



“Borderization” of Occupied Georgian Territory

OE Watch Commentary: There have been a number of reports in Georgian media about border problems regarding the occupied regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, but few of them go into any detailed analysis of the broader problem. The accompanying excerpted article, from the Georgian independent news website *Netgazeti*, looks at the problem of what some Georgians refer to as the “borderization” of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and the author offers a few solutions worth noting.

The author is a researcher at the Georgian Institute of Politics, a non-partisan research organization in Tbilisi, Georgia. He mentions that in the Tskhinvali region (South Ossetia) there are “barbed wire and fences installed by the Russian occupation troops along more than 52 km of the occupation line” and “more than 48 km” along the border with Abkhazia. He also notes that “Tbilisi has no direct levers to influence Moscow’s behavior regarding the occupied territories.” The author believes that to resolve the borderization problem, “it is necessary to act within the frames of what is possible” and makes four recommendations.

His first recommendation is to support “people on both sides of the administrative borderline” and to “simplify procedures for obtaining Georgian passports.” Secondly, he suggests developing an action plan with “procedures that will define concrete responsibilities in case of new instances of borderization.” Third, he recommends creating an “integrated state communications strategy” in order to deal with “the Kremlin’s narrative that is aimed at exerting a psychological influence on the public.” Finally, he recommends that the Georgian government become better at “informing the international community on the process of borderization,” specifically to “coordinate its anti-occupation policy with Ukraine and Moldova in order to shape a joint position at international forums.” Georgia’s potential cooperation with Ukraine and Moldova in border security is particularly notable as all three have been working with European governments on a variety of projects, including security. The author’s recommendations are not likely to become policy, but they do offer some insight into what action Georgia could take as reports of the borderization process continue to surface. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**



Map of Georgia showing the autonomous republics of Abkhazia (de facto independent) and Adjara, and the de facto independent region of South Ossetia.
Source: United Nations Cartographic Section, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:3AGeorgia_high_detail_map.png, Public Domain.

“According to the official data submitted by the Georgian State Security Service [SSS], the borderization process became intensive from February 2013.”

Source: Kakhishvili, Levan. “ბორდერიზაცია საქართველოში: შესაძლებელია თუ არა რუსეთის პოლიტიკასთან გამკლავება (Borderization in Georgia: Is it possible to cope with Russian policy?),” *Netgazeti.ge*, 25 December 2017. <http://netgazeti.ge/news/242817/>

After the August 2008 Georgian-Russian war, Russia recognized the independence of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region, but this has proved not to be the last stage of Russia’s aggressive policy regarding Georgia and the occupied territories. The first instance of the so-called “borderization” was registered a year later - in August 2009...The aforementioned process involves installing artificial barriers, fences, barbed-wires, and banners marking the so-called border and digging ditches and trenches along the occupation line...

According to the official data submitted by the Georgian State Security Service [SSS], the borderization process became intensive from February 2013...They involve 33 villages along the occupation line of the Tskhinvali region and additional seven villages along the Abkhaz occupation line...The total length of the occupation line in the Tskhinvali region is more than 350 km with barbed wire and fences installed by the Russian occupation troops along more than 52 km of the occupation line. As regards occupied Abkhazia, the total length of the occupation line is comparatively shorter and amounts to 145 km and the total length of illegal fences, barbed wire, and trenches is more than 48 km...

Georgia must face reality: For the time being, Tbilisi has no direct levers to influence Moscow’s behavior regarding the occupied territories in Georgia. Correspondingly, it is necessary to act within the frames of what is possible. This encompasses four major directions:

First, the government should continue to support people on both sides of the administrative borderline...simplify procedures for obtaining Georgian passports to make public services available to the population residing on the occupied territories and enable them to use the benefits of visa-free travel to the EU.

Second, in order to find mechanisms for coping with the existing situation, it is important that the state set up an interdepartmental working group to study the problem, shape a consistent official position, and elaborate an integrated action plan...The action plan must encompass details of all the procedures that will define concrete responsibilities in case of new instances of borderization.

Third, it is necessary to elaborate an integrated state communications strategy...Supplying the public with precise information on the issue and confronting the Kremlin’s narrative that is aimed at exerting a psychological influence on the public...

And finally, the Georgian government is to improve their practices of informing the international community on the process of borderization...The government should also coordinate its anti-occupation policy with Ukraine and Moldova in order to shape a joint position at international forums. This will enable to place borderization within the broader frames of the aggressive policy Russia is pursuing against its neighbors...