

## **“Abkhazia is just the start. It’ll be the Baltic States next.”**

Die WELT:

What do President Putin’s instructions to deepen the relations with Abkhazia and South Ossetia mean?

Temuri Jakobaschwili:

To legitimize the ethnic cleansing. About 400,000 people fled the regions – Abkhaz, Georgians, but also Jews, Greeks, Estonians. Most were chased into Georgia. Putin’s order is also a breach of international law, when it extends Russian sovereignty onto neighbouring territories. In other words: Russia is trying annexation.

Die WELT:

90% of the inhabitants of the separatist regions now possess a Russian passport.

Jakobaschwili:

Russia has carried out a “passportisation” of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. And now it claims to defend the interests of its citizens. This reminds one of the occupation of Czechoslovakia by the Nazis.

Die WELT

What direct influence does Moscow otherwise possess?

Jakobaschwili:

First, its troops in Abkhazia, estimated to be 2000 strong. Moscow has supposedly started to withdraw them – but this cannot be verified by the international community. Putin has also installed his representatives there; in South Ossetia ethnic Russians sit in the highest offices – just like in Chechnya. But the most important point is this: Russia is using the regions to keep Georgia out of Nato.

Die WELT:

You have called for a special session of the UN security council...

Jakobaschwili:

This won’t happen. We have no chance where Moscow has a right of veto.

Die WELT:

Does Georgia feel abandoned by the West?

Jakobaschwili:

We warned our partners during the NATO summit in Bucharest not to give Russia a free pass, since it would then continue its obstructionist policies. Now we see the result. So far, we’ve only had promises from the West. We can only continue to warn people: Abkhazia is just the beginning for the Russians. The Baltic States will be next.