Contemporary Abkhazia: Public Security, European Values, and Prospects for Sustainable Peace

თანამედროვე აფხაზეთი: საზოგადოებრივი უსაფრთხოება, ევროპული ღირებულებები და მდგრადი მშვიდობის პერსპექტივები

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Omar Ardashelia[1a]
ომარ არდაშელია[1]
[1] Sokhumi State University, Tbilisi Georgia
[1] სოხუმის სახელმწიფო უნივერსიტეტი, თბილისი, საქართველო
* o.ardashelia@sou.edu.ge https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4974-4951

Abstract

Introduction. The present study aims to examine the socio-political, economic, and cultural challenges facing contemporary Abkhazia, their public perception, and the threats they pose to regional peace and security. Attention is paid to the interrelationship between human security, human rights, cultural and civic identity, social well-being, and sustainable peace. The relevance of the study is determined by the fact that the unresolved Abkhaz conflict remains one of the major security challenges in the South Caucasus. At the present stage, the conflict can no longer be viewed solely through the prism of territorial status; rather, it encompasses a broad range of issues, including socio-economic conditions, the functioning of political institutions, human rights, cultural identity, interethnic relations, demographic change, migration, education, human security, and external political influence. **Methodology.** The empirical basis of the study is a public opinion survey conducted by the author, the findings of which make it possible to analyze the current situation in the region directly through the attitudes and assessments of the population of Abkhazia**. Results.** The analysis of the public opinion survey pays particular attention to problems that directly affect the everyday lives of the population of Abkhazia. The study identified a range of problems indicative of the protracted crisis in Abkhazia, including the deprivation of voting rights and property rights; restrictions on education in the native language; restrictions on the right to speak one's native (Georgian) language; restrictions on the right to worship in one's native language; violations of the right to healthcare; the minimization of entrepreneurial activity; difficulties in crossing the Enguri River into the rest of Georgia; and the alteration and reconstruction of cultural heritage monuments, particularly Christian places of worship, among others. Developments in recent years demonstrate that economic dependence and the issue of Russian influence remain among the major subjects of Abkhazia's internal political debates, particularly among the Georgian population. The findings demonstrate that sustainable peace in Abkhazia cannot be achieved solely through the resolution of the issue of political status. The disenfranchised position of the population of Gali, as well as parts of Ochamchire and Tkvarcheli municipalities, cannot provide a foundation for the sustainable development of peace in Abkhazia or in the region. Accordingly, the study integrates perspectives of public opinion, human security, conflict transformation, and regional security into the analysis of the Abkhaz conflict. **Conclusion**. The scholarly significance of the study lies in its assessment of the contemporary situation in Abkhazia on the basis of empirical public opinion data and its interpretation within a comparative framework encompassing the South Caucasus and the broader international context. This approach makes it possible to identify more clearly the factors contributing to the persistence of the conflict, while also determining the social, economic, and cultural areas whose strengthening may contribute to establishing the foundations for long-term peace and stability in the region.

Keywords: Abkhazia; Public Opinion Survey European values; European Union; European Security; Regional Security.

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აბსტრაქტი

შესავალი. შესავალი. წინამდებარე კვლევის მიზანია თანამედროვე აფხაზეთის წინაშე არსებული სოციალურ-პოლიტიკური, ეკონომიკური და კულტურული გამოწვევების კომპლექსური შესწავლა. კვლევა ასევე მიზნად ისახავს ამ გამოწვევების საზოგადოებრივი აღქმის გაანალიზებას და იმ რისკებისა და საფრთხეების შეფასებას, რომლებსაც ისინი რეგიონული მშვიდობისა და უსაფრთხოების უზრუნველყოფის პროცესში წარმოშობს. განსაკუთრებული ყურადღება ეთმობა ადამიანის უსაფრთხოებას, ადამიანის უფლებების დაცვას, კულტურული და სამოქალაქო იდენტობის შენარჩუნებას, სოციალურ კეთილდღეობასა და მდგრად მშვიდობას შორის არსებულ ურთიერთკავშირს. კვლევის აქტუალობა განპირობებულია იმ გარემოებით, რომ აფხაზეთის მოუგვარებელი კონფლიქტი კვლავ წარმოადგენს სამხრეთ კავკასიის უსაფრთხოების ერთ-ერთ მნიშვნელოვან გამოწვევას. თანამედროვე გეოპოლიტიკური და რეგიონული პროცესების ფონზე, კონფლიქტის გააზრება და ანალიზი აღარ შემოიფარგლება მხოლოდ ტერიტორიული სტატუსის საკითხით. იგი მოიცავს ურთიერთდაკავშირებულ პოლიტიკურ, სოციალურ, ეკონომიკურ, კულტურულ და ჰუმანიტარულ განზომილებებს, რომელთა შორის განსაკუთრებული მნიშვნელობა ენიჭება: სოციალურ-ეკონომიკურ პირობებს; პოლიტიკური ინსტიტუტების ფუნქციონირებას; ადამიანის უფლებებსა და კულტურულ იდენტობას; ეთნიკურთაშორის ურთიერთობებს; დემოგრაფიულ ცვლილებებს და მიგრაციას; განათლებას;ადამიანის უსაფრთხოებას; გარე პოლიტიკურ გავლენას. **მეთოდოლოგია.** კვლევის ემპირიულ საფუძველს წარმოადგენს ავტორის მიერ ჩატარებული საზოგადოებრივი აზრის კვლევა. მისი შედეგები რეგიონში არსებული ვითარების ანალიზის საშუალებას იძლევა უშუალოდ აფხაზეთის მოსახლეობის დამოკიდებულებებისა და შეფასებების საფუძველზე. **შედეგები.** საზოგადოებრივი აზრის კვლევის ანალიზისას განსაკუთრებული ყურადღება ეთმობა იმ პრობლემებს, რომლებიც უშუალოდ აისახება აფხაზეთის მოსახლეობის ყოველდღიურ ცხოვრებაზე. კვლევამ გამოავლინა რიგი პრობლემებისა, რომლებიც აფხაზეთში ხანგრძლივ კრიზისზე მიუთითებს, მათ შორის: ხმის მიცემის უფლებისა და საკუთრების უფლების ჩამორთმევა; მშობლიურ ენაზე განათლების მიღების შეზღუდვა; მშობლიურ (ქართულ) ენაზე საუბრის უფლების შეზღუდვა; მშობლიურ ენაზე ღვთისმსახურების უფლების შეზღუდვა; ჯანმრთელობის დაცვის უფლების დარღვევა; სამეწარმეო საქმიანობის მინიმუმამდე დაყვანა; მდინარე ენგურის გადაკვეთით საქართველოს დანარჩენ ტერიტორიაზე გადაადგილების სირთულეები; კულტურული მემკვიდრეობის ძეგლების, განსაკუთრებით ქრისტიანული სალოცავების, სახეცვლა და რეკონსტრუქცია, და სხვ. ბოლო წლების მოვლენები ცხადყოფს, რომ ეკონომიკური დამოკიდებულება და რუსეთის გავლენის საკითხი კვლავ რჩება აფხაზეთის შიდაპოლიტიკური დებატების ერთ-ერთ მთავარ საგნად, განსაკუთრებით ქართულ მოსახლეობაში. **დასკვნა.** კვლევის შედეგები აჩვენებს, რომ აფხაზეთში მდგრადი მშვიდობის მიღწევა მხოლოდ პოლიტიკური სტატუსის საკითხის გადაწყვეტით შეუძლებელია. გალის მუნიციპალიტეტის მოსახლეობის, ისევე როგორც ოჩამჩირისა და ტყვარჩელის მუნიციპალიტეტების ნაწილის მოსახლეობის, უფლებააყრილი მდგომარეობა ვერ იქნება მშვიდობის მდგრადი განვითარების საფუძველი ვერც აფხაზეთში და ვერც რეგიონში. შესაბამისად, კვლევა აფხაზეთის კონფლიქტის ანალიზში ოთხ პერსპექტივას აერთიანებს: საზოგადოებრივ აზრს, ადამიანის უსაფრთხოებას, კონფლიქტის ტრანსფორმაციასა და რეგიონულ უსაფრთხოებას. კვლევის სამეცნიერო მნიშვნელობა ორ ასპექტს მოიცავს. პირველი, იგი აფასებს აფხაზეთში არსებულ თანამედროვე ვითარებას საზოგადოებრივი აზრის ემპირიულ მონაცემებზე დაყრდნობით. მეორე, იგი ამ მონაცემებს განმარტავს შედარებით ჩარჩოში, რომელიც სამხრეთ კავკასიასა და უფრო ფართო საერთაშორისო კონტექსტს მოიცავს. ეს მიდგომა საშუალებას იძლევა, უფრო მკაფიოდ გამოიკვეთოს კონფლიქტის შენარჩუნების ხელშემწყობი ფაქტორები. ამავდროულად, იგი საშუალებას იძლევა, განისაზღვროს ის სოციალური, ეკონომიკური და კულტურული სფეროები, რომელთა გაძლიერებამაც შეიძლება ხელი შეუწყოს რეგიონში ხანგრძლივი მშვიდობისა და სტაბილურობის საფუძვლების ჩამოყალიბებას.

საკვანძო სიტყვები: აფხაზეთი; საზოგადოებრივი აზრის კვლევა; ევროპული ღირებულებები; ევროკავშირი; ევროპული უსაფრთხოება; რეგიონული უსაფრთხოება

1. Introduction

At the present stage of the Abkhazian conflict, it is no longer sufficient to consider it solely in terms of territorial status and military-political confrontation. The consequences of the prolonged conflict directly affect the everyday lives of the population and link the issue of security with human rights, social well-being, education, healthcare, freedom of movement, property, and cultural identity, and, above all, are associated with distrust toward peacebuilding policy. Therefore, an analytical framework that, alongside political security, also incorporates the dimension of human security is important for assessing the conflict **(UNDP 1994, 22-46).** This document identifies seven main components of human security: *economic security* - guaranteed basic income or employment; *food security* - physical and economic access to basic food products; *health security* - protection from diseases and conditions harmful to health; *environmental security* - protection from environmental degradation, pollution, and resource depletion; *personal security* — protection from physical violence, crime, and domestic violence; *community security* - preservation of traditional cultures and ethnic groups; *political security* - protection of fundamental human rights and freedom from political repression.

The empirical basis of this report is the public opinion survey conducted by us from December 2024 through February 2025. A total of 177 respondents participated in the survey: 123 from the Gali Municipality, 16 from Sukhumi, 32 from Ochamchire, and 6 from Tkvarcheli. The respondents represent that part of the population which has the possibility, to varying degrees, of maintaining communication with the rest of Georgia. Part of the research results has been published **(Ardashelia 2025: 6–11).**

This circumstance is fundamentally important for the interpretation of the research. The data obtained allow us to identify the opinions, experiences, and assessments of specific social groups; however, generalizing them as a representative picture of the entire population of Abkhazia would be methodologically unjustified. Nevertheless, they reflect the problems of a large part of the population, primarily the ethnic Georgian population. Therefore, in this report, the research findings are considered empirical material that is particularly valuable for studying everyday problems, human security, and the social dimension of the conflict.

The main premise of the research is that sustainable peace cannot be defined solely by a political agreement. Although resolving the issue of political status is a necessary component, the sustainability of peace also depends on the extent to which human rights, social well-being, safe movement, education, healthcare, economic opportunities, and conditions for public participation are ensured. It is precisely this interrelationship that the present report analyzes.

2. Methodology

*Research Methodology***.** The empirical basis of the research is an attempt to study public opinion, which was conducted from December 2024 through February 2025. The purpose of the research was to study the attitudes of the Georgian population living in the territory of Abkhazia toward issues of human security, social conditions, European values, and peacebuilding.

A total of 177 respondents participated in the public opinion survey: 123 from the Gali Municipality, 16 from Sukhumi, 32 from Ochamchire, and 6 from Tkvarcheli. Naturally, this sample cannot be considered representative of the entire population of Abkhazia, but it openly reveals the problems of the Georgian-speaking population.

The questions asked of the respondents covered the following issues:

1. How do you assess your personal security?
2. Which problem do you consider to be the most important challenge?
3. To what extent are your fundamental rights protected?
4. How do you assess freedom of movement?
5. What is your social and economic situation?
6. To what extent are healthcare and education services accessible?
7. To what extent do you trust the peacebuilding activities of international organizations?
8. Whom do you trust more in the process of implementing peace processes: Government of Georgia, the legitimate Government of Abkhazia (in Tbilisi), the de facto authorities of Abkhazia (in occupied Sukhumi), the Russian authorities, or international organizations?

9. How do you assess European values in the context of human rights and peace?
10. In your opinion, what prevents the establishment of sustainable peace?
11. Which direction would contribute to the peaceful resolution of the conflict?

3. Results

According to the survey, the sense of personal security is heterogeneous. This issue may be considered within the broader concept of human security, which encompasses physical, social, economic, and rights-related dimensions.

Table 1. Assessment of Personal Security

Response/Category	Percentage of responses
I feel completely safe	4%
I feel mostly safe	24%
I feel partially safe	31%
I feel mostly unsafe	25%
I feel completely unsafe	16%
Total	**100%**

Table 2. Main Problems Identified by Respondents

Response/Category	Percentage of responses
Restrictions on movement	26%
Social and economic difficulties	22%
Employment problems	18%
Access to healthcare	16%
Education-related issues	16%
Other problems/refusal to answer	2%
Total	**100%**

The respondents' answers show that security issues are closely connected with socio-economic conditions. Restrictions on movement, employment difficulties, and access to basic services may be considered interconnected factors that affect the everyday lives of the population and prospects for peace.

Table 3. Assessment of the Peacebuilding Activities of International Organizations

Response/Category	Percentage of responses
I assess them positively	19%
I assess them mostly positively	28%
I have a neutral attitude	23%
I assess them mostly negatively	17%
I assess them negatively	8%
I find it difficult to answer	5%
Total	**100%**

Table 4. Which institutions do you trust most to restore peaceful coexistence in Abkhazia?

Response/Category	Five-point scale
International organizations	5
Government of Georgia	4
Public diplomacy between the Abkhaz and Georgian peoples	
Russia	3
Russia	2
Legitimate Government of Abkhazia in Tbilisi	1
De facto (separatist) authorities of Abkhazia	0

As we can see, trust in international organizations remains high; however, attitudes toward the activities of international organizations, the Government of Georgia, the legitimate Government of Abkhazia, and the de facto authorities differ. We believe that this issue relates to the respondents' personal experiences, sources of information, and the practical outcomes of specific peace initiatives (Ardashelia, 2025: 164–177; Ardashelia, 2025: 264–277).

On the same five-point scale, which peace initiatives are more effective for restoring trust between the conflicting communities? The responses of respondents identified the following as the leading areas: economic support programs; social, including healthcare, support programs (these programs are implemented by the Government of Georgia); sports, cultural, and scientific events; peace education and the promotion of a culture of peace; provision of humanitarian assistance; programs supporting women's rights; and others (Ardashelia, 2025: 273).

4. Discussion

The analysis of the research issues indicates that, when considering the situation of the Georgian population of Abkhazia, it is necessary to understand security, human rights, socio-economic conditions, and peacebuilding within a unified context, and that sustainable peace is not limited to a political agreement. It also implies ensuring the everyday security of the population, improving opportunities for movement, taking social needs into account, strengthening mechanisms for the protection of human rights, and so on.

European Values and Peacebuilding. When speaking about European values, respondents focus on the protection of human rights, particularly the protection of electoral rights, the rule of law, equality, respect for human dignity, peaceful coexistence, and engagement and participation in public activities. The analysis of the research shows that, for respondents, the important issue is not merely the description of declared positions; rather, it is important to determine how these values are connected with their own everyday experiences (persecution and harassment on ethnic grounds, which are directly connected with the security of their lives and their social conditions, issues of education and healthcare, and the preservation of cultural and national identity).

The analysis of the results of the empirical research conducted revealed the need to analyze the research data in the following contexts: human security as a framework for analyzing the Abkhazian conflict; public opinion and the social dimension of the conflict; human rights and the practical dimension of European values; movement, social well-being, and economic vulnerability; the Russian factor and the regional security dimension of the Abkhazia issue; sustainable peace and conflict transformation; and European values as a social foundation for peace. Below, the analysis of the research conducted is briefly reviewed according to each dimension.

4.1. Human Security as a Framework for Analyzing the Abkhazian Conflict

In contemporary security studies, the concept of human security places the individual and their everyday needs at the center of security. In the United Nations Development Programme's 1994 *Human Development Report*, human security was associated not only with protection from military threats, but also with "freedom from fear" and "freedom from want"; this approach strengthened the inclusion of social, economic, health, and political dimensions in the security agenda **(UNDP 1994, 22–33).**

In the context of Abkhazia, the application of this framework makes it possible to see the consequences of the conflict more broadly. The absence of military action or a reduction in the intensity of violence does not in itself mean that human security is ensured if people continue to have restricted movement, access to education, protection of property, access to healthcare, or participation in public life. From the perspective of human security, sustainable transformation of the conflict also implies reducing these everyday vulnerabilities.

The public opinion survey conducted by us identified issues that confirm this multidimensional picture. Among the problems identified by respondents were restrictions on electoral rights, property-related issues, the problem of education in the Georgian language, restrictions on speaking the Georgian language and on religious practice, access to healthcare, restrictions on entrepreneurial activity, and difficulties in moving through the Enguri River to the rest of the territory of Georgia. What is particularly important in this list is that the problems are not isolated from one another: restrictions on movement may

affect education, health, employment, and family relations, while economic vulnerability may contribute to increased social and political dependence.

Thus, assessing the security dimension of the Abkhazian conflict solely through military or geopolitical categories provides an incomplete picture. The human security approach allows us also to assess the consequences of the conflict from the perspective of the extent to which a person can live safely, receive an education, access healthcare, preserve their cultural identity, and participate in public life.

4.2. Public Opinion and the Social Dimension of the Conflict

Public opinion research is of particular importance in the study of the Abkhazian conflict because it allows us, alongside political processes, to see people's everyday problems and their expectations of actors involved in conflict resolution. In fact, this is their experience, which is reflected in international and governmental reports, court decisions, and political statements, which provide important information; however, public opinion data create another type of knowledge — they show how the political and institutional consequences of the conflict are transformed into everyday social problems.

In the present study, most respondents are from the Gali Municipality, while the remainder represent the municipalities of Sukhumi, Ochamchire, and Tkvarcheli. Accordingly, the research data are particularly important for analyzing the problems affecting the Georgian population and everyday life connected with the conflict's dividing line.

Despite this limitation, the value of the research lies precisely in identifying specific experiences. As we can see, a large proportion of respondents focus on the prohibition of education in their native (Georgian) language, problems with access to education, the freedom of movement, property-related problems, threats to healthcare, and restrictions on economic activity, which shows that the major political conflict has been transformed into an everyday social experience. From this perspective, systematic study of public opinion may become a practical instrument of peacebuilding: it makes it possible for the policy agenda to reflect more clearly the problems that directly affect people's living conditions and everyday circumstances.

4.3. Human Rights and the Practical Dimension of European Values

In this report, European values are considered not only in terms of the significance of political rapprochement with the European Union, but also in the context of the principles of human dignity, equality, freedom, the rule of law, and political participation. The protection of these principles is directly connected with the social foundation of peace: where the protection of rights is weak, strengthening trust, social equality, and sustainable peace becomes more difficult.

Assessments by European institutions indicate that the human rights situation in Abkhazia remains a serious challenge. The European Union's 2025 statement concerning the twenty-second consolidated report of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe on the conflict in Georgia once again emphasized problems related to human rights violations and the case law of the European Court of Human Rights concerning Russia's effective control over Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia **(**European Union 2025).

The issue of education and the native language is particularly important. In the practice of the European Court of Human Rights, the right to education is connected with the principle that education must retain a real and effective character, while the right to speak and receive education in one's native language constitutes an important part of minority rights and their participation in society. In this context, restrictions on education in the Georgian language recorded in our research should not be considered merely an educational problem; it is also connected with issues of cultural identity, equality, and public participation (European Court of Human Rights 2026; European Court of Human Rights 2021).

In the information disseminated by the European Court of Human Rights concerning the case *Taganova and Others v. Georgia and Russia*, issued in December 2024, the Court found that the rights to protection of property and respect for private and family life of five applicants had been violated in relation to property they had left in Abkhazia as a result of the hostilities or which they had been unable to use; the Court linked Russia's responsibility to its control and insufficient efforts to ensure property rights. This judgment once again demonstrates that the consequences of the conflict manifest themselves in specific, everyday human rights problems (European Court of Human Rights 2024).

In our research, respondents clearly identified the problem of cultural heritage, particularly the alteration of Christian places of worship and the preservation of the authenticity of Georgian cultural heritage monuments. In this case, the protection of cultural heritage is not merely a matter of protecting and preserving architectural monuments; it relates to the historical and cultural memory of society and with identity. Therefore, the protection of cultural heritage may also be considered a cultural dimension of peacebuilding.

4.4. Movement, Social Well-being, and Economic Vulnerability

The problem of movement across the Enguri River is one of the important issues identified by the research. Restrictions on movement do not merely create a physical barrier; they may affect opportunities for education, healthcare, employment, family ties, and other social relations. In the positions of the European Union, restrictions on freedom of movement are consistently considered one of the important human security problems of conflict-affected populations (European Union 2025).

The European Union's 2025 statement concerning the thirty-first consolidated report on the conflict in Georgia emphasizes the need to open crossing points along administrative boundary lines, release detainees, and provide international humanitarian and human rights organizations with access to the respective regions. This approach is important in that it considers security not only in terms of relations between states but also through the everyday needs of people affected by the conflict (European Union 2025).

A large proportion of the people included in the study also focus on healthcare and economic activity. In the contemporary human security approach, health and economic opportunities are considered important components of security. Accordingly, economic vulnerability is not merely a social problem; prolonged economic dependence may also become an additional factor of political vulnerability. The situation is complicated in the healthcare sector. It is known that the Government of Georgia implements a humanitarian healthcare program, under which the Government of Georgia provides free medical services to citizens living in the occupied territories (Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region). It is called the *“State Program for Referral Services.”* Its beneficiaries are persons legally residing in the occupied territories who do not have a Georgian citizen's identity card or a neutral ID card, but who have been identified through a special procedure (Healthcare Guide, 2013). It is noteworthy that this project operates effectively, but our research reflected the unstable attitude toward the project among that part of the population of occupied Abkhazia who hold Georgian citizenship and live in occupied Abkhazia.

According to the research, economic dependence and the issue of Russian influence remain important topics in Abkhazia's internal political debates, particularly among the Georgian population. In assessing this circumstance, it is necessary to take into account the scope of the empirical data: the study describes the attitudes of the surveyed respondents (primarily the Georgian population) and not the overall position of the society of occupied Abkhazia.

4.5. The Russian Factor and the Regional Security Dimension of the Abkhazia Issue

An analysis of the contemporary situation in Abkhazia is impossible without taking the external political factor into account. The practice of the European Court of Human Rights has addressed the issue of Russia's effective control over the territory of Abkhazia in several judgments. These legal assessments are important not only for determining responsibility but also for understanding the political and security environment in which the Abkhazian conflict continues to exist.

From the perspective of regional security, the Abkhazia issue relates to the security of Georgia, Georgia–Russia relations, and the broader security environment of the South Caucasus. Accordingly, it is simultaneously a problem of local, regional, and international significance. At the same time, regional security analysis should not remain limited to a discussion of the interests of states and the balance of power; it should also encompass the security of populations affected by the conflict.

The involvement of the European Union in this context is multidimensional: it includes participation in the Geneva International Discussions, the activities of the European Union Monitoring Mission, support for human rights, and work with conflict-affected communities. The European Union also declares its support for Georgia's territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders and

for the peaceful conflict resolution process (European Union 2025). Without this support, it is difficult to imagine Georgia's situation within the boundaries of Russia's geopolitical interests.

At the same time, the call published within the framework of the second phase of EU4Dialogue in 2026 indicates such priorities as confidence-building, the resilience of conflict-affected communities, social cohesion, human security, and sustainable peace. This is important for the present research because it demonstrates that, in international practice, peacebuilding is increasingly connected with the needs of local communities and human security (UNDP Georgia 2026). The EU4Dialogue project is closely connected with Georgia. It is a joint initiative of the European Union (EU) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), aimed at supporting conflict-affected populations in the South Caucasus and Moldova.

4.6. Sustainable Peace and Conflict Transformation

One of the main conclusions of the research is that sustainable peace in Abkhazia cannot be achieved solely by resolving the issue of political status. The issue of status is an essential part of the political foundation of the conflict, but the sustainability of peace is also determined by broader social conditions. These conditions include the protection of human rights, safe movement, education, healthcare, economic opportunities, the protection of cultural identity, and opportunities for interaction between communities.

In peace studies, the distinction between negative and positive peace is important. Negative peace is primarily associated with the absence of direct violence and military confrontation, whereas positive peace also encompasses the social and political conditions that reduce the risks of injustice, discrimination, and renewed confrontation. In the case of Abkhazia, strengthening precisely this second dimension is necessary, because formal calm cannot ensure sustainable social peace (Galtung 1969, 167–191).

Our research shows that there are problems in the situation of the population of Gali and, in part, the population of occupied Abkhazia that weaken the social foundation of peace. Accordingly, practical peacebuilding may include cooperation in the fields of education and healthcare, improving opportunities for movement, supporting small-scale economic activity, protecting cultural heritage, and increasing direct contacts between people.

The experience of international programs in this direction is noteworthy. Joint initiatives of the European Union and the United Nations Development Programme in Georgia aim to strengthen the protection of human rights, social inclusion, and human-rights-based approaches. In the context of conflict, such an approach is important insofar as peacebuilding is not considered merely as negotiations among political elites but also incorporates the needs and participation of local communities **(UNDP Georgia 2024–2028).**

4.7. European Values as a Social Foundation for Peace

The practical significance of European values in the context of Abkhazia is expressed in the protection of human rights, equality, freedom, access to education, respect for cultural identity, and the opportunity for political participation. If a person can use their own language, receive an education, receive healthcare, move freely, and participate in public life, this is not only an improvement in their individual situation; it also contributes to strengthening trust and the sense of security in society.

From this perspective, European values should not become merely an abstract part of an external political agenda. Their practical significance becomes evident precisely when they are used as criteria for responding to people's everyday problems. Human dignity, equality, the rule of law, and the protection of rights may be considered the normative foundation that strengthens the social sustainability of peace.

Public opinion research provides an important basis from this perspective. The problems identified by the population show that the issue of peace is connected, for them, with specific needs — education, preservation of the Georgian language, movement, health, property, and economic opportunities. Accordingly, peacebuilding policy should connect these needs with human rights and security. This is precisely where the practical significance of public opinion research becomes evident: it connects the political agenda with people's everyday experiences.

Conclusion

The consideration of the situation in contemporary Abkhazia on the basis of public opinion research shows that the sustainable transformation of the conflict cannot depend solely on the resolution

of political status. A political agreement is necessary, but it is not a sufficient condition for sustainable peace. The quality and sustainability of peace are also determined by the extent to which human dignity and rights are protected and the extent to which the population is able to participate safely and fully in social and economic life.

The research data indicate that the contemporary dimension of the conflict encompasses human rights, education, language, cultural identity, movement, health, economic conditions, and political participation. Such a broad understanding of human security allows us to consider the Abkhazia issue not only as a territorial and geopolitical dispute but also as a prolonged social and security crisis.

The scientific significance of the research lies precisely in considering public opinion, human security, conflict transformation, and regional security within a unified analytical framework. At the same time, given the specific nature of the research sample, its results should be treated with caution and not as a statistically representative picture of the entire population of Abkhazia. Its main value lies in the empirical documentation of the experiences and problems of a specific Georgian-speaking population and in planning and implementing specific measures to address them.

In the long term, particular importance should be attached to the protection of human rights, access to education, respect for cultural identity, free and safe movement, expanding social and economic opportunities, and increasing contacts between communities. As the research has shown, the population has high hopes for the latter (public diplomacy between the Abkhaz and Georgian peoples). The combination of all these directions may create a stronger foundation for restoring trust and achieving sustainable peace. Accordingly, the prospects for the peaceful transformation of the Abkhazian conflict should be based on a dual approach: continuing the resolution of political issues and, in parallel, working to improve the everyday conditions of human security and human rights, with the involvement of international organizations, the Government of Georgia, the legitimate Government of Abkhazia (in Tbilisi), as well as the de facto (separatist) authorities of Abkhazia and Russia.

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