Borders, De Facto Borders and Mobility Policies in Conflict Transformation

The Cases of Abkhazia and South Ossetia

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Introduction

The two separatist conflicts that led to the establishment of de facto independences from Georgia in South Ossetia and Abkhazia in the early 1990s[1] created a status quo regarding territorial boundaries that lasted until the Russo-Georgian conflict of August 2008. However, far from being immutable, the dividing lines between the separatist territories and the rest of Georgia were subject to processes of "hardening and softening," influenced both by state and non-state actors, throughout the stalemates that characterized most of the 1990s and 2000s.

This contribution looks at the influence of regional and local actors on the evolution of external and internal boundaries, borders, and de facto borders of Abkhazia and South Ossetia between the ceasefire agreements of the early 1990s and the Russo-Georgian war of 2008. Although a range of variables can affect the transformation of boundaries and borders concurrently, the main focus of the following analysis is on mobility policies – policies aimed at enhancing or reduce the movement of goods and people. As argued below, these have proven to be a key factor framing the social and economic boundaries and borders in the case of Georgia and its separatist territories.

The analysis begins by distinguishing between borders, ceasefire lines, and de facto borders in order to clarify the specific nature of the dividing

1 | For an overview of de facto states in the former Soviet Union, see Lynch (2004).

lines that separate Abkhazia and South Ossetia from the rest of Georgia. It then provides a review of mobility policies in conflict situations, which are traditionally confined to trade sanctions and trade incentives. Analytically, there is a need to expand upon a narrow approach to mobility policies to include both formal and informal policies promoted by state and non-state actors. A wider understanding of mobility policies is therefore proposed before approaching the empirical cases.

Borders, Ceasefire Lines, and De Facto Borders

Although the words "boundary" and "border" are terms used in everyday language, clarity requires some brief defining remarks. If boundaries are the dividing lines at which something changes, separating areas of certain rules of behavior (Migdal 2004), borders can be defined as "fixed, legal, geopolitical entities" (Goodhand 2008). In cases of conflict, borders' very permanence and legality may be tested, for example by a change in the interpretation of international law, by differences in the way key parties interpret the law, by a change in international law itself, or in the constellation of geopolitical factors. As expressed by Jackson, "[borders] are not a permanence but merely a staged claim to permanence" (Jackson 2008: 269). Moreover, the permanence and the legality of borders may fail to coincide.

Not all the boundaries containing Abkhazia and South Ossetia fall under the category of "border." While the lines dividing the Russian Federation from Abkhazia and South Ossetia were, during the timeframe under scrutiny, internationally recognized borders between Georgia and the Russian Federation, the status of the lines separating these two de facto states and Georgia is less clear. The ceasefire lines of Abkhazia and South Ossetia remained fixed dividing lines, patrolled respectively by a Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) peacekeeping force stationed under the observation of a small United Nations Military Observer Mission since 1993, and a peacekeeping force of Ossetians, Russians, and Georgians, monitored by a mission of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, since 1992.

However, the term "ceasefire line" does not capture the multifaceted dynamics that shape relations between two neighbors in any areas other than security and the cessation of hostilities. Ceasefire agreements usu-

ally lead either to peace accords or to the resumption of conflict. In some cases, however, ceasefire agreements linger on as the status quo for prolonged periods of time. Ceasefire lines can therefore evolve into demilitarized and highly securitized zones, such as in the cases of Korea and Nagarno-Karabakh, or into semi-permeable boundaries with low levels of violence, such as in the case of Transdniestria. During prolonged stalemates, ceasefire lines take on the traits of borders, with the exception of legal recognition under international law. Parallel to the denomination of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as "de facto states", we will thus refer to their borders as "de facto borders."

The Political Economies of Borders and Borderlands

Boundaries can be hardened or softened to suit various interests, a process defined as "boundary activation" (Tilly 2003). Borders can undergo similar processes. Inquiries into what happens when a border is activated, especially on the impact of the porosity of borders on stakeholders of border systems, centered initially on anthropological issues of identity (Donnan/Wilson 1999; Flynn 1997; Long/Villarreal 1999). However, a better understanding of political-economic agendas in civil wars (Berdal/Malone 2000) has led scholars to pay greater attention to war economies in their regional contexts (Pugh/Cooper 2004), including also the transitional locations between state and region and, accordingly, borders and surrounding borderlands (Goodhand 2008).

Conventional liberal wisdom is that when boundaries harden, opportunities are lost. However, studies have shown that reality is multifaceted, with winners and losers arising from border activation. Jackson points out that borderlands in fact generally create "energies and opportunities arising from the contrasts and discontinuities that they both create and then police" (Jackson 2008: 266).

In order to understand the mechanisms behind such processes, we should first elucidate the role of borders in political economies. Borders are first and foremost "sites and symbols of power" (Donnan/Wilson 1999: 1) As such, borders are key locations where the state asserts its authority by erecting border and customs posts and by limiting the flows of people and goods eligible for transit. Because of the costs of transit authorities can impose, an incentive to cross the border is created: the

service of moving goods (and people) across the regulated boundary can bring profits. As Donnan and Wilson assert, "[the] existence [of borders] as barriers to movement can simultaneously create reasons to cross them" (Donnan/Wilson 1999: 87). To illustrate, let us point out that for the residents of the borderlands commerce across dividing lines often represents one of the few ways to make a living. For the private sector, borders represent a hurdle (in terms of logistics and finances) but also an opportunity to increase profits from additional services. For administrations and law enforcement agencies, borders are the line along which taxation can be extracted, whether officially through duties or unofficially through bribes. Stakeholders of border systems are therefore numerous and diverse.

Mobility across borders is a priced asset that influences the livelihoods and the economies of the regions surrounding them. Hence, elucidating what sort of influence various stakeholders have in determining the porosity and permeability of conflict borders leads to a new understanding of the dynamics that underpin conflicts in borderlands.

Mobility Policies in Conflict Settings

Because borders are never static, mobility policies affect the evolution of borders and boundaries (Newman/Paasi 1998). States and non-state actors can harden or soften borders according to their particular interests and can draw on a multiplicity of methods for doing so. Within this framework, mobility policies should be examined carefully in cases of conflict because of the unusual nature of the political economy of borderlands.

For cases of conflict, mobility policies traditionally have been analyzed in terms of formal arrangements that regulate the flow of goods. The two most scrutinized options are trade sanctions and trade incentives of various kinds.[2] A combination of the two can also be implemented, a method that has been hailed as the most effective (Amini 1997). Since the early 1990s, support for all-encompassing economic sanctions weakened because they were generally deemed ineffective in bringing about major changes in policy (Hufbauer et al. 1990: 94). Their negative impact on civilian livelihoods and their fostering of criminal behavior were also put forward as reasons for discontinuing or avoiding embargos (Ballen-

2 | For an analysis of power relations in sanctions see Baldwin (1971).

tine 2003: 279). While it is extremely difficult to quantify the results of sanctions, their effectiveness depends "on what goals they are measured against" (Dowty 1994: 192). Relevant goals have been classified into three main categories: behavioral change, containment, and regime change (O'Sullivan 2003).

In some cases, all-encompassing sanctions proved not only ineffective, but also counterproductive, generating a "rally 'round the flag" effect (Cortright 2007b: 392). In the Abkhaz case, they reinforced a siege mentality (Matveeva 2002: 419); the impact of trade restrictions on South Ossetia in 2004, discussed below, is similar in this sense. On the other hand, however, sanctions can at times support the creation of internal opposition, as has happened in the case of Transdniestria in 2006. Different reactions to commercial restrictions depend on the varying nature, implementation, and framework of changes in customs regulation.

A general preference for incentives versus negative sanctions has increased in the last decade (Newham 2000: 8). In both cases, however, the effectiveness of inducement strategies depends on the sender's objectives, the nature of the recipient regime, the political dynamics between sender and recipient and, crucially, the presence or absence of exogenous incentives (Cortright 1997a: 272-290; Rock 2000). Two more factors affect the effectiveness of both sanctions and incentives. First, receivers may perceive economic pressure differently than intended by senders. Secondly, the ability of countries to implement sanctions and incentives varies, as does their ability to monitor financial and commercial flows regionally. These factors partly depend on the state capacity of senders; the role of the neighboring countries and of regional powers is also crucial in the implementation of national strategies for dealing with separatist entities. However, the failure to implement sanctions consistently alters their effectiveness while undermining the legitimacy of the sender (Pugh/Cooper 2004: 227).

The sanctions/incentives approach, however, reflects the actions of a very limited pool of actors, namely governments and international bodies, and fails to take into consideration the micro-dimension of boundary dynamics. The need arises then to expand our understanding of mobility policies in order to encompass the large variety of actors, both formal and informal, and methods that affect the de facto borders under scrutiny. In the framework of this contribution, mobility policies are thus understood to include formal policies aimed at allowing or limiting the movement of

people and goods, planning of infrastructure that facilitates or hampers the movement of people and goods, and commercial policies between de facto states and other regional actors. They also involve unofficial policies, such as facilitating or impeding unsanctioned trade, influencing peacekeeping operations, and promoting or reining in non-state violence in the borderlands.

This approach expands the understanding of the scope of mobility policies, which traditionally included only sanctions and incentives, to a wider concurrence of factors behind the hardening and softening of borders. An analysis of such mobility policies shows clearly which actors sought to harden and which actors sought to soften borders and boundaries, asking also why and how.

Georgia's and Russia's Mobility Policies: Implementing and Undermining Sanctions and Incentives

The two actors that had a decisive impact on the borders, whether de facto or de jure, of Abkhazia and South Ossetia are Georgia and the Russian Federation, being the only two countries that share a border with the de facto states. South Ossetia is in fact landlocked by its two larger neighbors, while Abkhazia has an extensive coastline along the Black Sea.

Georgia lost control over most of the territory of the two separatist regions after the 1991-1992 conflict with South Ossetia and the 1992-1994 conflict with Abkhazia. Although ceasefire agreements held, with some resumption of violence, until 2008, no peace agreement was reached. Georgia never recognized the independence of the de facto states; its stated goal remains to reintegrate the two regions within the Georgian state, following the principles of territorial integrity and national sovereignty. The Georgian authorities decisively rejected the status quo and attempted to craft their mobility policies accordingly. In the case of Russia, however, the implementation of mobility policies with regard to Abkhazia and South Ossetia must be seen in the context of its policy regarding its neighbor countries and, more generally, of its foreign policy. While there is no straightforward interpretation of Russia's policy towards its closest neighbors or the South Caucasus, especially in the 1990s, the key factor

underlying it was the attempt to maintain a strong influence over bordering countries and to secure its own borderlands.[3]

In the case of Abkhazia, the CIS-imposed embargo banned official contacts for all CIS members, restricted economic co-operation, and prohibited trade of most goods without licenses from the Georgian central government with the exception of food and medical supplies (Soviet Bezopasnosti SNG 1996: 377ff.). Notwithstanding the trade restrictions, Georgia and Russia remained the two main trading partners of Abkhazia. Adding barriers and burdensome bureaucratic procedures to any movement of goods, the restrictions contributed to the creation of a grey economy (Closson 2007: 168; Chkhartishvili et al. 2004: 134). Although officially upheld by all parties, they were increasingly ignored since the late 1990s. Obstacles to crossing are circumvented by illegal trading along the Inguri and Psou Rivers and through the Abkhaz seaports, as well as by bribing low-wage state officials at checkpoints on the ceasefire line (Closson 2007: 168).

Commercial dynamics along the Psou River, marking the de jure border between Russia and Georgia, and the de facto border between Russia and Abkhazia, largely reflected political shifts in the relationship between Russia and Georgia. In 1999, the Russian President Vladimir Putin abrogated by decree the Russian commitment to uphold the embargo, canceling most restrictions on crossing the Psou River. While repeatedly claiming to uphold the blockade, Putin expressed in 2004 the belief that this commitment did not include curtailment of commercial activities or private investments.

On the Abkhaz-Georgian ceasefire line, on the contrary, the embargo was always officially upheld, and repeated efforts were made to curtail smuggling (Kukhianidze et al. 2004: 55). However, under the presidency of Eduard Shevardnadze, pervasive corruption at all levels of the security forces and state institutions made the ceasefire line highly permeable to smugglers (Closson 2007: 170). Commodities smuggled through the ceasefire line included petroleum products, scrap metal, stolen cars, and timber. These goods entered the Georgian market or were re-exported through the ports of Batumi and Poti (Kukhianidze et al. 2004: 15; Kukhianidze et al. 2007: 77).

3 | For an analysis of Russia's foreign policy and Russia's policies in the Caucasus, see Lynch (2005), Baev (1997).

In 2004, the Georgian government attempted to limit the various actors who participated in trade across the ceasefire line and to limit the overall volume of trade. These policies were born out of the necessity to augment the Georgian budget and the belief that Abkhazia could be forced to negotiate if its sources of revenue dried up. The Georgian president Mikhail Saakashvili insisted on the implementation of trade sanctions with other regional governments, repressed paramilitary groups and corrupted bureaucrats involved in smuggling, and attempted to reduce sea-borne trade (Lynch 2006: 41; Sepashvili 2004c). Nevertheless, smuggling increased slightly as a consequence of the shift of trading routes after the closure of the Ergneti market in South Ossetia (Kupatadze 2005: 70). In 2008, Tbilisi made the first attempts at initiating a dialogue on some forms of economic cooperation, such as a customs-free zone and investments; the conflict in August choked off these initial belated steps.[4]

On the South Ossetian front, the movement of people and goods was practically unrestricted until December of 2003, when the newly elected Georgian leadership started anti-smuggling operations along the ceasefire line and then proceeded to close the Ergneti market in May and June 2004. A de facto economic blockade was imposed, as forces of the interior ministry controlled access roads and villages in the southern part of the region, and some roads used for contraband were destroyed.[5] The logic behind this move was the belief that that the de facto regime would collapse if deprived of revenue (Khutsidze 2004). It is noteworthy that the anti-smuggling operation entailed an increased presence of Georgian security forces, which in turn was perceived as a build-up for military aggression (ICG 2004: 11f.). At the same time, the Georgian government repeatedly declared that it would differentiate between the regime and the civilian population, offering a range of incentives (Lynch 2006: 42; Sepashvili 2004a, 2004b). However, armed conflict flared up again in August 2004, when the Georgian military and police retreated, sustaining seventeen casualties.

Tbilisi's policy backfired as it antagonized both the South Ossetian elite and large segments of the South Ossetian population. Expectedly,

4 | Interview with Gia Jandieri, a founder and the vice-president of the New Economic School of Georgia, July 2008.

5 | 'Governor Blows up By-Roads to Prevent Smuggling', Civil Georgia, 23 December 2003.

the regime denounced Tbilisi's humanitarian initiatives as "a destabilization attempt" and suspended relations with Tbilisi.[6] The civilian population did not respond positively and did not contribute to destabilizing the regime of the de facto president, Eduard Kokoity. On the contrary, the blockade had a boomerang effect, strengthening Kokoity's popularity (ICG 2004: 13) and significantly reducing the possibility of employment in trade and the accessibility of Tbilisi's markets for small producers (Freese 2004). Incentives were in poor relation to needs. The restoration of the railway to Tsinkhvali and the support to farmers through the provision of fertilizers could have proven effective in the long-term; more immediate actions, such as a medical mission that distributed medicines in Tskhinvali, had little reach into the South Ossetian population.[7] Finally, aid was seen with suspicion and, as its delivery was not coordinated with Tskhinvali, the local police barred intended recipients from accepting it.

Trading did not stop outright, but it was considerably curtailed by the closure of the Ergneti market and the enforcement of trade regulations at roadblocks. It was initially diverted to the only legal border crossing between Russia and Georgia, the Zemo Larsi checkpoint (Freese 2004). This new route bypassed South Ossetia, depriving its inhabitants of trade revenues; moreover, the trade of some commodities was abandoned, as it was no longer profitable after the imposition of customs duties. In 2006, this route was also suppressed, as Russia closed the checkpoint indefinitely for maintenance.[8] This not only paralyzed traffic between the two states but severely affected the region as a whole and, in particular, Armenia and North Ossetia.[9] In retaliation, Georgia closed the checkpoint at Ergneti, which had allowed the transit of people between 2004 and 2006.[10] Still a soft border in 2003, the de facto border between Georgia and South Osse-

6 | 'Tskhinvali Cuts Links with Tbilisi, Demands Compensation', Civil Georgia, 12 June 2004.

7 | Georgian Healthcare Minister Visits Tskhinvali, Delivers Aid', Civil Georgia, 8 June 2004.

8 | 'Russia Closes Border Checkpoint with Georgia', Civil Georgia, 8 July 2006.

9 | 'Armenia for Reopening of Russo-Georgian Border Checkpoint', Civil Georgia, 11 July 2006; ICG (2004: 25); Alieva (2005).

10 | 'Tbilisi Denies Entry to Passengers Coming via Roki Tunnel', Civil Georgia, 10 July 2006.

tia had hardened considerably by 2006; after the 2008 conflict, that same border became sealed altogether.

A Wider Understanding of Mobility Policies: The Role of Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Local Stakeholders

From within Abkhazia and South Ossetia, variations in the state of their external de facto borders was linked to aspirations for state-building harbored by the leadership of both de facto states. But it was also linked to opportunities for profit that the leaders of the de facto states and of the neighboring regions crafted through boundary activation. Therefore, the approach to the management of dividing lines greatly differed between Abkhazia and South Ossetia not only because of their history, demographics, geographical situation, and economic viability, but also because of the stakeholders' interests.

In the case of Abkhazia, the destruction caused by the war and the blockade imposed by the CIS in 1996 led to a dramatic decline in social and economic conditions (Closson 2007: 165). Damaged and looted infrastructure, both public and private, remained unreconstructed (UNDP 1998). Both agriculture and tourism, the two main pillars of the pre-war Abkhaz economy, suffered from war destruction, the subsequent isolation of Abkhazia, and underinvestment (Gotsiridze 2002). Railways, which traditionally played the main role in heavy-cargo transportation, fell into despair during the conflict. The role of the state-run Russian Railway Company in rebuilding the railway in 2004 was crucial and, for many, an intentional provocation (Lynch 2006: 49; Sepashvili 2004c). The Abkhaz leadership greatly encouraged the restoration of infrastructure between Abkhazia and the Russian Federation, linking its hopes for economic viability of their de facto state to its northern neighbor.

The restoration of the railway and other forms of infrastructure linking Abkhazia and Georgia was seen as a national security problem (Rimple 2005). Abkhaz authorities neither sealed the de facto border nor did they facilitate transit. While Russian peacekeeping forces patrolled the ceasefire line, Abkhaz authorities left the adjacent borderland, which was traditionally mainly inhabited by ethnic Georgians, to the control of militia. Abkhaz militia turned the Gali region borderland into an opportunity

zone, activating the security/insecurity boundary, and creating opportunities for profit making. In the second half of the 1990s and early 2000s, they carried out periodic sweeps through the Gali region, contributing to the movement of internally displaced persons back and forth across the Inguri River (Billingsley 2001).

However, actors other than the Abkhaz militias and authorities benefited from this boundary activation. Along the security zone straddling the Inguri River, stakeholders in large smuggling networks included security services (Russian, Abkhaz, and Georgian), militias (Abkhaz and Georgian), officials (Abkhaz and Georgian), as well as peacekeeping forces, suppliers, and distributors of various nationalities (Closson 2007: 170). In addition, residents of the adjacent areas, often returnees to the Gali region or IDPs from the Gali region living in Sagramelo, carried out small-scale smuggling (Kukhianidze et al. 2004: 6). It allowed them to make a living, given the state of economic despair of the Gali region and the serious problem with landmines in fields previously used for agriculture (Kukhianidze et al. 2007: 84). Also, smuggling allowed residents of Abkhazia to have some access to consumer goods in spite of the embargo.

Along the ceasefire line, the involvement of Georgian security forces and bureaucracy was crucial for smuggling networks until 2004. Low-waged Georgian officials, earning as little as 7 USD per month, demanded bribes to supplement their income (Korsaia et al. 2002). Local departments of law enforcement agencies and influential actors in the Sagramelo region controlled large-scale smuggling, in particular of petroleum products (Closson 2007: 168, 172f.). The Abkhaz Government in Exile, the Georgian Tax Department and MPs from Sagramelo owning petrol stations were identified as having providing support to groups involved in smuggling (Closson 2007: 173f.). Officials within the Ministry of Interior had stakes in drug and weapons smuggling, kidnapping, and extortion;[11] senior officers of anti-drug departments were involved in trade of narcotics (Cornell 2003: 33).

South Ossetia opted for the opposite approach to security/insecurity boundary activation in the borderlands straddling the ceasefire line. Until 2004, the South Ossetian authorities guaranteed secure passage to goods crossing the de facto state line and maintained a policy of permeable de

11 | Interview with G. Baramidze, Saakashvili's new Minister of the Interior, reported in K. Stier (2003).

facto borders from within South Ossetia. These did not represent mechanisms of legal trade along the Transcaucasian highway (TransCam) (ICG 2004: 25). Goods usually bypassed Russian customs fees and bureaucratic procedures through customary payments of bribes; at the same time, they were not subjected to Georgian customs, as Tbilisi was unable to establish border posts at the Roki tunnel. The Georgian central government refrained from setting up customs posts along the ceasefire line between Georgia and South Ossetia, being adamant that the ceasefire line should be treated as an internal administrative boundary (Kukhianidze et al. 2007). The circulation of goods between Tskhinvali, the market village of Ergneti, located on the border, and Tbilisi, although unsanctioned, proceeded fluidly, relying on the support of corrupted Georgian officials. Access to and from the Ergneti market was highly profitable, as protection was provided for a price (Closson 2007: 181).

In the early 2000s, the European Commission proposed the establishment of a joint customs regime; as an act of compensation, it would have contributed to the overhaul of the TransCam itself. The South Ossetian government rejected it, on the grounds that it would have curtailed its sovereignty; more realistically, such an agreement would have curtailed the scope of smuggling and future profits (OCHA Georgia 2003: 2).

In fact, the stakeholders' analysis of the South Ossetian stalemate revolves around the TransCam trade and the evolution of trade regimes. A trans-territorial network composed of Russians, South Ossetians and Georgians orchestrated the trade; the stakeholders of this network were members of the elite, bureaucracy, business groups, and consumers (Closson 2007: 180). IDPs, refugees, and residents of the conflict areas conducted mainly small-scale trade. Although control over TransCam smuggling was gradually concentrated into the hands of a few well-connected businessmen and members of the elite, the trade continued to provide a living to residents of South Ossetia and adjacent areas in Georgia. It created jobs and contributed to keeping prices of basic goods low, being as they were virtually duty-free (ICG 2004: 10).

Conclusion and Future Research

The medium- and long-term consequences of the hardening and softening of boundaries in the interwar period were numerous and had econom-

ic, social, and political impacts both on the borderlands examined here and on the wider region. Indeed, the resurgence of full-scale violence in South Ossetia in 2004 shows that mobility policies had effects that were not limited to the transit of people and goods. While this aspect deserves a separate study, a few repercussions can already be discerned in terms of the diplomatic relations between the major actors at stake, processes of conflict resolution and confidence building between Georgia and the de facto states, the viability of the de facto states, and the livelihoods of borderland populations. Such analysis, however, should build on an awareness of the long-term dynamics and short-term consequences of the hardening and softening of boundaries during the interwar period.

Russia's mobility policies were consistent with its policy of maintaining a presence in the South Caucasus. The increasing permeability of the international border between the Russian Federation and the two de facto states led to a northward orientation of the two separatist regions in terms of trade and economic reliance. However, Russia's refusal to acknowledge Abkhazia's and South Ossetia's independence until 2008 shows that, instead of an institutional approach, it opted for a more practical and informal strategy in pursuit of its foreign policy goals.

Georgia's mobility policies, on the other hand, were at times in opposition to its overarching goal of the reintegration of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Its insistence on the implementation of the CIS embargo in Abkhazia and the lack of initiative in establishing commercial and transport links across the de facto border led to a further widening of the cleavage between Abkhazia and the motherland. Its more pragmatic approach in South Ossetia contributed to peaceful relations and reduced animosity until early 2004, when the decision to curtail the commercial flow on the TransCam precipitated conflict. In addition, limitations on the movement of goods and people across the de facto borders (whether explicit or implicitly generated by a lack of legal framework and infrastructure) severely impacted the livelihoods of borderland populations and of the residents of the de facto states, creating a siege mentality and failing to foster respect for Georgian sovereignty. At the same time, as this study showed, a multiplicity of actors were involved, including non-state actors who profited through boundary activation. In the case of Abkhazia, and in South Ossetia before 2004, the maintenance of a de facto border, respectively semi-permeable and permeable, suited the interests of key stakeholders of borderland economies.

A similar variety of actors and interests characterized the drive for boundary activation and deactivation within the de facto states, which in turn affected economic viability and aspirations for state building. Inevitably, local actors reacted to the policies implemented by their larger neighbors, accommodating themselves to Georgian and Russian policies that sustained the process of hardening and softening of the boundaries. They nevertheless contributed to boundary dynamics within the territories under their control, whether by acquiescing to violence as a method for boundary activation in the Gali region, or by regulating trade and increasing security on the TransCam.

A new scenario has emerged for the post-2008 observer. South Ossetia's de facto border is sealed; regional residents, IDPs, and international organizations are prevented from crossing it. Along the line dividing Georgia and Abkhazia, it is business as usual for the most part, with a stronger military presence. It seems that Abkhazia and South Ossetia's mobility policies have taken different trajectories, under strong pressures from their Russian ally. At the same time, Georgia is seeking to soften the de facto borders through its 2010 State Strategy on Occupied Territories. Its proposal, so far, has gone unanswered.

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