

## Map 42

### 1991–1992: South and North Ossetia

## Map 43

### 1992–1993: Abkhazia

**O**n 17 March 1991 a referendum was held throughout the Soviet Union on whether to preserve the country as a federation of sovereign republics. At the time the referendum took place, armed conflict was already under way between Georgian troops and South Ossetian militias seeking independence from Georgia. Georgia did not participate in the Soviet referendum, instead holding its own on 26 May. The Georgian referendum was used as the basis for proclaiming Georgia's independence (secession from the Soviet Union). South Ossetia, meanwhile, did participate in the Soviet referendum, and based on the result of the referendum and on Soviet law announced that it would remain an autonomy (now a republic) within the USSR. After the Soviet Union fell in December, Tskhinvali issued a declaration of South Ossetian independence and the creation of the Republic of South Ossetia, at which Georgia stepped up its military pressure.

The armed confrontation between South Ossetia and Georgia ended in 1992 with the Sochi Agreement of 24 June, which established a Joint Peacekeeping Force (JPKF) comprised of Russian, Ossetian, and Georgian battalions. The agreement created a zone of JPKF responsibility that included about a third of the territory of South Ossetia and a contiguous portion of Georgia proper (consisting primarily of the Gori District), all of which was subject to demilitarization. The battalions, which were under joint command, were given sectors of responsibility that largely corresponded to the zones under either Ossetian or Georgian control at the time the Sochi Agreement was signed. These zones were largely defined by their pre-outbreak ethnic composition, with Ossetians holding areas that were predominately inhabited by Ossetians, and Georgians holding South Ossetian areas that had majority Georgian populations. Population patterns created interspersed stripes of Georgian and Ossetian control. The Ossetians (the Republic of South Os-

setia, or RSO, though no other government recognized their sovereignty at the time) governed the sectors of responsibility under the control of Russian and Ossetian JPKF battalions, while Georgian authorities governed the Georgian battalion's sector of responsibility.

Between 1993 and 2003 a system developed whereby the functions of government were carried out both in direct coordination between the parties to the conflict (Georgia and South Ossetia) and through a Joint Control Commission (JCC) created under the Sochi Agreement that included not only Georgia and South Ossetia but also Russia and North Ossetia. The JCC coordinated efforts by Georgian and South Ossetian law enforcement agencies and facilitated the socioeconomic rehabilitation of the conflict zone and the return of refugees. An important function of the JCC was to serve as a platform for the negotiation process whereby the parties to the conflict, through the mediation of Russia and with participation by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the European Commission, could coordinate steps toward settlement and reconstruction.

During this period the framework set in place by the Sochi Agreement (the JCC and JPKF) and the actual practices of peacekeeping prevented an escalation of violence in South Ossetia. Interethnic tensions in the zone of conflict were significantly eased, and until March 2004 the population was able to move freely and without fear between zones controlled by both sides. The local economy of South Ossetia and adjacent districts of Georgia took shape around the Transcaucasus Highway, which connected Russia and Transcaucasia and permitted South Ossetia to integrate its economy into those of South Russia and central Georgia. The economy of the unrecognized Republic of South Ossetia was to a large extent dependent on this road, as well as on financial support from the Russian Federation. The

informal economic and financial integration of South Ossetia into Russia was accompanied by a measure of civic integration: by 2004 most of the Ossetian population of the RSO had received Russian citizenship, having refused to take Georgian citizenship after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the 1991–1992 war. Anyone living in South Ossetia, including people in Georgian-controlled areas, was allowed to cross the Russian border without a visa (this was also true for residents of Georgia's Kazbegi District), despite the fact that since January 2001 the Russian authorities had required Georgian citizens to have visas to enter the country. So by April 2004, South Ossetia was essentially a Russian protectorate and a "free trade" zone within the internationally recognized borders of Georgia. Tens of thousands of Ossetians and Georgians participated in duty-free commerce across the Georgian-Russian border. The quality of personal interactions between Ossetians and Georgians (despite the absence of a political settlement) gained the South Ossetian peacekeeping effort international recognition as relatively successful.

As of 2004 the two sides were far from finding a solution to the question of the political and legal status of South Ossetia, endangering the informal, grass-roots reconciliation of the Ossetian and Georgian peoples. The official Georgian position under President Eduard Shevardnadze was that any Ossetian autonomy within Georgia was illegitimate and that any institutions of this autonomy had to be dismantled and its territory incorporated into Georgia (primarily, into Shida Kartli Province), as it had been in 1991 when Georgia seceded from the Soviet Union. The very term "South Ossetia" was proclaimed invalid.

The official South Ossetian position was grounded in the idea of the historical validity and actual institutional and legal existence of a South Ossetian autonomy. Furthermore, the Ossetians saw the endangerment of their autonomy as the main factor necessitating independence from Georgia and driving