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## Georgia's New Nationalism: A Better Opportunity for State Building?

### Introduction

The much-discussed question of Georgia's "succession" was resolved in an unexpected manner: On 23 November 2003 – eighteen months before the end of his second term in office, Eduard Shevardnadze, the patriarch of the new Georgian state, resigned. Shevardnadze had ruled the country for 25 years in all: from 1972 to 1985 as first secretary of the Georgian Communist Party, and from 1992 to 2003 as president of an independent Georgia.

Shevardnadze's 1992 return to his homeland was welcomed as an opportunity for deliverance by a country devastated by civil war. He was indeed successful in ending the chaos and laying the foundations of the new state. However, the system of governance he established was highly focused on his person. Shevardnadze thus became – at one and the same time – the sole factor guaranteeing Georgia's stability and a major problem: What would happen when the charismatic patriarch stepped down? Would Georgia descend once again into chaos?<sup>1</sup> To ensure stability, a quasi-hereditary succession (such as has occurred in Azerbaijan or even in Russia) appeared to be a sensible solution.

Events in Georgia have disproved this logic. The overthrow of Shevardnadze did not lead to major turbulence within Georgia's fragile political system. On the contrary, the events can be seen to have given new momentum to a constructive nationalism (nation building), which can lead to a strengthening of state institutions and related social structures in the medium term.

Does this indicate a fundamental change of direction in the development of the Georgian state? Only time will tell. The initial acts of the new government in both domestic and foreign policy allow the identification of but a few general tendencies. This article concerns itself with the first ten months following the "Rose Revolution" (from the end of November 2003 to the start of October 2004). The analysis focuses above all on measures taken to strengthen central government and their consequences for domestic and foreign policy, especially with regard to the resolution of the conflict in Ajaria and Russian-Georgian relations.

A brief exposition of socio-political processes since the start of the 1990s will demonstrate the extent of Georgia's structural problems. These, I

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<sup>1</sup> This problem also exists in other South-Caucasian countries. On this topic, cf. Rainer Freitag-Würminghaus, *Politische Konstellationen im Südkaukasus* [Political Constellations in the South Caucasus], in: *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* B 42/1999, pp. 21-31.

believe, represent both opportunities and obstacles for the development of the Georgian state. They determined Shevardnadze's style of government while simultaneously leading to his fall. They cannot be overcome merely by a change of regime, and will also demand the attention of Georgia's new leaders.

### *Georgia after Independence: Shevardnadze's System of Governance*

Georgia, devastated by civil war, achieved independence at the end of 1991. In January 1992, the country's first president, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, was overthrown by various militia groups. To win international recognition for the new regime, the Military Council recalled as president the former Georgian party leader and Soviet foreign minister, Eduard Shevardnadze, who was respected as a democrat in the West. Shevardnadze took charge of a country in ruin: Power lay in the hands of numerous paramilitary groups, the economy had collapsed, and a new civil war had broken out with supporters of Gamsakhurdia in the west of the country. At the same time, the conflict in the Autonomous Region of South Ossetia escalated once again; and war was also threatening to break out in Abkhazia, eventually doing so in August of that year.<sup>2</sup>

Although Shevardnadze was appointed head of state and succeeded in legitimating his position in the parliamentary elections of 1992, he had to share his power with a number of influential paramilitary leaders, foremost among them Tengis Kitovani, the leader of the National Guard, and Jaba Ioseliani, the leader of the semi-official "Mkhedrioni" militia. It took Shevardnadze until the mid-1990s to consolidate his power and bring the militias under state control. This required him not only to forge numerous domestic and foreign alliances, but also to accept several defeats, e.g. in South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and Georgia's third autonomous area, Ajaria. While the first two regions declared their independence from Georgia in the wake of military confrontations, Ajaria, which is populated by ethnic Georgians, remained formally part of the Georgian state. At the same time, however, Ajaria's leader, Aslan Abashidze, distanced himself from the central government and consolidated his *de facto* sovereignty in the region.

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2 On the early years of independence, see: Jonathan Aves, *Path to National Independence in Georgia, 1987-1990*, London 1991; Suzanne Goldenberg, *Pride of Small Nations*, London/New Jersey 1994 (chapter on Georgia); Shireen T. Hunter, *The Transcaucasus in Transition*, CSIS, Washington D.C. 1994 (chapter on Georgia); Stephen F. Jones, Populism in Georgia: The Gamsakhurdia Phenomenon, in: Donald V. Schwartz/Razmik Panossian (eds), *Nationalism and History: The Politics of Nation Building in Post-Soviet Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia*, Toronto 1994, pp. 127-149; Stephen F. Jones, Adventurers or Commanders: Civil-Military Relations in Georgia, in: Constantine Danopoulos/Daniel Ziker (eds), *Civil-Military Relations in the Soviet and Yugoslav Successor States*, Boulder 1996, pp. 35-52.

During his long career in the Communist Party, Shevardnadze had learned to turn even defeats to his advantage. He was thus able to take advantage of the military defeat in Abkhazia to disempower the paramilitaries while they were dispersed and weakened. The defeat also dealt a severe blow to the anti-Russian tendency in Georgian politics: Georgia joined the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and Shevardnadze signed the agreement on the establishment of Russian military bases in Georgia without provoking significant opposition in Georgia. With Russian help, he ended the ongoing civil war with the followers of his predecessor Gamsakhurdia in western Georgia and took a hard line against paramilitary groups. However, the thaw between Tbilisi and Moscow was short-lived. The two sides had vastly different understandings of what co-operation entailed. For Moscow, it referred, above all, to its military presence in the region (military bases, peacekeeping and border troops), whereas Shevardnadze wanted to use co-operation with Russia to preserve Georgia's territorial integrity and, most importantly, to enhance his own power.

Nevertheless, the brief honeymoon in Georgian-Russian relations did allow him to strengthen his domestic power base. Shevardnadze revived networks of loyalty that had existed since Soviet times and made them the basis of his rule. For the most part, he relied on informal personal relationships, cloaked with the help of formal institutions.<sup>3</sup> Shevardnadze thus established a bureaucratic-patrimonial state, corresponding to the type of politics that had in practice prevailed in Georgia since the 1970s. This style of governance can be represented by a pyramidal power structure, with the ruler at the apex. He bases his power on a range of informal groups, creating new ones (often designated "families") and dissolving old ones at will, playing them off against each other and always keeping a tight grip on the reins of power.<sup>4</sup> An interesting feature of systems of this kind is that they emerge within formal state institutions and make use of the latter's organizational capacities. Admittedly, this makes the creation of a politically neutral bureaucracy all but impossible; nonetheless, in the former Soviet republics, there exist bureaucracies that will serve whoever happens to be their "master".

Shevardnadze's decision to re-establish a Soviet model was not necessarily a matter of personal choice. In a highly traditional society, dismembered by civil war, personal (familial) trust was (and remains) irreplaceable. In such a context, state institutions can only be trusted to work effectively when informal personal contacts are maintained with their leaders. In other words, during the years of chaos, establishing new state institutions on the basis of personal loyalty was a matter of survival for Shevardnadze: Corrup-

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3 For a consideration of similar structures, cf. Wolfgang Merkel/Aurel Croissant, *Formale und Informale Institutionen in defekten Demokratien* [Formal and Informal Institutions in Defective Democracies], in: *Politische Vierteljahresschrift* 1/2000, pp. 3-31.

4 Shevardnadze's influential vassals, who have often also been each other's rivals, have at different times included Jaba Ioseliani, Shota Kviraia, Kakha Targamadze, Nugzar Sajaia and Zurab Zhvania.

tion, nepotism, the sale of offices, and continual changes of personnel aimed to keep the system perpetually in motion.

Ten years later, the means Shevardnadze used to overcome the problems of the 1990s sealed his own fate; he began to fear the growing strength of Georgia's state institutions – and the security sector in particular. When in November 2003 the regime needed to use its repressive apparatus in an attempt to maintain its hold on power, it found that the structures it needed were no longer under its control. Corruption and the sale of offices had so undermined the patronage system within the police force – always considered to be Shevardnadze's power base – that in the end not a single officer remained loyal to the regime. The pyramid system – a suitable model for the consolidation of power in the early 1990s – proved useless ten years later.

Shevardnadze's biggest "error" proved to be his "democratic tendencies". The former Soviet foreign minister and a major player in the creation of the new Europe considered himself the father of Georgian democracy. A commitment to freedom and democracy was necessary to secure Western support<sup>5</sup> for his efforts to strengthen his position both within Georgia and towards Russia. Georgia had neither oil (*vide* Azerbaijan) nor an influential Western diaspora (as does Armenia) to arouse the interest of the West. "The only thing we have to offer is democracy", was how the parliamentary speaker and Shevardnadze's then ally, Zurab Zhvania, expressed it at the time. This comment pointed to how democracy and the regime's pro-Western orientation served a domestic political function, namely to strengthen the regime. To this end, Shevardnadze created a "reform-oriented, democratic wing" among his supporters, which aimed to secure the financial and political support of the West, while the traditional (conservative) wing ensured domestic "stability".

Relations with the West were also determined by the logic of the patronage system inherited from the Soviet Union. During the 1970s and 80s, Shevardnadze ensured that Georgia remained loyal to the Kremlin. This loyalty was rewarded by successive Soviet leaders, who allowed Shevardnadze to act autonomously within the area under his control. Shevardnadze understood the role of the West to be similar: Its task was to provide protection and financial support to his regime both in domestic disputes and with regard to Russia, officially in the interest of furthering the reform process, but without interfering too deeply in "internal matters".<sup>6</sup> This arrangement functioned for a while, but it soon became clear that the West's good faith had been quickly exhausted.

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5 "Western" is used here to refer to the OECD states.

6 Shevardnadze was visibly upset when the former US Secretary of State James Baker presented his plan for establishing the Central Election Commission during a visit to Georgia in the summer of 2003. Baker's aim was to ensure free and fair elections. In Shevardnadze's opinion, however, his former friend's mission amounted to excessive interference in Georgian domestic affairs. Although Shevardnadze agreed with the proposal, his parliamentary majority scuppered the plan.

In the last instance, this “staged democracy”<sup>7</sup> was detrimental for the regime. With financial support from the West and the help of transnational corporations, new zones of freedom were created within Georgian society: non-governmental organizations and an independent media. These were able to disseminate government-critical points of view among the population and establish a basis for the creation of centres of power outside government control. Following the revolution, Shevardnadze stated in a television interview that “I never thought that the kids [author’s note – this refers to the “Kmara” (“Enough”) movement, funded by the Soros Foundation, which made a major contribution to the mobilization of the masses] could get so far just by waving flags. I misread the situation. I should have acted against [George] Soros sooner. He shouldn’t have interfered in politics.”<sup>8</sup> Here, once again, his style of governance was the cause of his downfall: The staged democratic processes destroyed the informal structures based on loyalty.

### *The Prelude to and the 20 Days of the “Rose Revolution”*

On 30 October 2001, officers of the Ministry of State Security entered the building of the independent television station “Rustavi 2”, ostensibly to examine financial irregularities. Whether or not the company’s accounts did in fact breach any of Georgia’s then applicable laws, the population saw the operation as an attack on media freedom. In November, thousands took to the streets in Tbilisi demanding the resignation of the ministers of security and interior affairs, considered the key supports of the regime.

November 2001 foreshadowed the revolution. A new centre of power crystallized within the political system itself, one that knew to exploit the population’s dissatisfaction with social conditions. This new elite came into being within the moderate wing of the government. The former minister of justice, Mikhail Saakashvili, who had resigned in September 2001, formed an alliance of forces opposed to Eduard Shevardnadze.<sup>9</sup> Parliamentary Speaker Zurab Zhvania had, even before the Rustavi 2 incident, written an open letter to Shevardnadze, in which he described the situation in the country as “on the brink of catastrophe”.<sup>10</sup> Following the government’s attempt to close down the independent broadcaster, Zhvania resigned in the hope of encouraging Shevardnadze to dismiss Interior Minister Kakha Targamadze, Security Minister Vakhtang Kutateladze, and Prosecutor General Gia Meparishvili.<sup>11</sup>

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7 Guram Tevzadze, *sakartvelo: dzalauplebis sumulatsiebi* [Georgia: Simulations of Power], Tbilisi 1999.

8 Broadcast by various television channels, e.g. by *Imedi-TV* on 30 November 2003.

9 Cf. Dimitri Bit-Suleiman, Domestic Discord Hampers Georgia, *Eurasia Insight*, 1 October 2001.

10 Eurasianet.org, 29 August 2001, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/georgia/hypermail/200108/0084.html>.

11 Cf. Jean-Christophe Peuch, Shevardnadze unlikely to emerge from crisis unscathed, *Eurasia Insight*, 6 November, 2001.

With the departure of the parliamentary speaker and his group, Shevardnadze lost the last of his moderate supporters.<sup>12</sup>

Nevertheless, the Rustavi 2 protests ended in victory for Shevardnadze, the more experienced political operator. He succeeded in reversing an attack initially aimed at him and using it to destroy two opposition groups. With the sacking of Targamadze (known as “the iron man” in the Georgian press), he disposed of the threat posed by the increasingly powerful interior minister. Targamadze was the successor to Shota Kviraia, the influential interior minister during the 1990s, and as known for largely pursuing his own political goals in the Pankisi Gorge.<sup>13</sup> Shevardnadze also freed himself of the group known as the “reformers”, who demanded “reforms that were too wide reaching”. In the style of a neo-patrimonial ruler, who changes his following to match the political climate, Shevardnadze placed his hope in a new group, headed by Security Secretary Nugzar Sajaia.

This was, however, to be the veteran campaigner’s last victory. Shevardnadze’s manoeuvring failed to quell the population’s discontent. On the contrary, his former associates swelled the ranks of the opposition. For the first time in Georgia’s recent history, the government found itself faced with a challenge it could not master. The West suspended the financial support it provided to the regime<sup>14</sup> and began to support the opposition. The independent television station Rustavi 2 continued to mobilize the population.

Before the 2003 parliamentary elections, the distribution of political power in Georgia was relatively straightforward. Shevardnadze’s party, the electoral alliance “For a New Georgia”, consisted of former communists, corrupt politicians and criminals, populist nationalists, and those who would otherwise have had no chance of making a political career. Nevertheless, most commentators did not expect this group to achieve the seven per cent of the national vote needed for entry to Georgia’s parliament. This was partially confirmed by the 2002 local elections, which resulted in a catastrophic defeat for the governing party, which, for example, was unable to win a single seat on Tbilisi city council. The government was forced to rely on its majority on the electoral commissions, i.e. to manipulate the results. Local authorities and even the police also interfered with the election; not only the results, but also the register of voters were falsified.<sup>15</sup>

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12 Another splinter group left the governing majority before Saakashvili and Zhvania. Its members founded the political movement “The New Right”, which currently forms the opposition in the Georgian parliament.

13 The Pankisi Gorge borders on Chechnya and, for a time, served as a refuge for Chechen fighters. For this reason, Georgia was frequently accused by Russia of supporting terrorism. Targamadze is said to have had contacts with the Chechens (but also with the Russians) and to have made deals that were both financially and politically lucrative.

14 For example, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank temporarily suspended all programmes for Georgia.

15 Cf. Vanessa Liertz, *Demokrawas? Chaos mit System: Betrug bei den Wahlen in Georgien* [Democrawhat? Organized Chaos: Electoral Fraud in Georgia], in: *Die Zeit* 46/2003, 6 November 2003.

Nonetheless, it was a complete surprise when the parliamentary elections were won by the government party. Equally unexpectedly, second place went to the “Agordsineba” party of the authoritarian Ajarian leader, Aslan Abashidze. These two “conservative” groups and a number of pseudo-opposition parties<sup>16</sup> formed the majority in parliament and were thus able to put an end to all attempts at reform. Contradicting the official results, the parallel count of votes carried out by NGOs and the independent media concluded that the government and its allies had lost the election.<sup>17</sup>

However, the opposition was clearly prepared for this turn of events and called for mass demonstrations. The electoral alliances “National Movement” (Saakashvili) and “Democrats” (Burjanadze and Zhvania),<sup>18</sup> together with several smaller parties, united in opposition to the government. The 20 days of the Rose Revolution<sup>19</sup> revealed where the real alliances and the true balance of power lay in Georgia. Most of all, it became clear just how weak a state built around a single person is. Faced with organized pressure, the corrupt security structure of the regime was unable to offer any resistance. Many leading state officials changed sides. The police and other security forces made no attempt to stop demonstrators from storming the parliament building as the president was opening the newly elected parliament. The next day, on 23 November 2003, Shevardnadze stepped down.

### *The New Nationalism*

In the presidential elections that were brought forward to 4 January, 2004, Saakashvili was unopposed, receiving 96 per cent of the vote. That may be “uncomfortable” for a democratic politician, but it is in fact a fairly accurate representation of political reality.<sup>20</sup> Saakashvili was quite deliberate in naming his bloc “National Movement” – in Georgian “Natsionaluri Modzraoba”. The Georgian equivalents of the Latin noun “natio” and the adjective “national” are “eri” and “erownuli”, respectively. “Erownuli” implies an ethnic-

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16 In particular the labour party of the populist Shalva Natelashvili.

17 The main headline of the independent newspaper 24 Saati [24 hours] on the day after the elections was “The Regime is Defeated”. Cf. *24 Saati*, 3 November, 2003, p. A1.

18 Nino Burjanadze became President of the Georgian Parliament on 9 November 2001.

19 The mass demonstrations began on 3 November and reached their climax on 22 November as the demonstrators stormed the parliament building and presidential offices to prevent the opening of the new parliament with its pro-government majority. A number of the demonstrators carried roses, giving the revolution its name and echoing Portugal’s “Carnation Revolution”. The rallies were broadcast live on television. Given the key role played by the media in mobilizing the masses, the revolution may also be called considered a “revolution by media”.

20 The parliamentary elections were held on 28 March. An absolute majority was won by the alliance “National Movement – Democrats”, which forms the current government. The only opposition group to clear the seven per cent hurdle was “Industry Will Save Georgia – New Right”. Both elections were considered an improvement on previous contests. Cf. the OSCE’s evaluation at: <http://www.osce.org/Georgia>.

based conception of nationhood and was often used by Zviad Gamsakhurdia, Georgia's first president, who stood for an exclusive nationalism. Sakashvili, by contrast, prefers the Latin term "natsionaluri", using it to stress the positive aspect of nationalism – its integrative, inclusive aspect. He defines the Georgian nation not ethnically, but politically. To a certain extent, this cultural watershed can stand for the overall goal of the new regime: the establishment of a modern state.

The first acts of the new government give cause for hope that the Georgian hybrid state may be capable of gradually becoming modern. Institutional changes provide the first indications of this: Cabinet government has been introduced, comprehensive vertical and horizontal reforms of the executive have been carried out, and a start has been made in fundamentally improving the financing of public services.<sup>21</sup> Reforms aimed at increasing the efficiency of the highly critical security sector are a matter of urgency.<sup>22</sup> Various reform plans had already been developed under Shevardnadze with the help of Western partners but were never successfully implemented. Following the change of regime, the pace of their execution has now greatly increased. The organs of state security (public prosecution service, police, secret service) are being used above all to combat corruption and criminality, which has already led to the high-profile arrests of well-known politicians and notorious gang bosses. The greater efficiency of the state is also evident in the growing levels of revenue generated by the tax police and the customs service, considered up till now to be the most corrupt public authorities. As a result of tax reform, government revenue was 21 per cent higher in the first quarter of 2004 than in the same period of the previous year. In August 2004, state income and expenditure both rose for the first time since independence, by 106 and 112 million US dollars, respectively.

The initial successes of the new government also have consequences in the area of foreign policy. The West – the USA, the EU and its member states, and international financial organizations – are supportive of the new Georgian regime. A large number of financing projects that were suspended in recent years owing to the Georgian government's lack of willingness to carry out reforms are now back on the agenda. The USA alone has doubled the volume of direct aid it provides to Georgia (to around 160 million dollars in 2004) and has included Georgia in the Millennium Challenge Account

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21 On the one hand, various civil-service departments have been closed and the number of state employees has been reduced. At the same time, funds to provide supplementary pay to senior civil servants and those who work in the security sector have been established with the help of international organizations.

22 The border guards were relocated to the interior ministry and transformed into a border police force. Within the interior ministry itself, a range of reforms have been carried out: Several police forces were combined to create new units with responsibility for carrying out patrols (ensuring order and security) or performing criminal investigations. The troops of the interior ministry have been reassigned to the defence ministry. For further details of the reform plans, cf. Georgia, The Government's Strategic Vision and Urgent Financing Priorities in 2004-2006, Donors Conference, Brussels, 16-17 June 2004.



programme (Georgia will receive some 200 million US dollars within the scope of this programme). This illustrates that Georgia's difficult transformation is not feasible without external support, which may even increase if sufficient progress is made.

### *Ajaria as a First Test Case*

The new government's first major success – both domestically and in terms of foreign policy – was the peaceful resolution of the conflict in Ajaria. The Autonomous Republic of Ajaria, situated in the southwest of the country on the Black Sea, had effectively removed itself from the control of the central government following the break up of the Soviet Union. The local ruler, Aslan Abashidze, possessed his own militia force and controlled the brigade of the Georgian army stationed in the region. His regime received security guarantees, including one from the Russian military base situated near the Ajarian capital Batumi. Unlike Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Ajaria did not declare itself independent. Over 90 per cent of the population are ethnically Georgian,<sup>23</sup> ruling out ethnic separatism. The fundamental problem in Ajaria was the regime's authoritarian-patrimonial style: Ajarian society is structured along traditional lines, with clans playing a major role in social mobilization. Aslan Abashidze ruled the republic in an authoritarian manner, relying on his relatives for support (including in-laws through his marriage to Maguli Gogitidze). While democratic processes slowly developed under Shevardnadze, Ajaria remained an island of authoritarianism.<sup>24</sup>

Shevardnadze avoided any open attempts to tackle the conflict between Tbilisi and Batumi. His state apparatus was too weak to support such a move. In any case, Abashidze was an integral part of his convoluted system of governance. The two practitioners of *realpolitik* frequently entered into short-term alliances. In presidential elections, Abashidze never failed to provide his rival with open or tacit support. The new central government, however, was not interested in continuing this arrangement, but sought to gain control of the entirety of Georgian territory. Moreover, the planned reforms, especially the implementation of more effective customs checks and the fight against smuggling, would be impossible without control of the strategic port of Batumi and the Sarpi customs post on the Turkish border.

Without a doubt, Ajaria was the new regime's first major success<sup>25</sup> and represents one of the few conflicts between central and regional governments

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23 Ajaris, most of whom are Muslims, are ethnically Georgian.

24 Cf. Markus Wehner, *Mit Geschick und Größenwahn* [Method and Megalomania], in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 6 May 2004, p. 7.

25 The status of Ajaria as an Autonomous Republic has remained unchanged. The position of President of the Autonomous Republic was abolished in accordance with the law on power sharing between Tbilisi and Batumi. The Chairman of the Executive Council (government) is nominated by the Georgian president and confirmed by a vote of the Ajarian

in a Soviet successor state to be resolved rapidly and peacefully. The way Abashidze's fall was so carefully engineered also demonstrates the new regime's skill: Abashidze lost his authority in Ajarian society, the central security services broke up the official and unofficial militias that had served the local leader, and the Georgian military carried out manoeuvres near the Ajarian border, which contributed to the regime's psychological collapse. Finally, intensive consultations were held with the international community, in particular with Russia.

### *Relations with Russia*

Abashidze left Batumi together with the secretary of the Russian Security Council, Igor Ivanov. Following a phone-call between Saakashvili and the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, Ivanov flew to Ajaria with the task of persuading Abashidze to step down and seek exile in Russia. Ivanov, in his previous role as Russian foreign minister, had also visited Tbilisi some six months earlier as a mediator during the peaceful transition of power from Shevardnadze. For the first time in a decade, ordinary Georgians were talking about Russia in a positive light.<sup>26</sup>

The new Georgian government has retained the foreign-policy orientation of its predecessor: Priorities include the relationship with the USA in the area of security policy and integration into NATO and the EU.<sup>27</sup> Of equal importance on Georgia's foreign-policy agenda is the improvement of relations with Russia. Saakashvili declared his meeting with his Russian counterpart Putin a turning point in Russian-Georgian relations. Both Russia and Georgia are currently consolidating their state structures, and both countries are interested in ensuring stable development in neighbouring states.<sup>28</sup>

This rhetoric of friendship notwithstanding, problems in Russian-Georgian relations continue to exist:

1. The conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia
2. The Russian bases in Batumi and Akhalkalaki

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Supreme Council (parliament). Border, customs and security matters are directly controlled by the central government.

26 According to numerous commentators, Ivanov merely ensured that "a lost cause was not fought to the bitter end"; cited in: Markus Wehner, *Der Abwickler* [The Liquidator], in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 6 May 2004, p. 10 (author's translation).

27 Evidence of the continuity of Georgia's pro-Western orientation can be seen, for example, in the appointment of Salome Zourabishvili, the former French ambassador in Tbilisi, as the country's foreign minister. Salome Zourabichvili is ethnically Georgian, but spent a considerable time in the French diplomatic service. During a visit to Brussels, Saakashvili declared that Georgia's strategic goals are membership of NATO and the EU.

28 Many Russian experts nevertheless remain sceptical as regards declarations of friendship by the Georgian president. Cf. Sergei Blagov, Saakashvili "Makes Friends" With Putin During Georgian Leader's Moscow Visit, in: *Eurasianet*, 12 February 2004, at: <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav021204.shtml>.

3. The visa requirement for Georgian citizens
4. The control of the Pankisi Gorge on the Chechen border
5. Georgia's security co-operation with the USA.

Georgia has increased its control over the Pankisi Gorge, and Saakashvili agreed with the Russian proposal of carrying out joint border checks on the Chechen segment of the Russian-Georgian border. In return, the visa requirement for Georgians travelling to Russia may soon be dropped.

In other areas, however, there have been no significant breakthroughs. The two sides remain at loggerheads on the issues of military bases and the orientation of Georgia's security policy. Georgia would like to close the Russian military bases in Batumi and Akhalkalaki within three years; Russia estimates that it will take at least eleven years, or seven with foreign (e.g. US) financial help.<sup>29</sup> Moscow is concerned at the co-operation between Georgia and the USA in the area of security policy and would like to conclude an agreement with Georgia – currently in preparation – asserting that Georgia will not be allowed to agree to the stationing of any foreign troops on its soil following the withdrawal of the Russian troops. Georgia, for its part, is not interested in undertaking such a commitment given the increasing likelihood of its joining NATO at some point in the future.

The escalation of the conflict in South Ossetia in July and August and the terrorist attack in the North Ossetian town of Beslan in September 2004 have led to further tension in Russian-Georgian relations. Tbilisi accuses Moscow of having supported the regime in South Ossetia and of having sent Cossack units to the region, while, following the tragedy in Beslan, Moscow closed the border to Georgia and once more raised the question of Chechen fighters on Georgian territory. These events make clear just how difficult it may be to bring about a qualitative and above all a rapid improvement in Russian-Georgian relations.

### *Conclusions*

Georgia has a new flag, a new national anthem, and a new coat of arms. These are the symbols of a new attempt at state building. Is this attempt more promising than the one carried out at the start of the 1990s?

Saakashvili's initial successes are impressive. However, the view that the available supply of relatively easy successes has already been used up is gaining support. While the Rose Revolutions in Tbilisi and Batumi were by no means easy to secure, the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia are incomparably more complex. Especially in view of their ethnic background, they are not easily soluble by the "tried-and-tested" means of a revolution, as

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29 Following the conclusion of a recent agreement between Russia and Georgia, the Russian bases are set to close by the end of 2008.

the escalation of the conflict in South Ossetia clearly showed. The Georgian government's attempt to repeat the events in Ajaria in South Ossetia led to violent clashes with loss of life on both sides and the central government was forced to call off its offensive.

Saakashvili has declared that his next challenge is to deal with Georgia's ailing economy. This requires not only a comprehensive effort to tackle corruption and the structural causes of corruption, but also the enhancement of political, legal and social conditions, to encourage, for example, foreign investment in the country. In this connection, it is not rare to hear the view expressed that Georgia's patrimonial state has not really ceased to exist, but that there has merely been a "change of guard" with one elite replacing another. The new leadership is said to make use of the same methods as the old one.<sup>30</sup>

The question of whether the second wave of Georgian nationalism will succeed depends on a large number of developments – not only domestic, but also regional and international. It is thus clear that it will only be decided in the years to come. What is apparent, on the other hand, is that after a decade of independence which left it considered an incompetent "failed state", Georgia has received an new and unexpected opportunity – one in which it is being supported by the international community. This opportunity is one that could benefit all the countries of the former Soviet Union.

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30 Cf. the article on the alleged redistribution of Georgia's lucrative businesses, in: *Akhali Versia* 44/2004, 17-23 May 2004, pp. 3-4, 6.