

# Abkhazians call for recognition in European Parliament (Абхазы призвали к признанию их независимости в Европарламенте)

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Abkhazia would never accept a return to Georgia and still hopes for international recognition of its independence, as well as for the EU to include it in its neighbourhood policy, representatives of the breakaway province told MEPs during a hearing on Monday (6 October) organized by the Green Party.

The host of the event, German Green MEP Cem Ozdemir, said that his group had suggested for a long time for such discussions to take place, in order to prevent the escalation of the conflict.

"You can't select your neighbours: You have to live together," he said, stressing that it is important for all parties involved in the conflict to look ahead and not to remain captive in a blame game.

With a small, green-striped Abkhaz flag set up in front of his laptop, Viacheslav Chirikba, a Western-schooled advisor to the president of Abkhazia, presented in harsh terms such as "genocide" and even "holocaust" the history of his "nation," concluding that "Georgia has lost every moral right to rule Abkhazia."

Russia's recognition of the two breakaway provinces' independence on 26 August following the war in Georgia was a "surgical cut-off" that would "increase the stability in the region," he said.

Using the same arguments as the Kremlin, Mr Chirikba claimed that the EU, the US and the OSCE have an "irrational attitude" in not recognising Abkhaz independence, after they did so in regards to Kosovo, thus proving the "double standards" with international law. So far, only Russia and Nicaragua have recognized the two break-away republics.

He also insisted that Abkhazia, home to some 200,000 people, was not planning to join Russia - as the much smaller South Ossetia wants - since it was "economically viable" as an independent country based on agriculture and tourism.

In a more conciliatory tone, Abkhaz vice-foreign minister Maxim Gunjia insisted that his country does not seek any more conflicts, after one day of war destroyed 15 years of confidence building efforts. (В более примирительном тоне замминистра иностранных дел Абхазии Максим Гвинджия заявил, что его страна более не стремится к конфликту (?) после того, как один день войны разрушил результаты 15-летних усилий по укреплению доверия).

"Do you think it was our dream to have Russian military bases on our soil?" he asked, adding that there was no other solution than to ask for Russia's help. («Вы думаете, что размещение российских военных баз на нашей территории было нашей мечтой?» - вопрошал он, добавляя, что не было иного решения, кроме как обратиться за помощью к России).

A military agreement is being currently drafted in regards to the Russian presence in Abkhazia, with the aim to maintain a maximum 5,000 Russian troops on its territory, Mr Gunjia told EUobserver.

## EU 'can't guarantee' peace

What the conflict proved, in the Abkhazians' view, is that the EU "cannot give any substantive guarantees to stop or prevent a conflict."

"People only rely on the weapons at home and the Russian military bases," Mr Gunjia told the roughly 30 people in the audience.

He insisted that the only way out was for the EU to promote "a maximum de-militarisation of the region," referring to the Georgian army, but not the Abkhazian paramilitary or Russian troops.

Mr Gunjia also would like to see EU funds from the bloc's neighbourhood policy coming to his "country," claiming that Abkhazia is committed to "implementing EU standards," as it would otherwise be unable to trade with Europe over the Black Sea.

Asked by a German MEP who would be an acceptable partner in Tbilisi, if President Mikheil Saakashvili was to leave office, Mr Gunjia didn't want to give names, but said that "a party" or "political group" rather than one single person would be preferable.

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