

**DOCUMENTI  
IAI**

**HUMAN RIGHTS AND REGIONAL CO-OPERATION IN  
THE CAUCASUS: THE ROLE OF GEORGIA**

**REPORT**

*by Marco Gestri and Ettore Greco*

Report of the Conference on "Human Rights and Regional Co-Operation in the Caucasus. The Role of  
Georgia  
*Rome, 11-12 May*

IAI0116

**ISTITUTO AFFARI INTERNAZIONALI**

# HUMAN RIGHTS AND REGIONAL CO-OPERATION IN THE CAUCASUS THE ROLE OF GEORGIA

## REPORT

by Marco Gestri and Ettore Greco

### **Georgia and the European System for the Protection of Human Rights**

The first session of the seminar focused on “Georgia and the European System for the Protection of Human Rights”. Analysis of the topics to be discussed within this framework was preceded by some introductory remarks by Ambassador Maurizio Moreno, Department of Political Affairs of the Italian Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

Ambassador Moreno gave a concise but stimulating overview of the political context in which Georgia’s international relations must be considered. First, he emphasised the clear will of the majority of the Georgian people and of Georgian institutions to strengthen ties with European and Euro-Atlantic organisations. Then he drew the attention of the Georgian participants to the fact that there is a firm determination on the part of the European Union and its member states to consider Georgia a full member of the European family of nations; this has been proven, in particular, by Georgia’s accession to the Council of Europe.

Ambassador Moreno also stressed the importance of the special relationship that has recently developed between Georgia and the European Union. The adoption of the 1996 Partnership and Co-operation Agreement between the European Union (and its member states) and Georgia has provided the legal instruments for pursuing a political dialogue among the parties aimed, *inter alia*, at reinforcing the conditions for application in Georgia of the principles of democracy and respect for the rule of law. It has also paved the way for developing trade and economic relations between Georgia and the European Union.

In this regard, the speaker emphasised the important potentialities offered by the Caucasian market for investments by European companies. The area’s wealth in energy resources and raw materials is well known, but there are also possibilities for foreign direct investment in agriculture and tourism.

At the same time, he recalled the threats to the security and political stability of the Caucasian region posed by the domestic conflicts of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and by the crisis situation in Chechnya. These conflicts create important obstacles in Georgia to the full establishment of the rule of law and an effective system for the protection of human rights. Ambassador Moreno stressed the decisive role that the European Union could play in favouring a political solution of these conflicts.

In concluding, Ambassador Moreno emphasized the special attention with which Italy looks at Georgia. Some important agreements have recently been concluded between the two states, in particular, to foster Italian investments in Georgia and promote economic co-operation, especially between small and medium-sized enterprises. In this connection, he pointed out that important steps have been taken in recent years by the Georgian authorities to eliminate some of the major obstacles encountered by European

firms wishing to operate in Georgia. In particular, the Tbilisi government has tried to introduce reforms in both the economic and political spheres and to fight corruption.

The first session of the seminar was opened by a presentation on "The Human Dimension" by Natalino Ronzitti, Professor of International Law at the LUISS University of Rome and Scientific Advisor at the IAI. He focused on the development in international law and politics of the concept of "human dimension" and on the precise definition of its relationship with the notion of "human rights protection". Recalling the first attempts at codifying the concept of the human dimension in the framework of the Conference (now Organisation) for Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE/OSCE), Professor Ronzitti analysed the 1990 Copenhagen Document on the Human Dimension and the developments resulting from the 1991 Moscow Conference on OSCE practice. From a conceptual point of view, he highlighted the differences between the notions of "human dimension" and "human rights", stressing that "human dimension" is a broader concept than "human rights", in that it also includes issues concerning democracy and security. Other differences pertain to the legal cogency of the two concepts and the mechanisms provided to secure compliance with human dimension and human rights standards. In this respect, he stressed the difference in the position of the individual before supervisory institutions.

But there are also similarities between the rules on the "human dimension" and the provisions on "human rights protection". As is known, both matters are considered as falling outside the domestic jurisdiction of states, as recognised by the 1991 Moscow Declaration. In effect, complex international instruments have been put in place for control of the respect of international standards in both fields. In this regard, the speaker provided, in the last part of his presentation, an interesting analysis of the mechanism on the human dimension developed in OSCE practice. Special attention was devoted to issues concerning the protection of national minorities.

The presentation by Professor Ronzitti was followed by a discussion of the impact of "human dimension" standards on the Georgian situation. Interesting issues were raised by Levan Khurtsidze, Revaz Bachatadze and Shorena Lortkipanidze (all members of a Georgian NGO), regarding the difficult problems of treatment of minorities in a multi-ethnic society such as Georgia. Particularly thorny is the issue of repatriation to Georgia of refugees belonging to the Turkish ethnic minority. From a more general point of view, Sozar Subelian (journalist from the "Green Wave" radio station) stressed the need for deeper legislative reforms, especially in the field of criminal law, to bring the Georgian system effectively in line with international standards.

The second presentation was by Cesare Pinelli, Professor of constitutional law at the University of Macerata (Italy). Professor Pinelli focused on the role of domestic law in the protection of human rights, stressing that rules for human rights protection operate at three different levels: universal international law, regional international law (Council of Europe, European Union) and domestic law. In highlighting the relationships among these levels, he made some interesting references to the experience of the European Communities/European Union, in particular, the special function attributed by the European Court of Justice to the common constitutional traditions of member states to establish the content and scope of the fundamental rights to be protected at Community level. In this connection, Professor Pinelli also discussed the significance and impact of the EU's recently adopted Charter on Fundamental Rights. In the second part of his presentation, he referred to the situation in Georgia, noting that many problems still have to be solved, but also that time is needed for the full application of international

human rights standards in the Georgian context. He particularly emphasised the importance of educating judges and lawyers on the obligations and opportunities stemming from the European system of human rights protection.

The third report of the session, delivered by Rusudan Beridze (Deputy Secretary of National Security Council of Georgia), dealt with Georgia's internal legal order. The speaker offered interesting thoughts on the reform of Georgia's constitutional system after independence (1991). She described the country's main political institutions, both at the national (presidency, government, parliament, judicial system) and the local level. Special consideration was given to the institutions with a specific competence in the field of human rights protection, above all, the Public Defender, established in 1993. Special attention was also devoted to the treatment of national minorities under the Georgian legal system. In the last part of her presentation, Rusudan Beridze analysed the impact upon the Georgian constitutional order of the ratification of international treaties on human rights protection.

Pinelli's and Beridze's presentations stimulated an animated and fruitful debate, revealing a broad variety of opinions concerning the level of human rights protection in the country. Interesting remarks were made by political leaders - in particular Irakli Mindeli (Deputy Chairman of the "Socialist" Party) - and a good number of journalists. Some journalists complained about the Georgian government's persisting limitation of the freedom of expression and the freedom of press, while others stressed the important steps recently taken to solve this problem. The effective role of the Public Defender and, in particular, its real independence from the political bodies, was also the subject of lively discussion among participants. A particularly interesting point was raised by Sozar Subelian, who stressed the limited number of decisions by the Supreme Court of Georgia applying international rules concerning human rights protection.

The last presentation of the session was by Marco Gestri, Professor of European Law at the Law Faculty of the University of Modena (Italy). In his report, devoted to "The right of individual application to international bodies for the protection of human rights", Professor Gestri focussed mainly on the system established by the European Convention on Human Rights, to which Georgia is a party since 1999. Before illustrating the most significant aspects of the Strasbourg system, he emphasised the importance of the 1950 Convention of the Council of Europe, also in the framework of the EC's legal order, and recalled the jurisprudence of the Court of the European Communities on the protection of fundamental human rights, inspired mainly by the 1950 Convention, as well as codification of the principle of the respect for human rights in the Treaty on European Union (Art. 6). Special attention was devoted to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, officially proclaimed at the December 2000 Nice summit, to underline the importance of human rights in the EU framework, and to the clauses on human rights included in the 1996 Partnership and Co-operation Agreement between the European Union and Georgia.

The central part of Professor Gestri's presentation provided a general overview of the right of individual application to the European Court on Human Rights, in light of the recent entry into force of Protocol No. 11 to the Convention and the relevant practice. Issues such as identification of those having the right of application, the definition of the limitations to this right provided by the Convention, and the effects of the judgements rendered by the European Court were discussed.

Finally, Professor Gestri focused on the impact of the European system for the protection of human rights on the Georgian legal order. He noted and tried to give some

reasonable explanations for the limited number of individual applications brought against Georgia before the European Court on Human Rights (7 in the year 2000). In particular, he stressed the need for initiatives aimed at educating Georgian legal professionals in the field of human rights and the importance of promotional activities developed in this field by non-governmental organisations.

The speech prompted an interesting debate in which Michael Emerson of CePS pointed out that the accession to the European Convention by former members of the Soviet Union opened a new chapter in the Convention's practice. He also made specific mention of the danger that this could water down the standards so far applied.

Some interesting points were raised by Georgian participants. Levan Vepkhvadze (Chairman of the Centre for Democratic Novelties) pointed to the European institutions' lack of effective enforcement powers. More in general, there were signs of a certain lack of confidence by the Georgian population in the European system, notably due to the excessive length of the proceedings before the European Court of Human Rights. Nadia Tskepladze of the Tbilisi District Court stressed that judgements are often reached by a narrow majority of judges accompanied by dissenting opinions: this could, in her view, undermine the legal authority of the European Court.

From a general point of view, the following conclusions can be drawn from the first session of the seminar. On the one hand, the different cultural and professional backgrounds of the participants (journalists, political leaders, public officials, judges) did not allow the speakers to go into the legal details of the issues examined. In this connection, the importance of initiatives aimed at educating Georgia's opinion leaders on human rights protection must be underlined.

On the other hand, the participation of different categories of subjects enriched the discussion, providing constant reference to the problems effectively faced by Georgia in the field of human rights, and favouring an interdisciplinary approach to the search for appropriate solutions.

### **Conflict Resolution and Regional Co-operation in the South Caucasus**

Michael Emerson, Senior Research Fellow of Center for European Policy Studies (Ceps) of Bruxelles, and Nathalie Tocci, Research Fellow at Ceps, illustrated the origin, goals and main features of the project for a Stability Pact for the Caucasus. In November 1999 at the OSCE Istanbul Summit all of the South Caucasian leaders and former Turkish President Demirel made unison appeals for a stability or security pact for the Caucasus, as a recipe to break away from the destructive trends of conflict and competition in the region. Yet none of the appeals specified in any detail the content of such pact. At most they speculated upon its possible membership, i.e., what became known as the 3+3+2 format. At CEPS a group of researchers who agreed with the spirit of the appeals made by the leaders of the region produced its first document, the 'Stability Pact for the Caucasus'. The CEPS agenda included 6 principal chapters. 3 focussed specifically on the South Caucasus and the remaining 3 concerned directly the wider region of the Black Sea and South Russia:

- The establishment of federal arrangements, based on an internal division of competences between the centre and the regions, for the resolution of the Caucasian major territorial and ethnic conflicts.

- The creation of a supra-state structure, or a South Caucasus Community which would allow sub-state entities to gain access to a supra-state forum. The SCC would initiate a process of regional co-operation and regional integration in the area. The SCC would be institutionalised through governmental councils and possibly also a Parliamentary Assembly.
- The establishment of an OSCE-sponsored security system which would promote arms control negotiations and provide security guarantees.
- The development of co-operation mechanisms involving Russia, the EU and the US. In the short term those mechanisms would be principally concerned with Western emergency and humanitarian supplies in the Caucasus. At a later stage they would be designed to ensure technical assistance and financial support for economic development.
- The upgrading of the existing Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) into a Black Sea Caucasus Cooperation aimed at fostering co-operation in the wider Black Sea area.
- The launching of a set of initiatives to make full use of the region's high economic potential in energy sector.

At the end of 2000 the South Caucasus lived through a period of renewed tension and division, particularly in view of Russia's more aggressive visa policy towards Georgia. These trends clearly contradicted the spirit of any Stability Pact for the Caucasus. Yet in recent months developments suggest there could be new hope for a reactivated peaceful Caucasus process. The EU Troika mission to the South Caucasus and more importantly the encouraging talks between Presidents Aliiev and Kocharian at Key West Florida in April 2001, give some renewed hope for constructive change.

Bruno Coppieters and Tamara Kovziridze from the Free University of Brussels discussed possible federal solutions for Georgia's territorial arrangements aimed at putting an end to the frozen but still open conflicts over the status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Focusing on the sphere of external relations, they presented two possible models of federalization of foreign policy making.

The first model would be characterized by an asymmetrical distribution of powers: the federal state would consist of several federated entities, but Abkhazia and possibly South Ossetia would be given the highest number of exclusive competences, i.e. they would possess the so-called sovereign rights to legislate and administer laws in a number of fields where no federal intervention would take place. This would reflect, inter alia, in the right to conclude international treaties. This right would be enshrined in the federal constitution. Abkhazia and South Ossetia would thus become subjects of international law and possess limited (not equal with the federal state) international legal personality. Adjara and the regions of Georgia would have the right to conclude international treaties in their fields of competence provided that the federal government consents. As an alternative, Adjara and possibly the regions of Georgia would only have the right to exchange partnerships and regulate cooperation with other regions without these agreements having the quality of treaties in international law a second chamber would have to consent to the ratification of any international treaty concluded by the federal government.

According to a second model characterized by symmetrical distribution of power, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and the territory comprising the rest of Georgia would represent the only separate federated states. Adjara would be an Autonomous Republic on the territory of the latter. The federal government would have no right to enter into

international treaties in fields of exclusive competences of federal states. For the rest, the mechanisms of the first model would be applied.

Dov Lynch, Lecturer at the Department of War Studies of the King's College of London, addressed the problems connected with the existence on the world scene of a number of separatist governments which are striving to consolidate their independence and are actively seeking international recognition, a phenomenon of great political relevance in the Caucasian region.

The speaker placed the emphasis on the recent trends of those governments to coordinate their efforts to acquire an internationally recognized status. Telling examples are the Pridnestrovian Moldovan Republic (PMR), the Republic of South Ossetia, the Republic of Abkhazia and the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic.

These separatist areas have often been dismissed as criminal strips of no-man's land and/or the 'puppets' of external states. As a matter of fact, however, the continuing existence of these separatist areas has impact on the security of metropolitan states from which they have seceded as well as on wider regional developments. They have also represented opportunities for external states to intervene in the region.

The areas seeking self-determination face an incentive system that leads them to seek statehood rather than any form of association with their metropolitan states. The exclusive nature of the club of states, and the principles of equal sovereignty and non-interference upon which it is based, has meant that most self-determination movements will be content with nothing less than state sovereignty in order to achieve what they perceive as justice.

External factors continue to play a critically important role in inhibiting conflict settlement, but there are three key internal factors that work against a peaceful solution: the insistence by the authority of the de facto states on absolute sovereignty; the influence of unsolved security dilemmas which lead separatist areas to give self-defense the highest priority; the worsening of the economic situation and living conditions which fuels autarky syndromes and corrupt corporatism, reinforcing the isolationism of local leaderships.

From an external perspective, the future of these entities appear questionable since they have very fragile economies, are riddled with crime and face severe external threats. However, they have survived for almost a decade and the claim to statehood in these areas carries a logic that is difficult to overcome. Therefore, any solution to these conflicts will have to address the realities of 2001 rather than 1991. Their settlement will have to focus on the structures that have developed over the past decade and much less on the original sources of the conflicts.

Friedemann Mueller, Senior Research Fellow at the Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik of Berlin, focused on the problems of economic regional co-operation with particular regard to the Caspian energy issue and its effects on security co-operation and conflict resolution.

He placed the emphasis on the structural factors that continue to hinder economic co-operation at the regional level. Some of them derive from the Soviet heritage. For instance, the existing infrastructure was designed to underpin the links with Moscow rather than regional co-operation. An adverse factor also inherited from the Soviet times is the deep-rooted conviction that the only effective form of trade is complementary trade, i.e. machines vs. raw material etc. As a result, trade between the South-Caucasian states accounts for less than 5% of their total foreign trade while their trade with Russia remains much larger. Account should also be taken of the fact that

the combined GDP of the three South-Caucasian states is about the same magnitude as that of a middle-sized European city. The badly needed capital will not flow into the region unless a free trade zone and then a custom union are established.

The region is rich in natural and touristic attractions but they can provide a basis for economic development only if adequate infrastructure is built. Tourism, in particular, can offer important employment opportunities contributing to stem the migration flows which is depriving the region of crucial human resources.

Caspian energy resources offer unique potential source for economic development. Regional oil and gas reserves are estimated to be around 30 five times the annual current GDP of all states of Central Asia and the Caucasus. However no Caspian oil arrives in Europe yet, nor is it technically possible to transport Caspian natural gas to Europe unless through the old Soviet pipeline network. Future transport infrastructures may pass through the South Caucasus but there are other options. Energy transportation can also provide the engine for other economic activities and infrastructure measures and has the advantage of being self-financing. Georgia can play a crucial role in the transport infrastructure network. But this calls for political risks to be minimized, a goal that can be achieved only if a compromise is reached on the major pending conflicts including, in particular, the one over the status of Abkhazia. More generally, it is essential not to overlook the close linkage between economic efficiency and risk minimization.

Ugo Dionigi from ENI, Italy's largest oil and gas company, analysed the problems associated with the development of Caspian oil and gas and their specific significance for Southern Caucasian states. The most recent findings have confirmed the huge potential of the region in the energy sector. Ten years of exploration activity have provided ample evidence of that potential.

In a first phase, the findings in Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan were so promising that the region appeared as a new Eldorado and many important contracts were concluded. Subsequent exploration activities revealed, however, that the resources were much smaller than expected, especially in Azerbaijan. This happened in parallel to a sharp decline of international oil prices. As a result, oil companies reviewed their investment plans, reducing or abandoning some of them. More recently new important discoveries were made in both Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan, which has revived the attractiveness of the Caucasus as a key energy area.

Yet, for sheer volumes to be transformed into actual resources, a set of conditions have to be met: adequate know-how and level of technology, the availability of the needed human resources and financial means, a functioning regulatory framework, efficient infrastructure networks.

If the main oil and gas routes in operation, under construction or under design are considered, one comes to the conclusion that the strategic role of Georgia in the transportation networks is far from negligible. As far as oil is concerned the main routes are designed to connect Caspian resources with the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea. They involve, therefore, a direct role of Georgia. Of course other options are possible provided that they receive the necessary consensus and prove economically viable. As for gas, the Russian gas network and the Turkish pipeline system, currently in the implementation phase, offer a rational solution which can also serve the needs of local consumers.

Dag Hartelius, Director of the Department for Central and Eastern Europe of the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, offered the point of view of the EU presidency.



He stressed that the ongoing enlargement process of the EU is bringing Southern Caucasus closer to the EU. The latter is increasingly affected by developments in the region. It is therefore in the interest of the EU, which is already the biggest donor to the region, to contribute to stability and prosperity in the three countries concerned.

The enlargement process can serve as an instrument in itself to achieve this goal. The adoption by Turkey - the future immediate member state neighbor of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan - to the EU *acquis communautaire* will provide new opportunities for trade and sustainable economic development of the three countries. At the same time, the EU is rapidly developing its crisis management capability as well as a comprehensive conflict prevention policy. This is making the Union much better equipped to engage in conflict-ridden areas and use all its tools to promote peace and stability. A particular advantage for the EU when involved in Southern Caucasus is that it is perceived as a positive, impartial power, as well as as a potential gateway to prosperity and long-term security.

Against this background, in January 2001 the EU launched an upgraded policy on Southern Caucasus aiming at a comprehensive approach for a more active engagement in the region. The new policy consists of a set of elements including: (i) reinforced political dialogue with Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan; (ii) more active promotion of regional cooperation; (iii) stronger EU role in conflict prevention and conflict resolution; (iv) intensified dialogue on Southern Caucasus with Russia, the U.S., Turkey and Iran; (v) higher visibility of the EU's activities through an enhanced information policy. The EU has also committed itself to strengthening cooperation and coordination with the OSCE, the Council of Europe and the UN.

Georgia deserves and receives substantial assistance and political backing from the EU. It also plays a key role for regional cooperation initiatives involving both Armenia and Azerbaijan, which is highly appreciated. At the same time the Union remains concerned over the limited progress made in resolving the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. A necessary condition for real reform progress and sustainable economic and social development would also be a rapid and dedicated implementation of the recently adopted anti-corruption strategy. The EU remains concerned about the continuing Russian pressure on Georgia (visa regime, cuts in energy supplies, slow implementation of agreed closure of military bases in Georgia, border violations, etc.) and will continue to raise these issues in its talks with Moscow.

### **Security Challenges in the Caucasus and the Role of Georgia**

Roy Allison, Head of Russia and Eurasia Programme at the Royal Institute of International Affairs of London, started his speech by arguing that most of Georgia's security concerns represent Caucasus-wide challenges. The Georgian security environment has, however, a unique geopolitical character: the country's access to the Black Sea, its location at the center of the Caucasus region, and the importance to the country's stability of developing a Europe-Asia transport corridor. Georgia forms a bridge, or bottleneck for routes from the west to the Caspian and Central Asia.

Georgia has had a stark assessment of the challenges of imperial thinking of certain circles in the Russian military-political establishment. Georgia's official policy has viewed the problem of Abkhazia as a Russian creation and one that Russia can resolve. Yet there has been disillusionment in Georgia since the rapprochement with Russia did

not yield the desired results either in the Abkhazia conflict or in the expected economic benefits. This encouraged the subsequent Western-leaning foreign policy orientation. Tbilisi regards its relationship with Turkey as crucial not only for Georgian economic recovery and military modernization, but also to counterbalance Russia's military presence in the region.

Russian-Armenian military cooperation is a specific Georgian concern. The recent upgrading of the Russian-Armenian relationship causes nervousness in Tbilisi.

A number of non-traditional security challenges impact on Georgia. One issue is pipeline security. The GUUAM organization has discussed the idea of creating a peacekeeping battalion to protect pipelines and safeguard energy corridors. Western states may be able to deliver the necessary training and equipping, as the Caucasian militaries seem unprepared for pipeline security. Drug trafficking represents another regional destabilizing factor, whose effects are felt in Georgia because of its geopolitical position. Terrorism and organized crime networks, which are active in several republics across the border with Georgia, also tend to hinder the country's stabilization. For Georgia, Islamic extremism beyond the northern border are not a principal security threat. However, an enduring low-intensity partisan war in Chechnya, accompanied by further militarization and destabilization in other North Caucasus republics, refugee flows and the human degradation of the region, would represent a serious long-term security challenge for Georgia.

Sophia Matveeva, Consultant at the International Peace Academy, concentrated on the evolution of Georgia's relations with its neighbours, notably Russia, Armenia and Turkey.

She observed that the relationship with Russia is crucial for both security and economic reasons. It has however reached its lowest point since Georgia's independence. With Vladimir Putin's accession to power the Russian leadership started to pursue a differentiated approach to different countries, addressing particular issues it regards as important rather than dealing with the South Caucasus as a whole. Moreover, the Putin resorted – or appears ready to resort – to policy instruments which were unthinkable under Yeltsin, such as the introduction of the visa regime, the use of energy supplies as a leverage to extract political concessions or the deportation of Georgian nationals without legal status in Russia. The OSCE mission in Georgia is performing an important border monitoring operation at the Chechen sector of the Georgian-Russian border which has helped to reduce tensions between the two countries. However, the longest and the most difficult Dagestan sector is poorly guarded, giving grounds to Russia's concerns that arms and fighters penetrate through it and end up in Chechnya.

Relationship with Armenia on the surface is stable. The landlocked and isolated Armenia relies on Georgia for transit and cannot afford any aggravation. However, tensions are simmering over the hurdles of transportation via the Georgian territory, the situation of the Armenian minority in Georgia which numbers at least some 350,000 and especially the development in the region of Javakheti populated by ethnic Armenians.

Turkey is officially Georgia's ally in the region, however, tensions are simmering there as well. Turkey is concerned with political instability on its borders and wants Georgia to become a more stable and predictable country. There are also a number of practicalities causing friction. The transit route to Russia via Batumi is inconvenient and traders are subjected to frequent extortion. Turkey also needs to open a few other and more reliable border crossings. Tbilisi has its own grievances with Ankara: robust ties

between Turkish businessmen and the Abkhaz authorities, encouraged by the Abkhaz diaspora in Turkey, helped the break-away territory to survive and diversify its ties with countries other than Russia. Turkey, in turn, is pushing for the repatriation of Meskhetians to southern Georgia from where they were originally deported. This has proved, so far, too heavy a burden for the Georgian government to shoulder.

Brenda Shaffer, Research Director of the Caspian Studies Program at Harvard University, discussed some recent developments affecting Georgia's security role in the Caucasus.

Concerning Nagorno-Karabakh, she pointed out that although significant progress had been made in the peace process, the situation remains very precarious. Indeed, the status quo may not endure unless the negotiations produce concrete results. There could be a renewal of hostilities with destabilizing effects on the whole region.

The speaker also stressed the urgent need to build regional security arrangements involving the key powers, especially Russia, Turkey and Iran. In the absence of those arrangements, the major powers will be constantly tempted to undertake unilateral initiatives which can further erode regional security.

Of key importance is also the co-operation between Russia and the US. It is important, in this regard, that both Moscow and Washington have a convergent interest in the success of the talks on Nagorno-Karabakh.

Another promising development is the shift of Russia's perception of Turkey. Moscow has begun to see Turkey as less of a threat to its interests in the region and now there seems to be the concrete possibility of a co-operation between the two states on security matters which could contribute to a substantial degree to regional stability.

Scott Nadler, former Caucasus Director at the Office of the U.S. Secretary of Defense, focused his speech on the U.S. role in helping to reform Georgia's armed forces. He stressed that the U.S. is trying to be helpful in many areas: security of Georgia's borders; protection of the energy pipelines from the Caspian Sea; support for Russia's withdrawal of its military bases from Georgian territory. However, without coherent and rational armed forces, Georgia's ability to participate substantively with NATO, much less become a candidate for membership, will remain impossible. Nor can Georgia fulfill any of its national security objectives with a military in its current state.

Last year, the U.S. Defense Department conducted a defense assessment of the Georgian armed forces. A thick document full of findings and recommendations was produced. The study provided a very critical assessment of the state of Georgia's armed forces. Suffice it to quote a single paragraph: "Georgia's armed forces is too large for its budget, and is consequently mired in an undermanned, undertrained, underpaid, underfed, and under equipped state. It is unable to meet the most probable of the most dangerous threat scenarios that Georgia faces. It is a Soviet-style mechanized force unsuited to Georgia's defense requirements."

The U.S. military assistance program for Georgia is quite substantial, relative to what the US provides other countries. The bilateral military contact plan includes close to 100 events this year. Warsaw Initiative Funds (WIF) support Georgia's active participation in the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program. International Military and Educational Training (IMET) funding supports English language training and professional military education. The Georgian Government has used the U.S. Foreign Military Financing (FMF) program to purchase everything from uniforms to helicopters. And last year, the Pentagon began a dialogue with the Turkish General Staff to find way to create synergy and rationality with the assistance the two countries provide Georgia.

There is however a dramatic gap between what Georgia needs and what the U.S. can do. Georgia must take primary responsibility for reforming its military and guaranteeing its security. It should start by enacting the reforms recommended in the U.S. defense assessment. These include: downsizing the military to a force strength of 12-13,000 by 2005; consolidating the armed forces, by, inter alia, merging the Navy into the Coast Guard under the Border Guards; focusing on quality of life issues, i.e. devoting the resources necessary to ensure that the troops have adequate food, clothing, and housing. The Georgian Government must maintain and, if possible, increase military funding as it undergoes this transformation. Also, dealing with the massive corruption issue that permeates the entire Georgian Government is a prerequisite for successful reform of the military, as it is for reform of all sectors of society.

Georgia must also engage with NATO in ways that do not over-stretch. Tbilisi should focus less on big-ticket items – such as hosting NATO exercises - and spend more time developing armed forces that can be truly interoperable with NATO in the long run.