Abkhazia Votes:

Guide to the Two Thousand Eleven Presidential Elections
Election Observation Guide

Presidential Elections

Abkhazia

26 August 2011
Situated on the Eastern shore of the Black Sea coast, Abkhazia is a territory whose efforts towards international recognition as an independent state have been curtailed by reticence from the international community. Although the state claimed independence from Georgia in 1992, foreign governments and organizations alike continue to support maintenance of Georgia’s supposed territorial integrity. As a result, Georgia maintains a ‘Government of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia’ although this body enjoys little, if any, legitimacy within Abkhazia. The dual territorial and national claims on the region have led to several violent episodes in the last two decades. Since the four day Russo-Georgian War in 2008 the region has been relatively stable, although regional tensions continue to aggravate the situation in the South Caucasus.

Due to the unexpected death of President Sergey Bagapsh on 29 May 2011, Abkhazia will hold a special presidential election on 26 August 2011. The Central Election Commission (TsIK) cited the Constitution of Abkhazia in its decision to hold elections three months after Bagapsh’s passing which also marks the third anniversary of the Russian Federation’s formal recognition of Abkhazia.

The presidential elections represent an important step in Abkhazia’s development as a stable state. The normative structure in which this election will take place signals Abkhazia’s enduring commitment to the democratic process. Citizen participation in politics is vital to a strong democratic sentiment and the emergence of Abkhaz civil society as well as a demonstrated reliance on the tenets of good governance strengthens Abkhazian assertions of independence.

Abkhazia’s close economic and, more recently, military partnership with Russia will be a key factor in this election. Abkhazian attitudes on this relationship are mixed. Some citizens perceive the relationship to be one-sided and fear that growing dependence will compromise Sukhum’s actual power. Other groups, however, believe that the benefits of Russian friendship and recognition far outweigh the costs. While the last election proved that Kremlin support is not the sole factor Abkhazian
voters consider, the regional dimension will certainly influence the election results.

A shift towards a multiparty system has been observed in elections dating to 2005. In 2008, the Central Election Committee (TsIK) decided that while presidential nominations could still be posited by initiative groups, candidates must legitimize their candidacy via membership in a political party. Three candidates have been nominated for the position and they are supported respectively by the Forum of the National Unity of Abkhazia, the Party for the Economic Dependence of Abkhazia and United Abkhazia.

Media observation of the upcoming election has been mostly regional and a substantial portion of the media coverage has focused on candidate profiles, speculation as to Russian favorites and campaign tactics. UNPO has scheduled an Election Observation Mission to ensure that international attention is given to the democratic legitimacy of Abkhazia’s election process. This mission represents a continuation of the work UNPO began in 1994 when Abkhazia became a member of the organization and of UNPO -sponsored fact-finding missions conducted during the 1990s and the 2000s.
The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 coincided with growing tensions among the communities of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR). Increasingly nationalistic rhetoric from Tbilisi throughout the late 1980s alienated Abkhaz citizens and fuelled growing resentment within the Abkhaz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) – itself a former SSR. Issues surrounding linguistic and cultural security provoked calls for Abkhazian secession from the Georgian state after, what many commentators, believe was premature recognition of the Georgian SSR by the international community. With these issues unresolved, violence erupted in 1992 as Georgian forces attempted to assert Tbilisi’s authority and block Abkhaz attempts at securing self-determination.

After a violent year which saw the displacement, injury and loss of thousands on both sides, peace arrived in the form of an uneasy stalemate in which the newly established Republic of Abkhazia inherited the borders of the former Abkhaz ASSR. Armed exchanges in 1998, 2001, and 2006 ensured the entrenchment of distrust between both sides and Abkhaz forces remain wary of Georgian incursions. In August 2008, renewed tensions and increased military action between Russia and Georgia culminated in the four day Russo-Georgian War. The Russian Federation’s subsequent decision to recognize the Republic of Abkhazia marked a new chapter in history of the nation. Recognition has since followed from Venezuela, Nicaragua, Nauru and Vanuatu.¹

The 2008 conflict renewed international interest in the South Caucasus. Many foreign observers however, overlooked the consistent, albeit slow, development of civil society and capacity building by local non-governmental organizations in partnerships with international entities. TsIK’s landmark reform of the nomination process represents continued development in Abkhazia’s political process and possibly more international interest in the recognition of the state.

Sergey Bagapsh served as President of Abkhazia from 2004 until 2011. In 2004, Bagapsh’s first election, he was elected by a slim majority. Accusations of election tampering were made but the elections nevertheless saw the presidential two-term limit respected.

Ultimately, rapprochement between Bagapsh and runner-up Raul Khajimba staved off a potential political crisis. Due to the successes of his first term, Bagapsh went on to win a second term in office in 2009. During his tenure, Bagapsh encouraged the partnership with Russia and is credited with the development of a more economically stable society. Upon hearing of his death, Vladimir Putin stated, “the first steps of Abkhazia as a sovereign subject of international law are associated with Sergey V. Bagapsh’s name.”

Since Russian recognition in 2008, Georgia has imposed an economic blockade on Abkhazia, restricting international access (historically via ferry from Turkey) by sea. Although Sukhum airport remains closed to civilian flights, plans for development have been approved and the Abkhazian government is hopeful that the airport will function by the 2014 Sochi Olympics. In addition, Russia unveiled a rail line from border station Veseloye to Sukhum, Abkhazia’s capital in August 2011. Many of these new developments are motivated by the upcoming winter Olympics.

The United Nations (UN), European Union (EU) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) have each organized missions to the region in the hopes of finding a realistic and equitable solution to the sovereignty dispute. At present, Abkhazian authorities continue to participate in Geneva Talks with Tbilisi in the hope that a fair, equitable and realistic solution to the territorial dispute can be reached. In 2009, under the guidance of the Co-Chairman of the Geneva Talks, Abkhazia and Georgia partnered to create a joint incident prevention and response mechanisms program.

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The ultimate objective of this program is to “ensure a timely and adequate response to the security situation, including incidents and their investigation, security of vital installations and infrastructure, responding to criminal activities, ensuring effective delivery of humanitarian aid, and any other issues which could affect stability and security, with a particular focus on incident prevention and response.” On 14 July 2011, a plenary meeting was held in Gal to discuss the program’s framework.

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INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF DEMOCRACY
ABKHAZ POLITICAL STRUCTURE

In the aftermath of the war between the Georgia and the Abkhazia in 1992-1993, the Abkhaz authorities established a presidential parliamentary system of governance. As determined by the Constitution of Abkhazia, the government structure is comprised of three main bodies: The Office of the Presidency, the People’s Assembly, and the Supreme Court. These bodies represent the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government respectively.

In a speech given at 2009’s Independence of Abkhazia and Prospects for the Caucasus Conference, Manana Gurgulia, Director of the State Information Agency Apsny Press, stated, “in practice, the executive branch has more power than the others...but the issue of the redistribution of authority between the legislative and executive branches of power is being actively discussed.”5 The preference for a strong executive stems from legitimate and protracted security concerns. However, as peacekeeping efforts continue, several political groups have expressed faith that the balance of power will be equitably restructured.

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF ABKHAZIA – EXECUTIVE BRANCH

The Office of President is a directly elected position wherein the holder sits for a five year term. In office, the President selects and presides over the Cabinet of Ministers consisting of 15 ministries and eight chairmanships. Currently, the president has sole power to select and approve each member of the cabinet, including the prime minister. However, discussions regarding parliamentary approval continue to occur within both government and civil society.

The Public Chamber, an advisory board to the president, acts as a forum for public participation in government. The thirty five members of this body are appointed by the President and drawn from civil society,

political parties and local administration. The first session of the Chamber was held on 20 July 2007. Natela Akaba is the Chamber’s current chair.

The President and Vice President do not have the right to sit as members of the People’s Assembly, the legislative branch of Abkhazia’s government. For the duration of their terms in office, each official must surrender his membership in any political party or public union.

**PEOPLE’S ASSEMBLY OF THE REPUBLIC OF ABKHAZIA – LEGISLATIVE BRANCH**

The People’s Assembly of the Republic of Abkhazia is composed of thirty-five deputies elected for a term of five years. Legislation is approved by a simple majority of deputies present in the assembly except in the case of constitutional law which demands a two-thirds majority to pass. Parliamentary activities include examining, approving, and implementing state budgets. Additionally, members can declare a vote of non-confidence for chairmanship positions in the President’s Cabinet of Ministers.

Since 2002, Nugzar Ashuba has served as Speaker of the Assembly. In the last parliamentary election he was re-elected as speaker and will serve a five year term.

At present, political parties are enabled by law to nominate candidates in one-third of the electoral districts. According to Gurgulia, “the strengthening of the role political parties introduces the prospect of a mixed...electoral system.” According to Gurgulia, “the strengthening of the role political parties introduces the prospect of a mixed...electoral system.” The integration of political parties in the election of deputies to the Assembly strengthens the Central Election Committee’s judgment that presidential candidates should be supported by political parties.

**SUPREME COURT OF THE REPUBLIC OF ABKHAZIA – JUDICIAL BRANCH**

The Supreme Court presides over eight regional law courts which approximately correspond to the constituencies represented by the
People’s Assembly. Judges serve the court for five years and primarily consider issues of constitutionality at the local and federal level. Candidates are recommended by the President of the Republic but their office must be ratified and confirmed by the People’s Assembly.

Roman Mushba serves as the current Chairman of the Supreme Court. Prior to his appointment in 2010, he served as the head of Abkhazia’s Military Court.\(^7\)

Democratic progress has also been forthcoming on the local level as elected city and district assemblies become more effective in limiting executive power. The successful development of a potent local voice has given rise to a greater spectrum and expression of political perspectives. Increased access to new media and the proliferation of new political parties has also increased democratic involvement and commitment to civic duty. Combined, these factors have imbued the political landscape with a renewed enthusiasm.

EFFICIENCY AND IMPARTIALITY NORMALIZING THE ABKHAZ ELECTORAL SYSTEM

The August 2011 election reinforces democratic precedent in the region and the government’s mandate to justly represent the inhabitants of the area. In 2004, accusations of election tampering tainted the otherwise democratic presidential elections but demonstrated that constitutional safeguards were in place and responded well when tested. Notably, the Supreme Court exercised its constitutional right and declared the results null and void, calling for a new ballot to take place.

Each new election has allowed Abkhaz institutions and individuals to improve the efficiency, impartiality and normative features of the process. The Abkhaz demonstrated their commitment to improvement in the 2009 presidential elections in which accusations of fraud and partiality were rare and unsubstantiated. According to Gurgulia, “there are no issues regarding the frequency of elections. There were cases of fraud during elections at different levels, and this will probably happen again the future. There is certain improvement in that if a violation is identified candidates...go to the law.”

CENTRAL ELECTION COMMISSION (TSIK)

The Central Election Commission (TsIK) presides over the presidential and parliamentary electoral processes. The Commission operates primarily on an administrative basis but has the authority to mandate election reform. Currently, the Commission is chaired by Batal Tabagua who took office in December 2004. He is charged with the full authority of the organization and oversees the management of election process.

In 2009, the electoral process progressed dramatically when the People’s Assembly passed legislation that eliminated the use of Certificate No. 9 – a Soviet-era form confirming a lost passport - in favor of Abkhazian passports issued to confirm citizenship. In an effort to expand the voting

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population, the Assembly granted citizenship to individuals of Abkhaz descent who did not reside in Abkhazia and to residents of the country for five consecutive years. At present, approximately 149,000 Abkhaz citizens now hold passports issued by the Government of the Republic of Abkhazia. Although the legislation was criticized for not including the right to dual citizenship, passport distribution was a step towards fulfilling international standards of identification.

The right to vote is only conferred upon those citizens who have obtained and hold valid passports issued by the Abkhazian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In each case, the seventeenth page of the passport contains a stamp that indicates confirmation that the holder has voted. This procedure is used to curb attempts at voter manipulation. In an additional bid to ensure the validity of the approaching election, Abkhazian law enforcement chiefs have pledged to improve security as a measure to proactively manage any disturbances or attempts at ballot tampering at polling stations. On 16 August 2011, certificates were issued to citizens with Abkhazian passports but no residence permits.

The Commission compiles voter lists using data collected by the Passport and Visa Service which operates under the auspices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Abkhazia. Elections will open on 26 August 2011 at 8:00h and close at 20:00h the same day. As a reflection of a smaller voting pool, an exception will be made for polling centers in Moscow and Cherkessk, which will open at 10:00h and close at 18:00h. Within the thirty-five regions of Abkhazia there are 174 polling stations, each representing an electoral district. The Commission estimates that 143,735 citizens will vote.

The mountainous terrain of Abkhazia poses some logistical challenges for the Commission. In the North, ballots for the village of Pshku must be carried via air while the Abkhaz diaspora in Moscow and Cherkessk must receive 4,000 and 3,000 ballots respectively. After voting takes place, the

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Commission must also arrange efficient transport back to its headquarters so that these votes can be counted.

Abkhazia uses a simple majority voting system in which the highest polling candidate must obtain over 50% of votes cast.

In the event that no candidate receives a majority over 50%, a second ballot will be distributed listing the two highest polling candidates. This second vote should take place within two weeks of the conclusion of the first round.

**Commission Current Events**

Through international media, the Central Election Committee and civic representatives have emphasized the importance that the presidential elections be executed according to international democratic standards. Abkhazia has continued to make progress in meeting these standards in both political and civil society. Due to the success of the previous election, it has been deemed imperative that the upcoming election meet or exceed the standards set by the 2009 election. Abkhaz authorities recognize that continuity and consistency are essential to a fully mature democratic society and intend to make this evident on Election Day and thereafter.

As a demonstration of their commitment to electoral progress, on 27 July 2011, all three presidential candidates signed a document compiled by TsIK that called for equitable elections. Members of the media and civic activists were also asked to sign the memorandum, which stated that campaigning and reporting should support the legitimacy of the electoral process and that candidates be free in their answers to media and public inquiries. In a joint press conference on 12 August 2011, the candidates agreed to hold televised debates which seemed to be an attempt to validate this agreement.

According to **ITAR-TASS**, a Moscow-based news agency, representatives of Russia’s Public chamber will monitor the

“**The Commission estimates that 147,000 citizens will vote.**”

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upcoming election. In interview with RT, a Russian media organization, two presidential candidates, Sergei Shamba and Aleksandr Ankvab, assured that there would also be a number of international observers monitoring the elections. As of 22 August 2011, 80 observers are scheduled to monitor the elections. Abkhaz legal authorities have expressed a commitment to ensure increased polling station and ballot security.

Due to the extraordinary circumstances under which this election is being held, the Central Election Commission (TsIK) decided, under the auspices of election law, that acting President, Alexander Ankvab and acting Prime Minister Sergei Shamba, both of whom are presidential candidates, would take leave from their offices at the start of campaigning. Since 26 July 2011, the official start of campaigning, Speaker of the People’s Assembly, Nugzar Ashuba, has served as President and Vice-Premier Beslan Kubrava has served as Prime Minister.

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17 July 2011 marked the end of the nomination period for this election period. On 20 July 2011, Abkhaz language skills exams were administered to nominated candidates to test their fulfillment of the constitutional requirement that presidents be fluent in Abkhaz. Additionally, each candidate was required to present a list of at least 2000 signatures supporting their candidacy to be considered for registration by TsIK. On 27 July 2011, the candidates were registered and two days later the Commission released a list of candidates whose submissions had been approved.

The following three candidates were approved by TsIK:

ALEKSANDR ANKVAB
Ankvab assumed the interim presidency on the death of President Bagapsh’s before ceding the position to Speaker Nugzar Ashuba at the start of his campaign. He previously served as Bagapsh’s Vice President (2010-2011) and Prime Minister from 2005 to 2010. Ankvab is seen as a conservative enforcer of rule-of-law tenets and favors a hard line on corruption and security issues. He has survived a reported four assassination attempts since 2004. No one has been charged in these attempts but investigations are ongoing. Previous to his involvement in the Abkhazian government, the candidate lived in Moscow for ten years and served in the interior Ministry of the Soviet Union and its successors in the 1980s and 1990s.

Nominated by an initiative group on 29 June 2011, he has enacted several pieces of legislation since becoming the interim president. Most importantly, he recently approved a military agreement with Russia. Although this appears to signify a commitment to the Russian relationship, some media reports argue that he is not favored by the Kremlin.

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Interviews with the acting president and several media reports signal that the centerpieces of Ankvab’s campaign are assuring security improvements and enacting anti-corruption measures. In a recent interview with Apsny Press, he stated that the pursuit of democracy per se would not be the focus of his campaign. Instead, he suggested that “it would be better to help Abkhazia to faster get rid of effects of the devastating [2008] war.” Through the media, Ankvab has also made overtures towards Georgia regarding reconciliation, but responses from Tbilisi have not been forthcoming.

The current ruling party, United Abkhazia, endorsed Ankvab’s candidacy for President on 22 July 2011. Abkhazia’s Union of War Veterans, Amtsakhara, an organization which has proven effective in challenging unfair and undemocratic policies in the Republic since its inception in the 1990s, has also voiced their support for Ankvab, a move which has him increasingly identified as ‘the security candidate.’ The former Vice President has selected Michael Logua, Governor of the Gulripsh District, to be his running mate. Ankvab is widely seen as a favorite to win the election.

RAUL KHAJIMBA
Representing the opposition party, Forum of the National Unity of Abkhazia, Raul Khajimba has served as the Vice President (2004-2009), Prime Minister (2003-2004), and Minister of Defense (2002-2003) within various administrations. He has run for the presidency of Abkhazia twice. In the 2004 election a power sharing deal was brokered that allowed him to become President Bagapsh’s Vice President. He subsequently left the post, charging the Bagapsh administration with corruption, a charge which has yet to be proved.

In 2004, Khajimba enjoyed Kremlin support, however, Russian and Abkhaz media outlets report that his reputation in Russia was tarnished

due to the fallout of the 2004 election. Although Khajimba is not favored to win, his minority share of the electorate could be effective in blocking his opponents from office.\textsuperscript{19}

During recent campaign events in Abkhazia’s Gal District, where the majority of ethnically Georgian residents in Abkhazia live, Khajimba declared that relations with Georgia must normalize and further pledged to pursue the opening of the Georgian border, to which Gal is adjacent, and bring a Georgian language curriculum to the schools in the district. The Gal district is controversial in that Georgian authorities have made several claims of human rights abuses in the area. Additionally, Georgian authorities claim that Gal residents have been refused the right to vote as they are not considered citizens of Abkhazia.

Khajimba has accused other candidates of using fear tactics to gain votes, especially in the Armenian community and has also directly accused Sergei Shamba of violating the fair elections agreement.\textsuperscript{20}

Khajimba has selected Svetlana Jergenia, the widow of the first president Vladisav Ardzinba as his running mate. Observers have commented that despite the popularity of her late husband, Jergenia is expected to have little impact on Khajimba’s results.

\textbf{SERGEI SHAMBA}

Since 13 February 2010, Sergei Shamba has been acting Prime Minister for the Government of the Republic of Abkhazia. Prior to his appointment to the premiership, he served two terms as Minister for Foreign Affairs from 1997-2010 and has an academic background in history.

In contrast to Ankvab, Shamba is seen as an academic and adept diplomat with good relations in the Kremlin. In his thirteen years as Minister for Foreign Affairs he cultivated relations with powerful


international bodies,\textsuperscript{21} which makes him more attractive to those citizens for whom international recognition is a priority. As a result of his work with Ankvab in President Bagapsh’s cabinet, there is some speculation that the two will form a coalition before the election.\textsuperscript{22} As of 25 August 2011, no such coalition has been formed.

Shamba’s nomination is supported by the Party for Economic Development. He is also a favorite candidate to win the August election.

As the current Prime Minister and former Foreign Affairs Minister, Shamba continues to emphasize Abkhazia’s relationship with Georgia in the media, confirming his hope that Georgia will have a more realistic approach to recognizing Abkhazia as a sovereign, independent nation.\textsuperscript{23} As evidence, Shamba has commented on the validity of Abkhazia’s electoral process, stating that according to observers, elections in 2009 reflected a maturing, transparent democratic state.\textsuperscript{24} Additionally, he has stated that if elected, he will institute a 10 year plan to revitalize Abkhazia’s agricultural sector, which virtually collapsed during the conflicts with Georgia in the 1990s but has recently shown signs of recovery.\textsuperscript{25}

Shamil Adzinba will be Shamba’s running mate for the election. He is currently the Deputy Chairman of the Committee for Youth Affairs and Sport. Shamba’s selection reflects his youth-orientated campaign platform that champions bringing younger Abkhazians into the Abkhaz government. According to Shamba, they represent the new generation of political, social and cultural perspectives in the nation. He recently commented that “a young state, to my mind, is to be built by the young and enthusiastic people.”\textsuperscript{26} On 29 July 2011, ten youth organizations,

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid.
\footnote{Ibid.}}

Armenian leaders in the Republic have also come out in support for Shamba. As the second largest ethnic population in the state, their votes will be critical for the outcome of the election.\footnote{Ibid.}

**INFLUENTIAL POLITICAL ACTORS**

Beslan Butba has been an influential in the race as his endorsement has the ability to shift votes to whichever candidate wins his support. He is presently the Head of the *Party for the Economic Development of Abkhazia* and ran for president in the 2009 elections after Khajimba failed to partner with him. Butba is especially popular with those citizens who see the Russian relationship as intrusive. On 21 July 2011, Butba’s party announced their endorsement of Shamba’s candidacy.

Daur Tarba, Chairman of *United Abkhazia*, and Stanislav Lakoba, former Secretary of Abkhazia’s Security Council, have also had a significant impact on Abkhazia’s political landscape and will be active in their political contributions to the election.
The current political climate in the region suggests that key election issues will focus on Abkhazia’s military and economic partnership with Russia and questions of international recognition. These issues intersect at Abkhazia’s tenuous relationship with Georgia. According to Abkhaz World, a media website dedicated to raising awareness of Abkhazia in international fora, “there are no organizations studying public opinion in Abkhazia and local experts have long since made their calculations intuitively.”

THE RUSSIA QUESTION
With that in mind, political observers generally agree that Abkhazian citizens will demand comprehensive reforms and a realistic plan to modernize the country. Additionally, citizens appear most likely to elect a candidate who has experience navigating Abkhazia’s nuanced relationship with Russia. While most citizens acknowledge that the friendship must be cultivated and respected, Abkhazians want to ensure their sovereignty as an independent nation, not a client of Russia. It should be noted that Moscow has pledged to respect the decision of Abkhazian citizens and has refused to endorse any candidate.

ECONOMIC FOCUS
According to Ankvab, the acting President of the Republic, the elections will have little bearing on Abkhazia’s relationship with Russia and will have a more domestic focus: creating a healthier economy. All three candidates agree that bolstering the once prosperous agricultural sector will create more jobs and increase exports, an essential part of a highly

functioning economy. In an interview with *Messenger Online*, a Georgian daily English language newspaper, Ankvab recognized that salaries in Abkhazia are not commensurate with cost of living and that any incumbent government would need to address this problem swiftly and effectively.

### Tourism and the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics

In this context, many citizens, government officials, and civic groups have expressed interest in reintegrating the tourism industry into the Abkhazian economy. They feel that the Sochi Winter Olympics in 2014 would provide an excellent forum for Abkhazia to not only participate in an international event that promotes peace and cooperation, but also to make widespread contributions to the construction of Olympic structures. The once-healthy construction industry would also see a huge boost if Abkhazian involvement in preparation for the international event increased. Georgia has voiced strong objections to this plan, giving Russia pause as to whether to fully include the Abkhazians in Olympic preparations. Citizens are expected to seek candidates who publically call for the renewal of Abkhazian bids to be a primary provider for the Olympic event.

In an interview with *RT*, a Russian radio station, Ankvab addressed the current realities of Abkhazia’s contribution to the Sochi Olympics stating, “we do deliver some of the materials, but the volumes are tiny. If we were to increase our sales, this would certainly earn us some money, and that would be good for both our businesses and our government.

But so far, our sales volumes are virtually insignificant.”

When *RT* asked the same question in an interview conducted with Shamba, the acting Prime Minister was more optimistic, asserting that Abkhazia is “already receiving support on some communications projects, as you know, we’ve obtained a loan to restore our railway system, and we’ve signed a letter of

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intent pertaining to the reconstruction of our airport. And we are considering all this in the context of the Sochi Olympic project.”

Looking beyond the upcoming event, all three campaigns have prioritized tourist safety, commenting that law enforcement has and will continue to focus on this issue.

Despite voter fears concerning increasing property values, Ankvab, Khajimba and Shamba have all commented that removing the ban on sale of real estate to non-Abkhazian buyers is necessary to the reconstruction of the nation’s economy. Shamba has remarked that “we are working on other additional mechanisms to provide security guarantees for [international] business. We are very interested in it, and our laws will be increasing the extent of security guarantees for their business. We do want to attract more investors.” Ankvab released a similar statement regarding flexible business practices laws.

POLITICAL CLIMATE

Although the candidates adhered to their pledge to uphold the tenets of democratic elections by abstaining from unfair campaign tactics in the first weeks of campaigning, as Election Day nears, defamatory remarks and information regarding each candidate have been released via domestic and international media organizations. Acting President Alexander Ankvab was recently accused of collaboration with Georgian leadership during and after the conflicts with Georgia in the 1990s. Although the accusation was made by former Georgian Defense Minister Tengiz Kitovani, Ankvab has accused Shamba’s campaign team of violating the 27 July agreement. In lieu of this statement, several former Georgian politicians and another former defense minister have argued that Ankvab did not act as a collaborator during this period. This group also suggested that Moscow, and not Shamba, may have planted this story. However, on 15 August 2011, Shamba’s campaign screened

Kitovani’s comments to a gathering of his supporters, leading them to call for an investigation. Some reports hold that Kitovani’s statement might overshadow more pertinent election issues.

Throughout campaigning, Shamba has been vocal on the subject of election fraud and announced on 10 August 2011, that he and his followers would protest if election results were not in his favor. As a result of this statement, Khajimba accused the acting Prime Minister of violating the fair elections agreement.

In a move that signals interest in impartial public opinion reporting in Abkhazia, Interfax, an international information group reporting on Eurasia, recently released an August poll conducted by Shamba’s campaign staff that reported his vote share at 30 percent, Ankvab’s at 2 percent and Khajimba’s at 8 percent. However, it should be noted that this poll was not conducted by an unbiased source or organization.

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MEDIA USE AND OBSERVATION

REGIONAL DEBATE INFORMS ELECTION

PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGNING

*Apsny Press* allotted each presidential candidate three hours and each vice presidential candidate one hour of free television air time in the four weeks prior to 26 August 2011. Each week featured a different format. In the first week candidates could either be featured live, interacting with voters, or air a pre-recorded piece. During the second week, candidates were given one hour of air time in which they had to interact with voters. They were allowed a maximum of four staffers to help field questions. Weeks three and four were formatted for media and voter interaction with both the candidates and their running mates. In addition to these appearances, candidates were allowed to send in five minute commercials that would be aired three times a day from 1 August 2011 to the day before the election.

OBSERVATION

While international media outlets have released relatively few reports on the upcoming election, there has been informative debate in the regional media theatre. Although the Kremlin has not given explicit support to any of the three candidates, Georgian and Russian sources have speculated as to whom Putin and the Kremlin will publically support. The Kremlin has made no such statement and has pledged neutrality throughout the elections. Many observers see this impartiality in the media as being a direct result of the controversy Moscow’s endorsement caused during in the 2004 election. It must be noted that the regional news reporting is often clouded by regional dynamics and the frozen conflict, so media comments should be understood and analyzed through the context of this conflict.

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In a 5 July 2011 article regarding the August elections, the *Georgian Daily Independent Voice* speculated that two recent conflicts between Abkhazia and Russia would affect the outcome of the election. According to this source, religious enmity exists between the Russians and the Abkhazians as the Moscow proprietor of Sukhum’s main Russian Orthodox Church prohibited the clergymen to conduct services in Abkhaz. Additionally, the *Voice* reports, a border dispute over a town on Abkhaz’s border occurred because Russia wanted the location to use for the 2014 Sochi Olympics. The *Voice* insists that these two incidents have increased Abkhazian resentment of Russia.

The *Georgia Times* recently reported that the *Council of Elders of Abkhazia*, a civic forum dating back to the Soviet era, have called on the candidates to form an electoral bloc as a means to ensure the effective use of limited campaign resources. Although this request has been rejected by candidates, it signals the existence of a motivated populace interested in safeguarding good governance practices.

In June 2011, *Bloomberg* reported that former Georgian president Eduard Shevardnadze acknowledged that Georgian recognition of Abkhazia would be prudent in response to a report from the *Caucasus Strategic Research Centre* that came to a similar conclusion.44 Since this statement Shevardnadze has been vague about his actual support for a plan with recognition as the primary objective. The United States Senate does not seem to agree with the former president, as on 29 July 2011 they called for the Russian Federation to remove its troops from the region, signaling that the superpower will not recognize Abkhazia’s sovereignty in the near future.45

On 18 August 2011, *Radio Free Europe* released an article detailing the events of the presidential election campaign. While the article focuses

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on recent remarks regarding Ankvab’s supposed collaboration with Georgian forces in the 1990s, it reports that none of the candidates currently appears to have "sufficient support to garner the required 50 percent plus one vote needed for a first round win."46

INTERNATIONAL IMPLICATIONS
EVOLUTIONARY DEMOCRACY

Due to Abkhazia’s status as a de facto but unrecognized state, it is important that this election be viewed internationally as a step towards successful democracy and equitable treatment of all Abkhazian residents, regardless of ethnicity.

Abkhazia’s recent cooperation agreement with Transnistria and longstanding partnership with South Ossetia signify the influence regional alliances can have on international sentiment. As the Republic continues to improve its democratic process, prove its legitimacy as an effective and equitable government, and demonstrate its commitment to playing a constructive role in world affairs, Abkhazian citizens and the Abkhaz diaspora hope that more states will recognize Abkhazia’s right to statehood.
**APPENDIX I: TIMELINE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>29 May 2011</td>
<td>Special election declared for August 2011</td>
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<tr>
<td>8 June 2011</td>
<td>People’s Assembly sets date of election for 26 August 2011</td>
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<td>27 June 2011</td>
<td>Nominations for presidential candidates open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 July 2011</td>
<td><em>Akhasta</em> (unregistered political group) endorses Khajimba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 July 2011</td>
<td><em>Aruaa</em> (1992-1993 Georgian war veterans union) endorses Khajimba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 July 2011</td>
<td>Shamba and Khajimba file respective nominations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 July 2011</td>
<td>Nominations for presidential candidates close and Ankvab files nomination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 July 2011</td>
<td>All candidates administered Abkhaz language test and all candidates certified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 July 2011</td>
<td><em>Party for the Economic Development of Abkhazia</em> (political party) endorse Shamba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 July 2011</td>
<td><em>United Abkhazia</em> (leading political party) endorse Ankvab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 July 2011</td>
<td>Registration of candidates received by TsiK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 July 2011</td>
<td>All candidates received registration certificates; TsiK releases list of candidates; official start of campaigning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 July 2011</td>
<td>Candidates and members of media sign fair elections agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 July 2011</td>
<td>10 (out of 12) youth organizations endorse Shamba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 August – 25 August 2011</td>
<td>Candidate commercials air three times daily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 August 2011</td>
<td><em>Amtsakhara</em> (veteran union and political movement) endorse Ankvab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 August 2011</td>
<td><em>Union of Cossacks</em> (political party) endorse Khajimba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 August 2011</td>
<td><em>Interfax</em>, a Eurasian news agency, releases Shamba commissioned pol which has him leading the vote share with 30 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 August 2011</td>
<td><em>Communist Party</em> endorses Shamba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 August 2011</td>
<td>Shamba announces that if he does not win, he will organize a revolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 August 2011</td>
<td>Candidates announce joint televised debates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 August 2011</td>
<td>Shamba screen Kitovani’s taped accusation that Ankvab informed on Abkhazia in the 1990s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 August 2011</td>
<td>Election Day</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**APPENDIX II: MAP OF ABKHAZIA**
The Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO) is an international and democratic membership organization. Its members are indigenous peoples, minorities, and unrecognized territories who have joined together to protect and promote their human and cultural rights and to find nonviolent solutions to conflicts which affect them.

UNPO is dedicated to the five principles acknowledged in its covenant: nonviolence, human rights, self-determination and democracy, environmental protection, and tolerance. The organization is headquartered in The Hague, Netherlands with an advocacy office in Brussels, Belgium and representation in Geneva Switzerland.
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