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MAMUKA KOMAKHIA

108

EXPERT OPINION





საქართველოს სტრატეგიისა და საერთაშორისო ურთიერთობათა კვლევის ფონდი
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After the end the Russian-Georgian war and Moscow's recognition of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region's independence, the Kremlin started to openly integrate these regions into Russia. The formation and implementation of the Kremlin's policy on politics and security, as well as socio-economic and legal matters, has been bestowed upon specific public agencies and officials who actively participate in the internal political processes of Georgia's occupied regions. In this study,¹ we will try to determine which state agencies and public officials have been tasked with forming and implementing the Kremlin's policies related to the occupied regions that are not controlled by the central Georgian government after the re-inauguration of Vladimir Putin as president on March 18, 2018. This study will assess only the activities of those major public agencies and officials whose immediate responsibilities include (in our opinion) the occupied regions of Georgia and whose activities can be monitored through the analysis of open sources.

Administration of the President of the Russian Federation

The Administration of the Russian President plays a critical role in the formation of the Kremlin's policies with regard to Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region as there are special structures within the administration tasked with managing relations with the aforementioned regions. Since 2012, the management of socio-economic relations with Abkhazia and South Ossetia has been bestowed on the Russian President's Special Assistant. This Assistant oversees the Presidential Directorate for Social and Economic Cooperation with the Commonwealth of Independent States Member Countries, the Republic of Abkhazia and the Republic of South Ossetia, which is responsible for the implementation of the Kremlin's policy in the occupied regions and the monitoring of ongoing projects. Another division within the Presidential Administration – the Presidential Directorate for Interregional and Cultural Contact with Foreign Countries – was instrumental in determining the Kremlin's policy from 2005 to 2012 but in recent years, the role of this directorate has decreased significantly.

Vladislav Surkov - Assistant to the President on Social and Economic Cooperation with Abkhazia and South Ossetia

On September 20, 2013, Vladislav Surkov, the Grey Cardinal of Russian politics, replaced Tatiana Golikova who served as the President's Assistant from May 23, 2012. After Putin's re-election as president, many talked

about Surkov leaving the post of Assistant to the President. The reason given for this was Surkov's work in the direction of Donbas. According to certain reports, Surkov no longer wanted to work on the issue of Donbas. In another version of events, Surkov had a conflict with the 5th division of the Federal Security Bureau (FSB) which was responsible for counter-intelligence activities in Donbas.² Contrary to expectations, Surkov was re-appointed as Assistant to the President on June 13, 2018.³

Surkov's appointment as Assistant to the President in 2013 was connected to Moscow's desire to control Russian investments in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region. His appointment was assessed as a significant decision because he is from the Caucasus region and, therefore, is quite familiar with the Caucasus and Abkhazia, in particular.⁴ Surkov's role in the internal processes of Abkhazia was revealed in May 2014 when he emerged as one of the main actors in the internal political crisis in Abkhazia. In order to deal with the crisis, Surkov visited Abkhazia on May 28-29 following the resignation of the de facto president, Alexander Ankvab, on June 1. In addition to resolving the crisis, Surkov regularly visits Abkhazia and inspects construction ongoing within the investment program supported by the socio-economic development plan for the region.⁵

Like Abkhazia, Surkov directly controls ongoing political processes and reconstruction work in the Tskhinvali Region. According to the local media, Surkov's appointment was to establish order in the Tskhinvali Region, which resulted in reconstruction work in the region being completed.⁶ Surkov's role was explicitly revealed on April 9, 2017 during the illegitimate presidential elections held in the Tskhinvali Region. The former de facto president, Eduard Kokoity, failed to register as a presidential candidate and accused Surkov for the decision made by the election commission. Kokoity called Surkov a "swindler" who, according to his assessment, acted "as if he were the owner of South Ossetia."⁷

Surkov's involvement in the management of the occupied regions of Georgia was confirmed through a 2016 hack into his email. The contents of his correspondence revealed the details of his involvement as they showed that Surkov appears to participate in the adoption of laws, the selection of officials and in even such micro-managerial matters as inventorying, salary distribution and educational issues.⁸

Oleg Govorun – Chief of the Presidential Directorate for Social and Economic Cooperation with the Commonwealth of Independent States Member Countries, the Republic of Abkhazia and the Republic of South Ossetia

The division, which was founded on June 9, 2012, accommodates the Russian president's work in the field of socio-economic cooperation with Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region. Since October 11, 2013, the former Minister of Regional Development, Oleg Govorun, who is considered to be "Surkov's man," has headed this division.⁹ On June 22, 2018, Putin re-appointed Govorun to this post.¹⁰ He often meets with the de facto leaders during visits to Sokhumi and Tskhinvali. One of his obligations is the periodic monitoring of construction and rehabilitation work undertaken with Russian financing in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region.¹¹

Dennis Travin – Deputy Chief of the Presidential Directorate for Social and Economic Cooperation with the Commonwealth of Independent States Member Countries, the Republic of Abkhazia and the Republic of South Ossetia

Dennis Travin is Oleg Govorun's deputy. Prior to this appointment, he served as Director of the Investment Projects Department at the Ministry of Regional Development of Russia, including during Govorun's term. Based on the analysis of Travin's visits to the occupied regions of Georgia, we can assume at this stage that monitoring the implementation of ongoing projects within the framework of the investment program for the socio-economic development of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region is within his immediate obligations. Travin ensures the proper expenditure of funds allocated by the Kremlin and the timely implementation of ongoing projects. For instance, on June 8, 2017, he was present in Tskhinvali alongside Surkov.¹²

Inal Ardzinba – Department Head of the Presidential Directorate for Social and Economic Cooperation with the Commonwealth of Independent States Member Countries, the Republic of Abkhazia and the Republic of South Ossetia

On June 26, 2017, Inal Ardzinba, another person with close proximity to Surkov, was appointed as a department head within the directorate.¹³ He had spent some time as a consultant in the department and then as first deputy to Surkov. He was in charge of Moscow's relations with the breakaway republics of Donetsk and Luhansk.¹⁴ Ardzinba's involvement in

Abkhazian issues at this point is reflected in his participation in the Good Faith Ambassadors of Abkhazia charity movement and various other types of endeavors.¹⁵ He is personally familiar with Vladimir Putin who gave Ardzinba an honorary diploma for his contribution to the World Festival of Youth and Students held in Sochi in 2017.¹⁶

On February 22, 2005, the Presidential Directorate for Interregional and Cultural Contacts with Foreign Countries was established. One of the objectives for the establishment of the apparatus was to hinder pro-Western governments in the post-Soviet space and support governments loyal to Moscow. Following the 2008 Russian-Georgian war, Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region became a priority in the activities of this division. Vladimir Chernov was appointed as the head of the directorate in 2012. In 2013, before the appointment of Surkov as assistant to the occupied regions of Georgia, Chernov and his deputy, Sergey Chebotarev, conducted the supervision. After Surkov was appointed, the directorate's influence significantly waned.¹⁷

Government

Vitaly Mutko – Deputy Prime Minister of Russia

Vitaly Mutko is the new face in the Russian government for Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region. He has been the Deputy Prime Minister since 2016. After Putin's re-election, he retained his position but he has been assigned the role of managing relations with Sokhumi and Tskhinvali within the new cabinet. On June 5, 2017, Mutko was appointed as the co-chair of the State Commission for Social-Economic Cooperation between Russia and Abkhazia and South Ossetia.¹⁷ He replaced Aleksandr Khloponin who had worked with Georgia's occupied territories for years and had great experience in this field. Mutko is considered a weak figure as compared to Khloponin.¹⁸ Soon after his appointment on May 26, he met with the de facto leaders of the Tskhinvali Region at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum where the issue of the realization of the investment program in the region was discussed.¹⁹

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

One of the aims of the Russian Foreign Ministry is to conduct informational wars against Georgia in the international arena, provide diplomatic support

to the occupied regions of Georgia and strengthen Russia's position in the occupied regions. The Ministry implements this policy towards the occupied territories by means of the 4th Department of the Commonwealth of Independent States, Russian "embassies" in the occupied territories and the Federal Agency for Commonwealth of Independent States Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad and International Humanitarian Cooperation.

Grigory Karasin – Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs

Grigory Karasin is responsible for the formation of policy towards Georgia in the Ministry where he has been Deputy Foreign Minister since 2005. He is in charge of bilateral relations with CIS countries and relations with compatriots living abroad. After the August 2008 war, he was the first diplomat to meet with Zurab Abashidze, the Special Representative of the Prime Minister of Georgia, on December 14, 2012 in Geneva. At this meeting, the Abashidze-Karasin format was laid out.²⁰ Within the scope of his professional activities, he frequently makes statements about Georgia and occasionally visits the occupied regions to discuss issues of bilateral relations.²¹

Alexei Pavlovsky – Director of the 4th CIS Department of the Russian Foreign Ministry

The 4th Department of the CIS Countries (4ДЧНГ) is in charge of relations with Georgia and its occupied regions within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The department is responsible for Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia and, since 2008, Georgia's occupied territories. Alexei Pavlovsky has been the director of this department since July 4, 2011. He was the deputy director of the 4th Department of CIS Countries from 2006 to 2011.²² Pavlovsky, within the framework of the foreign policy coordination mechanism, regularly holds consultations with the "ambassadors" of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region to Russia.²³

Alexei Dvinyanin – Russia's "ambassador" to Abkhazia

On March 30, 2018, Alexei Dvinyanin was appointed as Russia's second "ambassador" to Abkhazia.²⁴ He replaced Semyon Grigoryev in this post. He is a relatively conscious diplomat on the issues of the South Caucasus, including Georgia, which became his responsibility in 2006 when he was appointed the head of the Regional Conflict Resolution Division of the 4th Department of CIS Countries. From 2009 until March 2018, he was the deputy director of the department.²⁵ Dvinyanin was an active member of

the Geneva discussions formed after the August 2008 war and was deputy head of the Russian delegation at the Geneva discussions from 2011 to 2018. According to Dvinyanin himself, he took part in every meeting from round 1 to 42 and visited Abkhazia twice a year for consultations with the de facto government.²⁶

Marat Kulakhmetov – Russia’s “ambassador” to the Tskhinvali Region

On May 23, 2017, Marat Kulakhmetov was appointed as the second “ambassador” to the Tskhinvali Region, replacing Elbrus Kargiev. A general-major in the Russian Armed Forces since October 2004, he was commander of the Joint Peacekeeping Forces before the Russian-Georgian war in Tskhinvali.²⁷ Kulakhmetov, who has years of experience working in the Tskhinvali Region and knows the local political peculiarities very well, is actively involved in the ongoing processes in the region.

Eleonara Mitrofanova – Head of the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States, Compatriots Living Abroad and International Humanitarian Cooperation (Россотрудничество)

On September 6, 2008, shortly after the Russian-Georgian war, the Russian president ordered the creation of a new agency within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to replace the Russian Center for International Scientific and Cultural Cooperation – the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States, Compatriots Living Abroad and International Humanitarian Cooperation. On December 19, 2017, Eleonara Mitrofanova was appointed as the head of this agency.²⁸ She has extensive experience working on issues related to Russian compatriots living in the international arena and the CIS space. She was the Deputy Secretary General of UNESCO from 2001 to 2003 and First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs from 2003 to 2004. From 2004 until 2009, she headed the “Росзарубежцентр” which was the predecessor of the current agency.²⁹

After being appointed as the head of the agency, Mitrofanova stated the following as the agency’s priorities: development of Russian cooperation with CIS member states, extension of Russian language teaching in the CIS area and the training of teachers for the aforementioned purposes. According to Mitrofanova, the creation of a suitable environment for dialogue with countries with which Russia has certain difficulties in its relations is an absolute priority.³⁰

Within the agency, the Department of CIS Affairs is responsible for matters related to Georgia and has been headed by Sergey Malenko since November 9, 2015. For a certain period of time, Malenko also worked in the administration of the Russian president where he reportedly had a close relationship with Surkov.³¹ Elena Volgina is the head of the department for Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

The agency's representation in Sokhumi was opened on December 18, 2009 as the Russian Center for Science and Culture. The agency's representation to Tskhinvali opened in 2010 followed by the opening of the Russian Center for Science and Culture in September 2012. Personnel of the Embassy of Russia manage the aforementioned representatives: Sergey Fedchenko in Abkhazia and Sergey Skvartsov in the Tskhinvali Region. The main tasks of the agency representations are: development of bilateral cultural, educational, scientific-technical and informational links; cultural and educational activities with Russian compatriots, and the development of links with international and local organizations.

Ministry of North Caucasus Affairs

Within the Russian government, the Ministry of North Caucasus Affairs, which was created on May 12, 2014, has been especially active in recent times with regard to Georgia's occupied regions.

Sergey Chebotarev – Minister of North Caucasus Affairs

Sergey Chebotarev replaced the first Head of the Ministry, Lev Kuznetsov, on May 18, 2018.³² Chebotarev is the only minister of the new government on whom information practically does not exist. Even the Russian media is quite unfamiliar with him. Within minutes of his appointment, information released in the media claimed that it was the Mayor of Tambov – Sergey Chebotarev – who had been appointed. Since 2006, he has worked in the president's administration, headed a department in the Directorate for Interregional and Cultural Contacts with Foreign Countries and since June 2012 he has been deputy head of the directorate. His sphere of responsibility included Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan and the Georgian occupied territories. According to reported information, being an acquaintance of the Deputy Secretary of the Security Council– Rashid Nurgaliyev – contributed to his accession to the post of minister himself.³³

In that period (2005-2013) when the Directorate for Interregional Relations and Cultural Contacts with Foreign Countries was the leading state agency in terms of policy development in the occupied regions, Chebotarev was responsible for the majority of the “basic hard work” that was conducted. He often visited the occupied regions and participated in various internal political processes. According to media reports, he was directly overseeing the illegitimate presidential elections held in the Tskhinvali Region in 2011-2012. His name is also associated with the preparation of the Agreement on Cooperation and Integration which was signed by the Russian president and the de facto president of the Tskhinvali Region on March 18, 2015.

In his capacity as Minister, Chebotarev held his first meeting with the de facto Prime Minister of Abkhazia, Genady Gagulia, in Moscow on June 27, 2018. At the meeting, the issue of the realization of an investment program supporting the socio-economic development of Abkhazia for 2017-2019 was discussed.³⁴ On July 16, 2018, he visited Tskhinvali with his deputy, Igor Koshin, to inspect the investment program. This was his first visit to the occupied regions of Georgia since his appointment as a minister.³⁵ The next day, on July 17, he visited Sokhumi with the same mission.³⁶

Igor Koshin – Deputy Minister of North Caucasus Affairs

The role of the Ministry of North Caucasus Affairs in the occupied territories was further strengthened with the appointment of Igor Koshin as a deputy minister on December 21, 2017. He was assigned the role of cooperating with the occupied territories. Prior to his appointment, he was the governor of the Nenets Autonomous District.³⁷ Koshin is a frequent visitor to Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region. Dennis Travin often accompanies him during these visits. In June 2018, together with Travin, he met with Abkhazian de facto leaders in Sokhumi to discuss investment projects.³⁸ In February 2018, he was in Tskhinvali to discuss the realization of the investment program along with Travin. During this visit, he criticized the pace of ongoing construction projects.³⁹

Security Council

Rashid Nurgaliyev – Deputy Secretary of the Security Council

After being appointed Deputy Secretary of the Security Council on May 22, 2012, appointed as supervisor of Russian law enforcement agencies in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region.⁴⁰ He directly manages

the implementation of the border regions improvement program for the Tskhinvali Region. In July 2017, Nurgaliyev personally inspected newly built roads leading to Russian military bases and border posts.⁴¹ His last visit to Tskhinvali came in July 2018. During this visit, he inspected areas where a roadway designed for cargo transportation could be built in the case of opening of a transit corridor through the Tskhinvali Region.⁴²

Nurgaliyev, alongside Surkov, is considered a “crisis manager” in the occupied regions. He arrived in Tskhinvali to resolve a conflict between political groups in the run-up to the illegitimate presidential elections in 2011.⁴³ He also assumed this “crisis manager” role in Abkhazia in 2014 when the opposition rallied against the de facto president. The Kremlin’s delegation that arrived to resolve this conflict included both Surkov and Nurgaliyev.⁴⁴

Security Representatives

Representatives of Russian law enforcement agencies (Special Services, Russian Defense and Interior Ministries) are in charge of the military, police and border protection of the occupied regions of Georgia. The purpose of the activities of these representatives of the Russian law enforcement agencies is to strengthen their influence on the occupied regions, ensure full control and security of ongoing processes within the occupied territories and execute anti-Georgian policies.

Igor Zubov – Deputy Minister of the Interior

Deputy Minister of the Interior, Igor Zubov, acts as the representative of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in the occupied regions. He was appointed on June 16, 2012.⁴⁵ Zubov frequently meets the leaders of the separatist republics, including representatives of law enforcement agencies.⁴⁶ Zubov has a special role in increasing control over the law enforcement agencies of the occupied regions. For example, on May 18, 2017, Zubov signed an agreement on establishing a Joint Information Coordination Center for Internal Affairs.⁴⁷ The agreement on the creation of the center was signed on July 4, 2016 in Tskhinvali, with Zubov’s participation.⁴⁸

Aleksandr Dvornikov – Commander of the Southern Military District

Aleksandr Dvornikov was appointed as the head of the Southern Military District of Russia on September 20, 2016. He was the commander of the Russian Armed Forces in Syria from September 2015 to July 2016.⁴⁹ The

military forces of the Southern Military District, in addition to being present on the territory of Russia and Armenia, also have bases on the territory of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region – respectively, the 7th military base in Gudauta and the 4th military base in Tskhinvali and Java. The border division of the Federal Security Service of Russia, which actively works in the occupied regions of Georgia, operates under the military district’s command.

Dvornikov regularly conducts scheduled as well as unannounced inspections of the military bases located in the occupied regions of Georgia. In February 2017, he personally visited Tskhinvali and inspected the military bases’ military preparedness level.⁵⁰ In May 2017, Dvornikov inspected the existent infrastructure and infrastructural projects as well as the condition of military equipment on the Russian military base in Abkhazia.⁵¹

Heads of the 7th and 4th Military Bases of Russia

The commanders of the 7th and 4th army bases represent the interests of Russia’s Ministry of Defense in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region. Their immediate responsibility entails the development of Russian military infrastructure in the occupied regions and ensuring military control over the regions. Igor Egorov has been commander of the 7th military base since 2017 while Aleksandr Kravtsov has commanded the 4th military base since 2016.

Dmitriy Yudin – Head of the Border Division of the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation in Abkhazia

General-major Dmitriy Yudin is the head of the Border Division of the FSS in Abkhazia. He was appointed on March 24, 2015. Prior to this, he served as the head of the Border Area Cooperation Group in Belarus from 2013 to 2015.⁵² Yudin is an active participant of events held in the occupied region. He has a close relationship with Raul Khadjimba. For example, in April 2016, Yudin informed Khadjimba regarding the closing of the Tagilone administrative border checkpoint and the activities to be implemented.⁵³

Anatoly Utkin – Head of the Border Division of the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation in the Tskhinvali Region

Since March 2017, General-major Anatoly Utkin, head of the Border Division of the FSS in the Tskhinvali Region, has ensured the “defense” of the de facto border. On June 30, 2017, the newly elected de facto

president of the Tskhinvali Region, Anatoly Bibilov, held a meeting with Utkin, demanding improvement of border security with Georgia.⁵⁴ It is precisely Utkin's service that promotes the kidnapping of people from areas controlled by the Georgian government. At this stage, Utkin has 19 military settlements along with their infrastructure at his disposal for the "defense" of the occupation line.⁵⁵

Legislative Body

The State Duma and the Federation Council are responsible for legitimizing decisions made by the Kremlin and discrediting Georgia on the international arena as much as possible. Multiple MPs have close ties with the de facto leaders of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region. The Committee on Relations with CIS Affairs, Eurasian Integration and Relations with Compatriots is the most active in the State Duma on the issue of Georgia. The chairman of the committee is Leonid Kalashnikov. Especially notable for his active participation in the affairs of the occupied regions is Kalashnikov's first deputy, Konstantin Zatulin, who was one of the first people to be "awarded" Honorary Citizen of Abkhazia shortly after the Russian-Georgian war on September 30, 2008.⁵⁶ The Duma's Defense Committee and especially its chairman – Vladimir Shamanov – also pay special attention to issues related to Georgia. It is worth mentioning that Shamanov headed the Russian military unit in the Kodori Gorge during the August 2008 war.⁵⁷ The issue of Georgia is also actively on the agenda of the International Relations Committee – chaired by Leonid Slutsky.

Chairman of the International Relations Committee, Konstantin Kosachev, is active on the issue of Georgia in the Federation Council. He regularly makes statements on the separatist regions both in Russia as well as in international organizations. He often meets with visiting representatives from the occupied regions in Moscow and provides them with political support.⁵⁸

Federal Subject of the Russian Federation – Republic of North Ossetia-Alania

Federal subjects of the Russian Federation are responsible for the development of bilateral relations with the occupied regions of Georgia. The North Ossetian Republic – Alania has a special place in this regard. Vyacheslav Bitarov has been the Chairman of the Government of the

Republic of North Ossetia since 2015. Bitarov, like his predecessors, believes that Ossetian people currently living in two republics must unite in a single political entity. On March 26, 2017 Bitarov met with de facto president of the Tskhinvali Region, Leonid Tibilov, in Vladikavkaz along with the citizens from the Tskhinvali Region residing in North Ossetia. At the meeting, Bitarov stated that “although Ossetians are separated by mountains, they represent one people and sooner or later historic justice will be celebrated and North and South Ossetia will become one republic again.”⁵⁹ Bitarov was involved in the illegitimate presidential elections in the Tskhinvali Region in 2017 during which he publicly supported Tibilov. However, that did not prevent him from attending the inauguration of the eventual election winner, Anatoly Bibilov.⁶⁰

Conclusions

The formation and subsequent implementation of the Kremlin’s policy towards Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region involves every branch of Russia’s government. Since 2008, special state agencies and positions have been created within the executive branch that are directly responsible for the implementation of the Kremlin’s policy in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region.

Since 2008, control of internal political processes in the occupied regions, as well as policy, social, economic, humanitarian, legal and legislative issues, have been placed under the competency and control of the Russian President’s Administration. Since 2013, Vladislav Surkov, Assistant to the Russian President on Socio-Economic Relations with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, has been in charge of the aforementioned issues. The implementation of the Kremlin’s policy in the occupied region falls to the Presidential Directorate for Social and Economic Cooperation with the Commonwealth of Independent States Member Countries, the Republic of Abkhazia and the Republic of South Ossetia – which is subordinate to Surkov. In this sense, Oleg Govorun and his deputy, Dennis Travin, play a significant role as they are directly responsible for ensuring the effective use of funds allocated by Russia and the implementation of ongoing projects in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region.

Especially in recent years, the role of Russia’s Ministry of North Caucasus Affairs in the execution of investment projects has conspicuously risen. Deputy Minister Igor Koshin is effectively responsible for the separatist

regions and together with Travin, he frequently conducts inspections of construction projects within the framework of the investment program in both Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region. With the appointment of Sergey Chebotarev, the role of the Ministry of North Caucasus Affairs will presumably increase even further. Chebotarev is one of the most conscious and knowledgeable officials with regard to Abkhazia/Tskhinvali Region affairs as he has been in charge of the processes on the ground for many years and enjoys a high level of familiarity and many years of consociation with the local governing elite.

The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as legislative bodies provide support for strengthening Russia's positions in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region, in addition to garnering international support for the occupied regions. Specifically, the 4th CIS Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs plays a leading role as it covers the occupied regions and the activities of Russia's "embassies" in these territories. Additionally, regional representatives of the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad and International Humanitarian Cooperation ensure the Ministry's endeavors in the humanitarian field.

Within the State Duma, the most active players with regards to the issue of Georgia is Committee on Relations with CIS Affairs, Eurasian Integration and Relations with Compatriots, and its chairman - Leonid Kalashnikov from the Federation Council, the Committee on International Relations and its chairman, Konstantin Kosachev, are distinguished.

Other sectoral ministries and legislative committees are also involved in the implementation of the Kremlin's policies, however, based on their clout, the central players remain the Administration of the President, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of North Caucasus Affairs, as their influence goes beyond the security realm (military, police, border control). With regard to security issues, the Russian Special Services, the Ministry of Defense (and relevant units) and the Ministry of Internal Affairs are key. Ensuring coordination between these agencies is bestowed upon Rashid Nurgaliyev – Deputy Secretary of the Security Council – who appears to act as the "crisis manager" of these regions.

The Russian Ministry of Defense has full control over security issues in the occupied regions of Georgia. In this respect, Russia's Southern Military District and its commander, Aleksandr Dvornikov, plays a special role. The

Russian armed forces deployed to the 7th military base in Abkhazia and the 4th military base in Tskhinvali are subordinate precisely to this military district. The border guards of the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation also provide protection for the Kremlin's interest in the region. They are directly responsible for controlling the de facto administrative border and the detention of Georgian citizens living near the de facto boundary.

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