



## Module 7

# Caucasus

This module is designed to introduce you to the Caucasus region, and focuses on the work of the OSCE in:

- Chechnya (Russian Federation)
- Georgia
- Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan)
- Armenia
- Azerbaijan

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## CHAPTER 1

# Overview

This section includes some basic information about the Caucasus including:

- Geography
- People
- Religious divisions



## Geography

The Caucasus region borders Europe and Asia and is comprised of the Greater Caucasus, the Lowland Strips, and the Lesser Caucasus.

### Greater Caucasus

The Caucasus region is dominated by the massive Caucasus mountain range. This range, the crest of which roughly follows the line that divides the Northern Caucasus from the Southern Caucasus, is sometimes called the main or Greater Caucasus range to distinguish it from another range further south called the Lesser Caucasus.

### Lowland Strips

A narrow strip of lowland, at places barely half a mile wide, separates the Greater Caucasus from the Black Sea on the western side, in Abkhazia and the Krasnodar Territory. A somewhat wider strip lies between the Greater Caucasus and the Caspian Sea on the eastern side, in southern Daghestan and northern Azerbaijan.

### Lesser Caucasus

The Lesser Caucasus runs across the southern Caucasus, eastward through southern Georgia and then southeastward through northern Armenia and western Azerbaijan, including Nagorno-Karabakh. Between the two ranges lie the marshy lowlands of western Georgia (on the western side) and of southeastern Azerbaijan (on the eastern side). The Greater and the Lesser Caucasus meet in the middle, in eastern Georgia.



## People

The long and turbulent history of the Caucasus, with its frequent migrations of peoples, has left behind a complex ethnic mosaic. The ethnic groups of the region can be divided into three broad categories:

- Groups that have lived in the Caucasus throughout recorded history.
- Groups that are thought to have lived in the Caucasus for “only” a few hundred years.
- Groups that arrived in modern times, as a result of the absorption of the Caucasus into the Russian Empire and then the Soviet Union.

Some ethnic groups have a close affinity to one another in terms of culture, language, and descent. Thus the Adygs, Cherkess, and Kabards of the northwestern Caucasus are all descended from related tribes that were known as Circassians, and are also closely related to the Abkhaz. The Chechens and Ingush are also very closely related; both refer to themselves by the single name Vainakh.

### Throughout recorded history

This category includes the Armenians, the groups that eventually merged to form the Georgian nation, and several of the mountain peoples (Abkhaz, Adygs, Chechens, Ingush, Avars, etc.). Except for Armenian, the languages of all these groups belong to the Caucasian family. It is possible that some of these groups did migrate into the Caucasus in prehistoric times. For instance, there is archeological evidence suggesting that the mountain peoples of the northwestern Caucasus originally came from Asia Minor.

### Newcomers

Groups that are thought to have lived in the Caucasus for “only” a few hundred years are often referred to as “newcomers.” Linguistic evidence suggests that these groups formed as a result of migrations associated with the conquest of parts of the Caucasus by Turkic and Persian Empires.

Azerbaijani belongs to the Turkic family, as do the languages of the Karachays and Balkars (in the northwestern Caucasus) and the Nogais and Kumyks (in lowland Dagestan).

Languages of Persian origin include those spoken by the Talysh (in southeastern Azerbaijan), Tats (in the mountains of Daghestan), and Ossets (in the north-central Caucasus); although the precursors of the Ossets (the Alans) were native to the Caucasus.

### Modern times

The last group includes people who arrived in modern times as a result of the absorption of the Caucasus into the Russian Empire and then the Soviet Union. Russians are the largest group in this category, but it includes also various smaller groups, such as Ukrainians and European Jews (distinguished from Jews of Persian origin among the Tats).



## Religious divisions

Religious divisions in the Caucasus overlap with ethnic divisions, but do not coincide fully with them. For example, most Georgians and Ossets are Christian, but there are Georgian Muslims (in Ajaria) and also a minority of Muslim Ossets. Among the Tats, there are Muslim, Christian, and Jewish communities.

### Strong attachment to religion

Some Caucasian peoples have been strongly attached to a particular religion for many centuries. The Armenians and Georgians have been Christian ever since the 4th century, while most of the inhabitants of Dagestan have been Muslim since the 9th century. Other ethnic groups have switched formal religious allegiance in response to changing external pressures. Thus the Abkhaz professed Christianity when Byzantium was the dominant power in the Black Sea region, but adopted Islam when Byzantium fell to the Ottomans— all the while continuing to worship their sacred mountains and copses. Further to the north, the Circassians remained Christian until the 17th and 18th centuries, when they converted to Islam largely with a view to securing Ottoman aid in the face of impending Russian conquest.

### Ethnic conflicts and religious differences

To what extent can recent ethnic conflicts in the Caucasus be explained in terms of religious differences? Religious attitudes (for instance, Armenia's traditional self-image as an outpost of Christianity in the Muslim East) may have contributed to some ethnic conflicts, but religion has not played a central role. In some conflicts it cannot have played any role at all, because the sides were not divided by religion, as in the case of the Georgian-Osset conflict, in which both sides were mainly Orthodox Christian.





## CHAPTER 2

# Chechnya (Russian Federation)

Chechnya is a federal subject of Russia (a republic) located in the Northern Caucasus Mountains. This chapter contains the following sections that describe Chechnya:

- Key information
- Historical background
- OSCE involvement
- Recent developments



# Key information

This section describes some key information for Chechnya.

## Geography

Item	Description
Area	6,100 square miles
Natural resources	Oil, natural gas, limestone, gypsum, sulfur, and other minerals

## People

Item	Description
Population	1.2 million (2010 est.)
Ethnic groups	Chechens 93.5%, Russians 3.7%, Kumyks 0.8%, Ingush 0.3%
Religions	Sunni Muslim (most Chechens), Russian Orthodox
Languages	Chechen and Russian

## Government

Item	Description
Capital	Grozny
Type	Federal Republic of Russia
System of government	Parliament
Head of state	Ramzan Kadyrov has been President since 2007
Currency	Russian Ruble



# Historical background

This section describes the historical background of Chechnya:

- Before Russian rule
- Under Russian and Soviet rule
- Since Perestroika



## Before Russian rule

The Vainakh (Chechens and Ingush) are believed to have lived in the north-central Caucasus since prehistoric times. According to their oral tradition, they once lived under Kabard overlords, but rose up and expelled them. To defend their lands against invaders they then erected stone towers that still dot the landscape. The Vainakh were organized on the basis of descent into clans called teips, and made decisions through a Council of Elders.

### Russian encroachment

Russians first settled in the Caucasus in the 16th century, but there was no conflict between them and the native people until Russia began to incorporate the Caucasus into its empire. The first armed clash occurred in 1722, when Peter the Great sent cavalry to occupy a Chechen village. In the late 18th century, intensifying Russian military encroachment provoked the first large-scale Chechen rebellion, led by Sheikh Mansur.

### War with Czarist Russia

Between 1817 and 1864 Chechens and Dagestanis fought the Russian army under the leadership of Imam Shamil, a Dagestani cleric who created the first state that the Chechens had ever known. The war resulted in the destruction of many Chechen villages and the death or deportation—to the plains of European Russia, Siberia, or Turkey—of at least a third of the Chechen population. Even after Shamil surrendered in 1864, some Chechens fought on as guerrillas.



## Under Russian and Soviet rule

In the 1920s, the Chechens were allowed a measure of autonomy under the administration of Chechen communists. Stalin reversed this policy. Forcible collectivization was implemented in 1932-33, and a [Chechen uprising](#) against the communists took place 1941-44.

### Deportation

Stalin's distrust of the Chechens was so great that in 1944 he [deported the entire nation](#) (together with the Ingush) to Central Asia. Many died during the journey or soon after arrival. Those who were not able to make the journey were killed ([Khaibakh massacre](#)). The Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) was erased from the map, and its territory was divided among the neighboring republics.

### Chechens return

In 1957, Khrushchev allowed the Chechens to return to their homeland, and formally restored the Chechen-Ingush ASSR. Chechens and Ingush quickly returned to their homeland in such large numbers that they found themselves without housing, their homes having been occupied by Russians and other ethnic groups. Both Chechen and Ingush were determined to reoccupy the homes they lived in before 1944. Some Russians were forcibly relocated by the Soviet authorities. The repatriation created enormous tensions between the two ethnic groups and in [1958 three days of violent pogroms](#) in Grozny were instigated by Russians against Vainakh, after an Ingush killed a Russian sailor. Soviet troops eventually subdued the unrest, however the pogromists were never brought to justice. The republic was ultimately ruled as a Russian colony, with Vainakh systematically excluded from positions of responsibility.

### Oil

Under Russian rule, the city of Grozny grew up around the fort of that name. In the 1880s, oil was discovered in the Grozny area, and an oil industry began to develop. By the second World War most of the Soviet Union's oil came from the Absheron peninsula of Azerbaijan, which accounted for half the world's global production, as well as the Grozny oil fields, which made up almost all of Russian oil. Outside Grozny, the economy remained largely agricultural and underdeveloped.



## From Perestroika to attempted independence

Gorbachev's perestroika led to the appearance of independent political organizations in Chechnya in 1988. Vladimir Foteyev, the Russian communist party boss in Chechnya, tried to suppress the new organizations, but his hand was weakened by the changes taking place in Moscow. The turning point came in June 1989, when [Doku Zavgayev](#) replaced Foteyev as Communist Party First Secretary, becoming the first Vainakh ever to hold the post. (Doku Zavgayev was Deputy Foreign Minister and Director General of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs as of February 2013.)

### Upsurge of Chechen nationalism

Zavgayev fostered the formation of a Chechen political and intellectual elite, and tried to co-opt the idea of Chechen self-determination while keeping Checheno-Ingushetia within the USSR. A Congress of the Chechen People was convened in Grozny with Zavgayev's consent in November 1990. The Supreme Soviet of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR (SSCIR), chaired by Zavgayev, adopted a Declaration of the State Sovereignty of the Chechen-Ingush Republic.

Zavgayev's efforts came too late to stem the Chechen nationalist tide. Opposition demonstrations continued through the winter of 1990-91. At the end of 1990, nationalist groups united to form the [All-National Congress of the Chechen People \(NCChP\)](#). They invited one of the most eminent Soviet Chechens, Air Force General [Dzhokhar Dudayev](#), to take over leadership of the new bloc.

### Chechen revolution

August 1991: The attempted hard-line coup against Gorbachev in Moscow gave the Chechen nationalists their chance. A non-stop mass meeting on Grozny's Lenin Square demanded that Zavgayev resign and the [SSCIR](#) disband itself. The "national guard" seized the television station and put Dudayev on the air. The police were ordered to disperse the demonstrators by force, but refused. The "Chechen Revolution" had begun.

The NCChP bought weapons on the black market or stole them from local Soviet military bases. Dudayev was also supported by Zvia Gamsakhurdia, who supplied weapons to the NCChP. Eventually, a demoralized Soviet Army ordered to leave Chechnya would also become a party to ensuring Dudayev's men were well-armed.

September 6: An armed crowd stormed the building where the SSCIR was in session. Many deputies were beaten and one was killed. Zavgayev was taken prisoner and forced to resign. Power was now in Dudayev's hands.

October 8: The NCChP declared itself the sole legitimate authority in the Chechen Republic, triggering a political confrontation between Moscow and Grozny.

October 27: Dudayev was elected president in elections of dubious validity organized by the NCChP.

November 1: Dudayev issued a decree declaring the Chechen Republic's independence. Moscow declared a state of emergency in Chechnya, but because the USSR was on the fast-track to



dissolution the decree was set aside by Russia's Supreme Soviet and no troops were sent to Chechnya to quell the unrest. The Yeltsin-Gorbachev rivalry at that time had resulted in a temporary breakdown in Soviet leadership, which failed to react to the separatist movement. Moscow's inaction was interpreted by the Chechens as a de facto recognition of the republic's independence.

### Russian response

November 7: Moscow's leadership sent a reconnaissance group from the Soviet army to Grozny, but they were later issued a command to stand down, most likely by Gorbachev. At that time Gorbachev still retained power as leader of the Soviet Union, but the orders to send troops were issued by Yeltsin. Dudayev oversaw the evacuation of the reconnaissance group, and the state of emergency was revoked. The main effect of the botched operation was to give Dudayev the opportunity to pose as a national hero and unite the Chechen people behind him.

By June 1992, all Russian forces deployed in Chechnya were withdrawn, leaving behind their weapon and ammunition supply stores for Dudayev's men. At this time, the Russian government had no clear policy on Chechnya. Dudayev's regime was officially considered illegitimate, but accepted as a fact of life. Moscow cooperated with Grozny, for instance to keep the oil industry going, but refused to recognize Chechnya as an independent state. Dudayev rejected any settlement that did not recognize Chechen sovereignty, such as the draft treaty negotiated in 1992-93 by Russian and Chechen parliamentarians.

### Provisional Council of the Chechen Republic (PCCR)

Dudayev has a mixed legacy among Chechens. Some considered him unstable and incompetent, and many of his associates were corrupt and linked to organized crime. Others consider him a national hero, who struggled to balance the various competing interest groups within Chechnya and Russia, and fought to establish a nation for the Chechen people. Yet most Chechens agree by early 1993 he rapidly lost popular support. Dudayev and the Chechen parliament were in open confrontation. In April he proclaimed presidential rule, and in June he disbanded the parliament by force and eliminated all legal opposition.

Nevertheless, Dudayev was unable to consolidate control over Chechnya. Some areas, especially in the north, slipped from his grasp and became bases for a new armed opposition, which in December 1993 united to form the [Provisional Council of the Chechen Republic \(PCCR\)](#). Moscow gave its support to the PCCR in its civil war with the Dudayev regime, providing money, arms, training, air support, and mercenaries. On November 26, 1994, PCCR fighters tried to capture Grozny, but were beaten back by Dudayev's men. The Russian mercenaries who had been driving the PCCR's tanks were taken prisoner and [paraded before the television cameras](#). This episode apparently prompted Yeltsin to decide on direct military intervention. A last-ditch attempt at negotiation failed to avert hostilities. On December 11, Russian forces crossed into Chechnya from the north, east, and west; beginning the first war with Chechnya.



# Conflicts

This section describes the following conflicts in Chechnya:

- First war with Russia
- Between the wars
- Second war with Russia and its aftermath



## First war with Russia

On December 11, 1994, Russian forces invaded Chechnya. The first Russian troops to enter Grozny were unprepared for the intense resistance they would encounter, and suffered great losses. It took them over two months to occupy the city, at an estimated cost of 27,000 civilian lives (mainly those of ethnic Russians). Grozny was reduced to rubble. A Russian-supported “provisional government” was set up under former Soviet oil minister Salambek Khajiev.

### Russian control of Chechnya

By the summer of 1995, Russian forces were in control of Chechnya’s towns, though they remained vulnerable to guerrilla attack. A [ceasefire](#) in June was followed by new negotiations. These collapsed in October, when the general in charge of the Russian delegation was badly injured by a car bomb. Full-scale hostilities resumed in December.

### Chechen separatists capture Grozny

A Russian missile [killed Dudayev](#) in April 1996. Then on August 6, the day of Yeltsin’s inauguration for his second term as president, the separatists suddenly launched their largest offensive of the war, caught Russian commanders unprepared, and succeeded in capturing Grozny as well as other towns.

### Human rights violations

Both sides violated human rights. Many Chechen civilians were killed by Russian troops or tortured in “filtration camps.” Chechen warlords Basayev and Raduyev conducted raids on neighboring towns outside Chechnya and took thousands of civilian hostages.

During two major raids (in 1995 at Budennovsk and 1996 in Kizlyar and Pervomaiskoe, Dagestan), Chechen fighters killed several hostages. Russian troops responded with an attack on rebels and hostages, causing many civilian casualties. Dudayev condemned the first attack, while the second seems to have been conducted with his approval. The Chechens often targeted civilian rather than military targets. The Russians often engaged in indiscriminate bombing of civilian areas, torture, and extrajudicial executions. Fighting often took place in civilian areas, where the rebels sought to hide. The human toll of the war was reportedly around 100,000, most civilians.

### OSCE involvement

During 1995, the OSCE sent several missions to Moscow and Chechnya. The first was a fact-finding mission that provided a report to the Permanent Council. A second sought to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance, explore the possibility of establishing a national human rights body, provided assistance in setting up local administration and government, as well as local and republic-wide elections.

The Permanent Council established an [OSCE Assistance Group](#) in April 1995 with a broad mandate, but under very difficult conditions. The mission in Grozny sought to be a mediator, criticize human rights violations, and support the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

In May 1995, direct talks between the parties began at the office of the [Assistance Group](#). An agreement provided for an immediate cessation of hostilities, liberation of detained persons, the



withdrawal of troops, and the establishment of a Special Observer Commission, but could not be implemented due to the fighting. The Assistance Group had to contend with threats to personal safety from indiscriminant firing, as well as restrictions on its operations and freedom of movement.

## Negotiations

The Russian government opted to bring a stop to fighting an unpopular war. Yeltsin sent the new chairman of the Security Council, General Alexander Lebed, to negotiate an end to the conflict with the Chechen military commander, [General Aslan Maskhadov](#)

Their agreement was only the first step toward a settlement. Chechnya's constitutional status was left for further negotiations, to be completed by 2001. Russia agreed to withdraw its forces from Chechnya before the presidential elections scheduled for the end of January 1997.

By the end of 1996, the Assistance Group successfully facilitated contacts between the conflicting parties, playing a major role in bringing about the [Moscow agreement](#) (where it says "with the mediation of the OSCE Mission") and the two Nasran protocols in June 1996.



*The OSCE brokers peace in Chechnya, Russian Federation, in 1996.(OSCE)*

## Elections

The OSCE played a leading role in organizing these elections. The OSCE provided financial support for the technical election preparations and the election observation mission, including the deployment of international election observers. The OSCE Election Observation Team also issued a report on the elections, Maskhadov won with 65% of the vote.

## Between the wars

In May 1997, Maskhadov and Yeltsin met in Moscow and [signed an accord](#) in which Maskhadov was recognized as the legally elected president of the “Chechen Republic of Ichkeria.” Agreement was also reached on some practical economic and infrastructure issues, but no further steps were taken toward a peace settlement.

### Anarchy

Hardly anything was done to rebuild Chechnya. Maskhadov was unable to crack down on crime as the country slipped into anarchy, as he lacked the resources to organize an effective government. Conditions became so dangerous in Grozny that in December 1998 the OSCE Assistance Group was withdrawn to Moscow.

Nor could Maskhadov control Chechen warlords like [Shamil Basayev](#), who operated with the support and funding of foreign Islamists. In August 1999, Basayev and his men made an [incursion into Dagestan](#), hoping to link up with Dagestani Islamic extremists and unite Chechnya and Dagestan into a single Islamic state. Although the Russian army in September repulsed the incursion, [terrorist apartment bombings in Moscow and other Russian cities](#), resulted in Russian Prime Minister Putin launching a second war in Chechnya. Maskhadov then joined Basayev in leading the resistance against Russia, and was killed in 2005.



## Second war with Russia

The initial Russian goal was to create a “security zone” in the traditionally loyal lowlands of Chechnya north of the Terek River. In November 1999, Russian forces crossed the Terek to re-occupying the remainder of Chechnya. Grozny was taken after a long siege, and Chechen fighters retreated into the mountains of southern Chechnya.

### Chechen resistance

The Chechen command reconsidered its strategy. Small groups of fighters made their way down from the mountains and infiltrated behind enemy lines, where they linked up with existing resistance cells. Hit-and-run attacks on the Russian forces grew bolder, more frequent, and better coordinated, undermining their morale and discipline. [Russian retaliation was often directed against Chechen civilians](#), enabling the separatists to recruit additional fighters seeking to avenge friends and relatives.

### Refugee camps

As in the first war, a large proportion of the population sought refuge in and outside Chechnya, particularly in neighboring Ingushetia. Many ended up in squalid refugee camps.



*The OSCE assistance group to Chechnya secured support for projects to help bring some sense of normality to the lives of refugees living in tent camps since the outbreak of armed hostilities, 2001.(OSCE)*

### Russians work through Kadyrov

In January 2001, President Putin announced a new Russian strategy in Chechnya. Greater reliance was placed on the civilian administration of the [Mufti Akhmad Kadyrov](#), a Muslim cleric and former secessionist who came over to the Russian side. Kadyrov was allowed to set up his own courts and his militia was expanded. The size and salience of the Russian troop presence in

Chechnya was gradually reduced.

### **Military phase “ends”**

In April 2002, Putin declared that the military phase of the conflict could be considered closed. However, a large number of Russian troops remain in Chechnya and secessionist violence has continued in and out of the area. For example:

- Chechen terrorists took over 800 people hostage in a Moscow theater in October 2002; Russian Special Forces used knockout gas and killed the 40 terrorists, but 130 of the hostages died as well.
- Suicide bombers blew up government office buildings in Grozny in May 2003.
- Secessionist fighters carried out an attack on Nazran, capital of neighboring Ingushetia in June 2004.
- Two Russian passenger planes crashed after explosions, killing 89 in August 2004.
- A suicide bomb attack killed 10 in a Moscow subway in August 2004.
- A school was seized in Beslan, North Ossetia, with 1,200 children and adults held hostage in September 2004. At least 335 were killed and hundreds wounded.

### **Redefining Chechnya’s status**

The Russian government was determined not to negotiate with the secessionists, whom it regarded as terrorists. All attempts at mediation by third parties were rejected. The Russian government opted for unilateral steps to redefine Chechnya’s status within the Russian Federation.

A referendum held in March 2003 approved a draft constitution and electoral law for Chechnya as a special part of the Russian Federation. A two-chamber parliament with 61 seats was created.

Chechnya held presidential elections on October 5, 2003. The OSCE did not send monitors to observe neither the referendum nor the presidential elections. Several candidates challenged Kadyrov, the strongest of whom was the Moscow-based Chechen businessman [Malik Saidullayev](#). The election took place in an atmosphere of intimidation: all candidates except Kadyrov were prevented from holding meetings and denied media coverage, and a hand grenade was thrown into Saidullayev’s headquarters. Kadyrov was proclaimed victor with 80% of the vote.



*OSCE/ODIHR and Council of Europe experts examine preparations for the 23 March referendum in a polling station in Grozny, Chechnya, during an assessment visit on 3 March 2003.(OSCE)*

## Refugee camps

The Russian government and the Kadyrov administration claimed that the situation in Chechnya was returning to normal and refugees should return to Chechnya. Many did not want to do so, however, realizing that the situation was still extremely dangerous. Nevertheless, refugee camps were closed and most refugees had to go back to Chechnya.

## OSCE involvement

In April 1995, an OSCE Assistance Group to Chechnya (Russian Federation) was established. The group helped to broker ceasefires and mediated in negotiations between the sides. Due to the deteriorating security situation, the international staff of the Group were withdrawn to Moscow in December 1998, where they continued to operate from temporary facilities. The OSCE office in Grozny remained open until armed fighting broke out again in 1999.

The OSCE was the only international organization present in Chechnya at this time. The Assistance Group:

- Arranged exchanges of prisoners
- Facilitated the return of humanitarian agencies
- Promoted a peaceful resolution of the crisis
- Promoted stabilization of the Republic
- Promoted de-mining
- Provided assistance for the return of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs)
- Monitored human rights

The Group regularly reported on the situation of IDPs, and political, military, economic, environmental, and human rights issues.

### Return to Chechnya

In June 2001, the OSCE Assistance Group returned to Chechnya (not to Grozny but to the town of Znamenskoe) to implement its 1995 mandate. During the period of its absence from Chechnya, the Assistance Group had maintained relations with the federal authorities in Moscow and established new contacts with local and federal authorities in Chechnya and adjacent regions. This helped the group to keep itself informed of the latest developments.

The Assistance Group attended parliamentary hearings on the socio-political situation and human rights in Chechnya and focused on the return of IDPs. It took part in a roundtable on post-conflict reconstruction with Russian and Chechen officials, as well as individuals from multilateral organizations and NGOs. The Assistance Group often met Chechen officials to discuss the situation of the IDPs and made assessment visits to IDP camps. The group closely co-operated with human rights organizations, such as Memorial and Human Rights Watch, and reported documented instances of human rights violations to the OSCE participating states.

Another major task of the group was to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid to the victims of the crisis. Before and after its return to Chechnya, the Assistance Group sought to identify programs geared towards the post-conflict social, psychological, and professional rehabilitation of victims. Due to the limitation of funds, programs were often targeted at children and young people, representing the most vulnerable and affected groups.

Finally, the OSCE and Russian government were unable to reach agreement on extending the

mandate of the OSCE Assistance Group to Chechnya, following Russian proposals to significantly change the mandate of the mission. Russia insisted that the mission give up its human rights and political dimensions. The OSCE refused. In late 2002 the Russian government requested the closure of the OSCE Assistance Group office in Chechnya. The Group ceased its activities in January 2003, and was closed by March.

Russia faced international criticism of its conduct in Chechnya, for example from the Council of Europe and the European Parliament. However, after September 11, 2001, Western (especially American) criticism became muted due to alleged ties between the Chechen secessionists and Al Qaeda. Russia came under less pressure to take account of international opinion of its policies in Chechnya.



*Members of the OSCE Assistance Group to Chechnya visit school no. 48 in the damaged city of Grozny, 26 October 2001. (OSCE)*



*The OSCE Assistance Group to Chechnya was relocated to Znamenskoye in 2001.*

### Kadyrov assassinated

On May 9, 2004, a [bomb planted by secessionists](#) under the VIP box in Grozny's Dinamo stadium exploded during Victory Day celebrations, killing Kadyrov and six others. Prime Minister Sergei Abramov was appointed acting president.

### Alkhanov elected president

Alkhanov declared that he would never negotiate with Maskhadov (killed by Russian forces in May 2005) or other leaders of the Chechen rebels, thereby effectively cutting off the possibility of a negotiated arrangement to the conflict. The Kremlin-backed Police [General Alu Alkhanov](#) was elected president in elections held in August 2004. Western governments asserted that these elections did not meet international democratic standards, although no outside parties, including the OSCE, were invited to send formal observers. After Maskhadov's death, the Chechen leadership became more radicalized, including rebel leaders Shamil Basayev and [Movladi Udugov](#) in its ranks. In July 2006, however, a truck bomb killed Basayev in a neighboring republic. The Russian security services claimed credit for the assassination, but others have suggested a rival separatist leader killed him.

### Ramzan Kadyrov appointed Deputy Prime Minister

After Kadyrov's assassination, Putin appointed Kadyrov's son [Ramzan](#) as Deputy Prime Minister. Ramzan began a massive rebuilding program but he and his militia have been accused of brutality and corruption. Ramzan also supports a greater role for religion in society. He has implemented several tenets of Shari'a law, including banning gambling and alcohol and decreeing that [all women wear head scarves](#).

## Kadyrov elected president

Alkhanov resigned the presidency in 2007 and Putin appointed him Russian Federation Deputy Justice Minister. Ramzan Kadyrov was named Acting President. A joint session of Chechnya's two-chamber parliament elected Kadyrov president in March, with 56 supporting votes, one against and one abstention.

## Power struggle between pro-Moscow Chechen factions

Forces loyal to Kadyrov and his main pro-Moscow Chechen rival, [Sulim Yamadayev](#), reportedly clashed in eastern Chechnya in April 2008, leaving 18 dead. The struggle was over the control of the [Russian military Special Battalion Vostok unit](#), the biggest pro-Moscow militia, which was not under the control of Ramzan Kadyrov. Up until 2008, Sulim Yamadayev was officially in command of this unit. Despite the fact Yamadayev was wanted in Russia on a federal warrant, he nevertheless served as a Russian military officer in Russia's 2008 war with Georgia during the same period.

The [feud between Yamadayev and Kadyrov](#) stemmed in part from the bomb assassination of Sulim's brother, Dzhabrail Yamadayev, in 2003. Yamadayev's older brother, Ruslan Yamadayev, was also murdered in Moscow in 2008. Sulim Yamadayev was shot dead in Dubai in 2009, and two Kadyrov ex-employees were sentenced for the crime.

## High profile murders linked to Kadyrov

In 2009 the human rights activist [Natalia Estimirova](#) was abducted and killed in Chechnya. She worked for the [Memorial Human Rights Centre](#) in Grozny and had been investigating the murder of Chechen women by Kadyrov's security forces. Estemirova also worked with investigating journalist [Anna Politkovskaya](#) and human rights lawyer [Stanislav Markelov](#), both of whom were also murdered, in 2006 and 2009, respectively. Politkovskaya had been working on a story on the torture practices used by the Chechen security detachments known as [Kadyrovites](#). In her final interview, she described Kadyrov as the "Chechen Stalin of our days." Markelov investigated many of the abuses documented by Politkovskaya.

## Chechnya today

Although the counter-terrorist regime was formally lifted in 2009, military operations continue. Chechnya is undoubtedly quieter, especially compared to the other North Caucasian republics, but security is still a problem. Human rights organizations continue to accuse the government of human rights violations. Since the beginning of the war, more than 40,000 cases have been brought against the Russian Federation in the European Court of Human Rights. The majority of the claimants were from the north Caucasus and Chechnya.

Grozny once considered the most war-torn city in the world, is now rubble-free, with shiny modern glass skyscrapers, a new international airport, and the largest mosque in Europe. From 1995 to 2001 about 39,000 apartments and more than 17,000 private houses were destroyed in Grozny, although some who lost their homes have been given new apartments, approximately 12,000 residents are without housing. Social tension over housing shortages has increased in past few years as many refugees who fled to Europe and neighboring Ingushetia are finally

returning. Most suspect the government of improperly using the federal subsidies for reconstruction.

### **Chechnya's future**

Although major hostilities in Chechnya have ceased, the republic may be slowly drifting away from Moscow's control. Kadyrov has introduced policies that directly contradict the laws of the Russian Federation, such as open acceptance of polygamy, Muslim dress for government employees, compulsory hijab for women, and teaching Islam in the public school system. The hijab, an import from Arab and Persian states, is not the traditional headscarf style of Chechen women, who previously wore a short kerchief after marriage or no head covering at all. The Kremlin silently condones these policies in Chechnya while in other parts of Russia the Kremlin has vehemently opposed Muslim girls even voluntarily wearing the headscarf at school.

There are concerns that the republic is being Islamized. Over 700 mosques have been built in the republic since the end of the war, along with 20 medrasahs and two higher Islamic institutions. Chechnya is now home to the largest mosque in Europe, which can accommodate 10,000 worshippers. Kadyrov promotes his brand of Islam based on sufism.

In 2012 Kadyrov appointed all imams and qadis as deputy headmasters in schools so that their work is funded by the republic's school system. An Islamic dress code has been introduced in Chechen schools. Girls must sit separately from boys. Female teachers must wear a headscarf on their heads and must also cover their shoulders and neck. Girls are obliged to wear a headscarf starting at the age of six.

The Kremlin's lack of criticism of Kadyrov's corruption appears to be the necessary price to pay to maintain peace in Chechnya. Chechnya has an unemployment rate of 31.9%, the highest in Russia. Many of the neighboring north Caucasian republics have even higher unemployment rates such as Kabardinia and Ingushetia with 48%. Although they also receive subsidies, Chechnya is viewed with envy.

As during the presidency of Jokhar Dudayev, Chechen oil plays a crucial role. During Dudayev's time independence was tolerated as long as Dudayev transferred 80% of oil revenues to Yeltsin's government. It is believed that Dudayev fell out of favor with Yeltsin when he proposed a 50/50 split of oil revenues.

After the war, the Russian oil company, Rosneft, was awarded the license to extract oil from Chechnya, which accounts for approximately 7% of Rosneft's output. Chechnya's known hydrocarbon reserves are estimated at some 60 million tons of oil and 3 billion cubic meters of natural gas. In 2011, Rosneft's local subsidiary pumped 800,000 tons of oil in the republic.

In 2007 Rosneft subsidiary Grozneftgaz announced it would build a new refinery in Kabardino Balkaria, to process Chechen oil. The Chechen Parliament and Kadyrov protested bitterly and it was agreed due to Grozny's greater extraction capacity, that the refinery would be built in Chechnya. This would increase the annual capacity to 1 million tons, and Grozny would receive a larger share of the profit tax from the sale by Rosneft of Chechen crude, approximately \$12.8 million.

The Rosneft license has now expired, however, and no construction of the refinery has begun. The delay may be due to Moscow's concern that Kadyrov is becoming too politically and financially independent from Moscow. As a result, the Chechen government has invited Azerbaijan to bid on the license. It is unlikely the Azerbaijan State Oil company will make such a risky investment due widespread oil theft and potential instability in the region.





## CHAPTER 3

# Georgia

Georgia is a sovereign state in the Caucasus that was formerly part of the Soviet Union. This chapter contains the following sections:

- Key information
- Historical background
- Conflicts
- Foreign relations
- OSCE involvement
- Recent developments



# Key information

## Geography

Item	Description
Area	27,000 square miles. Slightly smaller than South Carolina.
Natural resources	Forests, hydropower, manganese deposits, iron ore, copper, minor coal and oil deposits; coastal climate and soils allow for important tea and citrus growth.
Climate	Warm and pleasant. Similar to Mediterranean on Black Sea coast.

## People

Item	Description
Population	4.4 million (2010 est.)
Ethnic groups	Georgian 83.8%, Azeri 6.5%, Armenian 5.7%, Russian 1.5%, Other 2.5%. Ethnic Georgians are divided into several subgroups with regional identities, such as Megrelians in the west, Svans in the north, and Ajarians in the southwest, but members of these subgroups all consider themselves Georgians.
Religions	Orthodox Christian 83.9%, Muslim 9.9%, Armenian-Gregorian 3.9%, Catholic 0.8%, Other 0.8%, None 0.7
Languages	Georgian 71% (official), Russian 9.9%, Armenian 7%, Azeri 6%, Other 7%

## Government

Item	Description
Capital	Tbilisi
Type	Republic
Independence	From Soviet Union: April 9, 1991
System of government	Mixed parliamentary-presidential system
Head of state	Mikhail Saakashvili
Currency	The Lari



## Heads of state

Date	Name
1991 – 1992	Zviad Gamsakhurdia
1992 – 2003	Eduard Shevardnadze
2003 – 2004	Nino Burdzhnadze
2004 – 2007	Mikhail Saakashvili
2007 – 2008	Nino Burdzhnadze
2008 – present	Mikhail Saakashvili



# Historical background

This section briefly describes the historical background of Georgia:

- Before Russian rule
- Under Russian and Soviet rule
- From Perestroika to independence



## Before Russian rule

Tribes who spoke languages belonging to the Caucasian family inhabited the territory now called Georgia. Most of these tribes spoke languages similar to modern Georgian. The exception was the Abkhaz of western Georgia, whose language belonged to another branch of the Caucasian family, reflecting their kinship with the Circassian tribes of the northwestern Caucasus.

### Ancient times

In ancient times, the territory that now makes up Georgia consisted of Colchis in the west and Iberia (in Latin) or Kartli (in the local language) in the east. Colchis was colonized by the Greeks, became part of the Roman Empire, and was later under the influence of Byzantium. Kartli was an independent kingdom that adopted Christianity early in the 4th century, but later fell under Persian (and for a time Arab) domination.

The two areas were unified in 1008 when [Bagrat III](#), son of a Kartlian prince and an Abkhazian princess, ascended the throne of the new Kingdom of the Abkhazians and Kartvelians. It was at this time that there first appeared a word for Georgia as a whole (Sakartvelo).

### Mongol invasions

The [Mongol invasions](#) of the 1220s and 1230s destroyed the Kingdom of the Abkhazians and Kartvelians. Devastated and partly depopulated, Georgia fragmented into small principalities. Taking advantage of the disarray, the [Ossets](#), whose homeland was in the north-central Caucasus, started in the late 13th century to cross the main Caucasus range and settle in Kartli.

In the succeeding centuries, Georgia suffered repeated invasion by the Persians and the Ottoman Turks, as well as numerous wars among the local principalities.

### Annexed by Russia

Georgian princes sought the protection of the Czars, as fellow Christians, against Turkish and Persian invaders. [Kartli](#), together with the neighboring principality of [Kakheti](#), was annexed to Russia in 1800, followed over the next two decades by the principalities of western Georgia. Russia preferred to rule its new dominions directly, so the Georgian princes were deposed. Even the [Georgian Orthodox Church](#) was stripped of its autonomy, and subordinated to the Russian Orthodox Church.



## Under Russian and Soviet rule

Disillusionment with Russian rule sparked local rebellions, but in most parts of Georgia these were soon crushed. The exception was Abkhazia, where [uprisings](#) recurred until 1878. The Czarist government responded by deporting 100,000 Abkhaz to Turkey, leaving half of Abkhazia uninhabited.

People from all over the Russian Empire resettled the exiles' land, though mostly by land-hungry peasants from neighboring Megrelia in western Georgia. This gave rise to anti-Georgian feeling among the remaining Abkhaz.

### Tbilisi

The Georgian capital [Tbilisi](#) (called Tiflis by the Russians) was the administrative center of Russian rule in the Caucasus. Toward the end of the 19th century, it had become an industrial and cultural center, and the regional railroad hub. A modern intelligentsia and working class took shape with a sense of Georgian national identity that had been lacking in the centuries preceding annexation to Russia.

### Georgia declares independence

In May 1918, Georgia declared independence. Independent Georgia lasted less than three years before being deposed by a Red Army invasion in February 1921. Nevertheless, it is today regarded by Georgians as a precursor of the post-Soviet Georgian republic. The Georgian government of 1918-21 never managed to win the loyalty of the Abkhaz and Osset minorities, and had to deploy troops in Abkhazia in order to secure its control there.

### TSFSR

In 1922 the Soviet regime imposed a federal structure on the southern Caucasus, called the Transcaucasian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (TSFSR), consisting of four Soviet republics with equal status: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Abkhazia.

In 1931 Abkhazia was incorporated into Georgia as an autonomous republic. In 1936, the TSFSR was abolished, and Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan became full union republics of the USSR.

Violent resistance to Soviet rule continued in Georgia until 1924. Soviet leader Stalin was himself an ethnic Georgian. Nonetheless, thousands of rebels were executed or imprisoned. Thousands more perished in the Stalinist purges of the 1930s.

### Anti-Abkhaz policies

Stalinist repression took on an ethnic dimension in Georgia. Abkhaz leader [Nestor Lakoba](#) was poisoned in 1936, and Abkhaz autonomy and Abkhaz-language education were abolished. The Abkhaz interpreted Soviet repression as an attempt to forcibly “Georgianize” them. After the death of Stalin, the anti-Abkhaz policy was abandoned, but it left behind a deep legacy of bitterness.

### Eduard Shevardnadze

In 1972, [Eduard Shevardnadze](#) was appointed First Secretary of the Georgian Communist Party.



He experimented with economic reform, and responded to popular protest with concessions and dialogue instead of violent repression.

In [1978 demonstrators in Tbilisi](#) got their way when they demanded that the authorities drop a plan to make Russian a second official language in Georgia alongside Georgian.

Mass [protests by ethnic Abkhaz](#) in Abkhazia in the same year resulted in the promotion of more Abkhaz to leading posts and in improved provision for Abkhaz culture, such as television broadcasting in Abkhaz and the opening of an Abkhaz State University. These concessions only partly placated the Abkhaz, while causing resentment among ethnic Georgians living in Abkhazia. Shevardnadze left for Moscow in 1985 when Gorbachev made him Soviet Foreign Minister.



## From Perestroika to independence

Gorbachev's liberalization opened the way for the development of numerous Georgian nationalist organizations, both political and paramilitary. From early 1989 there were frequent large nationalist demonstrations in Tbilisi and other cities. The independence movement gained further impetus on April 9, 1989, when demonstrators in Tbilisi were killed or wounded by Soviet troops.

Simultaneously, nationalist movements appeared in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, organized in the Ossetian Popular Front and the Popular Forum of Abkhazia Aidgylara.

### Georgia declares independence

In elections to the Georgian Supreme Soviet in the fall of 1990, the Round Table-Free Georgia bloc led by the nationalist writer and former dissident [Zviad Gamsakhurdia](#) won a majority of seats with 64% of the vote, against 29% for the Communist Party. Gamsakhurdia became Supreme Soviet chairman. In a referendum held in March 1991, 98% voted for independence.

Georgia declared independence in April 1991. In May 1991, Gamsakhurdia was elected president with 87% of the vote.

### Civil war

Georgian nationalists were less united than these figures may suggest. Although Gamsakhurdia was at first by far the most popular figure, he had many rivals. The division of the Georgian nationalist movement into Gamsakhurdia supporters and opponents grew increasingly deep and bitter, resulting in a [civil war from 1991-1993](#).

### Shevardnadze returns

Eduard Shevardnadze returned to Georgia, became chairman of the State Council, and formed the Citizens' Union of Georgia (CUG). He slowly consolidated his position, eliminating rivals and their armed followers.

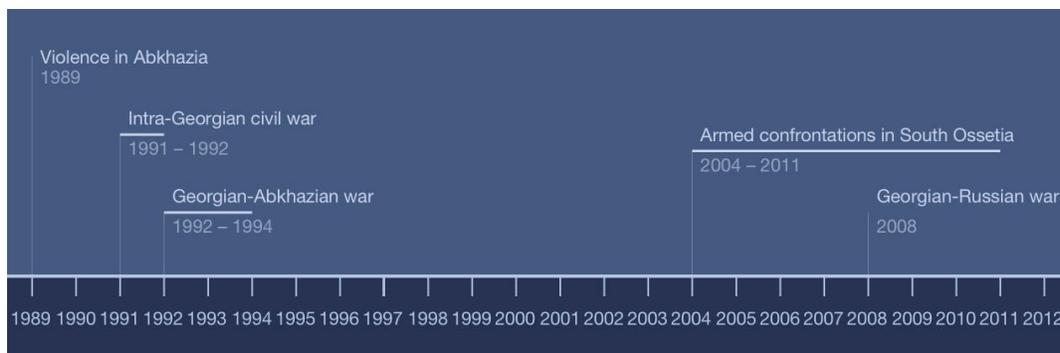
Parliament adopted a new constitution in August 1995 providing for a strong, but not an all-powerful, presidency. Parliament consisted of a lower house of 150 members called the Council of the Republic, elected by proportional representation; and an upper house of 85 members, the Senate, elected from single-mandate constituencies (except for 5 members appointed by the president).

In 2000, Shevardnadze won the presidential elections with over 80% of the vote, but the OSCE expressed concern at many irregularities noted by international observers.

## Conflicts

This section describes the following conflicts involving Georgia:

- Intra-Georgian civil war
- Georgian-Abkhaz conflict
- Georgian-Osset conflict
- Georgian-Russian War of 2008
- Ajaria
- Javakheti
- Southeastern Georgia



*Timeline of various events in Georgia*

## The Intra-Georgian civil war

During the second half of 1991, Georgian President Gamsakhurdia increasingly lost popular support. In December 1991, civil war broke out in Tbilisi between his supporters and opponents. Physical signs of the fighting remain visible today in the Georgian capital. Gamsakhurdia was defeated and took refuge in Chechnya in January 1992.

### Causes

Separatist movements—primarily Ossetians and Abkhaz, demanded more recognition in the early 1990s. The Georgian government, asserting its newly gained national authority, used its military to block separatism by force. On January 5, 1991, [Georgia's National Guard](#) entered [Tskhinvali](#), the capital of South Ossetia. Fighting broke out in and around the city. A three-way power struggle between Georgian, Ossetian and Soviet military forces broke out in the region. Gamsakhurdia denounced the Ossetian separatist movement as part of a Russian plan to undermine Georgia. This “Georgia for the Georgians” atmosphere exacerbated inter-ethnic violence. Over the next few months, his government reportedly committed numerous human rights violations. Freedom of speech and the press were restricted, the right to free assembly violated, opponents were arrested (some of whom were tortured), and there were attacks against South Ossetians. Prime Minister [Tengiz Sigua](#) and two other senior ministers resigned in August in protest Gamsakhurdia's policies and joined the opposition. After the coup against President Gorbachev, Gamsakhurdia's opponents accused him of not strongly opposing it. In turn, he accused forces in Moscow of conspiring with his internal enemies against Georgia's independence.

In the fall of 1991, the opposition against Gamsakhurdia became violent. After the police dispersed a large opposition demonstration in Tbilisi on September 2, members of the opposition were arrested, their offices raided and pro-opposition newspapers closed. The National Guard, the major paramilitary force in the country, split into pro- and anti-Gamsakhurdia factions. Another powerful military organization, [the Mkhedrioni](#), sided with the opposition. The power struggle intensified in late December and on December 22 the opposition took control of much of the city.





*The leader of the Mkhedrioni (Horsemen) paramilitary force Dzhaba Ioseliani gets into a car as his soldiers fight against the supporters of the first president of independent Georgia, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, at an undisclosed location in western Georgia in this 1994 photo. Ioseliani died in 2003 in Tbilisi. (© AP/Wide World Photo/ Shakh Aivazov)*

## Military Council

Power in Tbilisi passed into the hands of a Military Council dominated by the chiefs of the two main paramilitary forces that had defeated Gamsakhurdia—[Tengiz Kitovani](#), commander of the National Guard, and [Jaba Ioseliani](#), commander of the Mkhedrioni (Horsemen). A state of emergency was declared, and demonstrations by Gamsakhurdia's supporters suppressed. The new rulers decided to strengthen the international credibility of their regime by inviting Eduard Shevardnadze back to Georgia. Upon his arrival in March 1992, the [Military Council](#) was transformed into the State Council. Although Shevardnadze chaired the meetings of the State Council, he had to share power with three other leading members.

## Gamsakhurdia killed

Gamsakhurdia's supporters attempted a coup in Tbilisi in June 1992 and staged uprisings in Megrelia in western Georgia. [Gamsakhurdia later died](#) under mysterious circumstances in Chechnya.

## Shevardnadze elected president

Shevardnadze was elected with 70% of the vote when presidential elections were held in 1995. Even after Gamsakhurdia's death, Shevardnadze would face [assassination attempts](#) from his supporters.



*Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze stands on the podium behind a group of singers dressed in Georgian national costumes during a swearing-in ceremony in Tbilisi, 26 November 1995. (© AP/Wide World Photo/SHAKH AIVAZOV)*

## The Georgian-Abkhaz conflict

The Georgian-Abkhaz conflict is rooted in the Abkhaz perception of itself as a separate ethnic group with its own distinct culture, while ethnic Georgians see Abkhazia as part of Georgia. This conflict has been sharpened by human rights violations by both sides during two wars and intermittent violence over the last two decades. The conflict has resulted in the expulsion of ethnic Georgians from Abkhazia, and ethnic cleansing. The 2008 War and Russia's subsequent recognition of Abkhazia's independence and security guarantee have not resolved the conflict, but only served to make it even more rigid.

### Historical causes of tension

1870s: Russian Czarist government deports 100,000 Abkhaz to Turkey. Many Georgians resettle Abkhazia.

1922-1931: Abkhazia has separate and equal status in TSFSR with Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan.

1931-50s: Mass resettlement of Georgians into Abkhazia, a declaration of Georgian as the state language, and limited rights for Abkhazians.

1970s-80s: Power struggles between Soviets, Abkhaz, and Georgians.

### Background

March 1989: Violence following rival mass meetings of Georgian and Abkhaz nationalists.

July 1989: Violence between nationalists in response to an attempt to establish a Sukhumi branch of Tbilisi State University, which Abkhaz saw as a threat to the Abkhaz State University. Sixteen Georgians were reportedly killed and another 137 injured when they tried to enroll in a Georgian University instead of an Abkhaz one.

1989: Violence spreads throughout Abkhazia, and armed Georgian nationalists join the fighting. Order restored by Soviet troops.

August 1990: The Supreme Soviet of Abkhazia (SSA) declares Abkhazia a Soviet republic separate from Georgia—a declaration promptly ruled invalid by the Georgian Supreme Soviet in Tbilisi.

April 1991: Georgia declares independence from the USSR.

1992: Georgia reinstates the constitution that it had adopted in 1921, shortly before its invasion by the Red Army. This was interpreted by the Abkhaz as a move to abolish the autonomy the region had enjoyed under the Soviet Union. Abkhazia responds by re-instating the constitution that it had adopted in 1925, when it was separate from Georgia.

August 1992: a Georgian armored column crosses into Abkhazia and makes its way toward Sukhumi. At the same time, Georgian forces make a sea landing near Gagra in northern Abkhazia. Although it only took a few hours for the column from the south to reach Sukhumi, the landing force got stuck near Gagra. Abkhazian leaders escape to Gudauta, where there was a Russian military base. The temporary Abkhaz defeat galvanized paramilitary groups from Russia and across the North Caucasus region, which united under an umbrella fighting group known as the



[Confederation of the Mountain People of the Caucasus](#). The commander was Shamil Basayev, who would later lead the Chechen resistance against Russia.

July 1993: Abkhaz forces break through Georgian lines and retake Sukhumi. Quickly pushing south, the Abkhaz militia reoccupies all of Abkhazia by the end of September 1993; with assistance, including air support, from the Russian military, which was officially neutral in the conflict. 10,000 - 30,000 ethnic Georgians are killed. More than 250,000 ethnic [Georgians flee Abkhazia](#) as a result of massive human rights violations and ethnic cleansing.

## Developments

January 2003: Although the Georgian government had repeatedly demanded withdrawal of the Russian-controlled CIS force, the Georgian National Security Council consents to extension of its mandate subject to certain conditions, including expansion of the security zone to cover the whole Gali district to protect returning Georgian refugees. In 2003 Shevardnadze agrees to prolong the CIS force's peacekeeping mandate for an indefinite period.

May 1994: Georgian-Abkhaz talks, held under Russian and United Nations auspices, lead to the Moscow Agreement for a ceasefire, establishment of a security zone free of heavy weapons, and deployment of a CIS peacekeeping force to monitor compliance, with the assistance of the [United Nations Observers' Mission in Georgia \(UNOMIG\)](#).

October 2003: Twenty civilian UN police officers deployed in the Gali district to protect returning refugees and train a local police force.

2004: Georgian experts submit a draft peace plan to Georgia's National Security Council, envisaging a Georgian-Abkhazian federation with broad autonomy for Abkhazia. Meanwhile, Abkhazians elect a new "president," [Sergei Bagapsh](#), who defeats Russia's preferred candidate [Raul Khajimba](#). Bagapsh is later compelled to run in a new election with Khajimba as his vice-president.

2006: The Abkhaz and Georgians resume discussions in the UN-led Coordinating Council for the first time in five years. The Abkhaz pull out, however, after Georgia sends forces into the [Kodori Gorge](#) region of Abkhazia. Subsequently, [President Mikheil Saakashvili](#) makes a proposal for the resolution of the Abkhazia conflict that included demilitarization, direct dialogue between the parties, establishment of an international police presence, pledges on the non-use of force, and economic rehabilitation.

In 2007 "parliamentary" elections are held in Abkhazia. Georgia rejects the election, which was also not accepted by most of the international community. In contrast, Russia terms the election a continuation of democratic tendencies.

March 2008: Prior to the NATO Summit, Saakashvili proposes unification of Abkhazia and Georgia on the basis of full autonomy and with the assistance of international guarantors. Abkhazia de facto leaders are negative, insisting on separation from Georgia rather than autonomy.

April 2008: Russian President Putin took further steps to strengthen the Abkhazia and South Ossetia "governments" (and tighten their relationships with Russia). His decree instructed Russian ministries and other government bodies to increase bilateral cooperation; recognize the legal decisions and entities registered under their laws; and give legal assistance on matters of civil and criminal law directly to their authorities and residents (most of whom have been given

Russian passports).

August 2008: Russian recognition of the independence of the separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia on August 26, 2008 undercuts Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Nicaragua, Venezuela and Nauru also recognize the separatist states.

December 2009: Abkhazian "president" Sergei Bagapsh reelected, defeating five other candidates including "vice president" Raul Khajimba.



Joint UNOMIG and CIS peacekeeping force patrol in the Kodori Valley, 18 May 2003 (UNOMIG Photo)

## OSCE involvement

The OSCE has always reaffirmed support for Georgian sovereignty and territorial integrity and urged all sides to abstain from military action, respect the cease-fire agreement, and stick to negotiations. The OSCE also supported UN efforts to facilitate the peace process in Abkhazia.

In 2002, the OSCE sent a team of military experts to the Gudauta base in Abkhazia for discussions with Russian representatives of the CIS Peacekeeping Force.

In 2008, the OSCE CiO condemned the decision by Russia to recognize the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. He urged complete withdrawal of Russian troops and full implementation of the ceasefire agreement. The CiO stated that the international community could not accept unilaterally established buffer zones. Abkhazia refused to let OSCE and EU monitors enter its territory.

Knut Vollebaek, OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, visited Abkhazia in 2009 and 2010. He noted the pressure on local ethnic Georgians through "limitation of their education rights, compulsory 'passportization,' forced conscription into the Abkhaz military forces and restrictions on their freedom of movement."

Since the 2008 War, the Geneva Discussions on Georgia, co-chaired by the EU, UN and OSCE, have been the main venue for the conflicting sides to address outstanding issues. The

Discussions take place in two parallel working groups, one dealing with security and stability, and the other with humanitarian questions, including internally displaced persons and refugees. The 21st round of negotiations took place in Geneva in October 2012, with the next round scheduled for March 2013. The EU Monitoring Mission and OSCE have sponsored weekly local meetings of security officials under an Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism agreed on at the Geneva Discussions in 2009.

### **Analysis**

Since the 2008 war, and Russia's recognition of Abkhazia, the entity has become increasingly dependent on Moscow. Half of the entity's budget comes from Moscow, and new Russian military installations are being built in the Black Sea coastal area. Almost all Abkhazia residents hold Russian citizenship and almost all the trade is with Russia. At the same time, many ethnic Abkhaz are wary of their over-reliance on Moscow. The future for the international status of Abkhazia is uncertain. Only four countries, including Russia, have recognized its independence. The conflict thus remains unresolved and remains a "frozen conflict" with the very real possibility of unplanned escalation. Around 212,000 ethnic Georgians remain displaced. While some ethnic Georgians have been able to return to the Gali district, Abkhaz officials stated that returns to other parts of the entity would not be authorized.

Even before the 2008 war, prospects for progress in the relations between Tbilisi and Sukhumi were small. Since the war, they have become almost nil. Georgia sees Moscow as an occupation force, annexing its territory, while the Abkhaz authorities see Russia as a guarantor of security. There are no direct contacts between Moscow and Tbilisi, and the bitterness between the two governments has also been deeply personal and emotional.

## The Georgian-Osset conflict

The Georgian-Osset conflict, like the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict, is rooted in Ossetian belief that they are a distinct ethnicity with different culture and language than that of ethnic Georgians. The rise in respective ethnic nationalisms as the Soviet Union collapsed led to wars and human rights abuses by Ossetian and Georgian militias and military forces which hardened both sides. The 2008 War and subsequent Russian recognition of South Ossetia's independence and security did not resolve the conflict, but served to make both sides even more entrenched.

### Major events

1922: Ossetia is divided. North Ossetia remains part of Russia. South Ossetia remains part of Georgia.

November 1989: Soviet of the South Ossetian Autonomous Province declares the province sovereign. Its intention was to secede from Georgia and unite with the neighboring North Ossetian Autonomous Republic within the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR).

1990: The province was declared the South Ossetian Soviet Democratic Republic, within the USSR but separate from Georgia. Elections to a new South Ossetian Supreme Soviet were held in December 1990. In response, the Georgian Supreme Soviet declared the changes introduced by the Osset leaders as invalid, and withdrew recognition of the autonomy that South Ossetia had previously enjoyed. A state of emergency was imposed in the province, and police were sent in to assert Tbilisi's control, resulting in the first violent clashes. The war continued until June 1991. Most of the fighting was done by irregular nationalist paramilitary formations. Both sides committed atrocities. The war resulted in about 1,000 deaths. Much of the South Ossetian city of Tskhinvali was left in ruins. Over 100,000 people were refugees, mostly in other parts of Georgia and in North Ossetia.

2004: Armed confrontations as Georgia cracked down on smuggling from the region and vied for control of ethnically Georgian villages in the southern part of South Ossetia, leading to some exchanges of fire. In mid-July the Joint Control Commission (representing Georgia, South Ossetia, North Ossetia, and Russia) reached a new provisional agreement to avert large-scale bloodshed.

2006: South Ossetian leader Eduard Kokoity was reelected "president" in November 2006 in a poll not recognized by the international community. A referendum held at the same time expressed South Ossetian support for independence. At about the same time, the Georgian government launched an alternative to the South Ossetia authorities. Georgia held an election in the Tbilisi-controlled part of South Ossetia (also not recognized by the international community) resulting in the election of Dmitry Sonakoyev as "president," and a referendum supporting this territory remaining part of Georgia. Sonakoyev was an ethnic South Ossetian who fought against Georgia in the 1990-92 conflict. His "temporary administrative unit" was located in the Georgian-controlled village of Kurta. Georgia controlled about a third of South Ossetia's 30-80,000 people.

2008: Georgia notified Russia that it was no longer going to take part in the South Ossetia Joint Control Commission established by the 1992 ceasefire agreement and called for a new, more "international" mechanism. Russian President Putin took new steps to strengthen the position of the Abkhazia and South Ossetia "governments" (and tighten their relationships with Russia).



May 2008: After accusing Georgia of a military buildup in the Kodori Gorge, the Russian Defense Ministry warned Georgia that any attempts to use force against Russian peacekeepers or Russian citizens on the territory of Abkhazia and South Ossetia would be met with “a stringent and adequate response.”

### Attempts at peace

**1991:** Georgia opened peace negotiations with South Ossetia. Representatives of North Ossetia also took part in the talks. A ceasefire was reached in May 1992, but broke down almost immediately. In June, the sides met again under Russian auspices, and agreed on a new ceasefire to be enforced by joint peacekeeping forces.

**1992:** In contrast to the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict, the CSCE played the lead role in mediating the Georgian-Osset conflict. The CSCE Mission to Georgia was set up in Tbilisi with a mandate to promote negotiations to resolve the [Georgian-Osset conflict](#). In 1994, its mandate was expanded to include monitoring of the peacekeeping forces in South Ossetia, facilitating cooperation between the parties, promoting human rights, and assisting in the building of democratic institutions. In 1997, an OSCE branch office was opened in Tskhinvali. (It was closed in 2009, together with the OSCE Mission to Georgia.)

**1996:** The parties signed a memorandum in which they undertook to refrain from the threat or use of force, to continue negotiations, to facilitate the return of refugees, and gradually to demilitarize the area.

**2005:** Saakashvili called on South Ossetia to renounce the use of force and accept autonomous status within Georgia.

**2006:** Saakashvili made a proposal for the resolution of the South Ossetia conflict, which included demilitarization, direct dialogue, establishment of an international police presence, signing of pledges on the non-use of force, and economic rehabilitation.

**2007:** Saakashvili launched a new initiative proposing that South Ossetia be run by a new, interim administration pending a negotiated settlement of its status. South Ossetia’s de facto authorities rejected the proposal.

**2008:** A Georgian delegation led by State Reintegration Minister Iakobashvili visited Moscow to present a Georgian peace plan that included an international conference in Moscow, an agreement by all sides not to use armed force, a return of Georgian refugees, and an international force to police the peace that would include Russians and contingents from other nations. Russia found nothing in the proposal worth discussing. Following the 2008 War, the [EU Monitoring Mission \(EUMM\)](#) was established in October with 200 monitors from 26 member states and a mandate to monitor, analyze and report on the security situation in the disputed regions, including those displaced by the conflict. 2010: Russia urged OSCE to recognize the independence of South Ossetia. The overwhelming majority of participating states rejected the proposal.



*Mission members of the CSCE Mission to Georgia inspect areas of conflict in the region of South Ossetia, 1993.(OSCE)*

## Analysis

Near-term prospects for the peaceful resolution of the status of South Ossetia are dim. The very small territory, which lacks political, economic, or military autonomy or decision-making power, is under the control of Russia. The population is shrinking and the economy is stagnating resulting from the closure of the de facto border with the rest of Georgia. Russia funds the entity, protects its territory and is an advocate for South Ossetia internationally. The refusal of the Georgian government and the international community to deal with South Ossetia tends to push the region closer to Moscow.

## Russia-Georgia war

In April 2008, sporadic violence escalated into a short, intense, full-scale, five-day war between Georgia and Russia.

### Causes

Conflict between the Georgian government and Osset and Abkhaz separatists had plagued the region since the early 1990s. Soviet, and later Russian forces, often provided support to the separatists. After the war in 1991/1992, the Joint Control Commission, Joint Peacekeeping Forces, and the CSCE/OSCE served as conflict management mechanisms. In 1994 the Georgian government launched a large anti-smuggling campaign in and around South Ossetia, which increased the number of Georgian troops in the area. South Osset leaders saw this as an attack on their independence and security. Another event that triggered violence was Georgian claims that Russia was supplying South Ossetia with weapons. Even though a cease-fire was in place, relations between Georgia and Russia remained tense and were fuelled by continuing violent incidents along the lines separating South Ossetia from the rest of Georgia.

### Background

March 2007: Rockets landed in the Kodori Gorge, the only area in Abkhazia then under Georgian government control. Russia denied any involvement, and a UN report on the incident was inconclusive.

August 2007: Georgia asserted that a Russian aircraft entered its airspace and fired a missile that landed near Tsitelbani, 30 miles from Tbilisi. No casualties resulted. Russia denied any role, despite radar evidence provided by Georgian authorities.

April 2008: An unmanned Georgian military reconnaissance drone was shot down over Abkhazia. Georgia claimed that a Russian fighter had shot down the aircraft, and Saakashvili telephoned Russian President Putin to complain. Russia claimed that the drone flight violated ceasefire agreements and that Abkhaz forces had shot down the drone. A [UN Mission in Georgia \(UNOMIG\)](#) investigation completed in May concluded that a Russian aircraft had shot down the drone. UNOMIG also noted that under the Moscow Ceasefire Agreement, only CIS peacekeeping forces were permitted to keep Georgian and Abkhaz forces apart. Russian enforcement actions were therefore inconsistent with the Ceasefire Agreement. At the same time, Georgian drone over flights of the zone of conflict were also deemed a breach of the Agreement. Meanwhile, there were reports that Russia had significantly reinforced its troops in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

April 2008: Georgia suspended bilateral talks with Moscow on Russian entry into the World Trade Organization and threatened to block Russian entry, in response to Russian strengthening of its ties with South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Georgia also withdrew from a bilateral air defense agreement with Russia and from a CIS Air Defense Agreement. Georgia had previously withdrawn from the CIS Defense Ministers' Council.

August 2008: Attacks and exchanges of fire including artillery between South Ossetian and Georgian forces intensified. At no point during the run-up to the outbreak of violence did either Georgia or Russia take their grievances and concerns about security to the OSCE Conflict Prevention Center as called for by the Charter of Paris or to the UN Security Council as called for



by the UN Charter. Both parties appeared to be readying themselves for war, rather than seeking a negotiated solution to their differences.

August 7-8: Georgia moved armor and artillery towards South Ossetia. A Georgian artillery and ground attack on South Ossetia's capital Tskhinvali followed. Meanwhile, Russian forces entered South Ossetia from Russia through the Roki Tunnel. Georgia claimed that Russia started moving forces as early as August 6, while Russia asserted that it acted only after the Georgian attack on Tskhinvali. Georgian forces entered Tskhinvali August 8, but were quickly pushed out by Russian artillery and air attacks. Two more Georgian efforts to assault Tskhinvali over the next two days failed, with heavy losses.

The war widened. Abkhaz forces seized the Kodori Gorge, the only part of Abkhazia still held by Georgia. Russian and South Ossetian militia took the remainder of South Ossetia retained by the Tbilisi government. Russia sent additional forces to Abkhazia and Russian naval units operated off the coast of Georgia. Russian forces also pushed into the undisputed regions of Georgia, including the Black Sea port of Poti, the western town of Senaki and the central crossroads city of Gori. Russian forces established "security zones" on Georgian territory beyond South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

The EU sponsored a [report](#) by an international fact-finding team which was presented in 2009.

### **Attempts at conflict management**

The UN Security Council and OSCE Permanent Council were unable to make any progress toward a ceasefire, due to Russian opposition to any resolution that affirmed Georgia's territorial integrity.

On August 10-11, French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner, Holder of the EU Presidency, and Finnish Foreign Minister Alexander Stubb, the OSCE CiO, traveled to Georgia and presented a jointly drafted plan for a cease-fire, after which they traveled to Moscow on August 12 to present the plan to Russia's leaders. They were joined in Moscow by French President Sarkozy, who worked out a 6-point ceasefire arrangement first with Russian President Medvedev in Moscow, then with Georgian President Saakashvili in Tbilisi on August 13.

U.S. Secretary of State Rice traveled to Tbilisi and provided assurances on interpretation of the agreement that convinced Saakashvili to accept it.

Russian President Medvedev recognized the independence of the two separatist republics on August 27. Western states were highly critical, and the decision was condemned by the OSCE CiO as a violation of fundamental OSCE principles.

The French president mediated an agreement on September 8 for the withdrawal of Russian troops from Georgian areas outside of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and the deployment of an EU monitoring mission (which was not allowed access to Abkhazia or South Ossetia).

The OSCE, UN and EU have co-chaired a series of meetings in Geneva since October 2008 bringing together Georgia, Russia the U.S., and representatives of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Russia, satisfied by its achievements during and since the conflict, has seen little urgency in addressing either the short- or longer-term issues resulting from the war. The one productive outcome so far has been agreement on an Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM). The 31st IPRM meeting was held in Ergneti (Georgia) in February 2013.

Efforts to maintain an international monitoring role in the conflict areas have been blocked by Russia, which has opposed a mandate for, or the entry of, any group based on Georgian territorial integrity. Thus, the entry of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, staff from the OSCE Mission in Georgia, OSCE observers, or EU military observers was not allowed.

OSCE involvement in Georgia was limited further when Russia blocked renewal of the OSCE Mission in Georgia's mandate in the Permanent Council. The Mission shut down at the end of 2008. Russia also used its veto in the UN Security Council to block renewal of the UNOMIG mandate in June 2009.

In 2010, the OSCE's Special Envoy for conflict regions, Bolat Nurgaliev, sought to establish regular OSCE visits to South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Establishing these visits could be the first step towards reestablishing an OSCE presence in Georgia and its conflict areas. Tskhinvali officials refused to allow OSCE observers to enter the breakaway territories.

The EU Monitoring Mission became the only monitors on the ground, although even they were not allowed into the separatist areas.

### **Analysis**

The war and its aftermath demonstrated an acute failure of international institutions and political commitments designed to prevent and manage crises and conflicts like this one. International commitments that were to have protected human rights were also violated. International monitoring bodies were also dismantled one by one.

## Ajaria

The Ajars of Ajaria in southwestern Georgia are a Georgian sub-group. While other Georgian sub-groups are traditionally Christian Orthodox, the Ajars are mostly Muslim, having adopted Islam when the area was under Ottoman Turkish rule. During the Soviet period, Ajaria was an autonomous republic within Georgia.

### Operated as an independent fiefdom

Gamsakhurdia came to an understanding with the chairman of the Ajarian Supreme Council, [Aslan Abashidze](#), as did Shevardnadze. Abashidze ran Ajaria as an independent fiefdom, and even had his own army. However, unlike the leaders of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Abashidze never expressed any wish to secede from Georgia. On the contrary, he constantly emphasized that Ajars are Georgians, and demonstrated his loyalty to Georgia by becoming a major player in Georgian politics at the national level, with a party of his own called the All-Georgia Revival Union.

### Abashidze resigns

When Shevardnadze fell from power in November 2003, Abashidze sealed Ajaria's borders and declared a state of emergency. Although he reluctantly agreed to Ajarian participation in the 2004 presidential election, demonstrations by pro-Saakashvili activists from the Kmara youth movement led to arrests and a new state of emergency on January 7. Protests against Abashidze continued.

In mid-March, Saakashvili imposed an economic blockade on Ajaria and placed the Georgian armed forces on high alert after he was barred from entering Ajaria. From mid-April, tension rose as the two sides vied for control of the upcoming elections to the Ajarian parliament.

The [crisis](#) reached a head at the beginning of May with big new anti-Abashidze rallies, the defection of Abashidze loyalists, and Georgian army maneuvers near Ajaria. A violent outcome was averted by Russian envoy Igor Ivanov, who persuaded Abashidze to resign on May 5 and fly to exile in Moscow. Ajaria was placed under direct presidential rule pending new elections to the Ajarian parliament and the population was disarmed. Elections took place on June 22 and were won by pro-Tbilisi parties.

## Javakheti

To the east of Ajaria lies the region of [Javakheti](#), which is populated mainly by ethnic Armenians. Javakheti Armenians frequently complain of neglect by the central government and fear for their futures. Many Georgians fear that granting autonomy to Javakheti, as many of its residents have demanded, would lead to the region being taken over by Armenia.

### Meskhethian Turks

The Samtskhe area of Javakheti was also the homeland of the [Meskhethian Turks](#), a Muslim people speaking a Turkish dialect, before Stalin deported them to Uzbekistan in 1944. Several thousand Meskhethian Turks have returned since the collapse of the Soviet Union, but many Christian Georgians have been hostile.

The Georgian government put in place a legal framework in 2007 to facilitate the return of the Meskhethian Turks, setting conditions that returnees would have to meet. The OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM) has advocated that Meskhethian Turks who wish to return should be able to do so, or given the option of integration and naturalization in their current home countries. The HCNM funded a guide to explain the relevant Georgian law and assist those seeking to return. The HCNM added that repatriation would have to be carefully thought through and supported by international assistance to avoid undermining inter-ethnic relations in the area.

The need for the Georgian government to respond to the displacement of thousands of ethnic Georgians from Abkhazia and South Ossetia during and after the 2008 war made it even less likely that the Meskhethian Turks would get the necessary support for their integration.



*Nino Bolkvadze (r), National Programme Manager for Georgia with the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, meets Meskhethian Salim Khamdyev in the village of Abastumani, Samtskhe-Javakheti region, Georgia, 9 July 2008. (OSCE/Pavlo Byalyk)*

## Southeastern Georgia

The provinces of southeastern Georgia, to the east of Javakheti, have a large Azerbaijani population. There were clashes between Georgians and Azerbaijanis here in the summer of 1989. Anti-smuggling operations by the Georgian government in 2004 led to new tensions with local Azerbaijanis.



# Foreign relations

This section describes Georgia's foreign relations with:

- Russia
- Other states in the Caucasus
- The West



## Russia

Georgia's number one foreign policy challenge has been managing its relationship with Russia. While there are practical reasons for Georgia to cultivate its relationship with its powerful neighbor to the north, most Georgians prefer a pro-Western orientation. When given an opportunity to choose its political preferences after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Georgia refused to join the CIS for a full two years. In 2002, Shevardnadze formulated a foreign policy concept according to which Russia and the U.S. were both "strategic partners" of Georgia.

### Shevardnadze's policies

Nonetheless, Shevardnadze found himself with good personal reasons to lean towards Russia. Russia decisively came to his rescue twice—once in July 1993, when Sukhumi fell to Abkhaz forces and he was evacuated on board a Russian ship, and again in November 1993, when Russian troops put down a Zviadist rebellion in Megrelia.

Georgia subsequently joined the CIS in October 1993, and signed an agreement allowing Russia to keep its four military bases in Georgia, use Georgian ports and airfields, and station guards on Georgia's southern border. The Georgian parliament refused to ratify the base agreement, however. By the late 1990s, Shevardnadze began to seek greater security cooperation with Western states and the removal of Russia's military bases. At the 1999 OSCE Istanbul Summit, Russia committed itself to removing two bases, near Tbilisi and in Abkhazia. The first base was subsequently closed.

### Reasons for Georgia-Russia tensions

Georgians resent the support Russia has given to the Osset and Abkhaz secessionists, whom they see as pawns in Russia's imperialist designs.

The conflict in Chechnya also aggravated Russian-Georgian relations. Russia accused Georgia of allowing Chechen fighters to move freely across its mountain border with Chechnya. The Georgian government insisted that the 7,000 Chechens in Georgia were non-combatant refugees, and refused to allow Russia to deploy troops on the Georgian side of the border. Russian aircraft bombed the Pankisi Gorge area in 2001. Shevardnadze reacted by sending in 2,500 Georgian troops to restore control over Pankisi. By the end of 2002, under Russian pressure, Georgia closed Chechen leader Maskhadov's office in Tbilisi.

### OSCE border monitoring mission short-lived

In December 1999, the OSCE expanded the mandate of the OSCE Mission to Georgia to include monitoring and reporting on movement across the 82-kilometer mountainous border between Georgia and the Chechen Republic of the Russian Federation. In December 2001, the OSCE expanded the operation to include the border between Georgia and the Ingush Republic to the west of Chechnya.

But in December 2004 Russia asserted at the OSCE Ministerial in Sofia that the mandate of the border patrol mission had been fulfilled. Over the strong objections of Georgia, the U.S., and other countries, Russia refused to accept an extension of the mission's monitoring mandate.

Russia opposed suggestions that the European Union deploy monitors to replace the closed



OSCE monitoring mission.



*OSCE border monitors observe activity on the Chechen-Georgian border on a mountain ridge, summer 2000.(OSCE)*

### **After the Rose Revolution**

Although Saakashvili talked about the need for Georgia to maintain good relations with Russia after becoming president, he quickly showed a stronger pro-Western orientation than Shevardnadze.

The new Georgian leadership pushed for closure of the remaining two Russian bases, at Batumi in Ajaria and at Akhalkalaki in Javakhetia. An agreement was reached in May 2005 on the closure of the bases and the withdrawal of these Russian troops by 2008. Nonetheless, the Georgian Parliament called in 2006 for Russia to speed up the pullout of its troops.

In September 2006, relations sharply deteriorated after Georgia charged four Russian officers with espionage, and Russia responded by canceling its troop pullout, banning the import of Georgian produce and wines, suspending transport links with Georgia, and harassing and deporting Georgian citizens in Russia. The OSCE CiO, Belgian Foreign Minister De Gucht, successfully mediated the release of the Russian officers.

### **Collision of Russian and Georgian interests**

Increasingly, an assertive Georgian leadership unwilling to lose great chunks of its territory as a result of a “frozen conflict” found itself confronting an increasingly assertive leadership in its vastly more powerful neighbor to the north seeking to reestablish its influence in the “post-Soviet space.” Saakashvili’s efforts to remove Georgia from Russian influence and bring it under NATO’s security umbrella was seen as a major threat to Russian interests. Georgia’s efforts to establish itself as an alternative to Russia as an energy corridor also could be seen as a threat to Russian interests.

Starting in 2007, military incidents along the de facto borders between Abkhazia and South Ossetia with Georgia escalated. Russia had established itself as both peacekeeper in the area and defender of the separatist “states.” In August 2008, this clash of immediate and deeper interests involved Russia on the side of its separatist allies in a short, but intense five-day war with Georgia.

### **New Georgian government seeks to normalize relations with Russia**

The Georgian Dream coalition led by Bidzina Ivanishvili that defeated President Saakashvili's United National Movement in the 2012 parliamentary elections has promised to use diplomacy to normalize Georgia's relationship with Russia, while saying that it will bring Georgia even closer to the United States and NATO membership.

The Georgian Prime Minister's Special Representative for Relations with Russia, Zurab Abashidze, met with Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister in December 2012, in the first direct talks between the two countries since the 2008 war.

Cultural ties between Russia and Georgia--largely cut after the 2008 conflict--have also been resuming during Ivanishvili's tenure. These include Russian television broadcasts on cable in Georgia, Georgian dance groups touring Russia, a journalism school opening in Tbilisi, and conferences and roundtable events bringing together Russian and Georgian intellectuals.

Ivanishvili's stated goal of normalizing relations with Russia may actually constitute a shift from Saakashvili's Western orientation to an alignment towards Russia similar to that of Moscow's Caucasus ally, Armenia.



## The Caucasus

Georgia has closer relationships to Azerbaijan and Turkey than to Armenia. Reasons include Georgian anxiety over Armenia's potential claim to Javakheti, and the enormous importance to Georgia of its trade with Azerbaijan and Turkey. Georgia's official position on the Karabakh conflict is that of a neutral would-be conciliator.

Georgia shares with Azerbaijan a strong desire to become fully independent of Russia and reduce Russian predominance in the Caucasus and in the post-Soviet region as a whole. Armenia, by contrast, cooperates with Russia and relies on Russia's military presence in the south Caucasus for its security.

### The BTK Railway project

The ongoing Baku-Tbilisi-Kars Railway project is due to be completed in 2013. In December 2012, Prime Minister Ivanishvili surprisingly questioned the efficiency and profitability for Georgia of the project, which would connect Azerbaijan to northeastern Turkey via Georgia. Ivanishvili later backed off his remarks during a visit to Azerbaijan.

The project would link the Caucasus (and Central Asia/China) to Europe (bypassing Russia); further integrate Turkey, Georgia and Azerbaijan; and link Georgia's largely Armenian-populated Javkheli region over which it would pass more closely into the country. The project has been opposed by Russia, as well as its ally Armenia, which runs against their geopolitical and commercial interests. The BTK railway would provide an alternative to Russia's Trans-Siberian Railway, as well as Armenia's South Caucasus Railway (owned by Russia).



## The West

Western and international institutions and humanitarian agencies have a strong presence in Georgia, and the country is among the top recipients of American aid—about a billion dollars over the past decade. Georgia is also an enthusiastic participant in NATO’s Partnership for Peace program and sought NATO membership.

The U.S. launched a train and equip program for Georgian military forces in 2002, and a successor military assistance program in 2005. Georgia had a peak of 2,000 troops deployed in Iraq from 2002 until it ended its commitment during the 2008 War. Georgia also boosted its commitment to Afghanistan to 1,200 at the end of 2009.

Despite strong U.S. backing, the March 2008 Bucharest NATO Summit failed to offer Georgia a Membership Action Plan. The Summit did pledge, however, that Georgia would eventually be offered a path to membership.

The U.S. and the EU provided almost \$2 billion in aid following the August 2008 War.



## OSCE involvement

The Sochi Agreement in 1992, brokered by Russia, established a Joint Control Commission (JCC) with equal representation from Georgia, Russia, North Ossetia, and South Ossetia. The JCC was given oversight of a Joint Peacekeeping Force (JPKF), consisting of 500-man battalions from Georgia, North Ossetia, and Russia. (The JCC was terminated by the 2008 Russia-Georgia War.)



## OSCE Mission to Georgia

An OSCE mission was established in Georgia in November 1992. Its mandate involved:

- Securing peace
- Promoting practical co-operation between the conflict parties
- Resolving the status of South Ossetia
- Providing humanitarian and other aid
- Coordinating international contacts for South Ossetia

After the situation became more stable, the OSCE Mission mandate was expanded to:

- Support the UN mission in Abkhazia
- Promote human rights and fundamental freedoms
- Assist in the development of legal and democratic institutions and processes, including the provision of advice on the elaboration of a new constitution, the implementation of legislation on citizenship, the establishment of an independent judiciary, and election monitoring



*Human rights monitoring and reporting training for Georgian NGOs, May 2002. (OSCE)*

### Seminars and advice

In 1995, the OSCE Mission organized seminars on the rule of law and capacity-building for human rights NGOs. The OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights conducted a needs and assessment mission in Georgia with other international organizations in order to provide technical assistance in Georgia. Together with the Georgian Parliament, the OSCE established and managed the Centre for Parliamentary Reform, which coordinated donor activities and

provided strategic advice to the parliamentary leadership. Furthermore, the OSCE helped developing a national association of local councils. The OSCE also supported the development of professional skills of regional independent broadcast media.

When the Georgian justice ministry gave consideration to amending the constitution in 2004, the OSCE Mission provided expert advice. The Mission also worked to strengthen the rule of law by promoting reform of the legal system.

In 2004, as part of its South Ossetia mandate, the OSCE Mission advanced a ceasefire and demilitarization proposal.



*Head of Mission Roy Reeve and Chairperson of the Georgian Parliament Nino Burjanadze at the signing of the Parliament's Code of Conduct, 12 October 2004. The Mission supported the development of the Code in response to calls from Georgia's Parliament.(OSCE/Dimitry Chikvaidze)*

## **Election observation**

The OSCE election observation mission deployed in November 2003 was one of the organization's largest and longest election observation missions up to that time. Its assessment that the elections were characterized by systematic and widespread fraud substantially contributed to the massive popular protests against the government, which led to President Shevardnadze's resignation.



*Election officials counting ballots in the village of Sagvichio during Georgian parliamentary elections, 2 November 2003.(OSCE/Lubomir Kotek)*

### **Mission closed**

Following the 2008 Russia-Georgia War, Russia refused to accept any linkage between OSCE activities in South Ossetia and those in the rest of Georgia in the renewal of the Mission mandate. Russia insisted that recognition of the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia be included in the future structure of the mission, which was rejected by Georgia and most participating states. Russia blocked renewal of the Mission mandate, and the Mission was closed at the end of the year.

# Domestic politics

## 2003 parliamentary elections

The 2003 parliamentary elections reflected the rise of opposition parties and Shevardnadze's loss of support. Widespread vote rigging was reported. The OSCE was strongly critical of the conduct of the elections.

## 2003 Rose revolution

Non-violent demonstrations against Shevardnadze and calls for new elections followed the flawed parliamentary elections. Shevardnadze claimed that the protesters risked civil war and he deployed hundreds of soldiers on the streets of Tbilisi. At that point, student demonstrators gave roses to the soldiers. Many soldiers laid down their guns. Mikhail Saakashvili led the demonstrators to the parliament building. Together with other supporters of the opposition, they made their way into parliament with roses in their hands (hence Rose Revolution) while Shevardnadze was giving a speech inside. Lacking support from the military, Shevardnadze agreed to resign.

## Saakashvili wins 2004 presidential election

Presidential elections were held in January 2004. Saakashvili was elected with 96% of the vote. The OSCE noted "frequent but not systematic irregularities."

The parliamentary elections of November 2003 were annulled and new parliamentary elections held in March 2004. Saakashvili's National Movement-Democrats won with 67% of the vote and 135 seats. The only other electoral bloc that passed the 7% threshold for representation in parliament was the alliance of the Industrialists Party and the New Rights Party (8% of the vote and 15 seats). International observers praised the conduct of the elections, but the Labor Party questioned the accuracy of the returns.

While the new administration engaged in many reforms in tax and customs, police, defense, and other government sectors, it came under criticism by the opposition for exerting pressure on the independent media, passing restrictive amendments to the election code, and failing to reform the judiciary. The National Movement also lost some of its original allies, the Republican Party and the Conservative Party.

## Opposition seeks to oust Saakashvili

By 2006, the opposition parties and Saakashvili were in complete confrontation. Following the expulsion of a Republican Party member from parliament, opposition deputies boycotted parliament for several weeks. A rally of several thousand in Tbilisi later called for Saakashvili's resignation.

Former Defense Minister Irakli Okruashvili's arrest in September spurred the opposition on. He accused Saakashvili of a long list of crimes, including ordering the killing of oligarch (and opposition bankroller) Badri Patarkatishvili. The latter had claimed he would spend all his fortune to oust Saakashvili. Opposition activity peaked with a November 2 mass demonstration of 50,000 in Tbilisi, representing the largest protest event since the 2003 Rose Revolution. Demonstrators

pushed for Saakashvili's resignation, early parliamentary election, changes in the election rules, and the release of political prisoners. Patarkatishvili's television network, Imeldi TV, carried the opposition line on the airwaves.

### **Government crackdown boomerangs**

Smaller peaceful protests continued for several days, until forcefully broken up by riot police on November 7. Hundreds were reported injured. Riot police forcefully shut down the Imeldi and Caucasia TV networks. A state of emergency was declared in Tbilisi, banning all political activity and placing restrictions on the media. International criticism of these departures from democratic norms was sharp. The state of emergency was not ended until November 16.

### **Saakashvili goes to the voters**

Saakashvili responded by calling a snap presidential election for January 2007 to show that the people were with him, and not with the opposition. Curtailing his term of office by a year, he resigned in November to campaign for president.

Saakashvili was reelected in a first round victory with 53.5 percent of the vote, according to the Central Election Commission. The lead opposition coalition candidate, Levan Gacheechiladze, won 25.7 per cent, with all other candidates receiving less than 10 percent. Nonetheless, the opposition claimed the elections were rigged, including one-sided and unfair treatment of opposition candidates by the state media.

The International Election Observation Mission (including OSCE's ODHIR, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and the European Parliament) reported that the process was in essence consistent with most OSCE and Council of Europe commitments and standards for democratic elections, but significant challenges were revealed which needed to be addressed urgently. These challenges included widespread allegations of intimidation and pressure on public sector employees and opposition activists, lack of distinction between state activities and party campaigning, vote count and tabulation procedures, and the post-election complaint and appeals process. Notably, the IEOM noted that the vote count and completion of results protocols at 23 percent of the counts it observed were bad or very bad.

In addition to the presidential election, voters were asked in a non-binding referendum if they favored early elections in the spring (almost 80% did), and whether Georgia should join NATO (77 per cent were in favor).

### **Short-lived overture to the opposition**

Saakashvili made overtures to the opposition following his reelection. In talks a week after his reelection, he accepted an opposition demand to dissolve the perceived pro-government supervisory board of Georgian Public Television. He also reshuffled his cabinet, brought in several non-party figures as ministers and dismissed some close allies. Nonetheless, the opposition was not satisfied and continued to call Saakashvili's election illegitimate.

In March 2008, Saakashvili's United National Movement (UNM), with its parliamentary majority, pushed through a change in the election code. Parliament replaced the form of proportional representation based on large constituencies adopted in 2005, with an earlier provision through which half the 150 seats would be filled by majority vote in 75 constituencies and the remainder

by proportional representation. The opposition claimed the change was designed to tilt the outcome of the May 21 parliamentary elections in the UNM's favor.

### **Saakashvili's UNM big winner in 2008 parliamentary elections**

The United National Movement was the big winner in the May 2008 parliamentary elections, with 59.37% of the vote (119 seats). The United Opposition came in a far second with 17.59% (17 seats), followed by the Christian Democratic Movement (which split from the United Opposition to run on its own) with 8.48% (6 seats), and the Labor Party with 7.53% (6 seats). Opposition parties accused the United National Movement of stealing the vote. The United Opposition and Labor said they would boycott the new parliament in protest, and establish an "alternative parliament."

The International Election Observation Mission (IEOM) undertaken by OSCE's ODIHR, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and the NATO Parliamentary Assembly reported that overall, these elections clearly offered an opportunity for the Georgian people to choose their representatives from among a wide array of choices. The authorities and other political stakeholders made efforts to conduct these elections in line with OSCE and Council of Europe commitments.

The IEOM noted that it had identified a number of problems that made this implementation uneven and incomplete. These included inconsistencies, gaps and ambiguities remaining in the Unified Election Code that left room for varying interpretations, affecting its consistent implementation. Parties were able to campaign around the country, although within a polarized and tense environment. The distinction between state activities and the United National Movement campaign was often blurred. Allegations of intimidation of candidates, party activists and state employees affected the campaign environment. The media generally offered a diverse range of views. Public TV offered voters the chance to compare parties and candidates, while most other broadcasters lacked balance and tended to give more attention to the United National Movement and the authorities.

### **Domestic impact of 2008 War**

The public generally accepted the government's argument that Russian aggression caused the war, and that the Georgian government's action were more defensive than offensive. The opposition has been unable to use the war's outcome against Saakashvili.

### **Georgian Dream wins 2012 parliamentary elections**

Georgia had a peaceful change of government as a result of the October 2012 parliamentary elections. The Georgian Dream coalition led by Bidzina Ivanishvili took 55% of the vote (winning 85 seats), besting President Saakashvili's United National Movement with 40.3% of the vote (winning 65 seats). The parties winning the remaining 4.7% of the vote did not make it past the threshold.

Georgian Dream is a six-party coalition composed of Georgian Dream-Democratic Georgia, Republican Party, Our Georgia-Free Democrats, National Forum, Conservative Party, and Industry Will Save Georgia).

Ivanishvili became prime minister, entering into an uncomfortable cohabitation with Saakashvili continuing as president.





*Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili  
(Government of Georgia Website)*

## Tensions in government

### Within the coalition

Prime Minister Ivanishvili stripped Defense Minister Irakly Alasania, leader of the Free Democrats Party and his coalition partner, of his dual position as Deputy Prime Minister in January 2013. Differences appeared to include Alasania's candidacy for the presidency, as well as the Free Democrats support for a presidential or mixed presidential-parliamentary system of government. Ivanishvili has his own preferred presidential candidate, and advocates changing the government to a parliamentary system with the president elected by parliament.

### Ivanishvili vs. Saakashvili

The co-habitation has increasingly deteriorated into a no-holds barred struggle for survival.

Ivanishvili is doing everything possible to discredit and destroy Saakashvili's UNM as a political alternative. For his part, Saakashvili has returned to his populist roots. His UNM will be holding a massive protest rally in front of Parliament--the scene of the Rose Revolution--on April 29.

Meanwhile, Ivanishvili's government has initiated a criminal prosecution against Tbilisi Mayor Gigi Uglava, long close to Saakashvili and UNM's likely candidate in the October 2013 presidential election. The Court has refused, however, to remove the mayor from his position or take any actions against him.



*Tbilisi Mayor Gigi Ugulava (left) toasts the construction of the new USAID building with DCM Mark Pery and USAID Country Director Bob Wilson. Date 31 May 2007. (American Embassy Tbilisi)*

# Culture

## Tbilisi

The capital city, Tbilisi, home to almost one in four of the country's inhabitants, spreads out from the valley of the River Kura into the surrounding hills. Above the city looms the enormous statue of the Mother of Georgia, holding a sword for her enemies in one hand and a cup of wine for her guests in the other. Tbilisi means "warm city" and was founded in the 5th century.

Rustaveli Avenue, in addition to being the site of government buildings, is the address for new hotels and fancy shops. The old city, with its low red-roofed houses and narrow winding alleyways, is being renovated and becoming a fashionable entertainment area. One of the city's traditional attractions is the hot baths fed by underground sulfur springs. The entrance is below the mosque on the riverbank. Other sights include the ancient Narikhala fortress, the Sioni cathedral, and the theaters on Rustaveli Avenue.



*Mother of Georgia Statue, Tbilisi, 2008. (USIP/Ted Feifer)*



*Narikhala Fortress, Tbilisi, 2008. (USIP/Ted Feifer)*

## Festival of Tbilisi

The festival of Tbilisi, Tbilisoba, is celebrated every year on the last Sunday of October with traditional music and dancing concerts in the open air. This is the season of harvest and winemaking, and many Georgian weddings are held at this time.



*View of Tbilisi from Narikhala Fortress, 2008 (USIP/Ted Feifer)*

## East Georgia

The broad rolling hills and valleys of the East Georgian countryside are dry, but grain and vegetables can be grown and livestock grazed. Just outside of the capital city there is a fascinating outdoors museum, which includes life-scale model homesteads constructed to demonstrate the traditional way of life of peasants in different parts of Georgia. Nearby stands the

old capital Mskheti, still the seat of the Georgian Orthodox Church. Further north, the terrain rises steeply toward the crest of the Caucasus mountain range, which looms across the skyline.



*The Georgian Orthodox Jvari Monastery (Monastery of the Cross) at Mtskheta was built in an early tetraconch style (a four-apsed domed structure) that greatly influenced later Georgian and South Caucasus architecture. (CIA Factbook)*

## West Georgia

Western Georgia, by contrast, is humid and subtropical. The swampy coastal lowlands, drained by many rivers, provide ideal conditions for cultivating citrus fruits, tea, and tobacco. Northwards along the Black Sea coast into and through Abkhazia, the mountains approach closer and closer to the shore, until near the Russian border the strip of flat land is only a few hundred yards wide.

## Cuisine

Georgian cuisine makes much use of cheese. Slices of goat's cheese seem to be served at every meal, and khachapuri—a yogurt pastry filled with cheese and egg—is a popular dish. Many dishes also contain walnuts, a product of Ajaria in the country's southwest—beets with walnuts, cabbage salad with walnuts, fried eggplant with walnuts, and fried chicken in hot walnut sauce (satsivi). Other dishes are chakhokhbili (chicken stewed with onion, tomato, butter, herbs and pepper) and khinkali (meat dumplings). And no feast is complete without wine and eloquent toasts orchestrated by the tamada (toast-master). Most Georgians find it hard enough just to survive under current economic conditions, however, and can only rarely afford many of these delicacies.



## CHAPTER 4

# Nagorno-Karabakh

This chapter contains information about Nagorno-Karabakh, which was formerly the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Province within the Azerbaijan SSR. The territory now claims to be an independent republic, although in practice it is completely dependent upon Armenia. It is not recognized by the international community, or even by Armenia itself. Azerbaijan claims Nagorno-Karabakh as part of its territory.



# Key information

## Geography

Item	Description
Area	4,400 square miles
Natural resources	Granite, basalt, limestone, mineral water
Climate	Like other parts of western Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh has mountainous terrain and a cold and wet climate.

## People

Item	Description
Population	138,000 (2006 est.)
Ethnic groups	Armenian 95%; Assyrian, Greek, Kurd 5%
Religions	Mostly Armenian Apostolic Christian. Some Eastern Orthodox
Languages	Hayeren, Armenian

## Government

Item	Description
Capital	Stepanakert (in Armenian) Khankendi (in Azerbaijani)
Type	Unrecognized, de facto independent state within Azerbaijan
System of government	Unrecognized presidential republic
Head of state	Bako Sahakyan
Currency	Armenian Dram



# Historical background



## Before Russian rule

The original population of the region is believed to have been indigenous and migrant tribes. The area was, in turn, ruled by local Armenian princes, Persia, Arabs, Seljuk Turks, Tatars, and Mongols. Local Armenian princes holding the titles of [meliks](#) governed autonomously for centuries under Safavid Persia. The Armenian meliks maintained control over the region until the mid-eighteenth century when Persia's [Nader Shah](#) took Karabakh from the [Ganja khans](#) and placed it under his own control. Meanwhile, conflicts between the meliks increased and the Karabakh khanate was formed.

Karabakh became a protectorate of Imperial Russia when the [Kurekchay Treaty](#) was signed between Ibrahim Khan of Karabakh and General Pavel Tsisianov on behalf Tsar Alexander I in 1805, according to which the Russian monarch recognized [Ibrahim Khalil Khan](#) and his descendants as the sole rulers of the region.

In 1823, Persia formally ceded Karabakh to the Russian Empire. In 1822, the [Karabakh khanate](#) was dissolved, and the area became part of the Russian Empire. After the transfer of the Karabakh khanate to Russia, many Muslim families emigrated to Persia, while many Armenians were induced by the Russian government to emigrate from Persia to Karabakh.



## Under Russian and Soviet rule

Karabakh was incorporated into Soviet Azerbaijan in July 1921.

Karabakh's status was an issue to Armenians throughout the Soviet period. At various times Karabakh Armenians addressed petitions to the Soviet authorities pleading for transfer of the territory to Armenia. They complained that their cultural and economic needs were neglected, that they were cut off from contact with their fellow Armenians in the Armenian SSR, and that the leadership of the Azerbaijan SSR was encouraging Azerbaijanis to settle in Karabakh with a view to shifting the demographic balance against them.



## After Perestroika

In February 1988, the Armenian majority of the Soviet of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Province passed a resolution requesting that the province be made part of Armenia.

The resolution sparked massive demonstrations and strikes of support in Yerevan. Another outcome was a [pogrom](#) against Armenians in the Azerbaijani industrial city of [Sumgait](#), organized by factory workers living in communal factory dormitories who allegedly planned to occupy the homes of their victims. Lack of housing, the arrival of Azeri refugees from Armenia, and organized demonstrations in favor of Karabakh joining Armenia were all factors that helped fuel the tragic events in Sumgait.

The Soviet leadership quelled the unrest by deploying troops to Sumgait, after the police were unable to bring the rioters under control.

The events in Sumgait took Gorbachev and the politburo by surprise. They were not prepared to deal with issues of ethnic tension and nationalist movements. A change in republic borders was ruled out, but demands were made of Baku to take steps to satisfy the grievances of the Karabakh Armenians.

Confrontation moved to a higher level in June 1988 when Armenia's Supreme Soviet voted unanimously in favor of the unification of Karabakh with Armenia, followed a couple of days later by a contrary unanimous vote of Azerbaijan's Supreme Soviet.

### Special administration

In January 1989, the USSR Supreme Soviet placed Karabakh provisionally under a special form of administration. While remaining formally within Azerbaijan, the province was to be run by an official answering directly to Moscow.

In November 1989, the special administration was abolished and the province put under military rule. In the same month, the congress of the [Armenian Pan-National Movement](#) was organized. It would come to power nine months later.

### Renewed violence

In January 1990, another [pogrom](#) against Armenians took place, this time in Baku. The city's remaining Armenians were evacuated from Azerbaijan by the Soviet army. All but 10,000 of Azerbaijan's quarter million Armenians outside Karabakh fled to Russia or Armenia, while 200,000 Azerbaijanis and Kurds from Armenia (mainly [Zangezur](#)) became refugees in Azerbaijan.

### Breakup of the USSR

In the fall of 1991, the breakup of the USSR and political confusion in Moscow left the Soviet army in limbo. It ceased to act as a coherent force, resulting in individual soldiers and even units opting to fight on one side or the other on their own initiative. At the same time, the heavy weaponry of the Soviet army found its way into the arsenals of Armenian and Azerbaijani paramilitaries, facilitating a transition from low-intensity to high-intensity warfare.

In October 1991, the Supreme Soviet of now independent Azerbaijan voted to deprive Nagorno-Karabakh of its autonomous status within Azerbaijan.





# The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict plays a central role in the current affairs of both Armenia and Azerbaijan.



## Armenia, Azerbaijan and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict

The recent histories of Armenia and Azerbaijan, as well as the domestic politics and foreign relations of both countries, are inextricably bound up with the conflict between them over the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh (Karabakh for short).

### Background

Nagorno-Karabakh is a landlocked region in the South Caucasus and is surrounded entirely by Azerbaijan.

Violent clashes between Armenians and Azerbaijanis occurred in Baku in 1905 and again in 1918. A more direct precursor of the current conflict was the fighting between the independent Armenian and Azerbaijani republics of 1918-20 over three disputed border areas—Nakhichevan and Zangezur as well as Karabakh.

### Background

The communist authorities in the Soviet Union kept nationalism firmly in check. Nonetheless, the cleavages over Nagorno-Karabakh simmered beneath the surface. With the beginning of the Soviet Union's dissolution in the late 1980s, the question over the region re-emerged. Accusing the Azerbaijani Socialist Soviet Republic (SSR) of conducting forced Azerification of the region, the majority Armenian population, with support from the Armenian SSR, started a movement to have the autonomous oblast transferred to the Armenian SSR. The oblast's borders were drawn to include Armenian villages and to exclude Azerbaijani villages. The resulting distrust ensured an Armenian majority.

In February 1988, Karabakh Armenians began demonstrating in their capital, Stepanakert, and in Yerevan, asking for unification with the Armenian republic. When a large group of Azeris marched from Agdam against the Armenian populated town of Askeran, the first direct confrontation with civilian casualties between Armenians and Azeris occurred. Large groups of refugees left Armenia and Azerbaijan because of the outbreak of violence against the minority populations of the respective countries. As of November 1989, the region was administered from Azerbaijan.

### 1990-94 Nagorno-Karabakh War

Armed clashes began in early 1990. Soviet army units acting in support of the Azerbaijan authorities exchanged fire with militias defending Armenian villages on the outskirts of Karabakh. Local Armenian and Azerbaijani paramilitary groups began to form and clash with one another. Azerbaijan blockaded road, rail, and energy links with Armenia that still continue today. Nakhichevan was blockaded by Armenia.

Escalation to all-out war took place in 1991. Between April and August, troops of the Soviet army and the Azerbaijan interior ministry, overcoming the resistance of local militias, deported the inhabitants of a score or so of Armenian villages around the edges of Karabakh. This operation prompted Armenians to expand their paramilitary forces and improve coordination among them.

Winter of 1991-92: Stepanakert was besieged and under heavy bombardment from Shusha, an

Azerbaijani town situated on high ground overlooking Stepanakert.

February-May 1992: The tide of battle turned when Armenian forces captured [Khojali](#), an Azerbaijani town on Karabakh's eastern edge, massacring several hundred refugees. In May 1992 they captured Shusha, and proceeded to take control of the Lachin area, which lies between Karabakh and Armenia. With the "Lachin corridor" as a supply route, Karabakh was no longer isolated from Armenia. Lachin's Azerbaijani and Kurdish population fled, as did those Azerbaijanis still remaining in Karabakh itself.

June-September 1992: The Azerbaijanis counter-attacked. They recaptured several villages, but failed to make any decisive strategic gains. In September 1992, the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh declared itself an independent state, a move dictated by Armenia's reluctance, out of diplomatic considerations, formally to annex the territory.

Spring of 1993: The allied armed forces of Karabakh and Armenia made further dramatic advances. In addition to securing control of the whole of Karabakh, they occupied surrounding territory to the east, west, north, and south. The whole of southwestern Azerbaijan down to the border with Iran— eight provinces covering a sixth of the country's territory—was now in their hands. The roughly 600,000 Azerbaijanis who lived in the newly conquered areas fled to other parts of Azerbaijan or over the border into Iran, bringing the total number of refugees generated by the conflict to well over a million.

Fighting also spread along the whole border between Armenia and Azerbaijan, including the border between Armenia and Nakhichevan.

May 1994: A ceasefire arranged through Russian mediation has generally held since that time.

Since then: There have been frequent, but mostly minor violations. For example, two Azeri soldiers were killed in an incident in February 2013.



# The Minsk Process

This section describes the OSCE's efforts to mediate peace talks between Armenia and Azerbaijan, which is called the Minsk Process.





## CHAPTER 5

# Armenia

This chapter covers:

- Key information
- Domestic politics
- Foreign relations
- Culture



# Key information



# Historical background

This section describes Armenia:

- Before Russian rule
- Under Russian and Soviet rule
- From Perestroika to independence



## Before Russian rule

The original homeland of the Armenian people is not on the territory of the post-Soviet republic of Armenia, but to its south, on the plateau of eastern Anatolia in what is now Turkey. Visible on the horizon from the southern part of the post-Soviet republic, is [Mount Ararat](#)—the Armenians' spiritual symbol and the place where [Noah's ark](#) is believed to have come aground.

### Armenian ancestry

The Armenians developed into a recognizable ethnic group between the 6th and the 2nd centuries B.C. It is thought that their ancestors were partly people indigenous to eastern Anatolia, and partly migrants from the ancient empire of [Urartu](#) to the south. During their formative period the Armenians came under Persian domination, and later came into close contact with Greece and Rome. The society, culture, and religion of ancient Armenia reflected both Persian and Greek influences.

### Christianity as a state religion

Armenia was the first country in the world to adopt Christianity as a state religion, by proclamation of [King Trdat](#) (Tiridates III) in 314 AD. The Armenian Church became the center of a new Armenian literary culture after the monk [Mesrop Mashtots](#) devised an [Armenian alphabet](#) at the beginning of the 5th century. The Church was to play a crucial role in preserving Armenian identity, especially during the long periods when the Armenians lacked a state of their own.

### 11th century

The last Armenian kingdom in historic Armenia fell in the 11th century. Many Armenians sought refuge further south—in the region of Cilicia, on Anatolia's Mediterranean coast, where they established another Armenian kingdom that lasted until the 14th century.

### 16th century

During the 16th century, most Armenian lands came under the rule of Ottoman Turkey, except for a part of eastern Armenia that remained within Persia.

### 18th century

The beginning of the 18th century was marked by conflict between Russian expansionist and Russification policies in the Caucasus, and the Persian and Ottoman empires desire to maintain their influence in the region. In 1813 Persia was forced to sign the Gulistan Treaty, which confirmed Russia's supremacy over the southern Cacausus. A second Russo-Persian war ended with the khanates of Yerevan and Nakchivan being transferred to Russia. The Russian authorities openly encouraged Muslims to leave the Russian Empire in order to settle Armenians on their lands. Initially three Christian states were to be established: Armenia, Georgia and Albania. Albania was never restored and the Albanian autocephalous church was abolished and the Albanians absorbed into Armenia. This policy encouraged approximately 40,000 Armenians to leave Persia and settle in the Russian Empire.



## Under Russian and Soviet rule

Russia's conquest of the Caucasus brought the northern fringe of historic Armenia into the Russian Empire. At that time, the population of this area was predominantly Azerbaijani. But in the first half of the 19th century the Russian government encouraged a massive migration of Armenians from Ottoman Turkey into Russian-held territory. This resulted in an area with a predominantly Armenian population in the southern Caucasus that would become Soviet (and post-Soviet) Armenia in the 20th century.

### Two nationalist parties

In the late 19th century, Armenians seeking to improve the position of their people in Ottoman Turkey created two nationalist parties.

- [Hunchaks](#): who were socialist as well as nationalist.
- [Dashnaks](#): who are still active in Armenian politics today.

Both Hunchaks and Dashnaks resorted to terrorism against the Ottomans. The result was a series of massacres in 1894-96, in which many Armenians were killed.

### Armenian genocide

During World War One, Ottoman Turkey was allied with Germany against Russia, France, and Britain. The Ottoman government accused Armenians of being in league with the Russian enemy, and in 1915 ordered that they be deported. Deportees were marched until they died of hunger, thirst, and exhaustion—or were killed outright by police, soldiers, or bandits. It is estimated that 1,500,000 Armenians perished. Armenians consider the “deportation” as genocide. Even today the memory of this collective trauma marks the psychology of Armenians.

### Independent Armenian republic

By the end of 1916 most Turkish Armenia was under Russian occupation. Following the fall of the Czarist regime, war-weary Russian soldiers abandoned the front. Armenian volunteer militias replaced the Russian soldiers, enabling the Dashnaks to proclaim an independent Armenian republic in the spring of 1918, which was initially part of the short-lived [Transcaucasian Federation](#) (February - May 1918).

### Armenia attacked

At the end of 1920, Armenia was attacked from the south and west by forces of the new post-Ottoman Turkish government. At the same time, the Red Army attacked Armenia from the north and east, and Soviet rule was proclaimed in the part of Armenia formerly under Czarist rule. A [Dashnak](#) uprising in February 1921 was temporarily successful, but Soviet rule was re-imposed by the summer of 1921. Soviet Russia and Turkey negotiated an agreement that (among other things) confirmed the borders of the Soviet republic set up in “Russian” Armenia.

Soviet Armenia was included along with Soviet Azerbaijan and Georgia in the [Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic](#), which existed from 1922 to 1936. Soviet Armenia preserved

the symbols and appearance of Armenian sovereignty, although the reality was communist rule.



*The flag of the Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic.*

## From Perestroika to independence

Gorbachev's perestroika ushered in change in Armenia, as elsewhere in the Soviet Union in the mid-1980s. Political organizers in Armenia first focused on environmental issues—a dangerous chemical factory in Yerevan, the falling water level of [Lake Sevan](#), and the [Medzamor nuclear power station](#), located in an area at high risk of earthquakes. (Medzamor was closed down, but shortage of energy later forced it to be put back into operation.) During rallies placards with environmental and pro-communist slogans were soon accompanied by slogans addressing the nationalities question in Karabakh.

From 1987 on, protests focused increasingly on Karabakh. At the same time, some Armenian politicians were actively lobbying Moscow to transfer Karabakh to the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic. Ethnic tensions between Azeris and Armenians were rising and as early as 1987 Azerbaijanis living in some Armenian villages were forced to leave, although Soviet authorities did not publicly report these events in the media.

Increased inter-ethnic fighting between the two ethnic groups broke out shortly after the parliament of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast in Azerbaijan voted to unify the region with Armenia on 20 February 1988. Fighting soon spread to inter-ethnic villages in both Armenia and Azerbaijan and atrocities were committed on both sides.

Soon after the [Azerbaijani Popular Front](#) successfully pressed the Azerbaijan SSR to launch a rail and air blockade against Armenia. This was a major step since Armenia received 85% of its cargo through rail traffic. In 1993, Turkey joined the blockade against Armenia. In 1994, a Russian-brokered ceasefire ended the Karabakh war. At that point, Karabakh Armenians held 14% of Azerbaijan's internationally recognized territory, including Nagorno-Karabakh itself.



## Domestic politics

[Levon Ter-Petrosyan](#) and his colleagues in the [Armenian Pan-National Movement \(APNM\)](#) were swept to power on the wave of the Karabakh movement. Once in government however, and especially after the Karabakh war ceasefire, they lost much of their earlier popularity. They were widely seen as corrupt and inept in managing the severe economic crisis into which the Soviet collapse, war, and blockade had plunged the country.



*Levon Ter-Petrosyan (Courtesy of Global Voices Online)*

### Current system of government

The [constitution](#), adopted by referendum in July 1995, vests great power in the hands of the president. He appoints the prime minister and other members of the government, the chief prosecutor, ambassadors, and even the president and members of the constitutional court.

[The National Assembly](#) consists of 190 deputies, of whom 150 are elected by majority voting in single-mandate constituencies and 40 by proportional representation from party lists.

### 1995 Parliamentary elections

The APNM and its allies won about three-quarters of the parliamentary seats in the July elections. OSCE observers noted reports of the intimidation of opposition candidates, media bias, and the exclusion of the Dashnaks, and concluded that the elections were “free but not fair.”

### 1996 Presidential election

Ter-Petrosyan declared victory in the September presidential elections, but the opposition refused to accept the result, claiming that massive fraud had taken place. An initially peaceful protest turned into a riot inside the parliament building, in response to which Ter-Petrosyan deployed troops throughout Yerevan.

### Ter-Petrosyan falls from power

Ter-Petrosian attempted to regain public confidence by appointing several popular figures as ministers in his government. In March 1997, [Robert Kocharyan](#), at that time president of the [Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh](#), became prime minister.

But Kocharyan would not accept the compromises that Ter-Petrosian made in the Karabakh negotiations. The government was paralyzed by internal discord over the issue. Ter-Petrosyan was forced to resign.



*Robert Kocharyan. (NATO)*

### 1998 presidential election

Kocharyan ran and won 59% of the vote in the presidential election held in March .

### 1999 Parliamentary elections

An alliance of the [Republican Party of Armenia](#) (led by [Vazgen Sarkisyan](#)) and the [People's Party of Armenia](#) (led by [Karen Demirchyan](#)) won the May 1999 parliamentary elections. Sarkisyan became prime minister and Demirchyan parliamentary speaker.

OSCE observers reported shortcomings in the conduct of the elections, but no major violations. The elections took place in an atmosphere free of intimidation, marking a big improvement over previous elections.

### Gunmen storm parliamentary chamber

In October 1999, the former journalist Nairi Unanyan, his brother, uncle and two other gunmen stormed the parliament, took hostages, shot and killed Prime Minister Vazgen Sargsyan, Speaker of Parliament Karen Demirchyan, five other high-ranking officials and one journalist. Security forces freed the hostages and Unanyan and the other gunmen were sentenced to life in prison. Unanyan issued a statement to the press in which he stated he acted to defend the Armenian people from the corrupt politicians that controlled the country.

The military were again put on alert, and Vazgen Sarkisyan's brother Aram was chosen to replace him as prime minister.

### **Growing authoritarianism**

Hostility increased between the Kocharyan government and a fragmented opposition made up of 16 different parties. Kocharyan became increasingly authoritarian. Independent media were harassed and intimidated. In May 2000, President Kocharyan replaced prime minister Aram Sarkisyan with [Andranik Margaryan](#).

### **2003 presidential election**

There were accusations of widespread fraud, and OSCE observers noted blatant irregularities in the conduct of the elections. Presidential elections were held in February and March 2003. In the run-off, Kocharyan stood against [Stepan Demirchyan](#), chairman of the People's Party of Armenia, and won with 67.5% of the vote.



*Stepan Demichyan (Courtesy of Global Voices Online)*

## 2003 parliamentary elections

Parliamentary elections followed in May. The ruling Republican Party of Armenia, led by Prime Minister Andranik Markaryan, won over a quarter of the votes and 39 seats. Two other pro-presidential parties, the [Country of Law Party](#) and the Dashnaks, won 21 and 12 seats respectively. The opposition [Justice Bloc](#) won only 14% of the vote and 17 seats. The [National Unity Party](#) got 9 seats, while the new [United Labor Party](#) of businessman [Gurgen Arsenyan](#) got 6 seats. Several dozen businessmen without party affiliation also won seats. Neither the APNM nor the Communist Party won any seats.

There were many reports of vote-buying and other irregularities. The OSCE issued two reports on the elections, both critical.

The Republican Party had the largest single faction, but needed wider support to form a parliamentary majority. Negotiations led to a coalition government including the Country of Law Party and the Dashnaks.

## New confrontation with opposition

In spring 2004, the opposition held a series of rallies to demand a referendum of confidence in President Kocharyan. Police broke up the third rally (April 12-13) with considerable violence. The opposition boycotted parliament throughout 2004-2005.

In May 2006, the speaker of parliament, [Artur Baghdasaryan](#), resigned his post and took his Country of Law Party into opposition.



*Artur Baghdasaryan (Copyright © 2007. RFE/RL, Inc. Reprinted with the permission of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty)*

## Constitutional reforms

Despite continued tight political control by the government, as well as high levels of corruption,

Kocharyan agreed in 2005 to introduce a number of constitutional reforms that would devolve certain powers to the parliament and the prime minister. While the reforms gained the approval of Western governments, the opposition refused to support their passage in a referendum at the end of November, insisting that the reforms did not go far enough toward liberalizing Armenia's political system.

### 2007 parliamentary elections

The May parliamentary elections were largely in accordance with international commitments (in contrast to the 2003 elections), according to the international Election Observation Mission made up of OSCE/ODIHR, OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, COE Parliamentary Assembly and European Parliament monitors. Prime Minister [Serzh Sargsian's](#) ruling Republican Party of Armenia won about 40 percent of the vote, while coalition partners [Prosperous Armenia Party](#) and the Armenian Revolutionary Front won about 35 percent of the vote. The opposition Country of Law Party cleared the 5 percent hurdle and won 6 percent of the vote.

### 2008 presidential election

Sargsian won the February 19 presidential election with 52.8 percent of the vote, according to the Central Elections Commission. Former President Ter-Petrosyan won 21.5 percent, and Arthur Baghdasaryan 16.7 percent. Ter-Petrosyan claimed widespread election rigging and claimed he had won the election.

The International Election Observation Mission (including OSCE's ODIHR, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and the European Parliament) reported that the election was administered mostly in accordance with OSCE and COE commitments and standards. Shortcomings noted were the lack of a clear separation between state and party functions; lack of public confidence in the electoral process and ensuring equal treatment of candidates, and complaints about the vote count.



*President Serzh Sargsian (Armenian presidential website)*

## Aftermath

### Election violence

Demonstrations protesting the conduct of the elections turned violent on March 1, when police dispersed the demonstrators. Clashes involving demonstrators, police and military resulted in at least 8 deaths and over a hundred injuries. President Kocharyan subsequently declared a state of emergency, which was lifted on March 21. Protests continued, as well as the arrests of about 100 opposition supporters. Some were tried for attempting to overthrow the government. Legislation to bar political gatherings was approved by parliament. The media was heavily controlled. Ter-Petrosyan asserted that he would keep his supporters on the street until the election was overturned.

### New coalition government

Sargsian formed a government in April 2008 made up of his Republican Party, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaks), the Prosperous Armenia Party, and the Country of Law Party. Country of Law Party leader Artur Baghdasaryan, who had come in third in the presidential election, recognized the outcome and accepted portfolios for his party in the new government.

### Ter-Petrosyan backs off street protests

Ter-Petrosyan declared a moratorium on protest demonstrations in October 2008, pointing to the need not to undercut President Sargsyan in talks with Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh.

During a March 2009 demonstration on the first anniversary of the election violence, Ter-Petrosyan backed even further away from street action against the government. He stressed that he was not seeking an anti-government revolution, and called for a prolonged struggle against the regime through constitutional means. He denounced opposition groups calling for radical action.

### 2009 - Republic Party wins Yerevan mayoral race

The ruling Republican Party elected its candidate, incumbent Yerevan Mayor Gagik Beglaryan, in the May 2009 municipal election with 47% of the vote. This was the first time the capital's mayor was elected, rather than appointed. Coming in second were the candidates of the the pro-government Prosperous Armenia Party with 23%, followed by the opposition [Armenian National Congress](#) with 17% of the vote. Opposition leader Ter-Petrosyan complained of widespread vote buying, and said the ANC council members-elect would not accept their seats.



*Gagik Beglaryan (Yerevan Municipality website)*

## 2012 parliamentary elections

Garik Tsarukyan (Armenia National Assembly website)

President Sargsian's ruling Republican Party gained a majority of parliamentary seats in the May elections. Armenia's wealthiest man Gagik Tsarukyan's Prosperous Armenia party came second with about one fourth of the seats, while the ANC, ARF, Rule of Law and Heritage parties each won less than 10 percent of the vote.



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## 2013 presidential election

Two candidates, former President Ter-Petrosyan and leader of the Prosperous Armenia party Tsarukyan, withdrew from the race in December 2012.

Opposition candidate Paruyr Hayrikian was shot by an unknown assailant while leaving his home on January 31, but recovered and was able to contest the election. Two other candidates, Andrias Ghukasian and Aram Harutiunian, staged hunger strikes to discredit the president and the election, with Harutiunian withdrawing as a candidate on February 12.

Incumbent President Sargsyan won 58.64% of the vote according to the Central Election Commission, with the Heritage Party's Raffi Hovannisian coming in a distant second with 36.75% of the vote, and the remaining candidates sharing less than 5% of the vote. Over 60% of eligible voters participated in the election. After the leading opposition candidates withdrew from the race, Hovannisian--the candidate from the smallest party in parliament--appeared to become the key anti-Sargsyan candidate.

The International Election Observation Mission's preliminary [report](#) stated that the election was generally well-administered, although it expressed concern at the government's lack of impartiality and misuse of government resources, as well as cases of pressure on voters. Election day was calm, but was marked by undue interference by proxies of the President, and some serious violations were observed.

Hovannisian has refused to accept the election results, claiming they are fraudulent. He has pledged to use all legal means to have the election annulled. Protest rallies have taken place in Yerevan and in regional towns.



*Paruyr Hayrikian, 2011 (Courtesy of Konstantin Stalinsky)*



*Armenian Foreign Minister from 1991-1992 Raffi Hovannisian during the 2012 parliamentary campaign (Courtesy of the Heritage Party)*



*Voters at a polling station in Armenia, 18 February 2013. (OSCE/Tom Rymer)*

# Foreign relations

Armenia's foreign relations are dominated by the Karabakh conflict. In exchange for Russian military support, Armenia cooperates with Russia in the southern Caucasus. Armenia and Karabakh are integrated into the Russian air defense system, and Russian troops are stationed on Armenia's border with Turkey.

In 2002, Armenia transferred a number of strategic enterprises to Russian control in exchange for cancellation of some \$100 million of its debt to Russia.

Armenia receives substantial U.S. aid, including [Millennium Challenge Account](#) assistance. It also participates in NATO's Partnership for Peace Program, the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, and has an Individual Partnership Action Plan. Armenia deployed a 46-man unit to Iraq in 2005, which remained until 2008 .

## Armenia and Turkey 2009 Accord not yet implemented

Armenia and Turkey signed an Accord in 2009 to establish diplomatic relations, initiating a major change in their long poisoned relationship. Still, Turkey has made clear that it will not implement the Accord unless Armenia shows more flexibility in its negotiations with Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh. Turkey backs Azerbaijan in the Karabakh conflict.

Armenian-Turkish relations have long been influenced by the legacy of the 1915 genocide, the occurrence of which Turkey refuses to acknowledge. Ter-Petrosyan refrained from raising the issue, but Kocharyan insisted on doing so. In addition, Turkey has been concerned at the ecological risk posed by the resumed operation of the Medzamor nuclear power station in an earthquake zone not far from its borders.

## Armenia and Iran

Armenia has another friend in the region—Iran. While officially neutral with respect to the Karabakh conflict, Iran's ruling Islamist regime sides with Armenia. This stems mainly from Iranian fear of Azerbaijani aspirations to unite northern with southern (Iranian) Azerbaijan. Economic relations with Iran are also very important for blockaded Armenia. Besides cross-border trade, the two countries plan to harness hydroelectric power on the stretch of the River Aras that forms their border. Iran completed construction of a gas pipeline to Armenia in 2007 that is to provide Armenia natural gas in exchange for electric power.

## Armenia and Georgia

Armenia's relations with its other neighbor in the southern Caucasus, Georgia, have traditionally been ambiguous but have improved since Georgia's Rose Revolution. The Armenian government seeks to protect the interests of the ethnic Armenians in Javakheti but is sensitive to Georgian concern of Armenian government over-involvement.

## OSCE

An OSCE office was established in Yerevan in 2000 to promote implementation of OSCE principles and commitments, and maintains contact with local authorities and groups to contribute to the development of democratic institutions in the country. The OSCE office works



independently from the Minsk Group seeking to mediate a settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

[OSCE Office in Yerevan.](#)



*L-r: Oliver McCoy, Democratization Programme Manager of the OSCE Office in Yerevan, Liana Sayadyan, Vice-President of Investigative Journalists NGO and Lusine Hakobyan, President of Europe in Law Association, at the presentation of a publication on violence against journalists in Armenia, Yerevan, 20 February 2012. (OSCE/ Gayane Ter-Stepanyan)*

## COE

Armenia is a member of the Council of Europe.

## Culture

### Yerevan

The capital city Yerevan is home to over a third of Armenia's population. The city's architecture is mostly utilitarian and Soviet. Specifically Armenian features are the numerous summer cafes and the pervasive pink of the locally quarried stone. The heart of the city is Republic Square, which despite its name has a circular layout. Notable sights include the 16th-century Turkish fort, the 18th-century mosque, the cylindrical Soviet Youth Palace, the memorial to the victims of the 1915 Armenian Genocide, and the [Matenadaran](#)—a depository of nearly 15,000 very rare ancient Armenian and foreign manuscripts. Public works repairs are limited, so watch out for the potholes.

### Mount Ararat

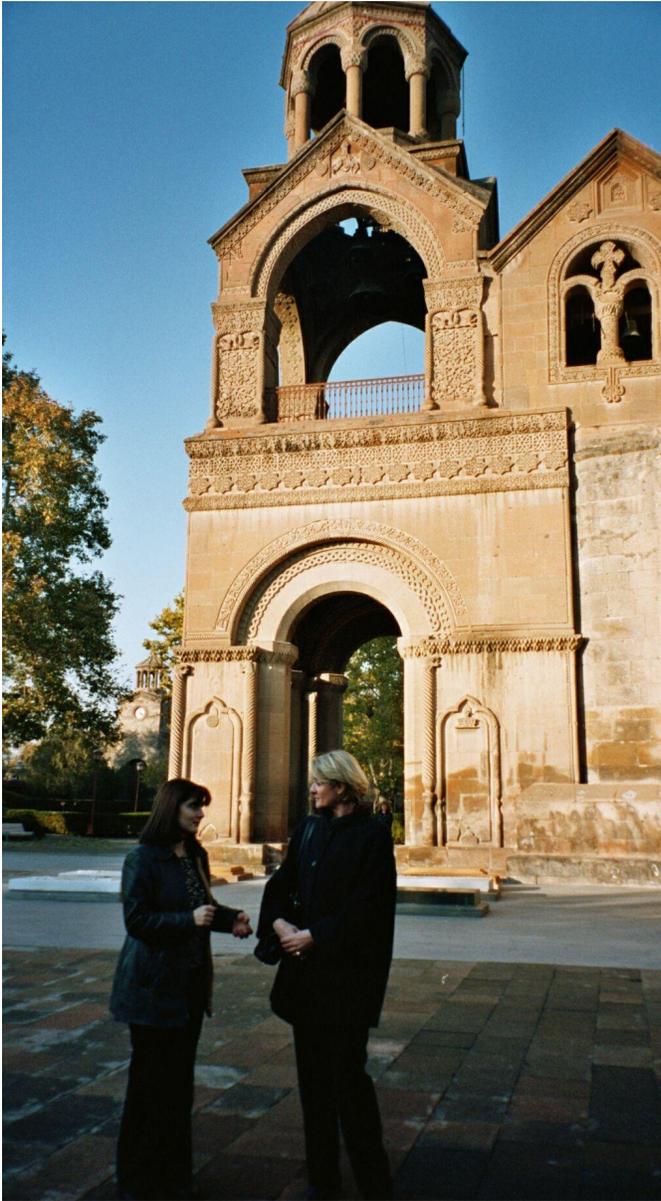
Across the border in Turkey but clearly visible against the horizon—at least on a day when not obscured by the haze—one can see snow-topped Mount Ararat, the spiritual symbol of the Armenian people and the place where Noah's ark is believed to have come aground.



*A view of Mount Ararat in western Turkey through the fog. The highest of its two peaks, Greater Ararat, is the tallest mountain in Turkey at 5,166 m (16,949 ft). Although located some 32 km (20 mi) from the Armenian border, the dormant volcano dominates the skyline of Yerevan, Armenia's capital. This photo was snapped after take off from the Yerevan airport. (CIA Factbook)*

### Echmiadzin

Not far from Yerevan stands [Echmiadzin](#), the ancient capital and still the seat of the Armenian Orthodox Church. Throughout the country you can see old churches with their characteristic conical roofs.



*OSCE colleagues visiting Echmiadzin. (OSCE)*

### **Climate and seismic activity**

Armenia is very mountainous with a dry continental climate. It has the largest lake in the Caucasus, Lake Sevan, which is 6,000 feet above sea level.

The country has suffered greatly from intense earthquakes. The area around the city of [Spitak](#) in northern Armenia still shows the signs of damage from the quake of 1988. An even greater disaster would result if an earthquake were to strike the nuclear power station at Medzamor, which is built on a seismic fault line.

## The Economy

The economic situation remains very difficult. Many people survive thanks to aid from relatives living and working abroad.

## Cuisine

Traditional Armenian cuisine reflects Middle Eastern influence. Popular dishes are churek (flat unleavened bread with sesame seeds), spas (yogurt soup with barley and herbs), kharpuz kiufa (ground and minced lamb with pine nuts and cracked wheat), kashlama (shoulder of lamb boiled with vegetables), yarpakh dolmasy (grape leaves stuffed with lamb and rice), and khorovadz (meat or vegetable kebab). The country is also famous for its pastries—and for its wines, brandies, and cognacs.





## CHAPTER 6

# Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan is a republic with a majority Turkic and Shia population. It was briefly independent of Russia from 1918-1920, and regained its independence in 1991. This chapter contains the following sections:

- Key information
- Historical background
- Domestic politics
- Foreign relations
- Culture



# Key information

## Geography

Item	Description
Area	33,436 square miles
Natural resources	Petroleum, natural gas, iron ore, nonferrous metals, bauxite
Climate	Dry, semiarid steppe

## People

Item	Description
Population	8.2 million (2010 est.)
Ethnic groups	Azeri 90%, Dagestani 2.2%, Russian 1.8%, Armenian 1.5%, Talysh <1%, Lezgins <1%
Religions	Muslim 93.4%, Russian Orthodox 2.5%, Armenian Orthodox 2.3%
Languages	Azeri 90%, Lezgi 2.2%, Russian 1.8%, Armenian 1.5%

## Government

Item	Description
Capital	Baku
Type	Republic
System of government	Presidential republic
Head of state	Ilham Aliyev
Currency	Manats



# Historical background

This section describes Azerbaijan:

- Before Russian rule
- Under Russian and Soviet rule
- From Perestroika to independence



## Before Russian rule

The ancient world knew of a mysterious place where flames would suddenly burst through the surface of the earth. This place was the Apsheron Peninsula on the Caspian coast—the peninsula on which now stands Baku. The source of the flames was oil that welled below the ground. The Persian name for the country was Azerbaijan, which means “land of fire.”

### Inhabited for at least 10,000 years

The first organized state in the area, the principality of Zamoia, appeared in the 9th century BC, only to be conquered soon thereafter by the Assyrians. The decline of Assyria led to the inclusion of southern Azerbaijan into the Median Empire, and northern Azerbaijan became part of [Caucasian Albania](#) (not to be confused with modern-day Albania) which by 600 BC ruled most of the southern Caucasus. Most Caucasian Albanians were absorbed by Armenia in the first half of the 18th century. Those who were not absorbed by Armenia today live in villages in northern Azerbaijan and are known as the [Udi people](#).

### Late 4th century BC to 3rd century

In the late 4th century BC, a Hellenic kingdom called [Atropatena](#) was set up in Azerbaijan by one of the commanders of Alexander the Great. From the 3rd century BC to the 2nd century AD, except for an interval of Armenian supremacy in the 1st century BC, Azerbaijan was a battleground between the empires of Rome and Parthia. In the 3rd century, Parthia broke up. Persia then became the nearest great power, and the Albanians its vassals. The Persian Shah appointed local nobles as governors over parts of Albania—an arrangement that gave rise to autonomous local [khanates](#).

### Persia and Byzantium

In the centuries that followed, Persia and Byzantium waged a struggle for control over the region. This struggle had a religious dimension. The Persian state religion, [Zoroastrianism](#), was based on the teachings of the prophet Zarathustra. Christianity reached Albania from Byzantium in the 3rd century, but had to compete for influence with Zoroastrianism.

### Arab invasions

A third religion, Islam, came with the Arab invasions of the 7th and 8th centuries. The Albanian khans eventually accepted Arab rule, and some of them adopted Islam. When the Arab caliphate broke up in the 9th century, Albania was dominated by the two rival khanates of Shirvan and Arran.

### Fifth century onward

From the fifth century onward, Turkic tribes had begun to settle in northern Albania. In 1025, one of these tribes, the Oghuz, took control of the whole country. In the second half of the 12th century, under the rule of a descendant of the Oghuz, Shams al-Din, Azerbaijan reached the height of its power.

### 12th century



This was also the period of classical Azerbaijani literature, science, and philosophy. Although an Azerbaijani literary language would eventually arise from the Oghuz vernacular, the Persian remained the language of culture and Arabic the language of religion and science. [Nizami Ganjavi](#), who is considered the first great Azerbaijani poet, wrote his epics in Persian. Only in the 16th century would the other great classical Ottoman poet, writer, and thinker Muhammad bin Suleyman, better known by his pen name [Füzuli](#), write in Azerbaijani as well as Persian and Arabic.

## The Persian Empire

In the early 13th century, Azerbaijan came under attack from Georgia ruled at that time by [Queen Tamar](#). Then the Mongol invaders swept through the region, leaving chaos and devastation in their wake in both Azerbaijan and Georgia. Internecine conflict among the local khanates ended only with the re-emergence of a strong Persia in the 15th century. The Persian Empire was, in fact, rebuilt by Ismail I with the assistance of extremist Shiite militant groups, who established in 1502, the new capital in [Tabriz](#). Ismail I expanded his territory during the next decade to include the Southern Caucasus, Persian Azerbaijan and most of Iraq. He created a feudal theocracy and made Shia Islam the official religion, a move that would separate Azerbaijan from the Sunni Ottoman Turks.

## Ottoman-Persian war

An Ottoman-Persian war then ensued for 40 years. The Ottomans conquered Azerbaijan in the late 16th century, but were routed by Persia in 1605—the first time that they had been defeated anywhere. Azerbaijan was reincorporated into Persia.

## 17th century

Despite their roles as part of the Persian Empire's ruling class, the Azerbaijani lords were not content being in a subordinate position. Toward the end of the 17th century they rebelled against and overthrew their Persian rulers, but failed to unite the khanates into a single Azerbaijani state.

## 1722-1747

In 1722 Czar Peter the Great invaded northern Azerbaijan, but a few years later was repelled by Persian troops. In 1747 the Azerbaijani lords again rebelled against Persia, and then began to fight against one another.

## 1804-1828

The khanates of Northern Azerbaijan fell to Russia between 1804 and 1806. Baku resisted and was reduced to ruins. By the [1828 Treaty of Turkmanchai](#), the border between Russia and Persia was set along the River Aras, where it stayed until the end of the Soviet period. Persia renounced all claims over the Erivan khanate (most of present-day central Armenia), the Nakhchivan khanate (most of the present-day Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic of Azerbaijan), the Talysh khanate, the Ordubad and Mughan regions (now also part of Azerbaijan), in addition to all lands annexed by Russia in the 1813 Gulistan Treaty, which included Dagestan, Georgia, Karabakh, Ganja, Sheki, Shirvan, Quba, Derbent, and Baku khanates.

The Czarist government initially governed Azerbaijan through the existing khanates, but later



switched to direct rule. Toward the end of the 19th century, Russification intensified with an influx of Russian settlers, mainly in connection with the oil boom that took off in the Baku area. Despite the fact Baku was connected to the Russian railway network, a great majority of Azerbaijanis neither benefited from increased trade nor from oil wealth; remained peasants and unskilled laborers.

### **Azerbaijani culture under the Czars**

The two main Azerbaijani mid-19th-century cultural figures were the poet and historian [Abbasgulu Bakikhanov](#) and the novelist and playwright [Mirza Akhundov](#).

Later in the century, some Azerbaijani newspapers and political organizations made their appearance. Political organizations were mainly nationalist in orientation and secret in organization — in particular, [Hummet](#) [Endeavor] and [Musavat](#) [Equality]. The communist movement became active in Azerbaijan in the first years of the 20th century, but its supporters were mostly ethnic Russians and Armenians.

### **Independent Azerbaijani Democratic Republic**

The Russian Revolution of 1917 led in Azerbaijan, and especially Baku, to a confused mix of political and ethnic conflicts. The collapse of the Transcaucasian Federation led in May 1918 to the proclamation of an independent [Azerbaijani Democratic Republic](#), led by the Musavat party. The republic lasted less than two years before falling to the Red Army. Armed resistance to Soviet rule continued until 1924.

### **Incorporation into the USSR**

Azerbaijan was incorporated into the USSR in 1922 as part of the [Transcaucasian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic](#). When this entity was eliminated in 1936, Azerbaijan became a union republic, the Azerbaijan SSR.



## From Perestroika to independence

Independent political organizations emerged in Azerbaijan in 1988. One of them, the [National Democratic Party](#), regarded itself as the successor to the Musavat Party. Although groups had different general political orientations, they all sought to restore an independent Azerbaijan that would include Karabakh. Some hoped for eventual reunification with Southern (Iranian) Azerbaijan. The [Azerbaijani Popular Front \(APF\)](#) provided a broad umbrella organization for all nationalist groups.

### “Black January”

Gorbachev sent troops to Baku in January 1990 (“[Black January](#)”) out of concern that Azerbaijan was about to fall into the hands of APF nationalists and to put an end to the [9-day pogrom](#) against Armenians living in the city, in which 90 were killed. The APF barricaded the main arteries into Baku. Soviet troops crushed the barricades and retook the city after 3 days of street skirmishes that killed 93 Azerbaijanis and 29 Soviet soldiers.

### Azerbaijan declares independence

After the collapse of the hard-line coup in Moscow in August 1991, Azerbaijan’s Supreme Soviet declared independence. The declaration was confirmed by referendum the following month.

Communist Party First Secretary Mutalibov won the presidency in elections of doubtful validity. and was forced to resign in March 1992. When he tried to reclaim his position in May, the APF pulled off a bloodless coup. In June 1992, historian and APF chairman [Abulfaz Elchibei](#) was elected president.

# Domestic politics

This section covers:

- Echibei's short-lived political role
- Opposition Parties
- Elections
- Heydar and Ilham Aliyev
- Religion and Politics



## Elchibei

Abulfaz Elchibei formed a government consisting of leading members of the Azerbaijan Popular Front. But the Elchibei government did not survive long. The serious defeats that the Azerbaijani forces suffered in the Karabakh war during the winter of 1992-93 and the spring of 1993 jeopardized its position.

### Surat Husseinov rebellion

In April 1993, Elchibei removed several military commanders whom he considered responsible for the reverses. One of the removed commanders, [Surat Husseinov](#), launched a rebellion against the government from his stronghold in the city of Ganja. In June 1993, Husseinov called for the resignation of Elchibei and of parliamentary speaker [Issa Gambarov](#), and set off for Baku at the head of his troops. Gambarov resigned.

### Aliyev sees Elchibei off into retirement

[Heydar Aliyev](#), the former Communist Party boss in Azerbaijan, had been biding his time in his native Nakhichevan and awaiting a suitable moment to return to the capital. The parliament offered Aliyev the position of speaker, and he took it up shortly before Husseinov's men reached Baku. Aliyev then escorted Elchibei into retirement.



*Heydar Aliyev (Embassy of Azerbaijan in Washington)*

### Aliyev consolidates control

Aliyev next set about the task of legitimizing his position and consolidating his control. In August 1993, a referendum endorsed the removal of Elchibei from the presidency. Presidential elections followed in October 1993. Aliyev won by a large majority. Husseinov was rewarded for propelling Aliyev back into power with the positions of prime minister and defense minister. Subsequently, Aliyev cultivated the establishment of a pro-presidential ruling party, the [New Azerbaijan Party](#).

## Opposition parties

The most important opposition parties are the Azerbaijan Popular Front, the Musavat Party, and the [National Independence Party](#). The first two are both nationalist parties with a general pro-Western and pro-Turkish orientation.

Party	Description
Musavat Party	Claims the legacy of the old Musavat. Its chairman is Isa Gambar, who was parliamentary speaker during Elchibei's presidency, and many former ministers and diplomats of the Elchibei administration are among its members.
Azerbaijan Popular Front	Split in recent years into two wings—a more nationalist wing led by Elchibei's followers, both before and after his death in 2000, and a more liberal democratic wing led by <a href="#">Ali Kerimli</a> .
National Independence Party	Led by <a href="#">Etibar Mammadov</a> , a former presidential candidate who was earlier considered to be a "loyal" opposition. Also a legacy of the late Soviet nationalist movement.

There are a considerable number of less important opposition parties, including communists, social democrats, environmentalists, pro-Iranian Islamists, and extreme pan-Turkic nationalists.

### Constitution endorsed

The current [constitution](#) was endorsed by referendum in 1995. It concentrates extensive powers in the hands of the president. The parliament or national assembly consists of 125 deputies, of whom 100 are elected in single-mandate constituencies and 25 by proportional representation from party lists. Only parties receiving a minimum of the vote—initially 8%, later reduced to 6%—are represented in parliament.

A referendum held in 2002 approved 39 amendments to the constitution.

## 1995-96 parliamentary elections

Parliamentary elections were held in two rounds in 1995. The results were declared invalid due to fraud in 15 constituencies. New elections were held in February 1996.

The New Azerbaijan Party won 63% of the vote and 59 seats (out of 125). Three other parties surmounted the 8% barrier, two of which were “loyal” parties: the Azerbaijan National Independence Party (9% and 4 seats) and the Motherland Party (8% and 1 seat). The only opposition party to get into parliament was the Azerbaijan Popular Front (9.7% and 4 seats). OSCE observers noted numerous irregularities, and concluded that the elections were “neither free nor fair.”

### 1998 presidential election

Aliyev was re-elected with 78% of the vote. Etibar Mammadov and Nizami Suleimanov, leaders of the “loyal” Azerbaijan National Independence Party and Azerbaijan Independence Party, came in second and third with 12% and 8% respectively. Firudin Hassanov of the Azerbaijan Communist Party got 1%.

### 2000 parliamentary elections

According to official results, the New Azerbaijan Party won 71% of the vote, and no other party surmounted the barrier to entry into parliament, even though the barrier was now only 6%. Pre-election polls had indicated that the opposition Musavat Party enjoyed more electoral support than the New Azerbaijan Party. The OSCE concluded that the conduct of the elections fell short of international standards.

### 2003 presidential election

Heydar Aliyev’s son, [Ilham Aliyev](#), stood against several opposition candidates, the strongest of which was Isa Gambar of the Musavat Party, in the October election. According to the official results, Aliyev received 76% of the vote and Gambar 14%.

OSCE observers judged the elections to have “fallen short of OSCE commitments and international standards,” while one third of the observers published a more sharply worded dissenting opinion. The election results led to rioting and violence in several Azeri cities. The government responded with arrests of opposition supporters throughout the country, including areas where no violence had occurred. There were also arrests of election officials who had refused to ratify the results in their polling districts.



*President Ilham Aliyev (Azerbaijan presidential website)*

## Ilham Aliyev takes over

Aliyev worked to clear out the old guard that had served his late father (Heydar Aliyev died in December 2003), including firing Minister of National Security Namik Abbasov, a veteran of the KGB and later head of its Azeri successor. But his government is still dominated, as it was before, by ethnic Azerbaijanis whose ancestors came from Armenia, and elites from the region of Nakhichevan.

### Pressure on opposition

The electronic media tends to reflect the government line, while the opposition and independent print media are subject to direct and indirect pressures from the authorities.

The murder of opposition journalist Elmar Hussein, editor of the weekly Monitor magazine, in March 2005 has not been solved.

In May 2005, authorities beat and arrested participants in a peaceful opposition rally in Baku. At least 30 opposition and youth movement activists were arrested and detained for five days. Journalists were also beaten.

In the run-up to the November 2005 parliamentary elections, protestors that gathered illegally to demonstrate support for free and fair elections were forcibly dispersed on a number of occasions. A student activist was arrested on charges of plotting a coup with the assistance of Armenian agents and the U.S.-based National Democratic Institute, and accused of being linked to Ali Kerimli's Popular Front. Aliyev fired several leading government officials, some widely recognized for corruption, accusing them of conspiring with the opposition and plotting a coup attempt.

A Baku court sentenced two journalists to prison terms for slandering the Minister of the Interior and Head of the State Diaspora Committee. Two journalists were sentenced to prison terms for "inciting hatred" in an article allegedly criticizing Islam. [Einulla Fatullayev](#), the founder and editor of two newspapers, was sentenced to 2 ½ years in prison for libeling Nagorno-Karabakh refugees. (Fatullayev was finally released by presidential decree in 2011.)

The OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Dunja Mijatovic, visited Baku in May 2011 at the invitation of President Aliyev. During meetings with senior government officials, she called for greater media freedom in Azerbaijan. She offered her office's assistance in reforming media laws, including the adoption of legislation decriminalizing defamation in line with international standards. Harassment of the media has continued.

Mijatovic also called on authorities to prevent attacks and harassment of journalists, and bringing perpetrators to justice. For example, masked individuals kidnapped [Seymur Haziyeu](#), a reporter with the independent Azadliq newspaper, near Baku. They reportedly beat him and threatened him with worse violence if he continued to write critically about government policies. Azadliq, one of Azerbaijan's main print media outlets, has been the target of repeated attacks and other forms of intimidation, including imprisonment of staffers and contributors. Haziyeu himself had been threatened and physically assaulted several times in recent years.

The OSCE Office in Baku and the Azerbaijan Press Council organized a conference on decriminalization of defamation in May 2011, which brought together representatives of the government, parliament, civil society and the media.

## 2005 parliamentary elections

The 2005 parliamentary elections were the first in which all seats were contested on a single-mandate basis. The New Azerbaijan Party competed mainly against two unified opposition blocs. The Azadlig (Freedom) bloc comprised Ali Kerimli's Popular Front, Musavat, and the Democratic Party of Azerbaijan (headed by Rasul Galiyev, a former government official living in Washington and wanted by the Azerbaijani government on embezzlement charges). The Yeni Siyaset (New Policy), or YeS, bloc, is made up of the National Independence Party, former Communists, and others. Far more candidates ran as independents, many of who were presumed to be linked to the ruling party.

In the voting, marked "by significant deficiencies" according to the OSCE, the New Azerbaijan Party initially won 64 of 125 seats, with Azadlig winning 5 seats, and independent candidates winning most of the rest. Subsequent adjustments by the CEC gave the ruling party 58 seats and opposition parties' 11 seats, including 7 for Azadlig and 2 for YeS. When the opposition held protests to demand new elections, Aliyev fired several regional election commission heads, claiming they were responsible for the alleged manipulation of election results.

The OSCE/ODIHR final report on these elections noted that overall they did not meet a number of OSCE commitments and other relevant standards for democratic elections.

## 2008 presidential election

### Aliyev reelected

The OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission's final report noted that the election marked considerable progress towards meeting OSCE commitments and other international standards, particularly with regard to some technical aspects of election administration. Nonetheless, the election process failed to meet some OSCE commitments. The election may have taken place in a peaceful atmosphere, but was characterized by a lack of competition, the absence of vibrant political discourse, and a restrictive media environment, and thus did not reflect principles necessary for a meaningful and pluralistic democratic election. In addition, the dominant coverage of the incumbent president by the electronic media, as well as instances of an overlap between the ruling New Azerbaijan Party with official structures, did not serve to create a level playing field. Aliyev garnered 87% of the vote, easily winning reelection. The remainder of the vote went to the Azerbaijan Hope Party's Iqbal Aghazada (2.9%) and several other candidates. Turnout was reportedly 75.64% of registered voters. The opposition—Musavat, the Azerbaijan Popular Front Party, Azerbaijan Liberal Party, and the Azerbaijan Democratic Party—boycotted the election, pointing to obstacles to equal treatment and equal opportunities to convey their views.

## 2009 Referendum

A referendum was held in March to decide on 41 amendments to 29 articles in Azerbaijan's constitution. The key item up for approval was the lifting of presidential term limits. The opposition asserted that the only purpose of the referendum was to enable Ilham Aliyev to remain president for life.

## 2010 parliamentary election

Aliyev's ruling New Azerbaijan Party won 73 of 125 seats. Other parties aligned with the

government won 38 seats. The remainder went to small opposition parties, including Civic Solidarity and Ana Vater. No candidates were elected from the main opposition parties Azerbaijan Popular Front or Musavet.

The OSCE/ODHIR Election Observation Mission’s final report stated that certain conditions necessary for a meaningful and competitive election were lacking in these elections. The fundamental freedoms of peaceful assembly and expression were limited and an active political discourse facilitated by free and independent media was almost impossible. A deficient candidate registration process, a restrictive political environment, unbalanced and biased media coverage, disparity in access to resources to mount an effective campaign, misuse of administrative resources as well as interference by local authorities in favor of candidates from the ruling party created an uneven playing field for candidates. Not all electoral contestants were able to compete on a basis of equal treatment by the authorities. Overall, these elections failed to meet a number of key OSCE commitments for democratic elections and important elements of Azerbaijani domestic legislation.”

### **2013 presidential election**

The campaign was marked by the shooting at the end of January of Paruyr Hayrikyan, a well-known dissident from the Soviet era and one of the eight candidates contesting the 2013 presidential election.



## Religion and politics

Azerbaijan is a largely secular state. Religious affiliation is nominal. Practicing adherents of Islam are far smaller than the estimated 93.4% Muslim part of the population.

### Government controls

Since the break-up of the Soviet Union and independence in the 1990s, independent Shi'a and Sunni groups have developed that do not accept the authority of the official religious bodies. The government has been suspicious of such independent groups, seeing them as possible sources of Islamic extremism. The authorities have used such official organizations as The State Committee for Work with Religious Institutions and the Caucasus Board of Muslims to control them.

### Islamic extremism

Azerbaijan has been the target of violent Islamic extremist cells since the 1990s, both foreign (such as Iranian and Lebanese Hizbollah) and domestic extremists.

The radical group [Hizb ut-Tahrir](#) is suspected of having several hundred members in Azerbaijan; some have been arrested and prosecuted by Azerbaijani authorities.



# Foreign relations

This section describes Azerbaijan's relations with:

- Turkey
- Russia
- Iran
- The West
- OSCE
- COE

## Strongly influenced by the Karabakh conflict

Azerbaijan's foreign relations, like those of Armenia, are strongly influenced by the Karabakh conflict, though they are also affected by a number of other factors.

## Turkey is main ally

Azerbaijan's main ally in the region is Turkey. Azerbaijan also has friendly relations with Georgia. Like Georgia, Azerbaijan seeks to reduce Russia's strategic presence in the Southern Caucasus.

The 2009 Turkey-Armenia Accord to establish diplomatic relations, which was not accompanied by any progress on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, disturbed Azerbaijan. Even Turkey's statement that it would not implement the Accord without greater flexibility by Armenia in the negotiations was not completely reassuring.

## Poor relations with Russia

The Azerbaijani government does not want Russian peacekeepers in Karabakh or Russian troops guarding the Azerbaijan-Iran border. Nor will Azerbaijan allow Russian forces on to its territory to intercept Chechen insurgents, although Russia has accused Azerbaijan of giving them free passage and Russian planes have bombed the Zakatala area in northwestern Azerbaijan.

Relations were further strained when Russia doubled the price of natural gas to Azerbaijan (equaling what Western European countries pay) in 2007, while gas prices to adversary Armenia did not change. This led Azerbaijan to halt the export of crude oil to Russia. In turn, Azerbaijan started to supply gas to Georgia, also in conflict with Russia on energy as well as other issues. Azerbaijan also said it would stop broadcasting Russian television channels in 2007. Aliyev has publicly termed the CIS "useless" for Azerbaijan.

## Azerbaijan and Iran

Most Azerbaijanis acknowledge the historical, cultural, and religious links between Azerbaijan and Iran.

Relations between the two countries, however, are poor. Sources of tension include a territorial



dispute over the control of offshore oilfields and the long-term possibility of Iran losing southern Azerbaijan to a united Azerbaijani state. In addition, Iran was implicated in planned terrorist attacks in Azerbaijan against Israeli and U.S. targets in 2008 and 2012.

### **Oriented toward the West**

The foreign policy of Azerbaijan is oriented mainly toward the West. In part, this is a consequence of Azerbaijan's orientation toward Turkey, which it sees as part of the West.

Azerbaijan has had close relations with Israel since Azerbaijan's independence.

Azerbaijani democrats wish that the West would integrate Azerbaijan more rapidly into Western institutions, and act more effectively in defense of democracy and human rights in Azerbaijan. From the perspective of the Aliyev regime, by contrast, concern for democracy and human rights has typically been an irritant threatening to spoil relations that are otherwise profitable to both parties.

Aliyev visited the White House in April 2006, where President Bush sought his support for U.S. policies on Iran and the war on terror. Azerbaijan has sent troops to serve with the NATO-based coalition in Afghanistan.

The strong U.S. involvement in achieving the 2009 Turkey-Armenia Accord without pushing for progress on Nagorno-Karabakh had a negative impact on the Azeri-U.S. relationship. There was further damage by the U.S. Congress' \$8 million appropriation for humanitarian assistance to Nagorno-Karabakh.

### **East and West and the Karabakh conflict**

In the 1990s, Azerbaijanis complained that both Russia and the West were biased toward the Armenian side of the Karabakh conflict. One reason for this perception was Section 907 of the U.S. Freedom Support Act, which banned aid to Azerbaijan so long as it maintained its blockade of Armenia.

In 2001, the U.S. Senate repealed Section 907 in recognition of Azerbaijan's contribution to the post-September 11th war on terrorism. (Azerbaijan had provided intelligence and allowed the U.S. to use its airspace.) As a result, Azerbaijan has strengthened its relations with the U.S. and received substantial U.S. economic and military aid, including assistance in building up its maritime defenses against Iran. The U.S. and Azerbaijan also explored in early 2009 the shipment of non-military goods through Azeri territory to U.S. forces in Afghanistan.

Under Putin, Russia has moved away from an exclusively pro-Armenian orientation, enabling Russian-Azerbaijan relations to improve.

The Minsk Group co-chairs (Russia, the U.S. and France) damaged their image with Azerbaijan in 2008 by voting against a Baku-sponsored resolution at the UN General Assembly. While the Minsk group countries may have been seeking to prevent the involvement of other players in the mediation process, Azeris perceived their votes as favoring Armenia in the Karabakh conflict.

### **OSCE**

An [OSCE office was established in Baku](#) in 2000.



Its priorities include:

- Helping the Government of Azerbaijan implement its commitments to the Council of Europe
- Carrying out legislative reforms in the fields of elections, mass media, and civil society
- Training police and prison officers
- Strengthening freedom and responsibility of the media, and
- Raising gender and youth issues



*The Head of the OSCE Office in Baku, Ambassador Koray Targay, during an interview on the announcement of the official start of "OSCE Weeks" in Azerbaijan, Baku 16 April 2012. (OSCE/Zaur Zeynalov)*

## COE

In 2002 Azerbaijan joined the Council of Europe.

## Culture

### Baku

The capital Baku stands on a bay of the Caspian Sea. It is home to one-seventh of the country's inhabitants. The core of the city is the old town or fortress—a maze of narrow alleys and ancient buildings. Dating to the 11th century are the palace of the Shirvan-Shahs (rulers of the old principality of Shirvan), now a museum, and the Synyk-Kala Minaret and Mosque. The 90-foot Maiden's Tower was erected in the 12th century.

Beyond the fortress walls, most of which still stand, the straight streets of modern 19th and 20th century Baku rise, in a regular criss-cross pattern, up the slopes of the hills surrounding the bay. Along the waterfront stretches a park.

Most industrial plants are located at the eastern and southwestern ends of the city. Between the city and the surrounding countryside lies a wasteland of long-abandoned oil derricks. Almost all of the oil wells currently in use are offshore. There is even a township of Greater Baku built on stilts 60 miles out in the sea.



*The Maiden Tower, built sometime between A.D. 800 and 1200, is the most recognized structure in the Old City of Baku. (CIA Factbook)*



*A downtown view of the capital of Baku. (CIA Factbook)*

## Historical sites

A few miles outside the capital are other impressive historical sites. The [Ateshgyakh Fire-Worshippers' Temple](#) was built by Indian traders in the late 17th century. At Gobustan, on the slope of a stony mountain, over 4,000 Neolithic rock drawings have been discovered. They vividly depict hunting, dancing, and other scenes from daily life in the Stone Age. Near Mount Beyukshad there is a large ring of stones set around an altar.

## Geography

The terrain in Azerbaijan rises from the lowlands along the coast and in the valleys of the Kura and Aras Rivers to high mountains in the north and west. In the lowlands the climate is mild and fairly dry. In the mountains it is cold and wet. There are a few small lakes. About a quarter of the land area is suitable for growing crops, and about another quarter is pastureland.

## Holidays

Some of the holidays celebrated in Azerbaijan, like Kurban Bayram (the Feast of the Sacrifice), are Muslim in origin. Others predate Islam. In rural areas, many holidays are of agricultural origin and are devoted to various crops. The most popular holiday, Novruz (meaning New Day), occurs at the spring equinox (March 20-21) and celebrates the renewal of nature.

Ritual foods are eaten, such as eggs and malt. On the last Wednesday before Novruz, people purify themselves by jumping over streams and sprinkling one another with water. Another Novruz rite is to place 7 things—7 being a magic number—on a copper tray and leave it on the holiday table for 12 days as a gift to the sun. When Novruz eve arrives, relatives gather round the holiday table, and family graves are visited and tended. On this day people pay no visits and receive no guests. The holiday continues for several days, and ends with festive public dancing, music, and sports contests.

## Cuisine

Azerbaijani cuisine resembles that of Georgia and Armenia while at the same time reflecting Central Asian influence. Popular dishes include kebab, rice pilaf with almonds and sesame seeds, plov (steamed rice with onions, prunes, spices, and lamb chunks fried in butter), dovga (yogurt boiled with rice, peas, onion, cress, fennel, and spinach), and dolma (grape leaves stuffed with minced lamb, rice, onion, and chopped greens). Tea is served with cardamom, ginger, and other spices. There are also various special pastries and candies. At Nauruz it is customary to fry wheat with nuts and raisins.

