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MITIGATING RUSSIA'S
BORDERIZATION OF
GEORGIA:
A STRATEGY TO
CONTAIN AND ENGAGE

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საქართველოს პოლიტიკის ინსტიტუტი
GEORGIAN INSTITUTE OF POLITICS

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Executive Summary

Russia's use of military, political, and informational tactics to manipulate unresolved conflicts is a dynamic process. One novel warfare tactic Russia has employed since 2009 is the "borderization" of Georgia's territory. The tactic of borderization serves Russia's strategy of undermining Georgia's sovereignty, including its democratic development and independent domestic and foreign policies. Borderization is a new phenomenon, differing from occupation in that it involves the expansion of territory under occupation. Borderization violates not only Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty but also undermines the wider European security order. By continuing its creeping occupation and annexation of Georgian territory, Russia is exposing the weakness of the Georgian state and sowing doubt about the credibility of Euro-Atlantic institutions. Moreover, the tactic

harms NATO and EU security interests by raising risks of escalation, augmenting Russia's militarization of the Black Sea and threatening to disrupt diversification of energy supplies. While the Georgian government condemns borderization as deliberate provocation aimed at destabilization, it lacks tools to directly deter use of the tactic. Therefore, it should focus on mitigating the harmful effects of borderization. This policy paper attempts to provide policy recommendations to that effect. At the local and national levels, the Georgian government should mitigate the human costs of borderization and prevent political and social disruption. At the international level, it should work with its Western partners to respond more assertively to further acts of borderization. This paper sets out detailed recommendations for achieving these objectives.

Introduction

Since the restoration of Georgia's independence, the Russian Federation has pursued a strategy aimed at fragmenting and weakening the Georgian state. To achieve this goal, Russia has both promoted separatism and undertaken direct military invasion. The latter, occurring in Georgia in 2008, is now called the Russo-Georgian "Five-day War."¹ In August 2008, Georgia and Russia reached a Six-Point Cease-fire Agreement to end that conflict. In violation of the agreement, Russia occupied Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region ("South Ossetia") and then illegally recognized both regions as independent states (Figure 1). Nine years later, Russian troops continue to occupy Georgia's breakaway regions. Shortly after the ceasefire agreement was signed, Russia began to cordon off the occupied territories in a process called "borderization." Borderization specifically refers to the unilateral installation of border markers, fencing, and barbed wire along the Administrative Boundary Lines (ABLs) that separate Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region ("South Ossetia") from the rest

of Georgia. In some instances, borderization has involved expanding the amount of Georgia's sovereign territory under Russian occupation.²

In most cases, borderization has occurred along or near the Administrative Boundary Line (ABL) demarcating Tskhinvali region, as most of Abkhazia is largely demarcated by the natural boundary of the Inguri river.³ Russia has undertaken the borderization of Tskhinvali region in waves. In April 2009, the Russian government and the de facto authorities of Sukhumi and Tskhinvali signed respective agreements granting the Russian FSB border troops jurisdiction over the ABLs. The first reported incident of borderization occurred roughly three months later, when local residents of the village of Kveshi on the central government-controlled side of the ABL reported⁴ that Russian border guards had put up border markers in the area.⁵ The process picked up in intensity starting in 2013 when, in two separate incidences, Russian soldiers and Ossetian militia border-

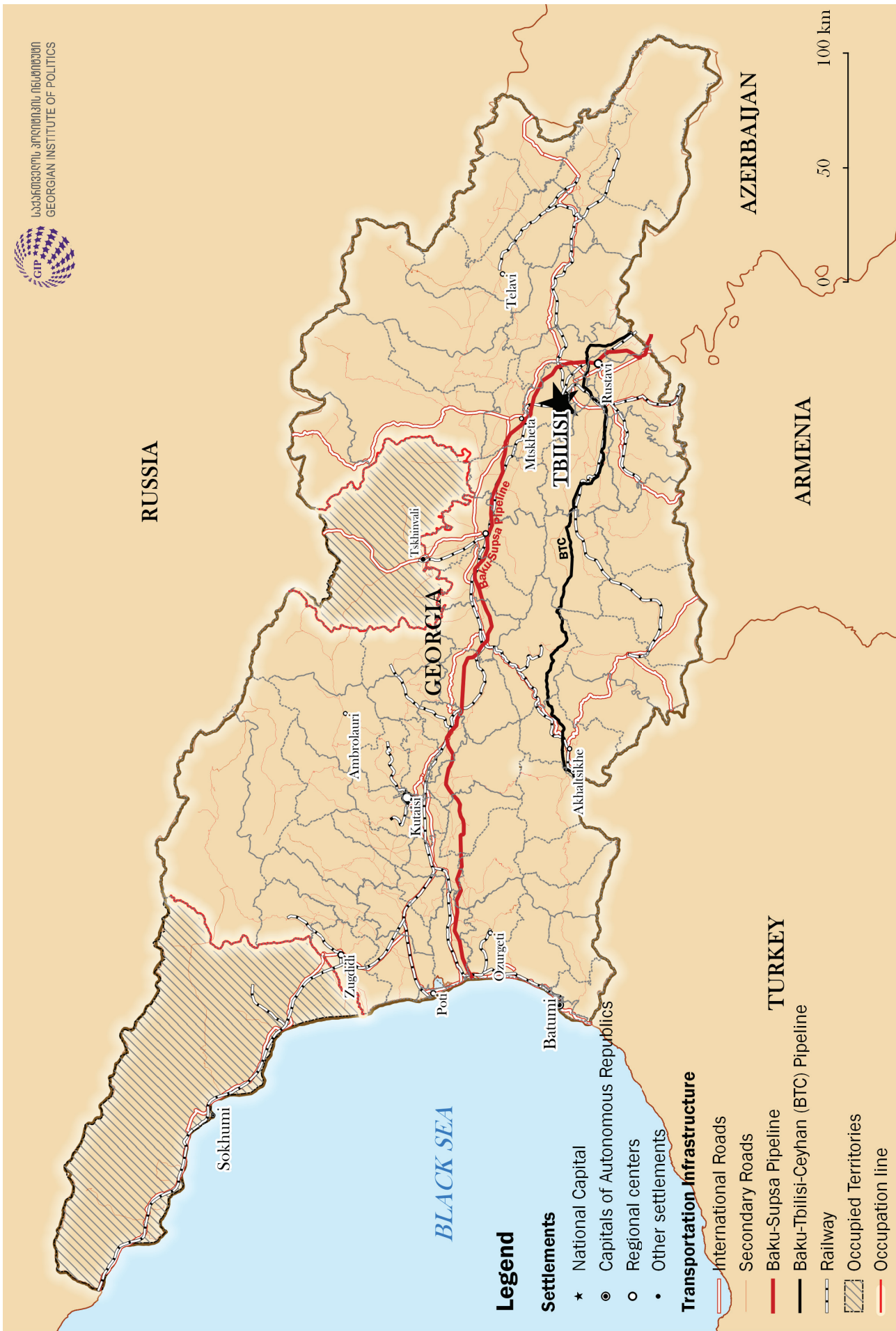
¹ For more information, see: Asmus, R. (2010) *A Little War that Shook the World: Georgia, Russia, and the Future of the West* (New York, St. Martin's Press).

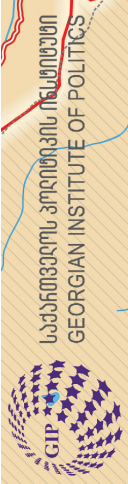
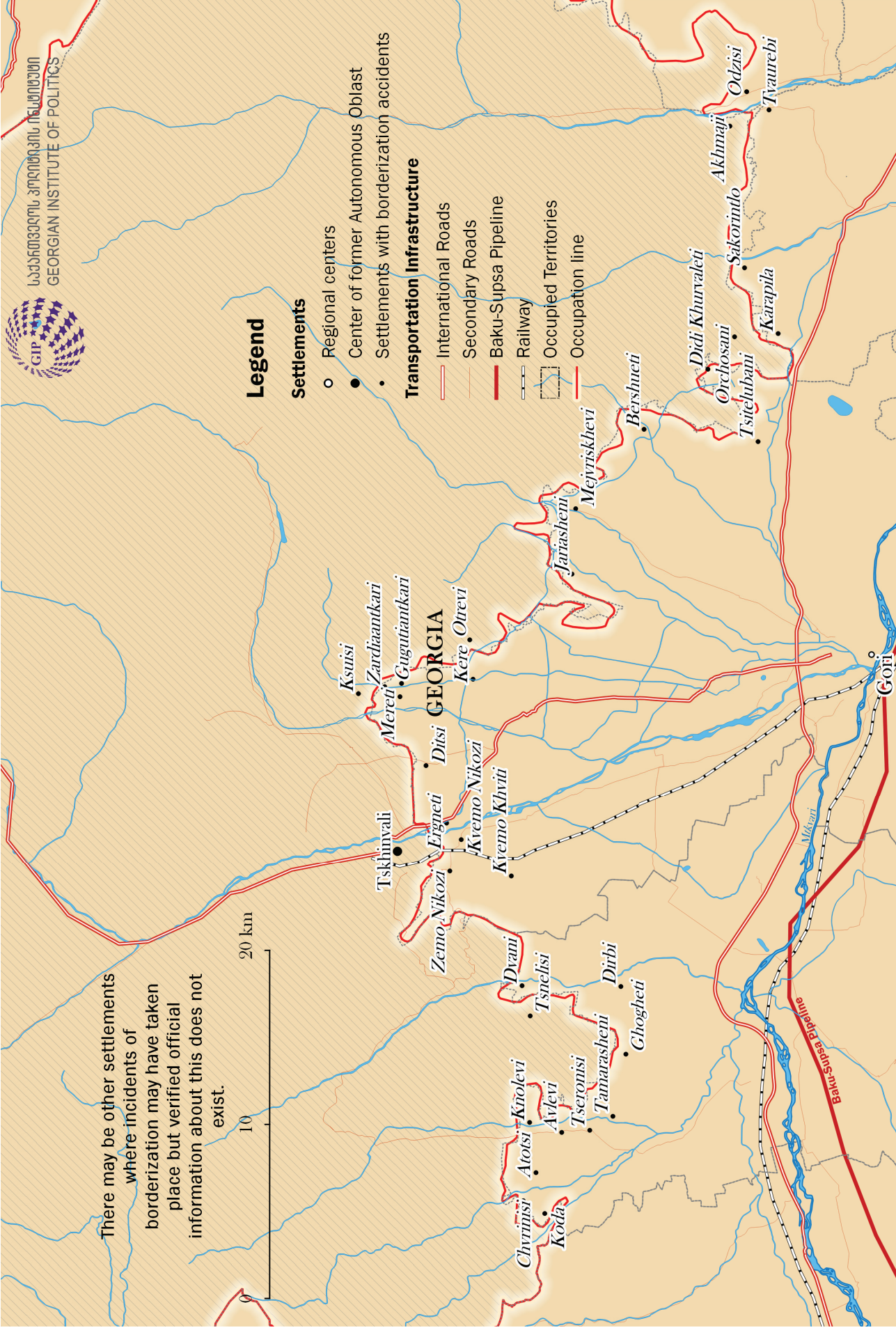
² According to Georgia's Law on Occupied Territories of Georgia, the term "the occupied territories and territorial waters" or "the Occupied Territories" covers the territories of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia, Tskhinvali Region (the territory of the former South Ossetia Autonomous Region) and the Black Sea maritime territory along Georgia's state border with the Russian Federation, running from the southern end of the Psou river to the administrative border at the estuary of the Inguri River. The term also covers airspace over the aforementioned territories.

³ Aptsiauri, G. (2009) 'Russian Troops Try to Shift South Ossetia Border Markers', RFE-RL, 3 August, available at: https://www.rferl.org/a/Russian_Troops_Try_To_Shift_South_Ossetia_Border_Markers/1791641.html.

⁴ According to information provided by the State Security Service of Georgia, the first instance of borderization occurred in 2011 and the process began intensifying in February 2013. According to the State Security Service's information, more than 30 instances had occurred along the ABL with Tskhinvali region as of October 2017. These instances affected 33 villages along the ABL with Tskhinvali region. According to the same information, borderization has affected seven villages along the ABL with Abkhazia.

⁵ Zhorzholiani, A. (2013) 'Russia Continues Border Demarcation in South Ossetia', *The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, 2 October, available at: <https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/field-reports/item/12822-russia-continues-border-demarcation-in-south-ossetia.html/>





ized the ABL near the villages of Ditsi and Khurvaleti on the central government-controlled side of the ABL.⁶ In summer 2015, Russian soldiers installed border markers in the village of Tsitelubani near Tskhinvali region. That incident resulted in a portion of the BP-operated Baku-Supsa oil pipeline being included in the zone of Russian occupation.⁷

Borderization occurs along with the continued integration of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region into the Russian Federation—a policy referred to as “creeping annexation.” This paper interprets borderization as a tactic used to implement creeping annexation. In November 2014, the Russian government and the de facto Abkhaz authorities signed a treaty on “Alliance and Integration.” The agreement covered four main priorities: establishing a coordinated foreign policy and “common defense and security space” (including a “Combined Group of Forces”); creating a common social and economic space; enhanced Abkhaz participation in Russian-led regional integration initiatives (including an Abkhaz commitment to harmonize its de facto customs regime with the Eurasian Economic Union); and maintenance of a common cultural, spiritual, and humanitarian space.⁸ Russia

reached a similar agreement with the de facto Tskhinvali authorities in May 2015.⁹

Abkhaz militia began to integrate into the Russian armed forces in 2015. By 2017, 4,500 soldiers directly under Russian military command were based in Abkhazia.¹⁰ In March 2017, Russia and the de facto Tskhinvali’s authorities signed an agreement to formally merge the region’s militia into the Russian armed forces.¹¹ Such steps by Russia and the de facto authorities in the breakaway regions further erode Georgia’s sovereignty and pose vital challenges to its national security.

Heretofore, the Georgian state has not been able to respond directly to Russia’s actions due to the asymmetry in military power between the two sides. Moreover, as Georgia is a NATO partner but not a full-fledged member, it cannot expect the Alliance to place a check on Russian aggression. Therefore, Georgia’s government is extremely cautious in its response to instances of borderization. There is no military option for Georgia, a fact which Russia exploits. Due to the ongoing and cumulative nature of the problem, a more coordinated and assertive response is needed from Tbilisi and its Western allies.

⁶ North, A. (2015) ‘Georgia accuses Russia of violating international law over South Ossetia’, *The Guardian*, 14 July, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jul/14/georgia-accuses-russia-of-violating-international-law-over-south-ossetia/>.

⁷ ‘Moscow, Sokhumi Endorse Final Text of New Treaty’, *Civil.ge*, 22 November 2014, available at: <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=27841>.

⁸ ‘The Treaty on Alliance and Integration between Russia and South Ossetia has been submitted to the State Duma for ratification’, *Kremlin.ru*, 20 May 2015, available at: <http://en.kremlin.ru/acts/news/49493>.

⁹ Batashvili, D. (2017) ‘Russian troop deployments menace Georgia’, *Civil.ge*, 4 April, available at: <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=29994>.

¹⁰ ‘Moscow, Tskhinvali Ink Military Agreement’, *Civil.ge*, 3 April 2017, available at: <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=29986>.

¹¹ ‘On the Impact of the Closure of Crossing Points on the Rights of the Population Living Along Abkhazia’s Administrative Boundary Line’, *Public Defender (Ombudsman) of Georgia, Special Report*, November 2017.

Policy Implications

The borderization process is part of Russia's campaign to undermine Georgia's sovereignty as well as the wider European security order. This serves several concrete aims: to exert psychological influence over Georgia's government and society; to permanently undermine Georgia's territorial integrity; to undermine the

credibility of Euro-Atlantic institutions; and to prevent further NATO expansion. The effects of borderization are first felt locally by communities on both sides of the ABLs, then in Georgia on the national level, then on the international level, where they have implications for the wider European security order.

Local Implications

First, borderization has grave human costs for the local communities affected. The borderization of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region deepens the respective territories' isolation from the rest of Georgia. This not only hampers the Georgian government's attempts to regain control over the occupied territories, it also hinders the peace and reconciliation process by preventing residents of both territories from crossing the ABLs to enter central government-controlled territory. This creates personal hardship and impedes people-to-people contact. Since April 2016, three of five official crossing points between Abkhazia and the rest of Georgia have been closed off.¹² According to the resident coordinator of the United Nations in Georgia, the closures will affect hundreds of people each day.¹³ This creates hardship for those residents seek-

ing to visit relatives or to partake in medical care, education, or economic opportunities on the other side of the ABL. Internal freedom of movement is also restricted. In Gali district—a majority-ethnic Georgian enclave of Abkhazia—residents must display a so-called Abkhaz passport or resident permit when commuting between villages.¹⁴

Residents of Tskhinvali are adversely affected, as well. While the number of Tskhinvali residents crossing the ABL to access medical services increased precipitously from 2011 to 2016, the figure is likely to decrease year-on-year in 2017.¹⁵ Villages and land plots are divided, depriving some individuals of their homes and farmland. Local residents are regularly detained by guards encroaching onto territory controlled by central government.¹⁶

¹² Quoted in 'On the Impact of the Closure of Crossing Points on the Rights of the Population Living Along Abkhazia's Administrative Boundary Line', November 2017.

¹³ 'The Human Rights Situation of the Conflict-Affected Population in Georgia', Public Defender (Ombudsman) of Georgia, Special Report, June 2017.

¹⁴ Information provided from the public defender of Georgia.

¹⁵ According to information provided by the State Security Service of Georgia, between the end of the Five-day War and November 20, 2017, 1,109 people were detained along the ABL with Tskhinvali region. During the same time period, 1,842 people were detailed along the ABL with Abkhazia. For those figures, the margin of error ranges between five percent and 15 percent.

¹⁶ Conversation with a representative of the public defender of Georgia.

Moreover, it is worth noting that borderization measures have also been taken around the city of Tskhinvali, well within the Russian-occupied side of the ABL.¹⁷ This restricts freedom of movement inside Tskhinvali region as well as across the ABL. According to the public defender of Georgia, this creates problems for some ethnic Os-

setian farmers attempting to access their own croplands.¹⁸ The negative impacts of borderization are felt by local communities regardless of ethnicity and results in violations of the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights in a number of areas, including freedom of movement and freedom from arbitrary arrest and detention.¹⁹

Nationwide Implications for Georgia

Borderization disrupts Georgia's domestic political processes as well. The Georgian public responds with outrage each time new border installations are put up. That outrage is mostly directed against Russia, but it also reflects negatively on Georgia's own government. Consequently, the current central government is viewed as weak and ineffectual on matters involving territorial integrity. This is an effect that can in part be attributed to the government's inability to respond assertively to borderization. Accord-

ing to a June 2017 poll by the National Democratic Institute and the Caucasus Research Resource Center, only 16% of Georgians said they trusted the current ruling party to effectively manage the issue (Figure 2).²⁰ By contrast, 40% reported trusting no party and 28% could not answer the question. This plays into Russia's hands. Injecting anxiety into Georgian society saps legitimacy from the current regime, disrupting the normal functioning of government.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) The United Nations, available at: <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>.

¹⁹ Online Data Analysis (2017) Caucasus Research Resource Center, available at: <http://caucasusbarometer.org/en/nj2017ge/WPRSTINT/>.

²⁰ Kremlin Influence Index (2017) Detector Media, European Values, Media Development Foundation, & Political Capital, Joint Research Report, available at: http://osvita.mediasapiens.ua/content/files/dm_iik_engl_pravka-compressed.pdf.

WPRSTINT: Which political party do you trust most to manage the following issues? – Restoring territorial integrity (%)

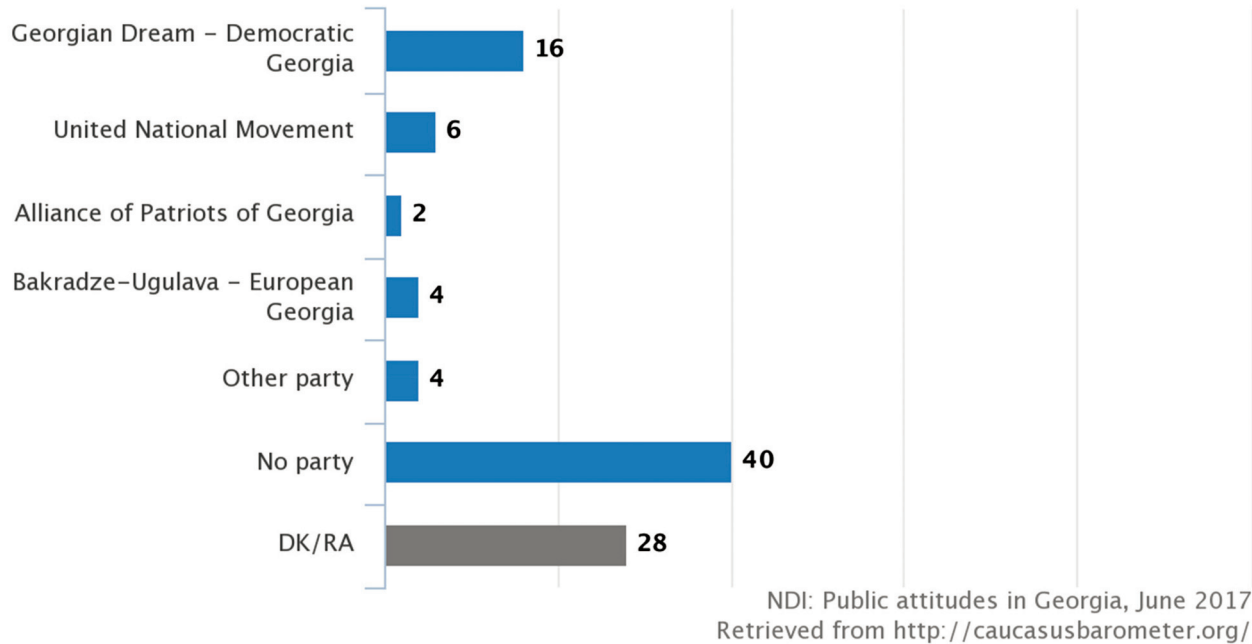


Figure 2: Online Data Analysis (2017) Caucasus Research Resource Center.

This situation is damaging not only to domestic perceptions of the government's effectiveness but also to the country's external image. Given that incidents of borderization occur intermittently and are followed by public demonstrations of outrage, the process feeds the Kremlin-promoted perception that Georgia is an unstable, failed state.

Borderization also strengthens two Kremlin narratives being disseminated in Georgia: first, that Georgia's Western allies (especially NATO) are unwilling or unable to help it restore its territorial integrity, making Euro-Atlantic integration pointless; and second, that Russia holds all the cards

and therefore the Georgian government has no choice but to make concessions in the hope of regaining sovereignty over the separatist regions.²¹ Moscow hopes that in the long run, this dilemma will prompt Georgia to cease its Euro-Atlantic integration and return to the Russian sphere of influence.²²

Borderization also impedes Georgia's NATO integration. According to the accession criteria set out in the 1995 Study on NATO Enlargement, any territorial disputes must be resolved before membership can be considered: "States which have ethnic disputes or external territorial disputes, including irredentist claims, or inter-

²¹ Cohen, A. & Hamilton, R. (2011) 'The Russian Military and the Georgia War: Lessons and Implications', Strategic Studies Institute, ERAP Monograph, June, available at: <http://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/pdffiles/pub1069.pdf>.

²² 'Study on NATO Enlargement' North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 3 September 1995, available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_24733.htm.

nal jurisdictional disputes must settle those disputes by peaceful means in accordance with OSCE principles.”²³ While this not an official precondition for membership, NATO considers matters of territorial integrity when deciding whether to accept additional members.

Moreover, borderization casts doubt on NATO’s viability and Georgia’s potential for membership. By solidifying the separatist status of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region, Moscow presents territorial integrity and NATO integration as a false dilemma – with the prevailing Kremlin narrative being that Georgia must abandon NATO integration before it can regain sovereignty over its occupied territories – or vice versa, officially cede sovereignty over the territories in order to join NATO.²⁴

The process also erodes public confidence in the EU. European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM) staff were deployed to Georgia in September 2008. The first priority of the monitors is “to ensure that there is no return to hostilities.”²⁵ However, Russia has precluded monitors from

entering Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region, thus monitors have no access to the Georgia-Russia border. For that reason, monitors are unable to fully monitor the security situation in the conflict zones as stipulated in the 2008 ceasefire agreement. Additionally, the EUMM staff are unarmed monitors, not peacekeepers; their mandate only covers reporting on the situation along the ABLs. While nothing further can be done from the perspective of the EUMM – due to its limited mandate – its inability to prevent further instances of borderization damages the EU’s credibility in the eyes of some Georgian citizens.

In short, borderization also erodes public confidence in the viability and utility of NATO and EU integration. Each time Russia deepens its occupation and NATO and EU member states fail to deter such actions, it exposes the fact that the Western Alliance is largely unable to directly help Georgia defend its sovereignty. By exposing NATO’s and the EUs weaknesses and shortcomings, Russia’s actions in Georgia are the localization of a broader campaign against the Western Alliance.

Implications for the European Security Order

Borderization has negative implications for the broader European security order. It directly contradicts the principle of inviolability of borders,

which is a cornerstone of contemporary European security recognized by the Helsinki Final Act. It also undermines fundamental principles of in-

²³ Kakachia, K. (2013) ‘NATO-Georgia Relations: Will 2014 Bring Anything New?’, PONARS EURASIA, PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo no. 291, available at: <http://www.ponarseurasia.org/memo/nato-georgia-relations-will-2014-bring-anything-new>.

²⁴ Our Mandate (2017) European Union Monitoring Mission, available at: https://www.eumm.eu/en/about_eumm/mandate.

²⁵ Bugajski, J. & Doran, P. (2016) ‘Black Sea Rising: Russia’s Strategy in Southeast Europe’, Center for European Policy Analysis, Black Sea Strategic Report No. 1, February.

ternational law, including respect for sovereignty, non-use of force, and the principle of non-intervention in the internal affairs of other states.

At the most basic level, borderization increases the potential for renewed military conflict. By increasing its military presence and moving its forward positions deeper into Georgian territory, Russia and the separatist regimes increase the risks of further provocation. For example, the presence of Russian FSB border guards and Abkhaz and Ossetian militia along the ABLs increases the chances of conflict with local residents and anti-borderization demonstrators. A small-scale, local conflict could potentially spiral into shooting between the Georgian and Russian militaries, resulting in an international crisis.

Moreover, the occupation and creeping annexation of Abkhazia have given it a dominant position in the eastern Black Sea littoral.²⁶ Control over Abkhazia's 195-kilometer coastline complements Russia's annexation of Crimea to expand its anti-access, area denial zone (A2/AD) in the Black Sea. Russia's remilitarization of the Black Sea directly harms NATO and EU in-

terests by disrupting access to Asia and the Middle East. Russia has already used its enhanced presence to deploy parts of the Black Sea Fleet to Syria, directly opposing NATO and EU interests there.²⁷

Furthermore, Russia's occupation of Georgia threatens another key component of the European security order: energy security. As mentioned above, part of the Baku-Supsa oil pipeline is now under Russian occupation. A potential future outbreak of hostilities between Georgia and Russia could threaten the pipeline as well as the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipelines running through southern Georgia. By fomenting instability, Russia can also impede further development of the Southern Gas Corridor, an EU-led initiative to bring Caspian gas to EU markets.²⁸ The route from Azerbaijan to Europe includes the South Caucasus Pipeline, which is currently being expanded to meet growing EU demand.²⁹ Regional instability poses a direct threat to EU ambitions for more diverse sources of energy supply and its stabilizing efforts in general in the immediate neighborhood.

²⁶ Toucas, B. (2017) 'The Geostrategic Importance of the Black Sea Region: A Brief History', Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2 February, available at: <https://www.csis.org/analysis/geostrategic-importance-black-sea-region-brief-history>.

²⁷ Gas and oil supply routes (2017) European Commission, available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/energy/en/topics/imports-and-secure-supplies/gas-and-oil-supply-routes>.

²⁸ South Caucasus Pipeline Project (2017) BP, available at: https://www.bp.com/en_ge/bp-georgia/about-bp/bp-in-georgia/south-caucasus-pipeline--scp-.html.

²⁹ 'Meeting of Georgian, Russian Negotiators in Prague', Civil.ge, 6 June 2013, available at: <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=26152/>.

Domestic Obstacles to Action

The Georgian government has few tools at its disposal to directly deter further incidents of borderization. What can be more readily done, is to mitigate the effects of borderization to such an extent that the process no longer serves Russian interests. Options are available to the Georgian government, although several major obstacles currently impede action: lack of interagency coordination within the government; lack of strategic communication to engage and inform the domestic public; and lack of cooperation among Georgia's political actors regarding borderization.

In interviews with various Georgian government agencies, it became evident that borderization has not been studied in a systematic and coordinated manner. For example, there is no unified government stance regarding "waves" of borderization – why it occurs when it does, and what forms it takes. Representatives of various state agencies do not agree on whether the timing of incidents depends on the availability of funds from the Russian state budget or whether instances of borderization are timed to coincide with important political events such as the Abashidze-Karasin meetings and milestones on the country's Euro-Atlantic integration agenda.³⁰ Moreover, different government agencies offer different accounts of when borderization began. Such a situation impedes taking effective measures to mitigate the effects of borderization.

As long as the Russian state relies on proxy regimes and military force to project its power in the post-Soviet space, civilians in conflict areas continue to pay the price for power politics through violations of their safety, rights, and welfare. Although the Georgian government lacks tools to directly influence Moscow to change its behavior, it is possible to communicate with the public in a more deliberate manner so that reactions to further incidents of borderization do not translate into outrage against the state or feed into Kremlin narratives. This is not to understate the significance of Georgia's territorial integrity. Rather, it is to ensure the public understands that expressions of outrage are misplaced and unhelpful in responding to borderization and to restoring Georgian sovereignty in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region more generally.

Finally, the fact that Georgian political parties have divergent responses to Russia and its actions in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region further complicates the situation. For obvious reasons, the issue of territorial integrity can be a potent instrument in the struggle for political power. Borderization is a tangible expression of Georgia's problems and the government can easily be criticized for its "inaction." For example, in July 2017, when the government reported another incident of borderization, one opposition politician stated, "today they will abduct a Georgian citizen. Tomorrow they will

³⁰ "Tbilisi Says Russian Troops Seize Farmlands Adjacent to South Ossetia." *Civil.ge*, 5 July 2017. Available at: <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=30238&search=>

move deeper [into the Georgian-controlled territory]: they know that the Georgian government will have no reaction to it.”³¹ Yet another opposition politician criticized the government for not being proactive on this front: “Of course, we cannot change Russia,

but we can eradicate and prevent this through a lot of active, concrete steps both inside and outside the country.” Heretofore, political parties and civil society actors have been unable to offer adequate alternatives to existing policy.

Conclusion

Russia’s tactic of borderization threatens not only Georgian security but also the wider European security order, the latter by augmenting Russia’s militarization of the wider Black Sea region and its ability to disrupt EU attempts at diversification of energy sources. The maintenance of unresolved conflicts enables Russia to remain the dominant regional actor not only in Georgia but in the wider Black Sea region. This weakens NATO’s regional security position; it also increases the risk of a renewed outbreak of conflict, as Russian troops occupy forward military positions in a NATO- and EU-aspirant country. Moreover, erecting barriers along the ABLs in Georgia’s breakaway regions violates the human rights of local residents on both sides of the ABLs and leads to frustration among the Georgian public regarding the apparent

inability of NATO and the EU to help Georgia solve one of its most pressing national problems. Moreover, by impeding freedom of movement across the ABLs and within the occupied territories, borderization hampers the peace and reconciliation process promoted by the international community. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that different governmental agencies have different understandings of the borderization process. Data collection and interagency cooperation are lacking. The Georgian government’s toolkit for responding to these challenges is limited. However, it is still possible to bolster measures aimed at mitigating the negative effects of borderization on the local, national, and international levels. This can be done by adopting a range of recommendations, as provided below.

³¹ Ibid.

Policy Recommendations

i Recommendations for the Georgian Government

The Georgian government currently lacks the tools to directly deter or prevent acts of borderization. Lack of coordination among government agencies and across Georgia's political spectrum regarding the facts and interpretations of borderization is problematic and creates obstacles to responding to further incidents of borderization. While partisan mud-slinging may help achieve short-term political gains, it increases social anxiety and political risks, disrupts Georgia's democratic political processes, and strengthens Kremlin narratives. Therefore, the government, while maintaining its strong position regarding recent developments in occupied regions, should be cautious when unilaterally responding to new incidents of borderization. Organizing large-scale demonstrations along the ABL has the potential to escalate the conflict. Such actions should be avoided in order not to be interpreted as provocations. Domestically, the government's focus should be on mitigating the human and psychological effects of borderization. Therefore, the government should:

- **Provide improved public services to people affected by the occupation.**

The government should continue supporting the livelihoods of people affected by the occupation living on both sides of the ABLs. Moreover, it should ease procedures for obtaining Geor-

gian passports so that the residents of the occupied territories can enjoy public services as well as the benefits of visa liberalization with the EU.

- **Improve coordination among government institutions.**

The lack of careful, coordinated study is problematic as it impedes development of a state strategy. In order to remedy the situation, the government should create an interagency working group to study the issue, form a coherent official position, and develop a unified action plan. The action plan should include detailed procedures establishing who is responsible for what when a new incident of borderization occurs.

- **Develop a unified state communication strategy.**

The communication strategy should focus on communicating borderization to the public. The communication strategy must achieve two objectives: accurately inform the public about the issue; and counter Kremlin narratives intended to impose psychological costs on the Georgian public. The strategy should manage expectations regarding Euro-Atlantic integration and its potential for helping restore Georgia's territorial integrity.

- **Improve the practice of informing the international community regarding borderization.**

The Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs informs foreign embassies when a new incident of borderization occurs. However, communication with international partners can be improved by maintaining a chronology of events and producing an annual report on borderization. The report would describe the events of the prior year and provide facts and statistical data to put borderization in the context of Russia's wider security strategy. This would decrease the possibility of incidents being interpreted on an ad hoc basis. The report should be distributed to embassies as well as international organizations such as the UN, OSCE, Council of Europe, and others.

➤ **Link borderization to the events in Ukraine and Moldova.**

The government should intensify its diplomatic efforts in coordination with the international community to make sure that borderization – as well as Russia's occupation of Georgian territory in general – is referenced in international resolutions and documents adopted by major international organizations. The government should also coordinate its anti-occupation policy with Ukraine and Moldova to reach a joint position to be taken in international forums. This will help frame borderization in the wider context of Russia's aggressive strategy toward its neighbors.

i Recommendations for the International Community

Russia's use of borderization is likely to continue as long as adequate costs are not imposed in response. The Georgian government lacks the capabilities to unilaterally impose costs on Russia in response to borderization. Any response must be international. The West should treat Russian violations of Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity as it treats Russia's annexation of Crimea and invasion of the Donbas – illegal and unacceptable. Therefore, the international community should consider the following options:

➤ **The EU and other international actors should put pressure on Russia to demilitarize the ABLs.**

Georgian's western allies should call for demilitarization of the ABLs. As

the Georgian armed forces are pulled back, demilitarization by Russia would create "buffer" zones along both ABLs. This would bring immediate benefits to local residents on both sides of the ABLs as well as reduce tensions and promote peaceful dialogue among all interested parties.

➤ **Increase calls to allow EUMM officials access to the occupied territories and enhance its technical capabilities.**

Russia's actions should be made more transparent and more attention should be drawn to its refusal to adhere to the 2008 ceasefire agreement, including its refusal to allow the EUMM to fulfil its original mandate. The EUMM should also increase the number of its staff to increase visibility from the

Russian side. The full-fledged functioning of the EUMM mission could help facilitate establishment of mutual trust along the ABLs, allowing crossing points to be reopened and local residents to move freely to engage in commerce, visit relatives, and obtain necessary medical services.

⇒ Increase support for reconciliation and peaceful reintegration of occupied regions in Georgia.

All parties should be encouraged to continue constructive negotiations aimed at achieving a mutually agree-

able non-use of force agreement. That should include continued negotiations within the Geneva discussions, despite the fact that a significant part of Georgia's population has lost confidence in the discussions' ability to yield tangible results. Georgia's western allies could also provide financial support for public services aimed at residents of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region, as well as Internally-displaced Persons. This aids the reconciliation process by mitigating the isolation of residents of the occupied territories from the rest of Georgia.

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