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Statehood, recognition and the desire for “normal lives” in Abkhazia

This paper explores the local meaning of state recognition in the (partly) unrecognised Republic of Abkhazia. 25 years after the end of the Georgian-Abkhaz war, which resulted in Abkhazia's de facto secession from Georgia, the recognition of Abkhazia's independence has become a top priority for Abkhazian political elites and ordinary people alike. This insistence on statehood is regarded as a sign of the unwillingness to solve the conflict by the international community, which continues to express support for Georgia's territorial integrity. Drawing on data collected during several months of fieldwork, this paper demonstrates that even though statehood is regarded as a necessary precondition for securing ethnic survival, the desire to have one's identity recognised is also predicated on a desire to move beyond identity politics and live in a “normal” state. Building upon Stef Jansen's research on the yearnings for ‘normal lives’ in post-war Bosnia, I argue that many people in Abkhazia have become less concerned with liberal notions of reconciliation than with building “normal lives” where nationality does not matter. Therefore, rather than rejecting any dialogue with Georgia, the hope for recognition can also be understood as a desire to establish new relations outside a nationalist framework.