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AUTHOR'S NOTE

Gatekhili translates to 'fractured' or 'broken' in English. The word is often used in reference to a part of the body that has been fractured or broken, but is still recognizable.

I wish to thank the Caucasus Environmental NGO Network (CENN), the Geography Department at Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, the Georgian Ministry of Environment and Natural Resource Protection, and Bacho Tsertsvadze for their time, assistance, and generosity. I am especially indebted to Beth Mitchneck for her support and guidance in this research project; to Paul Robbins, Tracy Osborne, and Natalie Koch for comments on early drafts of this paper; and to the anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments. This research was funded by the American Research Institute of the South Caucasus (ARISC) and the University of Arizona College of Social and Behavioral Sciences. All errors in fact or interpretation are, of course, the author's responsibility.

Introduction

- 1 In many ways, alpine zones define the periphery of the former Soviet Union (FSU). However, the political and ecological qualities of these mountainous territories vary widely as different governing regimes intersect with and shape a dizzying array of montane ecosystems. While many states at the edges of the FSU have pursued

decentralization in nearly all areas of governance, this trend is perhaps most notable in natural resource sectors and the effects these reforms have on society. The Republic of Georgia is an excellent example of this pattern and thus offers a unique opportunity to understand the broader political relationships among emerging state formations and alpine ecosystems, as well as the experience of transition in the post-Soviet world –an area of research that scholars have historically overlooked (Dear *et al.*, 2012). I explore these scalar political, economic, and environmental connections through a qualitative case study of alpine forest governance in the mountains of Georgia.

- 2 Georgia's alpine regions cannot be understood without consideration of the country's forests, and vice versa –two thirds of the country is mountainous and the territory, nearly 40 % of which is forested, has an average elevation of 1,200 m (Akhalkatsi *et al.*, 2010). However, alpine research has demonstrated that understanding the unfolding environmental dynamics of montane regions requires a multi-faceted approach drawing together physical and social processes in a regional context (Borsdorf and Braun, 2008; Scheurer and Sgard, 2008). In this way, I approach Georgia's multi-faceted mountains at the intersection of its spectacular alpine forest ecosystems and the politics through which they are governed. Alpine forests are often especially diverse, both biologically and socially, and the Caucasus Mountains, in which Georgia is located, are a consummate example (Glatzel, 2009). Approximately 20% of plant species and nearly 10% of animal species found in the region are endemic, while only 10% of the region's primary vegetation remains (Myers *et al.*, 2000). Georgia's unique biodiversity is directly linked to the montane nature of its landscape, as are the myriad cultural and political divisions of the region. The development of political factions has been equally diverse, producing a host of shifting political divisions and alliances over the centuries, and ongoing territorial disputes to this day (King, 2009).
- 3 Such territorial politics have extended to the realm of forest governance in Georgia. As part of broader political trends in alpine environments, the last few decades have brought drastic shifts toward decentralization in forest management systems around the globe –including Georgia (Sunderlin, 2011). Forest governance has been a key area of reform for the Georgian government in the past decade. The three most important legislative components for this –the national Forest Code (2011), the Rules of Licenses (2005), and the Law on Resource Abuse Remuneration (2004)– have produced a system in which licenses to manage and extract resources from particular *territories* for a particular period of time, with little governmental oversight, are auctioned off to private interests. These private interests then have the ability to pay minimal sums in restitution for egregious environmental missteps. This has been implemented at the same time as a push for more localized control at the municipal level, often in rural mountainous regions. As I argue here, these overlaps in governance produce fractures in the governance of Georgia's forested territories –and, as a result, the country's large alpine zones (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 – Alpine Forest Degradation, Georgia, 2000-2012

Realisation: J. Quinn, 2016.

- 4 The extensive imbrication of Georgia's mountains and forests, along with the territorial form of resource governance Georgia has implemented in the country's post-Soviet development, means that a shift in forest governance in this area inherently represents a shift in the governance of the country's alpine environments. In this paper I investigate the political effectiveness of various institutions involved in Georgian alpine forest governance as a lens to bring the current form of the Georgian state in to focus. I do so by asking respondents:
 1. which political entities (individuals or institutions) are the most influential in relation to forest governance?
 2. which entities have at least some influence?
 3. how influential are their own efforts?
- 5 Framing my research questions in this way shines a light on how relevant political players are experiencing the Georgian government's democratic transition in relation to alpine forest governance. Analysis of these stories and perspectives exposes contradictions and conflicts in a scenario where the structure of the Georgian state may, on the surface, seem obvious to those involved in resource governance activities, yet is more complex when given critical consideration. Studying forest governance in this way elucidates the processes shaping governance practices in post-Soviet Georgia and the country's transitioning alpine politics.
- 6 In this paper I therefore draw from a set of qualitative political empirics to understand how shifts in forest governance may indicate a transition, specifically a fracturing (*gatekhili* in Georgian), of Georgia's mountainous politics. To do so, I first provide a brief framing of the research project before expanding on the state of Georgia's alpine forests in relation to the country's post-Soviet development. I then explicate the findings of my empirical research to demonstrate how disturbances of alpine forest health and local livelihoods during this recent period may be linked to a similar political fracturing at the level of the Georgian state as well as broader governance of this alpine territory. I conclude by briefly reviewing some broader implications of these patterns for the political and alpine geographies of the FSU.

- 7 In this study I draw from a theoretical framework of scholarship in political geography and political ecology to investigate how resource governance, territorial control, and state functions may intersect in alpine environments. I specifically draw from the work of geographers and political ecologists who generally define governance, especially of the environment, as “a broad analytical framework for addressing the institutional arrangements, spatial scales, organisational structures and social actors involved in decision making around different environments and resources” (Bridge and Perreault, 2009: 486; see also Heynen *et al.*, 2007; Himley, 2008; McCarthy, 2005; Robertson, 2015; Rocheleau, 2007). The political ecology literature offers ways to consider the intersection of individuals and governments in environmental governance, while simultaneously suggesting that such governance provides space for state formation – what Gavin Bridge refers to as the “resource/state” (Bridge, 2014). Resource/state interactions like those in Georgia are inherently connected to local livelihood practices, such as firewood collection and hunting, as well as international economic systems, including manufacturing and regional trade, processes even further pronounced in socially and ecologically vulnerable alpine regions. Meanwhile, scholars in political geography have demonstrated the fluid, shifting nature of ‘the state’ as an analytical concept, providing an alternative starting point for consideration of sovereignty and power in post-socialist states (Brenner *et al.*, 2003; Jessop, 2007; Kuus and Agnew, 2008; Mitchell, 1999). For example, Joe Painter demonstrates that those social entities we traditionally consider to be ‘of the state’ are not always the most state-like within a polity, and that considering institutions in terms of their measure of “stateness” is much more effective for understanding modern governance (2011).
- 8 Respondents for this case study range from high ranking federal government officials to local NGO members; city administrators to international donor group deputies; park and forest rangers to timber company representatives; all contacted via ‘snowball’ sampling methods (Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981). This set of respondents was initially established through preliminary Internet research to determine key players in the forest sector based on newspaper articles, government publications, and donor group websites that was later enhanced by polling those knowledgeable of the political field. Any stakeholder group identified as relevant, or at least somewhat connected to the political network shaping forest governance, was therefore included in the research sample. The result of this technique was a diverse sample population with a broad, yet interconnected, set of perspectives and experiences gathered in a series of 35 semi-structured interviews during the summers of 2012 and 2013 (see figure 2)

Figure 2 – Interviews Cited

Interview #	Institution	Occupation	Location	Date
002	Local NGO	Coordinator	Tbilisi, GE	19-Jun-12
003	Environmental Ministry	Forester	Tbilisi, GE	25-Jun-12
005	International donor	Team leader	Tbilisi, GE	29-Jun-12
009	International NGO	Project manager	Tbilisi, GE	4-Jul-12
010	International donor	Project manager	Tbilisi, GE	4-Jul-12
018	Local timber company	Logger & project monitor	Telavi, GE	24-Jul-12
023	International NGO	Assistant manager	Tbilisi, GE	2-Aug-12

Fracturing Georgia's Alpine Forests

- 9 The link among Georgia's mountains, forests, and political development has existed in various forms from before the Soviet era to the present (see Figure 3 for detail of Georgian forest governance history). Based on potentially unreliable government data from the 1980s, when Georgia's last comprehensive forest inventory was taken, 40% of Georgian territory is covered by forest, approximately half a million hectares of which are considered to be virgin (Petrauskas 2010). The patterns of governance, use, and degradation have changed with the fall of the Soviet Union and the political upheaval that followed.
- 10 The current governance structure of Georgian forests resonates to a great extent with the historical pattern of centralized control through the federal government, yet is complicated by recent trends toward decentralization. Decisions are made with little local input, and both rural and urban citizens may be treated as criminals for using forest resources outside of such private jurisdiction.

Figure 3 – History of Forest Governance in Georgia

Based on Pryde 1991; Weiner 1988.

- 11 Since 2007, access to roughly 7-8% of Georgia's forests, up to 3% of Georgian territory, has been auctioned off as part of a long-term leasing system. Most of these sales have been to foreign companies, with more sales set to follow in coming years. Recent policy moves have ensured that these licenses will not be for forests only, but for all natural resources contained within these territories as potentially delimited by municipality, and subject to approval of a management plan by the central government – profoundly altering the nature of the montane environments existing on those territories.

- 12 Throughout the political shifts and upheavals of the Soviet decades a significant cause of deforestation has been fuel provision. Fuel provision from firewood has remained a prime necessity for households to survive the frigid Georgian winters in areas without Soviet gas provision, while forests also support a number of subsistence food and herb gathering practices for community survival (Torchinava and Iordanishvili, 2010; Macharashvili, 2009; Metreveli, 2002; Pryde, 1991; Weiner, 1988). These resources were especially important in the rural alpine regions of the country which were often disconnected from broader provision networks. The political chaos following the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s made widespread energy and utility provision nearly impossible in many regions, especially remote alpine areas, and has generated high levels of energy insecurity at the household scale. As the Georgian government has pushed toward decentralization in the post-Soviet transition, energy utilities that were previously owned, operated, and subsidized by the central Soviet government have fallen into increasing states of disrepair, and only slowly been replaced with any viable long term solutions (Lampietti *et al.*, 2003). With the regional political economic trend toward decentralization, privatization of the Georgian electric and natural gas utilities, that began in the late 1990s, has provided a relatively reliable energy supply for the capital city Tbilisi (Lovei, 1998).
- 13 As these decaying, Soviet-era gas lines are increasingly unusable, Georgian citizens have to rely ever more heavily on harvested wood to keep warm during the Georgian winters. A small network of employment for firewood collection has emerged because easily accessible resources are increasingly scarce and the central government tries to control both firewood collection and distribution. However, because of the government's efforts, much of this firewood collection is considered illegal, adding criminalization of livelihood practices to the physical hardship of collecting wood, the destruction of critical alpine habitats, and the health impacts of burning wood inside the household on a regular basis (The Forest Code of Georgia, 1999; Lampietti *et al.*, 2003).
- 14 Georgian households and communities, both rural and urban, are thus faced with difficult livelihood decisions about wood collection and theft, food provision, home construction, and heating. Georgian winters can be severe, especially in the country's many alpine villages, and living without a functional heating system can be difficult and dangerous. Over half of all Georgian households (55%) and nearly all those in rural areas (96%) rely on wood stoves to heat their homes throughout the year, connecting economic realities and ecological problems in the process (CRRC, 2013). The annual rate of domestic fuel wood extraction has increased by more than 250% since Georgia declared independence from the Soviet Union (from 247,800 m³ in 1990 to 666, 100 m³ in 2005), with most of that increase occurring post-2000 as the Georgian government emerged from the political turmoil of the 1990s into the relative stability of the post-Rose Revolution (2003) democracy (Torchinava and Iordinashvili, 2010). Deforestation is widespread, yet some of the highest concentrations exist in Georgia's many remote alpine regions, with many urban, suburban, and rural settlements surrounded by a ring of clear-cut forest (Macharashvili, 2009; Petrauskas, 2010; Zazanashvili, 2011).
- 15 Social and livelihood challenges are exacerbated by the impacts of commercial logging practices in these areas. The turbulence and lack of political administration in forest governance since the Soviet Union's collapse has fostered the development of an international black market, shipping large amounts of illegally harvested timber from

Georgia and promoting even more locally intensive degradation of Georgia's forests, especially those surrounding more easily accessible municipalities and urban areas. In the period between 1991 and 2004, anywhere between 2.5 and 6 million m³ of timber was illegally extracted from Georgian forests every year. The legal limit on a yearly total as set by the government during this period was 780,000 m³, meaning that at least three times the legal amount of timber was harvested for commercial purposes every year (Macharashvili, 2009). Estimates indicate that this latest wave of forest degradation resulted in as much as 50% of forest regions within Georgian territories possibly needing some form of restoration (Interview 005; see Figure 1).

- 16 At the local level, the primary agents of government enforcement are the forest rangers employed by the Forestry Department. The role of forest rangers as local enforcers has changed dramatically with the introduction of the leasing system. The parameters of the new system have created conflicts among forest rangers, timber company representatives, and local residents as a result of strict requirements that are unable to be met by any single party involved, corrupting the original intent of those regulations. While rangers are still responsible for managing the forests within their districts, the responsibility for reporting forest abuses to the police has been devolved to the license holders; license holders are obliged by the terms of their license to monitor and report transgressions to the police, causing reduced profits, potentially unsustainable activities, and a tendency, by many, to turn a blind eye toward illegal activities. These various factors combine to create a situation where effective monitoring is severely absent, self-regulation is the norm, and illegal logging is allowed to continue by those who can afford it.
- 17 In Georgia, these areas of deforestation are often highly concentrated and found on the steep slopes of both the Greater and Lesser Caucasus mountains. The ecological integrity of these montane forests is compromised in the process because forests provide services crucial to the alpine ecosystem such as water retention and erosion prevention, fracturing the stability of these ecosystems as a result. The state forestry sector has been one of the government's key areas of reform as Georgia's political elites have set out to redefine the state following the government's democratically-oriented Rose Revolution in 2003, part of the broader period of transitional 'color revolutions' in the FSU. More than ten years later, this process of reform is still ongoing and contributing to the fracturing of Georgia's alpine ecosystems.

A *gatekhili* State

You know, it's not an issue of where you are located, it's an issue of whether you can play or not, the game! There is a very old Russian folk story about some animals decided to play music. Bear, frogs, lion, rabbit sat together and brought instruments and wanted to play. And they started, but there was something unusual. They said, OK, lets sit like this now and play again. If you can't play... you will never play! This is the case. If you know how to play, it's not important where you sit in the Ministry of Energy and Agriculture, it's important if you can play. (Interview 003)

- 18 The currently fractured nature of Georgia's forest governance has clearly shaped the country's alpine forests, but these changes indicate shifts within the shape of the Georgian state that have themselves contributed to these patterns of degraded alpine ecosystems. To understand the politics driving this ecosystem fracturing, and how the

people involved in these political dynamics experience this ongoing and multi-faceted transition, I asked respondents who they considered most influential for shaping and enforcing forest policies in Georgia. Among respondents, the central government (including the different forest and park agencies) was mentioned most frequently as the most influential political entity for creating legislation concerned with managing forest resources and implementing governance. However, almost as frequently mentioned were international donor groups, referring to institutions such as the World Bank, UN, and foreign embassies. Mentioned with lesser frequency were institutions such as local Georgian NGOs, international environmental NGOs, local experts and local government officials (see Figure 4).

Figure 4 – Perceived Influence of Different Institutions on Forest Policy (number of responses)

- 19 Perhaps not surprisingly, civil society was never mentioned as being among the most important for influencing forest policy –although it was mentioned with great frequency that it should be. In fact, the general consensus among nearly all respondents was that during the process of shaping the new forest code, civil society was never truly consulted and the public hearings were not actually open to the public in any meaningful way, despite wide calls for inclusivity. Often the “public” hearings are opened or announced only to particular groups (local NGOs, donor groups, etc.) and are not truly public. However, even when the hearings on these issues are opened up to public inclusion, they are only announced days before occurring. They are usually announced through internet-based channels, a technological luxury many rural citizens do not have access to (although this is changing) and are held in Tbilisi far from the villages being affected. The use of such information-based technologies by the government often excludes rural population from the decision-making process, privileges certain types of knowledge over others, and in the process favors foreign interests, educated elites, and corporations over local citizens. The outcome of such practices is that, despite the democratizing language used by the Georgian government and the pro-civil society bent of many in the NGO sector, actual Georgian people are still excluded from decisions of alpine forest governance that effect their material lives.

Figure 5 – Perceived Influence of Own Institution on Forest Policy (number of responses)

- 20 However, what is perhaps most significant among these findings for understanding the fractured nature of the Georgian state through governance practices in the forestry sector are the differences that exist between perceived efficacy by others (Figure 4) and self-defined efficacy of groups (Figure 5) among those defined as the most influential. Not surprisingly, the central government of the Georgian State generally considers itself to be quite effective in influencing the shape of policies, a notion shared among most other stakeholder groups. However, despite being considered as not overly impactful in general, local NGO groups had the highest percentage of respondents who felt that their institutions were effective, relatively speaking. In comparison, respondents from the field of international NGOs feel somewhat ineffective, and those from international donor groups typically feel either neutral or not effective in their goals of shaping policy.
- 21 This distribution does not match the perceptions of the other influential players because international donors are considered nearly as effective at influencing policy as the central government itself. Drawing from the testimonials of the international donor groups themselves, it seems there are feelings that the Georgian state professes a desire to embrace policies oriented toward EU acceptance, yet is either ineffective at attaining these goals or resistant to actually embracing the changes required of such moves.
- 22 For example, the EU Delegation was defined by nearly all respondents in this survey as the most influential international donor in Georgian forestry, operating on the principles of EU directives. However, within the EU there is no official, overarching forestry directive, so forests in Georgia are dealt with through other resource issues such as water, biodiversity, etc. One high-ranking respondent from within this sector (Interview 010) described the reason that international donor groups feel ineffective is due to the structure of donations and contributions as they are given to development projects. This respondent, echoing others, felt that the biggest donors do not necessarily influence the shape of policy because the government does what it wants with many policies, as these donors give grants instead of loans. As a result of the removal of large sums of money from the forestry sector by development banks, grants (which essentially act as donations) from international governments and other donors make up the largest portion of money flowing into the sector through the government,

and come with “no accountability back to the money.” Ignoring this leads to lapses in oversight and political economic unbalance.

- 23 The system of alpine forest governance currently unfolding in Georgia has many such conflicts, none of which is more evident than the disjuncture that occurs between state, corporate, and local interests. Much of the wood that is consumed locally is used for either firewood or furniture for the home or for use as goods produced in local factories. Timber that is exported for use or processing elsewhere, is sent to China, Turkey, or Iran, and many hope that in the future the EU will be included in this market as well (Interview 009; Interview 018). In order to enter into these markets, foreign companies purchase effective sovereignty over specific territories of Georgian forests, and as a result, specific portions of Georgia’s alpine territory, the composition of which is often unknown.
- 24 As the fractured Georgian state devolves responsibility of managing these resources to private interests, it struggles to maintain legal power over those competing interests and resist the possibility of being overrun by market forces. As one member of an international watchdog organization put it:
“What I’m saying, for example closing eyes, of course nobody wants to violate the law, but when they’re introducing laws that allow to damage environment or introducing laws that are about the hunting of endangered species or things like that then you have feelings that they are trying to legalize illegal things.”
(Interview 023)
- 25 These re-organizations of the state, in order to adapt to varying interests and continue the production of these commodities, are inherently spatial and are profoundly re-shaping Georgia’s alpine regions. As a representative of an influential local NGO stated:
“...we don’t know what the commercial value of these forests are, and sometimes basically what they are doing is not selling forests or not appropriating forests, it is appropriating the territory, the land where the forest is, along with other resources such as streams, or, minerals, so basically what they are doing is selling land plots rather than forests, and that is happening with the right of the investor to change the status of the territory. So basically the territory has a set of forest, but the investor who appropriates the land can change the status of the forest and completely get rid of it, putting something completely different on it like a hotel or some other... lake!” (Interview 002)
- 26 These processes of changing territorial definition and responsibility create potentially under-governed spaces as accountability systems for those responsibilities are removed, or undermined, in the name of economic development. Such gray areas of accountability, either on the books or on the ground, open further possibilities for deleterious social and ecological effects in emerging post-Soviet alpine states.
- 27 The findings of who are the important players in forest governance and how this system operates suggest that the Georgian state remains fractured. While the state appears as a cohesive entity centered around the national government, this is only possible because these government institutions exist through the socially and politically charged activities of individuals who embody levels of ‘stateness’ that vary across time and context (Painter, 2011). Exceptions in governance occur as forest management rights and responsibilities are given up in exchange for capital through a system of rapid commodification. Such exceptions also unfold as social expectations of the government quietly overcome economic forces and political economic ideologies. These findings provide insights into the way historically driven social and political

trends may intersect in new and contradictory ways as contemporary neoliberal governance schemes emerge from ‘fractured’ states.

Conclusions: Alpine forests and political development in Georgia

- 28 The broad view of the Georgian state presented here is one of exclusivity, unevenly protective of some interests and not others, keeping some members of society “out of the game” while letting only certain others in, under the appearance of broader inclusion. Of course, this hybridized form of governance is not unique to the Georgian context. However, what is unique to this situation, and relevant to other democratizing FSU countries, is the effort given to masking these breaks and presenting a guise of cohesion. Local citizens are left out of alpine forest governance while other non-governmental entities may move across this state boundary when it is deemed politically effective for the central government. As with nearly all nation-states, the Georgian state is not monolithic – it is variegated, uneven, and shifting. This amalgam of institutions is almost always present in forest governance, and environmental governance more broadly. In other circumstances, this collection of political entities might be seen as a diverse coalition. However, in contemporary Georgia, this divergence of governance abilities and responsibilities instead manifests as confusion and fractures along with a symbolic mask of ‘state’-like unity – and at the cost of alpine ecosystem health in one of the world’s most important ecological zones.
- 29 The governance of Georgia’s forests, as well as all of the nation’s alpine resources, continues to shift as new hydroelectric plants are built, national parks are formed, and mines are opened. The actors involved in these state-oriented activities and making these decisions work at many scales, and in order to fully understand them, scholars must be pluralistic in their thinking and look beyond merely governmental critique or applause. The findings presented here also point toward a need for reconsidering academic and expert notions of post-Soviet alpine governance, looking beyond merely a focus on the governments of nation-states and instead looking at the lived, social experiences that shape the lives and territories of relevant actors.

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ABSTRACTS

While many states at the periphery of the former Soviet Union have pursued decentralization in nearly all areas of governance, this trend is perhaps most notable in natural resource sectors and the effects these reforms have on society. I explore these scalar political, economic, and environmental connections through a qualitative case study of alpine forest governance in the mountains of Georgia. Analyzing a series of thirty-five semi-structured interviews conducted during the summers of 2012 and 2013, I investigate the ways in which state power operates through governance of Georgia's alpine forests. Like all democracies, the Georgian government oscillates between poles of centralization and decentralization. However, the practices of the

Georgian government, as it currently exists through alpine forestry, produces a distinctly fractured (*gatekhili* in Georgian) form of democracy. The dynamics of the emerging Georgian state as seen through alpine forest governance are informative for understanding the political transition of mountainous post-Soviet states in the 21st century, and contemporary state formation more generally.

Si de nombreux États satellites de l'ancienne Union soviétique ont procédé à la décentralisation de quasiment tous leurs domaines de gouvernance, cette tendance est particulièrement flagrante dans le secteur des ressources naturelles et dans les effets sociétaux des réformes menées. Dans cette contribution, je vais examiner ces liens scalaires politiques, économiques et environnementaux à l'aune d'une étude qualitative de la gestion forestière des milieux alpins en Géorgie. En analysant une série de trente-cinq interviews semi-dirigées menées durant les étés 2012 et 2013, j'explorerai la manière dont le pouvoir public agit à travers la gestion des forêts alpines géorgiennes. Comme c'est le cas dans toute démocratie, le gouvernement géorgien oscille entre centralisation et décentralisation. Les pratiques du gouvernement géorgien, à l'image de sa gestion de la forêt alpine, produisent une forme de démocratie ostensiblement fracturée (*gatekhili* en géorgien). Analyser les dynamiques de l'État géorgien émergent sous l'angle de la gestion forestière en milieu alpin peut être utile à la compréhension de la transition politique des pays de montagne post-soviétiques au fil du XIX^e siècle et de la formation contemporaine des États en général.

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Mots-clés: Développement post-soviétique, forêt, État, gouvernance, gestion, Géorgie

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