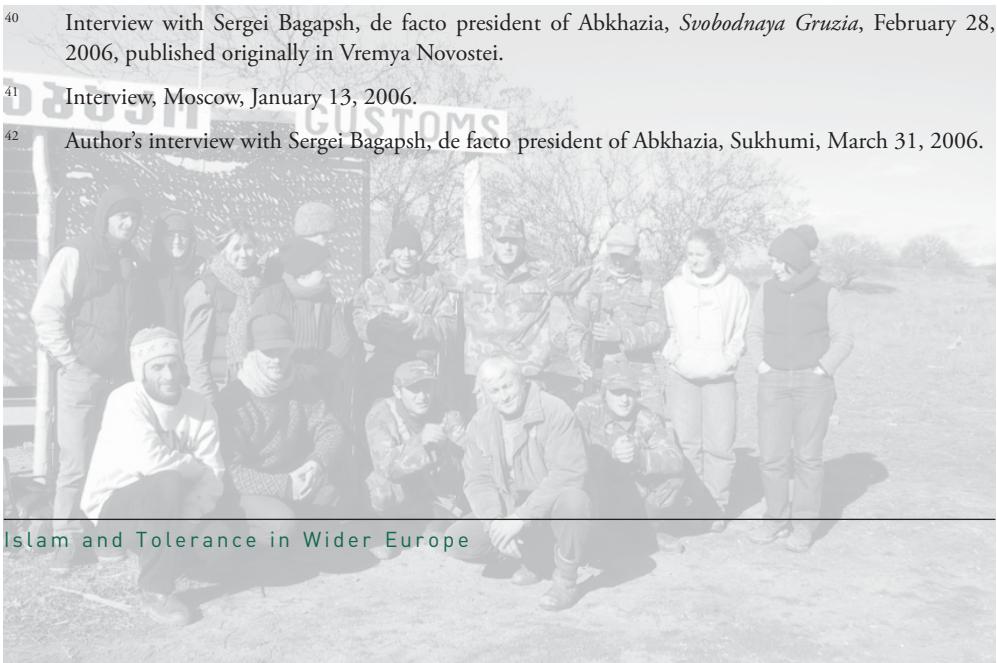
The longer the conflicts continue within the framework of an increasingly assertive Russian foreign policy, the more and more likely it is that the secessionist entities will become de facto parts of the Russian Federation. Moscow’s policy toward these regions in many instances resembles its policies towards subjects of the Russian Federation. The paradox of this situation is that, amid the fight for independence, the secessionist entities are ‘outsourcing’ their de facto independence to another state.

Notes

- ¹ Alexei Malashenko, “Post-sovetskie gosudarstva iuga i interesy Moskvy” (“Post-Soviet States of the South and Moscow’s Interests”), *Pro et Contra* Vol 5:3, 2000, Moscow, p.43.
- ² The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, 28 June 2000.
- ³ Vladimir Putin, annual address to the Federal Assembly, 25 April 2005, Moscow, www.kremlin.ru.
- ⁴ Author’s interview with Dmitry Trenin, Moscow, January 13, 2006. For the same argument see Interview with Dmitry Trenin, *Strana.ru*, January 26, 2006, <http://www.strana.ru/stories/02/05/20/2976/271554.html>.

- 5 "The New Russian Doctrine," Sergei Ivanov, *The Wall Street Journal*, 11 January 2006.
- 6 Obrashchenie Prezidenta Rossii Vladimira Putina (Statement by President Putin), *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, 6 September 2004, <http://www.rg.ru/2004/09/06/president.html>.
- 7 The paper does not deal with the Nagorno-Karabakh, a secessionist entity on the territory of Azerbaijan. The character of the conflict, let alone the Russian role in this conflict differs significantly from the other three cases analysed in the paper.
- 8 Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, 28 June 2000.
- 9 Vladimir Putin, annual address to the Federal Assembly, 26 May 2004, Moscow, www.kremlin.ru.
- 10 An article about China develops the link between internal regime insecurity in non-democratic states and their willingness to compromise in foreign affairs. The essay traces how most compromises made by Chinese leadership in disputes with their neighbours coincide with periods of internal instability in China such as the revolt in Tibet, the legitimacy crisis after the Tiananmen upheaval, and separatist violence in Xinjiang. See Taylor Fravel, "Regime Insecurity and International Cooperation: Explaining China's Compromises in Territorial Disputes," *International Security* 30:2, 2005, pp.46–83.
- 11 Interview with Dmitry Medvedev, Expert, 4 April 2005. Downloadable at <http://www.kremlin.ru/text/publications/2005/04/86307.shtml>.
- 12 Mikhail Khodorkovsky, "Krizis Liberalizma v Rossii," 29 March 2004, *Vedomosti*, downloadable at <http://khodorkovsky.ru/speech/82.html>.
- 13 Vladimir Putin, transcript of the press conference for the Russian and foreign Media, 31 January 2006, the Kremlin, Moscow.
- 14 Interview with an expert, Moscow, 12 January 2006.
- 15 Though UN peacekeeping missions are different in nature and character from Russia's peacekeeping operations, some of their effects have also been criticized. For example, Scott Pegg argued that: "...the specific status quo that the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus has helped to freeze is a status quo that the Turkish Cypriot political leadership is quite comfortable with. Thus, whatever its stated objectives may be, one can in some ways view UNFICYP as a midwife present at the birth of the Turkish Cypriot *de facto* state and as a guardian that helps make its continued existence possible", Pegg, Scott, *International Society and the De Facto State*, Ashgate, Brookfield, 1998, p.165.
- 16 Lynch, Dov, 2004: *Engaging Eurasia's Separatist States*, US Institute of Peace.
- 17 Moldovan President Vladimir Voronin, Speech addressed to the North Atlantic Council, Brussels, 7 June 2005.
- 18 Resolution of the Parliament of Georgia Regarding the Current Situation in the Conflict Regions on the Territory of Georgia and Ongoing Peace Operations, 11 November 2005.
- 19 Agreement on a Cease-Fire and Separation of Forces, signed in Moscow, 14 May 1994, <http://www.unomig.org/>.
- 20 Interview with an official, Moscow, January 2006.
- 21 The Russian for Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), is *Sodruzhestvo Nezavisimyh Gosudartsv*, or SNG. But SNG-2 stands for *Sodruzhestvo Nepriznanyh Gosudartsv* (Community of Unrecognised States). Sometimes the SNG-2 is translated into English as CIS-2, but it does not reflect the play of words between SNG and SNG-2. In addition to Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistria, SNG-2 includes also Nagorno-Karabakh. The second informal name for the group of secessionist entities is NATO-2, which is an acronym for Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, Transnistria, Ossetia.
- 22 See Vladimir Socor, "Bagapsh, Kokoity, Smirnov touch base in Moscow," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 28 January 2005. www.jamestown.org.
- 23 Vladimir Socor, "EU Policy disarray in Georgia and Moldova," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 15 April 2005.

- ²⁴ For the Russian role in the Abkhaz 2004 elections see “Putin Meddles in Abkhazia Presidential Race,” *Civil Georgia*, 31 August 2004, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=7721>.
- ²⁵ In fact Georgia itself has been partly responsible for the situation, as it refused the granting of UN passports to the residents of Abkhazia in the 90s, which resulted in the mass acquisition by Abkhazians of Russian passports as a means to travel. Had Georgia accepted the granting of UN passports to Abkhaz, their necessity to get Russian passport to travel would have been less.
- ²⁶ The information about the issuing authority on Russian passports in Abkhazia clearly state that they are issued by “MID Rossii,” that is the Foreign Ministry of Russia. Author’s observation in Sukhumi, March 2006.
- ²⁷ See text of the “Russian Draft Memorandum on the basic principles of the state structure of a united state in Moldova” (Kozak Memorandum), November 17, 2003, http://eurojournal.org/more.php?id=107_0_1_18_M5.
- ²⁸ It would be fair to say that not only the Russian Federation supports these type of agreements. The EU supported a Serbia-Montenegro confederation with a level of decentralization that made the common state hardly functional. Moreover, the Republic of Cyprus rejected the Annan Plan in 2004 exactly for the fear that in case of an agreement it will have to share too much power with the self-proclaimed Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.
- ²⁹ Interviews with Georgian officials, Tbilisi, March 2006.
- ³⁰ Interviews with experts and officials in Sukhumi and Tbilisi, March 2006.
- ³¹ Dov Lynch, *Why Georgia Matters*, Chaillot Paper 86, EU ISS, Paris, p.36, www.iss-eu.org.
- ³² Interviews with Georgian diplomats, Moscow, January 2006; Tbilisi, March 2006.
- ³³ Centre for Strategic Studies and Reforms, *Research Paper on Transnistria* (Chisinau: November 2003), p.28; available at: <http://www.cisr-md.org/pdf/0311%20transn-research.pdf>.
- ³⁴ For example in Abkhazia Russia pays some 30,000 pensions. The minimal pension is approximately 30 Euro. Interview with a de facto deputy-prime minister of Abkhazia, Sukhumi, March 2006.
- ³⁵ Interviews with experts and officials in Sukhumi, Abkhazia, March 2006.
- ³⁶ See “We arrived to see who wants to be with us” (My priehali ubedista kto hochet byt vmeste s nami), *Olvia Press*, 6 October 2005, <http://olvia.idknet.com/ol46-10-05.htm>.
- ³⁷ See Dov Lynch, 2004, op. cit.
- ³⁸ President Vladimir Putin, transcript of the Press Conference for the Russian and Foreign Media, January, 31 2006, The Kremlin, Moscow.
- ³⁹ Interviews with officials and experts in Tiraspol, Transnistria (December 2005) and Sukhumi, Abkhazia, (March 2006).
- ⁴⁰ Interview with Sergei Bagapsh, de facto president of Abkhazia, *Svobodnaya Gruzia*, February 28, 2006, published originally in *Vremya Novostei*.
- ⁴¹ Interview, Moscow, January 13, 2006.
- ⁴² Author’s interview with Sergei Bagapsh, de facto president of Abkhazia, Sukhumi, March 31, 2006.



Islam and Tolerance in Wider Europe offers a refreshing new look at the complex interplay between religion, nationalism and expansionism in an increasingly globalized world, as revealed by a new generation of open society leaders working to build a more tolerant Europe. The authors are fellows and colleagues of the International Policy Fellowships program—an initiative of the Open Society Institute that has attempted to combat ‘brain drain’ while developing policy research capacities, initially in emerging democracies of the former Soviet sphere where concepts such as ‘policy’ and ‘fellowship’ were virtually untranslatable. Since its establishment in the late 1990s, some 250 of its fellows have grown into a network of open society leaders spanning more than 40 countries on nearly every continent.

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