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P 100923Z APR 91

FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0528

INFO RUEHLN/AMCONSUL LENINGRAD

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 MOSCOW 10336

DEPT FOR EUR/SOV, C-ZOELLICK

E.O.12356:DECL: OADR

TAGS: PGOV, UR, PREL, SOCI, PINS

SUBJECT: GAMSAKHURDIA CONTINUES TO CHALLENGE MOSCOW

REFS: A) STATE 66817 B) MOSCOW 9932 C) MOSCOW  
1511 D) MOSCOW 1050 E) MOSCOW 5940

1. CONFIDENTIAL -- ENTIRE TEXT.

SUMMARY

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2. DURING A MARCH 31 - APRIL 3 TRIP TO TBILISI,  
POLOFF RELAYED THE TALKING POINTS IN REF A TO  
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GEORGIAN SUPREME SOVIET CHAIRMAN GAMSAKHURDIA AND  
EMPHASIZED THE IMPORTANCE OF SEEKING A MECHANISM FOR  
PEACEFUL DIALOGUE TO RESOLVE THE MANY PROBLEMS  
GEORGIA FACES. GAMSAKHURDIA INSISTED THAT HE HAD  
BEEN FORCED TO TAKE EXCEPTIONALLY HARSH MEASURES  
AGAINST THE OSSETIANS BECAUSE THEY WERE IN LEAGUE  
WITH MOSCOW. GAMSAKHURDIA EXPLAINED THAT THE CENTER  
HAD NOT BEEN ABLE TO USE ECONOMIC PRESSURE TO FORCE  
GEORGIA TO SUCCUMB TO ITS WISHES AND NOW MOSCOW WAS  
RESORTING TO POLITICAL SABOTAGE. GAMSAKHURDIA

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
REVIEW AUTHORITY: ROBERT O HOMME  
DATE/CASE ID: 17 MAR 2010 200902056

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CLAIMED THAT THE CENTER WAS ANGRY BECAUSE THE REPUBLIC'S CITIZENS HAD VOTED OVERWHELMINGLY FOR GEORGIAN INDEPENDENCE IN THE MARCH 31 REFERENDUM. HE FELT THAT MOSCOW WOULD MAKE FURTHER EFFORTS TO PROVOKE A CONFRONTATION AS A PRETEXT FOR IMPOSING PRESIDENTIAL RULE IN GEORGIA. GAMSAKHURDIA ALSO SAID HE FELT BETRAYED BY YEL'TSIN BECAUSE THE RSFSR LEADER HAD RENOUNCED THE AGREEMENT THEY HAD SIGNED EARLIER IN MARCH. END SUMMARY.

3. THIS IS THE FIRST IN A SERIES OF THREE REPORTS ON POLITICS IN SOVIET GEORGIA. THIS CABLE FOCUSES ON GAMSAKHURDIA'S CONFRONTATION WITH THE CENTER OVER SOUTH OSSETIA AND RELATIONS WITH OTHER REPUBLICS. THE SECOND REPORT DEALS WITH GEORGIA'S INTERNAL POLITICS. THE THIRD WILL COVER A TRIP POLOFF MADE TO A KGB PRISON AND A CONVERSATION WITH THE LAWYER OF THE IMPRISONED OSSETIAN LEADER KULUNBEGOV.

A BIRTHDAY GIFT FOR GAMSAKHURDIA

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4. POLOFF ARRIVED IN GEORGIA LATE ON MARCH 31, THE DAY OF THE REFERENDUM ON GEORGIAN INDEPENDENCE AND ALSO GAMSAKHURDIA'S BIRTHDAY. GAMSAKHURDIA SENT GEORGIAN FOREIGN MINISTER GEORGIY KHOSHTARIA TO THE AIRPORT TO GREET POLOFF AND WHISK HER AWAY TO A BIRTHDAY/REFERENDUM CELEBRATION HELD AT AN OPULENT GOVERNMENT HOUSE OVERLOOKING THE CITY. MANY OF GAMSAKHURDIA'S CLOSEST FRIENDS AND SUPPORTERS WERE IN ATTENDANCE INCLUDING FOREIGN MINISTER KHOSHTARIA, PRIME MINISTER TENGIZ SIGUA, AND ALL OF THE OTHER MEMBERS OF HIS GOVERNMENT.

5. THE PRELIMINARY REFERENDUM RETURNS WERE ANNOUNCED AS THEY CAME IN. WITH EACH NEW ANNOUNCEMENT ABOUT THE OVERWHELMING VOTE IN VARIOUS REGIONS IN FAVOR OF INDEPENDENCE, THE CELEBRANTS MADE MORE TOASTS AND BECAME ALMOST DELIRIOUS WITH THEIR VICTORY. THE BANQUET WAS LAID OUT IN TYPICAL GEORGIAN FASHION WITH PLATES FULL OF GEORGIAN DELICACIES AND FREE-FLOWING LIQUOR OF ALL SORTS. POLOFF ARRIVED RATHER LATE INTO THE CELEBRATION AND GAMSAKHURDIA WAS ALREADY INTO HIS SECOND ROUND OF TOASTS OFFERED TO MOST OF HIS MANY

GUESTS. THE TOASTS WERE INTERSPERSED WITH TYPICAL GEORGIAN SINGING WHICH CONSISTS OF A FOUR-PART HARMONY A CAPPELLA. ONE OF THE MORE INTERESTING TOASTS OFFERED BY THE MINISTER OF FINANCE BEGAN WITH REGRET THAT GEORGIA WAS REMEMBERED ONLY AS STALIN'S BIRTHPLACE.

6. PRIME MINISTER SIGUA (PROTECT) SAT NEXT TO POLOFF  
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AND TOLD HER THAT IT WAS HIS IDEA THAT GAMSAKHURDIA ATTEND THE MARCH 16 DINNER IN MOSCOW WITH SECRETARY BAKER. SIGUA SAID THE CENTER HAD DISCOURAGED ALL REPUBLIC LEADERS FROM ATTENDING AND THAT WAS WHY GAMSAKHURDIA HAD ARRIVED AFTER ANNOUNCING OVER THE

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FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0529  
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TELEPHONE THAT HE WAS NOT COMING. SIGUA SAID THAT GORBACHEV HAD SUCCESSFULLY PRESSURED MOST OF THE OTHER REPUBLIC LEADERS TO DECLINE THE SECRETARY'S INVITATION.

GEORGIA'S DISPUTE WITH THE CENTER INTENSIFIES  
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7. POLOFF MET WITH GMSAKHURDIA SEVERAL TIMES DURING THE VISIT TO DISCUSS GEORGIAN POLITICS AND THE  
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DEVELOPING POLITICAL DRAMA BETWEEN GEORGIA AND MOSCOW. POLOFF DREW ON POINTS OUTLINED IN REF A DURING DISCUSSIONS WITH GMSAKHURDIA AND EMPHASIZED THE IMPORTANCE OF FINDING A PEACEFUL MECHANISM FOR THE RESOLUTION OF DISPUTES. GMSAKHURDIA FELT THAT HE HAD OFFERED MORE THAN ONCE TO RESOLVE HIS DISPUTES WITH THE CENTER THROUGH PEACEFUL DIALOGUE BUT WAS REBUFFED BY MOSCOW. HE RECOUNTED SEVERAL RECENT CONFRONTATIONS WITH USSR LEADERS OVER THE UNION TREATY, SOUTH OSSETIA, AND THE GEORGIAN MVD.

8. GMSAKHURDIA REFERRED TO A FEBRUARY 25 CONVERSATION WITH GORBACHEV IN WHICH THE SOVIET LEADER REPORTEDLY WARNED GMSAKHURDIA THAT IF HE DID NOT SIGN THE UNION TREATY, GEORGIA WOULD FACE EVEN MORE VIOLENCE AND POLITICAL UNREST. HE ALSO SHOWED POLOFF COPIES OF TELEGRAMS HE HAD RECEIVED FROM MINISTER OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS BORIS PUGO AND GORBACHEV WARNING HIM TO COMPLY WITH USSR DECREES OR FACE THE CONSEQUENCES. GMSAKHURDIA SAID HE STILL HAS NO INTENTION OF SENDING EVEN OBSERVERS TO THE UNION TREATY NEGOTIATIONS AND THE GEORGIAN SUPREME SOVIET WOULD NOT EVEN BE DISCUSSING THE SUBJECT.

9. ON APRIL 7, THE GEORGIAN SUPREME SOVIET PRESIDUM PASSED A RESOLUTION PROTESTING THE ADDITION OF FURTHER SOVIET TROOPS IN SOUTH OSSETIA AS A "RUDE

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VIOLATION OF GEORGIAN SOVEREIGNTY," ACCORDING TO  
 GEORGIAN DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER GEORGIY KHONELIDZE  
 (PROTECT), WHO CALLED POLOFF THAT SAME DAY. THE  
 RESOLUTION DECRIES THE USE OF TROOPS AGAINST SOCIETY  
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 AND EXPRESSES THE HOPE THAT THE CENTER WOULD REFRAIN  
 FROM FURTHER DESTABLIZING THE SITUATION IN THE  
 REPUBLIC. THE RESOLUTION ALSO CALLS FOR A PEACEFUL  
 DIALOGUE TO FIND A POLITICAL SOLUTION TO THE OSSETIAN  
 PROBLEM. THE RESOLUTION EMPHASIZED GEORGIA'S INTENT  
 TO LEGALLY SEEK INDEPENDENCE AND INITIATE DIRECT  
 ECONOMIC, POLITICAL, AND CULTURAL RELATIONS WITH THE  
 RSFSR, ARMENIA, AZERBAYDZHAN AND OTHER REPUBLICS.  
 KHONELIDZE ALSO TOLD POLOFF THAT GEORGIA'S WORKERS  
 WERE PREPARING TO CALL FOR A GENERAL STRIKE IN  
 SUPPORT OF THE MINERS AS A RESULT OF THE PRICE RISES  
 AND CONTINUED PARTIAL ECONOMIC BLOCKADE.

GAMSAKHURDIA SEES CENTER'S HAND IN SOUTH OSSETIA  
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10. GAMSAKHURDIA INSISTED THAT THE CENTER WAS  
 FUELING THE OSSETIAN PROBLEM AND THAT GORBACHEV HAD  
 REFUSED TO ENGAGE IN ANY KIND OF DIALOGUE ON THE  
 PROBLEM. THE GEORGIAN LEADER ACCUSED USSR COUNCIL OF  
 NATIONALITIES CHAIRMAN RAFIK NISHANOV OF  
 MASTERMINDING THE CENTER'S MANIPULATION OF OSSETIA.  
 GAMSAKHURDIA CLAIMED THAT ARRESTING OSSETIAN LEADER  
 KULUNBEGOV WAS "THE ONLY WAY TO STOP THE BLOODSHED  
 AND DEFUSE THE SITUATION." (SEE SEPTEL FOR FURTHER  
 INFORMATION ON KULUNBEGOV'S DETENTION.)

11. GAMSAKHURDIA CLAIMED THAT GEORGIA WOULD BE  
 WILLING TO ALLOW THE OSSETIANS TO HOLD A REFERENDUM  
 ON AUTONOMY BUT ONLY AFTER GEORGIA ACHIEVED  
 INDEPENDENCE. HE SAID THAT NOW THEY COULD NOT BE

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 SURE WHETHER THE OSSETIANS GENUINELY WANTED POLITICAL  
 AUTONOMY OR WHETHER THEY WERE BEING DRIVEN BY THE  
 CENTER TO DEMAND THIS AUTONOMY. AS IN PAST

CONVERSATIONS (REFS C-E), HE ROUTINELY REFERRED TO THE OSSETIANS AND THEIR LEADERS AS "CRIMINALS" AND

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 03 OF 04 MOSCOW 10336

DEPT FOR EUR/SOV, C-ZOELICK

E.O.12356:DECL: OADR  
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"TERRORISTS." HE CLAIMED THAT HE HAD ORDERED AN END TO THE GEORGIAN BLOCKADE OF TSKHINVALI BUT THAT "BANDS OF CRIMINALS" CONTINUED TO SABOTAGE THE OSSETIANS.

12. WHEN POLOFF SUGGESTED THAT INNOCENT OSSETIANS, SUCH AS TSKHINVALI'S CHILDREN, MIGHT BE SUFFERING, GMSAKHURDIA AGAIN BLAMED THE OSSETIANS FOR THE PROBLEM. HE CLAIMED THAT THEY HAD BROUGHT THIS FATE UPON THEMSELVES BY CONTINUING TO DEMAND AUTONOMY. HE

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ALSO ASSERTED THAT "BANDS OF OSSETIAN CRIMINALS" WERE  
FIGHTING AGAINST EACH OTHER --A POINT THE OSSETIANS  
DENY.

13. ON THE EVENING OF APRIL 2, POLOFF SAT WITH  
GAMSAKHURDIA IN HIS OFFICE IN THE GEORGIAN SUPREME  
SOVIET AND WATCHED THE SOVIET NEWS PROGRAM "VREMYA"  
WHICH WAS FEATURING AN ITEM ON THE VIOLENCE IN  
TSKHINVALI. "THEY ARE ANGRY BECAUSE WE HAD SUCH AN  
OVERWHELMING VICTORY IN THE REFERENDUM ON  
INDEPENDENCE. NOW THEY ARE PREPARING THE GROUND TO  
SEND IN TROOPS TO TAKE OVER OSSETIA AND MAYBE THE  
REPUBLIC," HE SAID.

14. THOSE WORDS PROVED TO BE PROPHETIC BECAUSE  
GORBACHEV BEGAN TO SEND IN ADDITIONAL TROOPS TO SOUTH  
OSSETIA THE NEXT DAY. ON APRIL 3, GAMSAKHURDIA TOLD  
POLOFF HE HAD SPOKEN TO USSR SUPREME SOVIET CHAIRMAN  
LUK'YANOV BY TELEPHONE ABOUT THE TROOPS BEING SENT TO  
SOUTH OSSETIA. GAMSAKHURDIA SAID HE HAD WARNED  
LUK'YANOV THAT MORE TROOPS WOULD INCREASE BLOODSHED  
IN THE REGION AND THAT HE AND GORBACHEV WOULD BE HELD  
ACCOUNTABLE FOR THIS BLOODSHED. LUK'YANOV REPLIED  
THAT HE WOULD PASS THIS MESSAGE TO GORBACHEV.  
LUK'YANOV ALSO TOLD GAMSAKHURDIA THAT THE RSFSR  
CONGRESS' RESOLUTION CALLING ON GORBACHEV TO "TAKE  
URGENT MEASURES TO NORMALIZE THE SITUATION IN SOUTH  
OSSETIA" HAD HEAVILY INFLUENCED GORBACHEV'S DECISION  
TO SEND MORE TROOPS. GAMSAKHURDIA ASKED LUK'YANOV,  
"WHAT RIGHT DOES THE RSFSR HAVE TO TELL THE CENTER  
WHAT TO DO IN GEORGIA?" THE GEORGIAN LEADER SAID HE

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CONSIDERED THIS INTERFERENCE IN GEORGIA'S INTERNAL  
AFFAIRS. HE SAID LUK'YANOV HAD NO ANSWER AND WAS  
SILENT.

15. GAMSAKHURDIA TOLD POLOFF THAT ACCORDING TO THE  
GEORGIAN MVD COMMANDANT IN TSKHINVALI, THE CENTER  
PLANNED TO SEND IN THE DZHERZHINSKIY DIVISION TO



IMPOSE ORDER IN SOUTH OSSETIA. THIIYSPARTICULAR DIVISION WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE BRUTAL TREATMENT OF AZERBAYDZHANIS IN BAKU IN JANUARY 1990.

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16. GAMSAKHURDIA CLAIMED THAT THE CENTER WAS FUNNELING WEAPONS THROUGH THE SOVIET ARMY TO THE OSSETIANS. HE TOOK POLOFF TO A ROOM WITH A DISPLAY OF SOVIET ARMY WEAPONS ALLEGEDLY CONFISCATED FROM THE OSSETIANS. THE GEORGIAN LEADER ALSO SHOWED POLOFF A ROCKET WHICH ALLEGEDLY HAD BEEN USED IN AN ATTACK ON A GEORGIAN VILLAGE NEAR TSKHINVALI. THE ROCKET HAD KILLED A GEORGIAN FAMILY OF FIVE AND WAS THE SAME TYPE USED IN THE WAR IN AFGHANISTAN, ACCORDING TO A GEORGIAN VETERAN OF THAT WAR. GAMSAKHURDIA USED THIS EXHIBIT TO ILLUSTRATE THAT OSSETIANS WERE NOT THE ONLY ONES SUFFERING IN THIS CONFRONTATION. THE GEORGIAN GOVERNMENT ALSO HAD SEVERAL GEORGIAN REFUGEES FROM TSKHINVALI ON DISPLAY IN THE LOBBY OF THE INTOURIST HOTEL IVERIA WITH SIGNS WRITTEN ONLY IN ENGLISH PROTESTING OSSETIAN ACTS AGAINST GEORGIA. ALTHOUGH THE REFUGEES' SUFFERING APPEARED TO BE GENUINE, THEIR USE AS PAWNS IN A POLITICAL PROPAGANDA GAME WAS OBVIOUS AND A BIT CRUDE.

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17. INTERESTINGLY, GEORGIAN REPUBLIC OPPOSITION LEADERS ALSO BELIEVE THAT THE OSSETIANS ARE "TOOLS OF THE KGB" AND THAT OSSETIAN LEADER CHOCHIYEV IS A KGB OFFICER. LIKE GAMSAKHURDIA, THE GEORGIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS LEADERS BELIEVE THAT OSSETIANS SHOULD BE

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GRANTED CULTURAL BUT NOT POLITICAL AUTONOMY.

ECONOMIC PRESSURE INEFFECTIVE AGAINST GEORGIA

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18. GMSAKHURDIA ASSERTED THAT THE CENTER'S ATTEMPTS TO USE ECONOMIC PRESSURE AGAINST GEORGIA HAD FAILED FOR SEVERAL REASONS. HE SAID THAT GEORGIA HAD BEEN ABLE TO RETALIATE AGAINST THE CENTER'S ATTEMPTS TO USE ECONOMIC PRESSURE BY THREATENING TO CLOSE THE

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REPUBLIC'S RAILWAYS AND PORTS. HE SAID THAT THIS TACTIC HAD BEEN EFFECTIVE DURING THE REPUBLIC'S DISPUTES WITH MOSCOW LAST SUMMER WHEN GEORGIA WAS ABLE TO FORCE THE CENTER TO GIVE INTO ITS DEMANDS ON SOVEREIGNTY. GMSAKHURDIA POINTED OUT THAT BECAUSE OF THE ARMENIAN-AZERBAYDZHANI CONFLICT, GEORGIA'S RAILWAYS WERE THE ONLY ONES FULLY FUNCTIONING IN THE CAUCASUS AND THEREFORE CONSTITUTED A CRITICAL TRANSPORTATION LINK TO THE REST OF THE USSR. GMSAKHURDIA ALSO POINTED OUT THAT MANY SOVIET MILITARY FAMILIES LIVED IN GEORGIA AND THEY TOO WOULD

SUFFER FROM ANY MORE SHORTAGES OF FOOD AND ENERGY. IN ADDITION, THE NON-GEORGIANS IN THE REPUBLIC WOULD PAY A PRICE FOR ANY ECONOMIC SANCTIONS OR DEPRIVATION IMPOSED ON GEORGIA.

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19. GMSAKHURDIA OBSERVED THAT THE ECONOMIC WEAPON WAS NOT GEORGIAN-SPECIFIC AND THEREFORE COULD NOT BE USED EFFECTIVELY TO STEM GEORGIAN NATIONALISM AND THE DESIRE FOR INDEPENDENCE. HE MAINTAINED THAT THE CENTER WAS MORE LIKELY TO USE A COMBINATION OF POLITICAL AND MILITARY PRESSURE SUCH AS IMPOSING PRESIDENTIAL RULE, INSTEAD OF ECONOMIC THREATS WHICH HAD PROVEN INEFFECTIVE.

BETRAYED BY YEL'TSIN

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20. GMSAKHURDIA SAID HE COULD NO LONGER TRUST RSFSR LEADER BORIS YEL'TSIN "BECAUSE ONE DAY HE SAYS ONE THING AND THE NEXT DAY HE SAYS THE OPPOSITE."

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GMSAKHURDIA WAS REFERRING TO THE PROTOCOL HE HAD SIGNED WITH YEL'TSIN ON MARCH 23. THE PROTOCOL STIPULATED RSFSR-GEORGIAN COOPERATION IN QUELLING THE OSSETIAN CONFLICT WITHOUT THE CENTER'S INTERFERENCE. THE PROTOCOL ALSO CALLED FOR CLOSER POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC COOPERATION BETWEEN THE REPUBLICS IN THE FUTURE. GMSAKHURDIA AND OTHER GEORGIAN OFFICIALS SUCH AS GEORGIAN FOREIGN MINISTER KHOSHTARIA ON PREVIOUS OCCASIONS HAD EMPHASIZED THE GREAT IMPORTANCE OF THIS PROTOCOL FOR GEORGIA'S FUTURE (REF B).

21. GMSAKHURDIA TOLD POLOFF THAT YEL'TSIN WAS "FIGHTING FOR HIS POLITICAL LIFE IN THE RSFSR CONGRESS AND HE HAD TO GIVE UP HIS AGREEMENT WITH US IN EXCHANGE FOR HIS OWN POLITICAL FUTURE." THE GEORGIAN LEADER SAID YEL'TSIN HAD REJECTED THE PROTOCOL AS A SOP TO THE RSFSR COMMUNIST PARTY. GMSAKHURDIA CONTINUED TO LAMBAST YEL'TSIN AND HIS PERSONAL CHARACTER SAYING THAT THE RSFSR LEADER IS A "DRUNKARD AND OBVIOUSLY UNTRUSTWORTHY." "YEL'TSIN WILL DO ANYTHING TO SAVE HIS SKIN," GMSAKHURDIA SAID. INTERESTINGLY, ONLY A COUPLE WEEKS BEFORE, GMSAKHURDIA HAD BEEN SINGING YEL'TSIN'S PRAISES AND

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STRESSING THAT YEL'TSIN WAS THE SOVIET UNION'S ONLY  
HOPE FOR THE FUTURE. GMSAKHURDIA ALSO CRITICIZED  
USSR PEOPLE'S DEPUTY GALINA STAROVOYTOVA FOR HER ROLE  
IN BACKING THE SOUTH OSSETIANS' CAUSE.

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22. LENINGRAD MINIMIZE CONSIDERED.  
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