

# Abkhazia: Living with insecurity

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Destroyed building in Sukhum(i)  
PHOTO: ANNA MATVEEVA

## Summary

*When conflict with Georgian forces broke out in August 1992, many Abkhaz were armed only with hunting rifles, though more advanced weapons were soon acquired from Russian troops, either by negotiation or unilateral seizure. The SALW used were mostly of Soviet/Russian origin. Since the conflict ended in 1993, SALW have remained widespread. The local population still feels insecure, and in such circumstances, people are reluctant to hand in their weapons. Tension is particularly high in the Gal(i) region, which lies on the de facto Abkhaz border that forms a ceasefire line with Georgia proper. The government of the unrecognised Republic of Abkhazia has had some success in regulating SALW proliferation. Legal arms sales are better controlled, and the MOI keeps a register of all individuals who possess arms. Legislation has been passed on the possession and trafficking of firearms. However, whenever tension escalates at the border, guns again become more visible in society.*

## Traditional gun culture

A close affinity with guns and pastoral gun possession, especially in the mountain areas, is rooted in the cultural traditions of the Abkhaz. In the past, an Abkhaz man typically provided his family with food by hunting, fishing or farming and these traditions remain strong. Today, coupled with the impact of the war, the Abkhaz attitude to weapons is still largely governed by tradition. Traditional Abkhaz culture stresses the importance of firearms in society, and these ideas are instilled in the Abkhaz from birth. People had guns at home for hunting and men always carried knives. Although the worshipping of pagan gods died out long ago, traditions associated with living in close proximity to nature live on, in turn affecting attitudes to weapons possession. The god of hunting in Abkhaz myths, Azhveipsh, has always been one of the most important gods in Abkhaz mythology. A hunter can kill as much as necessary to feed his family and no more. A man whose wife is pregnant cannot hunt or kill any animal.

No marriage takes place without shots being fired in the air and knives are traditionally carried for use at the dinner table. Such cultural practices are tightly intertwined with key social values of hospitality, respect for the old and patriotism. Blood vengeance also exists. If a person evades legal punishment for his crime, he will not escape revenge by the victim's relatives. However, vendettas are not as widespread and extreme as in the customs of some other peoples of the Caucasus. Nevertheless, when such punishments are carried out small arms are inevitably used.

## 1992–93: Conflict

Most of the weapons that fell into the hands of the Abkhaz army and Abkhaz 'self-defence' units in the initial phase of the war were captured from the Georgian forces or acquired from other sources, mostly Russian. However Russia's Gudauta Military Base did not function as a major source of small arms and light weapons (SALW) proliferation in the initial stages of the war, since it is a military aerodrome and did not have SALW easily available in any significant quantities. At that time, the Gudauta Base acted as a transit point for internally displaced persons (IDPs) from Abkhazia (mostly local ethnic Russians and Armenians), who were then evacuated on Russian transport ships.

In August 1992, the Abkhaz army consisted mostly of volunteers, many of them armed with hunting rifles. They often ran out of arms and ammunition, and in some cases three soldiers had only one sub-machine-gun between them. When Georgian troops launched an offensive with artillery support, the Abkhaz approached the Russian military (who had also come under fire) and asked them for weapons. After tense negotiations the commanders of the base, who found themselves in a tight corner, gave in and supplied them with Kalashnikovs.

Two weeks later, the Abkhaz gained greater access to arms supplies. There were cases of attacks and thefts from Russian arms stores in the Gudauta district of Abkhazia, which became another source of arms proliferation. These were mostly one-off, spontaneous actions which, given the prevailing confusion, were impossible to control. With the help of volunteers from the Confederation of the Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus (a semi-official organisation which aimed in the early 1990s to unite the peoples of the North Caucasus), small arms started to arrive in Abkhazia in greater quantities. The Abkhaz diaspora and individual donations provided funds to buy new weapons and uniforms for the army, as well as food for both the army and the population. The diaspora therefore played an important role at that time. The Abkhaz army was formed quite quickly. Detachments of volunteers from the North Caucasus, Kuban and Don Cossacks, as well as volunteers from other Russian regions also provided significant assistance. Furthermore, Abkhazia also received military assistance from the Transdnestrian Moldovan Republic (a breakaway region of Moldova). All of these groups came to Abkhazia with their own weapons.

Due to the war and the subsequent growing demand for weapons, there were a number of sources of SALW coming into Abkhazia, something not unique to this conflict. During this period news reports reached Abkhazia of Georgian attacks on Soviet arsenals. Nevertheless eventually Abkhazia managed to equip its armed forces and won the war, despite substantial casualties and suffering. The weapons acquired were usually of Russian origin.

A truce was negotiated in 1993, but since that time Abkhazia twice saw further escalations in the conflict with Georgia, in May 1998 and in October 2001. Such events are one of the main reasons for the continued insecurity and arms proliferation.

## Aftermath of the conflict

At the end of the conflict in 1993 many people returned home, and volunteers from outside Abkhazia went back (for example, Chechen fighters returned to Chechnya where the first war against Russia would soon break out). This period saw the outflow of SALW from Abkhazia, as external combatants left the region. Nevertheless giving up arms was not on people's agenda and many arms remained in circulation. Public opinion was shaped by wartime propaganda and an atmosphere of hatred towards Georgia prevailed because of the war casualties. Abkhazia was awash with guns, so the price fell dramatically.

One of the biggest problems facing post-war Abkhaz society was the psychological impact of the conflict on the population. Men aged between 18 and 45 were particularly badly affected, both in terms of mental and physical health. War veterans received no rehabilitation of any kind. Reintegration into peace-time society was difficult, and in the immediate aftermath of the war violent crime was commonplace. As a result, people felt insecure and did not welcome arms control measures. Even today, ten years after the outbreak of hostilities, the aftermath of war continues to influence society. Suicide rates rose dramatically in the aftermath of the war due to war-related mental disturbance and the difficult social conditions the population faced. Suicide rates in 1995, for instance, were three times those in the following years.<sup>1</sup> Firearms also have their impact on these rates: for example, out of the six to eight people brought to the Sukhum Municipal Hospital No. 2 annually for treatment of firearms-related injuries (a not insignificant number in such a small region), the majority have been referred to the hospital after attempting suicide. The large incidence of suicide involving firearms is largely caused by the relatively easy access to arms. Furthermore, the problem is made worse by the fact that there is very little support for those who have already attempted or are contemplating suicide.<sup>2</sup> There needs to be some form of psychological rehabilitation for those affected. Many people commit suicide because they cannot earn a living wage and are pessimistic about the future. 85 percent of suicide victims are aged between 20 and 35 years old and are unemployed. Although suicide rates are coming down this is still a significant problem.<sup>3</sup>

After the cessation of violence, instead of arms prohibition measures, it might have been more effective to introduce a public awareness campaign aimed at educating people about the uselessness of arms and the harm that they could do. One of the reasons why this did not happen was the focus of the international organisations on rendering short-term humanitarian aid due to the blockade conditions that existed<sup>4</sup>, rather than tackling Abkhazia's underlying long-term social and economic problems.

The cost of the conflict was substantial and the economic infrastructure of the territory was severely damaged or destroyed.<sup>5</sup> For example, the health care system lost

<sup>1</sup> Data from the State Office of the Public Prosecutor.

<sup>2</sup> From an interview with the Head of Surgery Dept. of Sukhum Municipal Hospital No.2, Dr. Igor Dzidzava.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Ludmila Avidzba, Minister of Health, winter 2001.

<sup>4</sup> As a member of the CIS, Georgia requested that all CIS states initiate a blockade against Abkhazia. In response, Russia closed its border with Abkhazia in September 1994. A sea blockade began in October 1995, and from January 1996 economic sanctions were also imposed.

<sup>5</sup> According to data provided by the State Expert Group of the Republic of Abkhazia, the gross damage caused by the Georgia-Abkhazia war is estimated at several billion dollars.

almost 90 percent of its infrastructure. Many doctors and other medical personnel were also killed or wounded, while others simply fled. The rural health care system suffered up to 80 percent destruction in Oчамchire and Tkvarchel regions, and was entirely destroyed in Gal. The human cost of conflict was even more significant, resulting in a large loss of life and a war-ravaged society that was left unable to form any normal civic structure. The Gross National Product (GNP) fell from \$6,925 million in 1988 to \$60.3 million in 1994. The economic viability of Abkhazia was further damaged by an economic blockade put in place after the conflict.<sup>6</sup> Landmines are also a problem in many parts of Abkhazia; indeed it is estimated that landmines affect 18,366,000 m<sup>2</sup> of land.<sup>7</sup>

The ready availability of guns means that weapons are more likely to be used in personal disputes which in earlier days would more normally have resulted in verbal exchanges or fist-fights. At the same time, Abkhazia follows the traditional Caucasian pattern of conflict resolution, ie the use of family ties and inter-personal links, meaning that there is a certain balance between these methods and the use of violence. Nonetheless, no one can ever be entirely safe from the dangers posed by guns falling into the wrong hands. As always, there are exceptions to this rule. Much depends on the psychology and character of the owner of legal or illegal arms.

### Current gun ownership

Although SALW are widespread, the legal acquisition and production of firearms is increasingly organised. Law-enforcement agencies of the Ministry of the Interior (MOI), the Security Service, the Guard Service (protecting the most important government officials), the General Prosecutor's Office and the Internal Guard all bear arms in the course of their work. The acquisition of such firearms requires the permission of the MOI, except in the case of the Ministry of Defence (MOD). Abkhazia produces a small number of pistols (9 mm revolvers) for its internal security needs, ie for officers of the Abkhaz army and Abkhaz police.

The law-enforcement agencies are based on the Soviet system. There is a police school in Sukhum, where students undergo four years of training before joining the Police Force. The central branch of the MOI is in Sukhum, and has control over the ministry's district branches. Every district has a police division, and there are traffic police divisions in every district with police stations and posts. There are seven administrative regions in Abkhazia: Gagra, Gudauta, Sukhum, Gulripsh, Oчамchire, Tkvarchel, and Gal. Under current legislation members of the MOI, the Security Service, the Guard Service or the General Prosecutor's Office are not required to apply for permission to bear arms as individual citizens, but are issued weapons by their superiors, who have a responsibility to ensure that their subordinates are trained to use and keep the guns safely. The make and serial number of their weapons is written on their identity cards.

Due to a lack of funding and regional instability, Abkhazia has a standing army of 3,000, supplemented by a large reserve army, which could total about 25,000 reserve soldiers (excluding soldiers belonging to allies from the North Caucasus and other countries) and which could be mobilised at short notice. The reservists are part-timers who also have civilian jobs. Though at times reservists have been known to use their arms for inappropriate purposes, one has to bear in mind the importance of the army and on-going disarmament measures. Despite the large number of weapons kept at home by reservists, such cases of violence or misuse involving these arms are rare.<sup>8</sup>

There is an illegal market for SALW. However, given the fact that most weapons have

<sup>6</sup> The damage caused by the blockade is estimated at over \$500 million, according to calculations by the State Expert Group.

<sup>7</sup> HALO Trust and Abkhazia Mine Action Centre, *Abkhazia Minefield Survey Report*, March 2000, p 22. See also, HALO Trust assessment report, 11 April 2000, provided to AbCBL in Sukhum, Abkhazia; Abkhaz Committee to Ban Landmines Landmine Report 2001

<sup>8</sup> Arms ownership is governed in accordance with the Regulation of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Abkhazia dated 4 May 1994.

legal origins, the problem that the authorities face is how to prevent such arms from being diverted from legitimate to illegitimate use. SALW can be bought in Abkhazia relatively easily provided an individual has the right contacts. If an ex-combatant who keeps a weapon hidden at home decides to sell it to alleviate his personal financial problems, it is virtually impossible to stop that person. In Abkhazia one will not find dealers selling weapons out of the back of a truck, but if one wants a gun, it is possible to get it.

It is impossible to estimate how many illegal arms the population possesses, since there are no clear figures of how many weapons were acquired or sold. An approximate estimate may be that, owing to disarmament measures carried out by the Abkhaz law-enforcement agencies, the population has been disarmed by about 80 percent compared to the immediate post-war period. The authorities have also introduced some practical measures, as discussed in the next section.<sup>9</sup>

## Arms control measures

Given Abkhazia's traditional gun culture and the indispensability of arms in everyday life under current circumstances, any control measures will never be completely effective, especially given the current political climate.

After the war the situation gradually began to improve and the authorities began to take measures aimed at tackling the proliferation of SALW. Arms proliferation and handling is covered by Articles 238, 239, 240 and 268 of Abkhazia's Criminal Code. These are supplemented by other decrees and provisions. For instance, on 4 May 1994 the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Abkhazia adopted Resolution No. 173-p, the Statute on the Regulation of Trafficking in Firearms. The document prescribed the terms of possession, storage, licensing and registration, liability, acquisition and production of firearms. Bearing in mind the post-war reality, the statute focused on the procedures regulating the possession of arms by reserve troops. Thus, Abkhazia launched a campaign of arms registration and seizure.

As a result of this, a reservist should not keep arms at home. Instead he should hand them in to the local police station for storage and get a special card with his personal data, model of the weapon, its calibre and serial number. If the reserves are mobilised, the reservist must show this card to get his weapon back. In areas that are densely populated with reservists, the government has constructed special weapon storage facilities equipped with iron strongboxes and secured by armed guards.

In practice, not all reservists have put their weapons in storage. However, this does not mean that they all intend to use their weapons for criminal purposes. The law-enforcement agencies deal with such infringements, using appropriate legislation and in accordance with legal norms. In order to search a reservist's home, the police need to have legitimate grounds for suspicion, as well as a search warrant from the prosecutor.

Licensed weapons in the hands of the population are registered on the MOI database. Every weapon should be registered along with ammunition and the weapon's serial number. All individuals who possess arms are registered in the MOI and the MOD databases, and are obliged to undergo medical tests every two years.<sup>10</sup> The arms bearer is required by law to keep the weapon in a secure place out of the reach of children and other family members. All patients registered as mentally ill are also kept on the MOI database to try to ensure that the arms do not fall into the wrong hands.

The arms bearer is registered on the MOD database as a military reservist who will be

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Vladimir Arshba, Head of Military Headquarters of Abkhazian Army, autumn 2001.

<sup>10</sup> According to regulations provided by the Republic of Abkhazia Supreme Council Resolution on provision on firearm circulation, 14 May 1994.

attached to a division and is required to be ready within three hours in the case of a military attack.

Smooth-bore guns present an area of particular concern as they can inflict more serious wounds. Unfortunately, Abkhazia focuses on controlling military-style small arms proliferation, but has no streamlined system to control hunting rifles, which are more widely available and may be more dangerous.

Nevertheless, it is rare to see an armed person in the street unless that person is a soldier, a policeman or a hunter during the hunting season. Fortunately, there are many factors that impede the proliferation and use of arms, especially small arms. Life is gradually returning to normal. Positive steps have been taken towards controlling small arms and protecting businesses from crime. Street crime is decreasing, thanks to the formation of the reserve army and campaigns to confiscate illegal arms. The reforms carried out between 1995–8 led to a certain stabilisation of the budget, army and the executive, and had a positive impact on social development. Indeed, annual economic growth has averaged 30–50 percent during this period. Living standards are generally improving, civil society is growing and becoming more confident and the authorities are more in control. Given that the small arms problem was previously exacerbated by the general lawlessness of society, these improvements are to be welcomed and provide some hope for the future.

The development of tourism and agriculture has become a priority for the authorities. Attempts are being made to encourage small businesses (which have to operate under blockade conditions), to improve and reconstruct tourist resorts, and to encourage the development of civil society. These measures are taken in parallel with the small arms control activities but, regrettably, the two processes are not well co-ordinated.

## Guns and security

The widespread availability of SALW exacerbates the crime problem in Abkhazia.<sup>11</sup> Although criminal activity very much goes against many of the traditions and values of Abkhaz society and national characteristics, cases of extortion are nevertheless now considered to be an integral part of everyday life. As far as business rivalry is concerned, Abkhazia is experiencing the same problems as Russia did in the mid-1990s, with a rise in killings linked to economic activity. But in Abkhazia such incidents are rare and can hardly be identified as inter-group criminal wars for economic domination. Parties which have significant economic interests settle their scores abroad. Many criminals possess SALW, but because of their widespread availability many legitimate business people also possess such weapons for self-defence. This goes some way to neutralising the threat to business activities posed by crime. As cases of extortion involving the use of firearms result in a situation when businessmen feel threatened, many law-abiding citizens feel the need to possess such weapons for their own safety.

Abkhaz social traditions and strong family ties sometimes act as a restraining factor. However the problem of SALW has undeniably had a negative influence on small business development. Kidnappings have also occurred, with the business community being particularly targeted, especially in the immediate post-war period in 1992–5.

The fragile security situation is still the biggest factor affecting SALW casualty rates, claiming a large number of victims. The Gal district<sup>12</sup> is a zone of particular tension and deserves attention. The international community is represented by the office of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG), permanently stationed in Gal. Its building is located only fifty metres from the headquarters of the

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Adgur Lushba, Minister of Economy, autumn 2001.

<sup>12</sup> The Gal region is mostly inhabited by Mingrelians (Georgians) and has witnessed attacks by the Forest Brothers and White Legion paramilitary groups.

Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) peacekeeping force. The proximity of the two headquarters and the isolation of the peacekeepers (who are not socially integrated with the local population and have to strictly observe their mandates) have created a situation in which close co-operation and good personal relations between the United Nations (UN) military observers and the CIS peacekeepers can develop.

The area is divided into Upper and Lower Gal, and the border between the two parts goes through the town along the railway about 100 yards to the south of the market-place. The Upper Gal region – where social life continues – is reasonably controlled by the local authorities, who carry out their duties constructively and personally know everyone who lives there and their business, as is typical in many small communities. It can be assumed that even if someone in this part of Gal possesses a weapon, it will most likely be a hunting weapon.

In Lower Gal the situation is completely different and it is still a highly dangerous area, in no way controlled by the Abkhaz authorities. There is not one police post, except for the peacekeepers, whose status does not allow them to interfere in daily life. Hence the lower zone provides fertile ground for criminals, who exploit the absence of law and order. People in this area are almost completely unprotected and are often robbed and assaulted. Ethnic Russians living in Primorsk are particularly badly affected and are unable to leave, given that they were born there. This situation has forced many of those living in Lower Gal to form their own village militias.

The lower zone regularly witnesses incursions by criminals and guerrilla groups, possessing various types of arms. Although these groups have different motives for their actions, there is every likelihood that they are co-operating as they possess similar moral traits and profit from shared criminal and commercial links. Such links are uninhibited by the authorities or indeed by ethnicity. Their trade includes the smuggling of petrol and cigarettes, arms and drugs. Stolen cars from Georgia are also brought to Abkhazia to be sold. These groups frequently attack Abkhaz policemen and CIS peacekeepers.

Another problem in the region is landmines, which impede agricultural activities, a severe problem as most local inhabitants are farmers. Every morning they are picked up by bus and carry nuts, fruit and vegetable to the market in Gal. Since Gal is stuck between two conflicting parties, a free economic zone of sorts has been established. In Lower Gal people use the Georgian lari, whereas at the marketplace in Upper Gal one can either pay with Russian roubles, as in Abkhazia, or with Georgian lari. The Georgians that returned to the Gal district after the war maintain contact with their relatives in Georgia, and there are many shuttle traders who travel to and from Tbilisi. Georgian goods (mostly clothes and shoes) can easily be bought at Abkhaz markets.

People frequently cross the bridge over the Ingur River (which separates Abkhazia from Georgia), meaning that in periods of relative calm, the border sees significant social and economic contacts between the two sides. This may be regarded as a positive impetus towards the further improvement of the security situation and social stability in the Gal district. Although such contact acts as a means of building confidence between the communities, a terrorist act can easily undo any progress. Peace is very fragile in Gal. In fact at the market place if one tries to speak to a passer-by they are wary of talking to strangers. Members of criminal groups are hard to distinguish from law-abiding people, and one is always afraid of who is listening in on other people's conversation.

Since spring 1999 (when Abkhazia began the unilateral return of refugees to the Gal region) more than 60,000 people have come back to the district. Their decision does not have any political motive, they simply want to return home and live in peace. Unfortunately, the returnees are the major targets of political pressure in the context of the unresolved Georgian-Abkhaz conflict. Many people who returned to Abkhazia are criticised in Georgia for integrating into Abkhaz society, for their alleged lack of

patriotism and their lack of support for official Georgian policy on this issue.

This area of Abkhazia is a strategically important point for both Georgia and Abkhazia, since it possesses a lot of arable land and has great potential for agricultural development. Furthermore the famous Ingur hydropower station is also situated here and provides an energy source for Abkhazia and much of Georgia. Yet the people of Gal live in desperate conditions and desire peace and work.

At present, it is practically impossible to control small arms trafficking in this region, particularly since arms offer the only way for people to protect their livelihood, family and property. Moreover, in such a small town it is almost impossible to conceal one's income, and this makes people even more vulnerable to crime. There is also very little in the way of control by the authorities in Gal. The area lies across the front line of the ongoing tension between Georgia and Abkhazia. Given these factors there is a high demand for SALW in Gal and little desire for disarmament.

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## Conclusion

Given the small size of the territory and population of Abkhazia, where the social and communication network is quite small, large-scale disarmament operations may produce significant results. Theoretically, the small arms issue could be resolved relatively quickly. However, such actions should be accompanied by initiatives in the social and security spheres. To a certain extent, this should become the policy of the authorities, if sufficient grounds for pursuing disarmament exist. However, before this is embarked upon, a whole range of factors need to be taken into consideration, including the social environment, security situation, level of economic development, gun culture and level of urbanisation.

At present, the most serious obstacle to a widespread campaign of weapons collection from the civilian population in Abkhazia is the constant tension on the Abkhaz-Georgian border. People constantly fear the outbreak of a new war. Abkhazia lacks powerful allies and people do not trust any armies that might occupy Abkhazia, given the experience of the past. Therefore demand for weapons in Abkhazia remains strong. This feeling was only strengthened in the aftermath of attacks by armed groups based in Georgia in 2001.

Such tensions often occur in the summer and autumn during the tourist season. Any border tensions inflict serious damage on the economic situation of the territory. Abkhazia is not rich enough to carry out a large public relations campaign to advertise its resorts, and it is impossible to convince tourists of the safety of the resorts, if information about Abkhazia comes from sensationalist TV broadcasts rather than from the Abkhaz tourist board. Given the conditions of a poor economy and the blockade, underdeveloped resorts have to struggle for every customer. For these reasons, the security problem is by far the most significant impediment to economic progress and to the establishment of a society free of weapons.

This is just one example of the problems facing Abkhazia, which requires a long period of post-war rehabilitation. After every large-scale act of violence, the authorities have to start this process from the very beginning. Under these circumstances, it is too early to speak about a fully-fledged disarmament campaign, including the seizure of hunting rifles. It is important to develop a network of hunting co-operatives, which would work closely with the law-enforcement agencies. This will help to improve the situation and ensure stricter control over smooth-bore guns. Additional measures should be taken to supervise the shooting of animals during the hunting season and protect the environment and rare species.

However, there have been some moves towards arms control. These trends may be illustrated with the example of New Year celebrations. New Year is normally celebrated

with fireworks and the traditional shooting of guns in the air. Just after the war one would hear frequent shots from grenade launchers, hundreds of automatic rifles and machine-guns from nearly every window, sounding as though a battle was raging across several hundred square kilometres. Nowadays the celebration is much quieter, more joyful and easy-going, though a newcomer may be somewhat taken aback by the noise.

The statistical data on suicides, armed robbery and violence make pessimistic reading. But comparing the current situation with the past, it can be seen that life is slowly improving. This gives some hope that one day it will no longer be fashionable to possess a pistol or to be able to shoot well. However, the underlying feeling of insecurity among the population remains. Until this is tackled, SALW disarmament campaigns will prove almost impossible to carry out successfully.

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#### **About the author**

**Maxim Gvindzhiya** graduated from the Gorlovka State Pedagogical Institute of Foreign Languages in Ukraine in 1998. In 1999 he began work as a translator for the Abkhazian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In 2000 he researched the problem of landmines in Abkhazia, and has been head of the Abkhazian Committee for the Banning of Landmines since 2001. Maxim has attended a number of courses on peace-keeping and conflict management, including courses at the Peace Training Centre in Schlaining, Austria, and with the Harvard Conflict Management Group. He has also worked for the humanitarian organisation *Premiere Urgence*, a charity that is rebuilding homes in Abkhazia. In autumn 2001 Maxim carried out a study on small arms problems in Abkhazia.

#### **Saferworld's research project on arms and security in the Caucasus**

This chapter is part of a wider Saferworld report, entitled *The Caucasus: Armed and Divided – Small arms and light weapons proliferation and humanitarian consequences in the Caucasus*, which collects together case studies from local experts on the situation in their particular geographical region. The report focuses on the conflicts in the region, the relationship between conflict and levels of arms possession, and the effects of small arms proliferation since the break-up of the Soviet Union. It also includes a chapter on Russia's policy towards the small arms issues in the Caucasus.

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