

Soft Power On Abkhazia Will Not Work

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In Georgia, it's called the fall of Sukhumi. In Abkhazia, it's called the liberation of Sukhum.

Whatever it's called, it happened 20 years ago, and that's about the only thing that Georgians and Abkhaz can agree on. On Sept. 27, Georgian government officials commemorated the day at Hero's Memorial, where the government of the autonomous republic of Abkhazia in exile called for a new strategy to solve the Abkhaz conflict and expressed hope that "historical justice will be restored and that Abkhaz and Georgian people will live in peace."

There are a couple of problems with this statement. The first is that the government is pursuing a new strategy, although it's not much different than the old one, except the aggressive rhetoric is gone. But with the military solution out of the picture, the only strategy Georgia has left, short of recognition, is to create a utopian state that the Abkhaz will want to be a part of. From the Abkhaz perspective, the message is "exchange your independence for a good life." Nobody in Abkhazia is willing to do that.

This brings us to the problem of "historical justice," which means Abkhazia belongs

to Georgia. These are the last two words the Georgians should be uttering if they want to live in peace with their Abkhaz brothers. The entire foundation of the Abkhaz right to statehood is based on Josef Stalin's "historic injustice." It's been 20 years, and the government in exile still hasn't learned that when two sides lay historic claims to a territory you don't talk history.

What they should be discussing is how can they live together as neighbors. Georgia fails to understand just how deep Abkhaz animosity and mistrust is. Russia is keeping us separated, Georgians say. In 1992, Georgian military commander Tenghiz Kitovani rolled tanks into Abkhazia ostensibly to protect the railroad from marauders. Since when do tanks protect trains from thieves?

Again the blame is on Russia, who set him up.

There are responsibility issues here, but in the 20 years since the end of the war nobody has objectively analyzed their roles in it. Instead, they lay wreaths on Sept. 27 for those that died for their country and dream that someday the Abkhaz will realize Georgia loves them.

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