Threats to National Community

A Minor Field Study on Threat Perceptions and National Identity in Georgia

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Abstract

This thesis examines the influence of threat perceptions on the formation of Georgian national identity, aiming to explore the functions of perceived threats as obstacles to a reinforcement of civic elements in the conception of nation. The focus for analysis is threatening perceptions and depictions of each other by the Georgian government and the Armenian minority of the Javakhetí region. Threats perceived as emanating from the internal as well as the external political arena are mapped through a set of qualitative interviews conducted during a minor field study in Georgia. Approached through the theoretical concepts of nation building and national identity, it is concluded that threat perceptions potentially hamper the development of a sense of national community crucial to a civic conception of nation. Perceptions of oppression on an ethnic basis provide for questioning of the government’s legitimacy on part of the minority. While ambitions of downplaying ethnic elements in national identity seemingly provides for non-threatening depictions of the minority in official rhetoric, the threat posed by Russia compromises the loyalty of this minority in the eyes of the government.

*Key words:* Georgia, Caucasus, National Identity, Civic, Threat
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1 Introduction

If somebody hates Armenians, I Mikheil Saakashvili, will be an Armenian with him, if somebody hates Ossetians I will be an Ossetian with him. Hates Azeri’s? - I will be an Azeri, hates Jews? - I’ll be a Jew but still I will remain the greatest Georgian because patriotism is not measured by people’s origin - but by the efforts of people like you (Speech by President Saakashvili 2005-07-26).

1.1 Challenges

Political developments in Georgia over the last few years have drawn vast attention from the international community. After what came to be known as the “Rose Revolution”, massive protests against a flawed election and discontent on overall societal developments, president Shevardnadze resigned in November 2003. The following re-elections in January and March 2004 provided for an overwhelming victory for the opposition and Mikheil Saakashvili became the new president of Georgia.

Georgia is the most ethnically diverse country in the South Caucasus and interethnic relations have been quite problematic ever since independence from the USSR. The most obvious examples are the two secessionist civil wars in the early 1990s over the regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. However, the turbulent period of ethnic nationalism following independence also had an impact on the government’s relations with other minorities, though not generating as drastic consequences. The new leadership faces a tremendous challenge in re-establishing control over Georgia’s lost territories, but also in integrating regions densely populated by minorities, which are today largely excluded from Georgian political and economical life. This is especially valid for the region of Javakheti, largely populated by ethnic Armenians, which has frequently been termed a potential secessionist region (Cornell et al 2002b:50).

1.1.1 Introducing the Problem

The transformation of exclusive definitions of nation, based on ethnicity, into some form of inclusive ideology of citizenship has been termed an important precondition for long term stability in Georgia (Cornell et al 2002b:10-11, Vaux 2003:6, 28). Stances taken by the new government are undeniably key determinants to the prospects for this transformation as well as its outcomes. While it will be argued that certain steps are being taken in this regard, reformulating national identity from above is a thorny practice and may, if
employed in an insensitive matter, instigate further conflict. The extent to which
minorities are perceived as disloyal or unifying policies adopted by the
government are perceived as illegitimate are crucial issues to a redefinition of the
nation towards a more inclusive concept. The problem addressed in this thesis is
thus that while there seems to be a will within the government to redefine the
nation in an inclusive manner, threatening perceptions and depictions of each
other by actors within Georgia may hamper this development.

1.2 Aim and Research Questions

The overarching aim of this thesis is to identify and explore potential obstacles to
a reinforcement of civic elements in Georgian national identity. The more specific
type of obstacle under study here will be threats as perceived both by actors able
of defining national identity and those likely to be affected by this definition.
This aim may thus be expressed through the following research question:

“How may threat perceptions pose obstacles to a reinforcement of civic
elements in Georgian national identity?”

In order to study a concept as abstract as national identity, one needs to identify
phenomena empirically observable on an operational level, likely to reflect this
concept. In order to account for the function of threat perceptions as obstacles in
this regard, the overarching aim is approached through the exploration of two sub-
aims.

First, I seek to examine how perceptions of threat on part of the Georgian
government and the Armenian minority respectively affect attitudes towards
practical political issues, related to inclusion and integration. The purpose here is
to provide an account of problematic issues in internal relations within the state,
which may by extension hamper a reinforcement of civic elements in national
identity. Second, it seems plausible to assume that relations between government
and minority are not isolated from external actors and events, providing additional
implications to this relationship. I therefore aim to contextualise the threat
perceptions identified through examining their relation to factors external to the
Georgian state. This is intended to provide an understanding of the interaction
between perceived threats on internal and external arenas, and how this further
complicates the issue of redefining national identity. These sub-aims will be
approached through the following research questions:

“How do perceived threats affect relations between the Georgian government
and the Armenian minority?”

“How may these threat perceptions be understood in relation to the
interaction between internal and external arenas?”
1.3 Disposition

Starting off with an outline of the theoretical framework, the theoretical concepts of nation building and national identity are presented and discussed. These are put into relation with the impact of threat perceptions on formulations of national identity while also adapted to special features of the Georgian context. In the chapter on methodology, the case chosen for analysis is discussed in more detail, followed by delimiting remarks. Operational indicators are spelled out along with the analytic scheme in which the material is presented, followed by an elaboration on strategies and principles for the collection of material. In order to provide a background to the issues under study here, ethnic diversity in Georgia, along with political developments following the break up of the USSR and problematic issues in the Javakheti region are presented briefly. Subsequently, visible signs which may be interpreted as an approach towards civic national identity and practical political measures in this regard are accounted for.

I then move on to assess respective threat perceptions of the government and the Armenian population on the basis of interview material. In accordance with the analytic scheme, threat perceptions concerning internal and external relations are accounted for in turn, while the interaction between internal and external is illustrated through a concrete issue; attitudes towards the Russian military base in Akhalkalaki. The results and potential implications of these are then discussed and it is concluded that threat perceptions on internal as well as external arenas provide for both questioning of the state’s legitimacy on part of the minority and a perception of the minority as potentially disloyal in the eyes of the government, thus providing obstacles to a reinforcement of civic elements in Georgian national identity.
2 Theoretical Framework

The choice of theory unavoidably causes the researcher to focus on certain aspects of the studied phenomenon while ignoring others (cf. Lundquist 1993:122). In order to account for the assumptions and preconditions which have guided the material collection and analysis, the following constitutes an outline of the theoretical concepts serving as the foundation for this thesis.

The rhetoric and to some extent policy adopted by the new Georgian government may be understood through the theoretical concept of nation building. Nation building constitutes the construction of a nation state from above which is carried out according to a conception of national identity, equivalent to an idea or vision of what the nation comprises. While the classification of nations is a contested matter within theory on nationalism (cf. Özkrimli 2000:57-60), I will apply Anthony D. Smith’s version of the dichotomy ‘civic’ and ‘ethnic’ in order to differentiate between elements in national identity. The concepts of nation building and national identity hence allow for a theoretical understanding of the relationship between majority and minority and the potential conflict dynamics between these two within a nation building state.

Threat perceptions play an important part in this relationship in that they are likely to affect the prospects for creating the sense of national community crucial to the successful construction of a nation state. However, since an understanding of interethnic relations internal to the state has much to gain from also linking these to external actors and developments, as will be shown below, the framework will be expanded in order to provide a theoretical account of this interplay. Based on Brubaker (1996), a framework is elaborated on how actions by minority, majority and external actors as well as relations between these may be understood through their perceptions and depictions of each other.

2.1 Nation Building

Nation building has a very wide conceptual meaning and may apply to several fields of politics, but with the ultimate purpose of constructing a unitary nation state. According to Hettne’s definition, nation building projects are universal in their purpose, but unique in their realisation, since their principal parts by necessity consist of a specific territory and a specific population (Hettne 1993: no numbers). In cases where this process is undertaken by the political elite, the most central aspect of nation building is the creation of national community, granting the state legitimacy (1992:63). Furthermore, necessary elements of all nation building projects involve, from an elite perspective, establishing political and
military control within a limited territory and defending it against external forces, while also creating material welfare and bringing about a certain degree of cultural homogenisation within this territory (1992:63-65). Kymlicka holds homogenising processes of nation building in some form to be ongoing phenomena in all nation states and that the origins of tension between ethnic groups are generally to be found within these processes (2000:186). It is through policies of nation building, aimed at introducing a common national identity throughout the state, that the state seeks to eliminate feelings of non-belonging or forming a distinct nation within the state (Kymlicka 2001:230).

There are numerous ways of achieving national community within the state and the means for this may be more or less tolerant. They do, however, reflect a conception of the nation around which the nation state is being built. Somewhat simplified, this can be understood as a partition into two ideal types of the nation.

2.2 National Identity and the Civic / Ethnic Dichotomy

While national identity can be termed a very multifaceted notion (cf. Smith 1991:14), it fundamentally provides “a cultural and political bond, uniting in a single political community all who share an historic culture and homeland” (ibid. 1991:14-15). National identities come in rich variety concerning their inclusion/exclusion and tolerance/intolerance towards other ethnic/cultural groups. These differences draw from diverse conceptions of the nation and from various visions of what it comprises. Since the formation and definition of a nation by necessity comprises the demarcation of one group from others, the drawing of the boundary between the self and the other (cf. Neumann 1999:35) is crucial to the definition of what the nation comprises. This conception of the nation is thus decisive to who belongs and who does not to the nation.

Conceptions of the nation are often divided into a dichotomy, ‘civic’ and ‘ethnic’. These conceptions constitute the fundamental elements of national identity (Smith 1991:9). Smith defines “the civic/territorial nation” as the population of a given territory, bound together through loyalty towards common laws and institutions, before which all members are equal, and through a common culture of citizenship. The common culture is defined around a set of common values, typically promoted by the educational system and the mass media (1991:9-11). Within the other ideal type, "the ethnic/genealogical nation", the nation is instead based on "a community of birth and culture", where nationality is considered primordial and relies on perceptions of common descent and ethnic kinship (1991:11). An important distinction between the two is that, while all individuals must belong to a nation, the civic ideal type allows one to freely choose which nation one belongs to (ibid). Within the ethnic ideal type, one belongs to the nation one is born into, no matter where one decides to settle territorially (ibid: 11-12). The civic conception therefore allows for the belonging
of an ethnically heterogeneous population to the same nation, where ethnicity in itself is not considered an important source of national community.

Originally, the dichotomy was designed by Hans Kohn (1945, quoted in Hutchinson & Smith 1994:162-165) and was intended as a typology for classification of nationalisms as ideologies. In this version the dichotomy is normative in the sense that civic is viewed as a “good”, unifying nationalism, while ethnic nationalism is seen as inherently exclusive and violent. These preconditions for the normative element in the dichotomy have been subject to criticism. Critique has above all been directed towards the understanding of civic nationalism as inherently tolerant and inclusive. A civic conception of nation may include demands for vast homogenisation within the state’s territory (Smith 1995:101), repressing ethnocultural identities of minority groups (Brown 2000:61). Hence, it has been argued that the dichotomy civic/ethnic is not useful as a distinction between “good” and “bad” nationalisms and that this normative connotation should therefore be removed (Kaufmann & Zimmer 2004:75).

Most contemporary theorists do indeed not perceive it as possible or useful to define a nation or nationalism as exclusively civic or ethnic. As Smith notes, all national conceptions contain elements of both civic and ethnic (1995:99) and these notions should be viewed as ideal types which may be more or less forthcoming in any specific national identity (1991:13). The pursuance of an ethnic national conception, or nationalisation, aims at protecting the interests of the “core nation”, sharply differentiated from the population as a whole (Brubaker 1996:103-104). However, even in nations which are constructed in accordance with a closer resemblance to the civic ideal and which include numerous ethnic groups, the common culture is often defined by a dominant ethnic group, towards which minorities must adapt (Smith 1991:39) and are often expected to make an effort to assimilate into the ruling majority culture (Brown 2000:58). Whether a given form of nationalism is to be considered ethnic or civic in character is hence above all a matter of difference in degree (Coppieters 2001:73, Croucher 2003:5), making ambitions and contents in each specific nation building project a more relevant theme for analysis than attempts of classifying the project as a whole (Kymlicka 2000:187).

2.3 Expanding the Framework; Internal and External Actors

How, then, are we to understand the consequences of nation building for relations between majority and minority? Lindholm Schulz highlights the fact that nation-building processes and asymmetries within these are central to an understanding of internal conflicts (2002:71). Conflicts can often be put in relation to nation-building projects aimed at homogenizing the population of a state, which have failed to be perceived as legitimate (1993:7, 12). It is here relevant to refer to Smith’s argument above, concerning nation-building projects that are to a large
extent pursuing a civic vision of the nation state. While this definition of the nation by necessity implies some form of homogenisation of the population on part of nation-building elites in order to achieve national community, overtly far reaching or aggressive efforts in this regard have often been met by counter reactions and separatism on part of minorities (1995:101-102). A similar line of reasoning is found with Tilly where, what he terms top-down nationalism comprises attempted homogenization of a state’s population from above, granting a dominant national identity priority over other identities. Bottom-up nationalism comprises demands, on part of minority populations, for political autonomy and acceptance (2002:68). Tilly underlines the internal relation between these types of nationalism and that contemporary examples of top-down nationalism have often resulted in reactions in the form of bottom-up nationalism, involving demands for autonomy or even separatism (2002:95-96). These arguments seek to describe the internal relationship between majority and minority within the nation building state and the conflict potential in the aggressive pursuance of a national conception perceived as lacking legitimacy.

The main explanatory factors to the relationship between nation building and conflict given in this view of relations between majority and minority are the perceived legitimacy of the national conception and the manner in which its realisation is being pursued. If nation building, be it according to a civic or ethnic ideal, is carried out in a manner that disregards the cultural identities of minorities, the minority is likely to react in some way to safeguard its identity. According to these arguments, mutual suspicion between minority and majority is an important obstacle to inclusive changes in national identity. The minority may perceive the nation building ambitions of the majority as threatening their distinct identity, while the majority may find reasons to question the minority’s loyalty towards the state. These types of mutual threat perceptions and their impact on the prospects for reinforcing civic elements constitute the main focus for analysis in this thesis. The influence of others on national identity should, indeed, be understood in a broader sense than as comprising of perceived threats alone (cf. McIver 2003:51). The practice of formulating national identity is likely to take place in interplay with a variety of others, and the character and political use of national identity must therefore be studied through examining the friction with these others (ibid. 2003:56-57). While the focus on threat perceptions is considered a necessary delimitation (see chapter 3), these perceptions also may assume a variety of forms and may originate from the internal as well as external arena (cf. Triandafyllidou 1997:601). Hence, in order to contextualise perceived threats among the inhabitants of the nation building state, these also need to be put in relation to ones emanating from outside. A theoretical account is thus needed that links nation building and relations between majority and minority on the internal arena with actors and developments on the external.

Brubaker introduces a triadic nexus between in themselves dynamic and heterogeneous actors: A) National minorities, claiming membership of an ethnocultural nation different from the dominant nation, demanding state recognition of this distinct nationality and demanding collective cultural or political rights (1996:60), B) States perceived to be nationalising by the national
minority and/or external state actors (1996:63-64) and C) External state actors, possessing a potential to challenge the territorial integrity of the nationalising state from outside (Brubaker 1996:66-67, Triandafyllidou 1998:603). This framework introduces an interesting account of the relation between minority and majority on the internal arena, while also acknowledging the role of external actors in this relationship. Central issues here are the actors’ perceptions of each other. For instance, the perception of a state as nationalising by other actors may well have a higher significance than the state’s actual ambitions. While nationalising tendencies need to be verified in some way in order to be a strong foundation for ethnic mobilisation, perceived nationalisation may still be considered a more important basis for this than the states vision of itself (Brubaker 1996:64).

According to this framework, actors will interpret actions of the other as more or less threatening. The stakes in this relationship, from the perspective of the nation building state, is potentially its territorial integrity or cultural unity (Triandafyllidou 1998:601-602). A national minority may (as was touched on above) perceive the nationalising state as a threat to its autonomy or its distinctive identity (ibid), while an external state actor may perceive the nationalising state as possessing territory it considers to be its own (ibid:602). Positions taken within these actors are closely linked to the interplay between them. One actor’s perceptions may result in actions which shape another’s responsive perception, while an actor’s perceptions may also shape interpretations of external developments (Brubaker 1996:69).

While political actors may have an interest in depicting threats as objective accounts of reality (Eriksson et al 2001:99), the placing and ranking of these on the political agenda unavoidably contains an element of normative evaluation which is likely to reflect political interests (ibid:2, 6-7). The formulation of threat perceptions may be viewed as manifestations of national identity in that certain threats are emphasised, while others are downplayed in accordance with the ambitions of the nation building project (cf. Noreen 2001:91-94). Hence, an official political view of threat perceptions is to some extent likely to reflect the to national identity crucial practice of drawing the boundary between in- and outgroup.

2.4 The Desirability of Civic Elements in the Georgian Context

Keeping in mind the criticism of the dichotomy and especially the questionable practice of using it in a normative matter, this is exactly what I intend to do. The ideal typology will be used as a means for distinguishing between elements in Georgian national conceptions, with an understanding of reinforcing civic elements as desirable. Ethnic modes of identification are, indeed, important in Georgia and I am not looking to propose civic as a replacement to these. By referring to the term civic in the Georgian context I do not mean to imply that this
would necessarily disregard the importance of ethnic identities, but rather to reinforce civic elements in national identity, providing for a sense of national community and belonging shared by all ethnic groups within the state. Since it was argued above that civic should not be viewed as a necessarily more tolerant national conception, the issue of why national conceptions assume more or less aggressive forms needs some further elaboration. According to Brown, the reaction to perceived threats constitutes a most important factor in determining why projects of nation building assume tolerant or intolerant forms. Central to the nature of national identity is hence how the nation’s goals and uncertainty or potential enemies are depicted by political elites, and how these depictions of reality are accepted by the wider layers of the population (2000:67). National conceptions which are constructed around potential threats are therefore more likely to assume intolerant forms (ibid.). It seems logical, however, that civic elements referring to national community and common loyalty in national identity would provide for less hostile depictions of other groups, at least within the state (Petersson 2001:14-15).

My normatively positive use of civic in this case is also linked to a number of features specific to the Georgian context. If considering events in Georgia during and after the break-up of the USSR (see chapter 4), it would seem quite clear that ethnically exclusive conceptions of nation on part of both majority and minorities, pursued quite aggressively, were a dominant feature during this period (Cornell 2002:158-163). In accordance with the in-built conflict potential in nation building, the aggressive pursuance of exclusive ethnic national conceptions may indeed be viewed as a partial explanation to the eruption of secessionist conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Cornell 2002:225-226).

Furthermore, it may be questioned whether, in a multiethnic state like Georgia, changes in national conceptions should not normatively bear closer resemblance to a multicultural ideal, as this would provide for cultural autonomy and equal status for all ethnic groups (cf. Brown 2000:126). It is indeed difficult to imagine successful nation building in Georgia without granting minorities some degree of cultural rights. However, one also needs to keep in mind here the potential of multiculturalism to cement differences between ethnic groups (ibid:130). Multicultural visions of society would arguably also imply the granting of territorial autonomy based on ethnicity at least to compactly settled minorities in Georgia, potentially within some sort of federal framework. One may make several points in favour of multinational federalism when it comes to mediating tensions between majority and minority (cf. Kymlicka 2001:116-117). However, the creation of such a federative arrangement is problematic in the Georgian context. It has been argued that the already existing territorial autonomies in post-independence Georgia actually impeded the development of common loyalty towards the state, corresponding to an increase of civic elements in national identity (Cornell 2002:228), especially since national identities were already predominantly ethnic (ibid). Indeed, the institution of territorial autonomy, granted within the USSR to the regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, may even be a key explanatory factor to why large scale conflict erupted in these regions and not non-autonomous ones, such as Javakheti (Cornell 2002:231-233). With
this background in mind, it would seem reasonable to apply a certain amount of scepticism towards those arguments within multiculturalism advocating territorial autonomy for national minorities in the Georgian context. I do not mean to imply that granting national minorities group based rights is a dangerous practice by necessity, but rather that issues such as autonomy, federalism and local self governance are complex and controversial in Georgia. It is questionable whether weak state institutions like those of Georgia would at present be able to handle the decentralisation an ethnically based federative arrangement would imply and there is a risk that the creation of such an arrangement would actually increase tension between ethnic groups (Cornell et al 2002b:72).

The argument here is that in order to achieve national community within the state, capable of including all citizens, regardless of ethnicity, a reinforcement of civic elements in national identity is desirable. One must, however, be aware of the inherent problems of creating such a national identity, since the necessary homogenization of the population may, if pursued in an aggressive or intolerant manner, instigate further conflict.
3 Methodology

3.1 What to study, and why?

Why, then, does the choice of study in this case fall upon relations between the government and the Armenian minority of Javakheti? First, even though it would indeed provide most useful insights to the reception of national conceptions among the wider layers of population, and thus, for a more far reaching understanding of the impact of these (Petersson 2001:33), assessments of public opinion based on surveys is left out of the analysis. The choice of studying the perceptions of government officials is linked to the assumption that the definition of goals for the nation building project, and hence the very formulation of national identity, is likely to take place within the political elite (Hettne 1992:63). Georgian government officials are thus part of the very collective in which national identity is formulated.

Second, as for the choice of studying perceptions of the Armenian population of Javakheti, it constitutes a compactly settled minority, which is in addition relatively isolated from the rest of the state. Also, even though claims to autonomy for Javakheti have been voiced from time to time and the region often has been described as potentially secessionist (Cornell et al 2002b:50), the region has not been in large scale violent confrontation with the Georgian state. Relations between the Armenian minority and the government have, however, been the most problematic minority issue within Georgia after the secessions in the early 1990s. This makes the Armenian minority settled in Javakheti the most suitable case within Georgia for the type of study I want to conduct. The region’s isolation from the state, in combination with the minority’s close relationship to Russia, obviously poses a challenge to a reinforcement of civic elements in national identity.

Third, drawing on Brubaker’s triadic nexus, focus will lie on these actor’s perceptions of each other. While keeping in mind the multitude of forms influences on national identity may take, I will primarily focus on that of perceived threats. Even though one could probably make a number of interesting points on how Georgian ambitions of integration with European and transatlantic cooperation structures may affect national identity, I feel that some delimitation is needed in this regard. The scope of this thesis simply does not leave room for a thorough analysis of too wide a scope of potential influences on national identity and I have chosen to delimit the ones analysed here to threat perceptions.
While it may be argued that the results of this case study cannot be generalized in any universal sense, or be directly applicable to other cases, my ambition is to add to the understanding of the influence of threat perceptions on formulations of national identity. This understanding may house possibilities for successive expansion and a widened applicability in the sense that it may inspire new approaches to other cases (cf. Thomsson 2002:33).

To summarize the methodological outline, I will draw on the theoretical understanding of national identity as a corner stone for nation building. Analysing relations between minority and government through the study of threat perceptions, I will seek to demonstrate how these perceptions provide various types of obstacles to the reinforcement of civic elements in Georgian national identity.

3.2 Operational Indicators and Analytic Scheme

In order to bridge the gap between theory and practice, aspects of theoretical notions available for observation on an operational level need to be identified. The unavoidable distance between theory and these indicators does, however, pose a potential problem of validity (cf. Esaiasson et al 2002:63). Do the results of studying these indicators really reflect the aspects of national identity I claim to study? This is, indeed, a central question. However, to quote Petersson, if one is to study theoretical notions as abstract as national identities at all, they need “to be approached somehow” (2001:21).

Since the objects of analysis here are threat perceptions, further elaboration is thus needed on how these may pose obstacles to a reinforcement of civic elements in national identity. The empirical material will be presented in a scheme divided into two analytical dimensions. The first consists of the internal arena, that is, perceptions and depictions of each other by the Georgian government and the Armenian minority respectively. The second dimension comprises a contextualisation of the internal arena through an account of threat perceptions emanating from outside Georgia, the external arena.

3.2.1 The Internal Arena

Drawing on Smith’s definition of the civic nation, I have chosen to focus attention to the loyalty of Javakheti Armenians towards the Georgian state, as perceived by the Georgian government. The main motivation for this focus is the Georgian experience of separatism during the process of gaining independent statehood, as well as the isolation of Javakheti from Georgian state polity, making the issue of loyalty crucial to an inclusion of the minority in the definition of nation. Perceived tendencies of disloyalty on part of Javakheti Armenians thus pose a threat to Georgian territorial integrity. This is taken to provide an obstacle to the reinforcement of a civic national conception in that the minority may potentially
be depicted as an internal enemy to the Georgian state, which in turn provides for their exclusion from the nation.

Referring again to Hettne’s account of central aspects to nation building, the issues under focus on part of Javakheti Armenians will be their perceptions of legitimacy of measures undertaken to create national community. Actions of the Georgian government perceived as threatening Armenian cultural identity will be regarded as obstacles to gaining legitimacy for a civic national conception in that this potentially leads actors within this minority to depict the Georgian state as aggressively nationalising and thus makes less likely their voluntary acceptance of belonging to the Georgian nation.

To summarize, threat perceptions of government and minority towards each other will be considered obstacles to reinforcing civic elements in that these perceptions provide for A) exclusion of the minority from the nation and B) a perceived lack of legitimacy for the nation building project among the minority.

3.2.2 The External Arena

This analytical dimension will comprise of forces external to the Georgian state, which are perceived as possessing an ability of negatively affecting relations between the Georgian government and the Armenian minority. The account of the external arena will thus primarily regard threats perceived by the Georgian government in relation to the influence of foreign states over the Javakheti region. Threat perceptions in this dimension are taken to impede the reinforcement of civic elements in that they may further put into question the minority’s loyalty towards the Georgian state.

3.2.3 The Internal/External Interacting

The internal and external arenas are not treated as distinct from each other. In fact, the analysis rather demonstrates the importance of the interplay between these arenas for the generation of threat perceptions and the difficulty in separating one from the other. This relationship is demonstrated through a concrete example of problems in current relations between government and minority, namely the Russian military base located in Akhalkalaki. As shall be seen, the attitudes towards this issue on part of government and minority differ quite sharply.
3.3 Material

While sources such as Cornell (2002) provide a most important context to the issues under study here, other empirical accounts (at least in English) focusing on issues of national identity and threat perceptions in current relations between the Georgian government and other minorities than Abkhaz and Ossetians are scarce in supply. The most notable exception I have come across is a study carried out by Elbakidze, sociologist at the Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development. The Social, Economic and Political Situation in Javakheti: Peoples Concerns (2002) provides a qualitative account of perceptions and concerns of Javakheti Armenians. This study, combined with an interview with the author, constitutes the primary access to threat perceptions of the Armenian population of Javakheti, when accounted for below.

However, the study undertaken here must necessarily also include independent accumulation of empirical material. A potentially fruitful approach to areas not extensively covered by prior research is that of qualitative interviews (Esaiasson et al 2002:281) and accordingly, the main empirical material used in this thesis is a total of 28 interviews accumulated during a two month minor field study in Georgia. The general character of the interviews was that of informant-interviews (cf. Esaiasson et al 2002:254), where each interviewee is considered a valuable source and where the information provided by the interviewee is analysed, rather than the interviewee’s own relation to the studied phenomenon (cf. Kvale 1997:197). The choice of interviewees was made primarily according to the principle of intensity (cf. Esaiasson et al 2002:287), focusing on persons possessing vast knowledge of the issues at hand. While a number of interviewees were identified before or immediately upon my arrival in Georgia, several complementary ones were located through snowballing (cf. Esaiasson et al 2002:286).

The main concern regarding the collection of interview material for this thesis was to provide accounts of threat perceptions of Georgian government and Armenian minority respectively. The selection of interviewees was thus largely made according to four groups. The first group is that of social scientists and other experts which are not affiliated with the government and with a genuine experience of government-minority relations generally and issues regarding the Javakheti region specifically. These interviews are used in order to give somewhat independent accounts of relations between government and minority and their respective perceptions of one another. Respondents in this group are referred to as SE in the presentation. The second group consists of government officials (referred to as G), responsible for issues connected to government-minority relations, such as integration, conflict resolution and education. This set of interviews provides accounts of the government’s official position on the issues studied. The third group of interviewees is affiliated with the Armenian population of Javakheti, primarily consisting of representatives of Armenian NGOs and politicians in Tbilisi and Akhalkalaki (referred to as A). In addition, and in order to gain an understanding of the more general debate on minority
integration issues, I also interviewed representatives of NGOs focusing on minority integration and human rights, along with a representative of the public defenders office (referred to as O).

All interviews were semi-structured in character, with a prepared set of open-ended questions for each interview. This method of interviewing has the benefit of allowing for coverage of the overall theme of the interview, while at the same time housing the options of adding questions and following up on interesting issues during the meeting (Kvale 1997:117). In addition to the more or less spontaneous revision of questions during the interviews, these were also adapted to the position and specific areas of expertise of each interviewee, as well as added and removed during the course of research. The semi-structured interview as a method for the production of empirical material on issues related to national identities may be considered quite a fruitful approach (cf. Petersson 2003:39), since it gives the researcher access to the interviewee’s perceptions of the world (Kvale 1997:34). However, when choosing this approach towards the study of national identity, one must keep in mind some potentially problematic implications of the method. First, it is quite unavoidable that I will, in various ways, influence the results of the interview, through my way of structuring the interviews, through social interaction with the interviewee during the meeting, through my theoretical understanding of the issues studied and through my interpretation of the results (Petersson 2003:44-45). While these “interviewer-effects” neither can, nor should, be avoided completely, they may still be reduced in some respects, such as formulating the questions in a way that does not imply their “correct answer” and through clarifying the overall themes of the interview and how the material will be used (Petersson 2003:49). I have tried to observe these pointers as far as possible while conducting research.

A second implication concerning the use of qualitative interviews is the issue of whether the interviewee is really voicing his or her personal opinion and to what extent answers are rather shaped by the social and political context he or she is situated in, thus rather expressing what is politically correct or expected of a person in a certain position. This line of reasoning reflects what Petersson terms *instrumentality* in given answers or that statements given during an interview are shaped by specific objectives on part of the interviewee (2003:46). One may indeed never be entirely sure of whether the answers given reflect the interviewee’s personal sense of identity, are contextually shaped or related to completely different circumstances (ibid). The researcher must thus consider which types of identity expressions are most relevant for the study at hand (2003:47) and adjust the formulation of interview questions and selection of interviewees accordingly.

Within the framework of this study, answers shaped through belonging to a specific collective or occupying a specific position are considered to be of greater importance than spontaneous responses clarifying the reasoning of individuals (cf. Petersson 2003:46). The study of attitudes and threat perceptions in relations between government and minority is aimed towards developing an understanding of current political discourse on these issues. My interviews with nine government officials and a very limited number of representatives of the Armenian minority
obviously cannot be taken to be representative for the overall populations within these groups of respondents. They may, however, provide a reflection of what is politically correct in the current political climate and thus, hint towards the discourse within the collective the interviewee belongs to. By extension and as will be shown below, these instrumentally shaped accounts of reality provide insight to the implications of threat perceptions for national identity.
I found the use of a tape recorder to be the best way of documenting the interviews. These lasted between 30 and 60 minutes and were registered through a combination of recording and taking notes. They were listened through a number of times and finally transcribed\(^7\). While time consuming, this allowed for the use of quotations in the presentation.
4 Past and Current Minority Issues

4.1 Ethnic Diversity in Georgia

Georgia is a multiethnic country with about 16% of the population belonging to other ethnic groups than Georgian (FIDH 2005:6). The main minorities are Armenians, Azeris, Ossetians, Russians, Abkhaz and Greeks (Cornell et al 2002b:27). The two largest and most compactly settled minorities are the Armenian and Azeri populations, concentrated to the Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli regions respectively. The proportion of minorities has decreased steadily since the last USSR census in 1989, when they constituted around 30% of the population (Cornell 2002:158). Since then the demographic balance has been altered through migration, above all through a decrease in the number of Russians (ibid). However, the number of Armenians also decreased from 437000 to 249000 during this period (FIDH 2005:6).

4.1.1 Independence and the Following Conflicts

During the second half of the 1980s, the national movement was growing rapidly in Georgia, encouraged by the promising changes of perestroika and overall reform. The USSR supremacy over Georgia was largely identified with prior Russian domination and the Communist Party gradually lost its legitimacy (Cornell 2002:155). On October 28th, the party of Zviad Gamsakhurdia, the Round Table for National Liberation, won the parliamentary elections and Gamsakhurdia became speaker of parliament. The new government adopted several nationalising policies, among those language laws intended to make Georgian the only state language (ibid:159), and minorities were frequently referred to as “guests” on Georgian territory (Wheatley 2004:32). These policies caused resentment and protests among all minorities, and were met with counter reactions especially among Ossetians in the South Ossetian Oblast Soviet and Abkhazians in the Abkhaz ASSR (Cornell 2001:165-166). In April 1991, Georgia declared its independence and Gamsakhurdia was elected president shortly after. Tensions in South Ossetia escalated and violent confrontation on a large scale erupted during 1991.

On January 6th 1992 Gamsakhurdia was ousted and fled Georgia. Eduard Shevardnadze, former foreign minister of the USSR, was invited to assume the leadership. Shevardnadze and Yeltsin signed a cease fire agreement on South...
Ossetia which came into effect June 28th 1992. The agreement was largely observed thereafter, with minor exceptions, until the summer of 2004 when an attempt was made by the Saakashvili government to regain control of the region (ICG 2004:14). Increasing tension since 1989 caused the situation in Abkhazia to escalate into full scale war during the summer of 1992, after the Abkhaz leadership declared Abkhazia independent13. A cease fire came to effect in October 1993. These conflicts remain unresolved to date and the authorities of Abkhazia and South Ossetia are de-facto autonomous.

Russian involvement in the conflicts played a most important role during the course of events, through both political and military support for the secessionist regions (Cornell 2002:183, 194, Coppieters 2004:199). However, during the course towards independence, the Georgian nationalists never did recognize the claims of Abkhaz and Ossetians to language- and cultural rights, despite the fact that these were quite similar to the demands of the Georgian leadership (Cornell 2001:163). These were instead understood as a Russian creation, lacking support among the Abkhaz and Ossetian populations (ibid). During Shevardnadze’s time in power, little was achieved concerning the resolution of these conflicts.

4.2 Javakheti, an Isolated Region

Incorporated into the province of Samtskhe-Javakheti, the region of Javakheti consists of the Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda districts in Southern Georgia. Due to centuries of migration processes, the population of Javakheti is today predominantly Armenian. During the dominance of the Russian empire, Armenians were encouraged to settle in the region. Javakheti constituted an important border region and Armenians were considered the most loyal ethnic group to the empire (Darchiashvili 2002:25-26). Refugees from the genocides committed by Ottoman Turkey during WW1 further contributed to the concentration of Armenians (Suny 1994:202). The trend since the 1989 USSR census has been towards an increase in the proportion of Armenians in the region, which today amounts to 95.3% in Ninotsminda district and 93.6% in Akhalkalaki district (Wheatley 2004:5).

Socio-economic problems common to most rural regions in Georgia are very much present in Javakheti (Cornell et al 2002:51). General economic decline and high unemployment causes seasonal work migration to Russia for large parts of the male population. Emigration to a lesser extent, but not uncommonly, becomes permanent (Wheatley 2004:10). Another important provider of employment is the Russian military base located in Akhalkalaki. Infrastructure is in a bad state, forcing Akhalkalaki residents to make a long detour through Akhaltsikhe in order to reach Tbilisi (Wheatley 2004:8). This provides for vast limitations to trade and other physical connections with the rest of Georgia. In local governance, directly elected officials lack influence and Armenian gamgebeli (head of local administration) are appointed directly by the central government (FIDH 2005:14).
In the central government and parliament, minorities are overall poorly represented (Cornell et al 2002:27).

However, the problem most frequently recognized as specific to the region of Javakheti, in comparison with other regions, is the lack of knowledge of the Georgian language, which further contributes to the isolation of the region (FIDH 2005:15, SE3). The prerequisite of a working knowledge of Georgian for employment in public administration structures on a national level provides for a vast under-representation of minorities within these (SE4). These problems contribute to the isolation of the Javakheti region within Georgia. Arguably, the lack of economical and political links to the rest of the country, along with the lack of representation on a national level provide for a sense of exclusion, which impedes the development of a sense of community with the rest of society among this part of the Georgian population.

4.3 Civic in Official Discourse

Mapping ambitions of conceptualising the Georgian nation in an increasingly civic manner on part of the new central government is not easily done and the limited number of government officials interviewed during this study does not provide for an assessment of the position of the government as a whole. However, in order to get a more general picture of the contemporary political debate and whether an approach towards civic elements is visible here, interviews conducted with social scientists and representatives of civil society provide for an overview of how this issue is being treated in official discourse. Nodia commented the issue thus:

I think the Georgian government and especially Mr Saakashvili personally thinks […] that A) uniting the country is a big priority and B) that there is a need for civic nationalism as a unifying force and that nationalism should be civic and not ethnic (SE7).

In a similar manner, Darchiashvili made the following assessment when asked whether there has been an increase in references to a civic nation after the Rose Revolution:

Basically, yes. They [the government] feel the need for certain nationalist rhetoric […] and there are certain elements of civic here (SE1).

It seems that several signs which may be interpreted as an approach towards a civic national conception can be identified in the field of rhetoric. An important aspect of government strategy is to officially underline the equality between ethnic groups, the belonging of all citizens to the same nation and similar appeals for national community (SE2, SE8). In speeches given by the Georgian president, references are commonly made to the loyalty of minorities towards Georgia and to the importance of viewing all ethnic groups as principal parts of the state (See, for example, speeches by President Saakashvili 2005-02-16, 2005-02-24, 2005-03-
Interviewed government officials argued that one should not think in terms of majority and minority and that an approach towards minority issues by necessity cannot be separated from measures addressing the population as a whole, considered as Georgian citizens:

Minority issues can be [...] solved through a system that is based on the protection of all citizens of Georgia. It would be a big mistake to talk only about this or that group; we need to think about the whole country (G7).

When asked which efforts should be expected of minorities in order to integrate with Georgian society, most government officials underlined that they should feel as genuine citizens of Georgia (G4) and that they should learn the state language (Georgian).

It seems reasonable to ask whether the apparent emphasis on civic in official rhetoric is a new feature in Georgia. Most interviewees not affiliated with the government claim that it is not. When asked to compare the current position with that of the previous government, it is frequently claimed that a certain amount of rhetoric on the same theme was present during the Shevardnadze government, or at least by its more liberal faction (SE7), while the more conservative factions may have sympathised more with an ethnic conception (SE8). However, Shevardnadze’s tactic of balancing political forces against each other in the government apparently provided for a very inconsistent and unclear message on these issues. Nodia argues that the Saakashvili government is definitely more consistent, but that the difference lies precisely in consistency rather than overall message (SE7). Most respondents also argue that in the direction on integrating minorities as citizens of Georgia, close to nothing was achieved during Shevardnadze’s time in power.

It seems then, that the current government indeed feels a need for addressing the issue of national community. The explicit underlining of minorities as belonging to Georgia as equal citizens can be interpreted as a displayed ambition of reinforcing a territorially based conception of the nation, disregarding ethnicity.

4.3.1 Practical Measures

Government officials interviewed generally identify the lack of knowledge of state language as the key obstacle to minority integration and claim that the education reform, which addresses the issue through increased teaching of Georgian in minority schools, thus will provide a solution to the most pressing problems in this regard (G4, G6, G7, O4). Other measures taken towards integration include the planned reconstruction of roads in Samtskhe and Javakheti, dramatically shortening travel time to Tbilisi (Civil Georgia 2005-09-14). Also, the government has undertaken an education program for minority representatives aimed at facilitating their integration into public administration structures (Civil Georgia 2005-08-09).

However, most observers not affiliated with the government claim that very little has been achieved so far in terms of practical measures towards civic
integration of minorities. Representatives of NGOs occupied with minority issues criticise the government for neither taking this issue seriously nor giving it the priority it deserves (O2, O3). Explanations to this vary. In terms of organisational difficulties, it was stated that the current regime’s style of governing does not allow for the type of strategic planning needed to formulate a coherent approach towards this issue (SE8) and that the government lacks coordination (SE7). Obviously, insufficient funding and an overall weak state apparatus impede the implementation of integration policy (SE4). One government official also argued that issues of minority integration were not a priority, since more attention was needed for the peace processes in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and the return of internally displaced persons (G7). However, it was also stated that there is certain reluctance on part of the government towards efficiently dealing with issues of minority integration, due to their conflict potential and overall controversial nature: “Their main strategy is to avoid problems and not create new ones” (SE2).

It seems then, that while there is some evidence of the government appealing to a civic national conception in official rhetoric, little has been accomplished in practice to this point. Other than the education reform and its stress on language teaching for minorities, signs of homogenizing efforts are scarce. Future implementation of integration policies and other forms of homogenization are likely to be important factors in determining possible conflict over these issues. Another crucial issue is the extent to which the current approach towards a reinforcement of civic elements will have a deeper impact on the formulation of national identity. Focus therefore now turns to threat perceptions as potential obstacles in this regard.
5 The Internal Arena

5.1 Threats Emanating from Javakheti as Perceived by the Georgian Government

If considering Georgian experiences during the early 1990s, with two secessionist conflicts remaining unresolved or frozen to date, it seems a valid assumption that the Georgian government might also perceive other minorities as posing potential threats to territorial integrity. This would be especially valid for areas where minorities are both settled compactly and are relatively isolated, as is the case with Javakheti. Most interviewees do, however, not describe the current situation in the region to be especially unstable. Elbakidze states that there may well be a conflict potential in the region related to political groups or outside forces with a potential to mobilise the population and “*push the people living there to do something*” (SE2). However, she underlines that this potential threat does not stem from the wider layers of the population as for now, since these people are not prepared to fight over political issues or demand autonomy (SE2).

Local political actors in Javakheti have included and still include political groupings such as Javakh and Virk\(^\text{15}\), which have previously raised the issue of autonomy (Cornell 2002:202). Virk enjoys some support in Javakheti (Wheatley 2004:19) and may under certain circumstances, such as a deterioration of the overall situation in the country (SE1, SE2) or an approach by the Georgian government perceived as aggressive (SE4), gain increased influence (Darchiashvili 2002:31). This has occurred in the past and may do so again (SE2). A new force on the local political scene is a structure named “United Javakh”, which has a relatively large influence and a somewhat developed organisational apparatus. United Javakh organised two protest demonstrations during March 2005 against the withdrawal of the Russian military base during which also more far reaching political and economical demands were voiced (SE4, Central Asia – Caucasus Analyst 2005-04-06). Overall, there is a quite strong nationalistic undercurrent in the region, but this is not very well organised and demands voiced by local political actors are adjusted to the interests of Yerevan. Armenia has a strong interest in keeping the situation in Javakheti stable and opposes all demands for independence and autonomy\(^\text{16}\). Politically active forces in the region hence do not voice these demands (SE4).

Demands have, however, been raised for increased local self government and for elections of gamgebeli (head of local administration), instead of the current procedure of appointing these from Tbilisi, a practice which causes certain
resentment and puts into question the legitimacy of these representatives (Elbakidze 2002:88). The government currently perceives it as a risk to allow for increased local self governance and a commonly used motivation for this is that there is a lack of competence at the local level, a statement which is largely false (SE2). The government prefers appointing gamgebeli, since this ensures their loyalty to the Georgian state and the ruling party (SE2). While it does not see a real risk of separatism or violence on a large scale at present, the government may be foreseeing a danger in this form in the future and perceives it as preferential to have people whom they trust in local government (SE2). The reluctance on part of the government to grant the region of Javakheti increased self governance may thus in part be interpreted as a displayed fear of separatism: “One reason why the government is reluctant to grant too many rights to local self government [in minority regions] is the fear that minorities may abuse those rights” (SE7).

Government officials confronted with the issue of threats emanating from the Javakheti region generally agree that the potential for violent conflict in the region is to be considered as marginal. If there is a threat, it is certainly not described as originating from the population at large, but rather from radical groups, supported and sponsored by external, unfriendly forces with an interest in creating instability and weakening Georgia. A government official at the State Ministry for Conflict Resolution, stated that

In Javakheti we have to know that there are several political radical groups supported from some countries that are very much trying to […] start and escalate conflict […] and to underline that Armenians get discriminated only because they are Armenians. These are political parties who have been very active here for years and they are trying to start conflicts but they don’t manage to do it […] because they don’t get support, only by a small amount of people (G7).

These groups are perceived as opposing a Georgian military presence in the region and as supporting the Russian military base to stay deployed. Their main aim is to spread “propaganda” against the Georgian government and thus provoke negative attitudes among the Armenian population towards the government’s efforts of improving the situation. However, they are also considered to be quite isolated and their “propaganda” is not perceived as having an impact on the wider layers of population (G7).

It was also stated that the problems of the Javakheti region do not at all have an “ethnic dimension”, but are exclusively linked to social and economic issues (G2). The social and economic situation is described as being quite similar to that of other regions of Georgia (G5), with the partial exceptions of the lack of knowledge of Georgian (G6, G7) and problems connected to the Russian military base (G7). The perceived attitudes of the overall population differed somewhat. Most interviewed government officials claimed that the Armenian minority at large does not have a negative attitude towards integration into the Georgian state, as long as their social and economic problems are solved through this (G7, G3), while others acknowledged a lack of trust towards the Georgian government, originating from the period of Gamsakhurdia (G4). There seemed to be consensus, however, that if the economic and social issues of the region are solved, other
problems are likely to solve themselves. Another perceived key to the solution of the region’s problems is the removal of the Russian military base, which will affect Armenian attitudes towards the Georgian state for the better (G7).

The loyalty of the Armenian population was otherwise not put in question and it was argued that Javakheti Armenians feel like citizens of Georgia (G7, G5) and that they pursue the integration into Georgian society themselves (G4, G9). Kharsiladze claims that, according to threat assessments made by the ministry of defence, possible threats emanating from the Javakheti region are deemed as very unlikely in the coming 3-4 years (G3).

5.2 Threats Perceived by Javakheti Armenians

When attempting to assess threat perceptions on the internal arena of the Armenian population of Javakheti, these need to be viewed in the context of Georgia’s history in the early 1990s. During this period, the Georgian state under Gamsakhurdia pursued quite aggressive policies towards ethnic minorities in general and slogans such as “Georgia for Georgians” were rather popular. It is frequently stated that distrust towards the Georgian state on part of Javakheti Armenians is largely stemming from their experiences during this period and that, according to them, this situation may recur (Elbakidze 2002:86). Attitudes of the Armenian population were also affected by the events in South Ossetia during the summer of 2004, where the attempt to handle the issue of South Ossetia in a military fashion rendered opinions that the government may decide to deal with the Armenians in the same way (SE2).

There is a lack of quantitative studies on attitudes among Javakheti Armenians (SE7) and one should therefore be careful about generalising on these (SE10). This said, qualitative studies carried out in the region, such as Elbakidze (2002), reveal several signs of distrust towards the Georgian government among the Armenian population. While these results cannot be viewed as representative for the Armenian minority as a whole, social scientists in continuous contact with the region claim that these perceptions are voiced quite often and are likely to be fairly widespread (SE2, SE7). Interviews with these social scientists, along with interviews carried out during a visit to the Javakheti region17 constitute the grounds for an assessment of threat perceptions among Javakheti Armenians. In Elbakidzes study, most respondents spoke of the government in negative and critical terms (2002:86) and as will be argued below, the central government is seemingly perceived as a threat to the Armenian population in various ways. While this threat may not primarily consist of potential military aggression, the perception is quite visible that Armenians are victims of discrimination on basis of their ethnicity, that there is a risk of them being gradually assimilated into the Georgian population and, in some instances, that the government is pursuing a deliberate policy to cause poor enough living conditions to make them migrate from Georgia. Below, I will elaborate on each of these three issues.
5.2.1 Discrimination

When asked how Armenians in Javakheti perceive their situation, answers differ according to which group of respondents the interviewee belongs to. Most observers not affiliated with the government state that the Armenians of Javakheti quite evidently view themselves as discriminated, while government officials were largely reluctant to acknowledge this perception or other forms of suspicion towards the Georgian government on part of Javakheti Armenians. As was stated above, they were quick to assess that problems in Javakheti do not differ from those of other parts of countryside Georgia and that there is no “ethnic dimension” to these, with one major exception; the lack of knowledge of Georgian, the effects of which will be further elaborated on below.

However, even though the social and economic problems of the region may well be similar to those of other regions, the fact that the region is compactly settled by a minority arguably at least constitutes an additional aggravating factor. Issues such as poor infrastructure, underfinanced schools et cetera are frequently viewed as an expression of the government’s alleged prejudice towards ethnic minorities and there is a common belief that Armenians are deliberately overlooked by the authorities (SE3, SE4, SE7, O1). Poor living conditions are often interpreted as results of discriminatory policies and Armenians frequently state that they are “not equal with Georgians” and that they are second class citizens (SE2, SE9). Respondents in Elbakidze’s study indeed view most economic and social problems in a context of ethnic discrimination. One respondent put it thus: “Problems that affect the whole Georgia are more urgent and take an ethnic dimension in Javakheti” (Elbakidze 2002:85).

An interesting issue in this respect is the lack of knowledge of Georgian in the region, and the demand for a working knowledge of the state language for access to public office (Russian used to be the working language during Soviet times). This policy is frequently interpreted as discriminatory (Elbakidze 2002:82), since it has provided for the dismissal of Armenian public servants, doctors, police officers and so forth. This has produced overt resentment and an increased difficulty of finding employment (SE4). Furthermore, the exclusive use of Georgian in documents and administrative files complicates communication between region and centre on political issues (Elbakidze 2002:85, A4). Media in Armenian are scarce or unavailable, which provides for an information vacuum regarding developments in Georgia (Elbakidze 2002:78-79). Furthermore, media often provides quite stereotypical and negative depictions of the region and its population (SE5).
A fear of assimilation was an issue in both the study undertaken by Elbakidze and in the interviews I carried out during my visit to the region. Opinions on this issue were, however, quite diverse and while some did not see a serious danger of assimilation, others interpreted most attempts by the government to formulate policies aimed at facilitating integration of Javakheti with Georgia in this light.

Overall, there is a difficulty of communication between the Georgian government and the Armenian community in discerning between what constitutes desired integration and much resented assimilation (SE2). The understanding of this terminology differs widely among respondents in Akhalkalaki and many may be advocating some type of integration while perceiving policies formulated by the central government as threatening to eradicate Armenian language and culture and hence as assimilatory (SE2). The most frequently mentioned concrete issue in relation to the fear of assimilation was the policy of increasing the knowledge of Georgian in the region, which is commonly viewed as a “road to assimilation” (SE7). David Rstkyan, leader of the organisation “Virk”, states that the main motive of this policy is to assimilate Armenians and that they are therefore afraid to learn it.

We will forget our language […]. When we have learned Georgian, they will demand us to change our family names so that we become real Georgians and afterwards we can get any post in any place (A3).

There is a quite widespread perception in Javakheti that Armenians in Tbilisi and other parts of Georgia have repeatedly been assimilated in the past (SE4). This is frequently put in direct relation to prior requirements of knowing Georgian and of changing surnames into Georgian-sounding ones in order to be attractive on the labour market:

Many Armenians in other parts of Georgia […] learned Georgian, changed their family names and were assimilated. In Tbilisi the Armenian population is today only 1-2% officially […]. Assimilation is really a problematic issue; hundreds of thousands of Armenians were assimilated already (A1).

One must, however, be aware that there are also quite positive attitudes towards studying Georgian (SE4). There is an understanding among many Javakheti Armenians that an increased knowledge of Georgian will in certain ways be useful in their pursuance of political agendas, demands and rights (SE1). However, due to the isolation of Javakheti from the rest of Georgia, few residents of the region have a day to day use for the language and therefore do not see a need for knowing it (A5). Young people attending higher education frequently do so in Armenia or Russia as an effect of language requirements for admission to Georgian universities and hence do not perceive learning the language as necessary (Elbakidze 2002:82-83). Overall, current demands for knowledge of Georgian are perceived as too harsh (ibid:83-84) and are not accompanied with economic and other incentives which would make them more efficient and acceptable (A1).
5.2.3 Forced Migration

A somewhat more radical ambition of the Georgian government is, according to some respondents, to make the economical and social situation in Javakheti poor enough to force the Armenian population there to emigrate to Armenia or Russia (SE2). This opinion was voiced by several respondents in Elbakidzes study (2002:86). Nodia summarizes the issue thus:

They think that Georgians want to throw some type of settlement policies, to settle Georgians and force Armenians to leave […]. That is Georgian strategy as perceived by many Armenians (SE7).

The difficult social and economic situation is allegedly an effect of the government’s “deliberate anti-minority policy”, by one respondent referred to as “[…] a white genocide. They place us in such conditions that we will have to leave” (Elbakidze 2002:70).

Rstkyan even stated that recent employment of new Georgian teachers is part of the government’s deliberate policy to alter the demographic composition of Javakheti, a practice which is allegedly aimed at making Armenians turn into minorities in their own region (A3).

With the above said, it would be wrong to conclude that the opinions of Javakheti Armenians are exclusively negative towards integration into Georgia. It seems that participation in public life and other forms of increased interaction with Georgian society are deemed as desirable by large parts of the population. Even so, ambitions and actions of the government are viewed with certain suspicion. As put by Nodia:

Minorities also see homogenizing efforts not only as prejudice toward minorities. They have a quite ambiguous attitude, seeing some positive things […] but also a stronger state as a threat to their identity (SE7).

It seems, then, that even though integration with the rest of Georgia is not viewed as a purely negative prospect for the future, there are definitely signs of a lack of trust towards the central government, regarding both its capacity and its ambitions. While positive attitudes towards integration may not be uncommon, policies designed to facilitate integration, such as increased teaching of Georgian, are easily interpreted as threatening Armenian language and culture and thus as aggressive nationalisation.
6 The External Arena

6.1 Threats Perceived by the Georgian Government; the Role of Russia

Russian influence over Georgian politics gained importance during the second half of the 18th century, when Russia was perceived as a natural ally against Ottoman Turkey (Suny 1994:57ff). In 1801, the kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti (today’s eastern Georgia) was annexed by the Russian empire (ibid:59), followed by its gradual administrative integration of the entire Transcaucasia throughout the 19th century (ibid:95). These aspects of history, as well as experiences throughout the lifetime of the USSR, provide an important background to the Georgian government’s perceptions of current Russian interference in Georgian politics. Since Russia evidently played an important part in Georgia’s to date unresolved civil wars in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and still supports the separatist regions in various ways, the perceived threat posed by Russia to Georgia would seem as an important, probably even the most important, threat factor on the external arena.

Indeed, most interviewees in the category of government officials perceived Russian influence in terms of material, military and political support to be a crucial factor for determining the outcomes of the internal conflicts, as well as for inter-ethnic relations in Georgia at large. An official at the state ministry for conflict resolution states that support from Russia was the primary reason why South Ossetia and Abkhazia could win the civil wars and that without this support, these conflicts would not exist and problems would have been solved in a non-violent fashion (G1). Russia purportedly convinced Abkhazia and South Ossetia to declare independence and deployed soldiers on the Abkhaz side. Russia also used the North Caucasus as well as Armenians against Georgia in the Abkhazian war (G7). Furthermore, Russian involvement and interests are perceived to be the main reasons for the deadlock in negotiations between the government and secessionist regions:

Russia thinks the South Caucasus is a province of Russia […]. It thinks it is still a superpower which can do anything it likes to small countries in its surroundings […]. It is using Abkhazia and South Ossetia for its political goals but is not giving anything to them […]. As soon as we don’t have Russia in the region, our conflicts will be resolved (G7).
Moreover, even though large part of the populations of South Ossetia and Abkhazia are described as preferring a reintegration with Georgia, they are under harsh anti-Georgian propaganda from their authorities and by extension from Russia, claiming that “Georgians are fascists who want to eliminate them and control their territory” (G1).

However, even though negative Russian influence over the conflicts and peace processes in Abkhazia and South Ossetia are the most obvious instances of Russian interference in Georgian internal affairs, they are not perceived to be the only ones. Russia allegedly has an influence over other inter-ethnic relations within Georgia as well:

With Russian interests in the region, supporting radical groups against each other; one word is enough to start a war in the Caucasus (G7).

When put into relation to the region of Javakheti, most observers hold Russia to be an influential external actor in the region. According to Komakhia, Russia has an interest in maintaining the situation in Javakheti at a controllable level of instability which may be used as leverage against Georgia if needed (SE6). Nodia states that the government houses a fear that Russia has an interest in manipulating Armenian sentiments against Georgia (SE7).

While most government officials agree that Russia is probably interested in keeping the situation of Javakheti unstable and maintain the population’s ties to Russia, Russian interest in instigating actual conflict in the region is deemed as low, especially since this would put Armenia (which is closely allied to Russia) in a difficult position (G3). It is also argued that Russian attempts to destabilise the situation would not find any wider support among local residents, since their main political influence from outside is that deriving from Yerevan (G3).

It seems then, that while Russia is not perceived as having an interest in seriously aggravating the situation, it still exercises an influence over the local population which is aimed at countering attempts of improving internal relations. This influence over the Javakheti region is quite naturally put in relation to the Russian military base in Akhalkalaki by most observers. While the issue of removing the base is elaborated on at greater length below, it is worth mentioning that government officials frequently link negative attitudes among the local population towards the removal of the base, as well as towards other issues, to Russian manipulation. Russia is allegedly attempting to prevent the removal of the base through the spread of propaganda that the economic situation will turn unsustainable in absence of the base (G3). Furthermore, Russia is perceived as being responsible for the rumour that the removal of the base will deprive the Armenian community of their main source of protection against Turkey, and the misconception that the base is likely to be replaced by a NATO base manned by Turkish military units (G7, G5).
7 The Internal / External Interacting

7.1 The Russian Military Base in Akhalkalaki

The 62\textsuperscript{nd} Divisional Russian military base located in Akhalkalaki provides an interesting example of the interplay between internal and external arenas or, more specifically, the relationship between Russia, the Georgian government and the Armenian minority. Today, the base is hardly fulfilling any military functions since all heavy equipment has been removed and the number of deployed soldiers has decreased\textsuperscript{18}. It does, however, play an important role as Russian political leverage on Georgia and the issue of removing the base is a hot potato and a source of strained Russian-Georgian relations. Russia agreed to withdraw its military bases in Georgia at the OSCE Istanbul Summit in 1999 and in May 2005 Russia and Georgia agreed on a timeframe for the Akhalkalaki base to be removed in 2008 (Civil Georgia 2005-05-30).

The Russian military base is an obvious political problem for the Georgian government and difficulties in relations between the central government and the population of Javakheti are frequently put in relation to the base. The agreed removal is seen as an important factor in reducing interethic tension in the region. Government officials argue that when the Russian bases leave, the population of Javakheti, as well those of South Ossetia and Abkhazia will realise that they will "have to start thinking about their future and start negotiating with the central government" (G7). The base is perceived as a "foundation for potential conflict that plays a negative role both in Georgian internal and external relations" (G3). It is also argued that the influence the base has over the region and its population is not of a political nature, but exclusively economical. The support among local Armenians for the base to remain in the region is mainly seen as a reaction to the loss of income its removal will cause, since the main reason why locals of Javakheti are dependent on Russia and Russian troops is that they are provided with salaries and citizenship from Russia\textsuperscript{19} (G5). These economical connections between locals and Russian troops have allegedly been part of Russian strategy as a means for consolidating Russia’s position in Georgia (G5). However, due to the strictly economic nature of this dependence, local Armenians are not perceived to make any difference between Russian and Georgian troops, as long as the region is provided with money-spending soldiers and job opportunities (G3). As stated above, government officials mainly perceive negative attitudes towards the removal of the base, related to security concerns, among local Armenians as an effect of Russian propaganda (G7, G3, G5).
To summarize, most interviewed government officials perceive the base to be an important negative factor in relations between the central government and the Javakheti region and that the removal of the base will solve a number of problems. However, the support among local Armenians for the base is perceived to be mainly due to their economic dependence on troops located there. Russia is, in turn, abusing this relationship in order to undermine relations between Javakheti Armenians and the government.

Armenian residents of Akhalkalaki seemingly have a quite different understanding of the functions performed by the Russian base. Marina Elbakidze’s study revealed an almost unanimously negative standpoint by the Armenian population towards its withdrawal (2002:92). The immediate arguments for this were, in accordance with the view of interviewed government officials, mainly economical, such as job opportunities and overall commercial benefits (SE2). Both Nodia and Elbakidze state, though, that the main motive for wanting the base to remain is the guarantee for security it is perceived to represent (SE7, SE2). According to Nodia, the base does not play an important role economically nowadays, since the number of locals employed there has decreased²⁰. The main reason for support of the base is related to the traditional view of Russia as a protector against the Turkish threat, against which the base poses a symbolical shelter (SE4). Fears are often displayed that if the Russian base will be withdrawn, Turkish influence over the region will increase (Huber 2004:39, SE4). Concerns have even been voiced that it might be replaced with a NATO base, manned by Turkish military units²¹ (Elbakidze 2002:92-93, SE7, SE2).

The Russian base is, however, not only perceived as protection against Turkey. It is also viewed as a defence against potential aggression from the Georgian state. In relation to this, the time of Gamsakhurdia is frequently recalled as the base is by some perceived as needed to remain as protection “in case another Gamsakhurdia comes to power” (Elbakidze 2002:93). Also, since the central government is in some circles perceived as having an ambition of forcing the population of Javakheti to emigrate or assimilate them, the base is perceived as providing additional protection against this (SE7). Negotiations and debates over the closure of the base have not passed unnoticed in Javakheti. In March 2005, two large sized demonstrations were organised in support for the base to stay deployed (SE4, Central Asia – Caucasus Analyst 2005-04-06). Virk leader David Rstkyan voiced a quite dramatic view on the potential consequences of withdrawing the base:

If the Russian base will be removed […], local people will automatically support it to stay as long as they don’t have the status of autonomy […]. After removing the Russian base, the Georgian army will come here but the people won’t let them. After taking out the Russian base, they will not have any more problems with Armenians and they can all be assimilated […]. The main function of the base is to prevent the wolf from eating the sheep. We are the sheep […], Georgia is the wolf and Russia is the bear. And they prevent the wolf from eating the sheep […]. This is why we seek support from Russia. We will seek support from practically anyone who is prepared to give it to us (except Turkey) (A3).
A similar, but somewhat more nuanced assessment was made by Nair Iritsyan, mayor of Akhalkalaki:

Since Russia came here, we haven’t seen a war from the Turkish side. It is a guarantee for our people. That is why we support it. It guarantees security. [...] We don’t need the Georgian army. If they will come here with weapons, we won’t trust them. [...] If the Georgian army will replace the Russian base and here will be conflict, they will take part in that conflict and smash the Armenians [...] The officers will be Georgian and they will order the soldiers to do so. It will be an all-Georgian army with the power to destroy Armenians. They can use the army on Georgian territory, not here [...]. When we understand that we are real brothers, we won’t need an army, but this will take a long time (A2).

To summarize, opinions and perceptions of the functions of the military base differ somewhat, to put it mildly, between interviewed government officials and Akhalkalaki residents. It is interesting to note that, while there is some recognition among government officials for the protection the base is perceived as providing against Turkey (even though this threat perception is viewed as ridiculous and mainly an effect of Russian propaganda), there seems to be very little understanding of the fact that the base is also perceived as providing protection against the Georgian government.
8 Discussion

The following constitutes a discussion of the results of the field study, and of how these may be understood. First, threat perceptions and their impact on relations between government and minority are discussed. Second, these threat perceptions are contextualised through an elaboration on their connections to the external arena.

8.1 Perceived Threats and Relations between Government and Minority

As was accounted for above, there is some evidence in official rhetoric that may be interpreted as explicitly including minorities as part of the Georgian nation. While these signs remain quite ambiguous and have as yet to a limited extent been followed by consistent practical measures, references to national community seemingly imply an ambition of defining the nation in a civic fashion. A crucial factor to the realisation of this ambition is whether minorities are depicted as being loyal to the Georgian state. Therefore, whether threats to territorial integrity are perceived as connected to the minority is a key determinant to the prospects for defining the nation in a civic manner.

As perceived by the Georgian government, the main threat originating from the Javakheti region is that of radical political groupings, largely advocating interests of forces external to Georgia, with an interest in spreading anti-Georgian propaganda and mobilising the population against the Georgian state. While these groups are perceived as being quite isolated at present, the risk of them gaining influence under certain circumstances is not entirely disregarded. According to some observers, this provides a partial explanation to the reluctance towards dealing with issues of minority integration. Otherwise, it seems as though the Armenian minority in more general terms is not officially regarded as disloyal, but depicted as quite positive towards the Georgian state and the idea of belonging to it. The official depiction of potential threats related to the Javakheti region is thus seemingly downplayed and careful. An interesting finding in this regard is the denial of an “ethnic dimension” to the problematic relationship between the government and the population of Javakheti. Problems in the region are primarily defined as being of a socio-economical nature, hardly differing from those of other regions. While this may well be true, the accounts of interviewed Javakheti Armenians imply that most socio-economic problems are interpreted as various forms of ethnic discrimination. It seems, though, that these concerns are largely
disregarded by government officials and are taken as propaganda voiced by extremists.

However, when the perspective of Javakheti Armenians is taken into consideration, it seems obvious that the Georgian government is perceived as a threat in various ways. The perceived discrimination of Armenians, the fear of assimilation and the government’s perceived creation of harsh conditions in order to force Armenians to migrate all point towards certain distrust in the Georgian state. While the material presented within this thesis does not provide for generalisation and it would be unfair to describe perceptions of the Javakheti population as exclusively negative towards issues such as integration and learning Georgian, the accounts presented still point towards a suspicion of the government’s intentions as potentially threatening the cultural identity of Javakheti Armenians. The reception of the education reform aimed at increasing the knowledge of Georgian among Armenians provides an interesting example. While depicted as downright assimilation by actors with a political agenda, and perhaps with an interest in depicting the Georgian government as aggressively nationalising, scepticism towards learning Georgian is also described as likely to be a more widespread opinion.

Threat perceptions can thus be said to complicate internal relations between government and minority in that they impede the prospects for constructive approaches to integration and inclusion. Political measures deemed by the government as necessary for the integration of Javakheti Armenians into Georgian society are easily interpreted as signs of aggressive nationalisation among Armenians, due to a lack of trust in the central government. Perceived discrimination and assimilation of Armenians seemingly put into question the government’s legitimacy in the eyes of the minority and thus make less likely their acceptance of political measures aimed at integration. The reluctance of implementing policy in this regard may partly be understood as measure not to aggravate the situation. Furthermore, the official downplay of threats emanating from the Javakheti region may well serve the purpose of reinforcing civic elements in that a depiction of the minority as disloyal would obviously run contrary to an appeal to national community and a formulation of a national concept where Armenians are included. However, through refusing to acknowledge the perceived ethnic dimension to problems in the region, which is seemingly quite widespread among its residents, the government also fails to address a number of important concerns, not exclusively linked to socio-economical issues. Through terming complaints of discrimination and so forth as manifestations of extremism, the government arguably brands a larger proportion of the minority than actual members of political organisations as disloyal radicals.
8.2 Threat Perceptions and the Interaction of Internal and External Arenas

It seems quite obvious that the most prominent perceived threat to Georgia originating from the external arena is that posed by Russia. Russian involvement was the main reason for the eruption of civil war in South Ossetia and Abkhazia and Russian influence is still the key obstruction to a peaceful solution of these. However, Russian influence over Georgian internal affairs arguably stretches further than the frozen conflicts. A perception which is quite visible in the material is that of Russia as an important influence over minorities in Georgia. It is allegedly part of Russian strategy to use these minorities as political leverage against Georgia through the spread of anti Georgian propaganda.

If Russia’s perceived influence on relations between the government and the Javakheti region is taken into consideration, the government’s perception of the loyalty of Javakheti Armenians becomes somewhat more problematic. There is, indeed, some ambiguity in the understanding of Russian influence on part of government officials. While it is argued that Russian propaganda efforts do not find wider support among the Armenian population, voiced security concerns are frequently considered an effect of this misinformation, making Russian interests the determinant of these in official discourse. Even though it is difficult to tell how widespread these security concerns are among the Armenian minority, the material presented definitely implies that they exist and that they are likely to be more far reaching than to politically active groups alone. The practice of depicting security concerns as an effect of Russian propaganda thus has the double consequence of not taking these seriously and providing an image of Javakheti Armenians as easily manipulated by Georgia’s main external enemy.

The perception among Armenians of Russia as a protector becomes quite obvious when examining attitudes on the removal of the Russian military base in Akhalkalaki. While government officials acknowledge, although ridiculing, the sense of security the base is providing against Turkey, it is interesting to note that the perceived function of protection against the Georgian state filled by the base is hardly acknowledged at all. The government’s claim of indifference on part of Armenians to whether troops in the region are Russian or Georgian thus provides a seemingly oversimplified account of Armenian perceptions of the role of Russia.

External influences on Georgian internal relations may thus be stated to have great importance for the formulation of threat perceptions. Contextualising relations between government and Javakheti Armenians through accounting for Russia’s role in this relationship provides for a more thorough understanding of the role of threat perceptions as obstacles to a redefinition of national identity. The impact of Russian influence also seems to be a central issue in relation to loyalty. Russia’s perceived ability to manipulate the Armenian population and potentially use it against the Georgian state in a “divide and rule” fashion arguably compromises the loyalty of the Armenian minority indirectly. While loyalty is not openly put into question, their perceived receptivity to Russian propaganda hardly
depicts them as a trustworthy component of the Georgian state. If Javakheti Armenians are in part viewed as a potential instrument of an external enemy, posing a threat to territorial integrity, this indeed poses an important obstacle to a redefinition of national identity which includes this minority.
9 Conclusion

The time has come to summarize the findings and provide an answer to the overarching question formulated in the first chapter of this thesis:

“How may threat perceptions pose obstacles to a reinforcement of civic elements in Georgian national identity?”

The threat perceptions identified and elaborated on above obviously have an impact on relations between government and minority and their attitudes towards one another. In order to sum up the obstacles these are posing to the reinforcement of civic elements in national identity, focus now turns to the two operational indicators identified in chapter 3.

9.1 Legitimacy

The main issue here is the extent to which the minority perceives nation building conducted by the government as legitimate. Legitimacy is crucial to the success of a nation building project and a lack in this regard holds a potential for causing ethnic tension and polarisation. Civic national identity needs to be based on a sense of national community, disregarding ethnicity, in order to be perceived as legitimate. However, the homogenisation of the population inherent in civic national identity may pose a source for further questioning of legitimacy.

Threat perceptions on part of the minority thus pose an obstacle to the reinforcement of civic elements in that they provide for a depiction of the state as nationalising, primarily conducting nation building in accordance with the interests of the ethnic majority. This seemingly impedes the development of a sense of belonging, which is a precondition for civic nationhood. Furthermore, as was seen in relation to the language issue, perceived threats to cultural identity make less likely the voluntary acceptance of actions aimed at homogenisation, which are to some extent a necessary element in the development of civic national identity. Threat perceptions on part of the Armenian minority thus put the legitimacy of the Georgian nation building project into question, which poses an obstacle to the successful construction of national community corresponding to a reinforcement of civic elements.
9.2 Loyalty

If the perception of legitimacy can be taken as a key determinant for the minority’s acceptance of the nation building project, the perception of loyalty is a crucial matter to the inclusion of the minority into a civic definition of national identity. The source of community within a civic definition of the nation is a sense of common loyalty to the state on behalf of its citizens. Loyalty may thus be termed a requirement for inclusion. If an entire ethnic group is perceived as disloyal, this group is unlikely to be included in the definition of the nation, thus providing for national identity more closely corresponding to the ethnic ideal type.

As was shown above, government officials are careful not to depict the Armenian minority as disloyal to the state, but rather as citizens willing to participate in Georgian public life. This seemingly signals an ambition of including the minority in the definition of nation, corresponding to a reinforcement of civic elements. However, the perceived influence of an external actor over the minority complicates the issue of loyalty. While the minority in itself is not perceived as disloyal, its supposed receptivity to manipulation by a foreign state threatening Georgia’s territorial integrity puts loyalty into question implicitly. Perceptions of threat emanating from the external arena, through their impact on relations between government and minority, are thus likely to have an impact on the definition of national identity. They constitute an obstacle to a reinforcement of civic elements in that they compromise the loyalty of the minority, as perceived by those formulating national identity, and impedes the prospects for including the minority as part of the Georgian nation.

9.3 Results and Implications

This thesis has explored potential effects of threat perceptions for the formulation of national identity and inclusive definitions of the nation. In the Georgian context, perceived threats indeed seem to pose important obstacles to the development of a sense of national community in various ways. It is my belief that the presented results have demonstrated the complexity of relations between minority and government and the need for approaching issues related to integration in a cautious manner. The results also point towards the importance of dealing with threat perceptions along with institution building and other ways of strengthening the state. Without acknowledgement of and dialogue on the security concerns of people affected by nation-building activities, these activities run a risk of being counter-productive. Economic development and civic integration are certainly crucial issues to the establishment of a functional state. However, these are likely to be more efficient if accompanied with activities aimed at eliminating distrust and creating the sense of community essential to civic national identity.
10 References

10.1 Interviews

10.1.1 Social Scientists / Experts

(SE1) Darchiashvili, David, 050523 George Soros Foundation
(SE2) Elbakidze, Marina, 050517 Caucasus Institute for Peace, Development and Democracy
(SE3) Gogolashvili, Kakha, 050609 Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies
(SE4) Hertoft, Mikael, 050613 European Centre for Minority Issues
(SE5) Kintzurashvili, Tamar, 050519 Liberty Institute
(SE6) Komakhia, Mamuka, 050621 Independent Expert
(SE7) Nodia, Ghia, 050525 Caucasus Institute for Peace, Development and Democracy
(SE8) Ramishvili, Levan, 050518 Liberty Institute
(SE9) Svanidze, Guram, 050603 Parliamentary Advisor
(SE10) Usupashvili, David, 050530 Georgian Young Lawyers Association

10.1.2 Government Officials

(G1) Geradze, Levan, 050628 State Ministry for Conflict Resolution
(G2) Karablashvili, Archil, 050622 State Ministry on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration
(G3) Kharsliladze, Nodar, 050613 Ministry of Defence
(G4) Nalbardov, Alexander, 050525 National Security Council
(G5) Sjugarov, Givi, 050607 Ministry of Foreign Affairs
(G6) Svanishvili, Sandro, 050519 President’s Administration
(G7) Tsikhistavi, Tamar, 050530 State Ministry for Conflict Resolution
(G8) Tsipuria, Bela, 050531 Ministry of Education
(G9) Anonymous, 050617 Ministry of Education
10.1.3 Armenian NGOs and Akhalkalaki Residents

(A1) Elchian, Karen, 050607 Armenian Cooperation Centre of Georgia
(A2) Iritsyan, Nair, 050614 Mayor of Akhalkalaki
(A3) Rstkyan, David, 050614 Virk
(A4) Principal of Akhalkalaki School, 050608
(A5) Additional interviews with Akhalkalaki residents, 050607-08

10.1.4 Other

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Speech by President Saakashvili, 2005-03-03. http://www.president.gov.ge/?l=E&m=0&sm=3&id=436, 9 December 2005
Appendix 1. Map of Georgia

Source: Vaux 2003:4
Notes

1 This dichotomy has been widely used and been given a multitude of terms in literature on nationalism. Civic has, for instance, been termed as political, social or voluntaristic, while ethnic has been termed organic, exclusive or radical (Brown 2000:50).

2 Civic is also considered typically western, while ethnic is considered typical for East European, African and Asian nationalisms. The validity in distinguishing between Western and Eastern nationalisms has been questioned by a number of scholars, since the time frame of these nation building processes is incomparable and Western nationalisms have not been free from ethnic elements in the past and may not be so today (See Kuzio 2002:29, 36).

3 Termed “External national homeland with a potential for claiming the right of safeguarding the rights of their co-ethnics settled in other states” in Brubaker’s original framework (1996:66-67), this category has been somewhat modified in order to underline that affiliation between minority and external actors must not necessarily rely on ethnicity.

4 It is important to note here, that the actors themselves should not be considered as unitary, but likely to display heterogeneity on how other actors are to be perceived. There may well be competition for to what extent policies of nationalisation should be carried out within the state, whether national minorities are to be depicted as loyal or disloyal, how aggressive a nationalising state should be perceived by a minority and in which way co-ethnics of another state should be supported by an external state actor (Brubaker 1996:68).

5 The institution of territorial autonomy may actually have reinforced the ethnic identities of Abkhazians and Ossetians and provided the leadership of these regions with a power base and links to outside support along with structural tools for ethnic mobilisation (Cornell 2002:183-186, 194-196).

6 One may argue that graver instances of obstacles to reinforcing civic elements in national identity are to be found in Georgian relations with the de facto secessionist regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. While it is true that obstacles might well prove even greater in these cases, the current state of affairs is that these regions are cut off from Georgian authority and are thus not as likely to be affected by Georgian nation building policies.

7 One should keep in mind that transforming the recording of an interview into written text by necessity implies an additional interpretative element of what was said (Kvale 1997:152). However, a quotation presented in its original spoken form gives a rather incoherent impression and does little to facilitate the reader’s understanding of the information (Kvale 1997:241). All quotations are thus modified into written language.

8 During spring 1989, Georgian radicals organized mass demonstrations in Tbilisi, initially as a response to Abkhazian demands for raised status to Union Republic (Cornell 2002:156). However, the protests developed into demands for Georgian independence and on April 9th interior troops broke up the demonstrations, leaving 19 dead (ibid). This violent incident led to further loss of legitimacy for the Communist government (Cornell 2001:161).

9 In March 1991, a referendum was held throughout the USSR on the preservation of the Union. Georgia prohibited its population from taking part in the referendum, which was nevertheless held in Abkhazia and South Ossetia resulting in a vast majority voting in favour of remaining within the USSR. Georgia instead declared its independence in April 1991 and had previous to this declared Georgia “a unitary state with no internal boundaries”, in effect abolishing the three autonomies of Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Ajaria (Cornell 2001:164-165).

10 In 1991, the conflict in South Ossetia had escalated to the point that Tskhinvali (the capital of South Ossetia) was regularly shelled and surrounded by Georgian paramilitary troops. However, the development into full scale war was interrupted by the outbreak of a brief civil war in Tbilisi in December 1991, caused by internal divisions within the Georgian leadership (Cornell 2001:167).

11 The USSR had been abolished during the civil war in Tbilisi.

12 However, Shevardnadze failed to control the Georgian paramilitary forces and hostilities in South Ossetia were resumed, with open Russian support for the South Ossetian side (Cornell 2002:194).

13 Georgian paramilitaries entered Abkhazia and occupied Sukhumi (the capital of Abkhazia), forcing the Abkhaz leadership to retreat. However, the Abkhaz soon conducted a counter offensive, heavily armed with Russian military equipment and reinforced by volunteers from the North Caucasus (Cornell 2002:171). Russian involvement in the conflict on the Abkhaz side increased throughout the war (ibid: 172) and when a cease fire
came to effect in October 1993, the Abkhaz leadership was in control over close to all the territory of the former Abkhaz ASSR (ibid: 173). The war caused around 200000 internally displaced persons in Georgia and hostilities have reoccurred on a number of occasions, most notably in 1998 (ibid: 174).

14 A project chiefly funded through the Millennium Challenge Initiative by USAID.

Javakh emerged in 1988-89 and developed into a “popular front”, coordinating nationalistic forces and countering Georgian nationalism of the early 1990s with a corresponding Armenian one (Darchiashvili 2002:30). Javakh exercised de facto control over Akhalkalaki during 1992-94, at a time when central power in Tbilisi was non-functional (ibid.). During the second half of the 1990s, Javakh demanded political autonomy for Javakheti (Cornell 2002:202), but these demands later faded due to a more cautious policy by the Shevardnadze government and political coordination with Armenia (Darchiashvili 2002:30). This caused Javakh to gradually lose its importance as a local actor (Darchiashvili 2002:30-31). As a consequence, former members of Javakh formed Virk, also a regional Armenian organisation which has raised the issue of autonomy (Cornell 2002:202).

15 A more extensive account of the external arena in relation to the Javakheti region should therefore also include Armenia. Armenian influence over the region is, indeed, high. The local population largely relies on Armenia for supply of information, due to the lack of knowledge of Georgian and hence a disability of consuming Georgian media (Wheatley 2004:31). Furthermore, Armenian textbooks are used in schools and the church is run from Armenia and not from Tbilisi. Culturally, one may even state that Javakheti is more integrated with Armenia than with Georgia (SE4, SE6). However, if considering geopolitical realities, it is difficult to see an Armenian interest in a destabilized situation in Javakheti. In the aftermath of the to date frozen conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenia’s trade routes through Azerbaijan are cut off and the only links to the outside world are through Iran and Georgia (Cornell 2002:205). Armenia is thus strategically dependent on good relations with Georgia for access to trade and other communications. Armenia indeed intervened to calm separatist ambitions of Javakh in 1992, during the chaos following the fall of Gamsakhurdia (Cornell 2002:205-206). The role of Armenia as a guarantee for stability in Javakheti has caused a relationship of mutual dependence between the Georgian and Armenian leaderships (Cornell 2002:206). There are, however, political forces in Armenia with a potential to play a less stabilizing role in the region. The party usually referred to in this regard is the Dashnaksutyun, which has previously propagated an Armenian annexation of Javakheti (Cornell 2002:205). The Dashnaksutyun is currently politically allied with the Armenian government and is according to some sources active in Javakheti with an agenda of territorial autonomy (SE7). It is, however, quite unlikely that the Armenian government would allow the Dashnaksutyun to seriously aggravate the situation (Wheatley 2004:30) and according to Kharsiladze, the Georgian government does not perceive Armenian interests in Javakheti to pose a serious threat, but as more likely to have a stabilizing influence over the region (G3).

16 Included among these is an interview with David Rstkyan, leader of the organisation Virk. While some statements made during this interview can be taken as quite extreme, I believe that an account of one of the “radical political groupings” discussed in chapter 5.1 provides an interesting perspective on the political climate in Javakheti.

17 The total number of personnel employed at the base has been estimated to just short of 3000 (Wheatley 2004:28). In 2002, 1/3 of the officers, 2/3 of the soldiers and close to all civil employees of the base were local Armenians (Cornell 2002:204)

18 Armenians who enlisted in the Russian army were granted Russian citizenship (FIDH Report 2005:14). The base has served as the main provider of employment in Akhalkalaki and salaries are relatively high by Georgian standards. The base has also constituted a market for local agricultural goods (Wheatley 2004:28, Metreveli 2004:14). Moreover, the fact that Russian military vehicles are not stopped at border controls has facilitated smuggling of goods from Russia for which the base has functioned as a black market (Wheatley 2004:29).

19 During spring 2004, large parts of the military personnel were relocated to Russia and replaced with Russian soldiers (FIDH Report 2005:14); decreasing the number of locals employed there and hence, the economical importance of the base. Furthermore, the ability for the base of facilitating smuggling et cetera has been impeded by the introduced visa regime with Russia (SE7)

20 The setting up of a NATO base in the region can be considered as extremely unlikely in reality, but if it would happen, it could have devastating consequences (SE4).