DE FACTO STATES
a World Report
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Presentation

IGADI presents its first World Report on de facto States, which intends to regularly monitor these new figures on the international scene that reflect the emergence, and even consolidation, of those subjects, up to now marginal and totally fenced-in within the world order. Now such subjects usually appear in privileged positions on the global agenda whether directly (Russia-Georgia War) or indirectly (piracy in Somalia), displaying a strong impact capability.

In addition, we provide fact sheets for each of these de facto States, which have been chosen upon compliance with a series of common elements. These fact sheets include a brief analysis, momentary diagnoses, which both point out the clues that determine their present state and include specific alerts concerning vectors that may anticipate the appearance of serious crisis on the horizon.

This report tries to bring together some of the activities of IGADI’s Research Program on International System’s Security, Conflicts, and Alternatives, a usual work space for some of the contributors to this document.

We would like to thank all the authors for their contributions, since without their generosity and rigorousness, it would have been impossible to carry out this Report.
Introduction

With the expression “de facto States” (DFS), following Scott Pegg’s denomination, we designate those secessionist entities which receive popular support and have achieved sufficient capacity to provide governmental services to a defined population within a defined territory. A de facto State has effectively controlled this territory for a prolonged period of time. We could add certain degrees of international recognition to this definition, nevertheless always excluding the UN. Therefore, we are facing factual realities similar to States which, however, cannot be formally defined as “whole” States since they lack effective, widespread, juridical acknowledgment.

Within DFS we can identify very different situations. For instance, in contrast with Taiwan, one of the biggest commercial powers in the world in spite of its small dimensions, we can point out other realities that stand out for their absolute fragility, such as Palestine. Even when sharing the common denominator of a conflict involving a pre-existing State, their origins may vary too - some of them are related to the Cold War, others to the end of a bipolar world, or maybe to the defective ending of decolonization processes.

The greatest majority of these DFS survive in extremely harsh conditions. In these days, characterized by globalization and growing interdependence, their inner context is that of complex survival, sometimes overwhelmed by mere autarky in spite of regular support by some protector allied State, often insufficient to fulfill their integration needs, avoided in pursuit of caution. Nevertheless, some DFS seem to enjoy more statehood than other UN recognized states -Taiwan in comparison to Somalia, for example.

On the other hand, we should not observe the different performances of the international community’s main actors as uniform. For instance, US and EU attitudes clearly differ from those of Russia or China in the cases of Kosovo or South Ossetia. These differences are often due to powerful strategic interests.

Although limited, the number of DFS cases and their impact should not be underestimated - let us think of the impact of increasing tensions in Taiwan Strait or in Transcaucasia, as we witnessed in the war between Russia and Georgia (Summer 2008). Despite their peripheral condition within the system, DFSs can still show a great potential impact.

Thus, we shouldn't ignore the DFS problematic. Obviously they are not sovereign States, nor can we tackle their situation using the same standard instruments. What we need are new
strategies, acknowledging their tendency to prevail, in opposition to their initially believed temporary nature. A soft attitude won’t be a constructive approach to the conflict, neither will it lead towards its resolution. The prevalence of entities such as UNPO (Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization, www.unpo.org), points out the actual existence of a phenomenon that should be solved by the international community through peaceful and democratic means. This would avoid eventual security or humanitarian crises, so difficult to solve.

DFSs alert us to the existence of formally complex intra-state conflicts, for which there are no easy answers. Conflicts that should be included in a structurally ever-changing world, where territorial secession episodes are combined with other conflictive scenarios that show signs of blurring, considerably ephemeral boundaries and still uncertain shapes.

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Bibliography


Abkhazia: walking towards Russian assimilation?

The Republic of Abkhazia, declared independent in 1992, had to wait up to 16 years to be recognized by an official State according International Law. Yet, this recognition was only done by the Russian Federation - and only in order to bother Georgia - as well as other countries showing their support to Russia, such as Venezuela and Nicaragua. Some of them even did it to win Russia’s indulgence. This is the case of Nauru, which is said to have obtained up to $50 million in aid in exchange for the recognition.

Not even Belarusian President, Alexander Lukashenko, answered Moscow’s request, although this might have compromised his country’s privileged Russian gas tariffs - he just sent a delegation of their Parliament members to check “if Abkhazia was really independent”.

This country has an extension of 8,600 km² and only 216,000 inhabitants. Its ability to form an independent State has very little credit among the international community. Abkhazia emerged in the wake of Soviet Union’s disintegration, mostly due to Abkhazian people’s concern about Georgia’s separatist tendencies, which generated great uneasiness among the population. Due to its former status as Autonomous Republic within Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic, it has historical, economic, and cultural reasons both to continue sharing Georgia’s fate or to reject coexistence, as well.

A strong secessionist identity

From an ethno-linguistic point of view, Abkhazians are related with North Caucasian Cherkesians (Circassians), though their historic development related them to the Transcaucasian region. They share a rich history that dates back to the ancient Greek colonies. Abkhazia belonged to the Colchian Kingdom during the middle of the first millennium BC, and, later, to the Eastern Roman Empire until the 8th century. After liberation from the Byzantine domain, the Abkhazian Kingdom was established, spreading within West Georgia and thus allowing the entrance of Georgian population to its territory.

The Kingdom actively participated in the struggle for Georgian reunification. The Georgian State was considered as the “Kingdom of Abkhazians and Kartvelians (Georgians)”. The Abkhazian Catholic Church, initially dependent upon the Byzantine church of Constantinople, integrated itself into Georgian Church, which introduced the prevailing use of Georgian language not only in religious ceremonies but also in official and cultural spheres.
After the feudal Georgian State’s disintegration, Abkhazia became an independent principality, but was conquered by the Otoman Empire in the last quarter of the 16th century, yet kept its autonomy and stood up against islamization. Several uprisings against Turkish control took place in 1725, 1728, 1733, 1771, and 1806.

Eventually, Abkhazia’s rulers asked the Russian Empire for protection. Abkhazia’s Prince swore loyalty to the Russian Emperor in 1810. Some 54 years later, Russia abolished the Principality’s self-government, and even its mere existence, since, according to the then Caucasus Governor M. Románov “Instead of a grateful ally, Russia has found in Abkhazia a rebellious and treacherous slave, ready to welcome any of our enemies appearing on its coasts with open arms”.

This loss of autonomy was the cause of the 19th century’s most important Abkhazian uprising, which occurred in 1866. Their defeat led to a massive exodus towards Turkey, named muhayir. The Abkhazian people are considered to have lost 40% of its population by the end of 19th century due to war casualties, exodus, and reprisals.

Russia, in turn, promoted the territory’s repopulation with orthodox Christians, Russians, Ukrainians, and even Armenians and Greeks previously settled in Turkey, as well as Lutheran Estonians and Germans. Of course nothing prevented the massive influx of Georgian neighbors.

After the 1917 Revolution, the Abkhazian national movement joined the Confederation of the Mountain People of the Caucasus, which counted with members from Ciscaucasia too. But eventually the independent, social-democratic Government of Georgia, together with soviet authorities, compelled Abkhazia towards an autonomous status within the Georgian Republic. Georgia justified this by arguing that Abkhazians lacked sufficient national development to form their own independent State.

The Abkhazian language did not have its own writing system until the 19th century, actually. Abkhazian literature and press first appeared in the second decade of the 20th century.

Similar to all peoples under the Russian Empire’s rule, Abkhazian people experimented a national boom both in their culture and economy during the first two decades of soviet domination. Nevertheless, everything considered “nationalist” -and, therefore, Anti-Soviet- by Moscow rulers would be suppressed and suffered strong political reprisals from the mid-1930s on. During Stalin’s purges, Abkhazia virtually lost all its intellectuals and political leaders.

Together with this process of “suppression of national differences” -imposed in all regions within the former USSR- which turned the country into a mere region within the Russian State, as well, the country was forced to integration within the Georgian national community. In order to make education easier, schools became totally Georgian. Until then, Abkhaz had been used
in the first stages (grades I up to IV), and Russian in the secondary ones (grades V to X). Abkhazian toponymy was substituted by Georgian ones, and migration policies encouraged Georgian immigration. Anti-Georgian demonstrations took place during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. In 1989, these culminated in armed confrontations.

Within this context, Abkhazia didn’t take part in Georgia’s independence referendum. Once Georgia abolished all laws from the Soviet period, Abkhazia restored their 1925 Constitution, which established a nominally non-autonomous Republic. In July 1992 the eventual declaration of independence originated a bloody battle that ended with the expulsion of Georgian troops from nearly all of the Abkhazian territory in 1994. This was achieved with the indirect help of Russia. North Caucasus and other region’s volunteers were also on Abkhazia’s side.

Subsequently, an agreement was signed in Moscow the same year. The agreement increased Abkhazia’s autonomy within the Georgian State and called for stationing a peace force from the Commonwealth of Independent States (actually, Russian forces) and a United Nations Observer Mission in the conflict area. Abkhazia turned down the proposals for limited autonomy within the Georgian State, since, with Russia’s unconditional support, the region felt strong enough as to reject any Georgian attempt to recover its control over the territory. Thus, and, in spite of not having achieved international recognition, Abkhazia complies with the essential conditions for Statehood, even showing its democratic nature in the 2004 and 2009 elections.

Almost totally ruled by Moscow

Apart from the fact of Abkhazia being a region where Russia’s and the West’s clash from a global point of view, with western countries supporting Georgia, this new country has not achieved international recognition as an independent one. It is difficult to believe in its independence if we take into account that nearly 90% of Abkhazians chose to obtain Russian citizenship due to, among other things, the fact that Abkhazian passports are of no use at all – not even to grant their entrance to those countries that have recognized Abkhazia’s independence.

The real results of independence have been catastrophic: armed conflicts and instability have caused the loss of half of the Republic’s population: from a 525,061 census in 1989, to 239,872 in 2003 -losses including both casualties and exiled people. The Georgian population suffered an ethnic cleansing, with their population decreasing 80%. Nevertheless, other ethnic groups have seen their populations decrease too: 69% of the Russians, 41% of the Armenians and 89% of the Greeks. This has made Abkhazians the biggest ethnic group, notwithstanding, they still do not achieve half of the total population -just up to 44%. Abkhaz language, in turn, has been granted an official status, but Russian is used as the institutional language. This has restricted the use of Abkhaz, still regarded as an endangered language.
The economic situation seems to be better than the Georgian one, with wages four times higher. Nevertheless, economic activities are limited to two main branches. On the one hand, tourism on the Black Sea Coast, which attracted 800 thousand tourists in 2009, mainly Russians. On the other hand, growth and exportation of citrus fruits, which makes up to 35% of total export revenues. Economic dependence on Russia is almost total – 90% of foreign sales are destined to Russia. Russian currency, the ruble, constitutes the official means of payment. Money transfers to retired Russian citizens have a great importance. Turkey constitutes another outstanding foreign economic partner. Descendants of the muhayir (immigrants) that left Abkhazia in the 19th century still live there, their number being even bigger than the current population in Abkhazian territory.

With the exception of retail trade of semi-finished wood, and agricultural products, the main part of Abkhazian economy is still going through a depression, not achieving those levels of the 1980’s due to the loss of markets. Joint cooperation programs with Russia are being carried out in order to restore both overland and marine transportation, which virtually turns road building and fuel transport sectors into a Russian monopoly.

After 2008’s declaration of independence, military cooperation with Russia (2009 agreements on joint boundary protection and settlement of a Russian military base started in 2010 and planned to stand 49 years) proves that the defense of Abkhazia is included within the area of responsibility of Russia’s defense force and obeys exclusively Russian law. Thus, Abkhazia’s administrative boundaries have become a Russian protectorate in the eyes of Georgia, preventing any direct interventions by Georgia in this area which lies within its territory.

As a way out for this conflict, Georgia intends to offer Abkhazia greater autonomy levels, including its presence in all Georgian central governmental institutions, with the right of veto in all decisions concerning the autonomous territory. All on the condition that Russian troops withdraw, which has made the offer unacceptable for Abkhazia. But this is actually what suppresses Abkhazia’s real independence and the possibility of its recognition, since most of the international community recognizes Georgia’s national sovereignty. For instance, on March 12th 2010, the EU’s statement supporting Georgian initiatives reaffirmed “their commitment to the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognized borders”.

In a similar statement regarding presidential elections in Abkhazia, the European Union made clear the fact that it “does not recognize the constitutional and legal framework within which these elections have taken place”. Europe still regards the presence of Russian staff and troops in Abkhazia as a violation of one of the points of the 2008 agreement.

During the negotiations in Geneva, in which governmental delegates from Georgia, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Russia together with EU mediators, delegates from the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the United States took part,
security and humanitarian problems in the conflict areas were discussed, without any progress being made due to the incompatible positions of the parts involved. Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Russia want Georgia to sign an agreement with the secessionist regions to prevent the country’s use of violence. Georgia in turn argues that renouncing violence already figures in the 2008 agreement on armistice with Russia. This agreement also states that any further agreement must be signed with Moscow, not with the secessionists, since they are merely its protegés. This represents a serious obstacle to their permanence at the negotiations. Moreover, in sight of the EU’s tendency to favor Georgia, it also hinders the monitoring activities of the European mission within the territory.

In such conditions, Abkhazia will not be able to avoid gradual integration within Russia, which compromises its self independence and leads the region towards an accelerated assimilation. We cannot discard the possibility of conciliation with Georgia and thus national reconstruction within a broader autonomous framework. Nevertheless, this would require higher levels of political and humanitarian maturity, unfortunately not shown by any of the parts involved.

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Kosovo: towards a failed State?

Last February 17th, 2011, Kosovo celebrated the third anniversary of its proclamation of independence (2008). Since then, Kosovo has won the recognition of 75 countries including the US, and 22 EU member States out of the current 27 (with the exception of Spain, Greece, Romania, Slovakia and Bulgaria), as well as 53 other UN member countries. Kosovo’s intention is to legitimize its status as a nation State and become the 193rd UN member.

Nevertheless, the current panorama points to a worrisome future situation for this young State. Kosovo is still considered an “autonomous province” by Serbia, and has not yet been officially recognized by countries with a major influence in the international arena, such as China, Russia, Brazil, India, Iran, Mexico, or Argentina.

At the same time, foreign concerns -specially those of the UN and the EU- grow, both regarding the complex Kosovar political stability and the countless accusations of corruption and organized crime in collusion with highest political circles –which obviously also imply Prime Minister Hashim Thaçi’s performance.

Crime, mafias and political stability

The Council of Europe Rapporteur, Swiss magistrate Dicky Marty, made public a devastating report in December 2010, that had a profound impact in both Kosovo’s and international public opinion. This report accused the former guerrilla group Kosovo Liberation Army (UÇK in Gegg Albanian), led by Prime Minister Thaçi since 1988, of cooperation with drug trafficking and a network that extracted organs from Serbian prisoners which operated from Albania.

This report also informed of high corruption levels within the Kosovar Government, permeated by several mafia organizations that are turning Kosovo into a “failed State”, as US Ambassador in Pristina, Christopher Dell had pointed out.

Marty’s report depicts Thaçi as a “key actor” within mafia and organized crime in Kosovo, characterizing him as the “most powerful among UÇK’s crime Godfathers”. He also stated this “was already known by the NATO and other governments”. The accusations caused both Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly and the EU’s Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo,
EULEX, to request proofs of the truth of his accusations on Kosovo Government’s implication with crime and corruption. Even Serbian President, Boris Tadić, initially asked for an investigation and, eventually, for Thaçi’s appearance before international courts.

Apart from the scandal unleashed by this report, Kosovo’s political scene shows an unstable situation and certain doses of anarchy. The collapse in September 2010 of the coalition between the two main political parties, Thaçi’s Democratic Party (PDK) and the Democratic League caused the resignation of Fatmir Sejdiu, the first President of independent Kosovo. From then on, the presidency was held by UN-appointed Japuk Krasniqi, Chairman of the Assembly of Kosovo, the only existing Parliament in the country.

Later, last December 12th, 2010, the first legislative elections since its independence were denounced for alleged irregularities and electoral fraud. In these elections, the PDK obtained 34 of the 120 parliamentary seats.

Prime Minister Thaçi and the PDK tried to speed up negotiations in order to form a new Government together with the New Kosovo Alliance’s leader, Behgjet Pacolli, -reputed to be the richest person in the country- in order to find a way out for this political crisis. Nevertheless, and in spite of the fact of being the only Kosovar politician that ran for Presidency to take Sejdiu’s seat, he was facing accusations of corruption and dealing with the mafia.

The AAK obtained 12 seats in the last legislative elections, which led the PDK to begin negotiations to set up a Government. Other parties, such as the Democratic League of Kosovo (27 seats) and the Self-determination Party (14 seats) had already publicly stated their refusal to negotiate any political agreements to form a new Government with Thaçi.

Last February 22nd 2011, Kosovo Parliament’s appointment of Behgjet Pacolli as the new acting President gave rise to strong protests within the opposition parties, which eventually led to his own resignation on March 30th. On April 4th, Japuk Krasniqi took again the chair as acting President, but just three days after (April 7th), Atifete Jahjaga (the announced consensual candidate for the presidency by the Democratic League of Kosovo, the Democratic Party of Kosovo and the New Kosovo Alliance) was elected President of Kosovo.

Independence and international controversy

Whilst the political crisis pushes Kosovo towards instability, the perspective of the country’s independence still constitutes a source for strong controversy. Nevertheless, eight new countries recognized Kosovo’s independence in 2010, most probably due to US diplomatic efforts to gain international credit for the newly-formed State.
Kosovo is currently recognized by 75 UN members - only 39% of its members. Many countries keep waiting for a UN Security Council’s pronouncement to take their stance on Kosovo’s status. Nevertheless, Russia’s and China’s alleged vetoes are said to be stopping Kosovo’s aspirations of becoming a UN member.

The EU, in turn, is urging Kosovo authorities to resume dialogues and negotiations with Serbia in order to achieve an agreement on specific aspects of the current Kosovo status. For Brussels this is an essential condition to consolidate negotiations concerning Serbia’s accession to the EU. Nevertheless, the lack of a new Kosovar Government after ex-President Sejdiu’s resignation brought opportunities of negotiation with Belgrad to a standstill.

In view of this situation, the EU hasn’t sped up the visa liberalization process yet, with Kosovo being the only Balkan region that has not been granted this European recognition. A valid reason for such a fact could be that the liberalization of visas would encourage even more the traffic of Kosovar mafias towards Europe. Regarding communications, Kosovo still uses Serbian, Slovenian, and Monaco’s phone dialing codes, while Kosovar athletes continue to be banned from any participation in international competitions.

But the main focus of attention is still the controversy surrounding Kosovo’s unilateral declaration of independence in February 2008, specially regarding the legality of international agreements. At the UN General Assembly’s request, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued an advisory opinion on July 22nd, 2010. In it, the Court confirmed the legality of this declaration of independence, since “it doesn’t violate International Law” and represents an “unusual case”. This announcement, supported by the US, was rejected by Serbia and other countries contrary to Kosovo’s independence.

Dealing with economic crisis

We should also take into account how the impact of the economic crisis, and even the consequences of the Arab rebellion, which has led to the downfall of autocratic presidents in Tunisia and Egypt, could have an internal influence in the spreading of social and political discontent within Kosovo. At the end of January 2011, strong protests against rising food prices in neighboring Albania put Prime Minister Sali Berisha in a delicate situation.

In spite of the UN’s financial and logistic support, the socioeconomic situation in Kosovo is extremely complex. Kosovo is the poorest territory within Europe, with a per capita yearly income of around US$1,500. Its industrial sector is hardly relevant, very dependent on international aid, and the economic scene is dominated by mafias, illegal traffic of arms, people, and drugs. In some Kosovar regions, unemployment rates reach 40%.
Kosovo also lacks the physical infrastructure required for the viable functioning of a solid and effective State. Since 2007, the UN’s acting administration has been trying to encourage a political and administrative decentralization process, which currently faces serious problems regarding professional training, administration transparency, and the achievement of a framework for coexistence among the existing national minorities in Kosovo, specially the Serbians. Because of this, the UN’s intentions to set up an apparently non-viable “multi-ethnic democracy” have their difficulties.

Mining constitutes the only hope for Kosovo’s economic development, specially in view of the important coal, nickel, zinc, and gold reserves. But this hope dissolves due to the Government’s lack of political consistency, the uncertain climate, the power of mafia, and drug traffic, which bring Kosovo closer and closer to a “failed State” condition, undermining Washington’s credibility and that of all the states that recognize its independent status.

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In 1991, the Karabakh (Artsakh) people voted for their independence in a referendum, monitored by numerous international observers. Thus, the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic was proclaimed. This year 2011 will be its 20th anniversary.

The NKR has successfully developed its institutions in military, political, economic and social fields throughout these years as a non-recognized State. The clearly separated existence of Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh (NK) compels Karabakh leaders to pursue their full international recognition in order to consolidate the achievements in the constitution of their State.

In this sense, the prevalence of the status quo represents the worst of the best options. since it would not invalidate the mere fact of NKR’s separated existence. In turn, this imposed situation is the best of the worst options for Azerbaijan, since in spite of the NKR secession, it lacks the recognition of other states within the international community.

A de facto and democratic State

As an effort to point out their compliance with the basic conditions to be a full State to the international community, NKR authorities pay special attention and make use of democratic elections to conform their governmental institutions. After two terms as the NKR President, Arkadi Ghukasyan left his chairmanship in 2007. In 2004, an opposing representative became the mayor of NKR’s main city, Stepanakert. NKR leaders constantly claim that democracy levels in Nagorno Karabakh are much higher than those in Azerbaijan.

In spite of constant violations of the cease-fire, Karabakh’s Armenians carry on with the peaceful building of their democratic State, following international rules and standards, the most important being the holding of a constitutional referendum in 2006. Both this referendum as well as several presidential, parliamentary, and municipal elections have been acknowledged as democratic, free, and fair by several international observers, experts, and journalists.

Dozens of political parties, media, and NGOs operate in Artsakh. Also its market economy and national law comply with international rules. This reasserts NKR’s de facto State status. According to preliminary calculations, in 2010 the NKR’s GNP amounted to about US$320 mi-
llion, an increase of 9% compared to 2009. In 2010, 101,3% of the State budget was executed. All planned programs were implemented – wages, pensions, and benefits payments, governmental maintenance costs, support of several economic sectors, etc.

Statistics show that, in spite of the strong opposition by Baku authorities, international interest in Arstakh is constantly growing. According to the NKR Foreign Affairs Ministry Consular Services, 8,000 people visited Nagorno Karabakh in 2010 -30% more than in 2009. Apart from the visits from Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) citizens, the NKR received visits from political, cultural, and sports personalities, as well as businessmen and tourists from the European Union (EU), America, Africa, Asia, etc. There are many foreigners that visit the region regularly, encouraging the influx of travelers and spreading the NKR’s image into their countries of origin.

Both the visits of foreign authorities to NKR and the international visits of NKR representatives, as well as their international meetings with civil officials, prompt strong reactions from Azerbaijan authorities, which include complaint statements, declarations of persona non grata of those who have visited the NKR etc. As a result, the NKR demonstrates its international subjectivity, increasing the tension between Azerbaijan and those States (often very influential) whose representatives visited Nagorno Karabakh even more strained.

Between negotiations and return to an armed conflict

Nowadays, it is known that the NKR is represented in the negotiation process by the Republic of Armenia, which the NKR appointed as its representative. Nevertheless, all actors taking place in the peace process as well as the public sector, interested in a peaceful solution of the Azerbaijan-Karabakh conflict, must take into account that the final say belongs to the people and the NKR authorities.

Of course, fears of a sudden war outbreak are shared in Arstakh. This would have devastating, unprecedented consequences in the region. Tension at the front emerges as a result of the policy deliberately instrumented by Azerbaijan in the latest years. Soft attitudes shown by foreign negotiators and representatives are difficult to understand if we look towards the escalation of the military rhetoric and the increasing spirit of war in Azerbaijan. Of course, they should have strongly condemned Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev a long time ago, urging him to leave his policy of threats and to take a seat at the negotiation table together with the main part implied in the conflict -the Republic of Nagorno Karabakh. The strategy of making small concessions to the belligerent part does nothing but increase its aspirations.

A way out for this conflict will only be possible upon an agreement of both parts with the terms of the solution taking mutual interests into account. The opinions about the pros and
cons of an agreement differ completely within the political elites and societies of all parts involved. This can be observed in the internal political struggle in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Nagorno Karabakh.

The current situation demands the rapid implementation of measures of confidence, both in military and in social fields. The international community must establish direct relationships with the NKR. The NKR’s inclusion in international processes may be the only way for the international community to avoid an eventual armed conflict. The fact of continuing to ignore the NKR in favor of Azerbaijan does nothing but strengthen the latter country’s conviction of the legitimacy of a new aggression against the NKR.

The international community must not repeat the mistakes of the 1990’s, when the recognition of Azerbaijan’s rights to self-determination while ignoring those of the NKR was interpreted as a carte blanche to launch a large-scale aggression against this territory, destroying its people’s expressed will.

Nowadays, there is only one evident fact recognizable: the Nagorno Karabakh conflict, in its current form, cannot be exclusively solved neither in a peaceful nor in a military way. Azerbaijan will never recognize Nagorno Karabakh’s independence, and Armenia will never surrender Nagorno Karabakh to Azerbaijan jurisdiction, no matter how much the CIS, the UN, or all international and regional organizations discuss the situation.

In this case, the problem stems, not so much as a solution to antagonist positions of Bakú and Yerevan, but as the complete incompatibility of the very principles of modern International Law, that is to say, the recognition of the inviolability of the boundaries of a State (actually, a redundant matter), and the right of all nations to self-determination. Recent examples of quasi-independence achievements such as Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Kosovo eloquently confirm such facts.

Fears about time’s passage benefiting one of the two parts led Azerbaijan authorities to try to speed up Karabakh’s process: as time passes by, generations change, prospects of Karabakh’s return to Azerbaijan decrease, and authorities do not keep their promises.

Within this framework, Azerbaijan’s war rhetoric does nothing but exacerbate the feeling of an irrevocable loss. Nagorno Karabakh may not win a new armed confrontation, but an uncertain result of this armed conflict would not mean a defeat either. In turn, any result of Azerbaijan’s military actions -independently of gaining control over Nagorno Karabakh’s territory or not- would mean not only a military defeat, but also a political one. It would imply terrible consequences for the political spheres in power, which have already sparked off public outcry and revenge feelings within their own population.
The role of foreign actors

Foreign actors’ participation is one of the most important factors in the dynamics of this conflict. Their interests, and more importantly, the outcome of an eventual agreement, will be determined by their strategical ambitions -both at geopolitical and economic levels. The different stances of the countries involved are made up of a complex network of relationships, both with the conflicting parts and among themselves, within the regional and international context. Thus, changes undergone in the attitudes of the involved countries caused by global and regional dynamics can be observed.

The usual intercession of foreign powers in Karabakh’s conflict is accomplished by means of negotiations with influential regional and international actors. Today, the process is exclusively carried on by the OSCE Minsk Group. Karabakh’s conflict is the only ethnopolitical conflict within the post-Soviet territory. After ceasefire, stability at the battlefront and a relative truce are kept without foreign aid, with no need for peacekeeping forces from third countries or international organizations.

If we consider the possibility of an externally-enforced agreement and an international peace force, one should take into account both the scene’s complexity caused by differing positions within the international community regarding regional processes in South Caucasus and this conflict’s minor impact worldwide.

We should also consider the technical complexity of an eventual peace force to impose peace in the conflict area. Theoretically, if some of the parts involved in the Karabakh conflict resumed hostilities, or the situation of the population in the territory worsened dramatically (humanitarian crisis), an international peace operation could be carried out under the auspices of the UN, the OSCE, the EU, the NATO, or the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).

Thus, probabilities for an external imposition of a solution or peace enforcement within the Karabakh conflict area are few. The international community does not always get involved in all conflicts requiring a solution. Intervention is much more likely to be carried out by means of political pressure of world or regional powers whose interests in the conflict area are at stake, ready to provide military troops and lead operations. Furthermore, the execution of these operations depends on the results of an assessment of possible short-term solutions.

We should not exaggerate the international community’s willingness for giving military aid if armed actions continue. This is an important circumstance, well-understood by all parts involved in the conflict. Neither the NKR, nor Armenia nor Azerbaijan can be sure of eventual international support of their unilateral performances. On the contrary, patience and willingness to compromise will be considered support-worthy attitudes and will earn backing from the influential actors in worldwide politics.
Azerbaijan was born amid territorial demands of its neighboring States, and would expand from Caspian to Black Sea. Words “Bir, iki, bizimki Kafkasya” (“One, two, Caucasus is ours”) in the country’s military march weren’t empty. Back then, one of the objectives of Azerbaijan territorial claims already was Armenian Karabakh.

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South Ossetia: Moscow’s strategic pawn

Instead of solving national questions, or, at least, putting an end to hostilities among ethnic groups and nationalities within its territory, the USSR’s real legacy consisted on a series of frozen inter-ethnic conflicts, nowadays far away from a viable solution and that reemerge as bloody confrontations and massacres. The South Ossetian conflict, one of such cases, originated a real war between Russia and Georgia in 2008.

The Caucasus region presents a great ethno-linguistic diversity. There, Indo-European languages-Ossetian among them-and Altaic languages coexist with Caucasian tongues, which are formed out of five distantly-related groups, including the Georgian language together with its multiple variants. Christian and Muslim confessions are also represented within this territory, where many common cultural elements can also be found, turning the Caucasian zone into a strongly-marked geographical area.

This gives rise to foreign confusion: for instance, all inhabitants in the region are regarded by ordinary people inside Russian as “Caucasian people” without much distinction. All this makes it virtually impossible to find viable regional solutions -if they are based on the larger or smaller historical entitlement to a distinct territory, or the oldest native presence or demarcating territories in a stable manner following such criteria.

Ossetian struggle for independence

Most Ossetians –445,310 out of 710,275- live in Ciscaucasia, where a Republic within the Russian Federation exists. Ossetians belong, together with Armenians, to the Caucasian Indo-European group. They have no linguistic relation to Georgians, which conform a group of their own within Caucasian languages together with Abkhazian, Circassian, Daghestanian, or Vainakhian, the latter of Cechen-Ingush nature.

The first Ossetian military raids in Georgia were recorded in the 12th century, but a sharp growth in Ossetian population didn’t actually take place until the second half of the 19th century. This population settled in rural, mountainous regions, which, historically, had been gradually abandoned by Georgians, who moved into the fertile valleys when possible.
During the 1918 to 1921 Georgian independent period, no recognition of the area’s distinguishing features was made. This originated a South Ossetian secessionist movement, which arose in search of their own independence. During Georgia’s Bolshevik occupation, an autonomous province without State status was established within the region, where 70% of the population were Ossetians and 20% Georgians. In the beginning, attempts were made to promote the use of Ossetian language, but it was eventually relegated to domestic use and primary education.

After Georgia’s declaration of independence in 1991, Georgian authorities suppressed Ossetian autonomy. By then, violent confrontations between Georgians and Ossetians -some of them including firearms- had been occurring in the region for more than a year. Georgia tried to impose its rule by force, achieving even the withdrawal of the province’s Council resolutions on secession for a short period after cutting off power supplies within the region. This statement was nevertheless rejected by Georgian Parliament, which considered that a mere withdrawal of such claims wasn’t enough, demanding a permanent elimination of Ossetian autonomy.

All attempts of Georgian forces to obtain control over the rebel region failed. Ossetians had been using discarded military equipment of the Soviet Interior Ministry that remained after their withdrawal and had summoned many volunteers from North Ossetia and other Russian regions. The first stage of this bloody conflict caused 2,000 to 4,000 casualties and tens of thousands of refugees resettled in North Ossetia and Georgia. This phase eventually came to an end in the Summer of 1992, when a joint control committee including the two Ossetias (North and South), Russia, and Georgia, was established, and three battalions of peace forces were created. On September 14th, 1993, an agreement on a South Ossetian economic restoration was signed by Russia and Georgia.

The first meeting between Georgia and South Ossetia (together with representatives from Russia, North Ossetia, and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)) took place in Tskhinvali on October 30th 1995. An agreement was settled, establishing the withdrawal of both the Georgian statement on the abolition of South Ossetian autonomy and the South Ossetian’s decision on secession from Georgia. Thus, a diplomatic way out of the conflict seemed to make its way: the first official meeting of top level leaders of both implied parts took place in August 2006. In the year 2000, Russia and Georgia signed a new intergovernmental agreement on cooperation for the economic recovery of the conflict area and the return of refugees.

After Eduard Kokoity’s appointment as South Ossetian President after the 2001 elections, the demand for annexation to Russia was renewed. Another request was issued during his chairmanship in 2006, and a referendum on independence was held. Meanwhile, in 2004, elected Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili, reiterated their determination to return this province to Georgia, thus renewing regular armed confrontations, which took place mainly in South Ossetian territory.
In August 2008 a new attempt to recover rule over the province caused further deployments of troops into the province and a large-scale punitive counterattack including the bombardment of Georgian cities such as Poti, a port located more than 200km away from South Ossetia, and only 50km away from the Abkhazian border. Abkhazia also helped secessionists to take control over the remaining territory.

Victory over the Georgian “enemy” together with Russia’s official recognition couldn’t make up for the conflict’s tragic outcome. Direct civilian casualties are estimated to have ranged between dozens to 2,000 people. Nearly all South Ossetia-native Georgians were displaced, and so were members from other ethnic groups, all becoming refugees. Nowadays, the South Ossetian population is estimated to be less than 30,000 people.

Economic and military dependence from Russia

A survey carried out among South Ossetian district decision-makers at the beginning of 2011 revealed that, according to them, the main problems within the province are corruption, unemployment, education, low quality of public health system, poverty, drug-addiction, alcoholism, etc. This affects negatively all public spheres within the State. After the war’s end, South Ossetian leaders promised to reach Russian Southern Federal District’s average economic indicators by 2011.

The critical industrial levels of South Ossetia were discussed in a meeting of the South Ossetian Chamber of Commerce and Industry. They are caused by the lack of a development model, the impossibility of obtaining bank loans (annual interest rate is 24%), even when pledging their State-owned companies as securities. In addition, facilities stand idle and in need of repairs, and Ossetian certificates are not recognized even by their only partner, Russia.

South Ossetian conditions are so critical that they could cause the disappearance of the whole industrial sector, leaving only peasants, service-sector workers and civil servants in the region. The biggest industries in the country - a mineral water bottling company and a vibrating machine factory - employ just one fifth of their total production capacity. While formerly a large part of the population lived due to freight transport between Georgia and Russia, today 90% of the goods come from the latter – with the only difference that their prices are twice as high as in the neighboring regions.

Dependence upon Russia reaches all levels - both public institutions and productive sectors depend on the country’s aid, which is always direct, not given as credit. The Russian ruble is the only currency in use, official documents are Russian and nearly half of the population have Russian citizenship, since this grants them access to benefits, pensions, etc. Russia invested RUB50,000 million - a larger amount than the total budget of most Russian regions - in the recons-
struction of the Roki tunnel, the only route that joins Russia and South Ossetia. Total Russian aid per South Ossetian inhabitant between 2008 and 2010 amounted approximately to US$28,000.

All this interest is due to the joint Russian Military Base in South Ossetia, which was agreed to in 2010 for a 49-year term. It includes a contingent of 5,000-soldiers -which in a way has boosted the development of the service sector in the area- as well as 900 border guards. In February 2011 at a meeting with Russian First Minister Vladimir Putin, President Kokoity guaranteed that the comprehensive plan of rehabilitation would be over by the end of March this year.

After Putin's reproach that no proof could be found of results from the RUB26,000 million Russian aid invested in the region, Kokoity answered that these expenses had included the building of the military base together with its facilities, frontier guard premises, and the gas pipeline, which alone cost RUB16,000 millions. Furthermore, RUB8,500 million, including about RUB1,000 million, were also allocated for reconstruction of private housing. Nevertheless, Kokoity had to acknowledge fund embezzlement, especially in private housing construction, as well as in political corruption, which also involved the team of specialists of South Ossetia’s First Minister -a Russian State officer directly appointed by Kokoity.

The cost of supporting South Ossetia is obviously too high for Russia. Moreover, it has poor results taking into account the province’s politic and economic development levels -not to mention ethno-cultural questions. However, Russia gains the possibility of keeping a powerful military base operating only 50km away from Georgia’s capital city- Tblisi. This allows Russia to maintain the country split in two, as well as cutting its strategic communications and keeping it under constant threat.

Recovering their territorial integrity by putting an end to what they call the “Russian occupation” is one of the main objectives of the Georgia led by President Saakashvili. To this aim, he is trying to involve more international actors in the resolution of the conflict in the secessionist regions. His tough stance, which confronts Russia’s strong support to the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, hinders the process of conciliation on both sides.

Thus, meetings between Georgia and Ossetia together with representatives from Russia, the European Union Monitoring Mission in Georgia, and the OSCE, on subjects such as security matters, the situation surrounding South Ossetian border with Georgia (still considered by the latter as “merely administrative”), water supplies, cattle theft, people missing or arrested by any of the confronted areas, criminal matters, etc. remained broken for a year. Such meetings had been established in February 2009 at the Geneva Discussions as a means to prevent confrontations and provide controlled responses in case of their emergence.

Some non-governmental initiatives in the field are now in operation. For instance, bilateral meetings between Georgian and South Ossetian senior officials take place within the frame of
the “Point of view” initiative in Turkish territory. Nevertheless, the intensity of such projects cannot be compared to that of the period previous to the 2008 war. Georgian political scientist, Rtskhiladze, points out the permanent absence of the Russian representation in such initiatives as their main fault.

In turn, Georgian NGOs are afraid of the “hysterical” reactions of Georgian authorities if they establish contact with Russian actors. Thus, all projects related to ethnic conflicts in Georgia fall into the hands of Western entities, no matter to which extent the confronted governments are related to them. Positive processes remain associated to Western countries: unlike Russia, they have achieved their recognition as impartial mediators.

The seriousness of Russian military presence in South Ossetia, together with the lack of an Ossetian national project, and the intransigence of both parts confronted in Ossetian-Georgian conflict, prevent the achievement of an effective solution in the next years. However, we cannot rule out the possibility of finding gradual solutions for humanitarian problems suffered by the population within the conflict area.

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Difficulties for a Palestinian State in 2011

Palestine’s emerging statehood still depends upon what kind of solution is achieved for the long-term conflict between the Israel State and Palestinian People. Such solution, however, seems to basically depend on Israel’s political willingness.

Consecutive Israeli governments have shown systematically and de facto their opposition to the constitution of a real Palestinian State with full sovereignty and independence regarding the control over its territory, population, borders, natural resources, and economy. But, on the contrary, their most “generous” offers only allow for the creation of a sub-state entity within Israel, ruled under Israel’s national security, economically dependent, and only existing at the expense of Israel’s colonial expansion -the so-called “population growth needs”.

The result is well known: Palestine would be entitled to call itself “Palestinian State”, with all the government institutions and the foreign recognition this implies. But, actually, it would be closer to a Bantustan, lacking territorial integrity, economic viability, and no borders or army of its own.

Increase of Palestinian international recognition during 2010

Well aware of Palestine’s fragility, unequal power relations and the dead-end peace process, in 2009 Palestinian First Minister Salam Fayyad launched the idea of an unilateral declaration of an independent Palestinian State in 2011, with East Jerusalem as capital city and 1967 borders. The idea began taking shape during 2010, in order to prepare the political and diplomatic scene that would serve as the base of that State. The idea gained even more strength after the umpteenth failure of Israel-Palestinian negotiations shortly after being resumed.

Nevertheless, a Palestinian State with its 1967 borders was recognized by Argentina, Bolivia and Brazil in December, 2010. Subsequently, more Latin American States have followed suit: Uruguay, Ecuador and, more timidly, Chile. Palestine also obtained the commitment of recognition from Turkey and the Russian Federation -not to forget those countries which had previously acknowledged its status. According to international lawyer John Whitbeck, States that recognize Palestine represent up to 80% - 90% of the world’s population.

On September 2nd, 2010, a two-day summit took place in Washington under pressure from the Obama administration, which at that moment was facing Federal elections in November with a
sharply decreased popularity. The meeting between the National Palestine Authority (NPA) President Mahmoud Abbas and Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu did not result in any agreements. Apart from the customary photograph, the show performed by both leaders seemed to have more to do with the situation of US domestic politics than with the circumstances that surrounded the Middle East.

Actually, during preliminary meetings carried out to bring negotiating delegations closer, no progress was made concerning issues to be discussed during the Washington Summit. Palestinian leaders warned that, in case of an eventual resumption of Israeli escalation of colonization, they would withdraw from the negotiations. There was no sense in carrying on negotiations while Israeli bulldozers kept undermining the possibility of peace based on the existence of two States.

Israel’s intransigence

The resumption of the short-lived peace process came to its end when Israel refused to extend the deferral of building new settlements. In order to obtain a 90-day extension of this moratorium, due to finish on September 26th, Washington offered Tel Aviv important incentives: twenty F-35 fighter-bombers valued US$3,000 million together with their compromise to veto any eventual UN resolutions which supported or recognized the Palestinian State’s unilateral declaration of independence.

There was no way to convince the Israeli Government. Finally, the Obama administration abandoned its efforts to mediate and gave up exerting even the slightest pressure on its ally. Both countries had gone through an important crisis as the result of the diplomatic incident which occurred during US Vice-President Joe Biden’s visit to Israel in early March 2010. In spite of the uncertainty roused around the future of their close bilateral relationship, there is every indication that their “special strategic alliance” will remain untainted.

In turn, the European Union and its member States chose to keep a very low profile, neither displeasing the US, nor pressing Israel, in spite of their previous nearly EUR8,000 million investment in the peace process and their interests in the Mediterranean area’s pacification and stability. In December 2010, an outstanding group of 26 European ex-leaders urged Brussels to postpone any improvements in their relationships with Israel unless they abandoned their settlement policy. They also made an appeal to study the legal implications of the country’s colonizing policy in their bilateral relationships with Israel. Their demand, of unquestionable moral value, does not seem to have had any political repercussions so far, in spite of its deadline: April 2011.

At the same time, growing discredit of Israel within the international community went some steps forward after the assault of the Turkish vessel Mavi Marmara while in international waters out of Israel rule in May, 2010. The attack cost the life of nine Turkish citizens. The
relations between Turkey and Israel sank into an unprecedented crisis, coming close to a total breakdown. The Israeli attack on the humanitarian fleet ended up not having the expected deterrent effect. But, on the contrary, a great number of worldwide organizations and personalities reacted by trying to break Israel’s blockade of Gaza’s Strip. Many joined the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Campaign (BDS) as a reprisal against Israel due to the permanent infringement and systematical violation of International Law.

Even though the main obstacles for effectively building a Palestinian State derive from Israeli occupation, we must not excuse the two major Palestinian organizations - Al Fatah and Hamas - equally responsible for the development of their institutional structure. Their ongoing division does not smooth the way to strengthen their weakened position within negotiations, nor the consolidation of their State. Paradoxically, it only contributes to the geographical and human division imposed on the West Bank and Gaza Strip territories by Israeli occupation. The lack of Palestinian national conciliation and the political reunification of Gaza and the West Bank, dissipate the probabilities of crystallizing a Palestinian State.

In the case of the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), it would constitute a mistake to separate economic questions from political ones. The reasons are clear. First of all, the primacy of international politics over their homeland or nation policy under foreign military occupation, and secondly, because of the OPT’s external dependence on international aid, politics, and economy. Gaza continues to suffer the consequences of the blockade established in 2007 when Israel pronounced the territory “hostile”. This blockade was dramatically reinforced by Israel’s devastating attacks during the winter of 2008-2009.

Frustration and weariness among Palestinian population

Conditions of material life in the narrow and overpopulated Gaza Strip are similar to those in an humanitarian emergency: 65% of the population live below the poverty line, and 80% are dependent on international aid. Unemployment rate hovers at 40% and the region’s labor force amounts to only 330,000 people out of more than 1.5 million. Supply of basic products for their survival is dramatically restricted. For instance, they can only receive about 2,500 tons of gas per month for cooking purposes when 6,000 are needed to fulfill this need.

Israel’s blockade of Gaza was supported both by the US and the EU since the beginning. The message was clear: if their governmental option is “acceptable”, the OPTs would receive the promised aid from their rich donors thus maintaining the economic reliability of their authority. Economic improvements observed in the Western Bank in 2010 should be interpreted in this way. Actually, the Palestinian Authority is the main source of public employment within the OPTs. Since 2007, it manages only the West Bank, and since then it has received US$ 3 billion in international aid.
Nevertheless, Palestinian efforts must not be underrated. The Government’s strongly-tech-nocratic character has brought in some changes in the economic, institutional, and security fields, thus making some achievements. For instance, according to the World Bank’s report of September 2010 *The Underpinnings of the Future Palestinian State: Sustainable Growth and Institutions*, tax revenues were about 15% higher than expected during the first half of 2010, and 50% more during same period of 2009.

Nevertheless, the achievement of economic stability within the OPTs will depend on the conflict’s final solution. In fact, their main problems are caused by the occupation policy, which, among other things, hinders the mobility of people and goods, the access to land and water, and splits and isolates the OPTs while continuing to re-enforce its colonization policy. Furthermore, the OPTs need important private investments for their economic growth, social development, and the reduction of their dependence on international donors. The unstable and uncertain climate within the territories discourages potential private investors, though.

Finally, according to the Human Rights Watch report *Separate and Unequal: Israel’s Discriminatory Treatment of Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territories* from December 2010, on the social scene, the humiliating discrimination of the Palestinian population within OPTs has not changed since the first day of the occupation in 1967. Not to forget the population’s weariness caused by the permanent disagreement between their two main political forces.

The end of 2010 witnessed the launching of a very enlightening manifesto written by a group of youths from Gaza that tries to reflect the general feelings of a silent majority within the OPTs in a rap-like style. In sum, they deal with their weariness with Israel, Al Fatah, Hamas, the US, the UN, the occupation, the violations of human rights, and the indifference of the international community.

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In the middle of January, 2011, Puntland broke relations with the Somali Transitional Federal Government (TFG). The leaders of this autonomous region stated that they, regarding the TFG as an unlawful government which monopolized all the attentions of the International Community, at the expense of the rest of the parts involved into Somalia’s recovery, were no longer represented in international forums by this Government.

The Puntland Government declared it already felt excluded in the Djibouti peace process during 2008-2009, after which the TFG was born. In addition, the TFG had not consulted the Puntland Government about extremely important questions such as the writing of a new Charter. Moreover, the Puntland Government’s criticism was also directed against Mogadishu’s incapacity to lead the country towards an effective federalism. As a result of this, all members of the TFG are banned entrance to Puntland, and there will be no negotiations until this Government turns into a legitimate power that truly represents all the actors within the country.

Puntland constitutes a de facto independent entity since the 1990s, born because of Somalia’s inability to act as a proper State and intervene as such within its territories. But it had never broken its relations with the central Government until now. This breakup was supposed to attract the attention of the International Community and grant them access to the international funds destined to the country’s reconstruction, as well as to a higher standing within the State Government.

Nevertheless, now Puntland rulers consider that the expected objectives have not been fulfilled. In spite of starting to show the first signs of institutional construction, Puntland still has poorly legitimized structures, and their shared-power proceedings lack functionality. Furthermore, the Government’s performance is becoming more and more authoritarian. For instance, the freedom of the press hardly exists in practice, even though it is granted by the Charter.

In spite of this, the authorities of Puntland have achieved a more effective control over their territory than Somali institutions have and also have integrated some traditional elements within their Governmental structures. Actually, Puntland authorities have relatively effective military forces at their disposal, and have been trying to keep inner stability and security through participatory processes which involve all the actors implied. Notwithstanding, the total disarmament of the population has not yet been achieved, since clans and small traders still keep their militias just in case they are menaced by the Government or direct enemies.
The threats of piracy and terrorism

In addition, economic and social problems also cause instability in the zone. Puntland has made great efforts to improve security conditions that so far have had a negative international effect - for instance, piracy operating in the waters of the Horn of Africa, which causes assaults to international vessels and, sometimes, the murdering of their crew.

In 2008, the then-President Mohamud Muse Hersi ‘Adde’ was accused of giving shelter to the pirates. In turn, current President Abdirahman Mohamud Farole, who defeated him in the elections held in January 2009, has marked the fight against piracy as one of his priorities. Thus, several measures have been taken at the political level, and a great number of pirates have already appeared before Puntland’s courts. Nevertheless, the root causes of this problem have not yet been eradicated, and many inhabitants of the region continue supporting piracy. For the local poor population, this constitutes a legitimate struggle against the international looting of their natural resources.

Terrorism is also on the security agenda of Puntland leaders. The Al-Shabaab Islamist militia, which has the Somali Government in check, has made advances towards the country’s Northern regions. Rumors have spread about a virtual alliance with another group operating in Puntland, which, led by Sheikh Mohamed Said Atom, intends to destroy the local government and impose the Islamic law within the region. These facts alert us to the threats to stability in the safest area within Somalia.

Moreover, Puntland has also been considered to be the operating base for gangs whose activities include counterfeit as well as smuggling of weapons and people. The suffering of the inhabitants living in the East, caused by territorial disputes against Somaliland, must be added to all this. President Farole has recently accused their neighbors of massacring civilians in the disputed region of Cayn. Cooperation between the two territories is promising, although it still remains in an early stage. Problems with neighboring Ethiopia are also worth mentioning. The conflicts of this country have crossed Puntland’s borders, allowing members of the armed group Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) to enter Puntland territory.

The violent atmosphere, which began in 2010 with the murder of a member of the Parliament at the hands of an unidentified gang is quite extreme. In spite of security being a major priority in Puntland, violence already increased in 2009 with attacks against judiciary and police institutions.

Puntland’s foreign contacts

Just as its neighbor Somaliland, the contacts of Puntland with other countries have been mostly related to security subjects. For instance, the region cooperated with Ethiopia in the stru-
gle against piracy and it seems that this country will try to mediate between the autonomous region of Puntland and the TFG. Puntland’s President has also held meetings with Yemen where trade questions were discussed, especially those related to fishing and energy.

Nevertheless, due to the fact that it did not declare its independence, Puntland has not established international contacts to seek its recognition, although it keeps in touch with its ex-colonizer Italy. In spite of this, Puntland’s stability is a key factor in the Somali reconstruction process, and the International Community has tried to act accordingly. The US, in turn, have provided development aid as well as resources for counter-terrorist actions. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) has also worked in the area. Even the World Bank became involved with Puntland, something which Somaliland did not count on.

International NGOs also work in Puntland. The economic situation the same as the political climate and security levels enjoy more stability than in southern Somalia, but less than those in Somaliland. As a result, the basic needs of the population remain unsatisfied, and NGOs are often in charge of some services, such as education. In Puntland, the initiatives of civilian society, small business ventures, and company entrepreneurship required for an economic recovery are virtually inexistent.

The “two-track” policy of the US

At the end of 2010, the US made public that they would support both Somaliland and Puntland through their new two-track policy. First, Somalia will be aided to provide basic services within its territories. Second, they commit themselves to provide both territories -as well as all those fighting extremist groups such as Al-Shabaab- with aid for development -for instance, regarding job creation. The final aim is to stabilize Somalia.

According to the International Crisis Group, the first and foremost objective is avoiding Somali disintegration, in order to stabilize it. This means that the surprising Puntland’s decision to dissociate themselves from the TFG could be a strategy to obtain the attention from international donors and finally get what so far has been denied to them.

This political maneuver, which hardly implies a real secessionist attempt, happens to take place in the final year of the current Government’s term. Thus, by August 2011 Puntland may have achieved a higher standing within this African country for the next term, something that Puntland leaders had been refused to them in Djibouti. Even though at first sight the new situation of Puntland does not seem to suggest that they will follow the wake of Somaliland (which, as a de facto State, has only conquered poor results), we will have to keep a close eye on its evolution.
Aside from political maneuvers, insecurity in Puntland is worrisome. More than short-term measures, such as pirate arrests and counter-terrorist measures, it will be necessary to solve the real underlying problem. Economic and social development and the end of political disputes are essential. The international community, in turn, could use their years of experience to take advantage of the opportunity afforded by Puntland (as well as Somaliland) in the stabilization of the Horn of Africa.

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Transnistria: preserving the status quo

The Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic, also known as the Republic of Transnistria, is a country located on the Eastern side of the Dniester river, between Moldova and Ukraine. Its capital city is Tiraspol. In spite of having all the characteristics of a full State: a territory, a population and an effective power of its own, the Republic constitutes only a quasi-state because of the lack of recognition from the members of the UN.

Officially, Transnistria belongs to the Republic of Moldova, theoretically as an autonomous province, although Chişinău has not maintained any effective control over the territory since 1990. That is, Tiraspol has the capacity of controlling its internal conditions, keeping public order, as well as maintaining quasi-official bilateral relations with the surrounding States, effectively achieving the aims of its foreign policy.

According to the 1995 Transnistrian Constitution, modified in 2000, the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic is a semi-presidential republic where division of powers exists. Nevertheless, these statements in the Constitution are nothing but a democratic facade, since in fact the relationship between the legislative, executive, and judiciary powers is the same as that within autocratic States.

Smirnov holds the power

Transnistria’s main character, President Igor Smirnov, was formerly a civil servant of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Moldova. He has held the Presidency since 1990. In Transnistria, the President is elected by popular vote for a five-year term. Smirnov obtained 82.4% of the votes in the last elections, held in 2006, which were declared free and democratic by international observers who unofficially took part in the election process.

The head of State is also the President of the Government, from whom emanates the right of veto of those decisions taken by his ministers. This allows both Smirnov and his party, Republic, which has a strong nationalist character and revolves around the President, to detain most of the power. This means that they can control domestic affairs within the country, specially those regarding economic matters.

The legislative power emanates from the unicameral Parliament, named the Supreme Council. It has 43 members, elected by proportional representation. In the last Parliamentary elections, held in
in December 2010, the conservative party, *Renewal*, obtained 25 seats. Nevertheless, if we consider the limited role of the Pridnestrovian Parliament, the probabilities that this victory put an end to Smirnov’s political and commercial “clan” are limited.

The corrupt Pridnestrovian Judiciary, unable to execute its own decisions, fails to function properly. Its lack of independence limits the respect for human rights, and leaves the door open to the abuse of power. According to the report issued by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), written during mid 2010, the observance of civil liberties and human rights is scarce in Transnistria. This is, in a scale of 1 to 7, with 7 as the lowest protection level, Transnistria would get a 6.

One of the causes for the prevalence of Transnistria as a *de facto* State within the international scene is the strong determination of its political elites to preserve independence. According to the official stance of Tiraspol, their main objective is to obtain the full recognition of Transnistria within the international community. With this aim, Smirnov’s regime actively promotes the creation of a national identity, since the popular support in the country can help him to realize his own ambitions.

Nevertheless, the passive attitude of Pridnestrovian authorities towards the final resolution of their conflict with Moldova (through multilateral negotiations, for instance) is striking. We could conclude that the real aim of their leaders is to preserve the existing *status quo*, since it allows them not only to retain power, but to obtain economic profits from the country’s activity as well.

**Economic dependence on Russia**

On the other hand, an equally important issue regarding the current existence of Transnistria is the ability to obtain economic resources for running the country. This is not an easy issue, taking into account the unofficial condition of the international relations in this state-like entity.

The economic situation of the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic is a difficult one -or, better said, it would be a difficult one without the economic help from Russia. She contributes to the maintenance of the little Transnistria with a double purpose: first of all, to preserve its prevailing role within the ex-soviet area, and second, to achieve an effective influence over a country located almost on the European Union border.

Russia directly finances Transnistria’s activities, covering the State’s yearly budget deficits. This constitutes a significant contribution, yet not essential for the existence of the rebel province. The indirect help from the Kremlin is the most important for the Pidnestrovian authorities -for example, Russian gas is provided to the region at much lower prices in comparison to the free market.
Of course Tiraspol also has its own internal financial sources. Most of the industry of the former SSR of Moldova was located on the eastern bank of the Dniester river, which at the present constitutes a great advantage for Smirnov’s regime, since it allows him to base the Transnistrian economy on the export of its own production.

In turn, preserving its international commercial relations would not be possible for Transnistria without the tacit consent of Moldova and Ukraine. Trade exchanges with the rebel province are also profitable for both countries, thanks to the competitive prices of Pridnestrovian goods. Moreover, Moldavian and Ukrainian elites, together with the Pridnestrovian regime, take advantage of the lack of transparency within the region that gives rise to the illegal traffic of tobacco, alcohol and food - especially poultry.

2011: a key year for Transnistria and Moldova

Relations between Transnistria and Moldova are much more complicated at the political level. The recognition of the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic does not represent a possible option for Chişinău. In any case, the ineffectiveness of the strategies of Moldavian authorities, and their reluctance to adopt a policy of compromise, will not allow them to expect a rapid solution to this strained situation, unless Tiraspol loses the support of Russia.

At present, the activity of the EU and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) is the only possibility of normalizing the situation of Transnistria. So far the activities of the EU have been destined to improve the political situation and living conditions in Moldova, in order to make a more desirable reintegration for Transnistrians possible.

Nevertheless, the EU seems to be open to a more direct implication in the conflict. The need for a solution for the situation in Transnistria was one of the subjects discussed during the visit of the Russian President Dimitry Medvedev to Berlin last year. This may imply a greater willingness on the part of the EU to get involved in the solution of the current controversy, making use of political pressure on the actors involved as a means to achieve it.

In turn, the OSCE has included in its 2011 agenda another round of multilateral negotiations between Transnistria and Moldova, with the participation of Russia, Ukraine, and the OSCE, as well as the EU and the US as observers. The latest experiences were not successful, but a more determined dedication of the European States might change the situation.

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Nationalist turn in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus

The island of Cyprus experienced two significant events in 2010. The first one were the presidential elections in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), held on April 19th, that resulted in the victory of the nationalist leader of the National Unity Party (NUP), Derviş Eroğlu, with 50.3% of the votes, and the consequent defeat of the, until-then, President Mehmet Ali Talat, a moderate leader in favor of negotiations with Nicosia endorsed by the UN in order to find a solution, both to the TRNC and to the entire island’s status.

This re-emergence of nationalism within the TRNC overshadowed the second great event: the 50th anniversary of Cyprus’ independence, on last August 16th, 2010, which was celebrated in an atmosphere where the willingness for reunification was absent. Despite the initial consideration of resuming negotiations with Cyprus and the UN started in 2008, the victory of Eroğlu, who strongly advocates for the definitive political secession of the TRNC, could doom this negotiation process, as long-lasting as frequently broken, to failure. The EU has practically delegated its participation in this process to the diplomatic efficiency of the UN, as well as to the increasingly relaxed relations between Greece and Turkey, as the strategies for the resolution of a conflict that shows no signs of being solved in the short term.

Given these circumstances the UN has increased its efforts to reopen the negotiation process counting with a new political actor in the TRNC Presidency. Thus, the Secretary-General of the UN, Ban Ki-moon, called for a meeting in Geneva between Cyprus President Dimitris Christofias and the TRNC President Eroğlu on last January 25th, 2011. Christofias and Eroğlu met four times during the last two months, while their diplomatic representatives held thirteen meetings in the same period.

In December, 2010, the United Nations Security Council issued a revealing report on the negotiations for the reunification of Cyprus. In this document, the organization pointed out that in spite of the meetings held by Christofias and Eroğlu these could result in failure, especially after parliamentary elections in Cyprus, due to be held in May, 2011, and in the TRNC, due next June, since the more nationalist stances could result politically reinforced.

The central point of the current negotiations revolves around ownership rights. The Government of Cyprus argues that those citizens with properties in the North are entitled to have them back, to which the authorities of the TRNC and Turkish Cypriots object, since they consider that it would threaten the area’s Turkish identity.
The weight of Turkish geopolitics

After the declarations of de-facto independence in Kosovo, Abkhazia and South Ossetia that have taken place since 2008, it is presumed that the nationalist Government of Eroğlu will increase its demands for more international attention concerning the status of the TRNC, in spite of also taking part in negotiations with the UN and Cyprus. The Republic of Turkey (the only country that recognizes the TRNC) would probably increase its support in this case.

The beginning of 2011 has brought novelties in this area. The Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, Phil Gordon, visited Cyprus in order to meet presidents Christofias and Eroğlu, under the auspices of United Nations Special Advisor on Cyprus, Alexander Downer.

Chistofias, in turn, met German Chancellor Angela Merkel in mid-January, and stated his intention to help Turkey to “open the doors” to its accession to the UE. In exchange, he asked for Ankara’s support for the recognition of the Republic of Cyprus (member of the EU since 2004), which appears on the Ankara Protocol signed with Brussels. This demand involves the granting of access, both by sea and by air, to Greek-Cypriot vessels and planes.

Apart from UN efforts and the contact between Christofias and Eroğlu, the final subject that may determine the future of the TRNC is related to the geopolitical stance taken by Turkey during the last years, specially regarding the constant halts in the process of its accession to the UE, as well the important increase of “turkophobia” in some European countries and their respective societies, which strongly encourage those political stances contrary to the Turkish accession to the EU.

The traditional Turkish pro-Western stance has appreciably shifted recently, which could increase the weight of nationalist elements within the country -especially through its powerful military class, and the conservative and ultra-nationalist, far-right, political parties, willing to achieve the political influence necessary to preserve the sovereignty rights of the TRNC.

Precisely, the breakups in the negotiations with the EU and the spreading of anti-Turkish feelings within Europe have had an important influence regarding this shift to a less pro-Western position, encouraged by the Government of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the moderate-Islamic political party, AKP, in power since 2002. Initially, both Erdoğan and the AKP showed a policy open to negotiations with the UN, the EU, and Cyprus in order to resolve the charter of the TRNC.

Before the presidential elections in the TRNC last April, Erdoğan even stated his discomfort towards Eroğlu’s eventual victory, arguing that he did not wish a “nationalist resurgence” and
publicly expressing his support for ex-President Ali Talat\(^{(1)}\), an “essential interlocutor” in the negotiations with Cyprus and the UN in his words. Notwithstanding, Eroğlu’s victory afforded Erdoğan the opportunity to launch a severe warning to the EU, stating that the nationalist victory in the TRNC was due to the “European political failure” in achieving a solution for the situation of Cyprus, an aspect which has affected the “weariness” among the Turkish Cypriots towards the EU and the UN.

Despite the current political and electoral hegemony of the AKP in Turkey, the delicate political balance and counterweight with the Turkish powerful military class -a strong protector of the sovereignty of the TRNC- could persuade Erdoğan to take a more nationalist and intransigent stance, which would break the negotiations on the TRNC charter. Some political groups also doubt Erdoğan’s capacity to lower the nationalist claims of the Turkish-Cypriot President Eroğlu.

Secession as the solution

In view of these circumstances, finding a negotiated solution to the conflict in Cyprus seems very difficult. If the Turkish Cypriot President Eroğlu finally achieves the consolidation of his “breakaway regime”, based on the example of the “velvet divorce” that split the former Czechoslovakia into the present Czech Republic and Slovakia in 1993, any attempts of achieving a negotiated solution between both parts are doomed to failure. For instance, this model is strongly rejected both by the Turkish Cypriot ex-President Ali Talat and his Greek Cypriot counterpart Christofias\(^{(2)}\).

The problem still stems mainly in different aspects regarding property, security, and the presence of colonists in both territories. Since 2008, Ali Talat and Christofias advanced the reunification talks under a bi-zonal or bi-communal model. But the Turkish Cypriot fear of the solution of a “unified State” increased the nationalist options, which finally led towards Eroğlu’s victory.

Precisely this nationalist resurgence can hinder any initiatives taken towards a solution, as formerly happened with the Greek Cypriot refusal to sign the so called ‘Annan Plan’ in 2004. This possibility would have a negative effect in any reunification measures, and would increase Turkish difficulties for accession to the EU as well, obviously hindered by the pressure of both Greek Cyprus and Greece in Brussels.

In 2009, a year before the elections, Eroğlu proposed to consolidate the view of the TRNC as “both a universally recognized State and a nation” as his objective. In March, 2010, a month be-

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\(^{(1)}\) “Erdogan defiende la reunificación de Chipre”, Euronews, April 19\(^{\text{th}}\), 2010. [http://es.euronews.net/2010/04/19/erdogan-defiende-la-reunificacion-de-chipre/](http://es.euronews.net/2010/04/19/erdogan-defiende-la-reunificacion-de-chipre/)

fore the elections that led him to the presidential chairmanship, Eroğlu himself made this quite clear during an interview in the Turkish journal, Akşam: “It will be difficult to find a solution”. (3)

The feeling of being internationally isolated, misunderstood, and the foreign pressure alleged by both the Turkish Cypriot community and the TRNC authorities, have not only consolidated political and electoral support for Eroğlu, but also increased the sense of failure regarding any negotiating initiatives. Ex-President Ali Talat himself declared that “In my opinion the process will end”. (4)

The political situation in the Republic of Cyprus does not look clear either. President Christofias announced that he would not run for re-election in 2013. Meanwhile, his Government is politically isolated, after the withdrawal of political support from the socialists in February, 2010. The socialists stated that they felt that he had made “too many concessions” during the negotiations with Ali Talat and the Turkish-Cypriots. This political breakup could affect the results of Christofias’ Progressive Party of Working People (AKEL) in the parliamentary elections, due to be held on next 22nd of May.

In spite of the opening of a new round of negotiations, signs of achieving a short- or mid-term solution through consensus are scarce. On the contrary, they point to a more feasible scenario of permanent political and territorial division, as former British Prime Minister Jack Straw predicted in last November. (5)

Leaving negotiations aside, the present panorama points to the possibility of the definitive secession of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus as a virtual fait accompli. Maybe this measure can provide a solution for this anachronistic reality.

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(3) Ibidem
(4) Ibidem
(5) STRAW, Jack, “No ifs or buts, Turkey must be a part of the EU”, The Times, November 11 th, 2010. http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/
Somaliland: the need for political stability

In spite of not having achieved official recognition from any State, at present the Republic of Somaliland constitutes a *de facto* State with relative levels of stability and continuous progress. The year 2010 meant a step forward towards its consolidation as a State, although the presidential elections, initially scheduled to be held in April 2008, have yet to be held.

Disagreements concerning the electoral roll among the political parties, strongly influenced by the different clans, as well as the violence within the areas where border disputes with Puntland take place (Sanaag, Cayn and Sool), have been the cause of several cancellations of elections. In September 2009, new incidents took place among complaints about an irregular voting process. As a result, the new elections were postponed.

The year 2010 began with the challenge of a possible political dispute that might have detained Somaliland’s transit towards democracy. Nevertheless, the three political parties achieved an agreement to overcome this crisis, and the new election day was set for July 26th, 2010, the fiftieth anniversary of Somaliland’s independence from the United Kingdom. But, nevertheless, the year began violently, with an attack on the city of Las Anod, in the region of Sool, together with some incidents in the city of Hargeisa. This made the Government of Somaliland focus even more on national security, an issue that grew in importance as the election day was approaching. On the other hand, the civil society of Somaliland also asked to have the elections held in a peaceful atmosphere.

International observers coordinated by three British associations (Progressio, the Development Planning Unit of the University College London, and Somaliland Focus) took part in the process. Later, they stated that the elections had taken place in a successful and satisfactory way. The voting was regarded as a peaceful expression of the people’s will, but, nevertheless, concerns arouse regarding irregularities in some regions, specially in Sanaag and Sool. Actually, in spite of additional security measures, incidents took place within the more unstable areas. Among other incidents, an international observer was killed. Moreover, Al-Shabaab, the most important armed group pitted against the Government of Somalia, linked to Al-Qaeda according to Western countries, opposed the elections and attempted to intimidate the population to prevent them from going to the polls.

On July the 1st, the National Electoral Commission officially announced that the winner of the elections had been the opposition leader, Ahmed Mahamud Silanyo, from the Kulmiye party,
defeating the incumbent President Dahir Riyale Kahin from the UDUB, who accepted the results and allowed the President elect to take possession of his office. The third candidate, Faisal Ali Warabe from the UCID, was the least-voted. During his campaign, Silanyo had visited Washington and the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, and had talks with British diplomats as well.

Silanyo pointed out as his main objectives achieving the international recognition, fighting corruption, and putting an end to the violence of rebel groups, which, at the moment, were confronting governmental troops and causing displacements among the population. Regarding the fight against violence, the existence of a new and menacing armed group, SSC (named after the initial letters of Sool, Sanaag and Cayn), was confirmed in 2010.

They were these violent incidents which compelled the Governments of Somaliland and Puntland to cooperate in security issues at the end of 2010. The menace represented by Al-Shabaab and other eventual bursts of insurgency brought together these two governments, and led Washington to qualify the utility of both regions in stopping the spread of extremism. The US also showed their interest in cooperating with Somaliland. Nevertheless they never recognized it as a sovereign State.

At the same time, this emphasis on security issues also helped to establish new ties with Ethiopia. Somaliland contributed to the fight against the Ogaden Liberation Front, a group that demands independence for the people of eastern Ethiopia. Since the beginning of his chairmanship, the new President, Silanyo, reasserted his desire to maintain normal relations with the neighboring country. Before his replacement, the former leader, Riyale Kahin, had been equally visited by authorities from Kuwait and Russia, as well as by representatives from several agencies of the United Nations, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). His Government had also held contacts with France, Yemen and the United Kingdom, mostly dealing with security issues.

Development has also been a key issue in Somaliland’s international relations. Nevertheless, the efforts carried out in this field have not given the necessary fruits. The economic situation in Somaliland during 2010 has been described as “prosperous”, taking into account its condition as a developing country. Some signs, such as improvements in transportation infrastructures, acknowledge this. Notwithstanding, the lack of international recognition keeps hindering growth and development. Somaliland does not receive direct international aid, which, for instance, could help the country to tackle environmental problems (Western regions are usually severely affected by droughts). Likewise, foreign investments do not reach the area, because it is only recognized as an autonomous region within Somalia, it presents high insecurity levels, and foreign investors do not trust the local financial institutions either.

Apart from corruption, the high levels of poverty are worrisome. National and international programs destined to improve its education system fail because youths cannot apply the
knowledge acquired during their school years. This turns emigration into commonplace. The subject is always present in the talks held with UN members and Development Agencies of several countries.

Somaliland begins 2011 with a relatively young Government that will continue seeking the still refused international recognition, as well as fighting several focuses of violent outbreaks, and high poverty rates. Those issues, related to violence and terrorism, afford Somaliland an opportunity to cooperate with Western countries, as well as with neighboring countries, although this challenge must be tackled from the inside, also. Somaliland must prove the capability of its public institutions to cope with difficult situations.

In this sense, criticism of democratic deficiencies shown by some of their leaders’ actions when it came to setting a date for the elections during the period 2008-2010, as well as the frictions between the State institutions and the different clans, do not facilitate neither the achievement of international recognition nor the stability and the economic development of this *de facto* State. Therefore, doubts about its viability continue, as Somaliland waits for democracy to take deeper roots.

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Taiwan: playing “shall I, shan’t I” on integration

Since the beginning of his chairmanship, the President of Taiwan Ma Ying-jeou presented as inseparable issues the Island’s economic future and the rapprochement of the Island with mainland China. This link has been reinforced by the virulence of the global crisis, which has had a great impact on Taiwan. In 2009, the Island’s economy receded 1.4% (and 2% in 2008). On the contrary, 2010 ended with a growth of 10.82%, and a 4.24% growth forecast for 2011, according to the Taiwan Institute of Economic Research. The unemployment rate is 5%. It is no secret that the general improvements in macroeconomics are strongly related to the increase in exchange with mainland China, which has restored the Island’s stability at all levels, including the political.

The improvement of relations with Beijing has taken place in two stages. The normalization of cross-Strait communications (2008) signalizes an historical landmark putting an end to decades of confrontation and lack of communication. On the other hand, the signing of the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (EFCA) in July 2010, outlined the shape of bilateral commercial relations, more and more reinforced both regarding their flow rates and the consolidation of inter-company and financial alliances, as well as at the proper institutional level, including the establishment of an Economic Cooperation Committee. A third stage in the agenda already awaits to be completed. In addition to deepen the fifteen signed agreements, the door will be open to cultural cooperation. And last of all, the discussion of political and security issues will put an end to the agenda. These talks are expected to grow in complexity as they approach to interests considered vital by both parts involved. The completion of this agenda seems to point to a long-term discussion not exempt from tensions, as already shown in the reluctance of both parts to sign the agreement on investment protection.

Meanwhile, for the KMT, the current policy, based on the agreement with the Communist Party of China (CPC) in 2005 has no turning back. According to the KMT, the return to normal relations with Beijing is an essential requirement to avoid being excluded from the ongoing integration processes in the region. In January 2011, Taipei commenced talks with Singapore to reach a free trade agreement, which they also intend to carry out with other main economic partners. This diplomatic effort, even though focused on economic subjects, has made its impact in other fields, as we could recently observe, for example, in the achievement of the visa waiving announced by the EU, due to come into force in January, thus adding up to 96 countries in total that grant the Island this privilege in spite of its lack of diplomatic relations with most of them.
The bilateral talks have simplified the relations and made possible the attainment of tangible results in many fields, from the petrochemical industry to electronics, trade, or tourism. Nevertheless, we must not forget that this process has not yet reduced the reluctance of a great part of Taiwanese society to simply accept an eventual reunion with the mainland (just as the majority reject the secessionist option also).

The attitude of the DPP

The main party in the opposition has rejected the EFCA, drifting away from the dialogue process carried out by the KMT and the CPC, either directly or through the informal entities set up on both sides of the Strait in order to guide bilateral relationships (the Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Straits in mainland China and the Taiwanese Straits Exchange Foundation). They stress the great risks that a stronger economic dependence upon Beijing implies for the political survival of Taipei, as well as the weakness of the institutions in the negotiations.

From the DPP’s point of view, the attitude of the KMT guiding the process is characterized by its prudishness and submission, leaving the essential interests of the more than 23 million Taiwanese people unprotected. In contrast to this stance, completely coherent with the traditional sovereigntist trajectory of the DPP, the party has made a surprising shift in its policy towards the mainland, in an attempt to gain votes in the local elections held on November 27th, 2010. The launching of the New Frontier Foundation suggests gradual changes in the future within the founding principles and the stances of the DPP towards Beijing. Nevertheless, this shift is regarded by some as merely electoral. No matter what, this decision will have far-reaching implications. It also shows the acknowledgement of the impossibility of fighting the current scene at the risk of suffering an increasing marginalization.

At the same time, other offers of dialogue seem to be making their way at the initiative of the Chinese dissident, Wang Dan, one of the leaders of the student movement in 1989 and currently a professor in Taiwan, as well as at the initiative of the former DPP parliament member, Luo Wen-jia, with the aim of encouraging the democratic development on both sides of the Strait, stressing the importance of the respective civil societies.

Will the new policy of the DPP towards mainland China be fertile enough as to increase its social base and attract centrist voters? At present, this does not seem to be an easy task - at least on a sufficient scale. Specially, if we take into account that this whole process presents an uncertain evolution, in which the DPP should conduct itself with ingenuity and prudence, in the first place, to avoid internal damages, and, secondly, to better define the profile of their renewed political project’s identity regarding an issue of such a great importance.
In the meantime, this shift announced by the DPP could bring to an end an entire period in most recent Taiwanese political life, characterized by confrontations between “blues” and “greens”, between those supporting or opposing unification. This opens spaces for reaching agreements on the subject, both between the KMT and the DPP as well as between the DPP and the CPC, despite the great difficulties that can be foreseen within the current scene. On the occasion of the International Human Rights Day, the DPP made a call for the inclusion of a “human rights clause” in its Government’s future agreements with mainland China, as well for more support of Chinese dissidents, demands that, by the way, will not be welcome by Zhonanghai.

This turn in the policy of the DPP will also imply consequences for the KMT, making its political management more difficult. It is true that, a priori, this implies the acknowledgement that dialogue with mainland China has been a wise move. But, nevertheless, such dialogue could be much easier if the opposition rejected any involvement in it. Thus, from now on, it will have to fine-tune in order to prove the population that their negotiating capacities and efficiency are greater than those that the DPP could display. Otherwise, the CPC could be willing to offer the DPP more generous concessions than expected to seduce them, on the condition of their renouncing to independence.

The new triangle taking shape within the cross-Strait relations (CPC-KMT-DPP), adds the substantial political value of consensus as an indicator of a new phase that, apparently, will leave behind the strategy of confrontation that up to now determined the opposition’s policy.

In sum, only five years after the beginning of the “third cooperation”, Beijing succeeds again in imposing the strength of its logic, and considers, in view of the DPP’s turnabout, the possibility of a period of more stability in the cross-Strait relations, which it will have to repay with equal signs of flexibility -maybe even in the form of the unilateral announcement of matters concerning security, such as the withdrawal of the missiles that point at the Island. A more pragmatic focus from the main party in the opposition would be useful in this matter, and constitutes an essential requirement for the joint management of delicate issues, such as those related to sovereignty, the strengthening of mutual confidence, and a peace agreement. These subjects cannot be solved by the KMT alone, and must give rise to a new phase of the process started in 2005.

Ma has also achieved an improvement in the relations between Taiwan and the US, which were damaged during Chen Shui-bian’s term. At the same time, he has stressed the importance of the cross-Strait dialogue, and has attained an update of Washington’s commitment to fulfilling the defense needs of Taiwan. This commitment was reasserted by the current Deputy Secretary of State, James Steinberg, last December.

After its participation as an observer in the World Health Organization, Taipei aspires to become a member of the International Civil Aviation Organization, and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Both cases require the approval of Beijing, as does
the permission to take part in international institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, or the OCDE of Taiwanese experts. We must not forget that Taiwan is the world’s twenty-fifth largest economy, the eighteenth exporting economy, and the fourth owner of international currency in the world.

Conclusions

Taking the initial and shared immobility of the status quo as starting point, the new, apparent understanding between the political and institutional leaderships on both sides, as well as the DPP’s shift in policy, may soon help to stop focusing the debate on the question of the dependence/independence of Taiwan, and to begin to focus on the matter of who can gain the support of the majority of the population, in order to negotiate the best terms of an hypothetical unification with mainland China.

The “active approach” promoted by the KMT and the reemergence of the sinocentrist ideology, with a clearly pro-Chinese rhetoric regarding the Island’s governance, faces the challenge of meeting a society where the feeling of full-Taiwanese identity has grown exponentially -an underlying trend that the KMT needs to curb and redirect to keep counting with a significant socio-electoral support.

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**Official name**: Republic of Abkhazia, Apsny – აფხაზია (Abkhaz); Apkhazeti – აფხაზეთი (Georgian); Abkhaziya – Абхазия (Russian).

**Capital**: Sukhumi.

**Area**: 8,600 km². Located in the Caucasus region, it is bordered by Russia to the north, by the Black Sea to the west, and by Georgia to the south and east.


**Declaration of Independence**: On July 23rd, 1992 (from Georgia). After the proclamation, confrontations broke out between Georgian troops and Abkhazian paramilitary groups supported by Russia. Ceasefire in 1994 was followed by a long, relatively stable period. From that moment on, Abkhazia virtually remained as a *de facto* State thanks to the support from Moscow. In 2006, Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili decided to regain state control over Abkhazia.
This gave rise to tensions that eventually led to a brief war between Russia and Georgia in August 2008, which resulted in the de facto secession of Abkhazia and South Ossetia from Georgia. On August 26th, Russia became the first country that recognized Abkhazian independence, claiming its admission to the UN.

**Recognized by:** Russia, Venezuela, Nicaragua and Nauru (Micronesia), recognized the independence of Abkhazia between August and September, 2008. Other de facto republics such as South Ossetia and Transnistria also have recognized it.

**Form of Government or political system:** Semi-presidential Republic.

**President:** Sergei Bagapsh (since 2005).

**International disputes and conflicts:** Secessionist State from the Republic of Georgia. Abkhazia has no recognition from the UN, the US, the EU, or the NATO.

**Languages:** Abkhaz and Russian. Georgian is forbidden.

**Ethnic composition:** Abkhazs (43.8%); Georgians (19.3%); Russians (10.8%); Armenians (20.8%); Other (3.4%).

**Religions:** Orthodox Christian (Eastern Orthodox and Armenian Apostolic); Sunni Muslim; Jehovah’s Witnesses.

**Economy:** According to the UNDP (2004), unemployment rates reach almost 90%. In addition, Abkhazian economy has decreased between 80-90% since its declaration of independence (1992). The currencies in use are the Russian ruble and the US dollar, while Georgian lari is forbidden.

**Main resources:** Agriculture (citrus fruits, tobacco, tea), logging, packaged products, livestock.

**Armed forces and military expenditure:** Created in 1992, the Abkhazian Armed Forces (formerly Abkhazian Self-Defense Force) are mainly composed of land forces, along with some navy and air units. Their headquarters are located in Sukhumi, Ochamchire and Pitsunda. Abkhazian forces are estimated to have 5,000 troops, although than amount that may reach 50,000 if we include reservists. In February 2010, a Russian military base was established in Abkhazia for a 49-year term. Russia has also deployed its “anti-aircraft” system S-300 in the territory. In addition, Moscow has 1,600 troops stationed in Abkhazian territory, and its navy patrols Abkhazian territorial waters in the Black Sea. It is estimated that 35% of Abkhazia’s budget is spent on the defense.

Official name: Republic of Kosovo. Kosova or Kosovë (Albanian); Косово or Косово и Метохија, Kosovo or Kosovo i Metohija (Serbian).

Capital: Pristina.

Area: 10,887 km². Located in the Balkans, formerly an Autonomous Province within Serbia. Bordered by Macedonia to the south, by Albania to the west and by Montenegro and Serbia to the north.


Declaration of Independence: On February 17th, 2008 (from Serbia). Not recognized by the UN, although recognized by 22 of the 27 EU members, as well as by the USA.

Recognized by: 75 UN members: Afghanistan, Albania, Germany, Saudi Arabia, Australia,
Austria, Bahrain, Belgium, Belize, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Canada, Colombia, the Comoros Islands, South Korea, Costa Rica, Croatia, Denmark, the United Arab Emirates, Slovenia, the United States of America, Estonia, Finland, France, Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Honduras, Hungary, Ireland, Iceland, the Marshall Islands, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kiribati, Latvia, Liberia, Lithuania, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malaysia, the Maldives, Malta, the Republic of Macedonia, Malawi, Mauritania, Federated States of Micronesia, Monaco, Montenegro, Nauru, Norway, New Zealand, the Netherlands, Palau, Peru, Panama, Poland, Qatar, Portugal, the Czech Republic, the Dominican Republic, the United Kingdom, Samoa, San Marino, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Swaziland, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, the Tuvalu Islands, Vanuatu, and Djibouti. The only special case is the Republic of Taiwan, a non-UN member, which announced its recognition of Kosovo.

Yet, thirty-seven countries do not officially recognize the independence of Kosovo: Angola, Algeria, Argentina, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Brazil, Bolivia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Chile, the People’s Republic of China, Cuba, the Republic of Cyprus, Slovakia, Egypt, Spain, Greece, Georgia, Indonesia, Iran, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Libya, Moldova, Romania, Mali, Russia, Serbia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Tajikistan, Uruguay, Venezuela, and Vietnam.

**Form of Government or political system:** Parliamentary republic, under the supervision of the UN.

**President:** Hashim Thaçi (Prime Minister) and Atifete Jahjaga.

**International disputes and conflicts:** In 1974, Kosovo was granted a certain degree of autonomy within the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Inter-ethnic clashes from 1989, and the Balkan Wars between 1991 and 1995, made obvious the tensions between the Serbs and the Kosovo Albanians. During the period between March and June, 1999, the NATO started a war against the former Yugoslavia without the UN’s Security Council approval. The organization alleged the need to prevent an eventual ethnic cleansing in Kosovo, similar to that occurred in Bosnia and Herzegovina years before, as the main reason. After the expulsion of Serbian authorities, the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) was established. In the meanwhile, the Kosovo Liberation Army (UÇK), had begun to arrange political life in Kosovo. Currently, Serbia does not acknowledge the independence of Kosovo, and regards it as its “autonomous region”.

**Languages:** Albanian, Serbian, Macedonian, Montenegrin.

**Ethnic composition:** Albanians (88%); Serbs (8%); others (Gorani people, Turks, Macedonians, Romani people... 4%).
Religions: Sunni Muslim (92%); Orthodox Christian (7%); Roman Catholic (1%).

Economy: Kosovo is one of the poorest regions in Europe. Unemployment rates are estimated to be around 40%-50%. The GDP per capita is about US$1,500 (2006). The country is highly dependent on remittances as well as on international aid. The mafia and organized crime are very strong in the territory, their main activities including smuggling, prostitution, people and drug trafficking, money laundering, and tax evasion. The Euro is the official currency since 2002.

Main resources: The economy in Kosovo, mainly rural, is mostly under the influence the informal sector derived from trafficking.

Armed forces and military expenditure: After the war’s end in 1999, the NATO displayed its Kosovo Force (KFOR). At the same time, the UN established the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), in accordance with the Security Council Resolution 1244. In 2010, the KFOR cut its troops in Kosovo to 5,000. The Armed Forces of the Republic of Kosovo were made up of the remains of the former Kosovo Liberation Army (UÇK, in Gheg Albanian), that has been dismantled after agreements with the KFOR and the UNMIK in the latest years.

Official site(s): UN/UNMIK: http://www.unmikonline.org/
Official name: The Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (NKR) or Upper Karabakh; Dağlıq Qarabağ (Azerbaijani); Լեռնային Ղարաբաղ - Lernayin Garabag (Armenian); Нагорный Карабах - Nagörnyj Karabáx (Russian).

Capital: Stepanakert.

Area: About, 4,400 km². Located in the region of Transcaucasia (South Caucasus), it constitutes an enclave within the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Population: 130,000 (approx.).

Declaration of Independence: After the independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan from the USSR on 30th August, 1991, a referendum was held in the region of Nagorno-Karabakh making use of the Soviet Constitution, which affirmed the right to self-determination of the peoples within its territory. The results led to the declaration of independence of this region. On De-
November 10th, 1991, 99.3% of the Armenian population living in Nagorno-Karabakh voted for independence in a referendum. The result was boycotted by the authorities of the still-existing Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic. Moscow made an unsuccessful attempt to grant the NK the status of “autonomous region”, which was rejected by Armenia, Azerbaijan and the NK representatives. The Nagorno-Karabakh Republic was proclaimed on January 6th, 1992.

**Independence recognized by:** Nowadays, the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic is not recognized by any sovereign State. Only the self-proclaimed independent, *de facto* Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic of Transnistria recognizes it. Nevertheless, the Nagorno-Karabakh has the economic and military support of the Republic of Armenia.

**International disputes and conflicts:** An armed conflict between the then-Soviet Socialist Republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan, as well as the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast, took place between 1987 and 1993. The conflict resulted in 20,000 deaths. The ceasefire declared in 1994 did not put an end to the conflict. The Nagorno-Karabakh remained supported only by Armenia, without Azerbaijan’s official recognition of its *de facto* independence.

**Form of Government or political system:** Parliamentary republic.

**President:** Bako Sahakyan (since 2007).

**Languages:** Armenian, Azerbaijani, Russian.

**Ethnic composition:** Armenians (80%), Azerbaijanis, Russians.

**Religions:** Armenian Orthodox Christian, Sunni Muslim.

**Armed forces and military expenditure:** The Nagorno-Karabakh Defense Army was officially established in May, 1992. Since then, the number of its land forces hovers between 15,000 and 20,000, according to different estimations. Armenia totally supports the region both at military and logistic levels, and considers any foreign attack on the Karabakh as if it were on its own. There are no reliable data about the real conditions or the military expenditure of Nagorno-Karabakh, which stays out of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe.

**Official site(s):**


Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic: [http://www.nkr.am/en](http://www.nkr.am/en)
**Official name:** Republic of South Ossetia; Республика Хуссар Ирыстон, Respublikae Khussar Iryston (Ossetic); Республика Южная Осетия, Respublika Yuzhnaya Osetiya (Russian); სამხრეთ ოსეთი, Samkhreti Oseti (Georgian).

**Capital:** Tskhinvali (approx. 30,000 inhabitants).

**Area:** 3,900 km². Located in the area of the South Caucasus, between Georgian and Russian territories.

**Population:** About 80,000 (2010). Population density: 21/km².

**Declaration of Independence:** On September 20th, 1990 (from Georgia). The Regional Soviet of Deputies of the autonomous Republic of South Ossetia proclaimed its independence, but the autonomy was revoked Supreme Soviet of the Georgian SSR in December 1990. This led to an armed conflict between Ossetian militias and the Central Government in Tbilisi, resulting in nearly 2,000 casualties and 4,000 exiled South Ossetians. On January 19th, 1992, most of the South Ossetians voted for the annexation to Russia, which renewed armed confrontations
with Georgia until armistice was signed in July, 1992. During the armistice peacekeeping forces were deployed. In 1996 and 2001, Presidential Elections were held South Ossetia among Georgian protests. After a referendum held on November 12th, not recognized by Tbilisi, South Ossetia’s independence from Georgia was proclaimed together with its annexation to Russia and to the Autonomous Republic of North Ossetia. Within these tensions over secession, the brief war between Georgian armed forces and Russian peacekeeping forces on August 7th and 8th, 2008, resulting in approximately 1,500 casualties, was followed by a short attack in Georgian territory which ended with the material territorial separation of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. In the end of August, 2008, both regions were recognized as independent States by Russian Parliament.

**Recognized by:** The independence of South Ossetia was recognized by Russia, Venezuela, Nicaragua and Nauru (Micronesia) during August-September 2008. The *de facto* republics of Abkhazia and Transnistria have also recognized it.

**Form of Government or political system:** Presidential republic.

**President:** Eduard Kokoity (since December, 2001).

**International disputes and conflicts:** Georgia does not recognize South Ossetian *de facto* independence.

**Languages:** Ossetic, Russian, Georgian.

**Ethnic composition:** Before the 2008 war, South Ossetia was populated approximately by Ossetians (65%) and Georgians (25 %), as well as other minorities such as Russians.

**Religions:** Orthodox (Armenian Apostolic and Eastern Churches); Sunni Muslim.

**Economy:** With an estimated GDP per capita around US$ 250, South Ossetian economy is seriously dependent on Russia. This country transfers a total budget of US$ 30 million on a yearly basis, also allowing the use of its own currency, the Russian ruble. Ossetians have been granted Russian passports, too. Moscow also has strong energy interests in the area, due to the US$ 640 million-worth investments of the State-owned Russian Company Gazprom in gas pipelines. Trafficking constitutes an equally important activity in Ossetian Economy.

**Armed forces and military expenditure:** Specific informations on troops in South Ossetia are not available. Nevertheless, Russian and South Ossetian Ministers of Defense, Anatoliy Serdyukov and Yuri Tanaev, respectively, signed an agreement similar to that previously signed between Moscow and Abkhazia, which established the settlement of a Russian military base in Ossetian territory for a 49-term, with the option of its extension by 15-year periods.
**Official name:** Palestinian National Authority of the West Bank the Gaza Stripe (PNA). This authority is politically controlled by the secularist party Fatah, founded by Yasser Arafat within the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1964.

The historical names for Palestine are: فلسطين, Filasṭīn (Arabic); Palestine, פלשתינה, or Eretz Yisra'el, ארץ ישראל (Hebrew). Since the Oslo Peace Accords (1993), the PNA constitutes the only entity that represents a government for the Palestinian population in the West Bank and Gaza de facto. The latter became virtually separated after the withdrawal of Israeli settlers and troops in 2005, and stands under the rule of the Islamic movement Hamas since then.

**Capital:** The Palestinian movement has historically claimed Jerusalem (currently under Israeli rule) as their capital city. The PNA’s Public Administration headquarters are currently located in the city of Ramallah (West Bank), as well as in Gaza, although the political breakup undergone since 2007 has favored the prevalence of Hamas-ascribed organs as the political and public administration entities in Gaza. The PNA claims East Jerusalem as a de iure capital of a future
Palestinian State. This possibility is obviously rejected by the State of Israel.

**Area:** 6,239 km² officially recognized as territories under the rule of the PNA. After decades of military occupation, Palestinian borders are a constant source of controversy. The territory of the West Bank has an area of 5,640 km², while Gaza occupies 380 km².

**Population:** 4.2 million (2008 estimation). The number rises to 10 millions if we add the Palestinian refugees and displaced (in Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, the Occupied Territories and the Arabian Peninsula), as well as the Palestinian diaspora (in the Near West, Europe, South America, the USA).

**Declaration of Independence:** On November 15th, 1988, the leader of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Yasser Arafat proclaimed through the Palestinian National Council the independence of the Palestinian territories in the West Bank and Gaza, with Jerusalem as their capital city. Later on, the “Intifada” or popular uprising in both occupied territories (1987-1992) led to the peace negotiations for the Middle East at the Madrid Conference (1991), and the subsequent Oslo Accords (1993). On May 4th, 1994, the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) was officially established.

**Recognized by:** 102 countries recognize the independence of Palestine or the Palestinian National Authority (PNA): Algeria, Bahrain, the Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Tunisia, the UAE, Yemen, Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Democratic the Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, São Tome and Principe, Senegal, the Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Swaziland, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brunei, Cambodia, the People’s Republic of China, India, Indonesia, Iran, Laos, Malaysia, the Maldives, Mongolia, Nepal, North Korea, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Turkey, Vietnam, Albania, Austria, Belarus, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, the Republic of Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Malta, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Russia, Serbia, the Ukraine, the Vatican City, Costa Rica, Cuba, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Uruguay, the Dominican Republic, Chile, Colombia, Argentina, Mexico, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Vanuatu.

In addition, there are diplomatic representations of the PNA in 12 other States: France, Australia, Belgium, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, the UK, Brazil, and Switzerland. The UN has granted the “permanent observer” status to the PNA.

**Form of Government or political system:** The Palestinian National Authority (PNA) operates virtually as a State, without a formal de iure recognition at the international level. The UN
recognizes the PNA both as an “inter-governmental entity and organization”, and has accepted it as an authorized interlocutor of the Palestinian population. At the behest of law, the existence of the “Palestinian nation” is recognized. Nevertheless, it has not been granted the status as formally constituted State, yet.

**President:** Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) has held the Presidency of the PNA since January 2005, as the successor of the historical leader Yasser Arafat after his death in November 2004. His representative in Gaza is Aziz Duwaik. The overwhelming victory of Hamas in the legislative elections of January, 2006, has led, in practice, to a two-headed authority within the PNA: Ismail Haniyeh (Hamas) became the First Minister, but his actual power is limited to the Gaza Strip since 2007. Salam Fayyad (Third Way Party), in turn, became the West Bank’s First Minister.

**International disputes and conflicts:** The persistent struggle of the Palestinian people towards their territorial sovereignty since the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, as well as the military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza territories since 1967 (partially reduced after the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza in 2005), perpetuates a State-sovereignty problem that confronts Palestinians and Israelis. At the same time, the conflict involves Israel’s neighboring Arab states, as well as those that have accepted Palestinian refugees (Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt), and both the UN and the US -Israel’s main ally. Terrorism -both from Palestinian militias and from the State of Israel itself- constitutes a key element to understand the seriousness of this conflict, and so are the constant confrontations with the Israeli Army to gain effective control over the Palestinian Territory -and even between the Palestinian militias of Fatah, Hamas, the Al-Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades, the Islamic Jihad Movement, etc.

**Languages:** Arabic, in its Palestinian variant, is the majority language (80%). Hebrew is also spoken. In addition, there are Armenian communities and Aramaic-speaking communities. The Aramaic Language is a 3,000 year old Semitic language. Some Palestinians have also knowledge of other languages such as English, French, Italian, Spanish and German.

**Ethnic composition:** Most of the Palestinian population has Arab-Semitic origins. There are also Hebrew, Armenian and Druze communities.

**Religions:** Sunni Muslim (90%), although there are many Shiite communities. About 3% of the population is conformed by Catholic or Eastern Christians. There are also Jewish, Armenian Christian, Maronite, and Druze minority communities.

**Economy:** It is mainly based on agriculture (citrus fruits, dates, cereals, olives, vegetables). The Palestinian economy has a strong foreign dependence due to the Israeli occupation. Dependence from the remittances sent by Palestinian diaspora and international aid is specially big. The commercial activity, together with construction and textile industries, are remarkable. The
Israeli sheqel is still the official currency, although Jordanian dinar is also used in some West Bank areas. Completely reliable data on the GDP per capita are not available, although a report from the UNDP (2006) estimates it at US$ 1,100 for the Palestinian population in the West Bank, and only US$ 600 in Gaza. Poverty levels are worrisome: more than 60% of the West Bank population live under the poverty threshold. This percentage dramatically rises to more than 80% in Gaza, strongly affected by the Israeli blockade since 2007.

**Armed forces and military expenditure:** The establishment of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) in 1994 led to the creation of police and security forces, which are hardly united mainly due to the prevalence of armed militias that operate within Palestinian parties and movements (Fatah, Hamas, the popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, etc.). The political and territorial split started in 2007, that left the West Bank under Fatah’s control, and Gaza under the rule of Hamas, has increased the dispersion and lack of unity of the PNA’s security forces. This hinders the estimation of both the real number of troops and the military expenditure.

**Official site(s):** Ministry of Information of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA):


Official name: Republic of Puntland; *Puntlaand* (Somali); *طنبلان ضرأ* (Arabic); Former Italian Somaliland.

Capital: Garoowe. Estimated population: 35,000 inhabitants. It is the seat of the Parliament, the Presidential Palace, and the Government Ministries. The city of Boosaaso (500,000 inhabitants) is increasingly important. It is the main port in the Gulf of Aden, and constitutes the region’s main economic driving force. Boosaaso is also the seat of the East Africa University. Many inhabitants from the unstable southern Somalia have displaced to this city.

Area: 250,000 km². Located in the Horn of Africa, bordered by Somalia to the southeast, by the also self-proclaimed Republic of Somaliland to the west, by the Gulf of Aden to the north, and by the Indian Ocean to the East. It borders with Ethiopia to the southwest.

Population: 2.7 millions. Population density 5/km².

Declaration of Independence: July, 1998. Puntland’s territorial breakup was a consequence of the progressive disintegration of the Somali State that takes place since the fall of Siad Barre’s regime, which also caused the proclamation of the Republic of Somaliland. Within this context, the *Majeerteen*, or north-western Somali sub-clans tried to establish a regular
government in order to preserve their region from the civil war and the conflicts taking place in the rest of Somalian territory. Thus, the Majeerteen Republic, separated from Somalia and from the newly self-declared Somaliland, was proclaimed in 1991. After the consolidating their authority, the Republic of the Majeerteen achieved the establishment of viable and democratic, political and public administration institutions, which led to the proclamation of the Republic of Puntland in July, 2008.

By that stage, the leaders of different Somali factions such as Husayn Muhammad Aydid, Ali Mahdi Muhammad, Uthman Hasan Ali (aka Uthman Ato), and Mohammed Afrah Qanyareh, settled an agreement in Mogadishu, through which a High Committee for the administration of the Somali region of Banaadir- led by two Presidents: Husayn Muhammad Aydid and Ali Mahdi Muhammad- was created. After this agreement, another agreement between the north-western Somali clans was announced during a meeting which involved 450 delegates held in Garoowe, in the Nugaal Region. The meeting was attended by delegates from Darod clans and sub-clans Dhulbahante, Warsangell, Leelkase, and Awrtle.

It must be noted that, although Puntland announced its territorial separation from Somalia in 1998, its Government considers the possibility of becoming a political and administrative autonomy within an eventual federal Somali State. This option, however, is not possible nowadays.

**Recognized by:** Puntland has not been recognized by any sovereign State yet, nor by any international organization. In view of its pro-autonomy stance within a Somali federal State, the Government of Puntland does not seem to seek its international recognition as a separate and independent State, in contrast to the neighboring Somaliland.

Nevertheless, in January 2011, Puntland authorities announced a relation breakup with the Somali Transitional Federal Government (TFG), the only official authority recognized by the UN, claiming that the TFG “does not represent Puntland in international forums”.

**Form of Government or political system:** Presidential republic.


**International disputes and conflicts:** With the Republic of Somaliland, which led to a brief war in October-November, 2006, after the capture by Somaliland’s Union of Islamic Courts of the settlement of Bandiiradley, located in Puntland’s border. This caused a strong confrontation between several warlords, which, simultaneously, led to a raid and a capture attempt over the enclave of Gaalkacyo, capital city of the Mugdug district, claimed by Puntland. In addition, the country has political and territorial disputes with several Somali clans.
**Languages**: Somali and Arabic.

**Ethnic composition**: The diversity of family and ethnic clans conform a whole mosaic. *Majeerteen* sub-clans, along with *Darod, Dir,* and *Isaaq* clans prevail in Puntland. These clans are openly confronted with the rest of Somali clans, especially with those settled in the central and southern regions of Somalia. The sojourn of *Darod* members in Somali territory may be one of the causes why Puntland did not seek secession at a first stake. In 2001, a dispute on the elections led two political leaders from different clans to mobilize their troops and bring them into conflict. Therefore, such bonds are of great importance within their society.

**Religions**: Sunni Islam (majority), specially the *Shāfi‘i* school of Islamic jurisprudence, considered the most tolerant one within the stickler Islamic Law. Animistic and syncretic beliefs from African cultures are also present.

**Economy**: Fishing is the main economic activity in Puntland. Piracy constitutes a serious problem within the waters of the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean. Puntland’s 1,600 km of coastline offer a great amount of marine resources (seafood, lobster, dried fish, tuna). Furthermore, livestock, agriculture, and manufacturing are also important activities.

**Armed forces and military expenditure**: The military and security forces are estimated to range between 700 and 1,000 agents in Puntland. There are no reliable data available about the region’s military budget. In 1992, the UN imposed an arms embargo to Somalia that slightly affected the militias in Puntland.

**Official site(s)**:

Official name: Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic, Transdniestria or Pridnestrovia; Приднестровье, Pridnestrovye (Russian); Transnistria or Stînga Nistrului (Moldovan, meaning “Left Bank of the Dniester”).

Capital: Tiraspol.

Area: 4,163 km² (2001). Located on the left bank of the Dniester river in Eastern Europe, it is bordered by the Moldovan region of Bessarabia and by Ukraine.


Declaration of independence: On September, 2nd, 1990. It was proclaimed under the official name of Transnistrian Soviet Socialist Republic or Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic. At a referendum held on December 17th, 2006, 97.2% of the voters confirmed the de facto independence of Transnistria.
Recognized by: Transnistria’s independence is only recognized by three *de facto* States: South Ossetia, Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh, although Russia keeps relations with the region through a consulate in Tiraspol.

Form of Government or political system: Semi-Presidential republic with a unicameral Parliament.

President: Igor Smirnov (since 1991).

International disputes and conflicts: The declaration of independence from Moldova in 1990 led to an armed conflict which left approximately 1,500 casualties. Ceasefire was declared in 1992, encouraged by Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, and Transnistrian representatives. Since then, Moscow keeps its military in Transnistria through the 14th Russian Army, held by Moldova as an “external hostile factor”. Nevertheless, for Transnistrian authorities it constitutes the only guarantee of protection and security.

Languages: Moldovan (official), Russian, and Ukrainian.

Ethnic composition: Moldovans (32%), Russians (30.4%), Ukrainians (28%); as well as ethnic groups of Bulgarian, Gagauzians (Turkic), and Belarusian origin, Poles, Jews, and Germans.

Religions: Eastern Orthodox Christian (91%), Roman Catholic (4%), Evangelical.

Economy: The most important sectors are heavy industry, electric production, and metallurgy, along with a remarkable textile industry. The currency in use is the Transnistrian Ruble, only valid in this territory.

Armed forces and military expenditure: About 2,500 Russian soldiers are stationed in Transnistria, their main tasks being the maintenance of depots of arms and military equipments remaining from the former the Russian 14th Army, currently denominated Operative Group of Russian Troops in Transnistria. A great part of this arsenal is used by Transnistrian Armed Forces, as well as by the Security Forces of the Domestic Affairs Ministry, and the Transnistrian Police.

Official site(s):

Official Site of the Supreme Council of the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic: [http://www.vspmr.org/?Lang=Eng](http://www.vspmr.org/?Lang=Eng) (English)
**Official name**: Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, *Kuzey Kıbrıs Türk Cumhuriyeti, KKTC* (Turkish).

**Capital**: Nicosia (Turkish *Lefkoşa*). Claimed by the Republic of Cyprus.

**Area**: 3,355 km². Located in the north of the island of Cyprus, in the Mediterranean Sea.

**Population**: 210,000 (2003 estimation).

**Declaration of Independence**: November 15th, 1983 (from the Republic of Cyprus).

**Recognized by**: Officially recognized by the Republic of Turkey and by the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic (Azerbaijan) only. Nevertheless, the TRNC is a member of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, and the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO), headquartered in The Hague (http://www.unpo.org/).
**Form of Government or political system:** Secular, parliamentary republic, inspired by the political system of the Republic of Turkey.

**President:** Derviş Eroğlu (since April, 2010).

**International disputes and conflicts:** Since the military invasion on July 20th, 1974, Turkey keeps about 35,000 troops stationed in the TRNC. This increases tensions with the neighboring Republic of Cyprus, the UN and the European Union. Previously to the accession of the Republic of Cyprus to the European Union, the UN presented a peace plan in April, 2004. The plan included a two-state confederation between the Turkish-Cypriot and the Greek-Cypriot parts. This plan was approved by 65% of the Turkish-Cypriots, but was rejected by the Greek-Cypriot population, which mainly argued that the plan granted too many advantages for the Turkish part, including their indefinite military presence and the accommodation of 45,000 Turkish settlers in the north.

The UN and other international organizations recognize just the mainly Greek-Cypriot Republic of Cyprus (currently member of the EU) as legal, which is not officially recognized by Turkey.

**Languages:** The Turkish language is the prevailing language. There are Greek-Cypriot and Lebanese Maronite minorities.

**Ethnic composition:** Mainly of Turkish origin, with small Greek-Cypriot and Lebanese minorities.

**Religions:** Sunni Muslim (99%); Orthodox Christian, and Maronite.

**Economy:** The economic dependence from Turkey is total. The official currency is the Turkish lira. Ankara invests US$ 700,000 million per year in the TRNC’s development.

**Armed forces and military expenditure:** TRNC armed forces consist in seven infantry battalions that comprise 5,000 troops (reaching 26,000 if we include the reserve forces). Mainland Turkey also has 35,000 land, sea and air forces, under the 4th Army command (Cyprus Turkish Forces).

**Official site(s):**


Public Information Office of the TRNC: [http://www.trncpio.org/trncpio/en/](http://www.trncpio.org/trncpio/en/) (English)

Site with information about the TRNC: [http://www.northcyprus.org/](http://www.northcyprus.org/)
**Official name**: Republic of Somaliland; *Soomaaliland* or *Jamhuuriyadda Soomaaliland* (Somali); *Jumhūryat Arḍ aṣ-Ṣūmāl* (Arabic); former British Somaliland.

**Capital**: Hargeisa (Somali: *Hargaysa*).

**Area**: 137,600 km². Located on the East African coast, in the Horn of Africa, Somaliland is bordered by the Gulf of Aden to the north, by the independent Republic of Puntland to the east, by Djibouti to the west, and by Ethiopia to the south and southeast.

**Population**: 3.5 million (2005 estimation).

**Declaration of Independence**: In May, 1991, the Republic of Somaliland chose to formally break away from the Republic of Somalia, mainly due to the anarchic situation in that country and the persistent pressure of a diaspora that longed for independence. From that moment, the civil war not only increased instability within the Somali territory, but also virtually destroyed
the institutions and the State order achieved since the country’s independence from Great Britain in 1960, and, moreover, after the fall of the socialist-style regime of Mohamed Siad Barre between 1961 and 1991.

Although formally separated, Somaliland could not escape, neither from the instability caused by the ethnic and tribal diversity and the variety of clans, nor from the advance of the fundamentalist Muslim militias on Somalia’s capital, Mogadishu. All this deepened the *de facto* political and territorial division, with military and tribal factions controlling several territories, such as Puntland.

Despite the lack of international recognition, Somaliland has achieved remarkable stability levels in comparison to the rest of the country since 1991. It has even held democratic presidential, parliamentary, and municipal elections, and established a Constitution in 2001. Despite the Government has not yet complete control over the State police and military forces, stability levels in the country are satisfactory. Thus, the trajectory as a *de facto* State, together with its relative stability allowed it to slightly avoid the chaos and anarchy prevailing in other regions within Somalia and the Horn of Africa.

**Recognized by:** Somaliland has not been recognized by any State yet. Nevertheless, its political and institutional stability compared to the state-order problems and the existing anarchy in several Somali regions have allowed countries such as Ethiopia to establish useful, fluid political and trade contacts with Somaliland. This could constitute the base for an eventual future recognition at diplomatic and political levels.

However, Somaliland has diplomatic representations in South Africa, Ghana, London, and Brussels. Sweden, in turn, recognizes Somaliland as an autonomous region within the application for development aid since 2007. The future official recognition of Somaliland strongly depends on the evolution of its relations with Ethiopia. The African Union has made no comment on the matter yet, probably waiting for Ethiopia’s definitive stance on the issue.

**Form of Government or political system:** Presidential republic, although Somaliland’s political system is considered as a “hybrid” one, since it combines modern political institutions (executive, legislative, and judiciary powers) with ancient and traditional ones, that revolve around the assemblies of ethnic and family clans. This governance system is called the “beel system” (clan or community) and includes a House of the Elders (*guurti*). The *Sharia* (Islamic law) is also observed in the country, which limits the freedom of assembly, as well as well as the freedom of religion. Somaliland has only three political parties: the Justice and Development Party (UCID), the Peace, Unity, and Development Party (*Kulmiye*), and the United Peoples’ Democratic Party (UDUB).

**President:** Ahmed M. Mahamoud Silanyo (since 2010).
International disputes and conflicts: After the proclamation of the Republic of Somaliland in 1991, the Government in Hargeisa attempted to annex the administrative regions of Awdal, Woqooyi Galbeed, Togdheer, Sanaag, and Sool, sparking off strong political and armed confrontations against the central authorities in Mogadishu. In addition, Europe and other African countries are suspicious of alleged support from Somaliland clans to the piracy groups that operate in the Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Aden.

Languages: Somali and Arabic.

Ethnic composition: The diversity of family and ethnic clans constitutes an ethnic mosaic. Most important clans are the Darod, Dir and Isaaq ones, mainly settled in Somalia’s southern and central regions. They stand in open confrontation with the other clans in Somalia.

Religions: Sunni Islam (majority), specially the Shafī‘ school of Islamic jurisprudence, considered the most tolerant one within the stickler Islamic Law. Islam is the state religion of Somaliland. Animistic and syncretic beliefs from African cultures are also present.

Economy: Mainly dependent on livestock and agriculture (especially, cereal production and horticulture). The official currency, the Somaliland shilling, has no international recognition, although it is indeed used in trade deals with neighboring Somalia due to practical reasons. Somaliland obtains revenues from duties, taxes and tariffs at the port of Berbera, an important commercial enclave within the region. In addition, the country has considerable deposits of oil, natural gas, gypsum, lime, mica, quartz, lignite, lead, gold, and sulfur. It is worth mentioning that some public goods are provided either at the initiatives of Somali emigrants or by NGOs.

Armed forces and military expenditure: The Somaliland Armed Forces, along with the Police Force of Somaliland comprise a contingent of about 3,000 troops.

Official site(s):

**Official name:** Republic of China, also known as Taiwan, former Formosa; 中華民國 (Chinese); Zhōnghuá Mínguó (pinyin). From the political point of view, disagreements on the semantic nature of the names “Republic of China” or “Taiwan” are common, mainly caused by the People’s Republic of China (PRC) pressure to isolate the island.

During the Cold War, the Western media simplified such distinction dividing them in the “Nationalist China” (Taiwan) and the “Popular China” (the PRC). During Chen Shui-bian’s term as the President of Taiwan (2000-2008), the use of the name “Taiwan” was promoted, accordingly with a so-called “Taiwanization” process of its public and administration institutions.

**Capital:** Taipei.

**Area:** 36,200 km². Located between the Taiwan Strait and the Philippine Sea, a few miles away from the continental Chinese province of Fujian. It borders with East China Sea to the north and with the South China Sea to the south.

**Population:** 22,814,636 (2008). 75% of the population lives in urban areas.

**Declaration of Independence:** The declaration of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in
October, 1949, put an end to the hegemony of the nationalist party Kuomintang, led by Chiang Kai-shek. The Communists had fought the party in a long-time Civil War during the Japanese invasion of China and World War II.

The defeat of the Kuomintang in 1949 led to the resettling of the Party’s administration and leadership in Taiwan, formerly known as Formosa. The de facto division between Taiwan and continental China has been ongoing since then. Taiwan was supported by the US and its allies within the “Cold War” context, even though it caused the loss of its chair in the UN in favor of the PRC. The dictatorial regime of the KMT made possible the maintenance of martial law and a “state of war” between 1949 and 1987, followed by a progressive process of democratization, political opening-up, and economic reforms started in 1996.

**Recognized by:** Taiwan has been granted the recognition of 23 UN members: Belize, Burkina Faso, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Kiribati, Nauru, Nicaragua, Palau, Panama, Paraguay, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, São Tome and Principe, Swaziland, the Dominican Republic, Gambia, the Marshall Islands, the Solomon Islands, the Tuvalu Islands and the Vatican City.

Year by year, the number of countries that acknowledge the Republic of China and keep diplomatic relations with it keeps decreasing, mostly due to the PRC’s political, diplomatic, and economic boost. Nevertheless, in 2002, Taiwan joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) under the denomination of “Chinese Taipei” (Separate Customs Territory of Taiwan, Penghu, Kinmen and Matsu). The Republic of China left its seat in the UN in 1971, after most of the members supported the People’s Republic of China accession to the organization in a voting. In 1991, Taiwan became a member of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum (APEC).

**Form of Government or political system:** Semi-presidential Republic. The Head of the State is elected by universal suffrage. There are five powers for the governance of Taiwan: the Executive Yuan, the Legislative Yuan, the Judicial Yuan, the Control Yuan, and the Examination Yuan.

**President:** Ma Ying-jeou (since May, 2008).

**International disputes and conflicts:** The legitimacy of the Republic of China is not recognized, neither by the People’s Republic of China, nor by several other countries. Nevertheless, the ROC is tacitly and strategically supported by Washington, in spite of not having its official recognition. Taiwanese authorities have progressively given up the claims to their recognition as a legitimate and legal entity separated from continental China. From a strategic and geopolitical perspective, eventual tensions between the PRC and Taiwan could led to a high-level political and military confrontation between China and the US.
Languages: Although Mandarin Chinese is the island’s main language, Taiwanese people prefer using a variety of the families Min (from the region of Fujian in continental China) and Hakka, as well as other Formosan varieties.

Ethnic composition: Ninety-eight percent of Taiwan’s population is made up of Hahn Chinese, while the remaining two percent is a combination of Taiwanese aboriginal ethnicities.

Religions: The range of religions in Taiwan is a wide one: about 35.1% of the population are Buddhists, about 33% are Taoists and Confucians, 14% are atheists, 3% Christians, and 3.5% are affiliated to other religions or sects.

Economy: With a strong economic growth, a prosperous middle class, qualified work forces, and up-to-the-minute technology companies (microprocessors, telecommunications, biotechnology, etc.), Taiwan is considered by the international organizations as one of the economic centers with faster growth rates, which includes the island in the group of “Newly Industrialized Countries” (NICs). Taiwan is also one of the “Five Asian Tigers”, along with South Korea, Hong-Kong, Singapore, and newcomer Malaysia.

Taiwan has benefited from great investments of the US, Japan and Europe. The country’s estimated US$ 19,625 GDP per capita is one of the highest worldwide. The new Taiwan dollar is the official currency.

Armed forces and military expenditure: The Republic of China Armed Forces are roughly made up of 2 million troops, and also receive a strong support from the US. About 2.2% of the Taiwanese GDP is spent on defense (2009).

Official site(s):


Website of the Ministry of Foreign affairs (English): http://www.mofa.gov.tw
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