

## FOREWORD

I had the privilege of acting as ‘Opponent’ for Zelim Skurbaty’s Doctoral thesis ‘As if Peoples Mattered’ in February 1998. This was the second occasion on which I performed such a task in Sweden, so I was prepared for the ‘battle’ in Lund. Zelim had produced a work of great—sometimes bewildering—complexity and multi-disciplinarity. It required more than my limited scholarly range to unravel all its complexities, and fortunately there was on hand a distinguished jury drawn from a range of disciplines, presided over by Professor Asbjorn Eide, to elucidate it further. Despite its formidable appearance and juxtaposition of ideas, it was agreed that Zelim’s work was grounded in a coherent appreciation of central concepts of international law and human rights which were elaborated with sensitive scholarship. He had chosen one of the most difficult issues of contemporary human rights in attempting to tease out relationships between the rights of peoples and minority rights. In the course of discussion, it became clearer that Georgia-Ossetia questions were at the root of some of the author’s preoccupations. And also the situation in Chechnya, to which the work devotes a chapter. But thinking about world order, the role of international law and its conceptual underpinnings, and the fate of small nations or ethnicities in regimes of sovereignty, raises many questions the importance of which transcend particularist preoccupations.

Zelim’s work is intended for the broad audience: the scholars, the diplomatic professionals, NGOs and the ‘interested citizen’ of whatever country or nationality. While, ‘as everyone knows’, the Opponent does not judge the final result, this particular Opponent was more than happy to assent to the successful presentation of the work and the award of the doctorate. Now that the work has been translated into book form, the reader will find therein great riches, a provocative thesis, and some beautiful marshalling of sources and citations. The book will inspire reflection and promote critical knowledge. I hope and expect that it will be widely read.

Patrick Thornberry  
Keele University