

hensible for me. I feel safer when I'm protected by Russia," 23 year-old Ana Zakhariani said.

Guram Azhiba from Sukhumi, who backs the opposition, said that the current Moscow-backed government is selling Abkhazia in parts. It is not true that the opposition is against Russia, he argues, on the contrary, "we stand for equal cooperation."

Oppositionist Gennadi Arzinba claims that supporters and opponents of the government are divided along ethnic lines. National minorities, who favor close relations with Russia, will support the government, which is pro-Russian, while Abkhazians will support the opposition, as economic sovereignty and safety are of paramount importance for them.

Despite the fact that protests against the economic agreements with Russia united the opposition, it remains unclear whether it can act as a united front. Consultations seeking to unify the opposition parties have had no positive results so far. There are three big opposition groups: the Economic Development Party, whose leader Beslan Butba declares that he will participate in the presidential elections; National Unity Forum, which brings together several ambitious and charismatic leaders and Aruaa, a movement of 1992–1993 war veterans. The parties are different. For instance, the Economic Development Party is distinguished by its intellectual membership. The National Unity Forum has so called "Khajimbists," who have never sought presidential election. Aruaa unites people who are ready to strike if the government plays dirty games.

Therefore, observers argue that the opposition lacks a strong chance of winning without unifying its ranks.

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About the Author

Anton Kriveniuk works as a journalist for *Chegemaskaia Pravda*, an Abkhaz newspaper.

Agreement Between Strategic Partners

By Aslan Kobakhia, Abkhazia

On 30 April in Moscow Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and Abkhazian President Sergei Bagabsh signed an "agreement on joint protection of the state border." The document distinctly defines the functions of Russia but does not say anything about Abkhazia's obligations. Despite the word "joint," the agreement is unilateral. President Bagabsh, who signed the document, has no right to inspect the border. Everything depends on the will of the Russian head of the bor-

der post. Genadi Arzinba says that Bagabsh's rating is not very high, though a significant part of the electorate will support him. That's why the opposition should unite in order to force the elections into a second round. It seems that it will be difficult to choose one candidate. Apart from Butba, Raul Khajimba and Zaur Arzinba are interested in fighting for the president's post.

Sergei Bagabsh officially expressed his will to be elected for a second term. He will be supported by the party Yedinaya Abkhazia, which wields powerful administrative resources. Members of the Abkhazian political establishment lead this party. Despite certain expectations, few anticipate that Foreign Affairs Minister Sergei Shamba will run for the president's post. He is actively participating in Yedinaya Abkhazia's work and, if Bagabsh wins another term, he may become prime minister. Alexander Ankvab's future plans are not clear. Recently there was an attempt to restore his political movement Aitaira, but in vain. However, Ankvab has time. It is said that he will not be a member of the president's team.

According to reports, each candidate is trying to win support from Russia. Raul Khajimba is categorically denying it. "I'm a pro-Abkhazian politician and I've never been governed by Moscow. I'm holding no consultations outside Abkhazia," he says.

Beslan Butba notes that Moscow always follows the same tactic: they prefer working with the acting government. It makes no difference for the Kremlin who will become the head of Abkhazia, Moscow will cooperate with everybody.

der post. It is nonsense that the president of the country is not allowed to check the state border. It is a fact that this agreement does not answer the national interests of Abkhazia.

We Abkhazians have been protecting our borders for the last 15 years by ourselves. Nobody has granted us independence. Maybe somebody thinks that we gained it on 26 October last year. I'd like to point out that we gained independence on 30 September 1993

through armed conflict in which thousands of our citizens died. Of course, it is very important that Russian military forces are on the territory of Abkhazia, however, they have their interests and furthermore, our interests should be taken into account as well. I think that protecting Abkhazia's state border is first of all the interest of Abkhazians. It is reasonable that there should be Abkhazian border guards at the border post as well, but it is not envisaged in the agreement.

At present we do not have problems with Russia, though there is no guarantee that new "Kozyrevs [the former Russian foreign minister who pursued a pro-Western policy, the Kozyrev doctrine]" will not appear in the future in Russia.

It would not be terrible if the agreement were prolonged for one hundred or even two hundred years instead of five, provided that the border is jointly protected. The contingent should be defined in a way that at least 15–20 percent of the border guards will be Abkhazians. Otherwise a question arises: what is the function of Abkhazian citizens in providing state security? If the situation changes, we will be as unready as in 1992.

There was an expectation that, after Russia recognized Abkhazia's independence, the State Security Service and the Ministry of Defense would unite into a Ministry of National Security, which would protect the state border together with Russia. With the agreement signed in Moscow, Abkhazia's border guards lost their function. Today Russia is the only strategic partner of Abkhazia. There is no other foreseeable option. Our relations with Russia should be well-organized.

Let's have a look at Chechnya. President Kadyrov somehow managed to put the republic in order. The number of federal army troops stationed there is dropping. Chechnya began a new peaceful life. Kadyrov has subunits which are implementing military missions on behalf of the Russian Federation. For instance, a Chechen battalion carried out complex operations in South Ossetia. Chechnya is a part of the Russian Federation while we have the status of an independent country. What prevents us from creating effective power structures? Abkhazia can have a special reaction battalion carrying out complex operations in any part of the world together with the Russian Federation.

Of course, if we had such efficient structures, we would not conclude such an agreement. Let's stop deceiving ourselves. Everybody is aware of our problems. Everybody knows how the Kodori operation evolved and how we obtained results.

To tell the truth, the agreement drawn up with Moscow is very bad. It would not be correct to accuse the author of this article of an anti-Russian attitude. To my mind, we should fight against anti-Russian attitudes in Abkhazia; "Russophobia" should be regarded as a criminal act. However, Russia should understand that it did not grant us independence, we gained it ourselves. In 1999, at the end of Yeltsin's term, Putin realized that nothing could prevent Abkhazians from gaining independence. A policy of tolerance towards Abkhazia finally resulted in recognizing its independence. It seems that after recognition, Putin's team stopped working on the issue of Abkhazia, otherwise we would not get such a document. The idea that Russia will benefit from this agreement is wrong. Only if it has reliable partners in Abkhazia will Moscow will be able to maintain strong positions there. By offering such agreements, Moscow will simply lose its position in Abkhazia. Despite our great respect towards Ossetians, it is not correct to discuss Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the same context. Yet, an identical agreement has been composed for both republics.

Abkhazia and South Ossetia have different purposes and objectives. The Ossetian nation is divided into two parts and their aspiration for unification is quite clear. From the beginning, we declared that we are building a democratic state. Arzinba left us a lot of documents, including the constitution adopted in 1994. Any lawyer can find dozens of violations of the Abkhazian constitution in the document signed in Moscow. President Bagabsh has to understand that we should not sign a document which contradicts our laws. There will always be Zyuganovs and Zhirinovskys [leaders respectively of the Russian Communist Party and the Liberal Democratic Party] who will advocate holding referendums. We have already held a referendum in which the Abkhazian people made their choice. With regard to the signed document, there is a question whether Abkhazia needs presidential governance. It is not clear why the agreement was elaborated secretly. Nobody thought that such an important document should be discussed by the parliament and a general decision made? Today no changes can be entered into the document. In truth, we cannot build a state this way.

Under Medvedev and Putin, nothing threatens Abkhazia, but nobody knows what will happen in the future. Recently, Boris Nemtsov [a leader of the Russian liberal opposition] was nearly elected mayor of Sochi. Under Yeltsin, Nemtsov supported sanctions against Abkhazia. Do we have any guarantee that persons like Nemtsov

will not join the government of Russia? What should we do in such a situation?

The document signed in Moscow resembles a father's attitude towards his illegitimate child. We cannot call

this agreement strategic. Strategic partners do not conclude such agreements.

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About the Author

Aslan Kobakhia commanded the Abkhazian artillery in the war of 1992–1993. Afterwards he was a chairman of State Customs Committee.

Chronicle

From 18 May to 24 June 2009

18 May 2009	Energy and Natural Resources Minister Armen Movsisian says Armenia will build a new nuclear power plant to replace the old Metsamor plant
20 May 2009	Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili meets with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliiev on an official visit to Azerbaijan
21 May 2009	The United States allocates \$53.3 million for Georgia as part of a \$1 billion assistance pledge made after the August war
22 May 2009	The Azerbaijani parliament ratifies the contract signed between Azerbaijan's State Oil Company SOCAR and the French Total company to explore the Absheron bloc in the Azerbaijani section of the Caspian Sea
26 May 2009	Abkhazia and the Russian Rosneft company sign an agreement that gives rights to the company to prospect for oil and natural gas off Abkhazia's Black Sea coast for a period of five years
28 May 2009	Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili meets with Italian Foreign Minister Franco Frattini in Rome
28 May 2009	Vice-president of the breakaway republic of Abkhazia Raul Khajimba resigns
29 May 2009	Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Grigory Karasin meets with UN special envoy Johan Verbeke in Moscow to discuss the future mandate of the UN observer mission at the administrative border between Georgia and Abkhazia that expires on 15 June
29 May 2009	US, Russian and French diplomats from the OSCE Minsk Group meet in Baku with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev for talks
31 May 2009	Party of Unity supporting South Ossetian leader Eduard Kokoity leads in parliamentary elections in South Ossetia
1 June 2009	Armenian President Serzh Sarkisian's Republican Party of Armenia wins the municipal elections in Armenia's capital Yerevan which opposition parties declare fraudulent
1 June 2009	Opposition party Armenian National Congress (HAK) vows to boycott Yerevan's newly elected municipal council, denouncing the elections' results as fraudulent
3 June 2009	Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov says Iran should not interfere in Azerbaijan's affairs after Iranian officials say a planned visit by Israeli President Shimon Peres to Baku could impact bilateral ties
3 June 2009	Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev meets Syrian Foreign Minister Valid Al-Muallem in Baku
4 June 2009	The EU's special representative for the South Caucasus Peter Semneby meets with three opposition leaders, Irakli Alasania (Alliance for Georgia), Davit Usupashvili (Republican Party, part of the Alliance for Georgia) and Salome Zourabichvili (Georgia's Way)

(continued overleaf)