

BRUNO COPPIETERS, DAVID DARCHIASHVILI, NATELLA AKABA (eds.):
Federal Practice, exploring alternatives for Georgia and Abkhazia 281 pp. Brussels:
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Belgian historian Bruno Coppieters has for some time taken a keen interest in the disputes that have scarred the Caucasus since the end of the 1980s and is currently preparing a booklet on them for the Royal Institute of International Affairs. He edited 'Contested Borders in the Caucasus' (1996), which concentrated on the role of the major powers in the region. In June 1997 the European Commission funded a Brussels conference that enabled him to bring together scholars from the two sides. The papers were subsequently edited by Coppieters, the Kartvelian Gia Nodia, and the Abkhazian Yuri Anchabadze for publication in both Russian and English editions ('Georgians and Abkhazians: the search for a peace settlement'). The present volume, published in a Russian version in 1999, contains the papers from the follow-up gathering in November 1997.

Apart from the Introduction, the book is divided into six sections:

1. International Perspectives, which consists only of Coppieters' own survey of 'Western security policies and the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict'. I have already had occasion to criticise the use of one particular phrase by Coppieters and must do so again -- this is his reference to ethnic cleansing when he here asserts: 'The Abkhaz side could only consolidate its military victory by changing the demographic balance in the republic through ethnic cleansing' (p. 25). Since there is ample evidence to demonstrate that the vast majority of those Kartvelians who fled from Abkhazia after their forces' defeat in September 1993 did so prior to the arrival of any of the Abkhazian or allied fighters, what justification can there be for continuing unjustifiably to use this emotive expression?

2. European Experiences, under which heading the other editors present a Georgian and an Abkhazian perspective on Switzerland's federal arrangements. Darchiashvili feels the model is useful, but that it is too early to attempt applying it, whilst Akaba's view is that imperialism can masquerade under federalism's cloak, so that re-

establishing ties between Abkhazia and Georgia must be predicated on the prior construction of a worthy civil society and true democracy in the region. Alexei Zverev muses on the lessons Abkhazia and Georgia might draw from Moscow's treaty with Tatarstan, whilst Nikolay Petrov looks at cases of 'Shared sovereignty Russian style' ['stule' in the running-header!], though the glaring example of Chechnia, especially in light of Putin's cynical rekindling of this human catastrophe for electoral purposes, hardly suggests that Russia, a significant proportion of whose population holds distinctly racist views about the denizens of the Caucasus, has a great deal to teach indigenous Caucasians about ordering their relations.

3. Foreign Policies of Federated Entities, wherein Uwe Leonardi considers some concrete cases, and Gocha Lordkipanidze makes a suggestion for a federal Georgian-Abkhazian state.

4. Federalism, Confederalism and Consociationalism, for which Xiaokun Song offers 'Confederalism. A review of recent literature' and Tinatin Khidasheli a short piece entitled 'Federalism and consociationalism. Prospects for Georgian state reform'.

5. The Principles of Territoriality and Personality. Ivlian Haindrava [Khaindrava, surely?] of Georgia's Republican Party proposes to divide Abkhazia into predominantly Abkhazian and Kartvelian regions, roughly north-west and south-east of Sukhum, respectively. The problem, of course, is the fact that 39,000 Abkhazians out of their pre-war total of 93,000 would be left in the Kartvelian sector. Knowing that it was part of the nationalists' plan, as advocated by the then-leading lights, Merab K'ost'ava and Zviad Gamsakhurdia, both now dead, to divide Abkhazia along the R. Gumista (north of Sukhum) when their agitation made Sukhum and Ochamchira the scenes of fatal ethnic clashes in July 1989, the Abkhazians are unlikely to have any truck with such retouched dividing lines today. In direct contrast, Maarten Theo Jans ponders the viability for Abkhazia of the Belgian combination of regional government working in tandem with ethnically proportioned local (community-)councils -- a complex structure, but then Abkhazia is a complex case.

6. Constitutional Models, a section devoted entirely to Viacheslav Chirikba's thoughtful proposals, which combine federal and confederal characteristics, for constitutional arrangements between Abkhazia and the centre (in Tbilisi) of some future Common State, which he leaves so designated. He recognises that special provisions will also have to be made for Ajaria and South Ossetia but naturally does not address these when speaking to a forum concerned only with Abkhazia. Exclusively Abkhazian competences and those for the Common State are clearly set out and justified. Chirikba was aware of the scheme put forward by Tim Potier ('Conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. A legal appraisal', 2001), and it is constructive to compare the two sets of proposals. Chirikba, a native Abkhazian now resident in Holland, does not go as far as Potier in advocating any redrawing of Abkhazia's south-eastern border with Mingrelia, and yet even this offering was not universally well received in Abkhazia, which indicates just how difficult resolving this knotty issue is going to be. A further complication is that Abkhazia finally declared independence on 12 October 1999, which places any discussion on (con)federation with/in Georgia under an even larger question-mark.

Elsewhere in his chapter Chirikba rightly stresses that, contrary to how the Georgian-Abkhazian war is often portrayed either in deliberately misleading statements from Tbilisi or in ignorant Western pronouncements, this was never a war of secession -- Abkhazia responded to armed aggression and won a *de facto* independence. Echoing an observation in the Introduction when Coppieters asks why those Westerners who have concerned themselves for Georgia's (and usually not Abkhazia's) fate have displayed, often despite relevant experiences at home, no apparent interest in urging the sides to come to some sort of federative *modus vivendi*, Chirikba alludes to the role that could usefully be played by '*non-partisan* international mediators and guarantors' -- the difficulty lies in the distinct pro-Georgian (?pro-Shevardnadze) bias displayed by most of the international players, who are largely new to the area and have little understanding of the subtleties of the situation on the ground, not only in this conflict but across the Caucasus as a whole.

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