

**Committee: Security Council**

**Issue: The Question of the Separatist Movement in South Ossetia**

**Student Officer: Evangelos Tasios**

**Position: Deputy President**

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## PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

Dear Delegates,

My name is Evangelos Tasios and I will be serving as one of the Deputy Presidents of this year's DSTMUN Security Council. This conference will be my first as a Student Officer and I am glad to have such an interesting subject debated on.

The United Nations is an organization, which seeks to find solutions to the World's most important problems peacefully and diplomatically, especially when referring to the Security Council. As such, debating, cooperating and compromising will be essential towards achieving that goal. However, to facilitate this, you should be properly prepared. I hope that this study guide will introduce you to the topic and help you conduct your own research.

Should you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact me via e-mail at [evaggelost@outlook.com](mailto:evaggelost@outlook.com). I wish you a fruitful and thorough research and I am looking forward to meeting you all in November!

## TOPIC INTRODUCTION

With the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, major changes in international borders were put in effect in the former Soviet territory, with many ethnic groups wishing to be independent. However, in some cases, cultural borders overlapped, causing many disputes and conflicts between the nascent states. A notable example is the case of the area of South Ossetia which, while incorporated in the state of Georgia, is consisted mainly of Ossetians, a culture group descended from a mixture of the ancient Iranian nomadic tribes that have a different ethnic background to that of the Georgians, leading to the violent clashes of 1989 and 2008. Thus, the question of the political status of South Ossetia has arisen, which would need to be answered in order for peace and prosperity to be restored in the troubled region.

## DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

### Separatism

“The belief held by people of a particular race, religion, or other group within a country that they should be independent and have their own government or in some way live apart from other people”.<sup>1</sup>

### Autonomy

The term autonomy is defined as “the right of an organization, country, or region to [...] govern itself”.<sup>2</sup> However, unlike independence, autonomy doesn’t exclude having to answer to a higher political entity on some issues.

### Independence

“Freedom from being governed or ruled by another country”.<sup>3</sup>

### Recognition

“Acknowledgement of the existence, validity, or legality of something”.<sup>4</sup>

### Conflict

“Fighting between two or more groups of people or countries”.<sup>5</sup>

### Self-Determination

The United Nations defines self-determination as the right to “freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development”.<sup>6</sup>

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### Geopolitical Location of South Ossetia

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<sup>1</sup>"SEPARATISM | Meaning In The Cambridge English Dictionary". *Dictionary.Cambridge.Org*, 2019, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/separatism> .

<sup>2</sup>"AUTONOMY | Meaning In The Cambridge English Dictionary". *Dictionary.Cambridge.Org*, 2019, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/autonomy>. Accessed 20 June 2019.

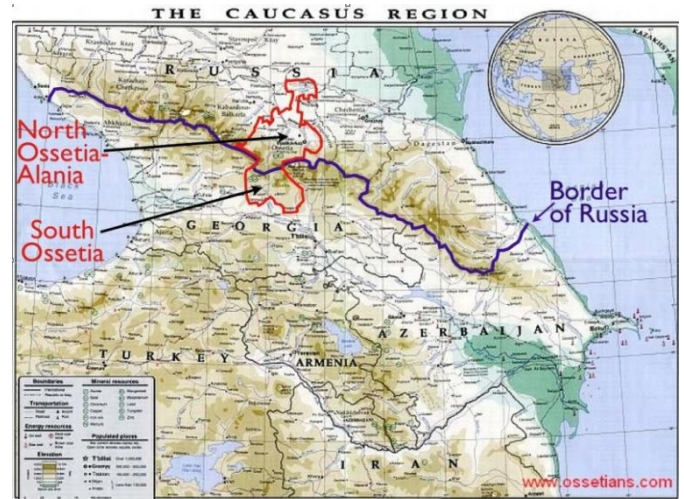
<sup>3</sup>"INDEPENDENCE | Meaning In The Cambridge English Dictionary". *Dictionary.Cambridge.Org*, 2019, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/independence> .

<sup>4</sup>"Recognition | Definition Of Recognition In English By Lexico Dictionaries". *Lexico Dictionaries | English*, 2019, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/recognition>.

<sup>5</sup>"CONFLICT | Meaning In The Cambridge English Dictionary". *Dictionary.Cambridge.Org*, 2019, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/conflict>

<sup>6</sup>"OHCHR | International Covenant On Civil And Political Rights". *Ohchr.Org*, 1966, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CCPR.aspx>.

South Ossetia is a landlocked region located on the southern slopes of the Greater Caucasian Mountain range, in the crossroad between Europe and Asia. It borders the Republic of Georgia to the south and the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania, a part of the Russian Federation, to the north. While it is just about 4.000 square meters with an approximate population of around 60.000, the region, sitting at 1.000 meters above sea level, has much geopolitical importance. This is because it encompasses the “Caucasian Gates”, from which one of the most important roads for traversing the mountain range passes. Also, with the recent boom of the Caucasian energy market, South Ossetia’s position in the center of the region has become even more important.



**Geographical map of the Caucasus showing South and North Ossetia**

**From antiquity to the Soviet era**

The origin of the Ossetians can be traced back many centuries. They are descendants of an ancient Caucasian-Iranian tribe, the Sarmatians (later known as Alans), who roamed the steppes of Eastern Europe from classical antiquity up until the Gothic and Hunnic invasions, forcing many of them to retreat to the Caucasus, where they became known as the Alans. These groups soon centralized and formed the medieval kingdom of Alania, functioning as a buffer state between the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire, Khazaria and the Arabian Caliphate. Due to their close ties with the Byzantines, they adopted Christianity and some Alan princesses were even married to the imperial family. However, the kingdom was destroyed by the Mongol and Timurid invasions of the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century, forcing the remaining Alans to flee to modern day North and South Ossetia, with the latter being controlled at the time by the Kingdom of Georgia. There they became known as the Ossetes, a name derived from the Georgian name for them, “Osi”. The region remained fragmented until the Russian Tsardom



**The Middle East and Caucasus in the Middle Ages**



**Soviet sub-states of the Caucasus**

annexed both regions from 1751 up until 1801. This annexation, however, benefited the region, with the construction of a railway and the opening of many factories. The region remained stable under Russian control until the October Revolution of 1917, when the Georgians declared independence from Russia. However, their independence was short-lived. The new Soviet regime soon invaded and absorbed the region into the Union, with alleged help from the Ossetians. The new Soviet regime signaled the creation of the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast within the Georgian SSR, with North Ossetia being absorbed to the Russian SSR.

### **Conflict of 1989-1992**

During the Soviet era, Georgians and Ossetians coexisted peacefully, but as the Union began crumbling, tensions started rising. In 1989, when the South Ossetian government requested to be elevated from an autonomous oblast to an autonomous republic, the Georgians reacted by enforcing the Georgian language as the only official language throughout Georgia (including the oblast) and banning the regional political parties from participating in the 1990 elections. As a result, the South Ossetians declared the South Ossetian Democratic Republic, which was to be an autonomous region within the Soviet Union, as well as boycotting the Georgian elections, by electing instead their own government. Things escalated when Zviad Gamsakhurdia, a prominent Georgian nationalist, who was elected president of Georgia, decided to move against South Ossetia to strip them completely of their autonomy, claiming that the Ossetians were “newcomers” to the region and had therefore no right to autonomy. Conflict erupted in the region from late 1990 until the spring of 1991, when Soviet Interior Troops arrived and partly stabilized the region. During the violent conflict, both sides committed many atrocities and despite the Soviet intervention, tensions were still high. However, the fall of the nationalist government in Georgia allowed for a compromise to be reached in cooperation with Russia. In the Agreement of Sochi, a ceasefire was agreed upon; leaving South Ossetia mostly independent, while some territory was still occupied by Georgian troops, meaning that the breakaway state’s status was not determined. Additionally, a tripartite peacekeeping force consisted of Russian, Georgian and South Ossetian soldiers was created.

### **Events from 1993 to 2002**

Shortly after, in 1993, South Ossetia drafted its own constitution making the breakaway state, which had voted in favor of independence in an unrecognized referendum in 1992, a republic. Soon, in 1996, the first South Ossetian president was elected with minimal international recognition and entered in subsequent negotiations which were not able to put an end to the conflict. In 2001, South Ossetia organized once again elections, which were again not recognized internationally. Soon, the newly elected Eduard Kokoity in one of his statements

asked Moscow to recognize the republic's independence and absorb it into Russia. Additionally, in December of the same year, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe attempted to solve the issue by sending grants to collect and destroy any weapons. In October of 2003 negotiations hosted by the OSCE in The Hague failed to reach a consensus.

#### **Georgian “Rose Revolution” and the subsequent events of 2004**

In 2003, the so-called “Rose Revolution” took place in Georgia, as a result of the corruption of the Georgian government which had brought the country into economic stagnation, instability and poverty. The peaceful revolution was named after the roses that the demonstrators were holding, with which they managed to make president Shevardnadze, who was accused of rigging the recent elections, step down and resign. The following year, new elections took place and Mikhail Saakashvili became the new president of Georgia. Upon his election, Saakashvili declared his intention to reintegrate South Ossetia, Abkhazia and Ajaria back into Georgia, along with combatting corruption. One of his measures was setting up a series of checkpoints in the Ergneti market, a major smuggling point and a source of income for the region. However, because he did not ask permission to open them from the peacekeeping forces, as stated in the Sochi agreement, the Russian peacekeeping force commander threatened to dismantle them, inciting a standoff with the 300 Georgian Interior Ministry soldiers who were sent there. The locals became suspicious that the Georgians wanted to intervene militarily. As a response, in a move to appease them, the Georgian president reassured them of his peaceful intentions and promised to rebuild the railroad connecting the region with the rest of Georgia and even a television station broadcasting in South Ossetian.

#### **Consequences of the international recognition of Kosovo**

The declaration of Kosovo’s independence incited once again the desires of South Ossetians for independence. Soon, they declared that, as Kosovo had exercised its right to self-determination and had declared independence from Serbia, South Ossetia had the same right. They also referred to the results of the 2006 referendum, which was almost unanimously in favor of independence, stating that it should be recognized immediately. As such, they pleaded to the international community to recognize them as independent and sovereign from the Republic of Georgia, as, according to the president of the breakaway state, Eduard Kokoity, the country had “all the necessary requirements and attributes of a democratic and law-based sovereign state”, while “coexistence [with Georgia was] impossible”.

#### **Conflict of August 2008**

As a result of Kokoity's provocative statement, as well as the general distrust of the two communities, the tensions reached their climax during the summer of 2008. Evidence, indicating the coming conflict, was apparent from June, in the form of minor skirmishes and bombings. The conflict started in August, but the identity of the aggressor differs from source to source. According to most sources, the conflict started when 15.000 Georgian soldiers invaded South Ossetia, supposedly in retaliation to some bombings in Georgian-controlled villages. Soon, the Georgian military pushed the Ossetians to the outskirts of Tskhinvali, while Russian reinforcements quickly came to the aid of the Ossetians, as the Georgians were not able to secure the Roki tunnel, the road connecting South and North Ossetia. The



**Russian Military Movements during Russo-Georgian War, August 2008**

The Russians initially joined the war, in order to restore the status quo set by previous treaties and honor their status as peacekeepers, but their motives seemed to change during the conflict. Additionally, Russian bombers bombed Georgian villages, military bases, railways and government buildings and according to some sources even civilian vehicles, while the Russian Black Sea fleet blockaded Georgian ports. Moreover, Abkhazia joined the conflict, in assistance to the Ossetians. As a result, the Georgians were forced to retreat from Tskhinvali, while the Russians advanced to the town of Gori. The Georgian government, seeing their whole operation failing, called for a ceasefire, which Moscow accepted after pressure from the governments of the USA and the UK. The peace plan, composed by French president Nicolas Sarkozy in association with the Russian leaders, was finally signed on August 12<sup>th</sup> after some minor alterations. The war resulted in hundreds of fatalities from both military personnel and civilians, of which 412 were Georgians, 365 Ossetians and 67 Russians. However, the number of displaced citizens was even greater; more than 80.000 people became refugees, of which about 20.000 have yet to return.

**Russian-South Ossetian relationships**

It is indisputable that the Russians have been the main ally of the Ossetians all these years and that North Ossetia, a member of the Russian Federation, is their closest "relative" state. As such, their countries are very closely tied, with Russia

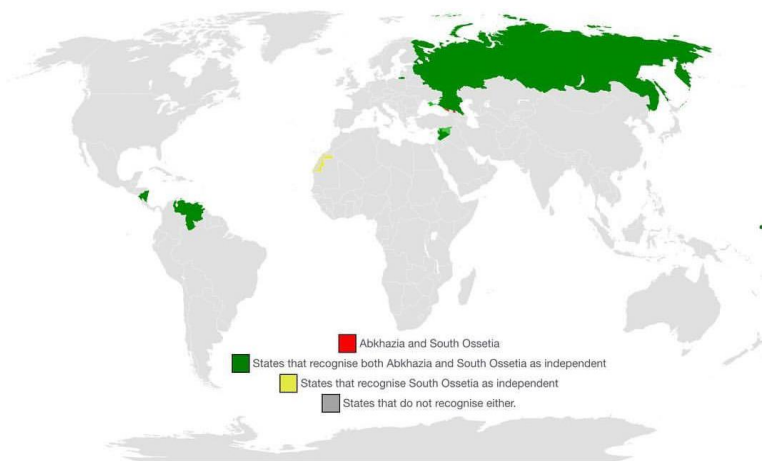
providing the majority of the budget of South Ossetia, mainly in the form of subsidies. Also, a major construction spree was completed using Russian funds, while Russia is the biggest export and import partner. As a result of these close relations, there have been many attempts of the Ossetian side to unite with North Ossetia-Alania and be absorbed into the Russian Federation. This process of integration seems to accelerate every year with the recent agreements of 2015 and 2017 (Treaty of Alliance and Integration), which in fact combines the South Ossetian military and economy with the Russian, resulting in annexation in all but name.

### The Situation of South Ossetia in 2019

The area, ravaged by war, even ten years after the 2008 conflict is still not able to be self-sufficient and support its population. The state is very poor, almost completely dependent on Russian subsidies and imports all kinds of Russian goods from food products to electricity, gas and even water. Also, anyone in search of higher education must travel to Russia. As per the local infrastructure, despite some recent Russian attempts to develop the region (new university, new pipeline, etc.), it is mainly destroyed or obsolete, with most factories being from the Soviet era and many public buildings still not usable after the war of 2008. This situation has led many South Ossetians to abandon their homes and move to North Ossetia, where the local economy is flourishing, thereby depopulating the already exhausted region.

### International recognition of South Ossetia

As of 2019, South Ossetia has been recognized by five UN countries; the Russian Federation, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the Republic of Nicaragua, the Republic of Nauru and more recently the Syrian Arab Republic. The first four recognized South Ossetia after the conflict of 2008, along with Tuvalu and the Republic of Vanuatu, which withdrew their recognition following the signing of some treaties with Georgia in 2011. Syria however, recognized South Ossetia just in 2018, with many believing to be a move to thank the Russians for their support in their conflict. Moreover, the breakaway state is recognized by other non-recognized states like Abkhazia and the Sahrawi Arab Republic.



**International recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia**

**War crimes committed by both sides**

It is undeniable that both sides have committed many war crimes throughout the decades that this conflict spans. Firstly, the Georgians claimed that the Russians, while assisting the South Ossetians in 2008, forced dozens of Georgian civilians to



**Ethnic Composition of the area during the Soviet era**

abandon their -later burnt- houses and bombed unprotected civilian areas. The Georgian government even appealed to the International Criminal Court (ICC) in Strasbourg. Yet, the Ossetians claim that such actions have been committed by the Georgians as well. Ethnic cleansing and genocide is claimed to have taken place against Ossetians living in the rest of Georgia. These presumed cases of ethnic cleansing along with the refugee flows to

North Ossetia and the rest of Georgia changed the cultural composition of the areas drastically, homogenizing the controlled area of both sides.

**Other Georgian breakaway states (Abkhazia, Ajaria)**

Apart from South Ossetia, there have been two other separatist cases in Georgia. The first one is Ajaria, located near the Georgian border with Turkey. The area is populated by predominantly Muslim Georgians, the Ajars, as historically the area was a part of the Ottoman Empire until it was annexed by the Russian Tsardom. Around the same time as South Ossetia, Ajaria showed similar separatist tendencies, but the dispute with Georgia was resolved in 2004, when the area was designated as an autonomous



**Location of the three Georgian breakaway states**

republic of Georgia (2000) and the separatist leadership was exiled. The other breakaway state is Abkhazia, along the northern Black Sea border with Russia. The Abkhazians have been striving for independence for the same time



as South Ossetia and have been as closely tied to Russia as the Ossetians, fighting by their side in conflicts against Georgia like the one of 2008. They are recognized by the same five UN countries as South Ossetia.

## **MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED**

### **Georgia**

The Republic claims that South Ossetia was artificially created by the Soviet Union and should remain a part of Georgia as it always has. The government condemns the Russian actions and demands that all Russian forces withdraw from internationally recognized Georgian territory. However, Georgia is open to compromise, proposing to give autonomy to the Ossetians, even in a federal structured state.

### **Russian Federation**

Russia is one of the few countries that recognize South Ossetia. It has signed multiple treaties of alliance and integration with the breakaway state and is supporting the republic both economically and militarily. The Russian government claims that the South Ossetians, by declaring independence, are just practicing their right to self-determination, while pointing at Kosovo as an example for South Ossetia.

### **French Republic**

The French Republic has been one of the most active non-directly involved countries in this conflict. It has acted on many occasions as a mediator in reconciliation attempts and has also been fundamental in the signing of the ceasefire that brought the conflict of August 2008 to a stalemate.

### **People's Republic of China (PRC)**

The People's Republic of China, while it does not officially recognize South Ossetia's independence, it supports them economically, in an attempt to secure its economic interests in the Caucasus region. Due to the lack of regulation in the region, China has been able to exert its economic influence, with minimal reaction from both the Russians and the Europeans, who do not consider China to pose a threat to their strategic interests.

### **North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)**

NATO perceives the situation in Georgia as a Russian attempt to exert its influence in the Caucasus. For this reason, it does not recognize South Ossetia and calls on Russia to respect Georgian national integrity and reverse its recognition of the breakaway states.

### European Union (EU)

The European Union has strong ties with Georgia, especially after the 2016 EU Georgia Association Agreement, after which their relations have become cordial. As such, the EU supports the territorial integrity of Georgia, criticizing Russia and refusing to recognize the breakaway states (South Ossetia included). However, the EU supports the current status quo and is willing to mediate talks between the opposing parties in order to find a peaceful solution to this issue.

### TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Date	Description of event
1237-40	The Mongol invasion causes the Ossetian migration from Russia to the North-Caucasian Mountains.
18 <sup>th</sup> -19 <sup>th</sup> Century	Russian expands into the Caucasus, and absorbs both Georgia and Ossetia into the Russian Tsardom.
26 <sup>th</sup> May 1918	The Georgians declare their independence after the October Revolution.
1921-1922	The Red Army invades and integrates Georgia with possible assistance from the Ossetians. The South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast is created (April 1922).
1989-1991	South Ossetia demands more autonomy and later secession, leading to violent clashes with the Georgians.
1992	In an internationally unrecognized referendum, South Ossetians vote for independence. Many die in sporadic violence, until June, when an armistice is signed between the Russians, Georgians and South Ossetians. A tripartite peacekeeping force is created.
November 1996, December 2001	South Ossetia conducts unrecognized presidential elections and asks Russia to recognize and absorb them into their

	Federation.
2003	The Georgian “Rose Revolution” takes place against corruption.
2004	Newly elected Georgian president Mikhail Saakashvili announces his intentions to re-absorb the breakaway states of Abkhazia, Ajaria and South Ossetia
2006	Another unrecognized referendum takes place, with the vast majority of South Ossetia’s voting once more for independence. The Georgian minority votes to stay with Georgia.
October 2007	The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe hosts talks between Georgia and South Ossetia, which ultimately break down in October.
March 2008	Following the West's support for the independence of Kosovo, South Ossetia calls for its independence to be recognized as well.
April 2008	South Ossetians reject a power-sharing deal from Georgia, insisting on full independence.
August 2008	Fighting begins between Georgian and South Ossetian forces.
12 <sup>th</sup> August 2008	The Plan of 12 August 2008 is signed.
26 <sup>th</sup> August 2008	The Russian parliament recognizes both South Ossetia and Abkhazia in response to Georgia's request to join NATO

## RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

### Sochi Agreement (1992)

This was the Agreement that essentially ended the 1992 conflict. Also, the conflict region was decided to be demilitarized, as well as tripartite Georgian Russian and Ossetian peacekeeping force was formed.

### Memorandum of May 1996

The Memorandum was a subsequent result of the agreement of Sochi. It tried to tackle the many problems caused by the 1992 conflict, like refugees and the

economic decline, while also reaffirming the Sochi agreement and giving more clarifications about the demilitarized zone and the peacekeeping forces.

### **Plan of 12 August 2008**

Like the Sochi agreement, the Plan of 12 August 2008 signaled ultimately the end of the 2008 conflict. The main points of the plan were the withdrawal of Russian forces from Georgia and the withdrawal of Georgian forces out of the disputed area. Additionally, an international observation mechanism was established, and an international discussion on a permanent solution to the issue was set to take place in October of the same year.

## **PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE**

There have been some attempts to solve this issue, but unfortunately, very few were accepted by both sides and then implemented. Notable examples are the following:

### **Plan of 12 August 2008**

The Medvedev-Sarkozy plan discussed the withdrawal of Russian forces from the region and the establishment of an international observation mechanism monitored by the UN and the EU. It was reaffirmed in September of the same year but is yet to be implemented fully.

### **Talks in October 2007**

Hosted by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the negotiations between Georgia, South Ossetia and the Russian Federation were close to reaching common ground but ultimately broke down.

## **POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS**

There are two general solutions which could be agreed upon by both parties. Firstly, a degree of autonomy could be given to South Ossetia in a federal Georgian state as proposed by Georgia. Secondly, full independence could be given to the breakaway state. The first option would mean that South Ossetia becomes once more a part of Georgia but has many special rights and fair representation in the government. The second option will result in Georgia abandoning every claim to the region of South Ossetia, thereby recognizing the state as independent. There are other options as well, like the incorporation of Ossetia into the Russian Federation and a union with the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania. It would be very unlikely for

this option to be accepted by any state other than the Russian Federation. Similarly, the possibility of reincorporating South Ossetia to Georgia with partial or minimal autonomy is an option both Russia and South Ossetia refuse to even see discussed. Finally, there is always the choice of the preservation of the status quo accompanied by the extension of the mandate of UN peace-keeping forces and the withdrawal of all other forces from the area.

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