



# Too Much Memory Too Much Amnesia

## History and History Teaching in Abkhazia and Georgia

Joke van der Leeuw-Roord  
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International Alert.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Arrival airport Abkhazia

The few arriving at the airport of Sukhum/i will find an almost empty place with two Aeroflot aircrafts standing idly. The atmosphere is very friendly and even hospitable, the border guard is a very nice guy and it looks like you pass the custom controls without any problem. However, despite the fact that tickets for the UN-flight - which brings you from Tbilisi, via Senaki to Sukhum/i - are only issued if you have a permit to enter Abkhazia, it comes out that none of the internationals on our flight are known to have



such a permit. Only Lada Zimina, who has a Russian passport, can enter. For the others, of Dutch, German and Swedish origin, the waiting begins. Phone calls are made but little happens. It looks like that this procedure is designed to serve the needs of a little café in the airport building. After a small hour I am the first to receive my passport back and am invited to enter Abkhazia. After another hour we leave the Swedish colleagues behind, as one of them is still not allowed to enter. It will take another three hours before she also receives clearance. This is how you enter free Abkhazia, an internationally unrecognised independent country, which is officially part of the Republic of Georgia.

### 1.2. Background of the mission

My reason to travel to this country is a request of International Alert (London) to compose a report on issues of history in Abkhazia and Georgia. International Alert requests this report as an action in their Eurasia Programme in the Caucasus. This programme aims *'to empower peace actors and to support their efforts; to build their capacities; to expand the constituencies and networks of peace actors and to achieve sustainability of peace efforts in the Caucasus'*.

This programme on confidence building between the Abkhaz and Georgian societies is running since 1998. The current project *'Support for Georgian and Abkhaz civil society partners in the implementation of their confidence-building initiatives'* is funded by the European Commission Rapid Response Mechanism. The goal of the project is to conduct a series of joint activities between International Alert, the Caucasus Dialogue Foundation and other partner organisations in Abkhazia and Georgia to support the confidence-building process between the Abkhaz and Georgian civil societies, and in particular, to develop greater understanding on the issues of history in the context of the Abkhaz / Georgian conflict, by conducting in-depth research into these topics and providing appropriate recommendations for follow-up work.

In 2003 a meeting in Moscow was initiated jointly by an Abkhaz and a Georgian historian, where a group of historians from both sides participated. Unfortunately, despite the good atmosphere in Moscow, the participants became rapidly entangled in difficult and controversial debates when they returned home. The meeting demonstrated that dialogue was possible and therefore it was decided to carry out an in depth research into the situation, to identify obstacles, to find approaches how to tear these down and to come up

with suggestions how to make history and history teaching play a more constructive role in both societies.

### **1.3. Methodology**

This research was carried out as a participatory research, and included stakeholder consultation with a broad constituency including academics, history educators, students, civil society, private sector and national and international organisations and was supported by appropriate desk research. As preparation for the trip I read a variety of articles and books related to the past and present of Georgia and Abkhazia. It was particularly difficult to obtain (historical) background knowledge on Abkhazia. During my trip I was able to acquire more historical literature, and especially for my contacts in Abkhazia that was very important. In the end of my trip, I had the good fortune to visit Prospero books in Tbilisi, which offered a good variety on (history) books on the region. However profound information about Abkhazia and its history was again not present among its good store of books. As a result there is not an equal balance between written resources from Abkhazia and Georgia. However the component of the mission that took place in Abkhazia was very well developed and gave me the opportunity to have lengthy in-depth interviews with a variety of historians and other stakeholders. As a result I believe that in the end the balance between the information from the Abkhaz perspective and the information from the Georgian perspective is rather equal.

### **1.4. Report**

This report is based on a visit to Abkhazia and Georgia which lasted 2 weeks, and on background literature I was able to identify. Such journey, however well planned and intensive, still gives a partial picture for a variety of reasons. The report is based on information given by a wide variety of interviewees. Most of them are historians and persons active in civil society, almost all of them living in the capitals of both countries. Although they were able to give me a multiplicity of perspectives, their opinions reflect the perspectives of people living in the centre of politics and society. The voice of more remote areas was not heard. Further, all people met were known to the local organizations or to me, so it is obvious that some people who could have made important contributions, are missing due to these practical circumstances. For Georgia, the group of specialists on national Georgian history could have been better represented. I tried to cross reference the information given by the interviewees; however the opportunities to check this information in depth for validity were limited. Not only for reasons of time constraint but also as a result of language deficiency. I miss the knowledge of Georgian and Russian and I am not a native speaker of English. Notwithstanding the excellent interpretation by Lada, Eka and Misha, this report is based on double interpretation. Because of this I hold it for possible that I have misinterpreted some of the information I received.

### **1.5. Spelling and names**

The relations between Abkhazia and Georgia are so sensitive that it is almost impossible not to hurt feelings. During the interviews I have stressed that I neither wished to take sides in the conflict nor that I wanted the interviewees to hold that attitude against me. In the report I have used the country names in alphabetical order, and use the term country also for

Abkhazia. The name of the capital of Abkhazia is spelled different in both countries. Therefore I use the compromise Sukhum/i.



## 2. PAST

### 2.1. Soviet Historical Heritage



*Stalin Museum in Gori, Georgia*

History was a popular university subject for university studies in the Soviet Union. As a result there were many trained historians, working in a variety of appropriate careers, such as Universities, Research Institutes and education. In 2005 still, both in Abkhazia and Georgia the amount of historians in an academic position is still very large. The Historical Institute of the Academy of Science in Georgia has alone 200 scholars employed (average age above 55). And in Sukhum/i University alone, in a country with less than 300.000 inhabitants, there were as many as 10 Professors of History and 40 other academic staff members for History.

In the former Soviet Union many historians were trained as archaeologists or as specialists in ancient and medieval history. Historians trained in the period after 1800 were a relatively small group. The arguments, which are generally used to explain this phenomenon, are the fact that in the old Soviet system, modern history was very much under the influence of the socialist ideology. By studying a more distant past, historians avoided to be under severe ideological pressure for their research projects as well as their publication. As a result of these circumstances I met during my trip many historians, whose fields of study did not exceed events in the Sixteenth Century. They were also historians with a strong focus on the national past of both nations. Modern historians were almost absent, certainly if they had a research focus on national history.

However, the methods used for the study and research in history - if it had its focus on a distant or a nearer past- were similar. That meant a strong emphasis on theory. Scrutinizing evidence and cross referencing was not always applied according to modern academic standards.

In the Soviet Union history was written within very strict frameworks. For Abkhazia and Georgia this meant in the first place application of the general Soviet historiography and in the second place operating within the local Georgian format. Everything that was situated outside these frameworks could not be published or only with the greatest difficulty.

The general assessment of the Georgian school of history before 1992 was rather high by the Abkhaz historians, the quality of their historiography was considered good. Some stressed that in the past one could even speak of *equality* between Georgian and Abkhaz historians. However others pointed out that this was only when they worked on Georgian history. In the Soviet time quite a lot of Georgian speaking historians taught in Sukhum/i but it was very rare that Abkhaz historians were invited to lecture in Tbilisi. In fact they could remember only one event, when a professor of Abkhaz history was invited in Tbilisi to give a course on Abkhaz history.

### 2.2. Theories in historiography

The historiographical frameworks in use during the Soviet times were not consistent, as they were depending on the (whims of) political leadership in Moscow and in Georgia. During

several periods, the Soviet framework was affected by heavy censorship and in some times certain theories were fashionable, whereas later they were considered incorrect or even falsifications. The discourse on Abkhaz and Georgian history during the Soviet Union followed results of academic work as well as political fashions. Theories were developed, abandoned and sometimes recalled. During my trip it was obvious that some of the theories developed in the Soviet-period were still in place or were even reinvented.

One of such theories was the discourse if the Abkhaz-Georgian state in the Medieval Ages could be considered a unified country or as an integrated country. As a result of the whimsical historiographical Soviet framework, it had been possible during one period to publish using the concept of a unified country instead of an integrated country. However, in other times such approach had been forbidden. This problem was still very topical and was one of the historical theories about early history, which was used as a weapon in the conflict which emerged in the last decades of the Twentieth Century between Abkhaz and Georgian historians. Later in this report, in section 3.13, an overview of the most contested historical theories between Abkhazia and Georgia.

The methodology of the subject developed in the Soviet Union along its own lines, as well. In the last three or four decades of the Twentieth Century, history in the Western World developed into a study including a high variety of dimensions such as social and cultural history, everyday life, gender studies and multiculturalism, human rights and environmental issues. The focal point of Soviet history changed far less and kept its emphasis the Marxist explanatory mode with focus on political and military history. Sources for research were generally official documents, kept in archives. Non-official documents or pictorial evidence were hardly considered serious sources for historical information.

### **2.3. Political influence**

Most historians I have been meeting during this trip had been aware of the fact that politicians specified how history should be interpreted. And obviously they had accepted this fact; otherwise a career in the subject was not possible. In only a few post-socialist countries university professors for history were replaced after the change of the political system. As far as I know only in Eastern Germany there was an intensive process of transformation. However, this process was not a result of introspection and internal debate of those involved but more through a take over by western German historians.

In general, the legacy of communism on historical research and the teaching of history are in post-communist and Soviet countries not sufficiently addressed, neither by academics nor by politicians and society. Historians in these countries were not questioned about their support for the previous political system. By changing their outlook from supportive (and sometimes even ardent) communists to supporters of the national cause, they developed often into participants of the most vocal groups supporting independent statehood and nationalist political stands.

### **2.4. Academic Isolation**

This lack of transformation of the old guard historians has hampered the international relations and exchange with western colleagues since 1989/91, as many western historians considered their academic contributions to the international discourses on history of little value. Most of the older historians from Central and Eastern Europe were and are internationally ignored. This attitude has been counter productive for the innovation of the

subject. And it probably strengthened negative attitudes towards their Western colleagues. Several historians in Georgia stressed that there was hardly any impact of political changes on the study of history. There is a big lack of modern subject literature. And there are no possibilities to publish in international publications in order to put themselves on the historical map.

### **2.5. National instead of regional history**

In the Soviet era, many academic publications and most school history textbooks were written in Moscow, however in the different republics local universities also contributed to research and education. Since the 1970's Moscow stimulated a development towards regional textbooks about Caucasus history and therefore historians from Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia were invited to publish. However, I was told that they were not able to find common grounds for such undertakings and therefore only produced national narratives. One interviewee stressed that this was an unfortunate failure and that these national narratives had a direct influence on the process of disintegration of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s.

### **2.6. Georgian school history**

In school education the position of Georgia was unique in the Soviet Union. History of the titular group had been part of the school history curricula of the different Soviet Republics. However the amount of time allocated such national history had been very limited. Georgia was an exception, as students and pupils were all through their school careers allowed to follow one hour per week national history. During my trip I noticed an exceptional high degree of sense of the past among those, outside the historical profession. What in other countries in Europe could be a cause of jealousy - the lack of historical awareness among citizens - is a problem in Abkhazia and Georgia. The mythological level in the representation of the Abkhaz and Georgian past is so high, that one only could realise how important it is to improve the standards of the subject history in this region.

### **2.7. Borjomi Meetings**

1978 was a decisive year for the relations between Abkhaz and Georgian historians. In that year Abkhaz historians complained to Moscow about the condescending attitudes of the Georgian historians and archaeologists. They also complained that Abkhaz artefacts and other elements of cultural heritage were in the hands of the Georgian museums and sites and they reclaimed them for their own museums. Although the claim for restitution of cultural heritage to Abkhazia was not honoured, Moscow agreed that some other complaints were fair and attempted to improve communication between the Abkhaz and Georgian historians.

As a result of the events of 1978 the so called *Borjomi meetings* were organised from 1979 onwards to enhance a mutual and equal Abkhaz and Georgian historical dialogue. These meetings were assessed in a different way by different participants from both countries. Some interviewees saw them as helpful meetings, which allowed them to have a wider understanding of the historical production in the area, others found them a helpful tool for dialogue, which in a way served the purpose for better understanding. Special speakers were invited in order to update the level of information of the audience. Some of these meetings have even led to common archaeological expeditions. But there was also a group of interviewees, who considered these meetings hypocritical events in the best Soviet tradition

with lots of food and drinks. During the meetings controversial topics were avoided, and only (carefully pre-selected) invitees were allowed to participate.

I tried to find a pattern in how these meetings were assessed by the different interviewees. However in the limited scope of this inquiry, it was hard to find out in how far the perspective of the participating historians had been depended on personal character than on the level of political stand or involvement.

It is evident that Abkhaz and Georgian historians assess the cooperation before the war differently. Some of them stressed a high degree of hypocrisy and no genuine wish to communicate where others said that there were disagreements but that they, at that time, were not very much based on ethnicity. The disagreement among ethnic lines developed later. Both sides blame each other for the deterioration of relationships.

## 2.8. Ideological Conflict

In the late 1980's the discourse on national history between Abkhaz and Georgian historians became very heated. The historians became soldiers in the information warfare. Both sides fuelled at that time politicians like Gamsakhurdia with arguments for their cause. For many Abkhaz the role of Georgian historians in the pre-war situation had been excessively negative. They complained that Georgian historians had been able to access television where they were able to express their eccentric and radical views. They were certain that the behaviour of their Georgian colleagues had led to a certain degree of hysteria among the population. They stated that Abkhaz historians felt challenged in those days and therefore started to develop counter theories. In their opinion there had been enough Georgian intelligentsia in the early days of the conflict in Abkhazia who also did not agree with this historical propaganda. However those historians had not been able to stop the escalating process. I do not have had an opportunity to verify their opinions, however the firmness of some Georgian historians that the Abkhaz were responsible for all aggression, made me aware that they could have told me similar stories.

In Georgia I met with some refugee historians, who felt responsible for the outbreak of the conflict in 1992. They had at that time agreed to the division of the University of Sukhum/i along ethnical lines. And in the meeting in the Caucasus House in Tbilisi they deplored this unfortunate move and agreed that the actions of the Georgian army had made things unnecessarily explosive. They felt responsible that they, as intellectuals, had not been enough aware of the dangers of their behaviour.

## 2.9. October 22, 1992



*Burned-out farmlands outside of Sokhum/i  
13 years on*

The war of 1992-1993 left deep scars, also among historians and history educators. For the Abkhaz historians, the destruction of the Abkhaz Institute for Language, Culture and History and the National Archives of Abkhazia on October 22<sup>nd</sup> 1992 became the point of reference. At that moment the Georgian army, in the eyes of the Abkhaz historians, deliberately tried to erase the history and culture of Abkhazia. Some of them even suggested that this act was carried out to destroy evidence about the rights of the Abkhaz

people on their lands and referred to this event as an example of *cultural genocide*. They were still very upset by these events and saw the fact that the Georgian government has not apologized for this act as a token of unwillingness to improve mutual relations. They also showed anger that the European international organisations and countries have until this moment not undertaken any action. They regarded this as a lack of acknowledgement from the side of Europe and as one of the signs that Europe does not care about Abkhazia.

The impact of the events of October 22<sup>nd</sup> 1992 has been crucial for the historical community of Abkhazia. Many original documents are gone and only in St Petersburg, Moscow and in Tbilisi original and copied materials are available. The Abkhaz historians complained that travelling to all these places is difficult or even impossible for them.

The problem of the destroyed Archive and Institute was mentioned by most of the interviewees in Abkhazia; however they assessed its impact slightly differently. Some people stated that for this reason historical work has more or less come to a stand still and PhD-studies are virtually impossible. One interviewee complained that the Georgian authorities made it even impossible for him to consult Georgian archives placed on internet. Others stated though, that with difficulty, it is still possible to work on original materials and by now some documents are again available in Abkhazia. It was true that travelling to Russia is expensive however possible as most of the Abkhaz citizens have Russian passports. And it was even possible to visit the archives in Tbilisi, however for a variety of reasons they did not wish to do so.

## 2.10. The Georgian Perspective

The impact of the war was for the Georgian historians differently. They referred mostly to the fact that the Abkhaz army in 1993 was able to defeat the army of Georgia and to expel a large group of refugees. Many of the Georgian historians denied the Abkhaz army such capacities and stressed over and over again that it had been



*Grave Names in Sokhum/i*

the Russians together with North Caucasian troops, and especially Chechens, who were responsible for the defeat. They stated sometimes in alternating states of emotions about the brutal behaviour of the Abkhaz or about the great sense of responsibility of the Abkhaz population towards their Georgian speaking neighbours in peril. If they adhered to this last stand, they also stated that the Abkhaz had hardly participated in the fights, but had been mostly helping Georgian fugitives. As soon as I was in Sukhum/i I tried to look into this issue. The war memorial in Sukhum/i lists surnames of mainly Abkhaz fighters. However this does of course not necessarily mean that there were no Russians or North-Caucasians involved, as their presence could be hushed up by simply not stating their names on the war memorial.

## 2.11. Inquiry

Most historians I met in Abkhazia and Georgia asked me how I assessed the causes and reasons for the conflict and which nation I held responsible for the beginning of the violence. As they themselves were quite eager to express their opinions, I was already informed by their mostly mono causal explanations, before I could even try to answer this complex question. I understood that very little is really known and that responsible historians have



an important role to play. At this moment the events of 1992-1993 are mainly presented as opinions, rumours and stories. It would certainly help if a more objective research would be able to reveal some proximity of truth. Perhaps such information could help to diminish the unsavoury debates on the events in both countries, but perhaps more important could help local historians to develop basic research skills and improve the quality of the subject.

### **2.12. Post-war attempts to meet**

After the war the historians from Abkhazia and Georgia did not meet. Only in 2003, on initiative of George Anchabadze, a historian from mixed Abkhaz/Georgian origin, a group of more moderate historians from Abkhazia and Georgia came together in Moscow. The meeting had, contrary to the Borjorni meetings, addressed sensitive issues, which had led to intense debates. The interviewees, who had been present, stated that the meeting had been far from easy, but had at the same time showed that exchange of opinions was possible and even useful. Some historians who participated in the meeting even acknowledged that the role of historians in the conflict had not been very positive and that it would be the duty to reverse that attitude.

The problem of such meetings is always that they do not require strict outcomes and that the participants do not feel responsible for the outcomes nor for the implementation of the results. And also the results of this meeting were not sustainable. The participants agreed to continue the talks; however made no concrete plans how to proceed. The group of historians from Abkhazia met after their return with heavy criticism. The critics considered them not representative for the historical community, and some opponents of the meeting felt that nobody in Abkhazia should engage in talks with Georgian colleagues. Some criticised the participants in the meeting because they should not have defended the Abkhaz case sufficiently and others were dissatisfied because they were excluded; they had not been invited to participate. As a result of these negative attitudes no other meetings were organised. However there is a positive outcome, which should not be hidden. The meeting created awareness for the impact of historians and history educators on the past and present situation in Abkhazia and Georgia and the need to address issues of history, in order to facilitate a peace process. It had put history on the agenda.

### 3. PRESENT

#### 3.1. Different societies

Politics and history are still very much intermingled in present day Abkhazia and Georgia. In all talks the interviewees constantly referred to everyday politics. In Georgia most interviewees were very critical about the present political situation. Much of this criticism can be traced back to the disappointments about the slow changes since the Rose Revolution. However, also actions of change, which were in the process of implementation, are target for criticism. During the last days of my visit, demonstrations against the highly ambitious plans of the Minister of Education were held on the stairs of the parliament building until late in the evening. And also the policy of the Minister of Defence was observed with great reservation.



*Sukhum/i – a photographic impression of the capital of Abkhazia*

This critical attitude was totally different from the situation I encountered in Abkhazia. The Abkhaz population is very isolated; most of them have not been able to leave the country since 1993. Due to the sanctions placed on the country, only a few of them have had the opportunity to travel to Russia. As a result of this isolation, people were generally little informed about the wider world and had therefore few opportunities to compare their situation with others. There was amazingly little self-criticism and obvious problems were almost denied or at least the responsibility of the government and politicians was hardly questioned.

#### 3.2. Ongoing War

The interviewees Abkhazia consider their country a castle under siege. As far as I understood it, it is to a large extend a self sustained siege. The continuation of the state of war is in Abkhazia generally held responsible for most problems. Dissatisfaction of the population

with the present situation in Abkhazia is counter argument with the claim that most of the attention is focused on the continuation of the conflict with Georgia. The army has to be kept in full strength and each man is, as reservist, to return to the front for 12 days every half year. Free speech is limited because they live in a country at war.

Very few of the people I have met showed any hesitation that these arguments were valid and therefore were willing to suffer and accepted to live under very difficult conditions. People in Sukhum/i are very aware of the destruction of their town but at the same time they are very proud to have their own country. Despite all the problems they are willing to sacrifice. In Sukhum/i people regularly informed me that their situation was not bad, despite the fact that there were very few shops, hardly any cars and the food was very basic.

In Abkhazia *the war* is a concept that covers everything. There is no personal appropriation and people do not speak about their own role in the conflict. However they do consider themselves as victims. As argument for the lack of interest in a dialogue or cooperation with their colleagues in Georgia they regularly emphasised that they are victims, that the suffering is still fresh and that they need time to heal before they could engage in any cooperative or collaborative work.

### 3.3. Public opinion

I was made to understand that the role of the public opinion in Abkhazia is very important. During our in depth talks about possible cooperation it could happen, that, when we had *in theory* been able to remove all practical obstacles for such cooperation, in the end the public opinion in Abkhazia was the final ( and only real) reason not to undertake any cooperation. Personal choices and responsibility looked impossible, the society condemned such actions. If I asked what would happen, when people would disregard this public opinion, interviewees gave as argument *otherwise you will be an outcast in our society*.

### 3.4. Politics

Despite the long talks in Abkhazia it was very hard to receive some wider understanding of any different groupings in society and among historians. Internal differences, if existing, were kept in very low profile towards me. They hinted sometimes to differentiated opinions but it was almost impossible to get a wider understanding of possible disagreements. It was clear that the recent elections had caused great controversy, but it was impossible for me to get a clear understanding of the different political stands of the five presidential candidates. However on one point there was certainly no difference of opinion: Abkhazia should be independent.

In Abkhazia as well as Georgia, it looks like politicians benefit from the conflict situation. In Georgia it appeared to me that the great dissatisfaction with the policy of the new government of Michael Saakesvili makes it necessary for his government to focus the attention of the people on the ongoing conflict with Abkhazia (and South-Ossetia), as it diverts the attention of the difficult personal circumstances. When I asked people to judge the effect of this policy, I got double messages. Some stated that the aggressive policy of the Ministry of Defence towards Abkhazia and Ossetia was approved by the majority of the Georgian people but others said that the majority of the Georgian population opposed such policy. However listening to people, one could observe such quick changing emotions about

the way the conflict could be solved that it seemed people could adhere to and reject the government policy within a few minutes. A reasonable assessment about possible attitudes of either general public or historians towards options for conflict resolution is in my opinion impossible. Often (younger) Georgian historians stressed a policy of economic seduction as solution for the conflict; however I am far from sure that they would react rationally if violence would occur.

The new political leadership in Abkhazia and in Georgia gave people hope for new opportunities for negotiations and dialogue. However, many also had doubts because the new Abkhaz president Sergei Bagapsh is very cautious not to show too positive attitudes to Georgia. The Abkhaz government feared that would weaken their public support inside Abkhazia and in the government of Georgia; there are some hawks who express very aggressive language towards Abkhazia. The situation keeps being very tense.

### **3.5. Russia**

In Georgia there are strong anti-Russian emotions. The way the Georgian historians (mis)used and referred to Russia and Russians is disturbing. In a country where ethnicity is such a dominant concept, words like *Soviets*, *communists* and *Russians* are often interchangeable and used without a proper definition. Georgian communists are referred to as Russian agents. It shows a policy of denial of responsibility for the recent past, which was especially interesting as most of the Georgian historians I spoke with were appointed (long before) the end of communism.

In the opinion of most of those I have been talking to in Georgia, the Russians caused the conflict, and are responsible for the continuation of the problems. Therefore they claim that the Russians can not be negotiation-partners in the possible solution procedures.

In Abkhazia the anti-Russian attitude is certainly less. However the pro-Russian attitude the Georgians ascribe to the population of Abkhazia is exaggerated. Quite some interviewees expressed a wish for more western support, as an opportunity to decrease Russian influence. People felt that the western world has left them on their own.

### **3.6. Refugees or IDP's**

In all the talks in Georgia people referred to the situation of the people who left Abkhazia due to the war. They are called refugees or IDP's, the use of these terms depending on the perspective of the country. '*IDP's*' is used in Georgia since it reflects perception of Georgia that Abkhazia and Georgia are a unified state. '*Refugees*' is the term in Abkhazia, making the statement that the conflict was between two separate countries. This group is a very important element in the awareness of the Georgian people that the conflict is still going on. Some Georgian interviewees even stressed that any dialogue with colleagues from Abkhazia would only be possible after all refugees had returned to Abkhazia.

In Abkhazia however the problem of the refugees was silenced. It was very hard to make people reflect on this issue and people hardly responded when I asked questions about the situation of the refugees and their perspectives to return to Abkhazia. Very few of the persons I met saw opportunities for them to return and if so, only those people who had not been participating in the fighting should be allowed to return. But even the most moderate

elements in the Abkhaz society feared that if these people could return, their life would be very unpleasant. They believed that the present population would not accept them as fellow citizens. (And the position of the group which has been able to return gives evidence of that opinion) It was also clear to all people I spoke with in Abkhazia that return of the mass of the persons in exile was only possible after a full independence of Abkhazia. Some Abkhaz historians also pointed out that only indigenous Georgians could return to Abkhazia. Migrant Georgians should be excluded. On my question, how to define these groups, they were not able to give clear criteria who would be considered an indigenous and who a migrant Georgian.

Only one person was willing to reflect on the moral implications of this example of ethnic cleansing. He agreed that it could not be considered as a positive action; however, he defended this attitude as the only manner for self-preservation of the Abkhaz nation. The IDP's, who I happened to talk to, in Georgia were very young during the war but were still carrying arms at the time. When I asked them why they were fighting, they answered they were simply defending their houses and families. They wanted to return to Abkhazia only in a united Georgia which should not be reclaimed by violence but along the ways of economic seduction or temptation. However, through wider questioning, they were even willing to consider returning to an independent Abkhazia but feared than very much Abkhaz domination.

### **3.7. Position of minority communities**

The observance of minority rights in Abkhazia as well as in Georgia is limited. The dominance of the titular nations in public life is overwhelming in both countries. At the history faculty in Abkhazia for example, the majority of staff and students are ethnic Abkhaz, despite the fact that they are a minority group in their own society. And in the political leadership of the country the titular group is also over-represented. Although I do not have similar information about the situation in Georgia, the historians I met were predominantly of Georgian origin.

Historians and history educators show in their work also little interest in *others* in their past societies. As result, different ethnic, religious and language communities are hardly addressed, neither in historical research, the study of history nor in history textbooks. It was astonishing that the Abkhaz interviewees were little self critical regarding the exclusionary policy they follow. They all criticize the policy of the Georgian titular dominance in the past but at the same time they support the present similar policy in their own country.

### **3.8. Sense of the past**

Sense of the past of the general public in Abkhazia and in Georgia is amazingly strong. Talking to young and old, everybody seems to be able to reproduce the respective national narratives. As both sides are reproducing negative interpretations of 'others' in their society and of their neighbours, it is clear that this sense of the past is not very helpful in building bridges between the different communities and neighbouring countries. When questioning people about how they look into the past it came out that people hardly reflect on the content and impact of these stories. They just consider them true accounts of the past which should be told, irrespective of its negative outcomes.



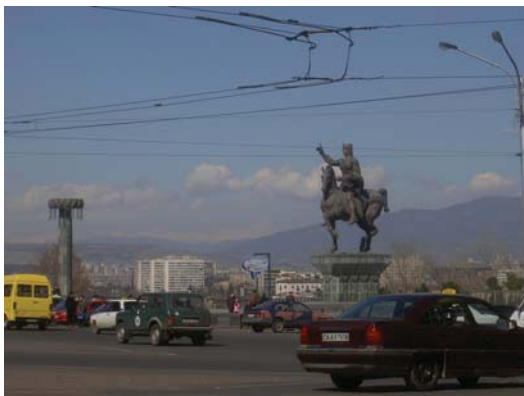
### 3.9. Fact, opinion and interpretation

Historians in Abkhazia as well as in Georgia have a great trust in facts and believe that by assembling facts they will find historical truth. They have difficulty with the idea that interpretation is the key word for history and that facts only help to develop such interpretation. The facts they use are based on sources; however there is a lack in cross-referencing the sources. They referred very often to sources from the 9-12<sup>th</sup> Century but did not convince me that they do enough to critically analyse their validity.

### 3.10. Men rule, women work

Most historians I talked to were men, mostly above 50, working in Universities or Research Institutes. Unfortunately I met with very few history educators, the few I met were women, as education in both Abkhazia and Georgia is a field for women. The lack of presence of women in the target group of academic historians and history educators is an interesting issue as women in Georgia as well as Abkhazia are in charge of most of the general work. Men are more often unemployed and have more problems to take on jobs that are of lesser status or quality than they are trained for. Some of the historians were remarkably open and informative about their incredible low salaries. They also almost generally referred to loss of their status. However they cling to their positions, although many of them show very little energy or initiative. And still, as soon as it comes to power women are hardly visible and men play the decisive roles

### 3.11. National History as a mirror of pain and pride



*King David, 'The Builder'. Tbilisi, Georgia*

The national histories of Abkhazia and Georgia are extreme examples of the general phenomenon in history and history education to present the national history as a mirror of pain and pride. National histories are presented with a strong emphasis on suffering, inflicted by others. They also focus on those periods where their (imagined) country was great and mighty. In general negative episodes are silenced or underexposed. In the case of Abkhazia and Georgia the role of enemy empires such as Persia, Russia, and the Ottoman Empire/Turkey receive a lot of emphasis. In the Abkhaz

national history also Georgia plays a (major) role as enemy.

The Georgians want to point out that the history of their country is a very long one. They pretend that there is one Georgia, which exists already from ancient times and which never conquered any other area. Almost all Georgian historians stressed the fact that Georgia has never attacked any other country; it has always followed a peaceful policy to enlarge its territory. It was only a victim of attacks from others.

As example for common pride there is the Abkhaz/Georgian Mediaeval Golden Age, when both entities were united under common rulers, and therefore could play an important role in the region. Both Georgians and Abkhaz use history as a tool to demonstrate the importance of their centuries old civilisations. Georgia aims to prove that Abkhazia was always part of their (very old) country and Abkhazia has the opposite target to show its separated position throughout most of its history.

Historians in the region practise a blame game. They give the impression that they can not accept the course of events in the past and would like to have the power to change it according to their own needs. The vital reflection of historians in Abkhazia and Georgia on the instrumentalisation of their subject for political purposes and on the other hand on their responsibility as citizens to positively contribute to society is totally missing. This is valid for their judgement of the situation in their individual countries but also in the regional framework of the Caucasus and for Europe as a whole.

### **3.12. Information warriors**

Such mirror of pride and pain is rather common in many countries all over the world; however the violence and civil war of the late 1980's and early 1990's in the region strongly influenced the national narratives. In Abkhazia and Georgia the historians fuelled the general political climate and even placed themselves in the forefront of the ideological battle. The amount of historical publications to justify the political stands of both sides, are numerous. In Abkhazia also the defence of outcome of the conflict, is the theme of many new historical publications. Walking through the streets of Sukhum/i, one can notice very few bookshops and newsstands. But the few that exist, have a variety of pamphlets and books about the justification of Abkhaz statehood, the 'revelations' of Georgian ethnic issues and the civil war on offer. Many of them are written by Abkhaz historians or pseudo historians that use history to justify the conflict, the war, the ethnic cleansing and the independence.

The historians were and are soldiers in the information warfare. The intensity of the relation of the past with the present is striking. Almost all historians I met took it as their task to convince me of the political right of their country. They did so by giving endless historical evidence, often going back for more than ten centuries. Opinions were often based on emotions, which were, certainly in Georgia, always near to the surface. The Abkhaz interviewees were in general less emotional, however had underneath stone hard convictions. Any (open) hesitation about their roadmap to the future was hardly noticeable. Their emotions were also not far away, and some of them were even bluntly aggressive. This gives little hope for a constructive dialogue in the near the future. It was suggested though, that there are historians in Georgia and Abkhazia who are interested in approaches to history. But they were neither willing nor allowed to express their opinions.

### **3.13. Contested historical theories**

Among the many historians I met, the overall majority had their opinions firmly based on contested interpretations and theories on the (national) past. It would go too far in the context of this report to give a list of all problematic historical interpretations and theories, which fuel the conflict between the two nations as most of them are written in languages I do neither read nor understand. I can only rely on the, often rather emotional, accounts of

the interviewed historians that came to me via my interpreters. From their accounts and the accessible foreign literature the following burning problems have emerged:

### Georgian and Abkhaz Statehood

For historians in Abkhazia and Georgia one of the most difficult historical problems is the question about the inner structure of the Abkhaz-Georgian state in the medieval period. How to assess the impact and influence of the Abkhaz Kingdom and Abkhaz culture in an Abkhaz-Georgian (unified) state? The Abkhaz and Georgian historians argue since long if they could define this structure under the concept of a unified or of an integrated state. This problem emerges as a serious controversy as it defines in the eyes of the historians an important difference in level of cooperation between the two peoples. Abkhaz historians oppose to the concept of integration as they consider it too far-reaching. It would mean that once the kingdom of Abkhazia had become part of the greater kingdom of Georgia, it would have lost its autonomous position.

Already in Soviet times the formulation of relationship between the two nations was contested, however it is evident that in the present battle for an independent Abkhazia or for Abkhazia as an inseparable part of Georgia, the belief in the different interpretations is vital as a fundament for the political and historical discourse. During the Soviet times the argument was tempered by official direction that one had to write that Abkhazia had unified the Abkhaz-Georgian state. However since the end of the Soviet Union and the waves of nationalist politics, it was clear that both sides were constantly in search for new evidence and arguments to prove their own right. The historians interviewed in Abkhazia had new reasons for anger as they believed that at the moment in Georgia, all historians try to emphasize that the Georgian state is already more than 2000 years old. I have not been able to verify in how far this statement was true. However during this and my previous visits and meetings with Georgian historians, the centuries old state and culture were always strongly emphasised.

### Language

Very much related to this issue is the intense debate which language was used in Abkhazia throughout the centuries. Georgian historians stress the fact that Abkhaz were culturally very close, possessed the Georgian mentality and wrote in Georgian. Georgian historians use the fact that



Abkhaz sources are written in Georgian as the main evidence that the Abkhaz (elite) spoke Georgian. However the Abkhaz disagree that Georgian was the general language of communication and state that the Abkhaz language was spoken through the centuries. When I pointed out that it was known that the script for the Abkhaz language was only

developed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and that until that time it was likely that the Abkhaz had used other scripts, like Georgian, without losing their native tongue at home, Georgian interviewees looked really surprised. I hastened to say that this was also only a theory, and that in order to find out if it was plausible, we had to scrutinise the existing evidence and to look for new.

### Religion

The role of culture and certainly Christianity also leads to heated debates. The Georgians see themselves as the second Christian nation in the world, and like to stress that their religion is their nation. The huge newly build Cathedral in Tbilisi can be considered as statement for this conviction. The Abkhaz have a more flexible attitude towards religion. On the one hand they want to present themselves as part of the Christian orthodoxy, however at the same time they do not hide, and even demonstrate a certain pride, about the fact that their attitude towards religion was always rather ambiguous. Islam and nature religions are also part of their religious heritage. On the whole they like to present themselves as not very religious and rather tolerant. In the later 19<sup>th</sup> century, when Abkhazia was, like Georgia, part of the Russian empire, a competition developed between the Russian and the Georgian orthodox missions. The Russian mission offered special benefits for Abkhazia by developing a script for the Abkhaz language. However at the same time Georgian historians claim that the Abkhaz population felt that the Russians took away their national religious practice. They present evidence that the Abkhaz asked for restoration of the religious service in their national language. According to the Georgians this language was obviously Georgian.



### Revolutions of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century

Another difficult historical topic is the early revolutionary history in Abkhazia and Georgia. This was one of the white spots in Soviet historiography. The (Russian) revolution of 1905 was a movement which was predominantly conducted by labourers in the cities, and Abkhazia is not considered to have participated in the revolutionary movement of 1905 as a result of its agrarian background. After the difficult second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Abkhaz were considered good citizens by the tsar. The Tsar's policy of divide and rule led at that time to a punishment for Georgia and praise for Abkhazia. However, the later communist historians of course despised the lack of revolutionary spirit of the Abkhaz and saw them as traitors to the good cause. The fact that during the Soviet era, Georgian historians prevented their Abkhaz colleagues to publish about this period is considered still painful and a cause for anger for them.



The period of the Russian revolutions and civil war is also disputed. The Abkhaz decision in 1918 to join the Mountain Peoples' Republic of the North Caucasus and not Georgia is a sensitive issue. The Georgian capture of Abkhazia in the same year is for Georgia ground to identify Abkhazia as an integral part of independent Georgia. However in Abkhazia this fact is considered as evidence for a long standing aggressive policy of Georgia towards Abkhazia. In the period of independence between 1918 and 1921, the Georgian government has indeed issued a law on an autonomous status for Abkhazia, but the fact that it was never implemented, makes contemporary Abkhaz historians still question the good intentions of the Georgian government at that time. Similar policies during the Soviet period strengthened this attitude.

The Bolsheviks, who took over power in 1921, were more welcome in Abkhazia than in Georgia as Abkhaz considered them liberators from what they called the Georgian *harsh imperialist regime*. The events in the period 1918 to 1921 were hushed up during the Soviet times, as a more or less white spots, and described only as part of the fight between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, or of the battle of the Reds against the Whites. Only in the post Soviet historiography emphasis was put on the national characteristics of this issue.

### The Soviet Period

For many historians the responsibility for many problems in the Twentieth Century was in the hands of the Russians and the Soviets. Georgian historians acknowledged a hard policy towards Abkhazia during the Soviet time but disregarded the fact that this policy was often carried out by communist politicians of Georgian ethnicity. One of the returning issues were that fact that Stalin and Beria were both of Georgian -or more accurate for Beria Mingrelian- background. For Abkhaz historians it seems to be very difficult to discriminate between the different aspects of these two persons as communists, as leaders of the Soviet Union and as ethnic Georgians.

Some Georgian historians attribute the failed solutions of the late 1980's and early 1990's to Moscow. At least historians show very little acknowledgement for the role of the Georgian politicians at the time. On their turn the Abkhaz historians blame mostly the Georgian political leadership for the events. Both the Abkhaz and Georgian historians accuse the other of exaggerating or underestimating numbers of victims and refugees as result of the conflict.



*Victims of the 1992/1993 War in Sukhum/i*

### Territory and population

However, the most contested and volatile theories are those, which are related to the debate, which could be considered as the native population of the Abkhaz lands. In Abkhazia as well as Georgia historians and other interviewees made me aware how important this issue is for all of them. The Abkhaz accuse the Georgian historians of adhering to theories



that claim that the Abkhaz are not the native inhabitants of the Abkhaz lands. The most extreme version was developed by Pavel Ingoroqva in the late 1940's and states that the Abkhaz only arrived in the Abkhaz lands in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. This theory was abandoned after the death of Stalin, but emerged again in the late 1980's. A somewhat more moderate theory accepts the Abkhaz presence in the mountains of Abkhazia for many centuries but states that the lowlands were inhabited by amongst others Georgians, Armenians, Greeks and Turks. This theory seems to be generally accepted by the Georgian population and as evidence several people told me that the Abkhaz language does not know a word for *sea*. However cross referencing I learned that the Abkhaz word for sea is *amshin*. It is a good example of how myths can live on uncontested as result of lack of critical attitude.

The Georgians at their turn claimed that they only developed these ideas as a reaction on the Abkhaz denial of the Georgians claim of being indigenous in their region. The Abkhaz historians wrote that the first Georgians could only be settlers which came to live in the Abkhaz land as a result of the policy of the Russian government in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Many interviewees stated that most Georgians were migrants who only recently settled in Abkhazia. I was not given any definition what *recent* meant in this case.

### 3.14. Interpretation according to political preferences

The role of Russia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as well as the Soviet policy of the 20<sup>th</sup> century had a great impact on the region and therefore on the Abkhaz as well as on the Georgian population. The Tsarist and Soviet policies of deportation, resettling and punishment had decisive influence on the ethnic make up of the Abkhaz and Georgian lands. The historians in Abkhazia as well as in Georgia are not very interested or willing to accept that the history of both nations is very much intertwined with the events in Russia and the rest of the world. Only one historian was able to observe that the policy that was explained by both sides as ethnic policy had certainly as much to do with the political leadership in Russia and developments elsewhere. The geopolitical power play in the end of the First World War is hardly recognized as a factor in the history of both countries and Stalin is in the eyes of the Abkhaz historians more considered a Georgian than a Soviet leader.

A striking example how interpretations of history vary widely according to different political situations is the fact that present day historians in Abkhazia judge the 19<sup>th</sup> century deportation by Russia of a large group of Abkhaz to Turkey as less problematic than the settling of Georgian farmers by the same Russians in the Abkhaz lands in the same time!

The enemy status of Russia and the Soviet Union is perceived far stronger in Georgia than in Abkhazia. Abkhazia realises that it has suffered under the Russians in the 19<sup>th</sup> century but it is now considered to give protection against Georgian aggression. Turkey has a neutral or even positive evaluation, certainly since Abkhaz Turks now are the first investors in the country. But also the assessment of the Turks in earlier history is more positive than in Georgia.

### 3.15. Other problems hampering dialogue between historians

The role of historians in Abkhazia and Georgia is not an academic one; they service politics. If historians from Abkhazia and Georgia are to meet, some younger historians are doubtful if they like to participate because they do not believe in any capacity for change and openness

of most of the older historians. The tone of the historical discourse between Abkhaz and Georgian historians is problematic. The historical discourse focuses on convincing the other of the single truthful interpretation of the facts instead of listening to others and a willingness to understand that you can look at events and processes from different points of view. And on top of this there is a lack of expertise on Georgian history in Abkhazia and on Abkhaz history in Georgia.

There is an apparent language problem between the historians of Abkhazia and Georgia as the knowledge of Georgian by the Abkhaz historians is rather restricted. The older generation has been able to study at the Tbilisi University on a regular basis; most of the younger historians fulfilled their studies in Sukhum/i and/or at Russian Universities. If publications from Georgia reach Abkhazia, the group who is able to read them is further diminishing; students in Abkhazia are not able to read Georgian. Most Georgian students are also able to read Russian. Very few of the historians and students are able to read publications in Abkhaz; however modern western languages skills are also not well developed, certainly among the older generations.

There is therefore a lack of information about what is published by historians in Abkhazia and in Georgia. The Georgian historians complain that the academic value of the work of the Abkhaz historians did not meet the required academic standards. The Abkhaz University gave to my opinion a clear example for such argument, as the first PhD study for history in Abkhazia since the war is looking only into the Georgian actions during the war and into the acts of terror committed by Georgia/ns after the war. Such academic work gives the impression of being incredibly biased already in its research objectives and is certainly an example that academics in Abkhazia are not very able to distinguish between academic work and political servicing. However I am sure that similar political studies are carried out in Georgia as well.

Despite the above-mentioned acute sense of 'historical' awareness, all Abkhaz and Georgian historians complained about the decrease in interest for the subject history. Asking for the reasons for this the argument was that it was mainly for economical reasons, as a position as teacher or researcher gave a very low salary. However I felt that for a younger generation the subject could also not be very appealing. I noticed that in Sukhum/i university students, mostly girls, with a more open attitude, made a choice for the study in international relations instead of history. Also in Georgia the interest of younger students moved from the field of national history into international history. However if I posed more explicit questions about this phenomena, I did not notice a deeper awareness of any reasons why history lost its popularity.

### **3.16. School History, educational reform in Georgia**

The level of development of school history in Abkhazia and Georgia is totally different. Since 1993 Georgia has been discussing and developing new history curricula and textbooks. In Abkhazia hardly anything has happened not at the level of education in general, and certainly not in history education.

As result of the Rose Revolution, Georgia has started a new big project for educational reform, with focus from pre-school education to post graduate education. This project is supported by the World Bank. The educational innovation is extremely ambitious and wants

to serve a variety of aims and objectives as it focuses on enhancing the quality of education but at the same time it wants to diminish the costs for education. It will lead to an approach in which the universities will have to finance the major part of their activities through the contributions of students as the present Minister of Education foresees that only about 4.000 students per year (not more than 30% of the total) will receive state support. The rest of the students has to contribute via own means.

Such a system will have a very big impact on the situation in universities where lecturers and university professors will be engaged in a rat race about who stays and who goes. Especially academics from the older generation, whom I met so many and, who are still working due to the very low pensions, will lose their positions if the Ministry of Education implements these plans.

For history education, the reformers in the Ministry are preparing a total break with tradition. History in Georgia was traditionally a subject taught along the lines of two separate sub-subjects - national and world history; now the Ministry envisages that during the compulsory educational period, history will be combined with geography and civic education. It will be taught as a social subject following a thematic approach to the past. Only for the end of compulsory education one year of separate Georgian national history is foreseen.

For the upper secondary level the Georgian Ministry of Education envisages a separate integrated subject history, with a chronological approach and with great emphasis on historical skills, interpretation and other methodological issues. The reformers envisage that the history curriculum should contain standards without a fixed historical content. It would be left to the authors of textbooks and publishing houses to make a choice which content should be presented. This means that publishing houses and textbook authors in the near future will determine the school curricula. The Ministry hopes that the textbooks will be as different as possible so that teachers have a wide variety of choice.

At the moment history textbooks in Georgia tell a traditional narrative of the past and are overloaded with information. They are more a collection of loose facts than a logical account of cause and consequence. In the eyes of the reformists the new textbooks should reduce the amounts of dates. The Ministry expected that the publishing houses would find new textbook authors to write innovative textbooks and student books. However it comes out that most of the traditional authors are still invited to write the new textbooks. The new textbooks have to be approved by a government committee; however the new approval procedure will mainly focus on methodological approaches and the availability of a teacher guide. Textbooks are developed stimulating students to form their own opinions based on a variety of source material, tasks and questions. The reformers want the new textbooks to help students to understand the past and the present, instead of memorising factual information.

Although the innovators are aware that the present narrative approach is too serious, too closed and mirrors a past strongly based on myths, they have limited awareness that methodology alone is not enough to change that. The present historical content of Georgian textbooks tells, as stated above, an exclusive narrative. Upgrading of the knowledge of textbook writers shall also have to be addressed, in order to really reform the school history books in Georgia.

The Georgian Ministry of Education is planning to pilot the new ideas in hundred schools with teachers who are well trained by teacher trainers and authors from the publishing houses. The Ministry also plans to organize a very intense training programme for teachers, in cooperation with the Teacher Training Institute, partly financed by the Ministry through the World Bank programme, partly by the publishers as a way to advertise their books.

The Ministry of Education in Georgia also recognises the importance of assessment and examination as a tool for educational change. Therefore they started the development and implementation of a national examination in 2005 for Georgian language, one foreign language and mathematics. In 2006 they want to introduce national examinations for history, geography and science as well. The students can choose for those subjects if they need them to enter specific departments of university.

The reformists in the Ministry of Education together with the Teacher Training Institute believe in their mission to reform history education and hope to use a training programme to enable the educational establishment to accept innovation and to change the traditional mentality and approach. However, the interviewees realise that a good legal fundament under the educational reform process is vital. For primary and secondary education this legal basis is not yet established. Therefore, the present reform is likely to face obstacles as the legal basis fails and at the same time the Ministry desires to change everything at the same time.

### **3.17. School History, stagnation in Abkhazia**

The situation in education in Abkhazia is totally different. Since the war the educational policy is virtually non-existent and the Ministry of Education stayed more or less in a state of inertia. With the new president elected, the new government was being formed and during my stay in Abkhazia a new Minister of Education was appointed. However the interviewees showed little confidence in her capacities to change this situation.

In my discussion with a group of Abkhaz educators it came out that people feel the need for educational innovation. However they state that first a general educational policy has to be developed, before a general curriculum can be designed and textbooks can be written. They embarked on a debate if the Ministry of Education should start for all educational levels at the same time, or should start with primary education. Starting from primary education will mean a firm basis for further development. However it will have as a consequence that University Education has to wait for another ten years.

A problem for school teaching in Abkhazia is that a certain group of students leaves for education on Russian Universities. The Ministry of Education has used this group as argument why Abkhazia always has to follow the Russian educational system. In order to enable these students access to Russian universities, the Ministry of Education has even decided that Russian history is compulsory for all students, as Russian history is compulsory in most Russian University entry examinations. The interviewees question this decision on the grounds that this benefits only a very small group of students. One might wonder how much this decision was a political decision instead of a decision to accommodate to the need of students.

Some of the interviewees questioned this attitude as this group comprises only 7% of all secondary school graduates. The group expressed a desire to have wider reference point of

reference than the Russian educational system, which has little to offer in terms of educational innovation..

For world history the Abkhaz schools use generally Russian textbooks. The textbooks are not, as traditionally were the case, supplied by the authorities. The interviewees complain that parents have to buy the books, that new textbooks are expensive, and that they are only available in Sochi, in Russia. I noticed in a book shop in Sukhum/i that the history textbooks, which were there on offer, are still from the Soviet period. In the Mingrelian Gali-district people in Georgia informed me about the special problem that the (new) Russian textbooks are not translated in the local language. But as far as I could observe that would not make a big difference, as also most of the Abkhaz students use the old Russian/Soviet textbooks.

Ten years after the war there still is no textbook on Abkhaz history available, neither in Russian, Abkhaz, and Georgian nor in the local, Mingrelian, language of the Gali district. Since 1991 the Abkhaz historians have not been able to produce a decent school textbook on Abkhaz history. There have been several attempts to develop a textbook but in the end only a collection of articles is used in Abkhaz schools. This publication is overloaded with information and the educators complained that this book cannot be considered a school textbook, as it fails methodology and it presents a version of history without any causes and consequences.

When I asked about the reason for the failure to write a coherent textbook, people were not very explicit about it. They mostly mentioned lack of money and lack of capacities of the Abkhaz academics to write school textbooks. However it appeared to me that there also had been difficulties among the Abkhaz historians to write a book acceptable for all. When I asked about it, I was again only met with silence.

For the Gali region there seem to have been a project scheduled to produce an Abkhaz history in Georgian. The Abkhaz/Georgian historian George Anchabadze was asked to write this book. However, despite positive attitudes of both Ministers of Education nothing has happened.

The meeting with the group of Abkhaz history educators strengthened the aspiration to set up a team of historians, teachers and educators to develop a concept for history education in Abkhazia on a rather short notice. If this team would have finished its task, it should also be made responsible for the development of a set of history textbooks for primary and secondary education. The team could be independent, and therefore not dependent on any (lack of) action of the Ministry of Education. The interviewees were aware that the work should focus on content as well as teaching and learning approaches. At the moment interactive learning is only introduced through the work of the Sukhum/i Youth House and is not yet accepted by the Ministry of Education in Abkhazia as a focal point for innovation in school teaching.

The interviewees also stressed that teachers play an important role in civil society and certainly in villages. During the recent elections they were part of the election committees and the results of the elections were dependent on their dedication towards the democratic process. In the villages they are certainly considered as the educated elite. However, since the war there is a shortage of teachers and the level of professionalism is not always very high. In remote regions textbooks are hardly available.



During the talks it was obvious that there has been little common thinking about educational policy. One could certainly sense embarrassment among the interviewees about these educational problems and the lack of any coherent educational policy. Some of the interviewees admitted or stressed that there was a lack of policy, action, teachers and materials. Others clearly felt uneasy with such a critical attitude and denied that the situation was as bad as people pictured it.

### 3.18. History Educators Associations

In Georgia an Association for History Educators exists already for several years. It has been cooperating with the Council of Europe in a teacher training programme and also during my trip the Board was able to bring together a group of people who were interested to work together for the future. The Association is small however, and does not have the necessary facilities to reach a greater audience.



*Meeting with the Georgian  
Association*

In Abkhazia, an association of history teachers does not exist. However, among the interviewees in Abkhazia, which were related to history education, there was a keen interest to set up such an organization. As direct contact would be difficult due to lack of modern communication tools, it was decided that for the time being the contact with this group would be created through one of the already active NGOs in Abkhazia. However, it would be important to set up in a foreseeable future an independent organisation for history teaching, taking its own responsibilities for the teaching process.

### 3.19. Council of Europe

The Council of Europe has been the only Intergovernmental Organisation, which has recognised the importance of history and school history education for stable and democratic developments in Europe. Since 1991 it has carried out a variety of programmes to enhance the level of (school) history in the former Soviet Union and former communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe amongst others in Georgia.

The Council of Europe has been since 1997 engaged in work on history and history teaching in Georgia. The so-called *Tbilisi Initiative* has been set up in order to develop a regional manual on the history of the region (in English). As element of the project also training seminars have been organised... The work of the Council of Europe has had a clear impact on the work of the Teacher Training Institute. The materials that were used in a Council of Europe training seminar in Georgia in 2003 have been developed into a present in-service teacher training programme for 200 teachers per year.

## 4. ASSESSMENTS OF POSSIBLE WAYS AHEAD

### 4.1. Problematic situation

During the last year some positive developments in the relations between Abkhazia and Georgia emerged. Policies are developed for common crime fighting and for the problematic energy supply. Many interviewees considered that at this moment the situation between both countries is in a state where work on history and history education could be beneficial. Most historians do agree that the development of modern research methodologies could be a helpful first step for preparing dialogue with partners in the region. Also the development of communication and other core skills as cooperation, discussion, argumentation and problem solving are considered vital in order to develop a constructive dialogue. They also emphasise that it would be important to go abroad and meet with colleagues in an international setting.

Despite this positive note, it is my judgment that in the foreseeable future it is not feasible to organise intense and direct bilateral cooperation between Abkhazia and Georgia on history and history education for the following reasons:

The present group of academic historians was active in the conflict and in the information war in the ten years after the conflict. When one of interviewees states that *'in the Caucasus the mother land is above all, even higher than life. This is everything; otherwise we will not continue to exist as nations'* it is clear that for building trust and confidence between the nations, direct meetings between historians have to be carefully prepared. On my question if there are any vetoes on meeting certain colleagues, no names were mentioned but sentences as *those persons who have been producing new myths about the past* were uttered. When selecting candidates for future bilateral cooperation, it will be important to check how focal they have been in the conflict and its aftermath. Too much personal involvement shall inevitable lead to passionate behaviour and strong reactions of other participants.

The group of traditional historians in Abkhazia and Georgia expressed very little interest in cooperation and is only willing to start dialogue when certain requirements are fulfilled. This means for such Georgian historians that the refugees from Abkhazia should be able to return. For most of the Abkhaz historians I have met, it means that Georgia should apologize for destroying Abkhaz cultural heritage and archives, recognizes that it has committed atrocities or even genocide against the Abkhaz population, and, probably even more important, that it accepts the independence of Abkhazia. Over and over again the Abkhaz interviewees stressed that they would like to re-establish contacts with Georgia, but only *as friendly neighbours*.

Only few historians and history educators from Abkhazia showed some interest for bilateral cooperation. However, this group is small and lacks influence and status. Possible future activities should in any case aim to strengthen and widen this group.

Most historians are still trained in the traditional Soviet approach which means that modern research skills are often not well developed. Changing the practice in historical research and in history teaching requires an open interest for learning. The fact that in the former Soviet world lifelong learning was not a general accepted practice for academic researches could hamper this process. Academics who concluded their studies with a PhD were considered experts who were not supposed to take part in further learning activities. Asking them to

participate in training events could be offending as experienced historians could consider such training below their dignity. But even if they would be willing to participate, their beliefs in the existing interpretations and theories regarding the histories of Abkhazia and Georgia are so strong that the results of training could be limited and disappointing.

Abkhaz and Georgian historians with focus on national history are considered to be stronger hardliners than those who are involved with international history. Political scientists and international relations experts generally show a more open attitude towards possible cooperation. However, all of them demonstrate nationalist biased interpretations of the past. Even rather modern historians, with good foreign language skills, have the habit to draw fast (historical) conclusions, based on little evidence and much prejudice.

In order to develop a constructive dialogue it is vital that historians adhere to principles as the courage to strive to objectivity, to adhere to evidence, to challenge and not to be dependent on others. Good intentions and skills are not enough. These elements also have to correlate with the existing political and social contexts. Looking into the political and social cultures represented by these historians, it is clear that correlation of their society with the principles mentioned is limited.

Public opinion, media and politicians in Georgia show interest in bilateral cooperation. This is seen in Abkhazia however as part of the Georgian policy to consider Abkhazia part of its country. Any positive attitude towards cooperation is understood by the Abkhaz as propaganda for that attitude. As a result Abkhaz historians and history educators show great mistrust for those of Georgia who express interest in bilateral cooperation.

The location for further work is also problematic. It is very difficult to enter Abkhazia. It is easier for Abkhaz historians to travel to Georgia as Abkhaz are considered Georgians by Georgia and are therefore exempt from visa regimes. However the Abkhaz historians (with hardly any exception) were very open in informing me that for them travelling to Georgia would be out of the question. They would feel unsafe in Georgia. And even if that was not the real problem, they expressed several times that in Abkhazia the public opinion would be against such trip and against bilateral work. Most Abkhaz historians also emphasised that Abkhaz public opinion would not be ready to accept Georgian historians on their territory. In their opinion bilateral meetings should be organised on neutral territory. This means that it would be best for the Abkhaz historians to meet in Belarus, Russia or Ukraine. However that would mean strict visa regimes for Georgians and experts from abroad. Possibly Turkey offers the best opportunities.

#### **4.2. Positive notes**

In Georgia there is a group of younger historians, which are very much looking forward to cooperation with Abkhazia and are willing to remove theoretical obstacles on the road to dialogue. They are interested to discuss a variety of interpretations and to work for common goals and common values such as democracy, economic prosperity and the development of a common framework for history. They are



*Joke van der Leeuw-Roord (right) meets with Dimitri Shamba, Abkhaz National University*

unhappy that there is not any form of contact at the moment. These younger historians suggested studying topics from 20<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century history for common work, as these periods are hardly researched. They were interested to study social history, the social interaction between Abkhaz and Georgians and the impact of the events of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century on the history of the area. There was even interest to write a textbook on the history of the relation of the two peoples. In preparation this Georgian group would like to establish a working group on 20<sup>th</sup> century history. In general there is a good interest of historians to work in a wider Caucasian perspective. Most historians expressed their interest in a regional approach for history. This should not necessarily include all Caucasian countries but certainly working with innovative historians from Russia and other countries in the region.

Both Abkhaz and Georgian historians are aware that the conflict and economic problems of the last decade created severe problems regarding supplies for teaching materials and the collections of libraries. They all complained about the lack of modern historical literature and the access to modern communication technology. The representatives from the OSCE and the European Union have already expressed their interest in cooperation with Universities and students, and should be addressed with concrete plans.

The Council of Europe and EUROCLIO stress that working for a common history does not necessarily mean working for common history curricula and common history textbooks. It means applying common principles and common methodological approaches. During my trip I was able to show examples of work in Europe, which had worked along these lines. Most of the historians and history educators showed interest in such approaches.

High-level officials in Abkhazia stressed the importance of the work of NGO's in Abkhazia and therefore were positive about projects where Abkhaz historians could be prepared for a European outlook. Projects which focus on challenging their own points of view and their critical thinking skills would be certainly be supported without bringing in too many limitations for work on history and history education. An agenda should be carefully developed and projects should start on topics which are not controversial. Many people stressed that George Anchabadze should play an important role in bringing Abkhaz and Georgian historians together.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

### 5.1. General

The relation between Abkhaz and Georgian historians has been problematic for more than three or four decades, not only since the conflict of the early 1990's. Their assessment of the problems depended not only on difference of interpretation of the recent and the distant past, but also on the personalities involved.

Most of the present historians and history educators working in the research institutes and universities have been soldiers in the information warfare before, during and after the conflict between Abkhazia and Georgia. Therefore they are not the most suitable persons to enter into an attempt for peaceful dialogue.

In the post-Soviet transformation process the position of historians and history educators was not sufficiently addressed. Despite the fact that many of them did operate on the forefront of ideological indoctrination, historians and history educators kept their positions. Their methodological approach to the subject was easily transformed from messengers of the soviet ideology to activists for the nationalist cause.

The unconstructive historical dialogue between Abkhaz and Georgian historians is fuelled by a series of contested theories. It is rather doubtful if the present generation of historians will be able to review these theories as they feature more as beliefs than as solid historical interpretations. However it would certainly be helpful, if leading politicians would distance themselves more from such historical theories and not (mis)use them for their own political purposes.

At the moment the assessment of the events by historians is based on opinions and rumours instead of solid evidence. Structured research on the events of the past twenty years that can feed the historical dialogue between historians and history educators is missing.

Historians in Abkhazia as well as in Georgia still adhere to a 19<sup>th</sup> century approach to history which means that they consider that it is possible, through serious study of the facts, to find the historical truth. Key concepts such as interpretation and evidence are considered of a lesser order than the concept of historical facts.

In Abkhazia and Georgia there is a lack of historians specialized in modern, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, history. Historical research and the study of history have still a strong emphasis on political, military and socioeconomic history based on research of official documents. Modern research and teaching with focus on topics such as gender, multiculturalism, human rights, and everyday life are not addressed.

There is neither experience in writing regional nor inclusive history in the Caucasus region. A regional textbook does not exist and the national history textbooks have a strong focus on the titular nation in the respective countries; minority communities hardly feature in these national history books.

As long as political problems as official independence for Abkhazia and the return of refugees or IDP's are not adequately dealt with by the politicians in both countries, it will be not viable for many historians in both countries to engage in a constructive dialogue.

The Moscow meeting in 2003 has put history and history teaching on the agenda. The meeting showed the importance of the role of history in the conflict and the actual relations



between Abkhazia and Georgia. It also showed the sensitivities of the past and they way societies in Abkhazia and Georgia use and react on it.

At this moment the students from Abkhazia and Georgia were the only group that expressed a wish for bilateral dialogue. However, aware of the war of propaganda between the politicians, such project could be easily stopped by the Abkhaz authorities, when not carefully prepared.

## **5.2. Abkhazia**

The Abkhaz reality is still totally dominated by the conflict. Therefore people express very little criticism towards the (political) situation and accept difficult living and working circumstances. Everyday life comes across as rather passive. In Abkhazia there is a firm consciousness for titular self-determination, although the Abkhaz titular group constitutes of less than 50% of the population. Abkhaz (re) unification with Georgia looks a very distant option, the culture of both countries is very different and for a larger part of Abkhazia a feeling of soul connection with Georgia is totally absent. There is a historical proximity between both countries but not a long lasting common past for all regions in the country. Some such as the Gali region experienced far more proximity and connection to Georgia, where other areas have very little shared (distant) past.

Many Abkhaz interviewees signalled that if Abkhazia is willing to develop relations with Georgia, such relations can only be understood as neighbourly relations. The loss of the Abkhaz National Archives and Institute for Abkhaz Language, Culture and History is a crucial element in the negative attitude of Abkhaz historians towards Georgia and their Georgian colleagues. A gesture from Georgia (and the international community) to restore as much as possible will certainly be helpful in preparing grounds for future bilateral historical dialogue. The attitude towards cooperation with Georgia was not depending on political preferences in Abkhazia. Some Abkhaz historians were not interested in any cooperation, even although they were active in the opposition against the past political leadership. In Abkhazia there is little interest among historians and history educators for a direct dialogue with colleagues in Georgia. However there are some who signalled to have interest in cooperation. This small group could be fortified by involving them in national and international work on history. The opinion of others is very important in Abkhaz society. Many stressed that an historical dialogue with colleagues from Georgia, travels to and from Georgia and relations with Georgians would be hardly acceptable for the general public and is therefore also for them out of the question. The lack of foreign language skills in Abkhazia and the possibilities to travel and to participate in international events leads to isolation and this isolation prevents a distant critical look into the situation. Since 1993 educational policy in Abkhazia has hardly been developed. In fact the Russian educational system is still functioning. Individual educators were in favour of a development of an independent Abkhaz educational policy. How far that is shared by any political leadership is unclear; the new Minister of Education was just appointed and was not known for any specific vision on this topic.

At present history teaching in Abkhazia is hampered by the lack of national textbooks on world and national history. For world history mostly old Russian textbooks are used, many even from the Soviet period. A school textbook on Abkhaz history still does not function despite the fact that several attempts were made to write such textbook. History textbooks in Abkhaz, Georgian or Mingrelian do not exist. A group of history educators is interested to

develop independently an outline history curriculum for Abkhazia. A group of history educators showed interest to set up an association for history education in Abkhazia. The group asked the Association of Women in Abkhazia to act as contact address, as all basic requirements to communicate and to network have to be developed.

### **5.3. Georgia**

In Georgia people expressed a variety of critical attitudes and dissatisfaction towards the political leadership. However this criticism seemed not to lead to a participatory attitude or to an open mind towards possible changes but rather to a passive negative way of thinking. An inclusion of different ethnic and religious communities in academic research and teaching and in school history curricula and textbooks is missing. This prevents the development of awareness that although the Georgian nation is the dominant titular group in Georgia, Georgia should be presented as a multicultural country in past and present.

In Georgia it will be easier to locate suited people to support bilateral projects. People are eager to meet their colleagues from Abkhazia and there is a younger generation of historians available which have not played a significant role in the propaganda warfare between the historians. Students showed a similar interest for mutual dialogue with their Abkhaz counterparts.

Since the Rose Revolution, Georgia is engaged in an in depth process of educational reform. School history is probably the subject most targeted in this process of change, as the innovators believe that the present practice in school history does not meet the needs of students for the 21st century. As a result the history curriculum textbooks and teacher (in-service) training is included in a process of total transformation. The Ministry of Education has decided to embark on national examinations. School history will be included in this examination programme from 2006. The work of the Council of Europe on history education in Georgia has been beneficial as it evidently influenced the work of the teacher training institute. In Georgia a small association for history education exists. It showed on several occasions that it is able to organize events and to bring together key persons for work on history and history teaching. However, their work is hampered by a lack of infrastructure and resources.

### **5.4. Russia**

Despite the fact that the relationship with Russia as a neighbouring country is certainly far from easy for Abkhazia as well as Georgia, most historians and history educators from both countries acknowledged that Russia can be considered an important natural partner in opportunities for the future development of bilateral dialogue on history.

### **5.5. Future work**

In order to change the practice for history and history education, civil courage is essential for those involved. The present historians and history educators have to disengage from their peer and political groups, and develop independent stands. Especially in Abkhazia, history and history educators should develop a more critical distance to politicians, authorities and their peer groups.

For further work for history and history education in Abkhazia and Georgia is important to work with people with a future. This means that people in the end of their career, as well as people with little interest in change, are not the first target group. Readiness to revise, willingness for work and an ability to accept criticism are absolute requirements for those who want to embark on future work.

In order to develop discourse between historians and history educators from Abkhazia and Georgia it is important to build trust and mutual relation. This trust is vital in order to build relations between historians which can stand a healthy professional discourse.

In order to develop a more neutral position it is necessary to strengthen academic capacities. However it is important to develop those skills not in the floodlight of media or politicians. Only after the development of professionalism and capacity building of the participants, confrontations with a bigger (national) audience are helpful.

Work on history and history teaching should focus on building national and regional networks, which take responsibility for the future and acts as agents of change. Such networks will enhance the professionalism of its members and strengthen civil society.

There is in both countries a need to focus on the principles of pedagogy and the methodology of the learning and teaching of history. People have to be aware of a variety of choices and alternative approaches in order to make choices that are suitable for the personal, local or national circumstances.

Vital elements for positive outcomes of work on history and history teaching in the region are information, transparency, equality and representation and publication of materials.

Support from local and national authorities is necessary in future work on history and history education. Eventually the results have to be implemented in the national historical culture and in the educational practice. Also it is important to encourage people to use the opportunities to improve the quality of their work. However authorities sometimes have to be convinced by grassroots results and that can take time.

George Anchabadze has been the only person who was able in the recent past to move in both historical communities. For the future it might be helpful to analyze why he is acceptable for both groups and what knowledge, skills and behaviour is necessary to reach such position. A further step could be to train others to operate along similar lines.

It is important and realistic to work in the near future on a unilateral level to prepare the pillars, which in a few years will be ready to carry a bridge of bilateral work. At the same time it is necessary to strengthen the regional dimension in the work on history and history teaching. It is vital to offer people access to the international stage and help them to join international activities. This takes people away from the narrow and inward looking national perspective and opens their eyes for a wider outlook. This is an important target and a condition for bilateral dialogue and cooperation in the future. By operating carefully it is certainly possible to capitalise on present expectations, preferably among younger representatives in both locations.

## **6. RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **6.1. General Recommendations**

#### **6.1.1. on bilateral cooperation**

It is important and useful to work on history and history teaching in Abkhazia and Georgia. If done well, it is an investment in peace, stability and reconciliation in the region. However on the short term constructive bilateral cooperation seems impossible. As long as political problems such as the official recognition of Abkhazia and the return of refugees or IDP's are not adequately dealt with by the politicians in both countries, it will be not viable for many historians in both countries to engage in a constructive dialogue. Each discussion will be immediately politicised and efforts to come to mutual understanding and compromise will be considered treason.

#### **6.1.2. on unilateral work**

However it is essential to have built good foundations on a national level, as soon as political change emerges. At the same time developments in the historical profession can contribute to change in the political attitudes, especially in countries like Abkhazia and Georgia, where history plays such an important emotional role. Activities in the field of history and history education, which can start from now, should prepare the pillars, which in a few years will be ready to carry a bridge of bilateral dialogue and work. For a period of two to three years unilateral dialogue, activities and events can be embarked on. During this period the options for bilateral cooperation should be further explored and strengthened.

#### **6.1.3. on methodology**

The aims of working on the national level should be to improve the methodology and the content of the historical practice, both on the academic and the educational level, and build professional networks of inspired and motivated people. History as a science and a school subject should become critical, multiperspective and inclusive and meet at least the basic academic and educational standards and principles.

#### **6.1.4. on a regional and international dimension**

At the same time it is important to strengthen the regional and international dimension in the work on history and history teaching by offering historians and history educator's access to an international stage and supporting them to join international activities. This is necessary to widen the narrow and inward looking national perspective, create an open outlook, get people acquainted and inspired by examples of good practice from abroad and developing an understanding for the need for bilateral dialogue.

#### **6.1.5. on international monitoring**

International monitoring of any project or activity on history and history education is important, especially in the beginning. A view from the outside surmounts the overall practised inward looking focus and rather exclusive culture of history and history teaching.

Moreover it prevents falling back into the usual habit of making accusations and demands instead of acquiring knowledge, experience and inspiration.



## **6.2. Concrete Recommendations**

### **6.2.1. Ministry of Education of Georgia**

In Georgia the intensive process of innovation of the history curricula, textbooks and teacher (in-service) training offers an excellent opportunity to connect to.

Special attention should be given to the national assessment of history as foreseen in the national examinations for 2006. These assessment approaches will definitively shape how history will be taught in (upper) secondary education. A training programme for national history examiners could be a helpful tool to assist the process of subject matter and pedagogical change.

### **6.2.2. Ministry of Education of Abkhazia**

It will be beneficial to convince the Ministry of Education of Abkhazia of the need to develop a national educational policy. This policy should include a process of development of history curricula, textbooks and teacher (in-service) training.

### **6.2.3. Historians**

Grants should be made available to enable academic historians from Abkhazia and Georgia to participate in international events and exchange projects linked to the study of history and historical research. Such events can also be used to organize informal meetings by historians from Abkhazia and Georgia, with the advantage of being outside the political arena and out of view of public and media.

For academic historians and students international seminars on the methodology of modern historical research should be organised in Abkhazia and Georgia. In such seminars local specialists and colleagues from several countries, including Russia, could perform master classes. These seminars could at the same time be used to identify more key-persons for future work and to give further insights in the short, middle and long term needs of the local historians.

Abkhazia as well as Georgia are in urgent need of an in -depth inquiry into the conflict to surmount the present discourse which is hardly based on hard evidence. The study could start with the mid-1980s, and continue into the present day. National Committees of Historians can be formed, with the task so research the course of the events and the atrocities committed against humanity and do so by research methods answering present day academic standards. Such Committees could draw their expertise from analogue groups, for instance those, which were created in the Baltic States on the period 1939-1945 and research groups who looked into contemporary problems like the events in Srebrenica in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

### **6.2.4. Historians and History educators**

A regional project should be organised for historians and history educators, including participants from Abkhazia, Georgia, Russia, Turkey and possibly also Azerbaijan and Armenia. It would preferably focus on a non-sensitive topic from the 20th or 19th century

history, which has no direct link with the Abkhaz-Georgian conflict. It should aim on developing knowledge, skills and competencies build a regional network and gain experience in constructive international cooperation.

Until an agreed curriculum for history has not been developed in Abkhazia, writing school textbooks is ineffective. For the time being historians and history educators in Abkhazia with support from specialists from abroad could embark on developing teaching materials on Abkhaz history.

#### **6.2.5. History Educators**

In Abkhazia, history educators in cooperation with historians should be invited in a workshop to develop an exemplar integrated curriculum for history. Resource persons from abroad could assist this project. Via such work they can encourage the Ministry of Education in Abkhazia in their responsibility to develop education in their country and provide useful concepts, starting points and examples for a curriculum. At the same time such a workshop would confront the participants with all the demands a good curriculum should meet, including taking into account the social and political consequences of the selection of content and methodology.

Grants should be made available to history educators from Abkhazia and Georgia to participate in international events and exchange projects, linked to the learning and teaching of history. Such events can also be used to organize informal meetings by history educators from Abkhazia and Georgia, with the advantage of being outside the political arena and out of view of public and media. Interesting options already on the agenda are training seminars on multiculturalism in history education organized in 2005 in Russia, and professional development seminars in projects on regional history and citizenship education through history, carried out in former Yugoslavia and in Rumania. These and other events are organised by EUROCLIO and its local partner organisations. Also the EUROCLIO Annual Training Conferences in 2006 in Malta, in 2007 in Slovenia and in 2008 in England would be worth visiting.

Activities should be undertaken to strengthen the Association for History Teaching in Georgia and to develop an independent History Teachers' Association in Abkhazia. A proven approach has been to organise seminars on the learning and teaching of history for interested history educators, which can then form the nucleus for such organisation. Such seminars offer workshops on modern pedagogy, methodology and active working with contributions of local and international resource persons and examples of successful associations in other (former Socialist) countries. In such meetings, participants are also asked to reflect on the needs for history education and about the role the association can play. A policy paper on the aims and activities of the Association might then be developed.

#### **6.2.6. Students**

As history students were the only group, in Abkhazia as well as Georgia, who articulated that they were interested and ready for dialogue, it seems important to honour this positive attitude. However to prevent political interference, it is better to organize a regional event, such as a study conference with experts from the neighbouring countries plus a wider international audience of specialists. The topic can be connected to the history of these

neighbouring countries, however not necessarily needs to be so, as many historical topics could be suitable.

Grants should be made available for history students from Abkhazia and Georgia to participate in international events and exchange projects, linked to the study of history. Such meetings events could be used to organize informal meetings between students from Abkhazia and Georgia, with the advantage of being outside the political arena and out of view of public and media.

#### **6.2.7. Universities**

The poor and outdated condition of libraries and resource centres in the Universities of Georgia and Abkhazia bring about the need to organize material aid. This support should focus on supplying (recent published) books and other materials on national and international history, historiography and research methodology. Also internet access in Universities and libraries should be widened and improved. For national history it is important to update the Universities in both countries with recent national, regional and international historical publications on Georgia and Abkhazia. Material written in the region might carry the danger of negative side-effects, as many of these publications are still written from the perspective of information warfare related to the conflict. This can be counterbalanced by providing a wide range of publications and the earlier recommended training in modern research techniques.

Possibilities should be created for guest lectures by specialists from a variety of European countries on methodology and on academic historical content issues.

### **6.3. Long Term Recommendations**

#### **6.3.1. on bilateral cooperation**

If signs of political détente appear between Abkhazia and Georgia it becomes useful and constructive to organize bilateral cooperation. Structural cooperation between Universities and individual historians is easy and cheap to organise, but depends totally on personal motivation. To crank up such structural cooperation a bilateral project is useful. Such a project should focus on creating agreement on research methods and principles, and debate on non-controversial and, in a later stage, controversial topics.

#### **6.3.2. on educational materials**

In the educational field a project could focus on the development of common educational material on the history of the region, providing a critical, multiperspective and inclusive approach, and a series of teacher training seminars. The importance of using education is that it provides a multiplying effect that reaches out to a whole generation of young people in both countries.

## **7. POSSIBLE PARTNERS FOR WORK ON HISTORY, KEY INSTITUTIONS, ORGANISATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS FOR FUTURE WORK**

During my visit I was so fortunate to meet impressive represents of an active civic society in both countries. However among the Non-Governmental organisations, these people represented, few had been targeting on issues of history. To my opinion it will be vital for future work on history and history education that the first focus is on creating a network of historians and history educators with people, who show independent thinking and behaviour, civil courage towards governments, professional peer groups and public opinion and who have an open attitude and are willing to act as agents of change. Without such network work on history has neither chance to develop mutual dialogue or create sustainability. It is important that the present organisations play a role in setting up such networks, however with the clear target to create independent NGOs for history and history education.

### **7.1. Possible partners in general**

#### **Intergovernmental**

Delegation of the European Commission to Georgia and Armenia

(Maria van Ruiten)

Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, mission to Georgia

(Magdalena Frichova)

#### **Governmental**

History Department Abkhaz State University

(Dean Alik Gabelia)

Ministry of Education in Tbilisi, Georgia

National Curriculum and Textbook Component (Simon Janashia)

Institute for Teachers Training of Tbilisi, Georgia

(Maia Inasaridze)

#### **Non- Governmental**

Center for Humanitarian Projects Sukhum/i , Abkhazia

(Batal Kobakhia, Liana Kvarchelia and Arda Inal-Ipa)

Sukhum/i Youth House Sukhum/i, Abkhazia

(Elena Kobakhia)

Caucasus Dialogue Foundation Tbilisi, Georgia

Keti Gogeliani

Open Society Georgia Foundation Tbilisi, Georgia

Mikheil Mirziashvili

## **7.2. Possible partners for work on history**

Caucasus House University in Tbilisi, Georgia

(Naira Gelashvili)

History Education Association in Tbilisi, Georgia

(Tsira Chikvaidze)

### **Individuals in Abkhazia:**

Guram Gumba: Academic, interested in contact with Georgian colleagues

Larisa Katzia, school history teacher

Natella Akaba, Association of Women in Abkhazia, opted to act as liaison person for a history educators group

Ivan Sadzva, for Minister of Education in Abkhazia with a long experience in the Ministry of Education

Rezo Katsia, University of Sukhum/i Professor of History, Government Counsellor

Abessalom Lepsaya, Abkhazia Academy of Science, Research Institute for Humanitarian Studies

### **Individuals in Georgia:**

Prof. Dr. George Anchabadze, history professor the Academy of Science, the Institute of History and Ethnology

### **International Individuals**

Experts on Caucasian History from abroad

### **International Non- Governmental**

EUROCLIO historians and history educators from a variety of (European) countries would be happy to support the work on history and history education in Abkhazia and Georgia and the further region. EUROCLIO history educators from a variety of (European) countries could support the training process of textbook authors and teacher training.

### **International Organisations already working in Abkhazia and Georgia :**

I received as feed back on my questions many loose ends, and have not been able therefore to develop any cohered insight in the different actions. Despite my lack of detailed knowledge on this issue, I still feel I can conclude that little of the focus of previous work was directed on issues of history. Only the Council of Europe has developed some initiatives in this field.

### **Abkhazia and Georgia**

Abkhazia and Georgia, International Alert, London, GB

Abkhazia and Georgia, Conciliation Resources, London, GB



Abkhazia, and Georgia, meetings were organized in Yalta, Istanbul and Athens with the intention to increase confidence-building. These events mostly focused on politicians, no special issues on history.

### **Abkhazia**

Abkhazia, the Heinrich Böll-foundation

Abkhazia, The Friedrich Naumann-foundation

Abkhazia, Californian University at Irving. Long-term project, 7 to 8 years, and it has been able to develop already reasonable lists of publications which are no bestsellers but provide totally new view points from what existed before. Visits abroad

Abkhazia, Project of the Berghof Center in Berlin, Germany. They have developed a 'Handbook on Conflict Transformation'. It is not yet part of the mainstream programme of the university, however positively assessed.

### **Georgia**

Georgia, Council of Europe, Strasbourg, France

Georgia, World Vision Tbilisi, Georgia

Georgia, The Norwegian Refugee Council has worked on a textbook for civic education.



*The striking image of the former parliament building of Abkhazia*

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