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Seeking Reconciliation between Georgia and Abkhazia: The Bottom-Up Approach since 2008

Master thesis

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Abstract

The diploma thesis deals with the reconciliation process between Georgia and Abkhazia after 2008. It focuses on the bottom-up approach to reconciliation and its potential for the transformation of protracted and unresolved conflict. As bilateral negotiations at the political level between Georgia and Abkhazia have been stuck since 2006, this approach may be the only tool to disrupt the current status quo. Nevertheless, the research results show that this potential is quite limited in Georgia. The current discourse about the conflict that supports the status quo is related to ethnic identity and is also supported internationally. Middle-range leaders who are a significant part of the civil peace process between Georgia and Abkhazia have attempted to disrupt this discourse. Still, even their willingness to compromise is limited by a myth-symbol complex. Moreover, participants in peace projects are not homogeneous groups that aim to disrupt the current discourse. The research results show that reconciliation outside the state level has contributed at least to the preservation of negative peace because its participants mostly avoid stereotypes, do not feel negative emotions towards the other side, and reject violence as a tool for conflict resolution.

Abstrakt

Diplomová práce se zabývá usmiřováním mezi Gruzií a Abcházií po roce 2008. Soustředí se přitom na bottom-up strategii k usmíření a její dosavadní přínos a potenciál k transformaci vleklého a nevyřešeného konfliktu. Vzhledem k tomu, že bilaterální jednání na politické úrovni mezi Gruzií a Abcházií neprobíhají od roku 2006, může být tato strategie jedním z mála nástrojů, jak současný status quo narušit. Výsledky výzkumu ale ukazují, že tento potenciál je v Gruzii značně omezený. Současný státní diskurz o konfliktu, který status quo podporuje, je navázaný na etnickou identitu a také podporovaný na mezinárodní úrovni. Vlivní lídři občanské společnosti, kteří jsou zainteresovaní v civilním mírovém procesu mezi Gruzií a Abcházií, mají sice snahu tento diskurz narušit, nicméně i jejich ochota ke kompromisům je značně svázaná mýticko-symbolickým komplexem. Účastníci mírových projektů navíc nejsou jednolitá homogenní skupina, která by se snažila současný diskurz narušit. Výsledky výzkumu ukazují, že proces usmiřování mimo státní úroveň přispívá alespoň k zachování negativního míru, protože jeho účastníci se většinou vyhýbají stereotypům, necítí negativní emoce vůči druhé straně a odmítají násilí jako nástroj k řešení konfliktu.

Klíčová slova

Gruzínsko-Abchazský konflikt, Rusko, Etnický konflikt, Usmíření, Transformace konfliktu, Budování míru, Symbolická politika.

Keywords

Georgian-Abkhaz Conflict, Russia, Ethnic Conflict, Reconciliation, Conflict Transformation, Peacebuilding, Symbolic Politics.

Range of thesis: 164 000 Characters, 88 pages.

Declaration of Authorship

1. The author hereby declares that he compiled this thesis independently, using only the listed resources and literature.

2. The author hereby declares that all the sources and literature used have been properly cited.

3. The author hereby declares that the thesis has not been used to obtain a different or the same degree.

Prague 30.12 2022   Patrik Salát

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Contents

Introduction

In 2019, there was an exhibition in a small gallery in Tbilisi. Introduced with speeches of the then ambassador of Switzerland, Patric Franzen, and the special representative of the Prime Minister of Georgia for relations with Russia, Zurab Abashidze, the exhibition, called Corridors of the Conflict, was supposed to present previously unpublished materials about the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict. Research teams on both sides started to collect them in 2015. Their goal has been to create a new archive containing objectively balanced materials about the historical dispute. However, the result of this activity is only one part of the so-called Memory Project. The second is cooperation based on the joint efforts of Georgians and Abkhazians. The inter-ethnic cooperation perceived within reconciliation activities as a means of building trust is the first step toward sharing common memories and engaging in peaceful dialogue. It is how Claudia Josi from Swisspeace, who participated in the project, commented on these activities.[1]

On the other hand, the exhibition with official presentation and support took place only in Tbilisi. Nothing similar happened in Sukhumi. This example explains very well the current process of reconciliation between the two parties. While Georgians mostly welcome such activities, Abkhazians usually encounter them with misunderstanding and suspicion.[2] It got even stronger after 2008 when the five-day war between Georgia and Russia occurred. The two sides (Georgian and Abkhaz) have stopped holding peace talks at the official political level, and relations between the groups have worsened due to the isolation of Abkhazia. Despite that, Rachel Clogg of Conciliation Resources, the peacebuilding organization behind the Memory Project, argues that peace activities of this type are needed, *"Even if they do not currently have an impact on the structures that would need to be changed in order to transform the conflict, they can have a positive and transformative impact on the individuals."[3]*

The master's thesis follows this statement and tries to discover if discourses about the conflict produced by individuals involved in peace projects significantly differ from the institutional state discourse. At the same time, the research attempts to reveal if

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[1] RIESER, Armin. *Looking back paves the way to a peaceful future in Georgia*, Swiss Peace Supporter, 2020.
[2] CLOGG, Rachel – ELBAKIDZE, Marina. *The Art of the Possible. Dealing with the past violence in the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict,* Conciliation Resources. 2016. https://rc-services-assets.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/GeorgianAbkhazConflict.pdf
[3] Ibid.

their discourses contain stereotypes and myths about the conflict and the other ethnic group. According to Stuart J. Kaufman's symbolic politics theory, stereotypes, myths, and fears are often part of the myth-symbol complex of ethnic groups. The negative myth-symbol complex can evoke emotions that justify ethnic violence and thus create an environment for conflict.[4] At the same time, Kaufman claims that successful peacebuilding requires a transformation of the myth-symbol complex, including negative attitudes toward the other group. [5]

Therefore, the thesis focuses on the individuals involved in peace activities, for instance, ordinary participants, organizers, peace activists, and academics in the attempt to discover whether their thinking about the conflict and the other group differs from the group myth-symbol complex. The research questions are formulated as follows: how do people involved in peace projects think about the conflict? To what extent do stereotypes and negative attitudes toward the other group persist in their discourses? Do their discourses challenge the current state discourse? The main goal of the master's thesis is to discover if the bottom-up approach to reconciliation is challenging or supporting the current status quo. Since 2008, the two societies have had minimal contact, and the peace process has been deadlocked at the top level due to incompatible narratives.[6] Thus, the only way to challenge the current status quo seems to be from the bottom through peace activities involving both sides.

This work can contribute to the discussion about the transformative effect of peace projects on the individual and his thinking and the effectiveness of the bottom-up approach to reconciliation and peacebuilding in the context of unresolved and protracted conflict. The thesis argues that the bottom-up approach to reconciliation in the Georgian context has helped to preserve negative peace. However, the potential to transform conflict is limited because discourses that need to change are supported at the state and international levels. Moreover, conflict resolution is not a priority in Georgia, and the government will not alter policy toward conflict because the current discourse is based on the group myth-symbol complex. Therefore, any changes in state discourse could provoke negative emotions from the Georgian public and cost political support.

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[4] KAUFMAN, Stuart J. *Modern Hatreds: The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015.
[5] KAUFMAN, Stuart J. *Escaping the Symbolic Politics Trap: Reconciliation Initiatives and Conflict Resolution in Ethnic Wars*, Journal of Peace Research, vol. 43, no. 2, Sage Publications, Ltd., 2006, pp. 201–218.
[6] DE WAAL, Thomas. *Beyond Frozen Conflict: Scenarios of Separatist Disputes of Eastern Europe*, CEEPS, 2020, p. 160.

Methodology

The thesis employs qualitative research strategies. Necessary data were collected through official documents, speeches, and structured interviews with 15 individuals involved in peace activities. The interviews were conducted in English and Russian. The respondents were selected based on purposeful sampling. This technique allows a researcher to choose participants that meet qualifying criteria.[7] The criteria were designed in purpose to evaluate the effectiveness of the bottom-up approach to reconciliation between Georgia and Abkhazia. Therefore, the research focuses primarily on middle-range and grassroots leaders as well as ordinary participants in peace activities. Another criterion for selection is the necessity to participate in the peace process after 2008. Unfortunately, the Abkhaz side was difficult to reach due to the war in Ukraine. Hence, the interviews were conducted only with the Georgian side.

The official documents dealing with reconciliation, as well as collected responses, were subjected to discourse analysis. In this work, discourse is understood as a social practice that influences social reality and, at the same time, is influenced by social reality. Through discourse, social actors can maintain power relations or disrupt them. In other words, discourse can reshape reality.[8] Kaufman sees the cause of ethnic conflict in negative emotions that arise from the myth-symbol complex, which is the core of ethnic identity. In this case, ethnicity and nation can be interchangeable in his concept.[9] From this point of view, it means that the basis of ethnic conflict lies in the very identity of a specific ethnic group. But Kaufman adopts a constructivist rather than a strictly primordial position and argues that ethnic identity is not given but can change.[10]

In this thesis, national or ethnic identity is understood as a form of social identity that is produced, transformed, and even destroyed by discursive practice.[11] Therefore, the master's thesis combines Kaufman's symbolic politics theory with the assumption that group identities are constructed through negative or positive attitudes towards

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[7] PALINKAS, Lawrence, et. al. *Purposeful Sampling for Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis in Mixed Method Implementation Research*, Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research, vol. 42, 2013.

[8] DE CILLIA, Rudolf, et al. *The Discursive Construction of National Identities. Discourse & Society*, vol. 10, no. 2, Apr. 1999, pp. 149–173.

[9] KAUFMAN, *Modern Hatreds,* 2015, p. 15.

[10] Ibid, p. 24.

[11] DE CILLIA, Rudolf, et al. *The Discursive Construction of National Identities*. *Discourse & Society*, vol. 10, no. 2, Apr. 1999, pp. 149–173.

another group.[12] Due to that, it makes sense to focus on the peace activists, stakeholders, and participants in peace projects to analyze their discourse and uncover strategies for portraying themselves and others. For example, in the case of Georgians, their group identity shapes their attitudes towards Abkhazians and vice versa. Considering the conflict between Georgians and Abkhazians as part of their identity, as well as the myths, fears, and stereotypes that justify it, the focus must be placed on discursive strategies that undermine or, on the contrary, strengthen this identity. According to Ruth Wodak, social actors construct knowledge, situations, social roles, identity, and interpersonal relationships through discourse. But discursive actions can have different functions. For example, they may seek to maintain or reproduce the status quo, while other discursive activities will seek to transform this status quo.[13]

Discourse analysis can reveal whether thinking of peace actors undermines or reproduces the state discourse about the other group and the conflict. For that reason, the thesis employs Ruth Wodak's discourse-historical approach. This approach focuses on strategies used to represent self and others in discourse. According to Wodak, discursive constructions of "us and them" are the core of discourses of identity and difference.[14] In her work, Ruth Wodak focuses on the discursive construction of identity through three dimensions – contents, strategies, linguistic meanings, and forms of realization. However, the most significant feature of her DHA is the concept of context. That means she examines discourses with regard to their historical background and connects them with social reality through intertextuality and interdiscursivity.[15]

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[12] KRZYZANOWSKI, Michal. *The Discursive Construction of European Identities: A Multi-Level Approach to Discourse and Identity in the Transforming European Union,* 2010. p. 18.

[13] DE CILLIA, Rudolf, et al. *The Discursive Construction of National Identities*, Discourse & Society, vol. 10, no. 2, Apr. 1999, pp. 149–173.

[14] Ibid, pp. 149–173.

[15] WODAK, Ruth. *The discourse historical approach*, IN: WODAK, Ruth – MEYER, Michal. *Methods of critical discourse analysis*, 2001, p. 67.

Research Limitations

At first, the research was designed to compare both sides' approaches to reconciliation. However, the war in Ukraine heavily influenced the willingness of the peace activist in Abkhazia to speak with foreigners. Georgian peace activists are also very reluctant to provide contact information with participants in the peace dialogue from the Abkhaz side. Therefore, the research focuses only on the Georgian side and their approach to reconciliation. The research outcomes are also influenced by the researcher's lack of knowledge of the Georgian language, which excluded individuals who do not speak English or Russian.

Literature Review

Many academic texts have been written about the conflicts in the South Caucasus. Therefore, the literature review concerns newer ones published after 2008 unless the work significantly refers to the research topic. The focus is on texts that discuss the causes of the conflict, its persistence or possible solutions, and critical evaluations of peace activities. The existing research literature on the conflict between Georgia and Abkhazia could be divided into several categories. For example, there are works with a purely empirical basis and works based on theories of ethnic conflicts.[16]

Among the empirical works can be included a book written by journalist and analyst Thomas De Waal - *Beyond Frozen Conflict: Scenarios of Separatist Disputes of Eastern Europe*.[17] In this work, Waal focuses not only on the Georgia-Abkhazia dispute. In addition, he attempts to evaluate the current state of conflicts and offers possible scenarios for the future. On the contrary, Stuart J. Kaufman's book *Modern Hatreds: The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic Wars* approaches the conflicts in Georgia through the theories of ethnic conflicts.[18] Emil Aslan Souleimanov draws from Kaufman's approach in his book *Understanding Ethnopolitical Conflict: Karabakh, South Ossetia and Abkhazia Wars Reconsidered.*[19] On the other hand, in his monograph - *The post-*

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[16] SOULEIMANOV, Emil. *Understanding Ethnopolitical Conflict: Karabakh, South Ossetia, and Abkhazia Wars Reconsidered*, 2013, p. 7.

[17] DE WAAL, Thomas. *Beyond Frozen Conflict: Scenarios of Separatist Disputes of Eastern Europe*, CEEPS, 2020. https://www.ceps.eu/ceps-publications/beyond-frozen-conflict/

[18] KAUFMAN, Stuart J. *Modern Hatreds: The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015.

[19] SOULEIMANOV, Emil. *Understanding Ethnopolitical Conflict: Karabakh, South Ossetia, and Abkhazia Wars Reconsidered*, Springer, 2013.

Soviet wars: ethnic conflict, and nationhood in the Caucasus, Christian Zurcher uses an institutional approach to analyze the conflicts in the South Caucasus region. At the same time, he focuses mainly on the Soviet administration and subsequently on the political elites after the collapse of the Soviet Union.[20]

The existing literature could also be classified according to international, regional, societal perspectives, or micro perspectives. The latter means that some researchers deal with a particular aspect of the conflict. In contrast, others explain conflicts from a macro perspective using theories of international relations. Many articles or monographs look at the conflicts in the South Caucasus region from a geopolitical perspective. In this case, some researchers like to use the label - *New great game*. For example, this geopolitical perspective can be found in the books *The New Geopolitics of South Caucasus for Regional Cooperation and Conflict Resolution*, edited by Shireen T. Hunter,[21] or *The South Caucasus 2021: Oil, Democracy, and Geopolitics*, edited by Fariz Ismailzade and Glen E. Howard.[22] In his article - *The pawn of great powers: The East-West competition for Caucasia*, Ronald Grigor Suny also deals in the first place with the rivalry between Russia and the West.[23] Another book that sees the conflicts in the South Caucasus from a regional perspective is *War and Peace in the South Caucasus Ethnic Politics and the New Geopolitics* by Vicken Chetarian. According to him, the collapse of the USSR and his state apparatus is responsible for the conflicts. Therefore, he argues that many disputes are interconnected and must be considered in the context of the entire Caucasus.[24]

On the other hand, many works concern the particular aspect of the conflict between Georgia and Abkhazia, for instance, identity and violence. As an example serves, the dissertation *Identity and Violence: Cases in Georgia* by Nino Kemoklidze.[25] In addition, relatively recently published Anastasia Shesterinina's book - *Mobilizing*

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[20] ZUCHER, Christian. *The post-Soviet wars: ethnic conflict, and nationhood in the Caucasus*, NYU Press, 2007.
[21] HUNTER, Shiren T. *The New Geopolitics of South Caucasus for Regional Cooperation and Conflict Resolution*. 2017.
[22] ISMAILZADE, Fariz – HOWARD, Glen. *The South Caucasus 2021: Oil, Democracy, and Geopolitics.* The Jamestown Foundation, 2012.
[23] SUNY, Ronald Grigor. *The pawn of great powers: The East-West competition for Caucasia,* Journal of Eurasian Studies, volume 1, no.1, 2010, pp. 10 – 25.
[24] CHETARIAN, Vicken. *War and Peace in the South Caucasus Ethnic Politics and the New Geopolitics,* Columbia University Press, 2008.
[25] KEMOKLIDZE, Nino. *Identity and Violence: Cases in Georgia*, Doctoral dissertation, University of Birmingham, 2014.

in Uncertainty: Collective Identities and War in Abkhazia deals with the connection between identities and mobilization.[26] Shesterinina claims in her book that the Abkhazian elites relied on pre-formed identities when mobilizing for the conflict. Besides, the decision to mobilize was made in small groups at the family level. There is also a publication - *Myths and Conflict in the South Caucasus*.[27] Compiled under the leadership of Oksana Karpenko, the book deals with mythology and historical narratives. Countless articles deal with identity, historical narratives, collective memory, or the mythology of conflict. There is, for instance, *The Impact of Historical Narratives on Ethnic Conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia,* written by Elaheh Koolaee [28]or *Myself and Other: Competitive Narratives of Georgians and Abkhazians* by Kristina Khutsishvili.[29] In the case of Georgia, Peter Kabachnik addresses the nationalist discourse based on the fear of losing territory in his study *Wounds that won't heal: cartographic anxieties and the quest for territorial integrity in Georgia*.[30] Magdalena Dembinska attempt to capture the effort to transform identities in the comparative study *Fluctuating Images of Enemies and Friends: Abkhazia, With Turkish Cyprus' Lens*.[31]

The transformation of identity associated with the conflict is also an object of research in the publication of the Berghof Foundation - *Transforming War Related Identities*, where there is a chapter dedicated to the conflict between Georgia and Abkhazia.[32] The author Andrea Zemkov-Zuge claims, among other things, that in order to change hegemonic discourse, societies must have contact with each other. Nina Lutterjohan attempts to link the conflicting narratives and their impact on the peace process in her article - *The depth of the deadlock? Underlying themes in the Georgian-*

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[26] SHESTERININA, Anastasia. *Mobilizing in Uncertainty: Collective Identities and War in Abkhazia.* Cornell University Press, 2022.

[27] KARPENKO, Oksana et al. *Myths and Conflict in the South Caucasus,* International Alert, 2013. https://www.international-alert.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Caucasus-Myths-Conflict-Vol2-EN-2013-1.pdf

[28] KOOLAEE, Elaheh. *The Impact of Historical Narratives on Ethnic Conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia.* International Studies Journal, vol.17, no.1 (65), 2020, pp. 137-168.

[29]KHUTSISHVILI, Kristina. *Myself and Other: Competitive Narratives of Georgians and Abkhazians,* Regional Studies of Russia, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia, vol. 7, no. 1, 2018, pp.69-82.

[30] KABACHNIK, Peter. *Wounds that won't heal: cartographic anxieties and the quest for territorial integrity in Georgia,* Central Asian Survey, Vol. 31, no.1, 2012, pp. 45-60.

[31] DEMBINSKA, Magdalena. *Fluctuating Images of Enemies and Friends: Abkhazia, With Turkish Cyprus' Lens.* Warsaw East European Review, vol.3, 2013, pp. 177-203.

[32] ZEMKOV-ZUGE, Andrea et al. *Transforming War-Related Identities,* Handbook Dialogue Series, no.11, Berghof Foundation, 2016.

Abkhaz and Moldovan-Transnistrian Post-Soviet conflicts.[33] According to her, these narratives rotted in alienated identities affect the continuation of the peace process. However, they still have a potential for change despite not being sufficiently addressed. The same author seeks to evaluate the involvement of international organizations in the peace process in her dissertation - *The limitations of imagining peace: the relative success and failure of international organizations and the Georgian-Abkhaz and Moldovan-Transnistrian conflicts, 1992-2013.* [34]

On the other hand, the role of the EU in supporting civil society and organizations involved in the dialogue is described in the article by Nick Popescu - *The EU and Civil Society in the Georgian-Abkhaz Conflict*.[35] Paula Garb focuses on civil society and its role in conflict transformation. In her text - *Civil society and conflict transformation in the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict: accomplishments and challenges*, she essays to show that civil society leaders on both sides cooperated after the Russian-Georgian war in 2008.[36] At the same time, she criticizes that only a few people took part in peace activities. For instance, Tomas Hoch was interested in the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict transformation from the point of view of the Orthodox Church's involvement. In his study *Orthodox Churches and the Transformation of the Georgian-Abkhaz Conflict*, he writes that the opposing views of the two organizations prevent greater involvement of church leaders in the peace process.[37] Furthermore, Eva Maria-Auch analyzes the connection between conflict and identity with the process of reconciliation in the chapter of the book *Societies in Transition: The Caucasus and the Balkans between Conflict and Reconciliation*. According to her, reconciliation projects should pay attention to narratives and deal with collective memory.[38]

[33] LUTTERJOHAN, Nina. *The depth of the deadlock? Underlying themes in the Georgian-Abkhaz and Moldovan-Transnistrian Post-Soviet conflicts,* National Identities, 2022, p. 1-22.
https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/citedby/10.1080/14608944.2022.2050197?scroll=top&needAccess=true
[34] LUTTERJOHAN, Nina. *The limitations of imagining peace: the relative success and failure of international organizations and the Georgian-Abkhaz and Moldovan-Transnistrian conflicts, 1992-2013,* Doctoral dissertation, St. Andrew University, 2017.
[35] POPESCU, Nick. *The EU and Civil Society in the Georgian-Abkhaz Conflict,* Routledge, 2011.
[36] GARB, Paula. *Civil society and conflict transformation in the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict: accomplishments and challenges,* European Security, vol. 21, 2012, pp. 90-101.
[37] HOCH, Tomáš, *Orthodox Churches and the Transformation of the Georgian-Abkhaz Conflict*, Czech Journal of International Relations, vol. 52, no.3, 2017.
[38] AUCH, Eva-Maria et al. *Societies in Transition: The Caucasus and the Balkans between Conflict and Reconciliation*, Gottingen, 2020.

The effects of the conflict in 2008 on the peace process and its necessary transformation are reflected in the joint publication of the Georgian and Abkhaz research team *Transformation of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict: rethinking the paradigm* edited by Natella Akaba and Iraklii Khintba.[39] From their point of view, the lack of trust at the political and social levels, along with the inability to overcome myths and negative constructs, bears the blame for the unsuccessful peaceful resolution of the conflict. The authors recommend that the peace process focuses more on dealing with the past. A comprehensive evaluation of successes or failures of the peace process often comes from non-profit organizations involved in peace initiatives. For example, the research *25 Years of Georgia's Peace Policy for Caucasus House* by Ivan Abramashvili and Revaz Koiava analyzes why the peace process came to a deadlock and adds options to solve this situation. One of them is the example of Cyprus and the bottom-up approach to the peace process. According to the authors, this should include an effort to build trust between people.[40] Edward Beswick's publication *Overcoming Geopolitics: Grassroots Transformation and the Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian Conflicts* also reaches similar conclusions.[41] He claims that it is necessary to overcome the geopolitical perspective of the conflict and focus on grassroots actors.

The publication *Conciliation Resources - The art of the possible: dealing with past violence in the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict* is concerned with the reconciliation process in the Georgian-Abkhaz context.[42] Rachel Clogg and Marina Elbakidze argue that conflict transformation projects can directly or indirectly challenge nationalism and selective historical discourses that support domestic political agendas. The research of Independent Peace Associates - *Analysis of 30+ years of working with conflict in the Georgian-Abkhaz-South Ossetian contexts* also tries to evaluate peace initiatives

[39] AKABA, Natella – KHINTBA, Irakli. *Transformation of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict: rethinking the paradigm*, Conciliation Resources, 2011. https://www.c-r.org/resource/transformation-georgian%E2%80%93abkhaz-conflict-rethinking-paradigm-abkhaz-perspective

[40] ABRAMASHVILI, Ivane – REVAZ, Kolava. *25 Years of Georgia's Peace Policy for Caucasus House*, Caucasian House, 2018. http://regional-dialogue.com/en/25-years-of-georgias-peace-policy/

[41] BESWICK, Edward. *Geopolitics: Grassroots Transformation and the Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian Conflicts*, The University of Oxford, 2014. https://www.generationsforpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Overcoming-Geopolitics-Grassroots-Transformation-and-the-Georgian-Abkhazian-and-Georgian-Ossetian-Conflicts-2014-Full-Report.pdf

[42] CLOGG, Rachel – ELBAKIDZE, Marina. *The Art of the Possible. Dealing with the past violence in the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict.* Conciliation Resources. 2016. https://rc-services-assets.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/GeorgianAbkhazConflict.pdf

critically.[43] The contribution of publication by Larissa Sotieva and Juliet Schofield lies in the research on the effects of peace projects on the transformation of the individual and society. The work derives from Jean-Paul Lederach's concept of conflict transformation. This publication has a very similar goal to this thesis. However, the authors work with a different theoretical framework, and their methodology is also significantly different.

It follows from the overview that predominantly non-profit organizations, which have worked in this environment for many years, reflect on peace projects and initiatives. While these reflections build on similar theoretical approaches, their conclusions are often similar as they emphasize the positive contribution of reconciliation activities. The literature review shows that many topics related to the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict have been well covered. For instance, the master's thesis draws from many of these works mentioned above in relating conflict with identity. On the other hand, the thesis focuses on the current stage of the peace process. It attempts to distinguish discourses produced by the state and by middle-range leadership, grassroots actors, and peace activists in terms of conflict and the other group. It, thus, compares the top-down and bottom-up approaches in an attempt to reveal their contribution to the current status quo.

Structure of the Thesis

In the first chapter dedicated to the theoretical and conceptual framework, the thesis focuses on group identity and the main theories of ethnic conflicts - primordialism, instrumentalism, and constructivism. Each explanation works with a different essence of ethnicity and thus assumes other causes of ethnic violence. Due to that, they approach the potential solution to ethnic conflicts differently. On that account, attention was paid mainly to the sociological-psychological approaches of Donald Horowitz and especially Stuart J. Kaufman since this thesis draws from his theory of symbolic politics. Kaufman claims a comprehensive approach is needed to transform ethnic conflicts into peaceful co-existence. According to his hypotheses, both sides must

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[43]SOTIEVA, Larissa, et al. *Analysis of 30+ years of working with conflict in the Georgian-Abkhaz-South Ossetian contexts.* Independent peace Associates, London, 2021. https://indiepeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/IndiePeace30-Years-Geo-Abkh-SO-contexts-EN.pdf

agree at the political and societal levels. The significant element he proposes as a part of the peace process is reconciliation. However, it is a concept with a wide range of definitions. That is why the thesis turns to the perspective of John Paul Lederach, who understands reconciliation as a long-term process, and Herbert C. Kelman, who argues that reconciliation can significantly change identity.

The second chapter describes the relations between Georgia and Abkhazia. First, the historical context of the Georgian-Abkhaz relationship is presented. The description is based on various books, for instance, *The Caucasus* by Thomas de Waal, *Modern Hatreds* by Kaufman, and *Understanding Ethnopolitical Conflict* by Emil Aslan Souleimanov. The chapter includes the development of historical relations from the beginning of the 20th century until the war in the 90s. After that, the period between the war and the year 2008 is described. The chapter also deals with the developments that followed after the five-day war in South Ossetia. Finally, the Georgian myth-symbol complex is depicted.

The practical part of the thesis is divided into two chapters. The third chapter focuses on the top-down approach to reconciliation and the state discourses produced by official documents dealing with conflict and resolution. An examination of the speech of Prime Minister Garibashvili at the UN in 2022 complements the analysis. Apart from that, the research looks at the discourse of the former minister Paata Zaakareshvili through analysis of his unpublished ministry vision and interview conducted in Tbilisi. That is a starting point for subsequent comparison with discourses produced by individuals outside the state level involved in peace activities.

The fourth chapter concerns the bottom-up approach to reconciliation and analysis of structured interviews with middle-range and grassroots leaders as well as participants in the peace projects. Thanks to the discourse-historical approach, it was possible to discover whether their thinking about the conflict supports or undermines the current status quo. In addition, it was possible to observe whether ethnic myths and stereotypes appear in their discourses.

Chapter I. Conceptual, Theoretical and Methodological Framework

This chapter explains the concepts and terms mentioned in the introduction. It is essential to interpret the idea of social identity that includes ethnicity, as well as its role in forming individual and group identity. Next, the thesis focuses on how ethnicity is perceived by theories that explain ethnic conflicts. The concept of ethnic identity is highly complex, and there is no complete agreement about it among academics.[44] Explaining the similarities and differences of ethnicity, race, and nation is also important since the terms can overlap.[45] Lastly, approaches to conflict resolution, conflict transformation, and reconciliation are introduced.

1.1 Identity

Identity can be divided into personal and social. Social identity is associated with a particular group. According to Hogg, personal identity has little to do with the group process, yet the group can create a space where these identities are formed.[46] Moreover, a group as such has no meaning of its own if it is not in relation to other groups. The characteristics of a particular group obtain significance through being different from others.[47] According to Hogg, self-improvement, and reduction of uncertainty are two rudimentary motivations guiding the process of social identity. In the first case, people try to improve and protect their status and the status of their group. In the second case, people attempt to reduce uncertainty about the social world and their place in it. They merely want to know who they are and how to behave. At the same time, they want to know who others are and how they behave. This behavior is associated with a social categorization. During this categorization, members of one group see members of another through a simplistic lens or stereotypes.[48]

1.2 Ethnicity

One form of social identity is ethnicity. The term derives from the Greek word ethnos. Ethnicity began to appear as an analytical term in sociology and anthropology in

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[44] TESAŘ, Filip: *Etnické konflikty*, 2007. p. 137.

[45] GREGORY, Derek et. al. *The Dictionary of Human Geography*, 2009, p. 214.

[46] HOGG, Michael A. *The Social Identity Perspective: Intergroup Relations, Self-Conception, and Small Groups*, Small Group Research, vol. 35, No 3, 2004, pp. 246 – 276.

[47] DESCHAMPS, J. C. *Social identity and relations of power between groups,* IN: TAJFEL, Henri: *Social identity and intergroup relations*, 1982, p. 87.

[48] HOGG, *The Social Identity Perspective,*, Small Group Research, vol. 35, No 3, 2004, pp. 246 – 276.

the second half of the 20th century. At first, it was understood as a traditional form of identity that was supposed to disappear with modernization. Later, it began to replace the word race in academic literature since Nazi Germany hugely discredited the term race.[49] As already mentioned, the academic community only partially agrees on the definition of ethnicity as the expression is difficult to define.[50]

Sociologist Richard Jenkins, for example, understands ethnicity as a primary human identity that is difficult to change during life. Nevertheless, he does not consider it a fixed category since people are responsible for the identification process. In addition, ethnicity can be associated with emotions based on the difference between "us and them."[51] In other words, ethnicity is a collective identity based on perceived cultural differences, rising from social interactions, especially group ones.[52] According to Anthony D. Smith, the core of ethnicity is the so-called myth-symbol complex. It transmits historical memory and, at the same time, influences individual experience. Currently, ethnicity is associated with concepts such as ethnic identity, ethnic group, or ethnic conflict. In the case of theories of ethnic conflicts, the explanations of ethnic violence and mobilization differ significantly according to the perception of ethnicity.

1.3 Ethnic Group

Ethnic group, as an analytical term, is primarily connected with the question of what forms this group. This diploma thesis draws from the concept of Anthony D. Smith, who uses the term - *ethnie*. According to him, *ethnie* has several dimensions on which the ethnic group is based. In the words of Smith, it is a collective name, common myths, shared history, distinct culture, and association with a specific territory. In the last case, he adds that *ethnie* does not have to disappear even when the group disperses and leaves a particular territory.[53] As a final dimension of *ethnie*, Smith adds communal solidarity.[54] For the first and sixth criteria, Smith was inspired by Frederik Barth. He emphasized the importance of imaginary ethnic boundaries formed in interaction with other groups. Being different from others leads to an awareness of one's own uniqueness and a stronger bond with the group. [55]

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[49] GREGORY, Derek et. al. *The Dictionary of Human Geography*, 2009, p. 214.
[50] TESAŘ, *Etnické konflikty*, 2007, p. 137.
[51] JENKINS, Richard. *Social Identity*, 1996, p. 87.
[52] TESAŘ, *Etnické konflikty*, p. 137.
[53] SMITH, Anthony D. *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, 1988, p. 28.
[54] Ibid, p. 29.
[55] TESAŘ, *Etnické konflikty*, 2007, p. 35.

Shared culture, above all its symbolic expression, is another important aspect of an ethnic group. The symbolic expression may include language, religion, family ties, way of life, etc. Through these symbolic elements, a member of an ethnic group identifies with another. At the same time, the already mentioned process of identification and differentiation necessarily occurs. However, differences between ethnic groups do not unconditionally lead to conflict.[56] The very essence of ethnicity does not have to be a reason to mobilize and unleash violence.[57]

1.4 Nation

In some cases, concepts of ethnic groups and nations overlap. However, there is no consensus on their relationship.[58] Generally, the emergence of nations is approached from two diverse perspectives. In the modernist interpretation, the concept is different from an ethnic group. According to modernists (Gellner, Hobsbawm, Anderson), a nation is the result of the process of modernization, industrialization, and rationalization, which is accompanied by the growth of bureaucratization, capitalist economy, and the secular concept of human autonomy. In addition, awareness about the nation-state is spread through mass education.[59]

On the other hand, the so-called ethno-symbolists (Smith, Hroch) do not agree with this statement. In their concept of nation, there is continuity with an ethnic group, and their analysis often focuses on the transition from ethnic group to the nation. According to them, there are no sharp boundaries between these two concepts.[60] For example, the already mentioned Anthony D. Smith claims that the roots of modern nations can be found precisely in ethnic communities.[61] At the same time, however, he does not agree with the primordialist view that nations existed before.[62] According to Anthony D. Smith, a nation is a named historical and cultural community with a unified territory, mass education system, and common laws.[63]

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[56] FENTON, Steve. *Ethnicity: Racism, Class and Culture.* 1999, p. 8.
[57] Ibid, p. 6.
[58] TESAŘ, *Etnické konflikty*, 2007, p. 140.
[59] HUTCHINSON, John. *Ethnicity and Modern Nations*, Ethnic and Racial Studies, vol. 23, no. 4, 2000, pp. 651 – 669.
[60] TESAŘ, *Etnické konflikty*, 2007, p. 140
[61] SMITH, Anthony D. *The Ethnic Origins of Nations.* 1988.
[62] Ibid, p. 3.
[63] TESAŘ, *Etnické konflikty*, 2007. p. 140.

1.5 Theories of Ethnic Conflicts

Interest in ethnic conflicts increased in the early 1990s after the wave of bloody wars on the territory of the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. During this time, new theories emerged while others were reformulated.[64] Regarding the explanation of ethnic conflicts, three main theoretical approaches exist - primordialism, instrumentalism, and constructivism.[65] They differ in their view of the essence of ethnicity and do not even agree on whether ethnicity is the leading cause of the conflict. On the other hand, these theories overlap and complement each other in some cases.[66]

According to primordialism, ethnic identity is fixed. It has roots that are hundreds or thousands of years old.[67] From that point of view, everyone belongs to some ethnic group. Members of an ethnic group then share a group consciousness that they acquire through language, culture, traditions, and history. Myths and symbols further reinforce this shared group consciousness passed down from generation to generation. Primordialism understands the cause of ethnic conflicts in the cultural differences between ethnic groups.[68] However, the primordial school of thought is not uniform and can be sorted into two branches. They differ mainly in the perspective of looking at ethnicity. Hence, primordialism can be divided into sociobiological approaches and cultural approaches.

Sociobiological approaches are considered an extreme form of primordialism. They essentially emphasize biological roots, genetics, environment, and culture. An important representative of this approach was, for example, the sociologist Pierre Van der Berghe. He connects ethnicity with kinship and sociobiology when he writes about the so-called kin selection.[69] In contrast, cultural primordialism is generally associated with the anthropologist Clifford Greetz. He does not attribute an objective and natural essence to ethnic identity. On the contrary, he understands it as assumed.[70] In his view, group members believe this identity is primordial, in other words, unchanging

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[64] SOULEIMANOV, Emil, *Understanding Ethnopolitical Conflict,* 2013, p. 7.

[65] WILLIAMS, Dodeye. *How useful are the Main Existing Theories of Ethnic Conflict?* Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies 4 (1), 2015, pp. 147–152.

[66] KAUFMAN, Stuart J. *Ethnicity as a Generator of Conflict*. IN: CORDELL, Carl et. al. *The Routledge Handbook of Ethnic Conflict,* 2010, p. 91.

[67] Ibid, p. 91.

[68] WILLIAMS, Dodeye. *How useful are the Main Existing Theories of Ethnic Conflict?* Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies 4 (1), 2015, pp. 147–152.

[69] VAN DER BERGHE, Pierre L. *The Ethnic Phenomenon*. 1987, p. 239.

[70] GEERTZ, Clifford. *The Interpretations of Cultures*. 1973, p. 259.

and fixed. Fearon and Laitin, for example, argue that Greetz could be considered representative of constructivism instead.[71]

Ethnic conflict is frequently associated with primordialism through the concept of ancient hatreds. These ancient hatreds are understood as a natural part of an ethnic group's identity. This concept gained popularity in relation to the wars in the former Yugoslavia. It could be observed, for example, in the speeches of nationalist politicians and was also widespread among journalists.[72] A list of prominent figures who use this concept in their works includes, for example, Robert Kaplan. His book Balkan Ghosts allegedly influenced the approach of the American administration to the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina.[73]

Instrumentalism stands in direct opposition to primordialism. The instrumentalist school of thought sees ethnicity as a tool used by elites to achieve certain goals because people who share common characteristics can be easily mobilized and organized.[74] For example, political scientist Paul Brass argues in his book *Ethnicity and Nationalism* that ethnicity and nationalism are not natural. On the contrary, they are social and political constructs created by elites to protect their group's interests while enhancing their position. According to Brass, ethnic identities and nationalism are the results of the interaction of representatives of the centralized state with the leaders of non-dominant ethnic groups.[75]

The example above shows that instrumentalists assume that human beings are rational actors and thus make choices based on maximizing their profit. In addition, people use ethnicity as an interest group to benefit them.[76] This group usually has a shared interest, which elites use to gain power. In this interpretation, ethnicity is nothing more than a political tool.[77] Moreover, instrumentalist approaches usually emphasize that conditions for conflict must occur first - weak government, growing population,

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[71] FEARON, James D. – LAITIN, David D. *Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity, International Organization*, vol. 54, no. 4, 2000, pp. 845 – 877.
[72] Ibid, pp. 845 – 877.
[73] KAUFMAN, T. Michael. *The dangers of letting a president read*, The New York Times, 05, 1999.
https://www.nytimes.com/1999/05/22/books/the-dangers-of-letting-a-president-read.html
[74] WILLIAMS, Dodeye. *How useful are the Main Existing Theories of Ethnic Conflict?* Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies 4 (1), 2015, pp. 147–152
[75] BRASS, Paul. *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparation*, 1991, p. 8.
[76] WILLIAMS, Dodeye. *How useful are the Main Existing Theories of Ethnic Conflict?* Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies 4 (1), 2015, pp. 147–152
[77] LAKE, David A. – ROTHCHILD, Donald. *The International Spread of Ethnic Conflict: Fear, Diffusion, Escalation,* 1998, p. 6.

and economic inequalities.[78] For example, Jack L. Snyder sees this window of opportunity for ethnic conflict in the transition to democratic politics.[79] According to him, in such a case, the elections only intensify the nationalist and ethnic differences between groups.[80] Painful transformation of the economy or redistribution from a shrinking economic pie can also play a role. Economic factors are a frequent justification of conflicts for instrumentalists. For example, ethnic groups living in poorer areas may be interested in seceding from another ethnic group with better access to resources. This sense of injustice can therefore lead to conflict.[81] According to instrumentalists, the reason for war can also be a security dilemma caused by the fall of the state and the efforts of various cultural groups to ensure security in anarchy. Aggressive leaders who can become the head of a group and maneuver it into a conflict with another ethnic group for their interests also play a significant role. [82]

Constructivism can be understood in ontological, epistemological, and theoretical terms or as an analytical tool.[83] According to Wendt, there are four characteristics common to constructivist thinking. First, it deals with the role of ideas in the construction of social life. Secondly, it essays to show the socially constructed essence of agents and subjects. Third, it builds on a research strategy of methodological holism and, lastly, opposes shallow causal explanations.[84] While primordialism considers ethnicity historically given, constructivism understands it as socially constructed.[85] According to constructivists, an individual does not have to belong exclusively to one ethnic group. Moreover, these groups are constantly reconstructed through various processes of social interaction.[86] Constructivism, in this case, is in stark contrast to primordialism.

On the other hand, there is not a single theory of constructivism. For example, Fearon and Laitin point to three main constructivist approaches to ethnic violence. The first derives from the assumption that political elites construct identity,

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[78] KAUFMAN, *Ethnicity as a Generator of Conflict*, 2010, p. 98.

[79] SNYDER, Jack L. *From Voting to Violence: Democratization and Nationalist Conflict*, 2000, p. 21.

[80] Ibid, p. 19.

[81] KAUFMAN, *Modern Hatreds*, 2015. p. 7.

[82] KAUFMAN, *Ethnicity as a Generator of Conflict,* 2010, p. 98.

[83] WENDT, Alexander – FAERON, James. *Rationalism v. Constructivism*. IN: CARLSNEAS, Walter et. al. Handbook of International Relations. 1992, p. 56.

[84] Ibid, p. 57.

[85] WILLIAMS, Dodeye. *How useful are the Main Existing Theories of Ethnic Conflict?* Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies 4 (1), 2015, pp. 147–152.

[86] FEARON, James D. – LAITIN, David D. *Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity, International Organization*, vol. 54, no. 4, 2000. pp. 845 – 877.

the second considers the masses responsible for construction, and the third attribute an essential role to cultural discourses.[87] Nonetheless, these approaches can easily be confused with concepts used by instrumentalists. For example, socially constructed ethnicity by elites resembles the instrumentalists' concept of manipulative leaders. Similarly, language, history, symbols, or myths can play a significant role in the identity construction and the maintenance of ethnic rivalries. Fearon and Laitin write about discursive constructivism, which is very close to ethno-symbolism. According to this concept, identity is invented through discourses that exist independently within society.[88]

Each of the mentioned theories has its strengths and weaknesses. Primordialism, for example, is criticized for oversimplifying conflicts by reducing them to ancient hatreds. On the other hand, constructivism lacks a sufficient explanation of how ethnic groups can remain unchanged for a long time. The economic approach of the instrumentalists, for a change, poorly explains the mass mobilization of the members of an ethnic group.[89] Some academics, therefore, seek to combine the theories of ethnic conflicts because they believe that a single theory is incapable of explaining such a complex problem as ethnic conflict.

In contrast to the mentioned three main theories, social psychological approaches open a new perspective of ethnic conflict analysis since they focus on different questions. For example, why do people follow manipulative leaders? And what drives them to use violence?[90] Among representatives of the social psychological approach, can be included, for example, Marc Howard Ross. His psychological-cultural theory tries to shed light on the intensity and uncompromisingness of ethnic conflicts. At the same time, he focuses on group and individual behavior based on social and cultural predispositions.[91]

Donald Horowitz also points to the psychological dimension of ethnic conflict. He mentions group anxieties deriving from the fear of threats from other groups.[92] According to him, this fear has the ability to modify perception and makes the group take collective action.[93] Stuart J. Kaufman's symbolic politics theory also works with similar

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[87] Ibid. pp. 845 – 877.
[88] Ibid, pp. 845 – 877.
[89] KAUFMAN, *Modern Hatreds,* 2015, p. 19.
[90] KAUFMAN, *Ethnicity as a Generator of Conflict*, 2010, p. 99
[91] ROSSE, Marc H. *Psychocultural Interpretation Theory and Peacemaking in Ethnic Conflicts*, Political Psychology, vol. 16, č. 3, pp. 523 - 544.
[92] HOROWITZ. Donald. *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, 1985. p. 175.
[93] Ibid. p. 175.

reasons for ethnic mobilization and violence.[94] Interestingly, Chaim Kaufman classifies him as a constructivist. Although others consider ethno-symbolism cultural primordialism or synthesis of this approach and instrumentalism.[95]

1.6 Symbolic Politics Theory of Ethnic Wars

Kaufman's symbolic politics theory of ethnic wars draws on the concept of ethnicity by Anthony D. Smyth. According to Kaufman, the six elements described by Smith are held together by a myth-symbol complex.[96] This myth-symbol complex contains elements that often form a strong foundation for ethnic identity and a sense of belonging. These include, for example, historical memory, symbols, or myths. In this sense, Kaufman builds on the approach of American political scientist Murray Edelman, who studied symbols in politics and political psychology. According to Edelman, a myth is a common belief of a certain group of people that gives meaning to events and various actions. Whether the myth is true is irrelevant in that case because its essence is to help a person to understand what a particular sequence of events means to him.[97] As an example, Kaufman uses the Armenian Genocide, which is a real historical event, but what affects the relationship of ethnic Armenians to Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh is more than this event, the mythology around the Armenian Genocide.[98]

A symbol is an emotional reference to a myth. For example, the Serbs have a powerful emotional attachment to the Kosovo Field because the place refers to a historical event with a catastrophically portrayed legacy. This symbol refers to the myth that simplifies a complex historical background and firmly defines good and evil. In this way, myths and symbols form the myth-symbol complex of an ethnic group.[99] In order to explain the causes of ethnic conflict, Kaufman uses a synthesis of the mentioned theories. For example, he criticizes instrumentalists for emphasizing rational choice, although he acknowledges the concept of manipulative leaders. According to him, bad leaders can abuse ethnicity due to its emotional character stressing that people do not choose rationality but emotionally.

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[94] KAUFMAN, Chaim. *Rational Choice and Progress in the Study of Ethnic Conflict: A Review Essay*. Security Studies, vol. 14, 2005, pp. 178 – 207.
[95] KEMOKLIDZE, Nino. *Identity and Violence: Cases in Georgia*, Doctoral dissertation, University of Birmingham, 2014, p. 54.
[96] KAUFMAN, *Modern Hatreds*, 2015, p. 16.
[97] EDELMAN, Murray. *The Symbolic Uses of Politics*, University of Illinois Press, 1985, p. 8.
[98] KAUFMAN, *Modern Hatreds*, 2015, p. 55.
[99] Ibid, p. 30.

Explanation of the causes of wars, therefore, draws on a psychological approach to ethnic conflicts, similar to that of Donald Horowitz, who claims that emotions such as the fear of group extermination are the main source of ethnic violence.[100] Moreover, people often label their ethnic group as an "extended family." This feeling creates a willingness to fight for or defend it. Horowitz points out that people from the same ethnic group often call themselves brothers or sisters.[101] Alternatively, other ethnic groups in a good relationship can be called the same way. In terms of ethnic mobilization, he claims that common stereotypes and myths are responsible if they are negative towards another group. They can create fear or hatred, leading to aggressive behavior or supporting it. [102]

It follows from the above that the preconditions for the emergence of ethnic conflict are negative stereotypes and myths that justify violence against another ethnic group. According to Kaufman, negative attitudes must exist for at least one of the conflict sides. At the same time, there must be an effort for ethnic dominance in a particular territory.[103] Furthermore, there must be an environment that causes concern and fear of coexistence. Extreme fear then leads to the justification of hatred and violence. This environment of fear draws from a myth-symbol complex that can portray one of the groups as a victim. The more this historical victimization is stressed, the greater the emotions, which can consist of fear and the need for just retribution. A demographic situation can also play a role in causing fear. For instance, an unequal mixed ethnic population can force one of the ethnic groups to feel that they are a minority threatened by the majority. According to Kaufman, these fears are another necessary precondition for the emergence of ethnic conflict. The sense of threat gives elites a justification and a tool for waging war.[104]

As well as the feeling of threat, an opportunity for ethnic mobilization is also a significant prerequisite. This possibility is limited only by the state's ability to prevent this mobilization. If state power is weak or collapsed, the opportunity for widespread ethnic mobilization increases.[105] For example, in the post-Soviet space, the possibility for ethnic mobilization opened up with the glasnost launched by Mikhail Gorbachev

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[100] HOROWITZ, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, 1985, p. 175.
[101] Ibid, p. 57.
[102] KAUFMAN, *Modern Hatreds,* 2015, p. 30.
[103] Ibid, p. 30
[104] KAUFMAN, *Modern Hatreds*, 2015, p. 31.
[105] Ibid, p. 32.

in the Soviet Union. But Kaufman also mentions the case of Rwanda, where the state elites triggered the ethnic conflict.[106] Foreign patrons that support one side in a certain way also play a role in the emergence of ethnic conflict. They can, for example, contribute economically or by supplying weapons.

Kaufman distinguishes between two types of ethnic conflict. One type is led by the masses, while the other by elites. Both types create a security dilemma that provokes conflict if the needed preconditions are fulfilled. Nevertheless, if ethnic mythology and identity are weak, yet the state apparatus breaks down, ethnic conflict may not arise.[107] It follows that the negative myth-symbol complex, which can evoke hateful emotions towards a different group, is thus the fundamental precondition for the emergence of ethnic conflicts.

1.7 Ethnic Conflicts and Peacebuilding

In his theory, Kaufman rejects the so-called rational choice. According to him, emotions are the driving force behind ethnic conflicts. It is this aspect that must be taken into account in an attempt to promote peace after conflict. He, therefore, criticizes peacekeeping activities based, for example, on the deployment of peacekeepers and the separation of hostile parties. Kaufman sees third-party intervention as insufficient for successful conflict resolution. According to him, there are very few examples of successfully resolved civil wars. [108]

In his book Modern Hatreds he states that 70 percent of identity-based conflicts end in one side's defeat and not in peaceful negotiations. And in two-thirds of these conflicts, violence erupted again despite previous peace agreements. Due to that, ethnic conflicts are difficult to solve through ordinary negotiations.[109] Kaufman sees a connection between theories of ethnic wars and peaceful conflict resolution. According to him, peace activities have to address the reasons why groups mobilize for war and help to mobilize these groups for a peaceful solution.[110] Due to that, it is essential that both

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[106] Ibid, p. 33.
[107] Ibid, p. 36.
[108] KAUFMAN, Stuart J. *Escaping the Symbolic Politics Trap: Reconciliation Initiatives and Conflict Resolution in Ethnic Wars*, Journal of Peace Research, vol. 43, no. 2, 2006, pp. 201–218.
[109] KAUFMAN, *Modern Hatreds,* 2015, p. 40.
[110] KAUFMAN, Stuart J. *Escaping the Symbolic Politics Trap: Reconciliation Initiatives and Conflict Resolution in Ethnic Wars*, Journal of Peace Research, vol. 43, no. 2, 2006, pp. 201–218.

sides come together and replace myths about the other group with better information, just as fear or hatred must replace understanding.

Kaufman argues that peacebuilding can transform these hateful attitudes.[111] He believes this approach can subsequently create an environment where a political agreement between opposing parties, which would be difficult for the population to accept in case of unchanging attitudes, can be sold later. Likewise, a society, which underwent this evolution, may choose other leaders who prefer agreement to conflict. In this way, there is an escape from what Kaufman calls the symbolic politics trap, which can endanger the peace process and prevent it from continuing.[112]

At the same time, he emphasizes that most of the practice regarding conflict resolution is based primarily on the mainstream theories of instrumentalism. Consequently, peace activities focus predominantly on building institutions, economic aid, external monitoring, or the multilateral negotiation process rather than attitudes change. According to Kaufman, these activities do not sufficiently reflect that ethnicity adds another layer of complexity. Therefore, he suggests that a reconciliation process should be part of the peace activities.[113]

The thesis understands reconciliation as part of the conflict transformation process. Therefore, these two concepts must be explained in more detail in the following section. The literature about conflict intervention distinguishes between three influential schools, which differ primarily in their understanding of the causes of conflict. Nevertheless, they cannot be considered entirely different and separate. For example, Cordula Reiman claims that the terms such as conflict management, conflict resolution, and conflict transformation are used loosely in academic literature and often refer to the same strategies.[114]

For instance, conflict management attempts to solve conflicts constructively by bringing both parties to negotiating table and creating a system in which they can co-

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[111] KAUFMAN, *Modern Hatreds*, 2015, p. 42.
[112] KAUFMAN, Stuart J. *Escaping the Symbolic Politics Trap: Reconciliation Initiatives and Conflict Resolution in Ethnic Wars*. Journal of Peace Research, vol. 43, no. 2, 2006, pp. 201–218.
[113] Ibid, pp. 201–218.
[114] REIMANN, Cordula. *Assessing the State-of-the-Art in Conflict Transformation,* Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation, 2004, p. 4. https://berghof-foundation.org/library/assessing-the-state-of-the-art-in-conflict-transformation

exist.[115] Therefore, the best solution is to maintain and manage disputes and eventually find a compromise that will lead to cooperation instead of violence. On the other hand, proponents of so-called conflict resolution reject this power-political view because conflict sides simply cannot compromise on their basic needs in the case of disputes involving communities and identities. Nevertheless, they claim that it is possible to get out of the spiral of conflict if the hostile parties reassess their positions with the help of a third party. In other words, they emphasize an intervention of qualified actors outside conflicts, for example, international organizations. In addition, they try to find the main causes of disputes and propose creative solutions that would shape new thinking and the relationship between parties. The goal is to create a conflict resolution process acceptable to both parties.[116]

The school of conflict transformation suggests replacing the term conflict resolution with conflict transformation.[117] Its goal is to transform deep-rooted war conflicts into peaceful cooperation. Conflict transformation is a long-term process that wants to transform society. The people inside these societies are essential. In this concept, third parties should only play a supporting role and help with resources and materials. Hence, this approach goes further than conflict management and conflict resolution school.[118] There are two main characteristics of conflict transformation. First, in order to transform conflicts into peaceful ones, an effort must come from the bottom. It means the school of conflict transformation promotes the so-called bottom-up approach, in which local actors are at the center. These local actors know the conflict environment best and, at the same time, work with people who are directly affected by conflicts.[119] In the second case, conflict transformation seeks to promote social justice by creating a new structure through the empowerment of minority and underprivileged groups. From the point of view of this approach, it is not enough to satisfy basic needs on a personal and relational level. There must be created infrastructure that will enable changes

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[115] MIAL, Hugh. *Conflict Transformation: A Multi-Dimensional Task*. IN: AUSTIN, Alex et al. Transforming Ethnopolitical Conflict, The Berghof Handbook, 2004, p. 3. https://berghof-foundation.org/library/berghof-handbook-for-conflict-transformation
[116] Ibid, p. 4.
[117] PAFFENHOLTZ, Thania. *Management, Resolution and Transformation*, A Journal of Peace Research and Action, vol. 14, č. 2, 2009, p. 3-6.
[118] MIAL, *Conflict Transformation*, 2004, p. 4.
[119] REIMANN, 2004, *Assessing the State-of-the-Art in Conflict Transformation,* p. 13.

in structural inequality and thus lead to long-lasting social reconstruction and reconciliation.[120]

Among the most influential theorists who created the concept of conflict transformation, can be included, for example, Jean-Paul Lederach and Johan Galtung. The latter argues that conflict has life-shaping and life-shattering aspects formed as a result of contradictions in societies. It is, therefore, necessary to overcome these contradictions, for example, through a compromise.[121] Moreover, Johan Galtung introduced a definition of negative and positive peace. In short, negative peace means in his concept an absence of violence, while positive peace stresses the restoration of peaceful relations.[122]

American academic Jean Paul Lederach linked his concept of conflict transformation to peacebuilding. According to Lederach, peace is a dynamic social construct, and thus peacebuilding must involve a substantial amount of processes, approaches, and levels needed to create a peaceful relationship.[123] Key dimensions of this process are changes in personal, structural, relational, and cultural aspects of conflicts. However, these changes occur in different time periods, from the shortest to the longest.[124] Lederach also encourages the reconciliation potential of society to be strengthened since reconciliation should help rebuild damaged relations between societies.[125]

According to Jean-Paul Lederach, conflict is generally characterized by deep-rooted and intense hostility, fear, and heavy stereotyping.[126] These repeating dynamics and patterns based on life experience, along with prejudices and emotions, hinder the possibility of using rational approaches to conflict transformation. Due to that, Lederach suggests the need for reconciliation between the warring parties. Reconciliation has several dimensions, and Lederach understands it as a process of encounter, likewise a social space where truth and forgiveness come together.[127] This encounter must help create new perceptions and shared experiences. In sum, his concept of reconciliation

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[120] Ibid, p. 13.
[121] MIAL, *Conflict Transformation*, 2004, p. 4.
[122] GALTUNG, Johan. *Violence, Peace, and Peace Research. Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 6, No.3, 1969, pp.167-191.
[123] LEDERACH, Jean Paul. *Building Peace, Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*, 1997, p. 20.
[124] MIAL, *Conflict Transformation,* 2004, p. 4.
[125] PAFFENHOLTZ, Thania. *Management, Resolution and Transformation*, A Journal of Peace Research and Action, vol. 14, č. 2, 2009, p. 3-6.
[126] LEDERACH, *Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*, 1997, p. 23.
[127] Ibid, p. 30.

focuses on building a relationship between antagonists. Hence, Lederach does not approach conflict as something that can be resolved or eliminated. The construction of change, which builds on transformation in four dimensions, is important to him.

Herbert C. Kelman also works with the concept of transformation on a personal and a relational level, even though his approach to peacebuilding could be include in the school of conflict resolution. Yet, similarly to Lederach, he bases his ideas on the need for reconciliation between societies.[128] Thus, according to Herbert C. Kelman, reconciliation is a process that helps divided communities live together in a post-conflict environment. Reconciliation assists in building trust, transforming relationships, and responding to the needs of communities. At the same time, however, reconciliation goes beyond conflict resolution by changing the identities of the parties involved.[129] Changing the collective identity of one group is fundamental because it implies a degree of acceptance of the other by stopping the negation of their identity. The other's identity then acquires value and legitimacy in the eyes of a hostile group, including partial acceptance of the other's narrative without necessarily agreeing with that narrative.

Kelman also argues that reconciliation facilitates the process of identity transformation, and this transformation consequently reinforces the process of reconciliation. As newly formed attitudes replace old ones, personal trust gradually increases. According to Kelman, that does not mean old wounds cannot reopen and fear returns, but the relationship between communities is less vulnerable.[130] Kelman also states that conditions must exist for reconciliation to be successful. These include, for example, the confrontation of history and historical narratives, as well as the reevaluation of national myths.[131]

In his approach to resolving ethnic conflicts, Kaufman draws from these concepts of reconciliation, which work on the assumption that it is a political and social process seeking to support mutual recognition and the effort to construct normalized and peaceful relations.[132] Kaufman defines peace initiatives as activities that support these goals. According to him, there are several reconciliation initiatives as, for example, verbal

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[128] KELMAN, Herbert C. *Reconciliation As Identity Change, A Social-Psychological Perspective*. IN: BAR-SIMAN-TOV, Yaacov (ed.). *From Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation,* 2004, p. 111-124.
[129] KELMAN, Herbert C. *Reconciliation as Identity Change, A Social-Psychological Perspective*. IN: BAR-SIMAN-TOV, Yaacov (Ed.). *From Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation,* 2004, p. 111-124.
[130] Ibid, p. 111-124.
[131] Ibid, p. 111-124.
[132] KAUFMAN, Stuart J. *Escaping the Symbolic Politics Trap: Reconciliation Initiatives and Conflict Resolution in Ethnic Wars*, Journal of Peace Research, vol. 43, no. 2, 2006, p. 201–218.

recognition of past actions by leaders, workshops organized by non-profit organizations, cultural events, media projects, or educational reforms.[133]

1.8 Critical Discourse Analysis

The thesis employs as a research method critical discourse analysis. CDA can be regarded not only as a methodological toolkit. In fact, CDA offers both theories and methods for the empirical study to investigate relations between discourse and social reality.[134] However, even critical discourse analysis is not a homogenous method of research. CDA can be divided according to three leading proponents - Norman Fairclough, Teun A. Van Dijk, and Ruth Wodak. Fairclough's CDA is three-dimensional. It focuses mainly on power in and behind discourse.[135] On the contrary, Van Dijk's approach combines cognitive theories with linguistic and social theories.[136] Finally, Ruth Wodak's discourse-historical approach uses the concept of context. It attempts to embed discourses in the socio-political and historical context and discover their relations. [137]

Like other CDA approaches, the discourse-historical approach is related to critique, ideology, and power. One of the aims of DHA is to demystify hegemonic discourses by uncovering ideologies that serve as a means of establishing or maintaining unequal power relations. They can, for instance, create dominant identity narratives or control access to specific discourses. According to DHA, texts are often sites of social struggle for dominance.[138] Apart from that, DHA is a type of CDA that emphasizes particularly identity construction.[139]

DHA consists of a three-step analysis. The approach combines a study on the macro and micro levels. At first, the researcher identifies context and discursive topics. The second and third steps investigate discursive strategies and linguistic devices.[140] Ruth Wodak works specifically with the concepts of interdiscursivity and intertextuality. Interdiscursivity means mutual relationships between different

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[133] Ibid, p. 201–218.

[134] DÜZGIT-AYDIN, Senem. *Critical discourse analysis in analysing European Union foreign policy: Prospects and challenges,* Cooperation and Conflict 2014, Vol. 49(3), pp. 354–367.

[135] FAIRCLOUGH, Norman. *Language and Power*, 2013.

[136] VAN DIJK, Teun A. *Discourse and Context*, Cambridge University Press, 2008.

[137] WODAK, Ruth et al. *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, London, 2001, p. 3. https://is.muni.cz/el/fss/podzim2019/MVPd0001/93744315/methods-of-critical-discourse-analysis_n4_jepyjcog.pdf

[138] WODAK, Ruth, *The Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA)*. In: Ruth Wodak — Michael Meyer (eds.), Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis, London, 2008, p. 89.

[139] DÜZGIT-AYDIN, Senem. *Critical discourse analysis in analysing European Union foreign policy: Prospects and challenges,* Cooperation and Conflict 2014, Vol. 49(3), pp. 354–367.

[140] Ibid.

discourses. Intertextuality, on the other hand, uncovers links between texts, actors, and events.[141] According to Wodak, texts are subsets of discourse, and they can be assigned to genres. Genres determine socially acceptable ways of using language. Wodak also uses the term - field of action. It indicates a part of social reality, which creates the frame of discourse.[142] Focusing on all these relationships, the researcher can explore how discourses, genres, and text change in relation to sociopolitical change.

Since the research aims to uncover differences between discourses about conflict and their links to historical context and socio-political reality through identity, the thesis employs the discourse-historical approach. However, in this thesis, the method is adjusted to the researcher's needs. The emphasis is placed on historical and socio-political contexts in which discourses operate. The next chapter dedicated to the historical background serves as the context. The discourses are linked to social reality through the theory of symbolic politics and the concept of the myth-symbol complex.

Subsequently, the research applies the method to discourses about the conflict between Georgian and Abkhazia on the state level. The analysis examines three official texts about reconciliation to determine discourses that are linked to the Georgian approach to the conflict. This serves as a starting point for subsequent comparison with discourses of peace actors. The peace actors are divided into two groups. The first group includes middle-range leadership, such as journalists, academics, and stakeholders. These people are very experienced and have worked on projects for many years. They are often initiators of various peace activities and can be regarded as an engine for a bottom-up approach to reconciliation. Apart from that, they are well-connected and have access to political circles. The second group includes grassroots leadership and ordinary participants in dialogues between Georgia and Abkhazia. These people often work with people affected by conflict or are students interested in peace projects in which they have taken part.

The analysis of the interviews attempts to discover how the individuals position themselves toward conflict and how they create an in-group and out-group. According to Wodak, the construction of "us" and "them" is a fundamental feature of discourses of identity and difference.[143] The discourse-historical approach uses as an analytical tool the

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[141] WODAK, *The Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA),* London, 2008, p. 89.

[142]Ibid, p. 90.

[143] WODAK, *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, 2001, p. 10.

so-called discursive strategies. Wodak proposes five strategies to uncover discourses of discrimination.[144] The analysis of interviews uses three of them - nomination, prediction, and argumentation. (Picture 1.)

Strategy	Objectives	Devices
Referential/nomination	Construction of in-groups and out-groups	• membership categorization • biological, naturalizing and depersonalizing metaphors and metonymies • synecdoches (pars pro toto, totum pro pars)
Predication	Labelling social actors more or less positively or negatively, deprecatorily or appreciatively	• stereotypical, evaluative attributions of negative or positive traits • implicit and explicit predicates
Argumentation	Justification of positive or negative attributions	• topoi used to justify political inclusion or exclusion, discrimination or preferential treatment
Perspectivation, framing or discourse representation	Expressing involvement Positioning speaker's point of view	• reporting, description, narration or quotation of (discriminatory) events and utterances
Intensification, mitigation	Modifying the epistemic status of a proposition	• intensifying or mitigating the illocutionary force of (discriminatory) utterances

Picture 1. - Wodak, 2001, p. 10.

Argumentation for or against ethnicism, nationalism, or racism usually uses topoi. (Picture 2.) Wodak claims that topoi are content-related warrants which connect the argument with the conclusion and justify the transition. [145]

TABLE 4.2   List of topoi

1	Usefulness, advantage	9	Finances
2	Uselessness, disadvantage	10	Reality
3	Definition, name-interpretation	11	Numbers
4	Danger and threat	12	Law and right
5	Humanitarianism	13	History
6	Justice	14	Culture
7	Responsibility	15	Abuse
8	Burdening, weighting		

Picture 2. - Wodak, 2001, p. 11.

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[144] Ibid.
[145] Ibid, p.11.

Chapter II. Georgian-Abkhaz Relations

2.1 Historical Context

On 26th May 1918, the first independent republic of Georgia was declared in Tbilisi. The announcement of the new Georgian Democratic Republic ended the Democratic Federative Republic of Transcaucasia, formed only slightly more than a month ago. The independence of the South Caucasus resulted from the deterioration of Russian and Osman power in the region due to their failed involvement in the First World War. The chaos that followed the Bolshevik revolution in Russia left the former imperial territory in a power vacuum and made the foundation of independent states possible. However, they had to cope with several external and internal problems in their brief existence.[146]

In the case of Georgia, the government was led by Mensheviks. They were mainly ethnic Georgians, predominantly from the western reaches.[147] The Mensheviks attempted to grab power also in Abkhazia. They organized a pro-Georgian Abkhaz People's Council in 1917 and, after the disintegration of the Democratic Federative Republic of Transcaucasia, negotiated a union with Georgia, which gave autonomy to Abkhazia.[148] The rule of Mensheviks over Abkhazia was briefly interrupted in March 1918 when an armed Bolshevik uprising under the leadership of Nestor Lakoba took over Sukhumi. However, the Soviet commune of Abkhazia lasted only a few weeks when Georgian armed troops reconquered Sukhumi.[149] They took control not only of Abkhazia but also of the Black Sea port of Sochi. Despite the re-establishment of Mensheviks' control, the local elites continued to be disloyal, and consequently, Abkhazia's autonomy was abolished, and the local population was subjected to Georgian repression.[150] Irregular fighting continued on Abkhaz soil until 1921, when Georgia was annexed by Red Army and incorporated into the Soviet Union. It is important to note that the Red army took over Abkhazia with the support of many Abkhaz.[151]

After the Bolshevik conquest of the South Caucasus, Abkhazia's legal status came under discussion once again. In March 1921, Abkhazia was proclaimed a Soviet Socialist

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[146] DE WAAL, Thomas. *The Caucasus: An Introduction*. Oxford University Press, 2018, p. 62.
[147] KING, Charles. *The Ghost of Freedom: A History of the Caucasus*, Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 168.
[148] KAUFMAN, *Modern Hatreds*, 2015, p. 88.
[149] AUCH, Eva Maria. *The Abkhazia Conflict in Historical Perspective*. In: IFSH (ed.), OSCE Yearbook 2004, Baden-Baden 2005, pp. 221-235.
[150] KAUFMAN, *Modern Hatreds*, 2015, p. 88.
[151] DE WAAL, *The Caucasus,* 2018, p. 66.

Republic alongside the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic.[152] In July 1921, Josip Stalin visited Georgia. It was his first trip to the country since 1917. As a Bolshevik commissar for nationalities, the future soviet dictator agreed with his chief lieutenant Sergo Orjonikidze that Georgian nationalism needed to be eradicated with a centralizing policy.[153] Subsequently, Georgia and Abkhazia, along with Azerbaijan and Armenia, were incorporated into the Federative Union of Socialist Soviet Republics of Transcaucasia, set up in March 1922. Abkhazia joined the federation as an equal partner in the union with Georgia. Two months later, the Soviet Union was officially created, and the new Transcaucasian Federation was one of its constitutive parts.[154] However, the federation had mainly economic purposes. The republics maintained their governments, party structures, and universities. Therefore, the national elites remained in charge, and a certain sense of nationhood was preserved.[155]

The legal status of Abkhazia was reduced in 1931 when it turned into the Autonomous Republic incorporated into the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic. Apart from that, under the leadership of Lavrenti Beria, who became the same year the first secretary of the Communist Party of Georgia and the virtual ruler of Caucasus,[156] Abkhazia was subjected to a strict policy of Georgianization.[157] It resulted in restrictions on Abkhaz language education and the introduction of the Georgian alphabet.[158] The Abkhaz language was also banned for administration and publication use. The cultural projects provoked unsuccessful demonstrations and strikes in 1931 and 1957.[159] However, the most significant aspect of this assimilation policy was the inflow of Russians, Georgians, Armenians, and Greeks into Abkhazia. The organized settlement of Georgians, which intensified after 1936, led to dramatic demographic changes, reducing the Abkhaz share of the local population and turning them into the minority in their autonomous republic. For instance, according to the census from 1989, Abkhazians constituted less than 18 percent of the local population.[160]

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[152] AUCH, *The Abkhazia Conflict in Historical Perspective*, 2005, pp. 221-235.
[153] DE WAAL, *The Caucasus,* 2018, p. 72.
[154] AUCH, *The Abkhazia Conflict in Historical Perspective*, 2005, pp. 221-235.
[155] DE WAAL, *The Caucasus,* 2018, p. 74.
[156] KING, *The Ghost of Freedom,* 2008, p. 192.
[157] AUCH, *The Abkhazia Conflict in Historical Perspective*, 2005, pp. 221-235.
[158] KAUFMAN, *Modern Hatreds*, 2015, p. 88
[159] Ibid.
[160] KING, *The Ghost of Freedom,* 2008, p. 215.

After Stalin's death and the execution of Lavrenti Beria, some rights of Abkhazians were restored. In 1954, for instance, the Abkhaz language was given the Cyrillic alphabet. Nevertheless, Georgians continued to dominate public and cultural life. The cultural oppression only resulted in more demonstrations in Abkhazia, including massive protests in 1978 that demanded a transfer of Abkhazia from the Georgian republic to the Russian republic.[161] This request came from Abkhazian intellectuals who wrote a letter to Brezhnev.[162] Moscow and Tbilisi responded to protests with increased economic investment. They approved financial aid to build roads in infrastructure-poor Abkhazia. The communist elites also made concessions in the cultural sphere. They allowed the creation of an Abkhaz State University, a State Folk Dance Ensemble in Sukhumi, and an Abkhazian-language television broadcasting.[163] Abkhaz also obtained concessions in the bureaucracy where the ethnic quotas were introduced. Georgian party boss Eduard Shevardnadze even publicly admitted that the policy toward Abkhazia was chauvinistic in that period.[164]

The introduced concessions did not calm the situation, and low-level ethnic disputes between Georgian and Abkhaz continued. Georgians were dissatisfied and complained that their privileges were denied. They also engaged in mass nationalist demonstrations due to cultural issues in 1956 and 1978.[165] The arrival of Glasnost and Perestroika in 1985 made a new level of constitutional debate possible and encouraged participation in public protests.[166] In 1988, there was an open public talk about Georgian independence and, at the same time, a restoration of the Abkhazian Union Republic. That only worsened the disputes. While the Georgians were accusing the Abkhaz of secession from Georgia, the Abkhaz were accusing the Georgians of splitting from the Soviet Union.[167]

The situation escalated further in 1989 when a mass rally was held in the Abkhaz village of Lykhny. Around 30 000 people participated in the meeting.[168] They signed the so-called Abkhaz letter, which demanded a break out from the Georgian state and the re-

[161] DE WAAL, *The Caucasus,* 2018, p. 152.
[162] Ibid.
[163] KAUFMAN, *Modern Hatreds*, 2015, p. 88.
[164] DE WAAL, *The Caucasus,* 2018, p. 152.
[165] AUCH, *The Abkhazia Conflict in Historical Perspective*, 2005, pp. 221-235..
[166] KAUFMAN, *Modern Hatreds*, 2015, p. 88.
[167] DE WAAL, *The Caucasus,* 2018, p. 152.
[168] SOULEIMANOV, Emil, *Understanding Ethnopolitical Conflict,* 2013, p. 132.

creation of the Abkhaz Union Republic.[169] The rally led to Georgian counterdemonstrations that rejected Abkhaz demands. One of the demonstrations in Tbilisi was suppressed by the Soviet troops. The violent action caused the death of 19 demonstrators.[170]

The division started becoming even more visible in Abkhazia as, for instance, the soccer team and theatre split in two.[171] Nonetheless, a proposal to divide Abkhaz State University into two parts provoked clashes among students in July 1989. Subsequently, the first causalities appeared. At least six people died, and hundreds were injured.[172] The events in Sukhumi provoked violence also in other towns, and order had to be imposed again by the Soviet army. [173] One year later, the disputes continued; this time, the legal status of Abkhazia was questioned. Since the Georgian government annulled all the treaties signed after 1921, the Abkhaz deputies to the Abkhaz Supreme Soviet answered by passing a Declaration on the State Sovereignty of the Abkhazian ASFR. A resolution adopted in the absence of Georgian delegates demanded the restoration of Abkhaz constitutional status as a union republic.[174] These steps were perceived on the Georgian side as an attack on sovereignty and constitution and, as such, rejected.[175]

On 9 April 1991, Georgia declared independence from the Soviet Union, and the first president of the new state became Zviad Gamsakhurdia. He was an extreme nationalist who once referred to Abkhazia as North-western Georgia.[176] However, he later tried to moderate his position and even attempted to persuade Abkhaz leadership in a public letter to unite with Georgians.[177] The answer delivered to Gamsakhurdia confirmed the status quo because the attitude of Abkhaz leadership remained unchanged as they claimed that Abkhazia was still part of the Soviet Union.[178] Moreover, the cooperation between Sukhumi and Moscow intensified in this period. The Abkhaz influence also grew due to the new parliamentary election law, which granted 28 seats to ethnic Abkhazians and only 26 seats to ethnic Georgians despite constituting a majority

[169] AUCH, *The Abkhazia Conflict in Historical Perspective*, 2005, pp. 221-235.
[170] Ibid.
[171] DE WAAL, *The Caucasus,* 2018, p. 152.
[172] Ibid.
[173] Ibid.
[174] AUCH, *The Abkhazia Conflict in Historical Perspective*, 2005, pp. 221-235.
[175] Ibid.
[176] DE WAAL, *The Caucasus,* 2018, p. 153.
[177] Ibid.
[178] Ibid.

in the autonomous republic.[179] Therefore, the displeasure of Georgians in Abkhazia increased at that time. They demanded equitable electoral reform. When the Abkhaz rejected their request, the Georgian delegates removed themselves from Sukhumi to Tbilisi.[180]

At the turn of that year, two significant events contributed to the escalation and opened the way for the looming conflict. At first, the Soviet Union ceased to exist. Next, a coup in January removed Zviad Gamsakhurdia from power. These developments left both sides insecure.[181] In the spring of 1992, the Abkhaz leadership proposed plans for a peaceful resolution. They demanded, for instance, a federal structure of the state and a guarantee of self-governing status. However, Georgians feared that the greater autonomy of Abkhazia would lead to the disintegration of the state. [182] Instead, Georgia adopted the constitution from 1921 that did not specify Abkhazia's special status. The step only intensified fears of the Abkhaz leadership.[183]

In the atmosphere of the ongoing civil war, Eduard Shevardnadze returned from Moscow and assumed the vacant leading position. Nevertheless, he proved to be incapable of controlling Georgian warlords who were in favor of a military solution in Abkhazia.[184] One of them, the head of the Georgian National Guard, Tengiz Kitovani, started to march with his troops on Sukhumi on August 14, 1992.[185] As a response, the president of the Abkhaz parliament, Vladislav Ardzinba, announced a general mobilization and turned for support to Moscow. He also requested help from the Confederation of Mountain People of the Caucasus.[186] In the meantime, Georgian soldiers took control of government buildings and began looting the city. Some public buildings, for instance, a historical archive, were burned down.[187] Kitovani also announced on television a dissolution of the Abkhaz parliament.[188] Vladislav Ardzinba, also publicly dismissed by Kitovani, moved the Abkhaz government to Gudauta, where it stayed until the recapture of Sukhumi.

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[179] SOULEIMANOV, *Understanding Ethnopolitical Conflict,* 2013, p. 134.
[180] AUCH, *The Abkhazia Conflict in Historical Perspective*, 2005, pp. 221-235..
[181] DE WAAL, *The Caucasus,* 2018, p. 153.
[182] AUCH, *The Abkhazia Conflict in Historical Perspective*, 2005, pp. 221-235.
[183] SOULEIMANOV, *Understanding Ethnopolitical Conflict,* 2013, p. 159.
[184] KING, *The Ghost of Freedom,* 2008, p. 215.
[185] DE WAAL, *The Caucasus,* 2018, p. 157.
[186] AUCH, *The Abkhazia Conflict in Historical Perspective*, 2005, pp. 221-235.
[187] DE WAAL, *The Caucasus,* 2018, p. 157.
[188] Ibid.

The Georgian-Abkhaz war lasted fifteen months. The Abkhaz were able to win due to the support from elements from the Russian military forces and irregular volunteers from the north Caucasus. They seized Sukhumi on 27 September 1993. By the end of 1993, they pushed the ill-prepared Georgians back to the Ingury River.[189] The war claimed around fifteen thousand lives.[190] Almost the entire Georgian population of Abkhazia left their homes. Thousands fled over the mountains into western Georgia. The city of Sukhumi was destroyed by heavy fighting.[191] The country was left physically devastated. Georgians accused Abkhazians of ethnic cleansing, while Abkhazians accused Georgians of human rights violations during the war. [192]

2.2 Georgian-Abkhaz Relations after 1993

Both sides eventually signed a ceasefire agreement the following May. The same year, Russia brokered a deal about the deployment of peacekeeping forces of the Commonwealth of Independent States in the conflict zone. The United Nations endorsed the deployment of Russian troops and established a monitoring mission in Abkhazia (UNOMIG).[193] The peace process was, from the beginning, mediated by the UN, OSCE, and Russia. However, the Russian role in conflict mediation was more decisive at this time.[194] Russian government tried to put pressure on both sides. As a consequence, Georgia had to join the CIS, while Abkhazia was subjected to an economic blockade.[195] Nevertheless, the same year, the Abkhaz leadership declared that Abkhazia was a sovereign constructional state, and Ardzinba was elected as the first president. Abkhazia also tried not to allow a full-scale return of the Georgian refugees due to the lack of security guarantees.[196]

Yet, during the first years after the end of hostilities, the search for a peace agreement was conducted with regard to Georgian territorial integrity.[197] Ardzinba even moderated his position and finally distanced himself from the previous demands

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[189] KING, *The Ghost of Freedom,* 2008, p. 215.

[190] *Country report Georgia/Abkhazia ICRC worldwide consultation on the rules of war,* Greenberg Research, Geneva 1999. https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/assets/files/other/georgia.pdf

[191] DE WAAL, *The Caucasus,* 2018, p. 164.

[192] COHEN, Jonathan. *Introduction to the Georgian-Abkhaz case study,* Accord, Conciliation Resources, vol. 19, 2008. p. 66.

[193] SOULEIMANOV, *Understanding Ethnopolitical Conflict,* 2013, p. 163.

[194] GEGASHIZDE, Archil – HAINDRAVA, Ivlian. *Transformation of the Georgian – Abkhaz conflict: rethinking the paradigm*, Conciliation Resources, 2011, p. 11.

[195] DE WAAL, *The Caucasus,* 2018, p. 165.

[196] AKABA, Natella – KHINTBA, Irakli, *Transformation of the Georgian – Abkhaz conflict: rethinking the paradigm*. Conciliation Resources, 2011, p. 22.

[197] GEGASHIZDE, *Transformation of the Georgian – Abkhaz conflict,* 2011, p. 11.

for complete independence. Instead, Abkhazia declared that is prepared to discuss a federation of equals with Georgia.[198] The will to live in a single state was also demonstrated in the Protocol on the Georgian-Abkhaz settlement signed in 1995. Although the Abkhaz side later recalled its signature.[199] The same year, Georgia had to further pay for Russian mediation by signing a Russian-Georgian agreement on the Stationing of Military Basis.[200]

In 1997, Russian Prime Minister Primakov arranged an unprecedented meeting between Ardzinba and Shevardnadze in Tbilisi. They sign a joint agreement declaring the restoration of peaceful relations. Despite that, the joint declaration did not contain any reference to federalization or restoration of Georgian territorial integrity.[201] In the same year, there was also established the so-called Geneva process. The new forum in Switzerland aimed to intensify the Abkhaz peace process under the aegis of the United Nations with the participation of France, Germany, the Russian Federation, the USA, and the UK. Yet, the relations between Abkhazia and Georgia worsened again after several clashes in the Abkhaz Gali District. Consequently, thousands of Georgians fled across the River Inguri once again. These events threatened the effectiveness of the UN initiative and affected further negotiations.[202] In 1999, the Abkhaz leadership announced they gave up negotiations about federation with Georgia and unilaterally called a referendum on independence. The results of the referendum were in favor of this step since around 97 percent of voters endorsed a proclamation of the independent Abkhaz state. The future of the peace process was also affected by the change in the Russian administration, where Prime Minister became Vladimir Putin.[203] This led to increasing changes in attitudes toward both sides, which resulted in the deterioration of relations with Georgia. Russia, for instance, gradually softened its blockade of Abkhazia and began to hand out Russian passports in the de facto state. Abkhazia was also removed from the introduced visa regime for Georgia.[204] During this time, both parties increasingly sought outside support rather than engage in negotiations with each other. Georgia relied on the Western allies, while Abkhazia on the Russian Federation.[205]

[198] AUCH, *The Abkhazia Conflict in Historical Perspective*, 2005, pp. 221-235.
[199] GEGASHIZDE, *Transformation of the Georgian – Abkhaz conflict*, 2011, p. 12.
[200] SOULEIMANOV, *Understanding Ethnopolitical Conflict,* 2013, p. 163.
[201] GEGASHIZDE, *Transformation of the Georgian – Abkhaz conflict*, 2011, p. 12
[202] Ibid.
[203] DE WAAL, *The Caucasus,* 2018, p. 166.
[204] AKABA, *Transformation of the Georgian – Abkhaz conflict*, 2011, p. 22
[205] COHEN, Jonathan. *Introduction to the Georgian-Abkhaz case study*, 2008. p. 67.

New energy for the peace process was provided, at least at the beginning, by the presidential changes on both sides. In 2004, after the Rose revolution, Shevardnadze was replaced by Mikhail Saakashvili. He created a new ministerial position for conflict resolution and reformed the Abkhaz government in exile, which had been based in Tbilisi since 1993.[206] Apart from that, Saakashvili sought to distinguish the local population in Abkhazia from the de facto state leadership. He stated that the local population had to be treated as Georgian citizens. Saakashvili also intended to improve a picture of Georgia proper and expected that societies in the separatist states would eventually decide to join Georgia by themselves.[207] In terms of the status of Abkhazia, the new president only repeated the position of his predecessor about the broad autonomy inside the Georgian state, which was rejected several times. Saakashvili also insisted on the return of IDPs to Abkhazia, which produced another disagreement. This only hurt Saakashvili's ambitious plans to restore the Georgian territorial integrity by the end of his first presidential term.[208]

Insufficient outcomes of negotiations frustrated the new Georgian government, and enthusiasm for seeking peaceful conflict resolution with the leaders of the two separatist republics started to evaporate. The result was a military operation in Kodori Gorge that aimed to seize the uncontrolled part of Abkhazia.[209] This action reflected the Georgian frustration with the process and a gradual tendency to solve the separatist issue by military power. Due to that, the attitude of the Abkhaz leadership hardened, and official negotiations were blocked.[210]

The relations between Georgia and Russia also worsened in 2006. At first, Russia banned the import of Georgian wine and mineral water.[211] Georgia responded with the publicly announced detention of Russian military spies.[212] In retaliation for this humiliating action, Russia suspended all the roads from Georgia and stopped issuing visas to Georgian citizens.[213] Another red line for the Putin administration was the Georgian

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[206] LYNCH, Dov. *Georgian Policy towards the Conflict*, IN: Why Georgia Matters, Europe Union Institute for Security Studies. 2006, p. 38. https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/why-georgia-matters
[207] Ibid.
[208] DE WAAL, *The Caucasus,* 2018, p. 198.
[209] COHEN, Jonathan. *Introduction to the Georgian-Abkhaz case study*, 2008. p. 67. https://www.c-r.org/accord/incentives-sanctions-and-conditionality/introduction-georgia%E2%80%93abkhazia-case-study
[210] Ibid.
[211] SUNY, Ronald Grigor. *The pawn of great powers: The East-West competition for Caucasia,* Journal of Eurasian Studies, volume 1, no.1, 2010, pp. 10 – 25
[212] DE WAAL, *The Caucasus,* 2018, p. 206
[213] Ibid.

intention to join NATO. At this time, Georgia was hoping to be awarded a Membership Action Plan, the first step to finally joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.[214] Russia responded by promising that any further Georgian step toward NATO integration would lead to the option of losing Abkhazia and South Ossetia.[215]

In 2008, the so-called frozen conflicts eventually melted. Saakashvili was elected for the second time as the Georgian president. He promised his voters to resolve separatist issues, claiming that his presidency was a ticket on the train to Sukhumi.[216] The five days war in South Ossetia between Georgia and Russia broke out on August 7, 2008.[217] The day after, Russian and Abkhaz opened the second front in the West, aiming to take control over Kodori Gorge. The war finished a few days later when the Russian forces finally stopped on the road to Tbilisi.[218]

2.3 Georgian-Abkhaz Relations after 2008

The Georgian-Russian war finished with an agreement between Saakashvili and Medvedev brokered by French president Sarkozy. Subsequently, Georgia decided to leave CIS while Russia recognized the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Georgia responded by cutting diplomatic relations with Russia, and the same year, Saakashvili introduced the Law on Occupied Territories, which the Georgian parliament adopted. These developments put the Georgian-Abkhaz peace process to an end.[219] From then onwards, the settlement of the conflict has been institutionalized around Georgian-Russian relations.[220] The new discourse about the conflict has diminished the Abkhazia and South Ossetia agency and created a narrative about a sole rival since, from the Georgian point of view, the territories have been occupied by Russia.[221]

In fact, Russian recognition of the separatist territories increased the influence of Moscow in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. After that, Russia signed an Agreement of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Support with Abkhazia and South Ossetia. These agreements, among other things, contained a promise to defend their territories and create military bases in the de facto republics. Additionally, both sides agreed on economic

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[214]. SUNY, *The pawn of great powers,* 2010, pp. 10 – 25
[215] DE WAAL, *The Caucasus,* 2018, p. 207
[216] Ibid.
[217] SUNY, *The pawn of great powers,* 2010, pp. 10 – 25
[218] DE WAAL, *The Caucasus,* 2018, p. 207
[219] ABRAMASHVILI, Ivane – REVAZ, Kolava. *25 Years of Georgia's Peace Policy for Caucasus House*, Caucasian House, 2018, p. 74.
[220] Ibid.
[221] Ibid.

integration.[222] In 2014, Russia signed new treaties that pledged a new level of economic integration. The treaties also promised a common coordination of foreign policy as well as security and defense.[223] Georgia criticized this step as a de facto annexation since the treaties directly undermined the autonomy of these regions.[224] They became an integral part of the Russian geopolitical map.[225]

In 2012, Saakashvili lost the parliamentary elections. The victory of the Georgian Dream provided a new opportunity to change policy against the separatist territories.[226] The new government tried to improve bilateral relations with Sukhumi and Tskhinvali, and, at the same time, normalize diplomatic relations with Russia. The Georgian Dream coalition, for example, adjusted the Law on Occupied Territories to simplify movement in the conflict regions. Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili also offered Sukhumi direct dialogue. The Office of the State Minister for Reintegration was renamed to become the Office of the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality. [227]

Despite that, the new approach to the separatist territories did not bring profound changes in common relations. As mentioned above, Abkhazia and South Ossetia had signed new integration agreements with Russia and allowed Russian soldiers to take full control of their borders. They started to erect metal fences along administration boundaries and even pushed them forward. The so-called borderization resulted in a number of incidents and detention in these areas. For example, from 2008 to 2015, the number of people detained along the Abkhaz administrative border exceeded eight hundred.[228] The Abkhaz leadership also responded to the Georgian proposals of the direct dialog that the matter had been settled and Georgia should rather adjust to the new reality and recognize the Abkhaz independence [229] Therefore, there has not been any bilateral negotiation since 2006. The parties of the conflict have continued to meet in Geneva,

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[222] GERRITS, Andre - BADE, Max. *Russian patronage over Abkhazia and South Ossetia: implications for conflict resolution*, East European Politics, vol. 32, 2016, pp. 297-313.
[223] Ibid.
[224] HARDING, Luke. *Georgia angered by Russia-Abkhazia military agreement*, Guardian, 11, 2014.
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/nov/25/georgia-russia-abkhazia-military-agreement-putin
[225] DE WAAL, Thomas. *Beyond Frozen Conflict: Scenarios of Separatist Disputes of Eastern Europe*, CEEPS, 2020, p. 161.
[226] GAPRINDASHVILI, Paata, *One Step Closer – Georgia, EU integration and the Conflict Settlement*, GRASS, Tbilisi 2019, p. 12. https://grass.org.ge/uploads/other/2020-02-11/573.pdf
[227] ABRAMASHVILI, *25 Years of Georgia's Peace Policy for Caucasus House*, 2018, p. 77.
[228] BILBAN, Christoph (ed.). *Perspectives on Conflict Management in the South Caucasus*, Vienna, 2021, p. 24.
https://www.bundesheer.at/pdf_pool/publikationen/buch_perspectives_south_caucasus_bilban_web.pdf
[229] DE WAAL, Thomas. *Beyond Frozen Conflict,* 2020, p. 161.

although these negotiations focus on current issues of concern rather than political talks.[230]

2.4 Georgian Myth-Symbol Complex

Kaufman explains the roots of the conflict through the identity of ethnic groups. The myth-symbol complex is a core of ethnic identity. Myths and symbols can evoke powerful emotions that justify ethnic hostility.[231] According to Kaufman, ancient Georgian mythology is based on three critical historical events. The first one is the formation of the kingdom of Colchis in the sixth-century b.c.e., which represents the first Georgian state.[232] The mythology related to the formation of old kingdoms emphasizes the long history of Georgian statehood and independence. Another important event occurred in the fourth century when the kingdoms of Kartli and Engrisi converted to the Christian faith. This event functions as a differentiation from Muslim and pagan neighbors complemented by subsequent struggle for liberation from their rule.[233] Georgian national mythology also emphasizes the unification of all modern Georgia by King David the Builder and the golden era under the rule of Queen Tamar.[234] This period is related to the flourishing of Georgian culture, symbolizes the strength of statehood and justifies the leading Georgian position among other ethnic groups in the territory.[235] It is important to note that from a Georgian perspective, Abkhazia was historically considered only part of Georgia. Therefore, Georgians see the Abkhazian kingdom that united Georgia in the eleventh century as a Georgian kingdom.[236]

In modern Georgian mythology, the Muslim threat is replaced by Russia. The first historical event that provokes emotions and distrust towards Russia from Georgians dates to the eighteen century. Russia promised to establish a protectorate over Georgia, guaranteeing Georgia's territorial integrity and the continuation of the Bagration rule.[237] However, fourteen years later, Russia abolished the monarchy in Kartli-Kakheti and incorporated it into the Tsarist Empire.[238] Another significant event is the establishment of the independent Georgian state at the beginning of the twentieth century

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[230] Ibid.
[231] KAUFMAN, *Modern Hatreds*, 2015, p. 15.
[232] KOOLAEE, Elaheh. *The Impact of Historical Narratives on Ethnic Conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia.* International Studies Journal, vol.17, no.1 (65), 2020, pp. 137-168.
[233] KAUFMAN, *Modern Hatreds*, 2015, p. 91
[234] SOULEIMANOV, Emil, *Understanding Ethnopolitical Conflict,* 2013, p. 71.
[235] KAUFMAN, *Modern Hatreds*, 2015, p. 92.
[236] Ibid.
[237] Ibid, p. 91.
[238] SOULEIMANOV, Emil, *Understanding Ethnopolitical Conflict,* 2013, p. 74.

and the following annexation by Soviet Russia. The short-lived republic represents another historical fragment of Georgian statehood and contributes to the legitimacy of modern independence.[239] Moreover, historical claims over the Abkhaz territory are supported by the fact that Abkhazia was a part of the Menshevik state at that time. From a Georgian perspective, the integration of Abkhazia ensured its economic and cultural development.[240] Georgians also emphasize that during the Soviet time, Abkhazians occupied important positions, even though they constituted a minority. Therefore, in Georgian discourse, Abkhaz and South Ossetian are often labeled as ungrateful and, at the same time, as brothers and sisters.[241] The second romanticized view is based on the notion that before the war, the ethnic groups lived in peace and harmony.[242]

From presented myths also derive fears that compromise a part of the myth-symbol complex. According to Kaufman, Georgians fear that Russia wants to deprive them of independence and, apart from that, assimilate them.[243] Georgians also self-picture themselves as tolerant people and explain rebellion towards their leadership by Moscow's action, which is regarded as a third force behind conflicts.[244] The narrative grew stronger after the war in 2008.[245] The Abkhaz and Ossetians' role in the conflict was diminished and replaced with the narrative of Russian occupation.[246] Another significant fear refers to territorial integrity. For instance, Peter Kabachnik claims that cartographic anxieties are integral features of Georgian nationalist discourse. They construct the entire Georgian territory as an inseparable part of the Georgian identity.[247]

[239] KAUFMAN, *Modern Hatreds*, 2015, p. 92.
[240] Ibid.
[241] CHANKVETADZE, Natia. *Re-examining the Radicalizing Narratives of Georgia's Conflicts*, Carnegie Europe, 2021. https://carnegieeurope.eu/2021/05/12/re-examining-radicalizing-narratives-of-georgia-s-conflicts-pub-84508
[242] Ibid.
[243] KAUFMAN, *Modern Hatreds*, 2015, p. 93.
[244] KHUTSISHVILI, Kristina. *Myself and Other: Competitive Narratives of Georgians and Abkhazians,* Regional Studies of Russia, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia, vol. 7, no. 1, 2018, pp.69-82.
[245] CHANKVETADZE*, Re-examining the Radicalizing Narratives of Georgia's Conflicts,* 2021.
[246] Ibid.
[247] KABACHNIK, Peter. *Wounds that won't heal: cartographic anxieties and the quest for territorial integrity in Georgia,* Central Asian Survey, Vol. 31, no.1, 2012, pp. 45-60.

Chapter III. Top-Down Reconciliation and Discourse

Most of the literature dedicated to the so-called top-down approaches to peace grants an essential role to the state and the concepts of state-building and peacebuilding. They focus mainly on strengthening norms and institutions, improving the economy, promoting justice, and creating a safe environment.[248] In terms of reconciliation from the top-down perspective, several strategies can be undertaken from the state level. For instance, there are top-down approaches based on actions that promote justice via trials, truth commissions, and compensation. The top-down approaches also emphasize the reinstatement of a new legal system through policies and reforms. The latter means, for example, the formation of a new constitution or educational reform acknowledging a new reality. [249] As Luc Huyse points out, the reconciliation process has three stages, and political leaders have a decisive role. They can replace fear by nonviolent coexistence if they create a safe environment and establish inter-state or inter-ethnic dialogues. The state's role is also crucial in building confidence and trust. According to Huyse, trust and confidence can truly develop only if the institutions fulfill their function.[250] Moreover, the reconciliation process should be supported by the introduction of the codes of democracy and just socio-economic order.[251]

Georgia has published so far two official documents dealing with reconciliation. The first is the State Strategy on Occupied Territories, and the second is A Step to Better Future. There is also a minister's vision published on the website of the State Ministry of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civic Equality in 2017. These three texts are subjected to critical discourse analysis in this section. Since no official documents about reconciliation have been published recently, the study is complemented by analyzing the speech of Prime Minister Garibashvili. His speech was conducted at the United Nations General Assembly in 2022. The research also examines the discourse of the former minister for reconciliation, Paata Zaakareshvili, through unpublished ministry vision and his statements in the interview conducted in Tbilisi.

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[248] RICHMOND, P. Oliver. *The Oxford Handbook of Peacebuilding, State-building, And Peace Formation*, Oxford University Press, 2021, p. 6.

[249] BLOOMFIELD, David. *On Good Terms, Clarifying Reconciliation,* Berhof Foundation, 2006, p. 11. https://berghof-foundation.org/library/on-good-terms-clarifying-reconciliation

[250] HUYSE, LUC. *The Process of Reconciliation*, In: BLOOMFIELD, David et.al. *Reconciliation after Violent Conflict,* A Handbook, IDEA, 2003, p. 19. https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/reconciliation-after-violent-conflict-handbook.pdf

[251] Ibid.

The objective of the analysis in this section is to identify the current state discourse and discover discourses and strategies that have shaped the official Georgian approach towards the conflict and reconciliation. Moreover, analyzing documents from 2008 enables evaluation of how the institutional state discourse has changed. The analysis also attempts to discover how the in-group and out-group are created in the discourse.

3.1 Georgian Approach to Reconciliation after 2008

After the war in 2008, Georgia introduced the Law on Occupied Territories, which significantly contributed to the isolation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The law restricted free movement and economic activity in the territories. The law also specified that Russia was the responsible side for the occupation. The de facto state agencies and officials from these territories were considered illegal. The law significantly harmed the process of reconciliation due to the pursuit of an isolation policy towards partly-recognized states.[252] The state approach to reconciliation changed in 2010 when the Georgian government introduced the State Strategy on Occupied Territories: Engagement through Cooperation. The strategy aimed to conduct a people-oriented policy and reduce the isolation of the population in the separatist territories. The action plan had several dimensions that included education, free movement, economic relations, and health care.[253]

One of the most important and successful projects introduced by this action plan has been free healthcare access in Georgia for people living in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. However, until 2013, the process had been politicized and forced inhabitants of de facto states to obtain a Georgian passport. After removing that requirement by the Georgian Dream coalition government, the number of patients from the territories significantly increased.[254] In 2021, government officials claimed that thousands of people from Abkhazia and South Ossetia come to Georgia annually due to free medical treatment.[255] The program is often praised as an example of a successful confidence-building measure between Georgians, Abkhaz, and Ossetians.[256] Nevertheless, it is

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[252] AKABA, *Transformation of the Georgian – Abkhaz conflict*, 2011, p. 33.
[253] GOVERNMENT OF GEORGIA, *State Strategy on Occupied Territories: Engagement Through Cooperation,* 2010, https://www.gov.ge/files/225_31228_851158_15.07.20-StateStrategyonOccupiedTerritories-EngagementThroughCooperation(Final).pdf
[254] ZAKAREISHVILI, Paata, *Conflicts in Georgia 2012-2016,* Fridrich Ebert Stiftung, Tbilisi, 2021, p.20.
[255] BAKRADZE, Nino, *Georgia's Health Diplomacy,* Institute for War and Peace Reporting, 2022. https://iwpr.net/global-voices/georgias-health-diplomacy
[256] GAPRINDASHVILI, *One Step Closer,* 2019, p.12.

essential to note that the program lacks support from authorities in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.[257]

The evolution of the healthcare program can serve as an example of the change in approach to reconciliation after 2012 when the Georgian Dream coalition replaced the United Movement government. First and foremost, they approved renaming State Ministry for Reintegration by the State Ministry for Reconciliation and Civic Equality.[258] Thus, reconciliation became an unequivocal part of the official state policy. According to the former minister Paata Zaakareshvili, the renaming was vital because it fostered trust from the Abkhaz and Ossetian sides and willingness to cooperate with the state office.[259] After that, the ministry launched unofficial Georgian-Abkhaz and Georgian-Ossetian dialogues. These meetings were not political, and no decisions were made there. However, they provided the representatives of both sides with the opportunity to discuss factors for and against conflict resolution. Paata Zaakareshivli claims that such formats attempted to return the Abkhaz and Ossetian sides an agency.[260] The new Georgian government also officially excluded the possibility of resolving conflict by force and ended support for armed groups operating in Abkhazia's Gali district. This move led to a significant decrease in tensions in the part of Abkhaz territory predominantly inhabited by ethnic Georgians.[261]

The Georgian Dream coalition government also modified legislation related to the Law on Occupied Territories and offered Abkhazia and South Ossetia to establish direct dialogues.[262] However, the call from the Georgian prime minister went unheard. According to the international peacebuilding organization Conciliation Resources, the steps from the Georgian side were not accepted in Abkhazia and South Ossetia in a positive light. For instance, the renaming of the state ministry only sent a message that reintegration and reconciliation are synonyms, and the aim of the Georgian policy remains

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[257] BAKRADZE, Nino, *Georgia's Health Diplomacy,* Institute for War and Peace Reporting, 2022. https://iwpr.net/global-voices/georgias-health-diplomacy

[258] CLOGG, Rachel – ELBAKIDZE, Marina. *The Art of the Possible. Dealing with the past violence in the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict.* Conciliation Resources. 2016. https://www.c-r.org/accord/reconciliation-and-peace-processes/art-possible-dealing-past-violence-georgian-abkhaz

[259] ZAAKARESHVILI, *Conflicts in Georgia,* 2021, p 18.

[260] ZAAKARESHVILI, Paata. *Interview*, Conducted by Patrik Salát, Tbilisi, 17. 11. 2022.

[261] INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP. *Abkhazia: Long Road to Reconciliation*, Europe Report, no. 224, Brussels, 2013, p. 1. https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/caucasus/abkhazia-georgia/abkhazia-long-road-reconciliation

[262] Ibid.

the same. Therefore, the space for reconciliation work has narrowed since it has become a highly politicized term in the Abkhaz and Ossetian eyes.[263]

Nevertheless, in 2016, there was an unprecedented exchange of prisoners between Georgian, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia. The de facto authorities exchanged 12 prisoners from Abkhazia and South Ossetia for four from Georgia. The exchange had a positive reaction and raised hopes that the agreement would lead to a new dialogue between the parties. After that, the representatives in Geneva agreed to resume IPRM meetings suspended in 2012. The meetings allow the parties to discuss security concerns and usually occur near administrative boundaries. In 2017, the government presented a new policy of peace that has eight objectives. The new policy was followed by a peace initiative *A Step to Better Future*. The initiative aimed to improve the humanitarian and socio-economic conditions of people in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and enhanced confidence building between divided societies.[264] The initiative had two different parts. For example, the first one dedicated to trade established a mechanism by which residents from Abkhazia and South Ossetia could export their goods and use a free-trade regime with the European Union.[265] Regarding education, the initiative enhanced an opportunity for Abkhaz and Ossetians to attend schools in Georgia, from primary level to university.[266] The initiative had not been discussed with the de facto authorities in the breakaway territories and, as such, was rejected.[267] Some experts even claimed that Georgia is monopolizing negotiations and that the initiative could fail to deliver any success because it is not part of any official conversations with Abkhazia and South Ossetia.[268]

In 2021, the Georgian Dream government announced that its approach to reconciliation proved to be successful. It claimed that between 2020 and 2021, there were eleven joint business projects, around a hundred confidence civic projects,

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[263] CLOGG, *The Art of the Possible,* 2016. https://www.c-r.org/accord/reconciliation-and-peace-processes/art-possible-dealing-past-violence-georgian-abkhaz

[264] OFFICE OF THE STATE MINISTER OF GEORGIA FOR RECONCILIATION AND CIVIC EQUALITY. "A Step to a Better Future" Facilitation of Trade Across Dividing Lines, Peace Initiative, Tbilisi, 2018. https://smr.gov.ge/en/page/40/nabiji-uketesi-momavlisken

[265] Ibid.

[266] OFFICE OF THE STATE MINISTER OF GEORGIA FOR RECONCILIATION AND CIVIC EQUALITY. *A Step to a Better Future" Enhancing Educational Opportunities for the residents of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia*, Peace Initiative, Tbilisi, 2018. https://smr.gov.ge/en/page/40/nabiji-uketesi-momavlisken

[267] CIVIL. GE. *Sokhumi, Tskhinvali Authorities Reject Georgian Government's Peace Initiative,* 2018. https://civil.ge/archives/220091

[268] KUCERA, Joshua. *Georgia aims at "better future" with breakaway Abkhazia and South Ossetia,* Eurasianet, 2018. https://eurasianet.org/georgia-aims-at-better-future-with-breakaway-abkhazia-and-south-ossetia

an increased number of students from Abkhazia and South Ossetia who enrolled in Georgian universities, and continuing provision of free healthcare for patients from the separatist republics.[269] The government representatives also announced that the policy of reconciliation and engagement would undergo essential adjustments in the near future. In June 2021, the government commission was launched in order to elaborate and implement the Georgian State Strategy for De-Occupation and Peaceful Conflict Resolution. According to the Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the commission's purpose is to set up a nationwide process aiming to develop a common-state approach and a strategic vision on de-occupation, peaceful conflict resolution, and unification.[270]

3.3 Georgian Institutional Discourse

The three documents represent an evolution of Georgian peace policy from 2010 to 2018. The genres are political, and the fields of action change from lawmaking procedure to sell-representation and formation of public opinion. In the three documents, there is strong interdiscursivity. The documents are shaped predominantly by discursive topics about territorial integrity and Russian occupation. For instance, the State strategy on Occupied Territories states, *"The Strategy is developed with the conviction that the remaining residents of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia are an integral part of Georgia's society and future."*[271]

Other discursive topics refer, for instance, to European integration, human rights, democracy, economic prosperity, and conflict resolution. The reconciliation topic is also presented in all documents. The text of the peace initiative states, *"The reconciliation and engagement policy of the GoG serves the goals of improving the situation of the population living in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, achieving their welfare and supporting reconciliation and confidence building between conflict divided communities."*[272] Intertextuality is also strong between analyzed documents. They often refer to the Law on Occupied Territories as an essential foundation of the Georgian

[269] SOCIAL JUSTICE CENTER. *Georgian imaginary policy of reconciliation and confidence building*, 2021. https://socialjustice.org.ge/en/products/sherigebisa-da-ndobis-aghdgenis-mochvenebiti-kartuli-politika

[270] MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF GEORGIA. *Government Commission to elaborate and implement the Georgian State Strategy for De-occupation and Peaceful Conflict Resolution.* 2021. https://mfa.gov.ge/News/premier-ministris-gadacyvetilebit,-sheiqmna-samtav.aspx?lang=en-US

[271] GOVERNMENT OF GEORGIA. *State Strategy on Occupied Territories: Engagement Through Cooperation,* 2010, https://www.gov.ge/files/225_31228_851158_15.07.20-StateStrategyonOccupiedTerritories-EngagementThroughCooperation(Final).pdf

[272] OFFICE OF THE STATE MINISTER OF GEORGIA FOR RECONCILIATION AND CIVIC EQUALITY. *"A Step to a Better Future" Facilitation of Trade Across Dividing Lines, Peace Initiative*, Tbilisi, 2018. https://smr.gov.ge/en/page/40/nabiji-uketesi-momavlisken

approach toward the conflict. The actors in the texts remain the same. The only exception is the peace initiative A Step to a Better Future where Russia is not explicitly named as a party of the conflict. The last document efforts to be apolitical and neutral. It states, *"This initiative is exclusively constructive and serves a humanitarian purpose. A range of issues can be discussed and resolved without politicization."[273]*

Nomination strategies in exanimated documents create three categories. Georgia, with the international community's support, is a part of one category. Russia is in another category. However, Abkhazia/South Ossetia is not in the same category as Russia. Nomination strategies also created events and process as reconciliation, engagement, and conflict resolution in opposition to conflict, occupation, and annexation. For instance, the text claims, *"Georgia's policy of involvement and reconciliation is implemented with the active support of international partners. The international community strongly supports Georgia's territorial integrity and independence."[274]* Predication strategies employed in these documents portray Georgia as a constructive actor who efforts to resolve conflict peacefully, respects human rights, and wants to engage in dialogue with other sides. Conversely, Russia is depicted as an aggressor, occupant power, and central counterparty. Abkhazia and South Ossetia create another category, which has neutral traces. There are no positive or negative references from the Georgian side. The de facto states are described as territories or regions. People in these territories are regarded as Georgian citizens, and they are distinguished from de facto elites described as illegal. Reconciliation is labeled as a positive process that helps build confidence between societies and help with reintegration. The text reads, *"Russia's occupation of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, and its policy of annexing them, complicates the reconciliation of all the peoples of Georgia and the peaceful reintegration of the occupied territories into Georgia's constitutional ambit."[275]*

Argumentation strategies often employ the topoi of usefulness, justice, law and right, and humanitarianism. Georgia's argumentation, for instance, stresses that conflict resolution is needed for future development and security. The text states, *"The unresolved conflict and the current situation do not serve the interests of either Georgian, or Abkhazian, or Ossetian communities. That's why it is necessary that the peace process*

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[273] Ibid.
[274] THE STATE MINISTER OF GEORGIA FOR RECONCILIATION AND CIVIC EQUALITY. *Our policy of peace provides for 8 main objectives*, Tbilisi, 2017. https://smr.gov.ge/en/page/35/ministers-vision
[275] Ibid.

acquires more dynamics." The topoi of justice and rights are usually employed to support the Georgian policy of non-recognition and reintegration. The need for reconciliation and engagement is emphasized through the topoi of reality and humanitarianism. For instance, the peace initiative reads, *"The GoG approach and vision is based on the principles of the freedom of choice, cooperation, and provision of equal opportunities, civic equality, and respect for the cultural identity and supports the people living in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region to acquire the knowledge necessary for success and self-realization as well as to develop skills."*[276]

The overview demonstrates that the institutional discourse about the conflict reproduces discourses based on Georgian myths and fears. The cartographic fear of disintegration is presented through discursive topic about territorial integrity. On the other hand, Russian-related myths are transferred to the present by narrative about the occupation. Russia replaced the role of Abkhaz/South Ossetians in the conflict. Reconciliation is labeled as a positive process outside politics that aims to build confidence between societies and reintegrate them in the future.

State Strategy on Occupied Territories.[277](Analysis of document)

Genre and field of action	The document published in 2010 presented a new Georgian strategy for conflict and reconciliation. The document represents a political genre designed for the international community, academics, and journalists. The aim is to define a new Georgian approach to conflict resolution after the war in 2008 and maintain the support of the West. Therefore, the field of action could be described as a lawmaking procedure, formation of public opinion, and self-representation.
Interdiscursivity	There are essential words with ideological expressions, such as integrity, sovereignty, and non-recognition, connected to the discursive topics derived from the myth-symbol complex. These words refer to Georgian national discourse about territorial integrity. Words like annexation and occupation refer to the current discursive topic about the conflict. There are also ideological words such as democracy, human rights, and tolerance that try to appeal to the international community through the liberal democratic discursive topic. Expressions like engagement, cooperation, and reconciliation are connected to the conflict transformation/resolution discursive topic.

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[276] OFFICE OF THE STATE MINISTER OF GEORGIA FOR RECONCILIATION AND CIVIC EQUALITY. *"A Step to a Better Future" Facilitation of Trade Across Dividing Lines*, Peace Initiative, Tbilisi, 2018. https://smr.gov.ge/en/page/40/nabiji-uketesi-momavlisken
[277] GOVERNMENT OF GEORGIA. *State Strategy on Occupied Territories: Engagement Through Cooperation,* 2010, https://www.gov.ge/files/225_31228_851158_15.07.20-StateStrategyonOccupiedTerritories-EngagementThroughCooperation(Final).pdf

Intertextuality	The text refers to international norms and law and tries to support its relevance through statements, decisions, and reports of international organization as the EU or UN. The text also derives from the law on occupied territories published in 2008.
Strategies	The nomination strategies in the text construct actors and processes. The main actors are Georgia, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Russia, International community. The process is constructed through peaceful engagement, cooperation, reintegration, prosperity, and security. Predication strategies define Georgia as a peaceful state, a future European member with a flourishing economy, and a victim of Russian aggression. Russia is defined as a responsible actor for the conflict, aggressor, and occupier. Abkhazia and South Ossetia are defined merely as territories or regions. Abkhazians and Ossetians are defined as citizens of Georgia. Argumentation strategies use the topoi of justice, history, reality, law and right, and humanitarianism predominantly.
Topoi **Justice**	The intent of the Strategy is to promote interaction among the divided Populations of Georgia, currently separated by occupation lines and to ensure that residents of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia enjoy the rights and privileges available to every citizen of Georgia.
Law and right	The Government of Georgia, supported by the consensus of the international community, believes that the Russian invasion and subsequent recognition took place in blatant violation of fundamental principles of international law.
Reality	Georgia opposes the isolation of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia and recognizes the negative repercussions of isolating the populations living there; the Government of Georgia is therefore pursuing a human-centric policy aimed at engagement with residents of these territories.
Humanitarianism	The Government of Georgia is determined to create the same opportunities for those populations who currently reside in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia as are provided for the rest of Georgia's population, without discrimination or prejudice with respect to ethnicity, religious beliefs, or political views.

3.4 Prime Minister Garibashvili's Discourse

The prime minister of Georgia, Irakli Garibashvili, delivered his speech on the occasion of the 77th session of the United Nations Assembly in September 2022. As described above, Georgia has started working on a new strategy for conflict resolution, and the prime minister's speech can highlight some of the ideas acceptable to the current government in this case. Garibashvili uses the Russian aggression in Ukraine to introduce the Georgian case, which he regarded as similar. He states, *"In 2008, my country was attacked by Russia, resulting in the ongoing occupation of 20 percent of our territory. At the time, the international community recognized this aggression. But, as we have*

learned, the world's democracies must act as one to ensure that freedom and peace prevail."[278]

Interdiscursivity and intertextuality are the same as in the official documents analyzed above. The discursive topics are built around the Russian occupation and Georgian territorial integrity. Other discursive topics include European integration, democratic transition, human rights protection, economic development, and security. There are also the same actors in texts and events as in the official documents. The nomination strategies create two categories. One category is Georgia, and the other is Russia. Interestingly, Abkhazia and South Ossetia are hereby included in the category with Georgia. The prime minister uses predication strategies to label them as brothers and sisters in his speech. The widely spread stereotype further diminishes the role of Abkhaz and South Ossetians in the conflict. For instance, Garibashvili claims, *"We are creating opportunities and giving all the necessary tools to our citizens, including those living in Georgia's occupied territories. For that reason, here today at the United Nations General Assembly, I want to speak directly to my Abkhaz and Ossetian brothers and sisters and once again tell them that our strength is in unity. We will build Georgia together and peacefully turn it into a prosperous, free and unified European state."* [279]

In Garibashvili's speech, Georgia is depicted as a positively developing state and democracy. He also describes Georgians as a nation with a long history that has become an example of resilience and progress. The argumentation strategies are based mainly on reality, justice and humanitarianism. In summary, the prime minister's discourse about conflict contains the same discourses and strategies that shaped the Georgian institutional approach to reconciliation. Moreover, his speech positively describes Abkhazians and South Ossetians as brothers and sisters. By all accounts, the Georgian official discourse about the conflict has not changed profoundly since 2010, even though there have been four different governments, six different prime ministers, and three different ministers for reconciliation.[280]

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[278] GARIBASHVILI, Irakli. *PM Speech at UNGA77,* 2022.
https://garibashvili.ge/en/n/all/sitkvit_gamosvla_gaeros_77e_sesiis_generalur_debatebze1
[279] Ibid.
[280] BBC NEWS. *Georgia Profile – Timeline,* 2021. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17303471

3.5 Paata Zaakareshvili's Discourse

The first minister for reconciliation and civic equality was Paata Zaakareshvili. In fact, he was responsible for changing the name of the institution. Focus on Zaakareshvili's discourse is important because from 2012 to 2016, no official state strategy was published during his ministry. On the other hand, he made important changes in the Georgian approach to the conflict and proposed reconciliation as the primary strategy for transformation. The analysis of Zaakareshvili's discourse is based on the interview with the former minister in Tbilisi and the examination of his unpublished vision that the Georgian Dream coalition did not accept and support in 2014. Zaakareshvili's strategy is named Vision of the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality on the Normalization of the Georgian-Abkhaz and Georgian-Ossetian Bilateral Relations. So he directly refers to Abkhazia and South Ossetia as the main actors in the conflict.[281] The same he does during the interview when he claims that the Russian role in the conflict is exaggerated, *"We became a state more concerned with Russian interests than Georgian interests."[282]*

Interdiscursivity in the text contains various discursive topics that can also be found in official documents. However, there is no discursive topic about the Russian occupation, and the Georgian territorial integrity topic is also more implicit. The discursive topic about the victim disappeared. More emphasis is put on discursive topics about the reconciliation process and European integration, human rights protection, and democratic development. At the intertextual level, the text is related to the peace initiative A Step to Better Future. Some of the ideas, as well as rhetoric, are similar. Zaakareshvili claimed that some of the ideas were outlined during his former ministry. Nonetheless, he also claimed that the offers contained in the peace initiative had been on the table before[283] Nomination strategies used in the text created five categories of actors – Georgia, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Russia, and the West. In contrast to other texts, Zaakareshvili differs between Abkhazians and South Ossetians. The processes are built around process reconciliation and Europeanization. There are also events mentioned the war in the 90s and the war in 2008. The text states, *"Both conflicts erupted in the*

[281] ZAAKARESHVILI, Paata. The *Vision of the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality on the normalization of the Georgian-Abkhaz and Georgian-Ossetian Bilateral relations,* Tbilisi, 2014. https://jam-news.net/zakareishvili-sooner-or-later-the-authorities-will-have-to-consider-my-ideas/
[282] ZAAKARESHVILI, Paata. *Interview*, Conducted by Patrik Salát, Tbilisi, 17. 11. 2022.
[283] ZAAKARESHVILI, Paata. The *Vision of the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality on the normalization of the Georgian-Abkhaz and Georgian-Ossetian Bilateral relations,* Tbilisi, 2014. https://jam-news.net/zakareishvili-sooner-or-later-the-authorities-will-have-to-consider-my-ideas/

autonomous units of the then Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic (the Abkhaz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic and the South Ossetian Autonomous Region) and escalated at the beginning of the 1990s; together with the political, both conflicts are also characterized by one of ethnic confrontation "[284]

Nomination strategies in the interview are the same. However, it is visible that Zaakareshvili wants to distinguish himself from the current Georgian representation. He does not use "we" in the context of Georgia as did in his speech the Prime Minister Garibashvili, *"Georgian side did not accept the Abkhaz document…"*[285] Predication strategies create a different notion of actors. Georgia is described as a conflict party, which is aware of the responsibility and acknowledges past mistakes. Georgia is also not described as a victim. Abkhazia and South Ossetia are depicted as the different parties of the conflict that also have responsibility. Russia is regarded as a third party. Nevertheless, Zaakareshvili also distinguishes in the text and the interview between the Georgian-Abkhaz/Ossetian and the Georgian-Russian conflict. He claims, *"Russia has certainly a great influence. However, they are issues that could be dealt with only between Georgian and Abkhazia or South Ossetia…"* [286]

Conflicts between Georgia and Abkhazia/South Ossetia are described as ethnic. This component is not present in other analyzed texts. They described these conflicts as a part of the geopolitical conflict with Russia, *"It is a great stereotype in Georgia. Abkhazians are regarded as nobody. It is not necessary to ask them anything. It is only needed to work with the Russian side."*[287] The reconciliation process is regarded as the primary tool for conflict transformation. It is marked positive in the text. Zaakareshvili also stressed the need for reconciliation in the interview. Regarding argumentation, Zaakareshvili uses different argumentation strategies in the text and the interview. He uses the topoi of reality, responsibility, and humanitarianism.

In sum, Zaakareshvili's discourse about the conflict is significantly different from the current state discourse in many respects. It does not contain the discourse about the one conflict with Russia. Also, the discursive topic about territorial integrity is not explicitly mentioned. He does not regard Georgia as a victim but as the party of the conflict. He emphasizes a need for bilateral dialogues between Georgia and

[284] Ibid.
[285] ZAAKARESHVILI, Paata. *Interview,* Conducted by Patrik Salát, Tbilisi, 17. 11. 2022.
[286] Ibid.
[287] Ibid.

Abkhazia/South Ossetia. Zaakareshvili's discourse also reveals the struggle between different interpretations of the conflict on the state level. The former minister explains in his book why he failed to change the approach to the conflict. Despite the change of the government in 2012, the institutional structures were still occupied by public officers affiliated with the former government. According to Zaakareshvili, they were against his proposals and pushed the narrative of the United National Movement instead.[288] Apart from that, he was also under pressure from the opposition, press, and civil society.[289]

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[288] ZAAKARESHVILI, *Conflicts in Georgia,* 2021, p 25.
[289] Ibid, p 41.

Chapter IV. Bottom-Up Reconciliation and Discourse

The bottom-up approach to peacebuilding is primarily related to civil society and local actors. For instance, Harold Saunders states in his book, *"Only governments can write peace treaties, but only human beings – citizens outside government – can transform conflict relationships into peaceful relationships."[290]* In conflicts where official negotiations are frozen, the bottom-up approach can encourage peace by challenging the polarization forces.[291] According to various experts, relationships and hostile attitudes must be changed on the human level. Building relations can help so-called public diplomacy or people-to-people diplomacy. It facilitates dialogue and provides the opportunity to humanize "the other."[292] The bottom-up approach is also connected to the critical school of thought in peace studies that criticizes top-down approaches, state centrism, and excessive involvement of international organization seeking to promote the so-called liberal peace.[293] The proponents of this approach often emphasize, for instance, the concept of everyday peace and local agency.[294] In this thesis, bottom-up reconciliation is understood as an approach that includes various peace activities and aims to build trust and understanding between the conflict-affected communities outside the state level. Therefore, the research in this section focuses on the middle range and the grassroots levels. According to Lederach's conflict transformation theory, middle-range leadership has *"the greatest potential for establishing an infrastructure that can sustain the peacebuilding process over the long term."[295]* However, the emphasis on middle-range leaders has been criticized in recent years by some scholars stressing the need to focus on Track III actors as well. [296]

4.1 Civil Society and Reconciliation after 2008

Before 2008, there had been many essential peace projects and dialogues facilitated by outside organizations, such as the Schlaining process or the Caucasus

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[290] SAUNDERS, Harold H. *A Public Peace Process. Sustained Dialogue to Transform Racial and Ethnic Conflicts*, New York, 1999, p. 17.

[291] CÁRDENAS, Magda L. *Women-to-Women Diplomacy in Georgia: A Peacebuilding Strategy in Frozen Conflict*, Civil Wars, vol. 21, 2019, pp. 385-409.

[292] Ibid.

[293] MAC GINTY, Roger – RICHOMND, Oliver P. *The Local Turn in Peace Building: A Critical Agenda for Peace.* Third World Quarterly, vol. 34, Issue 5, 2013, pp. 763-783.

[294] MAC GINTY, Roger. *Bottom-up and Local Agency in Conflict-Affected Societies*, Security Dialogue, Vol. 45, Issue 6, 2014, pp. 548 – 564.

[295] LEDERACH, *Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*, 1997, p. 60.

[296] PAFFENHOLZ, Thania. *International Peacebuilding Goes Local: Analyzing Lederach's Conflict Transformation Theory and Its Ambivalent Encounter with 20 Years of Practice*, Peacebuilding, vol. 2, Issue 1, 2014, pp. 11 – 27.

forum. The established channels of dialogue remained open even after the war in 2008.[297] According to Paula Garb, the Georgians and Abkhazians involved in the peace process started to meet in third countries a few months after the events. Some of the old peace projects continued, and new ones were started.[298] Nevertheless, the isolation policy pursued by the Georgian government created new obstacles for peacebuilders. For instance, the peace projects in Abkhazia were obligated to have approval from the State Ministry for Reintegration.[299]

However, as was mentioned above, projects and dialogues have continued after 2008. For instance, the University of California Irvine started organizing dialogues between Georgians and Abkhazians in 1994, and the projects continued after 2008. From 2011 to 2016, UCI organized distance learning dialogue courses for youths from conflict-affected societies.[300] Other important international facilitators in the Georgian-Abkhaz context are peacebuilding organizations Conciliation Resources and Berhof Foundation. These organizations cooperate with and support many local peace actors and NGOs. For example, they supported the mentioned Memory Project that brought both sides together in an effort to gather historical materials about the conflict between Georgia and Abkhazia.

Despite the ongoing effort of international organizations and local actors, a recent study of the Indie Peace shows a trend indicating a decline in the quality of civil peacebuilding.[301] According to this study, people involved in peace projects appreciate mainly initiatives that ended some time ago. The older generation of experts complains about missed opportunities. In comparison, the younger generation points out that they need more space for their realization.[302] The notion that the civil peace process is looking for a new dynamic also indicates a joint statement of Georgian NGOs published on the 29th anniversary of the end of the Abkhazian war. The statement called on the Georgian government to start a new process of peacebuilding and conflict transformation.[303]

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[297] GARB, Paula. *Civil society and conflict transformation in the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict: accomplishments and challenges,* European Security, vol. 21, 2012, pp. 90-101
[298] Ibid.
[299] Ibid.
[300] SOTIEVA, Larissa, et al. *Analysis of 30+ years of working with conflict in the Georgian-Abkhaz-South Ossetian contexts,* Independent peace Associates, London, 2021. https://indiepeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/IndiePeace30-Years-Geo-Abkh-SO-contexts-EN.pdf
[301] Ibid.
[302] Ibid.
[303] JAMNEWS, "*We honor the memory of victims on both sides of the conflict" - Georgian NGOs on the war in Abkhazia*, 2022. https://jam-news.net/we-honor-the-memory-of-victims-on-both-sides-of-the-conflict-georgian-ngos-on-the-war-in-abkhazia/

The Abkhaz civil sector has been actively engaged in the Georgian-Abkhaz dialogue for the past three decades. However, NGOs in Abkhazia do not receive any financial support from the de facto government on activities that aim to improve cooperation with Georgia.[304] On the contrary, peace activities are supported primarily by western international organizations, which could be a future problem. Since 2021, NGOs in Abkhazia have been under pressure from the de facto government, especially from the new de facto Minister of Foreign Affairs, Inal Ardzinba.[305] The war in Ukraine has only intensified this process and brought new challenges for Abkhazian civil society that endanger the possibility of receiving funding from international organizations.[306] On the other hand, a series of demonstrations in Abkhazia in 2022 showed broad public discontent with Russian pressure to transfer the land of a historic vacation residence. The events confirmed that Abkhaz civil society has remained independently active in the de facto republic.[307]

4.2 Discourse of Middle-Range Leaders

In this section, the analysis focuses on the discourse of middle-range leaders. These representatives of the Georgian civil society are predominantly stakeholders, NGO leaders, academics, or influential journalists. Five in-depth interviews were conducted with them in Georgia in November. Nonetheless, the thesis mentions only four names since one respondent wanted to be anonymous.

Regarding interdiscursivity, middle-range leaders' discourses are closer to Paata Zaakareshvili than Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili and the Georgian institutional discourse. It means that their discursive topics are not built around the Russian occupation. On the other hand, the respondents' discourses often emphasized the need to replace the monolithic discourse about the one conflict between Georgia and Russia. For instance, the Head of the Board of the Study of Nationalism and Conflicts, Nino Kalandarishvili, claimed, "*In this paradigm - everything that happens is about Russia. We lost the face of Abkhaz and Abkhaz as actors in the conflict. I think this is the main and very big mistake in our understanding of the conflict.*"[308] Also, the discourses of

[304] HOCH, Tomáš, et al. *Civil Society and Conflict Transformation in De Facto States: The Case of Abkhazia*, Problems of Post-Communism, vol. 0, 2016, pp. 1 – 13.

[305] KOMAKHIA, Mamuka. *Occupied Abkhazia: The Attack on the Civil Sector and International Organizations*. Rondeli Foundation, 2022. https://gfsis.org.ge/blog/view/1498

[306] Ibid.

[307] OCMEDIA, *Abkhazia's youth protest the Pitsunda dacha deal*, 2022, https://oc-media.org/features/abkhazias-youth-protest-the-pitsunda-dacha-deal/

[308] KALANDARISHVILI, Nino. *Interview*, Conducted by Patrik, Tbilisi, 16.11 2022.

middle-range leaders do not include victimization. In contrast, the respondents often pointed out the need to acknowledge past mistakes to reconcile with the Abkhaz side. Nevertheless, the discursive topic of territorial integrity still played a significant role concerning conflict resolution, being emotionally attached. Ivane Abramahsvili, executive director of the Caucasus House, stated, *"We are right to push on the territorial integrity. However, one kind of territorial integrity is the major question for me, which is still very painful to discuss even now when there are only theoretical discussions."*[309]

In terms of intertextuality, some respondents referred to the Law on Occupied Territories that is seen as an obstacle to reconciliation with the Abkhaz side, as well as the state policy of isolation. The war in 2008 is marked as a significant event. However, the wars in Ukraine and Nagorno-Karabakh were repeatedly mentioned as other significant developments. The war in Ukraine was regarded by some even as a game changer for the future. Ivane Abramashvili claimed, *"The biggest development over the last years has been the Ukraine war. And this has had a twofold effect. Abkhazians and South Ossetians now try to be more catholic than the pope to show Russia they are the most loyal to them. But, on the societal level, they see that Russia is not a partner they want to be with for the long-term, especially Abkhazia…."*[310]

Respondents' nomination and predication strategies create five categories of actors: Georgian, Russia, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and the West. They also set middle-range leaders apart from the government and society. One of them, for example, stated, *"The government has been using this narrative only with the international community. They just want to promote the agenda of occupation."*[311] The actors are portrayed differently from the state institutional discourse. The Abkhazians and South Ossetians are seen as important parties in the conflict, and middle-range leaders often distinguish between them and reflect their different needs and visions. For example, the national coordinator of the project Youth for Peace, Rodami Tsomaya, stated, *"This is not the case in South Ossetia because they want to be part of Russia, but Abkhazians really want to be independent."*[312] Moreover, they do not use the positive stereotype about brothers and sisters that makes Abkhazians and Ossetians passive victims of Russian politics. Russia is regarded as a negative key actor. On the other hand,

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[309] ABRAMASHVILI, Ivane. *Interview*, Conducted by Patrik Salát, Tbilisi, 17.11 2022.
[310] Ibid.
[311] Ibid.
[312] TSOMAYA, Rodami. *Interview*, Conducted by Patrik Salát, Tbilisi, 17.11 2022.

all the respondents emphasized that the conflict is not only about Russia. However, the narrative about the occupation, perceived as a significant obstacle to conflict transformation, is said to be reinforced by the war in Ukraine. For instance, journalist Margarita Akhvlediani stated, *"I try to fight it, I do it on all conferences, and I blamed to be Russian agent now. It is my new name."[313]*

The West is not portrayed only as a good partner for Georgia, and some respondents were critical towards the attitudes of the EU or USA that support the current state discourse. Margarita Akhvlediani claimed, *"It is very difficult now. The peace projects are becoming less effective because after years, dozens of years, those who still consider Abkhazians to be equal partners who want to discuss with them to find some compromises, to find some future, we are in the minority now because even the West does not support it."[314]* She also portrayed the middle-range leadership who wants to cooperate directly with Abkhazia and solve the conflict as a minority. At the same time, she considers the peace projects to become less effective. Others also stated the same. As Nino Kalandarishvili pointed out, the bottom-up approach is not effective enough, *"Making some influences on politicians is very difficult. Now, everybody understands that conflict is not at the top of the priorities, and not only for politicians. Conflict is not a priority also for society."[315]*

Reconciliation is regarded as an important process for maintaining peaceful relations. At the same time, some respondents were pessimistic about its impact on conflict transformation. Ivane Abramashvili stated, *"It is very hard to reach large sectors of the population. So we have been successful among students, among high school children who want to learn more. Also, IDPs are very much pro-peace in that sense. They are very receptive. These are the sectors that want to be at the forefront of the dialogue. In that sense, we have succeeded on the very small to medium scale but not on the level that could be a game changer. There is still a lot of progress to be made."[316]* On the other hand, Rodami Tsomaya pointed out that the effect could be seen in the future, *"It is very important to have this process. Despite the fact that we don't have results now, we will have results in ten or fifteen years, for example. Because people who*

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[313] AKHVLEDIANI, Margarita. *Interview*, Conducted by Patrik Salát, Tbilisi, 15.11 2022.
[314] Ibid.
[315] KALANDARISHVILI, Nino. *Interview*, Conducted by Patrik, Tbilisi, 16.11 2022.
[316] ABRAMASHVILI, Ivane. *Interview*, Conducted by Patrik Salát, Tbilisi, 17.11 2022.

become decision-makers they can change their attitude toward the Georgians. I hope so."[317]

The most repeated events in the interviews are mainly the war in Ukraine and Nagorno-Karabakh. Some respondents mentioned these events in relation to the need for the peace process, "*Especially the war in Karabakh showed that war could be repeated again. For us, it is clear that we have to put more effort into the dialogue.*"[318] The war in Ukraine was mentioned as a significant event concerning conflict resolution and reconciliation in positive and negative ways. According to some respondents, the war in Ukraine reinforces the current discourse about conflict and even brings new narratives that harm the peace process. Margarita Akvhlediani claimed, "*Georgian opposition claims that Abkhazia was before Bucha. It is a slogan now in Georgia. They are some oppositional journalists, and they created an exhibition, a huge one, about killed people, only Georgians. There was no mention of the Georgians who were killing Abkhaz as well. It is true what was presented there, but it is the worse version of the truth. There is also one more truth, and it should be presented there, but it is not. It is very emotional, and it influences you. And the slogan is: before Bucha was Abkhazia.*"[319]

In terms of argumentation strategies, middle-range leaders often use the topoi of reality and usefulness. For example, when they explained the need for reconciliation, they spoke mainly about the positive impact on the preservation of peace. When they emphasize the need for more engagement in dialogue and peace process, they justify it with the example of the wars in Nagorno-Karabakh and Ukraine. In sum, the discourses of middle-range leaders do not reproduce the current state discourse about the conflict. Their discourses also do not contain stereotypes. However, the symbol of territorial integrity connected to the myth about Georgian statehood and cartographic fear is still presented in discourses and even related to emotions. Only one respondent was ready to give up territorial integrity for peaceful coexistence. On the other hand, all respondents see reconciliation as a positive and needed process. At the same time, they are aware that the impact of the peace projects and dialogues is currently limited. There is also a difference between younger and older middle-range leaders in their attitudes toward the

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[317] TSOMAYA, Rodami. *Interview*, Conducted by Patrik Salát, Tbilisi, 17.11 2022.
[318] E. B. *Interview*, Conducted by Patrik Salát, Tbilisi, 17.11 2022.
[319] AKHVLEDIANI, Margarita. *Interview*, Conducted by Patrik Salát, Tbilisi, 15.11 2022.

future. While the younger are more optimistic and believe that the conflict will transform thanks to their effort, the older are more pessimistic and emphasize wasted opportunities in the past.

4.3 Discourse of Participants in Peace Projects

The last part of the analysis focuses on the discourses of people involved in joint peace projects and dialogues with the Abkhaz side. These people are mostly university students, grassroots and local leaders, or individuals working in NGOs. Most of them agreed for the interview on the condition that their names would not be published. Therefore, the analysis in this part does not mention their names when demonstrating their statements. Overall, nine respondents were interviewed personally in Georgia or online.

Discourses of people involved in peace projects and dialogues are much more diverse than the discourses of middle-range leaders. The most significant difference is between university students or graduates and local leaders or workers of local NGOs who work with war-affected communities or have IDP backgrounds. The latter often do not follow the discourse of Paata Zaakareshvili. Some of their discursive topics are closer to the statements of Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili. It means that their discursive topics emphasize the Russian occupation and the Russian role in the conflict. They do not see Abkhazians and Ossetians as the main party of the conflict. For instance, an interview was conducted with a veteran of the Georgian-Abkhaz war. He was involved in dialogues and met several times with other veterans from the Abkhaz side. Nonetheless, he claimed, *"I think, or I believe, that Abkhazians without the support of Russians would never attack Georgians. Russia inspired this conflict."*[320] On the other hand, one of the university students involved in peace projects stated, *"For a long time before actually learning more about the Abkhaz-Georgian conflict, I believed that only Russia was to blame for bad attitudes between Georgians and Abkhaz people, that they occupy the region and Abkhaz people actually want to reunite with the rest of Georgia, but can't as "Russians do not let them." Now I consider it to be a bit patronizing to think this way. I recognize the Abkhazian side as the side in the conflict. "*[321]

There is also the topic of victimization presented in some discourses. One local NGO leader claimed, *"Russia had been preparing Abkhazians for conflict for years.*

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[320] CH. Z. *Interview*, Conducted by Patrik Salát, Kutaisi, 18.11 2022.
[321] E. T. *Interview,* Conducted by Patrik Salát, Online, 26.11 2022.

For example, they brokered an agreement between Georgians and Abkhazians during the war. After some time, Abkhazians started to attack, and they let them. Abkhaz attracted peaceful people living in Sukhumi, and they let them. It is the role Russia played as a mediator."[322] Apart from that, the discursive topic of territorial integrity plays a significant role for all respondents. Even some university students related the topic to emotions, "*Maybe Abkhazia could join Georgia as a confederation, but it is very early to talk about it. Scars of the war are still open, and the active Russian propaganda makes reconciliation processes even harder.*"[323]

Regarding actors, events, and processes, when compared to middle-range leaders' statements, the participants in peace projects and dialogues do not mention too often the war in Ukraine as a new significant development. They also do not criticize the international community or the West for supporting the discourse about the one conflict with Russia. On the other hand, they labeled reconciliation as an essential process and shared the opinion that conflict must be resolved only peacefully. NGO leader stated, "*We have realized after the war that only a peaceful path was right and had the potential to resolve this conflict,*" One of the university students added, "*I think that taking into account the mentioned situation, peace activities are very important. The mentioned activities further promote the peaceful negotiations of the conflict.*"[324]

Participants include themselves in Georgian society more than the middle-range leaders. They often use "we" concerning Georgia. Moreover, when they have an IDP background, they emphasize it in the introduction and speak about Abkhazia as their home despite not living there. One student claimed, "*This question concerns both my personal life and career interests. I am a displaced person from Abkhazia. I was born in Tbilisi a few years after the war.*"[325] All respondents do not portray Abkhazians as enemies. The difference is, as mentioned above, in the agency they give them in terms of conflict. Moreover, they often see them as close people. One respondent stated in the interview, "*I used to think that they look more like us and culturally - I still think this way. As for the mentality and way of thinking about life - I think I associate them with early 2000's Georgians or Russians. Of course, it cannot be true as I have not met enough*

[322] E. A. *Interview*, Conducted by Patrik Salát, Kutaisi, 18. 11 2022.
[323] N.G. *Interview,* Conducted by Patrik Salát, Online, 23. 11 2022.
[324] E. A. *Interview*, Conducted by Patrik Salát, Kutaisi, 18. 11 2022.
[325] E. T. *Interview,* Conducted by Patrik Salát, Online, 26.11 2022.

Abkhaz people to generalize it, but it is just based on my experience."[326] By contrast, all respondents labeled Russia as a hostile opponent and an obstacle to conflict resolution. Reconciliation involving peace projects and dialogues is regarded as a positive process associated with change. Respondents emphasized that involvement in such activities helps them better understand the conflict and Abkhaz side. They also stressed the contribution of these projects to improving relations and maintaining peace. Overall, there was more optimism toward the effect of reconciliation than between the middle-range leaders. For instance, one NGO worker claimed, "*Peace projects really help. For example, when young people from Georgia and Abkhazia can meet each other, they can go back and sincerely share their opinions, and they will not kill each other for that. They can simply ask and finally get to know each other better.*"[327]

In sum, people involved in peace projects and dialogues appreciate their positive effects and relate them to change in their opinions. However, their involvement automatically does not mean a change in their discourses regarding the conflict. The crucial variables are family background and education. University students and graduates interested in the conflicts in Georgia follow the discourses of middle-range leaders. However, people working in NGOs or local leaders with IDP status are closer to Georgian institutional discourses. They emphasize the role of Russia in the conflict, and their statements sometimes contain myths and stereotypes about Abkhazians. Nevertheless, they do not have negative attitudes toward them.

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[326] N.G. *Interview,* Conducted by Patrik Salát, Online, 23. 11 2022.
[327] T.S. *Interview,* Conducted by Patrik Salát, Kutaisi, 18.11 2022.

Conclusion

The main goal of the thesis is to assess if the bottom-up approach to reconciliation challenges or contributes to the current status quo between Georgian and Abkhazia after 2008. The evaluation of the bottom-up approach is based on three questions. The first question focused on thinking of individuals involved in peace projects. As the analysis revealed, people participating in peace activities support the peaceful resolution of the conflict between Georgian and Abkhazia. They also emphasized the positive impact of peace projects on their thinking and related it to a change in their attitudes. However, their thinking is not homogenous. It is not a solid group united around one discourse about the conflict. Moreover, there is growing pessimism among some middle-range leaders about the future.

The second question was related to the myths and stereotypes in the discourses produced by those people. Primarily, the myth about Georgian statehood transferred to the cartographic fear about territorial integrity plays a significant role. The symbol of territorial integrity evokes emotions even among the middle-range leadership. On the other hand, the myth about the Russian threat transferred into discourse about the one conflict with Russia has limited reach. It is stronger, especially among people with IDP backgrounds. On the other hand, middle-range leaders mark it as a narrative for the international community to gain support for Georgia and, at the same time, diminish the role of Abkhaz and South Ossetians in the conflict. Regarding stereotypes about the Abkhaz side, Georgians involved in peace activities do not consider them enemies or brothers and sisters. They mostly acknowledge their differences in attitudes and do not have negative feelings toward them.

The third question concerned the difference between the current state discourse and discourses produced by people involved in peace activities outside the state level. The research showed a significant difference between middle-range leaders and the current state discourse based mainly on the narrative about the Russian occupation. The discourse is powerful and has not altered since 2008 despite the change of government in 2013 and challenges from the former State Minister for Reconciliation and Civil Equality, Paata Zaakarehsvili. As the speech of the Prime Minister Garibahsivli conducted in 2022 revealed, the discourse about the conflict with Russia keeps forming the official Georgian policy. The discourses produced by people involved in peace

activities mostly challenge this official discourse. However, some NGO workers and local leaders follow the state discourse about the one conflict.

Overall, the thesis reveals that the bottom-up approach in the Georgian context cannot challenge the current status quo and does not have the potential to transform the conflict in the near future. The bottom-up approach is essential because it helps to preserve negative peace. People involved in peace activities emphasized a change in their attitudes toward the Abkhaz side and a lack of negative feelings toward them. The peace projects also mainly help to beat stereotypes. On the other hand, myths sometimes persist in the discourses and are still related to emotions. Therefore, the possibility of compromises, even from Georgians involved in peace activities, is still limited due to the strong myth-symbol complex. Most middle-range leaders see the opportunity for change due to the war in Ukraine. They expect the change to happen on the Abkhaz side and try to push the government to alter its policy toward the conflict. On the other hand, the war in Ukraine has also reinforced the discourse about the conflict between Georgian and Russia and brought new narratives, which, for instance, compare events in Abkhazia to Bucha in Ukraine.

In conclusion, the thesis claims that the bottom-up approach to reconciliation has had a limited effect because the discourses about the conflict strongly related to the Georgian ethnic identity are supported on the state and international levels. Moreover, conflict resolution is not a priority in Georgia, and the government will not alter policy toward the conflict because the current discourse is based on the group myth-symbol complex. Therefore, any changes in the state discourse could provoke negative emotions from the Georgian public and cost political support. The thesis shows that effective reconciliation cannot be based exclusively on top-down or bottom-up approaches. A more complex strategy and cooperation between the state and civil society are needed to transform conflict. Nevertheless, the thesis evaluates the approach of one party of the conflict. Information is also needed from the Abkhaz side to make a valid conclusion. Further research could reveal if the peace projects have the same impact on Abkhazians and how they approach the conflict with Georgia. In this case, the research about the impact of the war in Ukraine on their thinking and relations with Russia could reveal if the expectations of Georgians are right or misleading.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: The minister's vision[328] (Document analysis)

Genre and field of action	The minister's vision was published in 2017. The document represents the political genre. It aims to present the official Georgian strategy toward conflict resolution. The field of action is self-presentation and the formation of public opinion.
Interdiscursivity	The discursive topic in this text includes the Georgian territorial integrity discourse and the Russian occupation discourse. The text combines policy toward conflict resolution with the restoration of integrity and de-occupation. There is also the European integration discursive topic, the conflict resolution discursive topic, the human rights discursive topic, and the liberal democracy discursive topic.
Intertextuality	The text refers to the state strategy on Occupied territories. It stresses similar actions published there as engagement and reconciliation. It also stays in line with the policy of non-recognition and de-occupation formulated in 2008. The actors and their roles and categorizations in the text are also the same. The vision often refers to Russia, Abkhazia/South Ossetia, and the International community.
Strategies	The nomination and predication strategies that are used to construct in-group and out-group are employed in the same way as in the state strategy on occupied territories. Georgia is in a group with international partners as opposed to Russia. Abkhazia and South Ossetia are excluded from these two groups. They are described as passive actors, occupied territories, or regions of Georgia. Their population is described as being forced to live in severe conditions due to occupation. Georgia is portrayed as a constructive state that aims to resolve conflict by peaceful means and wants to offer benefits from European integration to all citizens. The argumentation strategies employ the topoi of usefulness, threat, responsibility, and humanitarianism.
Topoi **Usefulness**	The unresolved conflict and the current situation do not serve the interests of either Georgian, or Abkhazian, or Ossetian communities. That's why it is necessary that the peace process acquires more dynamics.
Threat/Danger	We must prevent reoccurrence of the war, confrontation, involvement in provocations.
Responsibility	The Government of Georgia takes efforts in maintaining peace, neutralizing security risks and possible provocations, strengthening integrity and independence of the internationally recognized borders, and maintaining unwavering adherence to the European and Euro-Atlantic integration and economic development, which is a precondition for achieving peaceful and successful resolution of conflicts.
Humanitarianism	The principal value of the Government of Georgia is a person, human dignity and human rights. Accordingly, priority is given to the care of the affected population. Our objective is to create opportunities for them to have a dignified present and future, so that they do not become hostages of a long-term process of full-scale resolution of the conflict.

[328] The State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civic Equality. *Our policy of peace provides for 8 main objectives*, Tbilisi, 2017. https://smr.gov.ge/en/page/35/ministers-vision

Appendix 3: A step to better future[329] (Document analysis)

Genre and field of action	The peace initiative was published in 2018 in two documents. The documents represent a political genre that introduces a new reconciliation policy toward breakaway regions. The field of action can be described as lawmaking procedure, formation of public opinion, and self-representation.
Interdiscursivity	Interestingly, the document does not contain words such as occupation, integration, or non-recognition. The discursive topic of territorial integrity is presented only by naming Abkhazia and South Ossetia as regions or territories. On the other hand, the number of words related to peace, engagement, and reconciliation increased in comparison to the two other previous documents. Therefore, the main discursive topic is indeed reconciliation between the divided communities. There is also a discursive topic about human rights. The conflict discursive topic is not presented through Russia, only by the existing division between societies.
Intertextuality	The text refers to the state strategy on occupied territories and the law on occupied territories. The actors are constructed the same way as in the strategy. Russia is completely excluded in the first document. There are no events mentioned or history of the conflict. Similarly to the state strategy, the peace initiatives try to show Georgian goodwill to engage in cooperation with other sides.
Strategies	The nomination and predication strategies in the text construct actors and processes. The main actors are Georgia and Abkhazia/South Ossetia. Georgia is portrayed as a state that cares about its citizen, human rights, and peaceful conflict resolution. Apart from that, Georgia's action is portrayed with the line of international will. The action aims to peacefully resolve conflict and build cooperation. On the other hand, Abkhazia/South Ossetia is described as a region and people as residents affected by conflict. Their authorities are described as illegal. In the documents, Abkhaz/Ossetians are described as passive recipients of Georgian reconciliation policies. In terms of argumentation, the topoi of usefulness, humanitarianism, justice, and responsibility are employed.
Topoi **Usefulness** **Justice** **Humanitarianism**	Peace and development serve as the only way to overcome exiting challenges. A peaceful, consistent, pragmatic and principal conflict resolution policy is thus pursued and implemented by the GoG with the wide support of the international community. The existing situation affects the quality of education of population living in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia and complicates access to modern, high quality education. The GoG approach and vision is based on the principles of the freedom of choice, cooperation, provision of equal opportunities, civic equality and respect for the cultural identity and supports the people living in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region to acquire knowledge necessary for success and self-realization as well as to develop skills.

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[329] Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civic Equality. *"A Step to a Better Future"*
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Appendix 3: Ivane Abramashvili (Transcript of interview)

Has your perspective on the conflict between Georgia and Abkhazia changed over the years? If so, how?

The biggest, let's say, development over the last years has been the Ukraine war. And this has had, like, let's say, a twofold effect. Abkhazians and South Ossetians now try to be more catholic than the pope to show Russia they are the most loyal to them. But, on the societal level, they see that Russia is not a partner they want to be with for the long term, especially Abkhazia. Abkhazia is now very concerned what they see how the situation unfolds. Also, they feel the pressure of sanctions on them, and Russia is really decreasing their funds for them. So, in that sense, they are looking at Georgia as an alternative. For example, we see the renewal of some initiatives from Abkhazia about trade and so on. This shows that they really see us, the Georgian side that could count on in a very bad scenario. And this has been a big development in the sense that it was only Georgia who was always coming up with some initiatives and so on, being active. But now, it is vice-versa. Abkhaz wants to talk about some very different social and economic perspectives. Obviously, we don't talk about red lines and so on. They are also very much reactivating talks on traveling documents, like passports. In that sense, it really opens up opportunities for dialogues on very small and very concrete initiatives, which could be a very interesting development.

And, for example, has your thinking changed when you were learning more and more over the years?

No, I don't think so. The architecture of the conflict has stated the same, as well as the narratives. Nothing has changed in that sense. There has not been any process that would help to rethink the past or the now. Nothing has been done in that regard, so it has been stated the same.

How significant currently are peace projects between Georgia and Abkhazia? Do they have some impact?

They do not have a large impact because of their size and scale. It is non-governmental. But it is something that keeps hope and relations going on the very societal level, humanitarian level, but also on political level. These projects have many different aspects. Some are humanitarian, some focus on gender, maybe, and some are focused on purely expert dialogue. This is something that has been surviving this whole Georgian-Abkhaz relationship on the societal level. And obviously, another bridge is the Georgian ethnic population in the Gali region, which is, as I said, a very organic, natural bridge between ethnic Abkhaz and Georgians because many economic relations go through Gali. They are truly the ones that push the need for more engagement with Abkhazians, just purely facilitating dialogue with many different spheres.

If you compare the top-down and bottom-up approaches to reconciliation in Georgia, which has been more successful in peacebuilding so far?

Since we are still living in a post-soviet society, the authority of the government is still high, even though there is some distrust. I mean, people still feel it is okay if there are some top-down approaches. I think they will have more impact because when the government doesn't function democratically, we don't know any means of self-mobilization other than NGOs, which is a tragedy. Because, for instance, we don't have labor unions. We don't have, you know, student movements, nothing. It is very hard to really push the bottom-up approach structurally. So, in that sense, it is always impactful if they are some positive policies on the governmental level, and then they go down to society. It has been my observation for a long time.

And do you have some examples of this successful top-down policy?

Lastly, the government reassured that they would be no second front. As was said now dozens of times with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, we will not use this opportunity to engage in war with them. So, this has really played out well in society as well. This last example is the most vivid I can think of now.

What are the main stereotypes about the other side and conflicting narratives that currently harm the peace process?

Nothing has changed from the 90s. The biggest stereotype is that they are guests, and so on. The ones who want to promote a very harsh stance on Abkhazia and South Ossetia use this narrative and stereotype. It is rhetoric that Gamsachurdia used basically. And once again, this is all the product that there has not been and has not started any discussion among the academia, historians, civil society, and government to rethink the past. So this is why it is still attached. When the government does not push for the Russian agenda, this is what happens. They are still with the old ideas and stereotypes.

So the narrative about the Russian-Georgian conflict instead of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict has still been there?

I think, in reality, this is what the government is just pushing that has not been successful on a societal level because people still really feel that there is still conflict between Georgians and Ossetians, and Abkhaz. It is maybe different among youngsters because the young generation really believes this narrative that these territories are occupied, and when Russia is gone, our sisters and brothers are waiting for us to reconcile. But this is still not the majority. The majority of the population feels that there are conflicts with Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The government has been using this narrative only with the international community. They just want to promote the agenda of occupation and so on.

How significantly the separation of societies after 2008 reinforces stereotypes about the other side?

Very much because the golden formula of conflict transformation has been freedom of movement between each other, but since 2008, there has been complete closure for ethnic Georgians. Isolation between each other reinforces the stereotypes. That has also been very counterproductive.

Do you think reconciliation activities contributed to challenging these stereotypes or conflicting narratives? How?

Yes, but not on the scale we would like to see. We mostly work on informal education because it is very hard to go into formal education, mostly with the ones who are interested already learn more about the conflicts. It is very hard to reach large sectors of the population. So we have been successful among students, among high school children who want to learn more. Also, IDPs are very much pro-peace in that sense. They are very receptive. These are the sectors that want to be at the forefront of the dialogue. In that sense, we have succeeded on the very small to medium scale but not on the level that could be a game changer. There is still a lot of progress to be made.

Could the conflict be, in your opinion, resolved without Russian involvement?

We always say that this conflict has three big layers. One is direct Georgian-Abkhaz and South Ossetian, there is the big Georgian-Russian layer, and there is the West-Russia dimension. So, I think that any of these three can be resolved in isolation. So, basically, the way we see that with the current government in Russia, there is no hope that the conflict can be resolved. The only thing that we believe we could do is do our own homework. This is to work within the Georgian society and political elite that we are as a society as a government solid that this conflict should be resolved peacefully. We should be open to reconciliation and so on. In that sense, this is the thing that we are focused on, that we have to do in any other way. But, without Russia truly changing, we don't believe that this conflict will be generally resolved. As we see now and even as Abkhazians see. For example, now the transferring of state dacha to Russia, as well as the upcoming law about foreign agents, they see that the occupation is really happening. They also see that Russia is becoming stronger and stronger. In that sense, no one will truly believe that this conflict could be resolved without Russia.

Do you think that it would be possible in the future to reestablish Georgian territorial integrity? And should the government insists on this issue?

Yes, this is a good question. This goes with a heavy hand with sovereignty, but I think, like everyone, this is a big red line for Georgia in the preservation of state integrity. But, the thing that discussions go internally is whether we are ready to give up the unitary state, whether we are

ready to offer Abkhazia or to transform Georgia into a federation or confederation because the political price is getting higher and higher that we have to pay. So, this is the subject no one has answered because there has not been genuine open discussion inside Georgian society. We are right to push on territorial integrity, but what kind of territorial integrity is the major question for me, which is still very painful to discuss even now when there are only theoretical discussions.

Appendix 4: T. E. (Transcript of interview)

Has your perspective on the conflict between Georgia and Abkhazia changed over the years? If so, how?

This question concerns both my personal life and career interests. I am a displaced person from Abkhazia. From childhood, I had contact with my relatives in Abkhazia and with other ethnic Abkhazians. I was born in Tbilisi a few years after the war. I have never considered enemy Abkhazians. I have always thought that the only way to stir up and resolve ethnic conflicts is through human relations. However, now that the mentioned issue is my professional interest and the subject of research, of course, I began to perceive the actors and circumstances that led to the conflict and the situation we got today in a different way.

Do you think peace activities between Georgia and Abkhazia are still important?

Especially, in parallel with the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the periodic updates of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, in Abkhazians, the persistent fear of the start of the war by Georgia is fierce. Accordingly, I think that taking into account the mentioned situation, peace activities are very important. The mentioned activities further promote the peaceful negotiations of the conflict.

Has your opinion about Abkhaz changed over the years? Do you regard them differently than before?

Nothing has changed for me personally, perhaps this is also due to my family background

Does your participation in reconciliation activities contribute to changing your thinking about the conflict and the other side? If yes, could you describe how?

Unfortunately, in our society, especially among young people, Abkhazians and Ossetians have become part of mythology. Often, even information about the social life of Abkhazians is comical for Georgians. Perhaps because their feeling is that they have their own state, our society does not take it seriously.

Perhaps, I realized that I have a direct relationship with these people, and for me they are not only people living in the occupied territory of Georgia. When talking to them, I always think about what we have in common and whether we will be able to live together.

Do you think Russia is the main opponent in the conflict? Could the conflict be, in your opinion, resolved without Russian involvement?

I think this conflict has several layers. Although this conflict had an ethnic tone, the main inspirer and facilitator is the USSR/Russia. Legally, Georgia's defendant is Russia, as Abkhazia is not a subject of international law. But I think public diplomacy has the most important role in the process of transformation or resolution of this conflict. I think that only Georgia and Abkhazia should discuss the origin of the conflict, its instigation, and ways of future settlement.

Do you believe that it would be possible in the future to reestablish Georgian territorial integrity? And should the government insists on this issue?

As a citizen of Georgia, whose legal address is the city of Sukhumi, I hypothetically believe in the restoration of territorial integrity. At least I want to believe that. But, unfortunately, I do not see this perspective at this stage. I think the state should develop its vision, policy, and priorities in this direction. It should be a thoughtful action, not a pre-election or populist program.

Appendix 5: N. G. (Transcript of interview)

Has your perspective on the conflict between Georgia and Abkhazia changed over the years? If so, how?

Shortly - yes, it has changed. For a long time before actually learning more about the Abkhaz-Georgian conflict, I believed that only Russia was to blame for bad attitudes between Georgians and Abkhaz people, that they occupy the region and Abkhaz people actually want to reunite with the rest of Georgia, but can't as "Russians do not let them". Now I consider it to be a bit patronizing to think this way. I recognize the Abkhazian side as the side in the conflict.

Do you think peace activities between Georgia and Abkhazia are still important?

I think it is of paramount importance for many reasons. Whether Abkhazia reunites with Georgia or gets its independence recognized - it is not going anywhere - we are neighbors, possible trading partners, etc. It is wise for Abkhazia to diversify its export/import dependence to avoid absolute dependence on Russia.

It is also important for Georgian participants to understand that Abkhazians are not "poor brothers of ours" that need saving from "evil Russians". I think such projects bring us down to earth. The same goes for the Abkhazian participants - I have heard that they almost demonize Georgian people, think of them as occupiers who think about how to win war day and night and bring Abkhazia back under Georgia's influence. Face to face meetings make sure that we are not dehumanized. It is harder to be aggressive towards people when you know them personally.

Has your opinion about Abkhaz changed over the years? Do you regard them differently than before?

I used to think that they look more like us (Georgians) and culturally - I still think this way. As for the mentality and way of thinking about life - I think I associate them with early 2000's Georgians or Russians. Of course, it cannot be true as I have not met enough Abkhaz people to generalize it but it is just based on my experience.

Does your participation in reconciliation activities contribute to changing your thinking about the conflict and the other side? If yes, could you describe how?

Of course, it does. Before, I would not even think that I would not want to reestablish Georgian territorial integrity. Now sometimes I think more logically and evaluate - whether the Georgian economy can stand the reintegration of the pretty poor Abkhazian one.

Do you think Russia is the main opponent in the conflict? Could the conflict be, in your opinion, resolved without Russian involvement?

I do not think that Russia is the main opponent, as I mentioned before. I recognize the Abkhaz side as the side. As for the second part of the question - I think it is possible in theory, but I honestly do not know.

Do you believe that it would be possible in the future to reestablish Georgian territorial integrity?

I do not have an answer to this question. Maybe Abkhazia could join Georgia as a confederation but it is very early to talk about it. Scars of the war are still open and the active Russian propaganda makes reconciliation processes even harder.