

ГЕОПОЛІТИЧНІ Й ІСТОРИЧНІ ПІДСТАВИ ПОЛІТИКИ РОСІЙСЬКОЇ ФЕДЕРАЦІЇ ЩОДО САМОПРОГОЛОШЕНИХ ДЕРЖАВНИХ УТВОРЕНЬ В ГРУЗІЇ

GEOPOLITICAL AND HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION'S POLICY TOWARD SELF-PROCLAIMED STATE ENTITIES IN GEORGIA

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Abstract. *The purpose of the study is to analyze the historical prerequisites and geopolitical background of Russia's policy towards provoking and pretending to settle the Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-South Ossetian ethno-political conflicts in the territory of post-Soviet Georgia. The research methodology is based on the principles of historicism, systematicity, authorial objectivity, the use of general scientific (analysis, synthesis, generalization) and special historical (historical-genetic, historical-typological, historical-systemic) methods. The scientific novelty lies in clarifying the historical prerequisites for the proclamation of the self-proclaimed Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Georgian autonomous entities within the USSR, whose "independence" was supported first by the Soviet and later by the Russian leadership. In this way, the Russian Federation sought to weaken independent Georgia, depriving it of the right to pursue an independent foreign policy. Also, on the example of Georgia, one can see how Russia occupies territories, creates a controlled government there and thus influences the internal politics of its neighbors. The Russian Federation's policy towards self-proclaimed state formations in Georgia is part of the Russian strategy of restoring the Soviet empire with its center in Moscow. To this end, the Russian Federation uses the usual tools for empires: provoking ethno-political conflicts, managing them by introducing "peacekeeping forces" into the confrontation zone, encouraging the population of the rebellious republics to obtain Russian citizenship, providing economic and financial support to separatist regimes, and conducting an external disinformation campaign regarding the Russian Federation's right to the so-called historical territories of the former USSR. All these means are aimed at legitimizing the Russian presence in post-Soviet countries, such as Georgia, and thus at making it impossible for official Tbilisi to ensure the implementation of the foreign policy course towards Georgia's European and Euro-Atlantic integration. This Russian policy currently makes it impossible for Georgia to leave the sphere of Russian imperial geopolitical influence.*

Keywords: *Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Georgia, ethno-political conflict, Russian Federation policy, restoration of the Soviet Union, Russian-Georgian war, geopolitical influence.*

Анотація. *Метою дослідження є аналіз історичних передумов і геополітичного підґрунтя політики Росії щодо провокування і удаваного врегулювання грузино-абхазського і грузино-південноосетинського етнополітичних конфліктів на терені пострадянської Грузії. Методологія дослідження заснована на принципах історизму, системності, авторської об'єктивності, використанні загальнонаукових (аналіз, синтез, узагальнення) та спеціально-*

історичних (історико-генетичний, історико-типологічний, історико-системний) методів. Наукова новизна полягає у з'ясуванні історичних передумов проголошення у складі СРСР самопроголошених Абхазії і Південної Осетії, грузинських автономних утворень, чия «самостійність» була підтримана спочатку радянським, а згодом російським керівництвом. В такий спосіб Російська Федерація прагнула послабити незалежну Грузію, позбавивши її права проводити незалежну зовнішню політику. Також на прикладі Грузії можна побачити як Росія окупує території, створює там підконтрольну владу і таким чином впливає на внутрішню політику своїх сусідів. Політика РФ щодо самопроголошених державних утворень в Грузії є складовою російської стратегії відновлення радянської імперії з центром в Москві. Задля цього влада РФ використовує звичний для імперій інструментарій: провокування етнополітичних конфліктів, управління ними за допомогою введення в зону протистояння «миротворчих сил», заохочення населення бунтівних республік до отримання російського громадянства, економічну та фінансову підтримку сепаратистських режимів, зовнішню дезінформаційну кампанію щодо права РФ на так звані історичні території колишнього СРСР. Усі ці засоби спрямовані на легітимацію російської присутності в пострадянських країнах, на кшталт Грузії, відтак на неможливість для офіційного Тбілісі забезпечити реалізацію зовнішньополітичного курсу на європейську і євроатлантичну інтеграцію Грузії. Ця російська політика наразі унеможливлює вихід Грузії із сфери російського імперського геополітичного впливу.

Ключові слова: *Абхазія, Південна Осетія, Грузія, етнополітичний конфлікт, політика Російської Федерації, відновлення Радянського Союзу, російсько-грузинська війна, геополітичний вплив.*

Introduction. More than thirty years ago, amid the disintegration of the USSR and the rise of national liberation movements among peoples oppressed by the Soviet communist empire, the Abkhazian and South Ossetian Soviet republics were proclaimed within the Georgian SSR as components of the Soviet Union. Despite the collapse of the USSR, these entities did not become fully-fledged subjects of international law. Nevertheless, their existence posed a threat to the territorial integrity of independent Georgia and became an issue of geopolitical contention among major global political actors, thus transforming into a pressing international problem. What is the essence of this problem? Since the answer lies in historical and geopolitical dimensions, this article attempts to identify the causes and consequences of Russia's imperial policy in Abkhazia and Georgia's Tskhinvali region.

The purpose of the study is to analyze the historical prerequisites and geopolitical background of Russia's policy towards provoking and pretending to resolve the Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-South Ossetian ethnopolitical conflicts in the territory of post-Soviet Georgia.

Literature review. The historical and political prerequisites of ethnopolitical conflicts in Georgia, the causes and consequences of the Georgian-Russian war of 2008 were covered in sufficient detail by Ukrainian researchers (Bebeshko, 2010; Doroshko, 2008, 2011; Doroshko, Aliksiejchenko, 2025; Korniychuk, Lazhnik, 2010; Kyrydon, Troyan, 2009; Kulyk, 2009; Perepelitsa, 2003; Shelest, 2009), and foreign authors (Baev, 1996; Herzig, 1999; Lynch, 2000; Zdravomyslov, 1999), however, they are not fully able to explain the origins of the interethnic confrontation in Georgia and the motivation for the participation of the Russian Federation in its settlement.

Main results of research. However, these studies do not fully clarify the deeper roots of interethnic confrontation. The causes of most interethnic conflicts in the post-Soviet space should be sought not in inherent hostility between neighboring peoples but in the period when Russian Bolshevism - the imperial successor of Russian tsarism - imposed the Soviet form of governance on the peoples of the former national peripheries of the Russian Empire against their will, concealing behind it the dictatorship of the Bolshevik Party.

Acting on the principle of "divide and rule," previously cohesive ethnic groups were divided among several national-state formations. Such was the fate of the Ossetians, who today live compactly in the Kabardino-Balkarian and North Ossetian republics of the Russian Federation and

in the Tskhinvali region of Georgia. This North Caucasian people came under Russian control after Russia annulled the 1783 Treaty of Georgievsk in 1801, which had established a Russian protectorate over eastern Georgia. Following the creation of the Tiflis Governorate in 1843, which included the historical Georgian region of Shida Kartli, the Russian authorities established the Ossetian District. In 1859, however, it was abolished and incorporated into Gori County of Georgia (Doroshko, Alieksiejchenko, 2025, p. 113).

After the Bolshevik coup in Russia in October 1917, the territory of contemporary South Ossetia came under the control of the Democratic Republic of Georgia. Between 1918 and 1920, three anti-government uprisings orchestrated by the Bolsheviks broke out in South Ossetia, intending to establish Soviet rule and join the region to the RSFSR. All of them were suppressed. Nevertheless, after the Red Army overthrew the government of the Democratic Republic of Georgia, the Bolshevik leadership created the South Ossetian Autonomous Region in April 1922, disregarding historical realities. The region incorporated not only the mountainous areas of the Caucasus range populated predominantly by Ossetians but also foothills and lowlands inhabited largely by Georgians. Initially, the autonomous region became part of the Transcaucasian Federation, and from 1936 it belonged to the Georgian SSR (Doroshko, Alieksiejchenko, 2025, p. 113).

The Georgian - Abkhaz conflict also stems from the arbitrary treatment of the history of Georgian - Abkhaz relations by Soviet authorities. When constructing national-state entities in the Caucasus in the early 1920s, the Bolshevik leadership in Moscow did not consider, for example, that Abkhazia had detached from the Georgian kingdom as early as the beginning of the 15th century. Between the late 15th and 18th centuries, Abkhaz territory was under Ottoman control, and from the early 19th century it became part of the Russian Empire. In 1917, the Abkhaz joined the Union of United Mountaineers of the Caucasus, which in 1918 proclaimed the Mountainous Republic composed of Dagestan, Checheno-Ingushetia, Ossetia, Karachay-Balkaria, Kabarda, Adygea, and Abkhazia. On 31 March 1921, the Abkhaz Soviet Socialist Republic was proclaimed; by December 1921 it became part of Soviet Georgia as the Abkhaz Soviet Republic under treaty status, and in 1931 it was transformed into the Abkhaz ASSR, which became part of the Georgian SSR in 1936 (Doroshko, Alieksiejchenko, 2025, p. 101).

Thus, by disregarding historical realities, the Bolsheviks deliberately laid the foundation for future Georgian - Ossetian and Georgian - Abkhaz confrontation, which erupted during the final years of the USSR. Having lost the ability to control the situation in the union republics, the Kremlin deliberately provoked interethnic conflicts in these territories in order to maintain geopolitical influence and justify the presence of troops in the form of “peacekeeping forces” (Doroshko, 2008, p. 20). In Georgia, such territories became Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

The conflict between the Abkhaz autonomy and official Tbilisi is considered to have begun on 18 March 1989 with an Abkhaz gathering in the village of Lykhny, attended by 30,000 people, including party and government leaders of Abkhazia and representatives of the Armenian, Greek, and Russian communities. The gathering adopted a “Resolution of the Representatives of the Abkhaz People” and an “Appeal to M. S. Gorbachev,” calling for the restoration of “political, economic, and cultural sovereignty” of Abkhazia within Lenin’s idea of a federation (Doroshko, Alieksiejchenko, 2025, p. 102).

In response, between 1989 and 1990, the Supreme Council of the Georgian SSR adopted legislative acts annulling all agreements of the Georgian Soviet government from the 1920s that formed the legal basis for Georgian autonomies - Adjara, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia - and passed an election law barring regional parties from participating in parliamentary elections. On 25 August 1990, the Abkhaz majority in the Supreme Council of the Abkhaz ASSR, supported by the Soviet central authorities in Moscow who viewed Abkhaz separatism as a counterweight to Tbilisi, adopted a Declaration of State Sovereignty of Abkhazia (later annulled by the Georgian Supreme Council). Later, at the Congress of the Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus, the Abkhaz delegation announced its intention to withdraw Abkhazia from Georgia (Doroshko, Alieksiejchenko, 2025, p. 102).

The parliament of Abkhazia, headed by Vladislav Ardzinba, adopted a course toward open confrontation with official Tbilisi after the victory of Zviad Gamsakhurdia’s bloc in the parliamentary elections in Georgia in October 1990. When, on 17 March 1991, a referendum on restoring the state

independence of the republic was held in Georgia, the Abkhazians participated instead in the all-Union referendum, with 98.4% voting in favor of preserving the USSR (Doroshko, Aliksiejchenko, 2025, p. 102 - 103).

In July 1992, the Supreme Council of Abkhazia adopted a decision to restore the 1921 Constitution of Georgia, suspend the Soviet Georgian Constitution of 1978, and reinstate the Abkhaz Constitution of 1925, thereby nullifying the legal framework that placed Abkhazia within Georgia. This decision by the Abkhaz parliament effectively destroyed the contractual and legal basis (including the 1991 Georgian - Abkhaz agreement) for resolving contradictions between Sukhumi and Tbilisi by peaceful means and elevated military force to the primary instrument for pursuing the interests of both sides.

The decision of the Abkhaz parliament shifted the conflict into a phase of military-political crisis. Escalation of the Georgian - Abkhaz conflict occurred in the summer of 1992, when the new Georgian leadership under Eduard Shevardnadze, attempting to correct the mistakes of the country's first president, Zviad Gamsakhurdia - whose course toward building a unitary state had, in effect, contributed to Georgia's fragmentation - sent troops into Abkhazia in order to establish control over its territory.

The stage of open armed confrontation between Sukhumi and Tbilisi was marked by several particular features. These features stemmed from the multidimensional, heterogeneous, and divergent political goals of the conflict's actors.

Among the main actors on the Abkhaz side were the Abkhaz political elite and the Abkhaz population of the autonomous republic. For the Abkhaz elite, the military conflict served as a means of gaining independence from Georgia and constructing their own monoethnic state entity. For the Abkhaz population, the war became a chance for the survival of their ethnic group. For those who supported the Abkhazians without belonging to the Abkhaz ethnicity, the war became a means of personal enrichment.

Despite these differing interests, they were united by a common goal: to free themselves from Tbilisi's dominance over Sukhumi and from a Georgian statehood that excluded equal participation of Abkhazians in governance. The actors and participants representing the Abkhaz side were united not only by this shared goal but also by a shared path toward achieving it.

As for the goals and intentions of the Georgian side, these too were diverse. The then-state leader of Georgia, Eduard Shevardnadze, did not desire a war with Abkhazia. His primary concern at the time was victory in the civil war against supporters of former president Zviad Gamsakhurdia. Nevertheless, Shevardnadze did not rule out the possibility of a military conflict with Abkhazia. However, he viewed the purpose of such a conflict not so much as military victory, but as ending the future war on terms that would be more or less acceptable for Tbilisi (Doroshko, Aliksiejchenko, 2025, p. 105). Moreover, Shevardnadze feared that successes by Georgian military formations would significantly strengthen the position of the ultra-nationalist military leadership within Georgia's political power structure, thereby weakening his own position. Thus, Shevardnadze regarded the war with Abkhazia primarily in the context of "domestic political" contradictions among competing power groups struggling for influence in Tbilisi. Given these considerations, Shevardnadze himself did not seek either victory or defeat in this war. Maintaining such a position ultimately led to Georgia's complete defeat in the military conflict with Abkhazia.

Because of his ambiguous attitude toward the war, Shevardnadze failed to organize mobilization of the population and resources necessary for effective military operations. At that time, Georgia did not possess a regular army, although in July 1992 the Russian military command agreed to transfer part of the Soviet Army's legacy to Georgia - 220 tanks, 250 armored vehicles, 285 artillery pieces, 100 combat aircraft, and 50 helicopters - on the condition that this equipment would not be used in internal conflicts (Baev, 1996, p. 117).

The forces that constituted the numerical composition of Georgian military formations participating in the war were those that most consistently supported Shevardnadze and official Tbilisi. These included the defenders of Sukhumi and the National Guard of the State Council, headed by Tengiz Kitovani and Gia Karkarashvili. Attempts to form a national guard and military units based on regular conscription yielded no significant results. The personnel of Georgian military formations consisted mainly of volunteers guided by patriotic and romantic sentiments, as well as by interests of

personal gain. Such a composition lacked unity of purpose, discipline, and a high level of professional combat training. A relatively independent force consisted of the **Mkhedrioni** armed detachments of Jaba Ioseliani, formed from various strata of the population, including criminal elements. Finally, the majority of the Georgian forces consisted of militia units from the local Georgian population of Abkhazia - Svans, Mingrelians, and others. However, they were supporters of Gamsakhurdia and therefore distrusted Shevardnadze and were reluctant to fight on his side. Consequently, the Georgian leadership placed little hope in them and even hesitated to arm them. The Georgian militia in Abkhazia, as well as the two-thousand-man unit of Loti Kobalia - a staunch supporter of the former president - pursued two goals in the armed struggle against Abkhazia: first, to restore Georgian authority over Abkhazia, and second, to use the difficulties of war to overthrow Shevardnadze. The latter goal was the more important (Perepelitsia, 2003, p. 181).

Thus, although the Georgian side possessed a significant advantage over Abkhazia in human and material resources, the forces fighting on its behalf were not capable of carrying out the military orders of official Tbilisi. In contrast, the Abkhaz side had almost no internal human or material resources. Of the 90,000 Abkhaz population of the autonomous republic, no more than two thousand were capable of fighting. Therefore, in the war against official Tbilisi, Ardzinba relied mainly on external resources. In search of such support, he turned to Russian military personnel and representatives of the reactionary party nomenklatura within federal institutions of Russia, as well as to the Confederation of the Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus. Both provided assistance.

Ardzinba's hopes were reinforced by the actions of the Russian military, who at the beginning of the war began forming assault units in Gudauta, where the Abkhaz leadership was later based. At the onset of the Georgian - Abkhaz conflict, ten battalions of Russia's internal troops, the Vladikavkaz Cossack regiment, and elements of the Dzerzhinsky Division were deployed to the North Caucasus. For his part, Ardzinba repeatedly emphasized the Abkhazians' desire to live within a unified state with Russia and supported the presence of Russian troops in Abkhazia. Having secured external military assistance, the Abkhaz government relied on professional military personnel represented by units of the Russian armed forces stationed in the republic, Abkhaz militia groups who viewed the war as a struggle for their physical survival, and mafia-type criminal mercenary formations (Perepelitsia, 2003, p. 184).

The war with Abkhazia began with the introduction of Georgian armed forces into its territory on August 14, 1992, under the pretext of releasing high-ranking representatives of the Georgian government who had been captured by the Zviadists in the village of Kohori, Gali district, among whom was the Deputy Prime Minister of Georgia A. Kavsadze. Another goal of this operation was to control the railway connection in the territory of Abkhazia and Western Georgia. But the actions of the Georgian troops, despite the relevant agreement between V. Ardzinba and E. Shevardnadze, were perceived by the Abkhazian side as aggression. The Abkhazian leadership announced a general mobilization. The opposition to the Georgian government troops by the local Abkhazian guard units was planned in advance (Zdravomyslov, 1999, p. 59).

Encountering resistance, the Georgian command began suppressing its pockets. The political objective of such actions was to overthrow the power of the Abkhaz ultranationalists led by V. Ardzinba and to restore comprehensive control over the autonomy by official Tbilisi.

The local Abkhaz guard and the small units of the Abkhaz militia were unable to mount serious resistance to the advance of Georgian armed formations, which rather easily took control of most of the territory of the autonomy. On 18 August, four days after the start of the military operation, fighting erupted for the capital - Sukhumi. On the same day, the building of the Abkhaz government was seized and the Georgian flag was raised on its roof. On 19 August 1992, Sukhumi came under full control of Georgian forces.

The Abkhaz government left Sukhumi and sought refuge at the location of the Russian military garrison in Gudauta. The pursuit of the Abkhaz government by Georgian troops ended on the outskirts of Gudauta. The command of the Russian garrison warned T. Kitovani that if Georgian units entered the city, they would be destroyed (Doroshko, Aliksiejchenko, 2025, p. 108). Moreover, E. Shevardnadze was categorically opposed to Georgian troops taking Gudauta.

After the fall of Sukhumi and the blockade of Gudauta, pockets of Abkhaz resistance remained only in the Ochamchire district. On 25 August 1992, the commander of Georgian forces,

G. Karkarashvili, delivered an ultimatum to Abkhaz partisans: within 24 hours they were to cease armed resistance throughout the territory of Abkhazia (Karasar Hasan Ali, 2008). For the Abkhaz, the situation became critical. They were essentially facing military capitulation. Under these circumstances, the most important tasks for V. Ardzinba's government became, first, securing a temporary ceasefire, and second, mobilizing forces and obtaining external assistance. V. Ardzinba therefore appealed to the government of the Russian Federation to act as a mediator in negotiations, and to the Russian military and the Confederation of Mountain Peoples for military assistance.

Thus, with the intervention in the Georgian - Abkhaz conflict by the mountain peoples of the Caucasus (traditional allies of Abkhazia) and by units of the Russian Armed Forces (today the so-called peacekeeping contingent), the fate of the confrontation was decided in favor of Sukhumi. In this way, the Abkhaz side won the war, primarily thanks to the covert support provided to official Sukhumi by the personnel of the three Russian military bases stationed in the autonomy.

Since then, Abkhazia's position in the conflict - marked by extreme radicalism - has not changed. Most of its population does not believe in the possibility of parity-based negotiations, primarily because of the rigid stance of the Georgian leadership on its main demands: the inclusion of Abkhazia within Georgia and the return of 300,000 refugees - three times the population of Abkhazia itself. Under such conditions, the parties to the conflict face not only a divergence of interests but also a divergence of interpretations of events, as the population of Abkhazia perceives the legitimate (from the standpoint of international practice) demands of the Georgian side as unjustified pressure and an attempt to reclaim territories they believe do not belong to Georgia. At the same time, every subsequent attempt by Tbilisi to defend its interests, promoting the idea of uniting all peoples of Georgia into a single state - using both historical and political precedents - meets outrage and leads to further escalation. Despite the most acceptable autonomy provisions possible, the Abkhaz do not consider these proposals justified, which deepens the crisis.

The conflict in Abkhazia became a source of instability in the entire Caucasus region, as it touched the interests of numerous ethnic and political groups. Directly or indirectly, Georgia, Abkhazia, Russia and its North Caucasian republics, Armenia, and Turkey became involved in the confrontation. An attempt at resolution came in mid-July 2006, when the Georgian parliament adopted a resolution demanding the withdrawal of Russian peacekeeping forces from Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In response, the Abkhaz parliament called on the international community "to begin immediately the process of official recognition of the independence of the Republic of Abkhazia," and decided to appeal to the UN, OSCE, and other international organizations to "halt the militaristic plans of the Georgian leadership".

At the end of April 2008, an unmanned reconnaissance aircraft that had entered from Georgian territory was shot down over Abkhazia. The incident triggered a serious international scandal. Georgia accused Russia of shooting down the aircraft and demanded that the issue be reviewed by the UN Security Council. However, the UNSC failed to reach a unified position regarding the situation in Abkhazia. On both questions - regarding the strengthening of Russia's ties with the unrecognized republics and the flight of the Georgian UAV - Council members merely listened to Russia's position.

Following these events, the situation in the Georgian–Abkhaz conflict zone sharply escalated. Moscow deployed additional peacekeeping forces to Abkhazia. Tbilisi interpreted this step as military aggression. Meanwhile, the Abkhaz leadership decided to take advantage of the war in South Ossetia in August 2008 to achieve final withdrawal from the jurisdiction of official Tbilisi and obtain international recognition of its statehood.

The Georgian–Ossetian conflict during the collapse of the USSR was provoked by the decision of the South Ossetian regional council to transform the region into an autonomous republic within Georgia on 10 November 1989. The next day, the Georgian parliament annulled the decision, and on 23 November 1989, about 20,000 citizens of Georgia marched toward the administrative center of the autonomous region, Tskhinvali - the march organized by the leader of the national-patriotic forces, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, and the First Secretary of the Georgian Communist Party, Givi Gumbaridze, to "protect the Georgian population" of the autonomy. The marchers were stopped by Soviet Interior Ministry troops and blood was shed.

In autumn 1990, relying on the USSR law of 26 April 1990, which expanded the rights of autonomous entities, the South Ossetian regional council proclaimed the region the South Ossetian Soviet Democratic Republic and appealed to Moscow to recognize it as a subject of the Soviet federation independent of Georgia. In response, official Tbilisi abolished the South Ossetian autonomous region in December 1990 and began a blockade of the area that lasted until July 1992.

The economic blockade was accompanied by armed confrontation, which became particularly fierce after a referendum held by the South Ossetian leadership on 19 January 1992, in which 90% of participants supported joining Russia. The fighting, which continued with interruptions until July 1992, was halted through Russian mediation, and Russian peacekeepers were deployed in South Ossetia. The consequences of the 1992 Georgian - Ossetian conflict were tragic: 93 villages burned, more than a thousand killed, and 40,000 - 100,000 refugees (Doroshko, 2011, p.119).

In the years following the conflict, Russia consistently armed and strengthened the South Ossetian separatist regime, openly supporting the region's separation. Russia also actively granted local residents Russian citizenship (more than 90% of the population of the Tskhinvali region, according to unofficial data), which became one of the "legal" pretexts for Russia's military operation of "coercion to peace" against sovereign Georgia on the territory of South Ossetia in August 2008.

The international consequences of this operation are well known: Georgia's final loss of jurisdiction over South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and the recognition of these self-proclaimed state entities by Russia, Venezuela, Nicaragua, and the Republic of Nauru.

Georgia effectively lost Abkhazia back in 1992, not least because the Abkhaz, having only conditional autonomy during Soviet times, preserved their national identity and largely "nationalized" local power structures. Most key positions in the Abkhaz ASSR administration were held by ethnic Abkhaz, and it was they who, amid the national revival, raised the question of granting Abkhazia the status of a union republic. In this they received significant support from Moscow, which feared the secession of Georgia - whose de facto leader became former dissident Zviad Gamsakhurdia - from the USSR. Also contributing to Abkhazia's separation from Georgia was the rapprochement between the Abkhaz leadership and the command of Soviet military units stationed in the autonomy, whose intervention in the Georgian - bkhaz conflict on the latter's side became a decisive factor in Abkhazia's military victory.

The fighting in the Tskhinvali region stopped in August 2008, but Russia's aggression against Georgia did not end there. Moscow continued the so-called "borderization", that is, the creeping annexation of Georgian territory, pressure, propaganda and other hybrid methods of intervention.

As a result of the war, Russia occupied Abkhazia and South Ossetia and recognized their "independence", which means the actual destruction of the Helsinki Accords, which are based on the recognition of the inviolability of borders in Europe. This is evidenced by the well-known position of the OSCE – an institution created during the Helsinki process – according to which both sides are found guilty of the Russian-Georgian confrontation in South Ossetia. This means that Realpolitik has once again won, its victim this time being not only the brutal violation of the Helsinki Accords in general, but also the state sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia, in particular. However, in January 2021, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruled on Georgia's claim against Russia for the 2008 war. The ECHR judges satisfied almost all of Georgia's claims and recognized that it was the Russian Federation that occupied the regions of Georgia. The 2008 war showed that Russia is ready to do anything to restore and maintain control over the post-Soviet region (13 years after the war... <https://babel.ua/texts/61110-cherez-13-rokiv-pislya-viyni-gruziya-zmogla-dovesti-fakt-rosiyskoji-agresiji-v-sudi-chomu-abhaziya-ta-pivdenna-osetiya-konfliktuvali-z-gruzinami-ta-yak-rosiya-mayzhe-unikla-pokarannya>).

Conclusions. So, on the example of the Russian war in Georgia, we can see how Russia occupies territories, creates a controlled government there and thus influences the internal politics of its neighbors. Such actions of the Russian Federation are a continuation of the Kremlin's policy of restoring the Soviet empire with its center in Moscow. To this end, the Russian government uses the usual tools for empires: provoking ethno-political conflicts, managing them by introducing "peacekeeping forces" into the confrontation zone, encouraging the population of the rebellious

republics to obtain Russian citizenship, economic and financial support for separatist regimes, an external disinformation campaign regarding the right of the Russian Federation to the so-called historical territories of the former USSR. All these means are aimed at legitimizing the Russian presence in post-Soviet countries, such as Georgia, and therefore at the impossibility for official Tbilisi to ensure the implementation of the foreign policy course for the European and Euro-Atlantic integration of Georgia. Such a policy of the Russian Federation currently makes it impossible for Georgia to leave the sphere of Russian imperial geopolitical influence.

Thus, the analysis of the causes of the 2008 Russian-Georgian war in South Ossetia once again confirmed the axiomatic statement that interethnic conflicts are often provoked by external forces of the imperial type and acquire extraordinary proportions as a result of their intervention in local disputes. These forces have their own interests and are interested in deepening conflict situations according to the “divide and rule!” scheme. The settlement of spontaneous interethnic disputes is more painless under the conditions of the appropriate operation of international security mechanisms and mutual tolerance of the parties. The dominance of only one state in the region can only provoke various conflicts, while real stability is formed rather in a situation of balance of various geopolitical forces.

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