

Caucasus Edition

Journal of Conflict Transformation

THE SOUTH CAUCASUS AND ITS NEIGHBORHOOD

From Politics and Economics to Group Rights

Caucasus Edition July 2016

The South Caucasus and Its Neighborhood

From Politics and Economics to Group Rights

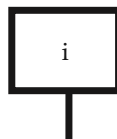
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From the Editorial Team

The region of the South Caucasus is famous for its rich culture, and sadly, for numerous conflicts that sprung up as the Soviet Union was collapsing. Frustrated have been the hopes that after the initial spark of violence in the early 1990s, these conflicts would remain non-violent and “frozen” until sustainable peace was reached. In August 2008, bombs and shells ravaged the region, and this time around, not only Georgia, with South Ossetia, but also Russia openly engaged in violent confrontation. The tensions in the region of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict have also been on the rise. Not long before this publication was finalized, in April 2016, a round of intense clashes claimed the lives of dozens if not hundreds of Azerbaijanis and Armenians. On the other facet of the region, the long-awaited normalization between Turkey and Armenia did not take place either. The drastic deterioration of Russian-Turkish relations in late 2015 also adversely affected the South Caucasus and further demonstrated the fragility of the system of “unions” and “alliances” developed in the region after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The papers in this inaugural hard-copy issue of the Caucasus Edition – the Imagine Center’s Journal for Conflict Transformation¹ examine how these conflicts shape the perception of the South Caucasus societies of themselves and the neighbors, how they influence political and economic relations, and how they affect the human rights of many groups. All papers presented here are the result of the joint work of social scientists, journalists, and policy analysts from the South Caucasus, Russia, and Turkey.

The first section presents a collection of papers reviewing and analyzing the web of political and economic relationships in the South Caucasus and its neighborhood.

The first paper in the section by Gamaghelyan, Rumyansev, and Sayan highlights the results of dialogue programs carried out by the Imagine Center for Conflict Transformation from 2007 onward. Particular emphasis is put on the analysis of the needs, fears, concerns, and hopes of the Turkish, Armenian, and Azerbaijani societies as understood and articulated by the participants of

¹ The papers in this publication appear online on the analytic platform Caucasus Edition – Journal of Conflict Transformation at www.caucasusedition.net and include also the Russian versions of the papers.

the dialogue initiatives and the lessons this analysis offers for conflict transformation work.

The paper by Gafarlı, Anapiosyan, Chapichadze, and Öztarsu presents the analytic review of the place of the South Caucasus in the complicated web of geopolitical relations that the countries of the region have with global and regional actors – the United States, the European Union, Turkey, Russia, and Iran.

Economic relations in the region and its neighborhood are the focus of the paper authored by Sayan, Gafarlı, Jijavadze, Muradyan, Öztarsu, and Romashov reviewing the impact of the conflicts on the development or stagnation in various spheres of economy, as well as on the systems of transnational economic projects and relationships.

This topic is developed further by Gültekin Punsmann, Anjaparidze, Avetisyan, Chania, Romashov, and Shirinov who examine the isolationist policies of the actors in the South Caucasus vis à vis each other, as well as sanctions implemented by the bigger neighbors – Russia and Turkey.

The first section concludes with the paper by Abasov, Voronkov, Gamaghelyan, Huseynova, and Krikorova assessing the prospects of federalization and transnational integration in the South Caucasus as a mechanism of conflict resolution. The authors discuss the lessons learned from the past experiences of integrative processes, the feasibility and viability of federalizations on the state level or beyond as instruments of conflict resolution, and the prospects for such processes in the context of ongoing conflicts in the South Caucasus.

The second section of the publication is dedicated to the discussion of the rights of various groups in the South Caucasus and Turkey. The term “group” here does not imply rigid boundaries or homogeneity of its members based on ethnicity, gender, or culture. Instead, it is an attempt to analyze the official policies and public discourses that essentialize ethnic and other social groups and boundaries contributing to the emergence and reproduction of conflicts.

The first paper in this section by Abbasov, Delihuseyinoglu, Pipia, Rumyansev, and Sanamyan focuses on internal conflicts within states identifying the dynamics that has influenced the emergence of relations along an “ethnic groups” – “dominant groups” line. The authors try to shift the language of analysis from the reproduction of the hierarchical model of “majority” vs. “minority”. The criticism towards ranking the population of a country in that model exposes the practices of subordination of the citizen statuses based on

their ethnicity. The authors analyze how these present-day hierarchical relations were shaped by the events that unfolded at the wake of the 20th century, specifically by the Soviet Nationalities Policy, the post-Soviet ethno-nationalisms and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's nation-building endeavor.

This paper is seconded by Duygulu and Karapetyan who look at the prospects of conflict transformation and group rights as instruments of conflict transformation, within the framework of norms defined through international charters and covenants on human rights.

The publication features also a paper by Bobghiashvili, Kharatyan, and Surmanidze on a specific case of policies aimed at addressing group rights in the South Caucasus – the secondary education in minority languages in Georgia, the current challenges, and the prospects for policy reform. Georgia has been chosen as the case study since it has made the most robust attempts at implementing minority rights legislations in the South Caucasus.

The fourth paper of this section by Shahnazaryan, Movlud, and Badasyan focuses on the question of women's equality. The authors take the readers to the roots of the "state feminism" of the Soviet Union starting from the 1920s and the path that female leadership, women's political participation and involvement in the public sphere have taken since then. The authors track the influence of the Soviet legacy on the present-day relations, the contestation of the gender discourse between the feminist movements and the nationalist ideologies that appeal to traditions.

Editorial Team of the issue: Philip Gamaghelyan, Sevil Huseynova, Maria Karapetyan, Sergey Rumyansev

Acknowledgement

This publication is part of the ongoing work of the Imagine Center for Conflict Transformation and the South Caucasus Open School that for many years now create dialogue platforms for social scientists, historians, journalists, scholar-practitioners, progressive youth and others who hold an active civic stance and are ready to reclaim their voice in the developments of their societies. The Imagine Center's and the South Caucasus Open School's team believes that the way forward for the region of the South Caucasus and its neighborhood is not in the resolution of conflicts but in their transformation. This path goes through the development of transnational networks and communities of young, emergent, as well as experienced journalists, social scientists, historians, and other professionals capable of contributing to the change of dominant conflict discourses and ready to participate in open public debates.

Drawing from years of valuable experience of the previous phases of the "Breaking the Impasse" Series² and other initiatives, the Imagine Center and the South Caucasus Open School brought together close to 30 analysts from the South Caucasus, as well as Turkey and Russia in the fall of 2015. Over the course of several months, the group engaged in professional dialogue and an in-depth analysis of the current situation in the region and around it.

With its array of themes, this publication is not merely a collection of reviews and analytical papers that will be of interest for social scientists, journalists, policy analysts, and other professionals working in the South Caucasus and its neighborhood. The process that has led to this publication has been a qualitatively new step necessary for conflict transformation in the region. Until now, the vast majority of regional peacebuilding initiatives that have produced publications have stretched as far as authorship conceding for the parallel but separate publication of papers within one collection. In these separate papers,

² The "Breaking the Impasse" Series started in 2008 as analytic meetings of conflict resolution experts, civil society representatives, and diplomats facilitating the coordination of Track I and Track II efforts in resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Over the years, the Series has expanded to include all of the South Caucasus and its neighborhood. The current phase of the Series – "Breaking the Impasse: Prospects for Conflict Transformation and Regional Cooperation in the South Caucasus" – advocates for a common vision, strategy, and action for regional peace and development and contributes to positive changes in the public discourses about the conflicts in the region and in the peace processes.

each author would present his or her point of view that often stood in sharp opposition³.

Going beyond, the authors of this publication have engaged in cooperation for the development of joint approaches and a shared understanding of processes in the region. All of the papers included in this publication have been co-authored and developed through a constant exchange of opinions and building consensus. In this regard, this publication is unique; it showcases the tenacity and professionalism of the participating authors and hopefully sets the precedent for future initiatives.

Working in the complex context of the South Caucasus and its neighborhood, the group of experts and the Editorial Team of the Caucasus Edition have taken up the challenge of gradually developing a language fit for dialogue – one that provides space for openly and constructively discussing conflicts and their transformation.

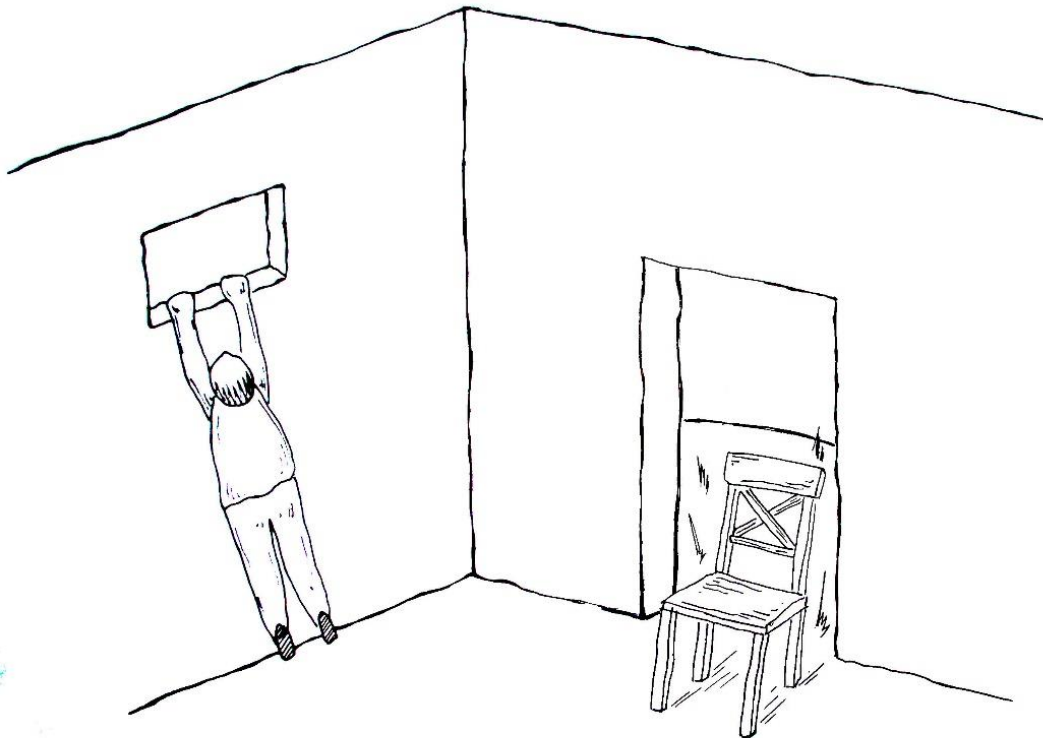
This publication acknowledges the support⁴ of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Sweden. Further, some of the papers in this issue have been developed thanks to the support from the US Embassies in the South Caucasus. The Editorial Team of the Caucasus Edition and all the authors express their deepest gratitude to all individuals, networks, and institutions that have made this publication possible.

Editorial Team of the issue: Philip Gamaghelyan, Sevil Huseynova, Maria Karapetyan, Sergey Rumyansev

³ This pattern has seen very few exceptions. Hardly by coincidence, the co-author of the only previous joint work on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict Professor Ali Abasov participated in creation of this publication as well.

⁴ The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Sweden or the US Embassies in the South Caucasus. Responsibility for the information, views, opinions, and positions expressed in the publication lies entirely with the authors.

Conflicts, Politics and Economics



Learning from Azerbaijani- Armenian and Armenian- Turkish Problem-Solving Workshops: The Essential Needs, Fears and Concerns Faced by the Societies

Philip Gamaghelyan, Sergey Rumyansev, Pinar Sayan

This analytic review is a discussion of the spectrum of the needs, fears, concerns, and hopes (NFCH) of the Turkish, Armenian, and Azerbaijani societies as articulated by the participants of inter-societal dialogues conducted by the Imagine Center for Conflict Transformation since 2007. While on the political track, the Turkish-Armenian and Azerbaijani-Armenian conflicts are often addressed separately, the analysis of the needs, fears, concerns, and hopes of these societies in regard to one another exposes many interlinks. On the analytic level, therefore, we see it important to understand not only the bi-lateral relations between any two of the societies, but also the interrelationship among the three. The look into this broader picture, we believe, surely brings complexities into the analysis, yet also provides new insights into possible strategies for moving forward that are not visible when viewed from a narrow binary perspective.

This analytic review is based on the results of the Azerbaijani-Armenian and Armenian-Turkish workshops organized by the Imagine Center for Conflict Transformation (Imagine Center).⁵

Introduction

Since 2007, the Imagine Center has initiated and facilitated dozens of Armenian-Azerbaijani, Turkish-Armenian, Georgian-South Ossetian, Caucasus-wide, Syrian, and other dialogue initiatives. The Center has been working with youth activists, educators, historians, journalists, analysts, and policy makers – groups that have an influence on the production and reproduction of conflict discourses. Our methodology has been centered on discussing conflict and its various dynamics openly and constructively, treating it as a joint problem to be understood and resolved collaboratively.

The Imagine Center works with the histories of the conflicts, including the historical narratives and their impact on the conflicts themselves and individual and collective identities, conducting analysis of the methodologies of historiography and history education and developing alternative approaches. We also work with the present-day dynamics of the conflicts, attempting to step away from the entrenched and visibly irreconcilable positions and analyze conflicts from the point of view of the needs, fears, concerns, and hopes of the involved societies. And finally we conduct joint visioning of the future, followed by strategy building and implementation of specific initiatives conceived in these planning workshops. Our work with journalists and historians, the on-going “Breaking the Impasse” Series focused on contributing ideas to policy-level thinking, and the on-line publication the Caucasus Edition are all products of the joint planning and strategizing of the previous groups we have worked with.

The knowledge created and the data collected through the middle stage of the Imagine Center’s methodology is the focus of this paper that discusses the present-day dynamics in the context of the often-interconnected Armenia-Turkey-Azerbaijan relations. While on the political track, the Turkish-Armenian and Azerbaijani-Armenian conflicts are often addressed separately,

⁵ We would like to underline that when speaking about Armenians, Azerbaijanis, or Turks we have in mind the participants of the dialogue initiatives that are citizens of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey and the participants of the dialogue initiatives that have self-identified as Armenian, Azerbaijani, or Turkish.

the analysis of the needs, fears, concerns, and hopes of these societies in regard to one another exposes many interlinks. On the analytic level, therefore, we see it important to understand not only the bi-lateral relations between any two of the societies, but also the interrelationship among the three. The look into this broader picture, we believe, surely brings complexities into the analysis, yet also provides new insights into possible strategies for moving forward that are not visible when viewed from a narrow binary perspective.

The authors did not have the aim to present a quantitative analysis. Our approach concentrated on the individual opinions. This is more about the dissemination of the experience and some of the results of the dialogue initiatives for a wider audience. The authors of the review also offer their cautious interpretation of the collected ideas and opinions. All of the instances of generalization are only an indication of the prevailing perceptions among the participants regarding the most essential needs and challenges facing the societies that they are part of.

This analytic review is a discussion of the spectrum of the needs, fears, concerns, and hopes (NFCH) of the Turkish, Armenian, and Azerbaijani societies as articulated by the participants of inter-societal dialogues conducted by the Imagine Center since 2007. These are opinions of people primarily with a background in social sciences and humanities, also of journalists and activists. Participants included young professionals, who have been socialized as individuals already after the collapse of the Soviet Union, as well as middle-aged specialists, who went through socialization processes within the Soviet Union. Opinions and judgments presented below were expressed initially in single-party groups consisting of 6-10 participants from each society, and later shared with colleagues from across the conflict divide during a plenary session. Before proceeding to the analysis of the NFCH, the methodology employed in the middle stage of the dialogue is described below in detail.

The problem-solving workshop methodology

For the discussion of the present-day dynamics during the dialogues led by the Imagine Center, we often rely on the adapted version of the Problem-Solving Workshop methodology where the participants are asked to step back from the conventional positions, identify the groups within the society whose needs they can relate to and analyze, presenting them to their colleagues from across the conflict divide.

Interactive problem-solving, also known as Problem-Solving Workshops or PSW, was developed as an alternative to international relations approaches though it often positions itself as complementary to the latter. It has its roots in Maslow's theory on the hierarchy of universal human needs. Maslow argued that humans all have similar needs, and some of these needs take priority over others. He represented the hierarchy in a form of a pyramid with physiological needs such as food and shelter at the bottom, safety needs right above them, followed by identity needs such as love and belonging. On the top are the needs of self-esteem and self-actualization. While Maslow believed that a person can have many of these needs simultaneously, he also argued that the ones on the top of the pyramid can be aspired for only after the lower-level needs are achieved (Maslow 1943). The PSW methodology adapted Maslow's approach shifting the focus of conflict resolution from the interests of the states onto the needs of the people. Different from Maslow, the methodology rejected the notion that needs are hierarchical and argued that they are all pursued simultaneously, while agreeing that they are universal (Burton, Human Needs Theory 1990).

The PSW approach does not aim at achieving an immediate resolution to the conflict. It is focused instead on moving away from adversarial positions and analyzing the conflict from the standpoint of the NFCH of the involved societies, followed by joint explorations of core dynamics that sustain the conflict and ways of addressing them (Burton 1969) (Kelman, The Problem-Solving Workshop in Conflict Resolution 1972). The PSW renders the intractability of conflicts penetrable by diverting the conversation from the mutually exclusive positions that are often doomed to lead to a deadlock to what lies behind those positions. It is an approach that leads to the exposure of the veiled drivers of those positions – the needs, fears, concerns, and hopes of individuals and societies. Arriving at the level of these not only allows for a mutual acknowledgement of basal exigencies but also empowers individuals to collaboratively seek the reframing of positions in the multiplicity of possible ways to satisfy those basal exigencies of all parties involved.

The PSW are not only a means to an end – a methodology, but also a transformative exercise in itself. It is a trust-building exercise in that it allows participants to speak about the needs and challenges of their societies and comfortably express vulnerability while being prepared to listen to the others without the urge to argue back. Coupled with other methodologies such as reflective practice it allows individuals to reach a deeper understanding of each

other and to jointly envision ways of moving forward taking into consideration the learning gained through the exercise.

The format of PSW is informal: the participants are asked to collaboratively design the agenda of the meeting and the ground rules, thus breaking with the legalistic atmosphere typical of negotiations (Kelman and Cohen, *The Problem-Solving Workshop: A Social-Psychological Contribution to the Resolution of International Conflicts* 1976, 79). PSW should be approached critically as well. First, the totalizing concept of universal human needs that assumes every human to have the exact same needs, does not take into account the unique background, culture, and contexts of various societies; the vast differences that shape the experiences and the identities of people within the same society; and the resulting differences in regard to the perception of needs. PSW is a structuralist approach claiming that the underlying layers of the NFCH condition the relationships of actors and are there to be discovered after removing the layers of positions and interests. Moreover, the approach assumes that a group of participants present at the workshop is able to represent the grand picture of the needs of their society.

Contrary to the above, we come from the position that each person's opinion is subjective, that a person's standing in the society and socially imposed categories such as gender, race, ethnicity, economic class, age, and others can affect the perception of needs, and that concurrent groups from the same society can very well form and express very different needs. The NFCH presented here, therefore, do not claim to be representative of the entire Turkish, Azerbaijani, or the Armenian societies. What we represent here are the patterns of the NFCH articulated by many dozens of participants from Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey in the span of eight years and representing various generations and professions.

The fears, concerns, and hopes were added to the list when Maslow's theory was adapted to serve the ends of conflict resolution practice. We analyze here the lists of each group separately, as well as in comparison with each other. As many of the NFCH are mentioned consistently by the participants, they point at systemic problems in the societies that need to be addressed should there be lasting and sustainable peace in the South Caucasus and its neighborhood. These categories are also correlative: a *need* for physical security can be also expressed as a *fear* of extermination, or a *concern* about a new cycle of violence, or a *hope* for sustained absence of violence. Oftentimes the same group might name one issue both as a need and as a fear. It is important in itself, however,

to analyze how the groups choose to frame the issues as the framing and not only the content can suggest what actions are necessary to move toward a solution: a fear of the other can possibly be dealt with the help of trust building, while a concern about restarting or continuing violence might require a cease-fire agreement or an international mechanism for the implementation of a peace agreement.

We acknowledge that the perception of the needs and challenges have been and are changing from year to year. This suggests that the societies are not standing still and always are immersed in certain processes. At the same time, we can talk about needs and challenges that have carried on throughout the entire post-Soviet period and have not lost their relevance for many years.

The accumulated information from the experience of the dialogues in itself may be interesting for many people in these three societies, and for all those interested in the processes taking place in the South Caucasus and Turkey. The analysis of the information and lessons learned from it can also contribute to the development of approaches to improve the efficiency of peacebuilding programs and confidence-building measures aimed at meeting the NFHC of these communities.

Azerbaijani list of needs, fears, concerns, and hopes

Here we analyzed the lists of eleven dialogues attended by Azerbaijani participants – one each from 2007, 2010, 2011, 2012, and 2015, two in 2009 in spring (1) and summer (2) and four in 2014 winter (1, 2, and 3) and summer (4). The year when the group participated in a dialogue is important as what mattered could be affected by developments of that particular time.

Needs

The participants of the Azerbaijani dialogue groups often articulated the need to address the **issue of refugees and IDPs**. This public need was represented as the necessity for the return of refugees and IDPs to the places of their origin. This will address a certain collective and/or individual frustration among the refugees/IDPs, and the return can bring them some emotional healing/satisfaction. This question, though with various intensity, remained urgent for at least five groups of Azerbaijani participants starting from 2007 and until the recent dialogues in 2014. (2007, 2009, 2011, 2012, and 2014). There was also an accompanying exigency that such a return should be part of the

comprehensive peace process. The very possibility of the beginning of such a process is viewed as an important step for the transformation of the conflict.

The need of return was complemented by an often articulated clause on **the security of those who return and legality of this process**. This safe return should not become a spontaneous and chaotic process. On the contrary, as participants of two dialogues (2012 and 2014) indicated, conditions that will contribute to the successful completion of this process should be deliberately created and controlled. The list of prerequisites may include specific actions, which should be taken without waiting for a possible start of the return process. According to the participants of two dialogues, these include security for those people who live near the zone of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, as well as for military personnel. Thus, overcoming the consequences of the conflict, that has led to a massive displacement, continues to be seen as a critical need for the “normalization” of the Azerbaijani society.

The next often articulated social need was the one for a **stable economy** and the successful **development of infrastructure**. This need was also tied to the conflict in certain ways. In one of the groups in 2014, an opinion was voiced about the need for building and restoration processes in those areas where the conflict mainly unfolded. Further economic needs, such as ensuring social, economic, and industrial development, along with stability, the need for paying attention to development in diverse fields were cited by a group in 2012. In 2015, following an economic downturn caused by the decline in energy prices and devaluation of the national currency – the manat, the need for the **diversification of economy** gained importance. The participants of this dialogue conditioned the success of such diversification with the **stabilization of the region**.

Over the years, participants in the dialogues reflected on issues that can symbolically be summed up as the well-being of the society. They shared thoughts on what are those social needs that can help establish harmony and overcome potential feelings of frustration. When discussing what the needs of the modern Azerbaijani society are, categories of improving collective self-esteem and self-trust were cited along with the development of mutual-trust.

In this last case, once again, the importance is given to the need of overcoming the conflict and its consequences. From discussions by three groups (2007, 2009, and 2011) we learn that confrontation around Nagorno-Karabakh may be perceived as an identity conflict. Thus the resolution of the latter becomes an

important part of the endeavor on the restoration of collective hope in the viability of the Azerbaijani society. Conversely, **loss of Nagorno-Karabakh is equated to damage to identity, resulting in the need of recovery and recuperating from emotional shock of loss.**

At the same time, the idea of overcoming the emotional shock, the feeling of having undergone a loss, and problems caused on the level of collective identity includes also directives of concrete measures necessary for resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. According to some groups, the Azerbaijani society needs the **restoration of territorial integrity**, citing it as the main condition for the resolution of the conflict. Only in parallel with this process, the restoration of the feeling of collective confidence is seen as possible, together with **confidence in achieving justice and restoring self-trust**. Or even, as it was voiced by one of the earliest groups (2007), it was the **collective dignity** that was to be recovered.

According to the participants of the dialogue process, “return” and “recovery of justice” imply a two-step process. The ultimate goal is to achieve peace, which implies the **restoration of mutual trust**, followed by comprehensive **peace-building**. It also implies a joint (for the conflicting societies) movement in this direction and the restoration of a variety of shattered ties. The 2011 dialogue participants believed that without permanent contacts at various levels, the outlined needs cannot be satisfied, and the fears cannot be overcome. They cited the needs to **ensure reconstruction of intellectual, economic, political, and cultural infrastructure**.

The task of building a democratic society was outlined in the spectrum of the most important needs of the Azerbaijani society by two groups (2011 and 2014). Among conditions for freedom and democracy were the ideas on the importance of the development of the civil society and the creation of real conditions necessary for the realization of the political and religious rights and freedoms. Among such rights, the most critical were considered a **strong civil society with ensured political freedoms, including provision of religious freedoms/education, free media, and free speech**. In this case as well, the developments were linked to the conflict. Participants considered the **post-war reconciliation process** an important part of the process of democratization.

Concerns

To some extent, the needs of the Azerbaijani society are related to alleviating issues that cause anxiety and concern. Among these, first and foremost, the

groups mentioned the economic problems also resulting from the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The region remains unstable and conflict-prone, and investments necessary for the development of the economy are impeded by the possibility of negative developments on the ground. Therefore, Azerbaijan suffers from **economic consequences of the war and conflict and from the absence of investments as conflict and instability loom**. In 2015, in the context of the crisis caused by declining energy prices, the risks associated with the dangers of relying on a single aspect in the economy gained new relevance.

In the post-Soviet period, religious institutions and ideology gained unprecedented influence. If in the beginning of 1990s, the “religious renaissance” was perceived as part of the anti-Soviet rhetoric and was considered a positive process and part of the “return to the roots”, after a quarter of a century, many of the participants cited concerns about the possible excessive growth of the influence of religion on the society and a **concern about the emergence of theocracy**.

Among the issues of concern that need to be addressed, the topic of destructive third party influences on the negotiation process has also emerged. A number of groups voiced that there is a **pro-Armenian bias in the international community**. International politics appears to these groups as subject to the **influence of lobby groups** resulting in negative consequences. The perception of the international community as pro-Armenian and biased ties to the perception of the impossibility of **reliable security guarantees for Azerbaijan**. A softer criticism by other groups referred to the influential actors not investing enough efforts into the peace process. Over the years, the **absence of interest on behalf of the third states like Russia and others in the OSCE Minsk Group in reaching the solution** was cited. A related criticism was in regard to the **secrecy of negotiations**.

Among other often-cited topics was the role of history in influencing the conflict discourses. In this regard, participants recalled again the role of the Armenian diaspora in the production of the conflict narrative. The **Armenians not differentiating between Azerbaijanis and Turks** was also of concern. This problem is particularly acute in the context of the genocide discussions when part of the responsibility is attributed to Azerbaijanis.

In the same semantic context, the Armenian state propaganda is seen worrisome and is viewed as anti-Azerbaijani. As examples of action taken in the context of diaspora lobbying and state propaganda, the “war of toponyms”

and the destruction of monuments were brought up. The **re-naming of places** in Nagorno-Karabakh and the **damage to historical monuments, identity, and heritage** were all seen as pressing issues. The destruction of the Azerbaijani cultural heritage was tied with the effect it has on group identity as well.

The issues of refugees and the IDPs were mentioned not only among the needs but also among the concerns of the Azerbaijani groups with a slightly different focus. In the needs, the focus was on the return and the safety consideration connected with such a return. As a concern, the dialogue participants expressed almost the opposite consideration about the possible lack of desire among many of the displaced to return to their homes. This concern was linked to the questions of safety and stability, **IDPs' hesitation or unwillingness to return back to their homes without knowing how they are going to live when they return**. The cities and villages, where the conflict mainly unfolded, are in ruins now, covered with minefields. In 2014, the participants argued that peace should not be an end in itself, but implies the return to **co-existence and mutual adaptation**.

Fears

The concerns were complemented by the fear of a new war that can negate all the achievements of the post-Soviet period. In 3 groups (2009, 2012, and 2014), the fear of the possible eruption of another hot conflict was listed, which according to 2014 dialogue participants could lead to new losses. In 2014, among such losses the **fear of a new defeat** was voiced. As an extension of this topic, there were fears about possible **new waves of violence and cruelty**, as well as **possible involvement of Russia** in support of Armenia.

In general, it should be highlighted that the vast majority of the fears are associated with the escalation of the conflict and continuation of **Armenian aggression**. Among them are fears that **territorial claims** by Armenia will not cease, and on the contrary, will continue to grow resulting in **permanent or continuous loss of territories**. The fear of a new war and new losses coexists with the fear of **Nagorno-Karabakh being forgotten**. This fear was projected on the younger generation in particular, but not exclusively. It embodies the assumption that the emotional connection with the lost territories will dissipate over time for the citizens of Azerbaijan, with the older generation **losing hope and not being able to see those territories** and the younger generation **losing the emotional and moral attachment as time goes by**. At the same time, one group (2011) feared also the **growth of armenophobia** in the country,

considering such attitudes to be an obstacle to the resolution of the conflict and reconciliation.

Besides possible consequences of conflict escalation, some participants look back with fear to the **negative experience of democratization** that Azerbaijan had to date. This contrasts with the need in democratization cited by other groups. The participants in the latter years, while sharing the concerns of the growing authoritarian tendencies of governance, at the same time expressed a fear that any move toward a **regime change will lead to instability**.

Hopes

The hopes articulated by the participants were reflective of the needs and fears. Dialogue participants in four groups (2007, 2009, 2011, and 2014) expressed a hope for the **peaceful resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict** and for a **future peaceful life routine and coexistence** in the region. In the current context of mutual isolation, some hope has remained for the **effectiveness of contacts at the level of the civil societies**. However, for these relationships to be sustainable, they have to be complemented by the restoration of **diplomatic relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia**. The participants of one group (2011) looking into the future expressed hopes for the **creation of a framework preventing future conflicts in the Caucasus**. The **hope for the return of hope** itself was raised as a necessary step for making peaceful coexistence conceivable.

Many groups, at the same time, linked their hopes to the prospects of **regional integration**. Regionalism implied a high level of interdependence in the Caucasus, coupled with independence from third party interference, transparent borders, and an expansion of cooperation in the region. These hopes imply work toward the **elimination of mutual hatred** in general, as well as more specific steps toward it such as **peace-oriented media prevailing over war-oriented media**.

Armenian list of needs, fears, concerns, and hopes

We analyzed the lists of thirteen dialogue initiatives attended by participants from Armenia – one each from 2007, 2010, 2011, two each in 2009 – in spring (1) and summer (2), 2012 – in spring (1) and summer (2), 2015 – in winter (1) and summer (2), and four in 2014 – in winter (1, 2, and 3) and summer (4). As in the analysis of the Azerbaijani list, the year when the group participated in a

dialogue matters in some cases, as the context of that particular time was affecting the content of the dialogue.

Needs

The Armenian participants most consistently articulated the need for **economic development**, connected to Armenia's on-going conflict with Azerbaijan ever since the collapse of the Soviet Union that resulted in a halt of any economic ties and communication. The participants see this problem further exacerbated in connection with the struggle with Turkey over the recognition of the Armenian genocide, with Turkey having also closed its borders with Armenia in solidarity with Azerbaijan. With the two of its longest borders closed and Azerbaijan pursuing a policy of economic isolation of Armenia, the latter finds itself left out of projects of regional economic development and increasingly reliant on Russian assistance.

Every single one of the thirteen groups we worked with discussed the need of sustainable economic development. The central theme here was the discussion of Azerbaijan and Turkey having their borders with Armenia closed, referenced by 7 groups of Armenian participants as "**the blockade**". The discussion of the need for open borders was supplemented by auxiliary topics such as the conflict leading to the exclusion of Armenia from regional development and cooperation mentioned by 3 groups, the resulting needs for better living conditions mentioned by 3 other groups and for the freedom of movement mentioned by 8 groups.

The Armenian participants often focused also on the need for **sustainable peace**, otherwise phrased as a need for stability, a need for sincere actions toward confidence building, and even needs for love, peace, and the pursuit of happiness. This cluster on sustainable peace had two sub-clusters – one focused on the need for **self-empowerment** and taking things into one's own hands and the other on the need for **security and preservation of identity** as dependent on the actions of others.

The sub-cluster of needs related to **voice and empowerment** was mentioned 9 times. These included the need to have the **voice of the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians be heard** in the peace process, the need for **restoring self-trust and trust in the other, freedom of media**, as well as freedom of taking matters into one's own hands and the **need for the restoration of the voice and rights of the refugees**.

The needs for the **preservation of identity and physical and cultural security** were mentioned 8 times. The cultural security and security of identity were discussed mainly in earlier years of the dialogue events, between 2007 and 2012, when the cease-fire was relatively stable and negotiations on both the Armenian-Azerbaijani and Turkish-Armenian directions were active. They were not mentioned even once during six dialogue events held in 2014 or 2015. The cultural security need was discussed in a form of a **need for the preservation of the Armenian identity** in general (2009), the **preservation of the identity of the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians** specifically (2007), the **preservation of Armenian cultural identity** (2011), and the **preservation of a positive (non-victim) version of the Armenian identity** (2012-2).

In the later years, characterized by the breakdown of both the Armenian-Turkish and Armenian-Azerbaijani negotiations, the worsening of political relations and military escalation with Azerbaijan, physical security was mentioned more often. The **need for physical security of Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians** took the central notch (2011 and 2012) within a larger **need for physical security of all Armenians** (2009 and 2014).

Related to identity and security, the Armenian participants often talked of the need for the **recognition of the Armenian genocide**. This was discussed by five groups mainly in the Armenian-Turkish or regional dialogues. Three of these discussed it in the context of **achieving historical justice**, while one discussed as related to the **need for respect from Turkey** toward the collective pain of Armenians and the other one in the context of the **need for Armenians to feel home in Anatolia**.

Fears

The fears outlined by the Armenian groups can be broken down into two broad categories: one is the loss of identity and physical extinction of Armenians, and the other is the fear of a new cycle of violence.

If the preservation of identity was a prominent topic when discussing needs, **losing identity** and the fear of **physical extermination** was even more often cited when discussing fears. Loss of identity in general was cited most often, with some clarifying that they see it happening as a result of **potential discrimination and physical threat** to Armenian populations under Turkish or Azerbaijani rule, particularly in the case of the return of Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijani control. Other groups went further and discussed the **fear for the survival of the Armenian statehood** and the fear of physical extinction.

If the fear of extinction of all Armenians was abstract and in one form or another mentioned by a total of 7 groups, the fear of a soon-to-come war or other form of mass violence was referenced by every group. Specifically, the **fear of a new war with Azerbaijan** was articulated by 8, with others expressing fear of the prospect of a life under the **perpetual threat of war**. Others yet feared that **Turkey will radicalize**, resort to **pan-Turkism or pan-Turanism** leading to mass violence against Armenians and possibly a **new genocide**.

Only one group mentioned the fear of rising individual-level extremism, in a reference to the glorification of Ramil Safarov in Azerbaijan. Yet it would be misleading to assume that the topic was not a major part of the conversations. Our dialogues are designed along the past-present-future continuum, therefore the analysis of the NFCH follows the analysis of the past. Safarov's image, according to the Armenian participants, is central to the Armenian narrative and came to be associated with the image of an Azerbaijani person in general, contributing to the fear of murderous intensions of individual Azerbaijanis capable of killing a sleeping colleague.

Concerns

Of particular concern to the Armenian participants, mentioned virtually by all the groups, were the questions of **propaganda** resulting in **negative attitudes** and impacting each side's **identity**. Three groups specifically named anti-Armenian propaganda in Azerbaijan as a concern with one more group naming negative propaganda both in Azerbaijan and Armenia.

In regard to the consequences of propaganda, one group named the differing understanding of history, as well as the absence of a readiness to live together. Others referred to the polarization created by the conflict discourses, the enmity between the sides and especially those who after a prospective solution would have to live together, and with such polarization, the hindrance to any possibility of a solution.

Others were concerned with the impact of propaganda on identities. The concern here was not only in the **negative attitudes toward Armenians in Azerbaijan**, but also the **dominance of the victim narrative in the Armenian discourse** creating a victim identity. The groups that brought this up also mentioned the above-discussed need of transforming this victim identity. The conflicting yet parallel **syndromes of superiority and inferiority** were also discussed as one of the results of propaganda.

Lack of ethnic-diversity or diversity of opinions in the Armenian society and the pressures to conform with the mainstream views and not to challenge taboos was also shared as a concern resulting from mutual propaganda.

Lack of democracy or rule of law was articulated as a concern by a number of groups, and was seen as part of the dynamics hindering conflict resolution. One group, at the same time, had the mirror approach, listing conflict as an obstacle to democratization.

Other major concerns raised were related to the **arms race** and the **power imbalance**. These issues were discussed mainly in the later years mentioned 6 times in 2012 and later and only once prior to that. The concern about the **arms race** applied to Azerbaijan and Armenia, together with its effect on economy and the increase of the war rhetoric, was coupled with the **need for de-escalation**.

Many groups, at the same time, were concerned with the rapid **outmigration of Armenians**, which along with the increase of populations in Turkey and Azerbaijan, could create an even greater **demographic disparity**. The sheer difference in size and population between Turkey and Armenia was mentioned as a concern, along with the slow pace of the otherwise seen as positive shift in attitudes in Turkey toward Armenia and Armenians.

The Armenian groups shared the worry of the Azerbaijani groups in regard to the **negative influence of geo-politics or third party actors**. Many of the participants discussed it in the context of the need of taking the destiny of the region into the hands of the local populations.

Hopes

As outlined by the methodology, the final category discussed in the PSW process were the hopes related to the conflict resolution process. The hopes were most of the time based on the needs, fears, and concerns and articulated as a solution to them. Two groups expressed a hope that it would be the Azerbaijani or the Turkish side that would **compromise unilaterally**, accepting the Armenian positions.

All other groups, however, focused on hopes for jointly developed solutions. Some hopes contained process suggestions, such as **collaboration** and changes in the peace process that would make it less state interest oriented and more concerned with the **humanitarian issues and the needs of the populations**. From the solution-oriented hopes, **overcoming stereotypes and transforming**

attitudes were mentioned, **the restoration of trust**, and **the healing of trauma**, followed by a future where everyone has **equal rights irrespective of background and sustainable co-existence and stability**.

If in the Azerbaijani teams the regional integration models were mentioned often, relatively few Armenian groups mentioned the possibility. One of the groups, however, went as far as suggesting a **United Caucasus, integrated politically and economically**, as the ultimate solution to the region's problems.

Turkish list of needs, fears, concerns, and hopes

Groups from Turkey participated in the Imagine Center's dialogues where needs of the societies have been discussed three times: once in 2012, as well as in winter 2015 (1) and summer 2015 (2). Although the number of the dialogues attended by Turkish participants compared to Armenians and Azerbaijanis might present a limitation when it comes to portraying the larger picture, the outcomes of the PSW bring out clear similarities within these three meetings.

Fears

We start the discussion of NFCH of the Turkish groups from fears, as it was the Sevres Syndrome articulated in this category that anchored all others.

All the Turkish groups mention the concept of the **Sevres Syndrome**, although the 2012 group mentioned it as a concern, while the others as a fear. The Sevres Syndrome is associated with the Sevres Treaty and is a collective paranoia, shared by large segments of the society in Turkey. When the Sevres Treaty was signed between the Ottoman Empire and the Allies in 1920 in order to conclude the First World War, the remaining Ottoman lands were divided between Greeks, Arabs, Armenians, and Kurds. However, the Treaty has never been implemented, as the independence movement led by Mustafa Kemal was successful enough to sign the more favorable Lausanne Treaty in 1923, which is the founding treaty of modern Turkey. Although never implemented, for many Turks, the Sevres Treaty represents the idea that the Western powers are on a constant quest to weaken and divide and rule Turkey. This idea has turned into a syndrome as the power-holders have since been using elements of the Sevres Syndrome whenever the state authority or sovereignty is challenged domestically or internationally.

Despite being recognized as a fear or concern, and stated separately by all groups, some other mentioned fears are also connected with the Sevres Syndrome. While the 2012 group stated the Sevres Syndrome as a concern, they

connected it with the fear of the recognition of the Armenian Genocide and its possible **domino effect for other persecuted groups**. The 2012 group connected the genocide recognition also with the **legal ramifications of territorial and financial compensations**, and stated it as a fear in the Turkish society that prevents it from moving closer to the solution of the conflict with Armenians. Similarly, the 2015-1 group considered **losing territory and suffering economically** as a fear and connected it with Turkey's **weakening and being blamed**. The 2015-2 group went further framing this question as connected with losing territory and the **disintegration of Turkey** as a result of anti-Turkish **Western conspiracies**, all leading to a possible **chaos and renewed conflicts**.

The other fear stated by the 2012 group was that the **reconciliation with Armenians could lead to loss of Azerbaijan – morally, economically, and geopolitically**. While the kinship relations between Azerbaijan and Turkey are important for some circles in both countries, the economic and geo-political relations are even more crucial as Azerbaijan is the main resource for Turkey's prospects of being an energy hub. Turkey closed its borders to Armenia in 1993 as a result of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. However, when Turkey initiated the normalization process with Armenia, the Azerbaijani reaction was harsh; the natural gas prices were doubled. The group acknowledged that without solving the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, Turkey's hands are tied for any step that it might take toward Armenia. The 2015-2 group stated it as a concern about damage in the economic relations, which can be commented to be related both to Azerbaijan and the rest of economic relations.

Concerns

Among many concerns aired by the Turkish groups, one was stated by all – the **loss of the prestige of the Turkish identity**, if the Armenian genocide is recognized, explaining further the resistance of the Turkish society when it comes to the recognition of the Armenian genocide. This concern rests on the assumption that Turkishness is a prestigious identity, not only for Turks themselves but also for the foreign audience. The loss of prestige, therefore, can be in one's own eyes or, as the 2015-1 group put it, can result in the **loss of prestige in the eyes of the West**. The 2012 group also stated a related yet distinct concern of **giving too much one-sided concessions** to Armenians. The emphasis on "one sided" here is another hint of the concern of losing power, projecting inability to receive reciprocal concessions, and being seen as a weak state.

By stating that **Cosmopolitanism could undermine the Turkish unity**, the 2012 group suggested that the unity of Turkishness indeed exists in the society. It then sees the possibility of diversity or cosmopolitanism as undermining this unity by the rights given to different groups. The 2015-1 group, on the other hand, claims the opposite, articulating **being seen as monolithic** as a concern. The participants in the latter group underlined the diversity in the society in the name of ethnicity, religion, ideology and were concerned about the prospects of being seen as one unit, considering that these diverse groups in effect have diverse opinions on many issues, including in regard to the recognition of the Armenian genocide.

Needs

The 2015-2 group conceptualized the state-society relations as problematic and underlined the need for it to change. It described Turkey as a very state-centric society where the state is conceived as sacred and the rights, freedoms, or welfare of the citizens can be abandoned for the survival of the strong state. Related to that, the 2015-2 group stated the need for **strengthening the civic relations in terms of education, economy, communication, and information**, which can also be seen as a tool of changing state-society relations. Groups also put it as **democratization** in a more general sense.

Another category of needs articulated by all the groups can be broadly called as a need for empathy or mutual empathy. The participants in 2012 group phrased it as a need to **articulate victim mentality**, in reference to lack of remembrance of the Turkish victims of the Balkan and Caucasus wars and their suffering, including millions of deaths. The suggestion was that a culture of remembrance and mourning of past injustices, including the Turkish (Muslim) ones, would make it easier for the Turkish society to have empathy with others.

At the same time, the 2012 and 2015-2 groups defined empathy in wider terms as the **reshaping of the image of self and others** and the **recognition of the pains of a multiplicity of different social groups**. All those points underline the need for developing empathy for the others' by evaluating, recognizing, reshaping one's own and others' identities. The 2015-1 group also makes reference to the diverse groups in the society by stating 'Recognition of multiplicity of different social groups pains'. As the "enemy of the state" changed and evolved throughout the decades, there have been many victims in the modern Turkish history including Kurds, Alevis, Greeks, leftists, rightists, nationalists, Islamists, atheists, liberals, as well as Armenians. The participants

underlined the need of the society to be recognized as diverse and having diverse pains. This connected also with the concern stated earlier in regard to being seen as monolithic.

Hopes

The participants in the 2015-2 group articulated a hope of the Turkish society to **become a world leader economically and culturally**, and the 2012 group took it further with a hope of **Turkey becoming such a great power that no one could make any claim against it**. That group projected this power to the genocide recognition question by expressing a related hope that **all claims about the Armenian genocide will go away**. While the 2012 group narrowed the hopes of the Turkish society in this relationship down to preventing genocide recognition, the 2015-2 group articulated a larger hope in regard to leadership both on economics and cultural fronts. While agreeing that the society was state-centric and sanctity was attributed to the state, the 2015-2 group also expressed a hope for a **reform of education and legal systems away from nationalistic and toward civic values**.

Cross-analysis of the lists

Concluding the review, first of all it should be stressed that the three countries are in an unequal position. For “big” Turkey, relations with Azerbaijan and Armenia are often seen through the prism of the relations with other “big” actors such as the EU, NATO, and Russia. This explains the extensive focus on the Sevres Syndrome and the concern about the loss of prestige in the eyes of the West, while discussing the Turkish-Armenian-Azerbaijani relationship. The rift with Armenia is primarily concerning because of its impact on the relations with the West. Close relations with Azerbaijan, while important, are rarely mentioned as they also are overshadowed by relations with “bigger” partners. The closed border with Armenia is rather a regional problem, pressing for the authorities and residents of the border areas, caught up in the economic and infrastructure impasse, yet it is hardly mentioned by the groups of Turkish participants who for the most part come from Istanbul and Ankara. At the same time for the Armenian and the Azerbaijani groups the relations with Turkey are critical. Both the Armenian and Azerbaijani participants reference the close relationship between Azerbaijan and Turkey, both economically and symbolically, often referring to the phrase “one nation – two states”. That same concept, however, was not referenced by the Turkish participants.

At the same time, the importance of the inter-relationships for all the three societies increases in the context of the Turkey-Armenia-Azerbaijan triangle. Perhaps paradoxically, the alliance between Turkey and Azerbaijan does not translate into better awareness about each other. In our experience, Armenian and Turkish, as well as Armenian and Azerbaijani participants are relatively well aware of the developments in the “other” society, while Azerbaijani and Turkish participants exhibit little mutual awareness in regard to each other’s internal developments.

Key topics in both bilateral (Turkish-Armenian and Armenian-Azerbaijani) and trilateral dialogues are the discussions on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the issue of recognition/non-recognition of the Armenian genocide. As is evident to date, on the political arena the sides of the triangle have greatly succeeded in creating problems for one another, rather than cooperating and developing partner relations. This situation is reflected in the prevailing NFCH that can be reduced to two important blocks – economy and conflict. For Armenian and Azerbaijani participants, the economic benefits in case of the resolution of the conflicts are seen to be stability and diversification of sectors. At the same time, Turkish participants, in case of a solution, expressed much more ambitious hopes for Turkey to achieve a significant (leadership) position in the region.

For the Azerbaijani groups, the cornerstone issue was the right of return for the refugees and IDPs. This question was viewed from an economic angle, as well as from an emotional and symbolic perspective. For Armenia, the priority is the economy and stable development, which was seen as practically impossible without open borders and the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Unlike in the Azerbaijani groups, the question of refugees was rarely raised, conditioned by a better integration, outmigration, and the loss of hope for a safe return of the refugee community.

In the needs and fears sections, however, both Armenian and Azerbaijani participants gave great importance to the questions of security of those inhabiting the zone of conflict and prospective returnees and the fear of a possible escalation of violence. The question of survival and the fear of a new cycle of violence was also shared. The Armenian participants gave a big importance to the need of the inclusion of Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians in the peace process and the protection of their rights. While the Azerbaijanis stressed the need to include the IDPs and refugees into the process.

All the parties expressed hopes for achieving solutions, normalization, and reconciliation. Although the Turkish groups articulated that while they see the prospects of rapprochement with Armenia as an attractive possibility, it loses its attractiveness significantly when seen in the context of possible reciprocal losses in the relations with Azerbaijan.

Participants from Azerbaijan and Armenia have identified the issue of maintaining the collective identity, including a cultural identity, as one of their core needs and expressed a fear or a concern of losing it. If for Armenian participants this question was linked primarily to new cycles of violence and physical survival, Azerbaijani participants linked it mainly to the losses suffered during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and loss of cultural heritage.

In the Armenian groups, the issue of the recognition of the genocide by Turkey, and by extension, the hope for achieving (historical) justice, bore urgency. Lack of progress in understanding each other and the absence of the recognition of the genocide leads to the fear of possible reoccurrence of genocide in the event of a rise of “new pan-Turkism”. Physical survival is a fear articulated by the Armenian participants not only in relation with Turkey, but also with Azerbaijan: it comes up in the context of the discussion of a possible new war, the alliance of Azerbaijan and Turkey, as well as in the context of Safarov’s glorification in Azerbaijan and the resulting image of a joint Turkic enemy. Often, different in essence events in Turkey and Azerbaijan are seen by the Armenians as interconnected and intended to damage Armenia or Armenians.

While the Armenian groups see the recognition of the genocide as a central step toward the normalization of relations and the establishment of trust, the transformation of the enemy image, and reduction of fear, the Turkish groups describe the recognition of the genocide as one of the dominant public fears and connect it with the Sevres Syndrome. The participants articulate that for the Turkish public, the resistance to recognition is explained by the fear of possible losses (including territorial) if the recognition of the Armenian genocide is initiated, followed by a weakening of Turkey. It is believed that recognition will not only fail to solve any conflicts, but, on the contrary, will open an even larger Pandora’s box for many other groups to demand justice and may cost Turkey the loss of statehood. And for the Turkish public, the weakening of the state is an issue of identity, or at least the loss of prestige for Turkish identity. Turkish and Azerbaijani groups are united by their perception of a bias on the part of the international community, which is seen as sympathetic to Christian Armenia to the detriment of its Muslim neighbors.

For groups from all three countries, issues of democratization and more freedoms are urgent in different categories, but more frequently in the needs and hopes. The development of civil societies, the freedom of media, and other issues do not lose their urgency. The issues in the educational systems and hopes for their successful development in the future are also deemed important by all three groups.

The Armenian and the Azerbaijani groups were united in their concern of the negative interference of the third parties and strongly articulated the need for taking the matters into their own hands. This could serve as a common ground on which the further Armenian-Azerbaijani collaboration to solve their conflicts could be built. Since both groups, and particularly Azerbaijanis, also referred often to the need for regional integration, that could open up possibilities for articulating a role for Turkey and possibly other regional powers in envisioning such integration.

Conclusion

The authors of this review, as well as the dialogue participants, did not have the goal to present the whole spectrum of needs, fears, concerns and hopes that are urgent for Turkish, Armenian, and Azerbaijani societies. Often having a proactive stance in their societies, the dialogue participants have conveyed to us the NFCH that are significant to them. Further, in a recent variation of the PSW methodology, we started asking the participants to identify their own needs as members of the society, rather than those of the society in general. Such rephrasing provides us with a much more nuanced picture of often divergent needs and fears that can co-exist in the same society. As not enough data is accumulated as of this writing through this new approach, further analysis will be necessary integrate the learning.

The analysis of the lists of the NFCH developed in the span of over 8 years by dozens of participants from Turkey, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, at the same time, points toward a number of core dynamics that will have to be addressed on the road toward a sustainable solution to the existing conflicts. These point to the obligation to address the needs of the forcefully displaced, the cessation of imminent threats of violence, historical reconciliation, as well as the democratization and regional economic integration and more.

The analysis also points toward a number of topics that need to be researched further. Such topics include understanding the consequences of the strategy of isolation lead by Azerbaijan and Turkey in regard to Armenia; exploring

possibilities restorative justice in regard to the displaced populations; questions of diversity and the state of the minority rights; understanding, exposing, and addressing the taboo topics in the societies to advance pluralism; exploring possible scenarios for political and economic solutions to existing conflicts and more.

The editorial team of the Caucasus Edition plans to commission analysis on these and other topics to joint teams of scholar-practitioners and analysts from across the region.

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The Role of Global and Regional Actors in the South Caucasus

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This paper is an analysis of the policies of global and regional actors in the South Caucasus for the past 25 years. This paper will look at each of these actors – the US and NATO, the EU, Russia, Turkey, and Iran – to analyze the web of overlapping or conflicting interests and patterns of influence and affiliation. This analysis is used to then propose a rethinking of policies of all five actors with implications for the countries of the South Caucasus and the conflict context. This will be done with the vision of increasing the fraction of shared interests and decreasing the confrontation of interests and the conflict potential in the region.

Introduction: competing interests in conflict contexts

For the past few centuries, regional and global powers have struggled to gain or maintain hegemony or influence over the South Caucasus. The region is important economically because it is on the Silk Road and geopolitically because it is a buffer zone lying between regional powers (Świętochowski 1995).

In the early 20th century, during the disintegration of Tsarist Russia, the Caucasus communities used the opportunity to exercise their right to self-determination, taking advantage of the power vacuum in the region. Azerbaijan (1918-1920), Georgia (1918-1921), and Armenia (1918-1920) in the South Caucasus and the Gorskaya Republic (1917-1920) in the North Caucasus declared independence (Hille 2010). Although the republics were recognized internationally, there were territorial disputes and even wars between them related to borders. The present-day internationally recognized borders of the Azerbaijani, Armenian, and Georgian republics were established by the Soviet authorities and are subject to grievances by many. The disintegration of the Soviet Union led, once again, to the formation of independent states in the South Caucasus in 1991.

The disputes over the Soviet-era autonomous entities led to the wars in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia bringing economic instability and security problems to the South Caucasus. These on-going conflicts weakened the South Caucasus states and provided an opening for the regional and global powers to restart their competition for influence over the region. Russia acted to regain the power it had lost after the collapse of the Soviet Union through the “Controlled Conflict Strategy” (Lowenthal 1971). Since Turkey has a common cultural and religious affiliation with Azerbaijan, it stood by Baku in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, while Iran maintained a neutral position. Russia, initially backing the territorial integrity of Georgia⁶, later accepted a more assertive position regarding the conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia by openly supporting those regions and recognizing their independence in 2008 following the war in August of that same year.

Among the countries in the South Caucasus, Armenia has been the only one that entered a strategic alliance with Russia due to security concerns related to

⁶ While the official position of Moscow was that of support towards Georgia’s territorial integrity in the early years of the conflict in Abkhazia, the role of the Russian military in the South Caucasus is argued to have been independent from the central government’s role in tacit or even direct support to the Abkhazians **Specificata fonte non valida.**

the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the concern that Turkey might intervene militarily in support of Azerbaijan. In 2013, the partnership that had been established through the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) took an even longer-term outlook when Armenia announced that it would enter into the Eurasian Customs Union, a precursor to the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), established by Russia, Kazakhstan, and Belarus. Although an Iran-Azerbaijan rapprochement took place in 1991-1993, relations changed when the nationalist Popular Front came to power in Azerbaijan led by Abulfaz Elchibey. Starting from 1998, the formation of regional alliances among Turkey, Georgia, and Azerbaijan engaged Iran into closer cooperation with Armenia and Russia.

Until 2008, the United States' (US) policies related to the South Caucasus were determined by energy considerations and the competition with Russia for influence over the region. As a result, alternative energy routes that would bypass Russia were established, and the Caspian policy was developed in 1994. A member of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) since 1956, Turkey had played an important role in the US-led containment policy toward the Soviet Union. In the post-Cold War period, the US supported Turkey's growing influence in the South Caucasus to create alternative energy routes. The White House supported the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline and the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (BTE also known as the South Caucasus Pipeline) natural gas pipeline. To develop closer relations with the West, the cooperation platform called GUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova; Organization for Democracy and Economic Development) was formed, supported by the US. This also pushed the US to support the Azerbaijan-Turkey-Georgia geopolitical line in the South Caucasus, while developing a separate relationship with Armenia.

The European Union's (EU) policy towards the South Caucasus is a result of its own internal debates and the sometimes divergent interests of the individual states that make up the Union. Although the EU is a structure above states, differing policies of the United Kingdom, Germany, France, and other states categorized as 'Old Europe' on the one hand and Poland, the Czech Republic, and other Eastern European states categorized as 'New Europe' on the other hand have shaped the EU policies towards the South Caucasus. Since 2008, the EU's Eastern Partnership (EaP) program has been important for the former Soviet countries of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Armenia, and the 'New Europe' countries played an important role in this coordination.

With Iran emerging out of its own decade-long isolation, its policies towards the South Caucasus will be shaped around the aspirations to contributing to the Southern Gas Corridor and expanding trade with Armenia and Georgia. Iran's policies will be conditioned by the possibility of overcoming differences with Azerbaijan and negotiating with Russia around its own greater involvement in the South Caucasus.

This paper will look at each of these actors – the US and NATO, the EU, Russia, Turkey, and Iran – to analyze the web of overlapping or conflicting interests and patterns of influence and affiliation. This analysis is used to then propose a rethinking of policies of all five actors with implications for the countries of the South Caucasus and the conflict context. This will be done with the vision of increasing the fraction of shared interests and decreasing the confrontation of interests and the conflict potential in the region.

The US and NATO in the South Caucasus

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the bipolar world, the three newly independent and internationally recognized states of the South Caucasus – Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia – found themselves in a new geopolitical scene where the administration of President George W. Bush tried to redesign US foreign policy in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War. Meanwhile, Russia was busy with handling the socio-economic challenges facing the country.

The US has had a few foreign policy strategies in this region. From the neorealist perspective, the US has no vital interest at stake in Armenia, Azerbaijan, or Georgia. However, as a buffer zone situated between three regional powers – Russia, Turkey, and Iran – the South Caucasus becomes an important piece for the US on the world chessboard. The involvement in regional affairs can help advance the US interests in the projects of the Caspian basin, as well as contain the influence of Iran and Russia. With a growing rift between Russia on the one hand and the US and the EU on the other regarding Ukraine and Syria, and an escalating conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh that might draw in regional powers, the South Caucasus may well become the third spot for employing the strategy of encircling Russia (Suny 2010) (Melvin 2016).

In addition, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia have their strings to pull trying to impact the US policy towards the South Caucasus. Two lobbying organizations of the Armenian diaspora are operating in the US advancing

Armenian interests⁷. At the same time, Azerbaijan knows the importance of its energy resources as an alternative to Iranian and Russian energy supplies, and Georgia with its geographical position and relatively stable relations with neighbors becomes a hub for regional projects and also plays a decisive role in upholding the presence of Russia in the region or threatening Russia with its Western integration aspirations, particularly with NATO.

Democratic enlargement: The Clinton doctrine

At the beginning of the 1990s, the so-called Clinton doctrine of US foreign policy was aimed at democratic enlargement with the emphasis of promoting US economic interests in the world and supporting democracy, particularly in the former Soviet Union (Brinkley 1997). At the time, the US also adopted a relatively cautious policy towards the South Caucasus as the region was not perceived in Washington as a stand-alone geopolitical unit: policies towards it were seen as a continuation of the US policy towards Russia (Dawisha and Dawisha 1995, 310).

With free trade at the core of the US foreign policy throughout the first term of the Clinton administration, the geoeconomic and geopolitical importance of the South Caucasus was not acknowledged until the mid-1990s. The year 1997 marks the turning point in the US foreign policy towards the South Caucasus when a number of political scientists started to bring the attention of American politicians to the internal socioeconomic and financial problems faced by Russia and its reduced capacity of maintaining exclusive hegemony in the South Caucasus. Furthermore, the Clinton administration saw an opening for the US to access the energy resources of the Caspian basin. Hence, the US engaged in a policy U-turn towards the South Caucasus.

Publicly, the region started gaining attention in the speeches of high ranking officials of Washington. Deputy State Secretary Strobe Talbott, while analyzing the prospects for US economic engagement in the South Caucasus and Central Asia in 1997, mentioned that “It would matter profoundly to the United States if that [conflict escalation] were to happen in an area that sits on as much as 200

⁷ The Armenian National Committee of America and the Armenian Assembly of America are the two Armenian lobbying organizations. They closely work with certain congressmen and other politicians to further Armenian interests. It is noteworthy that these organizations might often disagree on a range of issues, and the interests they pursue might even vary from (but not contradict) those of the Republic of Armenia.

billion barrels of oil. That is yet another reason why conflict resolution must be job one for US policy in the region” (Talbot 1997).

Of course these conflicts did not appear in 1997 and the US was already involved in the conflict resolution, specifically over the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Still, 1997 marks a new level of engagement, when the western oil companies started to study the commercial viability of the BTC oil pipeline project⁸ (Çağaptay and Gencsoy 2005). Certain lobbying groups in the US acknowledging the economic and political importance of the pipeline started to work for the waiver or repeal of Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act⁹. Section 907, which banned any kind of direct US aid to Azerbaijan, was the result of lobbying efforts by Armenian-American organizations in response to Armenia’s blockade by Azerbaijan.

The manifestations of US active engagement in the region starting in the late-1990s were financial assistance, support to the enhancement of democratic institutions, military cooperation bilaterally and via NATO, and diplomatic involvement in the regional conflicts. In the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the US is one of the Co-Chairs of the Minsk Group international mediation initiative. However, not much was gained towards advancement of democratic institutions or conflict resolution. Further, a former co-chair of the Minsk Group has noted that had the US had a genuine interest to resolve the conflict it would have done so (Bryza 2015). The US involvement in the Abkhazia and South Ossetia conflicts in this period was less intensive. Moreover, in the post-Rose Revolution period and until the August 2008 war, the US would encourage Georgia to collaborate with Russia in developing settlements in the two regions (Nixey 2010, 127).

The “War on Terror” and NATO

The terrorist attacks of 9/11 and the following “Global War on Terror” of the Bush administration gave a new impetus to the US policy in the South Caucasus: the region was now viewed as a launching pad for the US military forces on the way to Afghanistan and Iraq (Nixey 2010, 126). The three countries of the South Caucasus supported the US in its fight against terrorism, which

⁸ The project for the construction of the BTC oil pipeline began in 1992, when Turkish Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel called on the Central Asian countries and Azerbaijan to export energy resources through Turkey. In 1993, Turkey and Azerbaijan signed a framework document on the construction of the pipeline.

⁹ In January 2002, Section 907 was waived by President George W. Bush.

resulted in a more intensified involvement with NATO-led activities, including the deployment of military personnel. Noteworthy is the fact that Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan joined NATO's Partnership for Peace in 1994. One of the four axes of the Clinton foreign policy was about marginalizing security competition and reducing the risk of large-scale war in Europe, East Asia, and the Middle East (Walt 2000). This implied becoming or remaining militarily engaged in each of these regions and advancing the NATO enlargement.

The foreign policy of George W. Bush, compared with Clinton's, was more tailored to the needs and potentials of the regional countries. Following Georgia's declaration of the willingness to join NATO in 2002 (Kavadze and Kavadze 2014) and supporting Georgia in and after the Rose Revolution in November 2003, for a certain period the US administration perceived Georgia as probably the most pro-American country in the world (Nixey 2010). Nevertheless, the Georgian public felt betrayed by the US when it remained largely passive during the war of August 2008. The Russian aggressive behavior, mainly provoked by the NATO Bucharest Summit earlier in 2008 that had opened the prospect for Georgia and Ukraine to join the Alliance, sent a clear signal to the US that it should proceed more cautiously in its aspirations of enlarging NATO or trying to contain Russia, at least in the South Caucasus. And while Georgia continued aspiring to further integrate with NATO, high-ranking NATO officials, despite the Bucharest commitments of 2008¹⁰, became more reserved in their statements about Georgia's membership (North Atlantic Treaty Organization 2015).

NATO's relations with Armenia are limited to training and reform of its defense and security sectors. As a member of the Russia-led CSTO, however, Armenia never expressed interest in joining the Alliance. Neither did Azerbaijan, preferring an independent path and relying on a strong bilateral alliance with Turkey. However, both Armenia and Azerbaijan remain involved in the Individual Partnership Action Plans with NATO.

What is next?

After taking office in 2009, Obama's administration once again reversed the US course towards the South Caucasus with its "Russian reset" policy that subordinated the relations with the South Caucasus countries to its relations with Russia. This implied accepting the South Caucasus as a region within the

¹⁰ At the Bucharest Summit in 2008, NATO leaders agreed that Georgia will become a member of NATO, provided that it meets all the necessary requirements.

sphere of Russian influence, as a result adopting a much more limited engagement with the region. And while the “reset” policy clearly failed, highlighted by the disagreements over the Europe-based missile defense system, NATO’s eastward expansion, Iran’s nuclear program, conflicts in Syria and Ukraine, and numerous other developments, the US presence and influence in the South Caucasus has visibly decreased.

The Obama administration has somewhat detached the US from the South Caucasus politically and in terms of its support for democracy and civil society, maintaining an active role in matters only concerning the energy sector. It will be important to see whether the upcoming US administration would follow Obama’s line or commit to another direction. Would the South Caucasus continue to be seen as Russia’s domain, or would it be treated as a separate geopolitical region or a pressure point to open the third front against Russia? The election year rhetoric indicates that a Hillary Clinton administration is more likely to adopt a proactive policy in the region, taking pages from the playbook of the George W. Bush administration rather than Obama’s, while Donald Trump would further prioritize relations with Russia.

The EU in the South Caucasus

The EU’s institutional involvement in the South Caucasus dates back to the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements with Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan signed in 1996 and entered into force in 1999. The region gained importance for the EU due to its energy resources and as a transportation corridor between East and West, North and South, as well as for security purposes in terms of building “a ring of friends” outside the EU borders. The EU development and integration policies for the region have been between political constructivism and idealism.

The European Neighborhood Policy and the EU enlargement

In 2004, the EU announced its new instrument – an integration mechanism called the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP). The countries of the South Caucasus were also included in the new policy. The policy served as a framework for the EU to promote democracy and human rights in the region and increase political, economic, and trade relations with Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan. The ENP was implemented through action plans developed separately for each country. However, these action plans were similar, indicating that the region *was* perceived by the EU as one geopolitical unit.

When the ENP was formed in 2004, the EU was facing a completely different set of geopolitical challenges than it does today. At the time, the EU was enlarging, its economy was growing, and the development of “a ring of friends” from the Caucasus to the Sahara was a priority for the EU foreign affairs¹¹.

With the accession of new member states in 2007, the EU went even further in its intentions of enhancing relations with the South Caucasus, and the European Security Strategy stressed the importance of “the need to avoid new dividing lines in Europe” suggesting that the EU would “take a stronger and more active interest in the problems of the South Caucasus” (Efe 2012, 187).

To develop a more nuanced strategy towards its neighbors, in 2009 the ENP was split into two regional blocks – the Southern Partnership and the EaP. Thus, the countries of the South Caucasus became part of the EaP and started to negotiate higher-level integration with the EU. Armenia and Georgia started to negotiate Association Agreements, part of which was the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA)¹². Since then, the three countries of the South Caucasus followed different paths toward EU integration.

Since the launch of the EaP, the EU has intensified its involvement in the reform of institutions in the region. The prospect of signing the Association Agreements with Armenia and Georgia was a strong driving force for supporting the reform of the normative framework within the countries as well as institutions dealing with trade, customs, and taxation.

Moscow, however, started signaling that it was rather unhappy with the over-involvement of the EU in the South Caucasus and used its extensive influence in Armenia to restrain it from signing the Association Agreement with the EU. On September 3, 2013, one month before the Vilnius summit, Armenia’s President Serzh Sargsyan announced Armenia’s intention to join the Russia-led economic integration process – the Eurasian Customs Union. Surprised by this unexpected turn of events, Brussels and other European capitals criticized Sargsyan’s decision, while Yerevan announced its willingness to continue cooperation with the EU as long as it did not contradict Armenia’s accession to the Eurasian Customs Union. The reason cited by Sargsyan for this political U-

¹¹ It would be difficult to anticipate then that the “ring of friends” would turn into a “ring of fire” within 10 years.

¹² Azerbaijan and Belarus were left out of this process, as it is a precondition for membership in the World Trade Organization (WTO) for entering DCFTA negotiations with the EU.

turn was the reliance on Russia for security in Armenia's confrontation with Azerbaijan.

With Armenia's refusal to sign the Association Agreement, there was a long debate over the mode of cooperation between the EU and Armenia. On October 12, 2015, the Foreign Affairs Council authorized the European Commission and the High Representative to open negotiations on a "new, legally binding and overarching agreement with Armenia, and adopted the corresponding negotiating mandate" (European External Action Service 2015). Finally, in December 2015, the EU and Armenia started working on developing a new framework for cooperation (European External Action Service 2015).

Unlike Armenia, Azerbaijan has not shown interest in signing the Association Agreement with the EU. Currently, the EU cooperates with Azerbaijan economically within the framework of the agreement on extracting gas from the Shah Deniz Stage 2 bed in Azerbaijan, according to which 10 billion cubic meters of gas will be imported to Europe starting at the end of 2019 (European Commission 2013). The other framework for cooperation is the Visa Facilitation and Readmission Agreement. However, the absence of political freedoms in Azerbaijan and unwillingness to adhere to the EU human rights frameworks undermine its implementation.

Currently, the legal basis for the cooperation framework between Azerbaijan and the EU has been the same as between Armenia and the EU – the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (1999), the ENP (2004), the EaP (2009), and the Visa Facilitation and Readmission Agreement (2014). However, unlike in Armenia where the EU has been successful in advancing certain reforms, EU dependence on Azerbaijan's energy supplies undermined the EU's ability to advance democratic reforms and human rights protection. The Azerbaijani government, meanwhile, legislatively restricted civil society activities and imprisoned and persecuted scores of civic activists and human rights advocates, which led to a split within the EU member states' approach to the country. Some countries evaluate the EU-Azerbaijan relations through the prism of their energy dependence on Azerbaijani oil and gas (Merabihsvili 2015), while others prioritize human rights. As a result, although EU officials voice their concerns about human rights violations in Azerbaijan, the improvement of civil and political liberties is rarely, if ever, used as a precondition for trade relations between the EU and Azerbaijan.

The Azerbaijani government, regarded as authoritarian in the West, was expected to make some concessions to the EU and the US to gain back a certain

degree of legitimacy (Rumyansev 2014). These concessions implied institutional reforms, respect for human rights, and adherence to other “western” values and principles. The Azerbaijani government carried out imitations of such changes and poured resources into public relations campaigns aimed at improving its image abroad. Consequently, any criticism of Azerbaijan or its government was taken defensively. The criticism from the EU, however, led to growing anti-European rhetoric in Azerbaijan, although this rhetoric has been skillfully applied against the specific European or American organizations that criticize the Azerbaijani regime, and not the western countries per se. The anti-West rhetoric in Azerbaijan is further fueled by the popular discourse that the West, and particularly France and the US, are in the pocket of the Armenian lobby.

Regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the EU largely stays out of the official process rhetorically supporting the work of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs and periodically mentioning that the status quo is not sustainable and the situation over the line of contact raises concerns (Council of the European Union 2016). The EU, leaving the official track to the US and Russia, has assumed the role of the international actor that supports civil society efforts. However, its role remains rather rhetorical, resulting in very little action on the ground. However, the EU continuously commits substantial amounts of funding to the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process through a mechanism called the European Partnership for the Peaceful Settlement of the Conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh (EPNK). The funding is transferred to a number of European non-governmental organizations and only a negligible part of it reaches the conflict zone. Between 2012 and 2015, out of a total of €6 million allocated to confidence building in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict through the EPNK, only €100,000 were distributed to organizations on the ground through EPNK’s Regional Grant Initiative. The bulk of money is spent on coordinating meetings among the European non-governmental organizations and other Europe-based discussions about the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict with little impact on the ground (The European Partnership for the Peaceful Settlement of the Conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh 2013).

Unlike Armenia and Azerbaijan, Georgia remained committed to its path toward the EU integration for many years despite the changes in leadership and in the geo-political situation. The EU supports Georgia, first of all, because of its steady commitment to institutional reform and democratization, the history of relatively free and fair elections, the fight against corruption, and more. Furthermore, given the geographic proximity of the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia to the EU, its member states acknowledge the importance of

contributing to the peace processes and to stability, as mentioned in the EU Security Strategy of 2003. During the war of August 2008, the EU led the mediation between the conflict parties by putting forward a ceasefire agreement, providing humanitarian assistance, conducting a civilian monitoring mission, and ensuring financial assistance to Georgia (Whitman and Wolff 2010). Although the EU-appointed fact-finding mission acknowledged the Georgian artillery's attack on Tskhinval/i calling the following Georgian offensive "questionable", it criticized all sides for violating humanitarian and human rights law and condemned Russia for recognizing Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia 2009). With Georgia being the final 'loyal to the EU' country in the South Caucasus, the EU shows no signs of abandoning the integration processes. In June 2014, the EU and Georgia signed the Association Agreement, and it included the DCFTA. In December 2015, the EU declared Georgia's progress on the Visa Liberalization Action Plan and granted it a visa free regime starting from summer 2016.

Russian foreign policy in the South Caucasus

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia, mindful of its own ethno-territorial conflicts, had a limited yet important influence on the conflicts in the South Caucasus throughout the 1990s. However, starting from 2000, when Vladimir Putin came to power, Russia's role in the South Caucasus grew. Arguably, the conflicts served as an efficient tool for augmenting Russian influence in the region.

The two questions addressed in this section are:

- What were the main objectives of Russia's policy in the South Caucasus since 2000 and what role did the CIS, CSTO, and Eurasian Economic Community (EAEC) play in this policy?
- What was or was not achieved and why?

Russia's major goals since President Putin assumed office have been the reestablishment and maintenance of the Russian sphere of influence in the former Soviet Union, including the South Caucasus¹³, and the impediment the

¹³ On the other hand, some public and academic voices often interpret such attempts of Russia's leadership as endeavors to restore the Soviet Union, sometimes referring to the statement made by Vladimir Putin in 2005 calling the collapse of the Soviet Union "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century" **Specificata fonte non valida.** This

EU's, and more so NATO's expansion into the South Caucasus to prevent "the Western encirclement of Russia" (Friedman 2008).

The main instruments for achieving these goals have been the CIS and the CSTO, and the former has proved itself quite ineffective. Only a small percentage of the agreements its members signed since its inception in late 1991 have been implemented. The second one, which numbers far less countries than the CIS, as well as the Single Economic Space (SES), have been more efficient in achieving their tasks. In later years, Moscow created several more comprehensive integration projects, such as the EAEC, the Eurasian Customs Union, and the EAEU. In October 2014, Armenia, the only South Caucasus country that participated in these initiatives, signed its EAEU Accession Agreement, which came into effect in 2015.

Complications that the CIS and the CSTO face are those connected with security in Central Asia due to the increasing violence in northern Afghanistan. In addition, according to the statement of the Russian President Vladimir Putin, some 5,000 to 7,000 people from the CIS were fighting alongside Islamic State militants (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty 2015).

Russia-Georgia relations

The Georgian Rose Revolution and the Ukrainian Orange Revolution, followed by the EU association and NATO accession negotiations, rang alarm bells for Russia's national security. After the US promise that NATO would not expand into the former Soviet Union republics was broken since the 1990s with the accession of the Baltic states, the threat was real. Through the August 2008 war and the current Ukrainian crisis, Russia signaled that it would not tolerate NATO's looming expansion.

Another motive for the August 2008 war was the recognition of Kosovo's independence despite the Russian objection and support for Serbia. From the Russian perspective, in Kosovo Europe and the US violated the post-World War 2 principle that conflict prevention necessitates that the national borders would not be changed. As a response to Kosovo's recognition by the West, South Ossetia's and Abkhazia's independence was recognized by Russia, and any objections from the US and Europe in this regard would simply confirm their hypocrisy (Friedman 2008).

interpretation makes a significant difference in making solid geopolitical prognoses of further dynamics as well as for domestic developments in the former Soviet republics.

Despite successful military campaigns in Georgia in August 2008, as well as in Ukraine currently, Russia is struggling to keep these countries in its sphere of influence. In 2014, Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova signed Association Agreements with the EU, effectively closing the door to their participation in the EAEU. Following the Association Agreement, the EU also offered visa liberalization to Georgian citizens on December 18, 2015 (European Commission 2015). Interestingly, the visa liberalization was preceded by the Russian initiative to relax its visa requirements for Georgian citizens on November 19, 2015 (Lomsadze, Russia, EU: Who Will Liberalize Visas for Georgians First? 2015). Therefore, while Russia managed to complicate the prospects for the integration of Georgia or Ukraine into NATO, it was unable to prevent their political and economic integration with the West.

One of the consequences of the August 2008 war was Russia's return to the geo-political scene moving from a regional power to a global actor. That has been subsequently reconfirmed by its engagement in Crimea and Syria.

The countries opposite Russia in these conflicts also had some gains despite the military defeats. Georgia and Ukraine received declarations of solidarity from many in the international community, humanitarian and financial aid, support for the development of civil society, infrastructure, and support in the fight against corruption. They implemented a wide range of reforms in many spheres of public life. They also lost a lot, including human resources and territories. They were plunged into an economic crisis and had the trauma of societies that "lost" the war.

By 2012, Georgia adopted a new constitution and became a parliamentary republic. Mikheil Saakashvili's party lost the elections to the coalition called Georgian Dream that held a more moderate position regarding Georgian-Russian relations. However, this did not prevent the Russia-backed South Ossetian authorities from establishing a fence that demarcates the South Ossetian territory. Furthermore, according to Georgian sources, the border fence has been continually moving forward.

Currently the slow-moving Georgian-Russian official dialogue takes place in the Geneva International Discussions launched after the August 2008 war. A number of less formal dialogues are also taking place, most notably the Abashidze-Karasin format that brought together a special representative of the prime minister of Georgia and the deputy foreign minister of Russia. The informal interactions established since 2012 have contributed to discussions of economic relations and trade and communication. They also led to Moscow's

recent initiative of visa simplification for Georgian citizens, the promised opening of the border between the two countries, the removal of the visa requirement for Russian citizens, and the resulting increase in the number of Russian tourists to Georgia.

Russia-Azerbaijan relations

Russia-Azerbaijan relations involve Azerbaijan crafting an independent path and steps by Russia to keep Azerbaijan in its zone of influence. The energy politics and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict have both been central in advancing these policies. While Azerbaijan spent most of the 1990s and 2000s developing energy routes independent of Russia, currently it is working hard on improving relations with Russia with the aim of changing the status quo in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The smaller-scale clashes along the contact line that have defined the conflict for the past 20 years are yielding space to larger-scale fighting. Furthermore, the Armenian media has been expressing concern that the recent Russian-Azerbaijani rapprochement might lead to Russia lending diplomatic support to Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in return for Azerbaijan joining the Russia-led Eurasian Union (Stratfor 2015). This recent Russian-Azerbaijani diplomatic rapprochement can be also explained by the lifting of Western sanctions on Iran, and Armenia potentially becoming a transit country for Iranian oil and natural gas (Stratfor 2015), a prospect to which Russia is fiercely opposed. Russia has also been concerned with Iran's plans to build a railway through Armenia to Georgia. Instead, on April 2016 the North-South Transport Corridor from Iran to Russia's Baltic ports through Azerbaijan was announced, taking precedence over the plans for transit through Armenia.

In spite of certain disagreements with Moscow over the Nagorno-Karabakh settlement and energy policy, Azerbaijan's political elite has strong ties to Moscow dating back to the Soviet period, while the details of these personal relationships remain invisible to the public eye. The Azerbaijani elites also maintain close relations with wealthy Azerbaijanis who live in Moscow. Russian Ambassador to Baku Vasily Istratov stated that he mentored many of Azerbaijan's elites during his days as a professor at Moscow State University, including Presidential Advisor Ali Hasanov (Global Security 2013).

Azerbaijan and Russia also have in common the presence of many former Soviet officials in their governments. This creates a shared outlook that is propelling Azerbaijan to follow a political path similar to Russia in domestic policy. In both countries, the ruling party works to limit civil society and drastically weaken

the opposition. As the political models in the two countries converge, the relationship between Moscow and Baku further improve (Global Security 2013).

Russia-Armenia relations

Since the breakup of the Soviet Union, among the South Caucasus countries Armenia maintained the closest and most pragmatic relationship with Russia, the illustration of which is its participation in all Russia-led post-Soviet integration projects (CIS, CSTO, EAEC, SES, Eurasian Customs Union, EAEU). For the first years after independence, Armenia exercised a balanced policy participating also in Western-led initiatives, such NATO's Partnership for Peace, the EaP, and others whereas in the recent years, Armenia found it increasingly difficult to maintain this balance. The late leaning on Russia was determined by Armenia's lack of choice due to its limited natural resources, landlocked geopolitical position, closed borders and conflicts with Azerbaijan and the latter's ally Turkey.

Armenian-Russian relations, however, are not always smooth and are often tested by incidents such as the tragic slaying of an Armenian family by a Russian soldier in January 2015 and the inability of the Armenian government to try him in an Armenian court. The 2015 "Electric Yerevan" protests were held effectively against the Russia-held monopoly over the energy sector. More importantly, the Russian ambivalence during the "Four-Day War" in April 2016 in Nagorno-Karabakh was also troubling.

Yet few in Armenia see an alternative to Russian policies. Although the Armenian government, opposition, and civil society all are unanimously against territorial concessions to Azerbaijan, they realize that the state of no-war and no-peace is only manageable through a military alliance with Russia. Therefore, it is not surprising that only one of the six parties represented in the Armenian parliament has openly opposed membership in the EAEU (Danielyan 2015).

As a new reality emerged in the Middle East with the Iran nuclear deal and Armenia's potential to become a transit country for Iranian oil and natural gas, Russia increased its economic presence in Armenia, while also pushing influential Armenians living in Russia to enter Armenian politics (Stratfor 2015). With these actions, Russia aims to keep Armenia firmly in its sphere of influence and away from the West, and thwart Armenia's development into an oil transit country and capacity to devise an independent policy.

Finally, Russia serves as the main arms supplier to Armenia and Azerbaijan, as well as to Nagorno-Karabakh's Armenia-backed army. Russia claims to ensure the relative parity between the sides through discounted sales to Armenia, which is struggling to keep up with oil-rich Azerbaijan's military expenditures (Danielyan 2015).

Turkey's foreign policy in the South Caucasus

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Turkey was one of the first countries to recognize Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, aiming to establish relations and cultural and economic ties. Ethno-linguistic affinity has been important while building relations with Azerbaijan. At the same time, history had to be deemphasized to establish relations with Armenia. Considering the absence of borders connecting Turkey and Azerbaijan (with the exception of Nakhchivan that in its turn is separated from the rest of Azerbaijan by Armenia), Georgia started serving as a transit route between them. Over time, a strong economic partnership developed among Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Georgia.

The Turkey-Azerbaijan-Georgia triangle

In the 1990s and 2000s, Azerbaijan and Turkey established relations of intense partnership. As Azerbaijan's conflict with Armenia deepened, and the shortest route connecting the two allies started looking politically infeasible, Georgia became the transit country and gradually developed into an ally as well. The BTC oil pipeline and the BTE gas pipeline projects have played a significant role in the development of strategic cooperation between the three countries. In the 2000s, Russia's revised South Caucasus policy and the August 2008 war brought Ankara, Baku, and Tbilisi even closer. With the oil pipeline already functioning, the work on the BTE gas pipeline began in 2002 and ended in 2006 transporting 7.7 billion cubic meters of gas annually (Sandıklı, Gafarlı and İsmayılov 2014).

Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey signed an agreement in 2012 on the Trans-Anatolian Pipeline (TANAP, natural gas) and the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP, natural gas) projects. According to predictions, the volume of natural gas to be transited in 2023 will be 23 billion cubic meters, and in 2026 the volume might reach 31 billion. Azerbaijan currently meets 20 percent of Turkey's demand for gas. In 2016, gas from the Shah Deniz Stage 2 bed will start being transported to Turkey and this bed will acquire a 30 percent share in Turkey's domestic market in the future (Starr and Cornell 2005).

The ministers of foreign affairs of Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey met in Trabzon in 2012 for the first time to further strengthen cooperation between

them and issued a declaration (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey 2012). The first meeting of the presidents took place in 2014. The regional collaboration with Azerbaijan and Georgia has been considered a success in Turkish foreign policy. Referred to as the “trilateral partnership”, this experience has been later applied to other countries. In 2011, the first trilateral meeting among Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Iran took place in Urmia, and in 2014 Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Turkmenistan created a trilateral format of cooperation in Baku (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey 2014).

Some analysts have referred to the trilateral cooperation between Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Georgia as the “Three Musketeers” (Shiriyev 2016) in reference to Alexander Dumas’s historical fiction work. In this allegory, the US plays the role of D’Artagnan as the fourth outside partner to this cooperation. Washington advocated bringing Georgia into Azerbaijan-Turkey alliance. Brussels provided similar support as well when the energy projects developed by Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Georgia became alternatives to Russian natural gas, thereby contributing to the diversification and energy security of Europe.

Turkey-Armenia relations

While prioritizing the development of cooperation with Azerbaijan and Georgia, Turkey did not ignore its relations with Armenia, either. Ahmed Davutoğlu, during his tenure as the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, advanced a few initiatives. The first major initiative that “broke the ice” was the Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation Commission that functioned in the early 2000s and was supported by the US government. While it failed to bring about the establishment of formal diplomatic relations, it paved the way for many civil society initiatives and further official efforts.

Informal talks were held between Turkey and Armenia during the terms of Abdullah Gül, Ali Babacan, and Ahmed Davutoğlu in the Foreign Ministry from 2003 to 2009. These negotiations were made public in 2008 when the Turkish and Armenian presidents attended a soccer match, starting what became known as the “football diplomacy.” Despite the initial hope and the signing of diplomatic protocols in 2009 in Switzerland, the process was soon frozen, the Turkey-Armenia border remained closed, and the protocols were never ratified by the parliaments (Iskandaryan 2009). The reason for the failure was the Turkish demand for Armenia to evacuate some territories around the former Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) in exchange for the border opening. However, Yerevan insisted on separating the Turkey-Armenia normalization process from the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process. Azerbaijan

treated the “football diplomacy” with harsh criticism and the Turkish leadership resolved that Azerbaijan’s interests could not be circumvented. The Turkish government froze the normalization process when it understood that moving forward with the border opening without extracting concessions for Azerbaijan might damage Turkey-Azerbaijan relations.

Some symbolic gestures have also taken place. In 2007, Turkey restored an important Armenian historic church in Van called Akhtamar. In 2014, Ahmed Davutoğlu’s “Just Memory” article was published in Turkish Policy Quarterly, suggesting a path to reconciliation (Davutoğlu 2014) by reevaluating Turkish-Armenian relations and remembering mutual massacres, while focusing on the history of positive relations between Turks and Armenians. In support of the “Just Memory” project, studies that communicate important positive historical relations between Turks and Armenians have been initiated (Gafarlı, Dilemma in Turkey’s Armenian Foreign Policy 2015). The initiative, however, was not well received by Davutoğlu’s Armenian interlocutors who saw an attempt to whitewash their demand for genocide recognition. A debate was initiated on the pages of Turkish Policy Quarterly as well (Libaridian 2014).

A growing number of civil society efforts have also taken place. The Hrant Dink Foundation, Anadolu Kultur, and the Eurasian Partnership Foundation of Armenia have led some of the largest-scale efforts and initiatives, while many other civil society and media organizations, as well as academic institutions and artists, have led many smaller initiatives. One initiative of the Turkish Ministry of culture is based on Davutoğlu’s “Just Memory” concept and has become known as “Ani Diplomacy”. It aims at increasing mutual awareness among the younger generations of Turks and Armenians. The key component of the project involves the restoration and rehabilitation of cultural artifacts and holy sites that carry significance for the Armenians, including the ancient city of Ani (Gafarlı, Dilemma in Turkey’s Armenian Foreign Policy 2015) (Directorate General of Press and Information, Office of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Turkey 2015).

With the recent escalation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the deterioration of the Turkish-Armenian relations, the Turkey-Armenia normalization process has been put on hold, and the border opening looks increasingly less realistic.

Turkey-Abkhazia relations

Turkish-Abkhazian relations are also characterized by historical ties. Approximately 1.5 million people from the North Caucasus were forced to

migrate to the Ottoman Empire during the Circassian exile of 1864-1877 (Gafarlı, *The North Caucasus Diaspora in Turkey–Russia Relations* 2014). The Circassians of today's Turkey who have been estranged from their homeland for two centuries supported the Abkhazians during the Georgian-Abkhazian war in the early 1990s. Today, according to informal records, there are five million Circassians living in Turkey, and some of them have positions in public, military, political, and business sectors. They have a strong diaspora, affected Turkey's foreign policy, and lobbied for relations with Abkhazia (Gafarlı, *The North Caucasus Diaspora in Turkey–Russia Relations* 2014). At the same time, Turkey supports the territorial integrity of Georgia. Therefore, while Abkhazia doesn't have a de jure recognition by Ankara, their trade relations amounted to 30 percent of Abkhazia's total trade in 2007, prior to Russia's recognition of Abkhazia. Since then, the Russian share in trade with Abkhazia has consistently grown, and Turkey remains the second largest trade partner with its trade accounting for 22 percent of the total in 2009 and 18 percent in 2012. The trade turnover between Turkey and Abkhazia was \$200 million in 2014. Passenger ships sailed between Sukhum/i and Trabzon until 1996, but they were later prohibited with Georgia's embargo against Abkhazia. Also, visits of Abkhazians living in Turkey to Abkhazia became difficult (Kapanadze 2014).

Vice Minister Ünal Çeviköz's visit to Abkhazia was the first for any diplomat representing a NATO country since the August 2008 war (Güvenç 2009). There were speculations after his visit that Turkey might recognize Abkhazia's independence in return for Russia's recognition of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). However, they did not materialize. Russia's Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov denied the allegations and countered those claims by declaring that Russia has no plans to recognize the TRNC.

The relationship between Turkey and Abkhazia was further complicated, of course, by Abkhazia joining the Russian sanctions against Turkey. While the move would hardly affect Turkey, it is likely to deal a severe blow to Abkhazia's economy by leaving it no other outlet to the world beside Russia.

Iran's foreign policy in the South Caucasus

Iran, located at the southern borders of the Caucasus, due to its geographical position and political leverage, is among the most important actors of the region. Iran's coastline on the Caspian Sea certainly adds to its influential position in the region. Tehran, which sought to enhance its relations with the South Caucasus states after the collapse of the Soviet Union, has pursued a policy of self-preeminence concerning regional matters. Previously, Iran

responded to the Western policy towards this region by positioning itself within a Moscow axis; in this novel period, it seems to have adopted a more comprehensive policy.

Iran-Azerbaijan relations

Iran-Azerbaijan relations have had many ups and downs. Iran on the one hand insists that it sees Azerbaijan as having a shared history and culture and on the other hand perceives it as a threat towards its national security because of the large Azerbaijani population in the northwestern part of Iran, which according to some sources is close to 25 million people (Keskin n.d.). As a result, bilateral relations are formed around this security axis. Adding to this, the pro-Armenian position of Iran perceived by Azerbaijanis in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, or at the very least the absence of support for Azerbaijan, has been adding to the anti-Iranian sentiment within Azerbaijan.

Still, relations tended to improve in the early years of Azerbaijan's independence and many partnerships were formed. In recent years, however, Azerbaijan's rise as a significant actor within the energy markets and with the increase of western-backed projects similar to the BTC oil pipeline, have created disjoints within Iran-Azerbaijan relations. Pressure from the US to prevent Iran from benefiting from these projects has pushed Iran to adopt a pro-Russian outlook within its Caucasus politics.

Baku's cooperation with the West in the "War on Terror" and energy-related projects, as well as complying with the sanctions against Iran and closely cooperating with Israel in military matters have a great impact on Tehran's views of Baku, adding to the mutual suspicion.

Another important matter in bilateral relations is the Caspian Sea. The dissolution of Soviet Union and the emergence of new countries having a coastline on the Caspian Sea have complicated relations. Azerbaijan's recent proposal of recognizing the Caspian as a sea and every coastal country having their own territorial waters were rejected by Russia, and the greatest support for this rejection came from Iran. The divisive issue of the Caspian, which is significant for energy resources and repercussions for regional relations, constitutes a major rift between Azerbaijan and Iran (Abilov 2011) with a potential for a violent confrontation, as was the case in 2001 when Iran intercepted an Azerbaijani oil ship in the Caspian Sea and threatened Baku with its warplanes (Ali 2012).

In 2005, with President Mahmud Ahmadinejad assuming office in Iran, a rapprochement was made. Tehran improved its treatment of the Azerbaijani population of Iran, though its harsh warning to Baku from time to time also tensed up the issues. Espionage, border crossings, and illegal trafficking were the main matters that damaged relations (BBC 2012).

At the same time, some major projects between Iran and Azerbaijan continue developing. The North-South Transport Corridor is one of them and will provide great opportunities to both Azerbaijan and Iran to become transit routes between Europe and India. Today's Azerbaijani leadership is interested in increasing its cooperation with Iran and becoming Iran's main partner in the South Caucasus, competing for that role with Armenia.

Iran-Armenia relations

Iran cooperates with Armenia in the sectors of trade, energy, and transportation. Armenia, landlocked and blockaded by Turkey and Azerbaijan, relies on Georgia and Iran as its only ground transportation routes. For Iran, which was for decades sanctioned by the West and left out of regional development projects such as the BTC oil pipeline, its relations with Armenia allowed it to become a regional actor in the South Caucasus. Iran-Armenia relations accelerated since 1998 under the presidency of Robert Kocharyan and improved further during the Serzh Sargsyan era along the line of the "strategic partnership" discourse advanced by the Iranian President Ahmadinejad (Times.am 2011). The Armenian community living in Iran is estimated to be around 200,000 people and it plays an active role in promoting bilateral relations.

The Iran-Armenia natural gas pipeline, which opened in 2006, is of great importance to Armenia's energy demands. There were plans to further stretch the current 140-kilometer-long pipeline to reach Europe via Georgia. With Russian pressure, however, this project was limited to solely supplying Armenia's energy needs (Jalilvand 2013). The construction of a hydroelectric plant and a high voltage transmission line along the border between these two countries is currently ongoing (Asbarez 2015). The 470-kilometer-long Iran-Armenia railway, the 556-kilometer-long North-South highway, and an oil pipeline project are also in development. These are not only important to the bilateral relations and economies of the two countries, but they also aim to position them better in the region (Barrow 2013). The former Iranian President Mahmud Ahmadinejad's call for free trade and the sustainment of long-term bilateral relations in 2012 was also significant (Claude and William 2013).

The bilateral trade volume between the two countries stands at about \$300 million a year, and the potential is estimated to be over \$1 billion (Armenpress 2015). Therefore, while the volume of trade is relatively low despite years of contacts, the benefits of the Iran-Armenia cooperation are not so much economic as political, giving Iran a regional political influence (Giragosian 2015). With Armenia as a corridor, these projects facilitate Iran's reach to Georgia.

Politically, Iran kept a relatively neutral line in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Although it continuously offered its services as a mediator, this offer was not picked up by the conflict parties with the exception of 1992-1993 when active negotiations led to short-lived ceasefires. Throughout the years, Iran's relations with its northern neighbors have been changing. On the one hand, Iran has been trying to improve its relations with Azerbaijan based on cultural and religious affinities. On the other hand, it has been developing relations with Armenia based on economic and political considerations as Iran sees Armenia, and particularly its partner Russia, as allies that can prevent the spread of Western interests in the region and hinder Turkey's increasing influence, opening up possibilities for itself.

Iran-Georgia relations

Due to the absence of a common border, Iran-Georgia relations have been limited to the implementation of various economic, energy, and transportation projects via Armenia, commerce, and the aspiration of gaining influence over Georgia's Shia population.

Georgia has aligned itself closely with the West. Georgia's support for the US military exploits in the Middle East prompted Tehran to approach Tbilisi with suspicion during the staunchly pro-Western Saakashvili times. Similarly, Washington warned Tbilisi not to get too close with Tehran (Schwartz 2006). Hence, Tbilisi had to follow a balanced policy between Washington and Tehran (Lomsadze, In US-Iran Conflict, Georgia Walks Thin Line Between Ally and Neighbor 2012). After the change of the ruling party in Georgia in 2012 and a shift toward a more balanced policy, the presidency of moderate Giorgi Margvelashvili in 2013 opened up new possibilities.

Following the August 2008 war, Georgia's ongoing strain in relations with Russia and difficulties in the energy sector further pushed Tbilisi toward Tehran (Chilcote 2006). While criticizing the US for the war, Iran declared support for Georgia's territorial integrity (Press TV 2009). This signaled a change in Iranian policy. Iran had initially supported Russian policy toward

promoting the interests of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in their struggle for independence, but realizing that it might damage its relations with Georgia, it reversed the approach (Abkhaz World 2009).

As the cooperation grew starting from 2008 at the initiatives of the presidents, it was declared that Iran would open hydroelectric plants in Georgia and purchase electricity from there (High Beam Research 2010). With the decision to improve bilateral relations in 2010, several agreements were signed by the foreign ministries. Dubbed as the “historic meeting”, the agreements included a visa-free regime, Iran’s opening of a consulate in Batumi, and other steps (Lomsadze, Georgia: Tbilisi and Tehran Drop Visa Requirements, Resume Direct Flights 2010). However, Georgia’s cooperation with Iran during the western embargoes was criticized by the US (Faucon, Solomon and Fassihi 2013) prompting Tbilisi to abolish the visa-free regime and freeze the bank accounts of 150 Iranian businessmen (Democracy and Freedom Watch 2013).

Understanding the difficulties faced by the Georgian side, Tehran was not overly critical and with time several economic and energy agreements were reached (Caucasus Business Week 2015). Iran, by extending the collaboration on projects it has with Armenia and Georgia, aspires to enhance its standing within the region (Financial Tribune 2015).

Another dynamic between the two countries is Iran’s strategy to gain influence over the Shia population in Georgia. Religious activities in Iran, especially in the predominantly Azerbaijani-populated region of Kvemo Kartli, triggered concerns in Tbilisi (Prasad 2012). The madrassas, educational centers, journals, and other printed materials set up by Iranian missionaries are being criticized by the Georgians (Aliyeva 2005).

A comparative analysis of the policies of global and regional actors in the South Caucasus

With Georgia getting ready for NATO membership, Armenia’s membership in the CSTO, and Azerbaijan’s aims at neutrality, it can be argued that a balance among global and regional powers has been achieved in the South Caucasus. On the other hand, the policies of Russia, Turkey, and Iran as global and regional powers in the South Caucasus show that they have convergent opinions about changing the status quo and similar reservations about a possible change. Turkey, Iran, and Russia have common reservations about the expansion of extra-regional actors into the region.

Illustrative of this type of reservation is Ankara's resistance to the possibility of large US naval ships advancing across the Black Sea in support of Tbilisi during the August 2008 war. Perhaps to ease the tensions in the region, this resistance also indicated Turkey's gatekeeping in the South Caucasus towards extra-regional actors. Turkey had a selective approach toward Russia and Iran. Ankara, by presenting the Caucasus Security Platform in 2008, was willing to share a sphere of influence with Moscow while excluding Iran. At that time, Russia challenged the Platform's viability and after the plane crisis in November 2015, Russia posed a challenge directly to Turkey rather than isolated challenges to its initiatives in the South Caucasus.

Perhaps now that the sanctions against Iran are lifted, Moscow and Tehran will enter into a tug-of-war for their interests in the South Caucasus while relations between Iran and Turkey will turn into one of cooperation in the South Caucasus. A partnership in the energy sector between Turkey and Iran is the first opportunity that comes to mind. Iran's natural gas is the best source assuming that Turkmenistan doesn't join the TANAP and TAP projects. The cooperation between Iran and Turkey surely includes Azerbaijan, and the trilateral foreign policy dialogue platform between Turkey, Iran, and Azerbaijan is indicative of the great potential to defuse the tensions between Azerbaijan and Iran.

At the same time, a partnership between Iran and Turkey will disturb Russia in the long-term. If Iran gets closer to the EU and the US in the near future, a larger-scale harmony may emerge in the relations between the US, EU, Iran, and Turkey, and Russia's impact in the region might diminish. While 'Old Europe' is likely to resist the integration of the EU and the South Caucasus, 'New Europe,' ignoring US support, will continue lobbying for the South Caucasus countries. Poland's role in this area is especially noteworthy. The lack of motivation in 'Old Europe' in integration is conditioned by risks of high tension with Russia. It is important for Brussels that the expansion to the East brings stability and not crisis.

Policy recommendations

While there are concrete geographical and historical reasons why the South Caucasus could emerge as a cohesive region in the post-Soviet era, the always outward-looking geopolitical alignment of each of the states in the South Caucasus with extra-regional actors as well as the interactions of these extra-regional actors among each other make the South Caucasus nothing more than a jigsaw puzzle of overlapping or conflicting interests. This is not to suggest to

the global and regional actors to pursue policies that treat the South Caucasus as a whole or that treat each of the states on an individual basis. The first option is faulty because the region is torn apart; the second one is faulty because it will tear the region even more apart. This is, therefore, to suggest to the global and regional actors pursuing policies that *will help* the South Caucasus to become a region. It is of course also necessary that the South Caucasus states themselves stop canceling out each other's opportunities for cooperation or seek their security guarantees inside the region rather than outside. However, it seems that they have had little to learn from their allies and partners that have incomparably more freedom to choose policy. The EU (and the US) and Russia seem to have done better at blocking the success of each other's initiatives in the region – for example the EAEU or the EaP – than achieving success in their own initiatives.

How could the regional and global actors' policies forge a South Caucasus not only in the geographical sense but in a geopolitical sense and how would this meet the interests of these actors?

There seems to be a task division between these actors. The US is stronger on the political end and the EU is stronger on the civil society end in the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Meanwhile, the US has less of a political role in the Abkhazian and Ossetian conflicts with the EU engaging here more actively. If the new US administration does not subordinate its engagement with the South Caucasus countries to the relations with Russia, it can further coordinate engagement with the civil societies of the region with the EU. Since there is more synergy between these two actors, joint policy approaches rather than task division might heighten the efficiency of these approaches. Similarly, the EU can have a more active political role in the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. It can draw on the experience in the Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian context to advance an incident prevention mechanism for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as well.

The EU and the US could develop policies that prioritize not the integration of this region into large transnational structures but inter-regional integration, by pushing, for example, projects of inclusive cargo transport flows inside the region to start a process of de-isolation in the region. The geographic location of the region between Russia and Europe should be taken into consideration and policies that do not exclude collaboration with either actor should be promoted, thus avoiding the construction of "fences" between the region and its immediate neighbors or inside the region. If intraregional cooperation is prioritized, the EU and the US can try to forge a regional consensus which will

be easier to legitimize and reconcile with Russia's approach to the region than integration policies into various structures that are beyond the region.

This type of an approach would ultimately contribute to the EU's and the US's shared goal of achieving a peaceful and stable South Caucasus in Europe's neighborhood and a secured flow of Caspian energy resources. The EU and the US need to treat the South Caucasus as a single block, not only offering equal partnerships *to* each country as the ENP or the EaP have done but offering partnership *among* the countries. While the EU, being an external to the region actor, has not been successful in generating integration like Germany and France once did for European integration, it can "lend the idea" and provide guidance for the region to go through its own process.

The realization of any integration project – Eurasian or European – in the South Caucasus demands extreme caution from all initiators and participants of such projects. More importantly, the expansion of mutually exclusive security structures such as NATO or CSTO is very destructive and counter-productive to the cause of security in the region.

Western policy analysis may discard Russia's concerns about NATO's expansion into its "near abroad" as groundless; however, this does not dissipate these concerns nor their influence on the policies that Russia exercises towards what it concerns its "defensive depth" (Cohen 2003). Having lost this "defensive depth" in Ukraine and most of Eastern Europe, Russia's attention is towards the states of the South Caucasus and Central Asia. Here its security considerations are coupled with its energy policies as well. The importance of relations with the countries of the South Caucasus becomes bigger in view of what lies beyond the South Caucasus: Turkey and the Middle East. By establishing a "buffer" in the South Caucasus, Russia has often been accused of exercising the "Controlled Conflict Strategy" or what it would describe as the "Parity Strategy." Whatever the name, this strategy can best be exercised in the context of regional stability. However, for a true development of the EAEU and CSTO, Russia would need not only a stable but also an internally collaborative South Caucasus. The susceptibility to conflicts and the risk of Islamic extremism spreading in the region create an extremely volatile environment for the pursuit of Russian interests.

While keeping or attracting states into Russia's sphere of influence creates tensions inside the countries of the South Caucasus and creates or reinforces the divides among these countries as well, an alternative to creating a "buffer" would be the creation of a "neutral zone" in the South Caucasus, which would

mean steps on Russia's behalf nurturing regional consensus prior to offering integration projects to the region. If Georgia's security concerns are neutralized, it would not have to actively seek accession to NATO. If the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is resolved, the choices that Armenia makes in its alliances would not have the touch of "no better options left." The other option to the militarization of the region is to create prospects for greater and sustainable economic gains through regional cooperation, not only intra-regional but also inter-regional by connecting to Iran and having a truly functioning segment in the Silk Road. Russia's role in what the South Caucasus can make of Iran's de-isolation can be turned into a positive force.

All three South Caucasus states expect to benefit in one way or another from the removal of sanctions on Iran. The states in the region as well as their immediate neighbors could work together to build consensus and create a multilateral trade off of interests. Armenia and Iran could overcome the consequences of their long-term isolation, while Azerbaijan could change its take on Iran by decoupling its close cooperation with the latter from a request of exclusion of Armenia from such cooperation. If the South Caucasus countries continue hindering each other's projects, Iran will not waste its attention on the regional tangle and will instead explore possibilities with other partners in the world. The alternative cooperative scenario would open numerous prospects for all actors concerned.

Speaking in specific terms, Russia could come forward with constructive proposals that build on the overlap between its interests and those of the countries in the region. For example, the reopening of the railway (at least in cargo transport) that passes through Abkhazia, which Georgia has resisted, could be coupled with a compromise on the Russian side to loosen the resistance on Georgia's attempts to diversify its gas supply by connecting to Iran via Armenia. This coupled with a full-fledged implementation of the railway project connecting Russia, Azerbaijan, and Iran would create a distribution of regional projects where Armenia and Azerbaijan would be asked not to disapprove of the projects that bypass them. At the same time, they would benefit from the unhindered implementation of the projects through their territories. Russia would get the cargo route through Abkhazia and onto Armenia as well as major grain exports to Iran through the railway passing through Azerbaijan.

Another area of cooperation within the region could be a large regional project of revival and reconstruction of cultural heritage. Turkey has already implemented a few important projects of restoring Armenian churches, and

Turkey and Georgia agreed on a process of reciprocal restoration of mosques and churches. If this reciprocity is brought to a regional level, then areas of overlapping interest may emerge also for Azerbaijan and Iran to be involved.

Similarly, due to a considerable amount of dialogue, Turkish-Armenian civil society relations have an important experience that can be shared throughout the region. However, without Azerbaijani or Russian contribution, the Turkish-Armenian reconciliation meets a wall. Turkish-Georgian and Turkish-Azerbaijani civil society relations can be plugged into this process, thereby creating a region-wide dialogue since quite often these bilateral processes are not well informed about the progress in the other parallel but detached processes.

Measures such as these would also help the global and regional powers rebuild their reputations rather than supremacy in the region and even in each other's eyes. Despite the popular voice being quite powerless in instigating political change in the South Caucasus, public opinion in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia is either split or growingly hostile towards different regional and global actors, and steps regaining credibility for policy interventions are also indispensable.

Appendix 1

This paper is an analysis of the policies of regional powers, global actors, and global powers in the South Caucasus for the past 25 years. *Global powers* are understood here as those that have the *de jure* capacity to reshape boundaries anywhere in the world. *Global actors*, while having the power to influence political processes in the world, can *de facto* change the boundaries inside their region only. *Regional powers*, on the other hand, have the capacity to influence political processes regionally.

The cases of Kosovo, Abkhazia, Ossetia, and Crimea are good examples for understanding this difference between a *global power* and a *global actor*. When the US and the European countries supported Kosovo's independence in 1998, the international community supported these decisions. Since then Kosovo has gained diplomatic recognition as a sovereign state by 108 United Nations member states. This shows the *de jure* capacity of the US as a global power.

The EU's role on the world scene has been shaped by the transatlantic bargain made with the US and assuming more responsibility on the EU for stability and security in its own backyard to the east and south. With this new structural challenges in the transatlantic relationship, the occasional lack of alignment among European countries, as well as the global power shifts – “the rise of the rest”, the EU is shaping its new Global Strategy with an acknowledgement of the limits on its powers and place in the international system. Thus, for the time being the EU can be considered a global actor.

After the August 2008 war, the Russian initiative to recognize the independence of Abkhazia and Ossetia did not find support from the international community. Another similar case is Crimea—its annexation by Russia has not received support from the international community or even former Soviet countries except Armenia and Kazakhstan. These cases show Russia's capacity as a global actor but not as a global power. Thus, while Russia *de facto* reshapes boundaries regionally, it does not have the capacity to do so *de jure*. And despite its capacity to exercise influence over global policy, it remains solely a global actor. As a matter of fact, Russia was more of a regional power between 1991 and 2000. Since it started recovering with the help of oil revenues during Vladimir Putin's presidency, it has transformed into a global actor.

With this paradigm in mind, Iran and Turkey should also be considered regional powers affecting geopolitical developments in the South Caucasus.

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Economic Cooperation in the South Caucasus and the Wider Region: Gained Losses, Lost Benefits

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The past two and a half decades in the South Caucasus leave little hope to entertain for the eventual integration of the region. The different integrational processes and transnational alliances that the South Caucasus countries have engaged in surely contribute to the creation of new spaces for cooperation, but also to the perpetuation of the conflicts in the region. In fact, often conflicts have been defining the design and implementation of these transnational alliances and integrational processes. With this reality, regional transnational integration as an avenue for conflict resolution seems to be part of a vicious circle since conflict resolution is often seen as a precondition for regional integration.

This paper aims to explore economic options for inserting a wedge in this vicious circle. Convinced that regional economic cooperation could be an important step towards conflict transformation in the South Caucasus, this paper suggests that the prospects of such integration be considered. Be it in the form of exploring opportunities in the different integrational paths that the countries of the South Caucasus have taken or challenging the isolationist economic policies that have outlived their goals and utility, this paper offers all stakeholders to look at economic cooperation *with* rather than *against* each other as the option that could lead to the resolution of conflicts in the region.

Introduction

Today, two and a half decades after the Belavezha Accords, discussions about the disintegration of the common Soviet space often evolve around the range of losses suffered and the depth of different fractured ties – cultural, infrastructural, and economic. As the authors of this paper, we focus on the concrete economic gains emerging from transnational cooperation – and the losses due to the absence of such cooperation – in the post-Soviet space and beyond the borders of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). More specifically, we analyze the potential socio-economic benefits of regional cooperation and the related lost opportunities for post-Soviet Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia as well as in the wider context regarding Russia, Turkey, and Iran.

We depart from the premise that disintegration and integration are ongoing parallel processes: new alliances are created on the ruins of old ones. The new ones – that is the post-Soviet economic and political unions or forms of regional and transnational cooperation – can be either narrower or wider in both geography and scope than the previous ones. The Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), the Eurasian Economic Space and the Eurasian Customs Union, the Organization for Democracy and Economic Development (GUAM), and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) often are not only amorphous, but also narrower than the Soviet Union, and much narrower than the Eastern Bloc and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA). However, many post-Soviet countries cooperate with and join different, often very wide alliances – the Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) association, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the EU, the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and others. The South Caucasus countries also enter these types of relations that are often intersecting or even mutually exclusive. The instances of such cooperation point out to another effect of the collapse of the Soviet Union: one set of opportunities has been replaced with another, and options and forms of transnational and economic cooperation, perhaps, have become even more diverse.

This paper discusses the current situation, as well as the prospects for regional cooperation and integration in an environment where many conflicts rend the South Caucasus region contributing to the popularity of isolationist policies and often determining the principles of economic cooperation. Under the concept of regional integration, we imply a process in which states voluntarily come together for an institution that provides economic, political, social, and security

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benefits, and the integration level can range from a simple free trade agreement to a full political union. While the benefits and motivations can vary in different contexts, we underline the possible contribution of economic integration to conflict transformation in the South Caucasus. This stand can be traced back to Kant: economic interdependency between countries is effective for preventing conflicts and might contribute to conflict resolution (Domke 1988), (Polachek and McDonald 1992), (Oneal and Russett 2000).

Not surprisingly, our analysis shows that the South Caucasus countries together with their neighbors Turkey, Russia, and Iran are not moving in the direction of voluntary integration. Most transnational projects implemented after the collapse of the Soviet Union have been focused not only on the creation of new spaces for economic cooperation, but also on serving conflicts. Conflicts have been defining the principles of implementation and the design of regional projects. The majority of the implemented or envisioned transnational projects are perpetuations of conflicts through economic means. They entail not only cooperation “with” but also cooperation “against” others. In our opinion, two and a half decades during which the main criteria for economic cooperation were often determined by conflicts show that this approach is not conducive to conflict resolution or transformation in the region.

Instead of conflict transformation, we have been observing a dynamic wherein conflicts deepen and become ingrained due to decreased pragmatic economic interest toward neighbors. Besides, the quality of life of a significantly large portion of the South Caucasus population remains disappointingly low. In the meantime, resources needed for socio-economic development are spent on carrying out policies of economic isolation of the “enemies,” and thus the cost of the economic projects increases.

The governments of the South Caucasus countries¹⁴ pay far more attention to the development of the “defense¹⁵” industry that is serving conflicts than to health care, education, or the creation of sustainable systems of social guarantees. The militarization of the region is growing at the expense of quality of life, because cooperation in the military sphere and trade in arms absorb significant financial resources. At the same time, conflicts remain unresolved, while the resources needed for their transformation are running out.

¹⁴ In a sense, this statement can also be attributed to Russia, Turkey, and Iran, with a caveat of significant differences among these countries.

¹⁵ We used quotation marks for this term simply because the “defense” industry is easily transformed into a system that serves offensive, and even expansionist goals.

We acknowledge that regional integration as an avenue for conflict resolution seems to be part of a vicious circle since often conflict resolution is seen as a precondition for regional integration. The history of the past two and a half decades makes us think that integration for the South Caucasus is impossible in the near future due to the conflicts within and among the states, along with complex and sometimes strained relations with the big neighbors – Turkey, Iran, and Russia. Convinced that regional economic cooperation could be an important step towards conflict transformation, we suggest that the prospects of such integration be considered. Therefore, what follows is an attempt to assess the current situation, identify the most problematic and most promising areas of economic cooperation, and offer some recommendations.

Socio-economic and conflict context: After the USSR collapse

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the South Caucasus experienced a full economic fragmentation. The cooperation chains of enterprises and people-to-people contacts dramatically decreased not only between faraway regions of the former Soviet Union but also between neighboring republics, in which the political elites were vigorously engaged in building ethnically-defined nation-states and the struggle for domination over the economic resources of the newly independent states. In the South Caucasus, these processes were exaggerated by nationalistic rhetoric and policies that led to violent conflicts.

One of those conflicts has been over the Nagorno-Karabakh region between Armenia and Azerbaijan, as a consequence of which the borders between the countries were sealed off in the early 1990s. Turkey closed the rail and air connections with Armenia and halted the transit of humanitarian aid through its territory to Armenia in 1993.¹⁶ Today, Armenia has two “gates” to the world – Georgia to the north and Iran to the south. These “gates” are largely inappropriate for the establishment of regional economic cooperation and the implementation of transnational projects. Out of the 1,500 kilometers of land border that Armenia shares with its four neighbors, only about 250 kilometers are open for transnational economic relations. All parties involved in this

¹⁶ Prior to this and also in the Soviet period, Turkey and Armenia were connected only through the Kars-Gyumri railroad; the land border was generally closed. In early 1993, Turkey allowed the transit of international humanitarian aid to Armenia through its territory at the Doğu Kapı-Akhourian crossing **Specificata fonte non valida.**

conflict have demonstrated commitment to practicing political and cultural isolation of the neighbors for more than twenty years now. The readiness of political regimes in Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Armenia to live with closed borders outweighs the desire to find mutually acceptable avenues for conflict resolution or transformation. Hence, Armenia was excluded from large transnational projects, and the desire of each party to unilaterally get what they want particularly using economic leverages was put above the obvious prospects for effective regional economic cooperation.

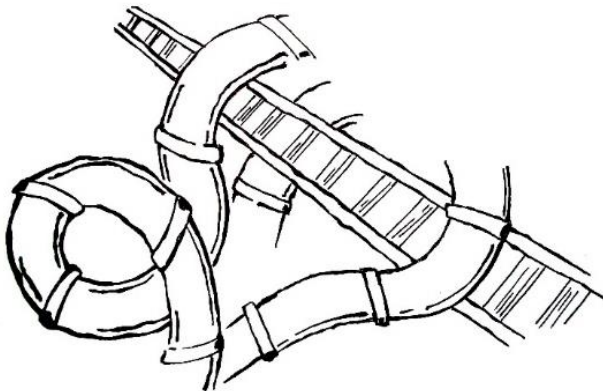
Armenia has well-established relations with Georgia and their current economic ties are crucially important for Armenia, as Georgia is the main transit country for Armenia. Iran and Armenia have developed energy and trade cooperation even though Armenia's major trade and economic partners for either state or private business actors are Russia, the EU, the US, and Turkey. With an active flow of remittances and investments from Russia, its role in Armenia's economy is major. Recently Armenia deepened its economic integration with Russia within the framework of the EAEU along with Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. In this context, Armenia could potentially benefit from new opportunities gaining access to the EAEU markets. On the other hand, Armenian businesses have almost one-sided economic relations with their Turkish counterparts. Goods from Turkey enter Armenia, but no major trade flows are going from Armenia to Turkey.

Azerbaijan borders Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan via the Caspian Sea and it has land borders with Georgia, Russia, Iran, Armenia, and Turkey. Azerbaijan has the richest hydrocarbon reserves in the region and therefore plays an important role in major energy projects. Access to these resources explains the Azerbaijani regime's claim for a leading role in the South Caucasus and its attempts to influence the policies of the big neighbors, particularly those of Turkey. Its share in the cumulative gross domestic product (GDP) indicators of the South Caucasus countries in 2015 was 74.2 percent (Central Intelligence Agency 2015). Although the drop in oil prices in 2015 and the devaluation of the national currency had an impact on these figures, the economic weight of Azerbaijan in the South Caucasus remains significant.

Azerbaijan's cooperation with Georgia and Turkey is focused on natural resources and excludes Armenia due to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The closed borders also have an inverse effect on Azerbaijan. Its border with Armenia is one of its longest and constitutes an easy and the most economically viable route to Turkey – its biggest political and economic partner. The impact of conflicts and geopolitics on the economy was clearly reflected on the largest

transnational economic project of the post-Soviet period – the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline running from Baku, bypassing both Russia and Armenia, via Georgia to Turkey. The option to have the pipeline run through Iran, which was “the most economically effective,” was not seriously considered due to strained relations between the United States (US) and Iran (Starr and Cornell 2005). In addition, the impermeable border between Armenia and Azerbaijan is the biggest obstacle for communication with the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic – Azerbaijan’s enclave sandwiched between the borders of Armenia, Iran, and Turkey.

One would assume that the conflict between the neighbors and, as a result, the closed borders with Armenia, as well as the complex geopolitical relations among the US, the EU, Russia, and Iran, would put Georgia in a preferential position. Indeed, Georgia plays an important role in the socio-economic relations of the South Caucasus since it is the transit country for regional transport and energy projects. Currently, Georgia has substantial socio-



economic cooperation with all neighboring countries, even Russia. However, Georgian external economic relations are strongly affected by the Abkhazian and South Ossetian conflicts and political confrontation with Russia that intermittently result in closing the lucrative Russian market for Georgian products. In addition,

another source of constant tension is that part of the Baku-Supsa oil pipeline passes in the immediate proximity to the boundary line with South Ossetia established after the August 2008 war. Consequently, conflicts and complex geopolitical relations have a significant impact on the implementation of economic projects in Georgia as well. They are a serious obstacle to the development of both the country and regional cooperation.

Turkey conceives the South Caucasus as an energy-rich region, which also provides access to new markets including those in Central Asia. Turkey needs the energy resources of the region to meet its growing demand. Its contribution to the international projects is significant for the South Caucasus countries and

Economic Cooperation in the South Caucasus and the Wider Region: Gained Losses, Lost Benefits includes opening the Caspian energy reserves to the West¹⁷. Turkey is also a major trade partner for all countries in the region. Turkey's relations with Armenia and the future of the borders depend on the progress of the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process and relations with Azerbaijan. Turkey recently engaged in a confrontation with Russia stemming from their conflicting policies in Syria, and this tension is thus a negative factor hindering regional cooperation.

Russia also influences the establishment of transnational economic ties. Russian experts and policy-makers traditionally consider the South Caucasus as a geo-strategically critical region for defending the country's southern borders from security threats derived as both direct and side effects of the dynamics in the Middle East and in global politics. Russia's corresponding securitization policies have determined its keen attention to the political and economic developments in the South Caucasus republics as well as in Turkey, a neighboring political power with its own strategic considerations towards this region. In addition to the efforts aimed at maintaining its military and political presence, Russia strives to preserve and possibly enlarge its economic influence on all three ex-Soviet republics in the region. At the same time, Turkish-Russian, as well as Russian-Iranian, relations have their own dynamics that do not always consider the developments in the South Caucasus, but they certainly and greatly affect them.

The Russian military industry gets significant dividends from the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict by supplying weapons to all political actors involved. In a period of high oil prices, Azerbaijan even became one of the largest buyers of arms in Europe. Moreover, conflicts have pushed the South Caucasus republics to actively participate in "the politics of sanctions and blockades." In many cases, the local regimes were the initiators of such policies in the early 1990s in order to oppose each other in the conflict dynamics. Thus, the political elites who control the South Caucasus republics show no desire to create a common regional economic space. Twenty-five years since gaining independence this policy has demonstrated its inadequacy, assuming that the main goal of all the actors involved was the resolution or transformation of the conflicts. In that case, counterproductively, conflicts in the region were not resolved and deepened even further.

¹⁷ Reference to such civilizational constructs as "East" and "West", the authors do not seek to reproduce orientalist categories, but only refer to the vocabulary of certain economic projects, as used by the actors engaged in their implementation.

Against this backdrop, we analyze the main areas of cooperation, the challenges and the suggestions for solutions. We believe that the potential socio-economic benefits of regional cooperation, and the actual losses without them, might be valuable incentives for regional integration attempts by the South Caucasus countries to prevent further conflicts and resolve the existing ones. In the following section we analyze the main cooperation areas in the region – trade and investments, energy and transportation projects, education, tourism, agriculture, and defense industry. In the final sections, we make recommendations to advance the cooperation.

Cooperation ‘with’ and ‘against’: Main transnational cooperation areas in the region

Trade and investments: Despite conflicts and because of them

Despite the declining economic and political influence on the regional processes after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia remained actively involved in the conflicts in the South Caucasus as a key broker between the conflicting parties. The gradual return of Russia’s economic power to the region began with the recovery after the devastating crisis in the 1990s thanks to the new economic policies underpinned by high prices on energy resources. At the same time, Russia’s private and state-run corporations managed to acquire considerable shares in some vital sectors of these countries’ economies.

Armenia is a salient example of Russia’s widespread economic presence in an ex-Soviet republic. Russia is Armenia’s main trade partner: in 2014, the foreign trade turnover between the two countries amounted to \$1.43 billion, of which \$1.12 billion were from Russia’s exports and \$308 million were from Russia’s imports (National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia 2015). Armenia’s membership in the EAEU came into force on January 2, 2015, and the possible benefits to trade relations between Russia and Armenia resulting from this development are yet to be seen. The EAEU became a key factor of economic relations for Armenia with any non-EAEU country. Now, Armenia must follow the EAEU rules when developing any relations, especially trade-related ones, and the Armenian legislation is being reformed to correspond to the EAEU regulations.

Russian companies are the main foreign investors in Armenia. The Russian state-run corporations such as Gazprom and, until recently, Inter RAO UES,

have dominated the energy sector of the country's economy. In 2014, Gazprom purchased the remaining 20 percent of shares of ArmRosGazprom and became the sole owner of the company. Eventually, Gazprom Armenia grew into a backbone energy organization in Armenia. In addition to energy distribution, Gazprom is involved in the reconstruction of the Armenian energy facilities. A similar situation is present in the sectors of telecommunications, banking, transportation, and heavy industry. Russia's VimpelCom took possession of all assets of the national communications operator ArmenTel; VTB Bank took over Armsberbank, one of the country's leading banks; Russian Railways is conducting concession management of Armenian Railways; and the Russian aluminum company Rusal runs one of the largest industrial enterprises in Armenia, Rusal Armenal, which is the only producer of aluminum foil in the Caucasus and Central Asia (Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation 2015).

Although there are no diplomatic relations between Armenia and Turkey and the borders are closed, Turkish businesses are important trade partners for their Armenian counterparts. The imports from Turkey to Armenia were at \$232 million in 2014 according to Armenia's official statistics (National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia 2015). Because of the closed borders, trade, which mainly means imports to Armenia from Turkey, is happening through Georgia and Iran. There is no embargo on Turkish goods in Armenia so the rules of demand ensure the flow of goods to Armenia. Turkish businesses became the fourth trade partner of their Armenian counterparts in terms of imports to Armenia in 2014 (National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia 2015).

Imports from Armenia to Turkey are low and are conditioned by the absence of a trade agreement between Turkey and Armenia, which would allow Armenian trucks to unload in Turkey without special permits. Since no diplomatic relations exist, requesting such permits is not possible. An alternative way would be a direct request from Armenia's Ministry of Transport and Communications to the Ministry of Transport, Maritime Affairs and Communications of Turkey (Turkish-Armenian Business Development Council 2013). However, such a request has not been placed perhaps because of Armenia's reluctance to reach out in the absence of proper diplomatic relations. At the same time, the Armenian Customs Service data and Armenia's official statistics demonstrate that in 2014 goods were exported from Armenia to Turkey in the amount of \$1.5 million via Georgia or Iran (National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia 2015) (Customs Service of the Republic of

Armenia 2015). In addition to the impediments and the blockade, the basic cause of the narrow flow of Armenian products to Turkey is the limited range of export products that the Armenian economy has to offer.

The obstacles to trade between Armenia and Turkey are usually ascribed to the legal framework, despite the trade between Armenian and Turkish businesses. However, the legal grounds for obstruction are also loose. The decision to close the border between Turkey and Armenia was taken on October 3, 1993 by a decree of the Turkish government. This decree does not refer to trade relations in general; it only mentions that Turkey will halt the transit of humanitarian aid across its territory to Armenia. Thus, the obstruction is bigger than what the law requires and a de facto embargo is in place (Turkish-Armenian Business Development Council 2013).

Russia is the main foreign trade partner of not only Armenia, but also Azerbaijan. The trade turnover between the two countries in 2014 reached \$4 billion. While the volume of exports from Russia to Azerbaijan was \$3.37 billion, the volume of exports from Azerbaijan to Russia amounted to \$634.9 million (Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation 2015). However, the presence of Russian business capital in Azerbaijan's economy is less significant than in Armenia's economy. In 2014, the largest shares of foreign investments into Azerbaijan's economy were from the United Kingdom (UK), Norway, Turkey, the US, and France. Russia's proportion in foreign investments in Azerbaijan was 6.1 percent, which means that Russian investors rank sixth among the top investors in Azerbaijan. This rank is shared with Iran (Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation 2015).

Foreign investments in Azerbaijan are flowing mainly into the energy sphere, notably gas production in the Shah Deniz gas field in the Caspian Sea, which is considered a founding link for the Southern Gas Corridor aiming to reduce the EU's and Turkey's dependence on Russian gas supplies. Lukoil, Russia's second largest oil company, is developing the Shah Deniz gas field and has invested about \$700 million since the project started (Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation 2015).

The economic relations between Turkey and Azerbaijan are multi-dimensional and extensive. Since 1992, agreements to intensify economic relations, especially concerning the export and marketing of Azerbaijan's oil and gas, have greatly evolved due to Turkey's role as an energy corridor. The trade volume between the two countries, which was \$278 million in 1996, increased to \$2.13 billion in 2015 (Turkish Statistical Institute 2016). In 2014, the amount

Economic Cooperation in the South Caucasus and the Wider Region: Gained Losses, Lost Benefits of investments of about 2,600 Turkish companies in Azerbaijan reached \$9 billion while the total amount of investments by Azerbaijani companies in Turkey was \$4 billion (Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Dışişleri Bakanlığı 2014). Azerbaijan is investing in the energy sector and the construction of ports and refineries in Turkey. The Petkim factory in Izmir is one example. The largest investor is the State Oil Company of Azerbaijan Republic (SOCAR) with \$2.4 billion (Karimova 2015). Since 2010, Turkey stands among the top five countries of Azerbaijan's imports list (Observatory of Economic Complexity 2015). Officials in Baku state that the existing potential is worth \$20 billion, though only a fraction of it is realized (Turkishnews.com 2012).

The Russian-Georgian economic cooperation has substantially suffered from the turbulences in the political relationship of the two states during the last decade. The policies of confrontation resulted in Russian sanctions against Georgian products and in severed diplomatic relations between the two countries. Even though the sanctions were lifted following the change of the political elite in Georgia in 2012, diplomatic relations remain halted as the Georgian government continues opposing Russian cooperation with South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

Nevertheless, in 2013 the trade turnover between the two states returned to the position prior to the August 2008 war, and in early 2015 Russia was Georgia's third largest trade partner after China and Turkey (National Statistics Office of Georgia 2016). Despite these positive dynamics in trade, in 2015 the share of the Russian capital in Georgia's total foreign investment stock remained at \$49 million, making Russia the seventh major investor in Georgia (National Statistics Office of Georgia 2016). Some Russian companies, however, have been successful in the Georgian market, especially in the energy and telecommunications sectors. To give just a few examples, Lukoil-Georgia through its largest chain of gas stations holds one quarter of the retail diesel and petrol market; Inter RAO UES owns 75 percent of the shares of Telasi, which is the leading electricity distribution company in Tbilisi; and Vimpelcom owns 51 percent of the shares in Mobitel and thus controls about 13 percent of Georgia's telecom market (Zavyalova 2014).

The development of Turkish-Georgian economic relations began in 1988, when the Sarp-Sarpi border crossing between Artvin and Batumi was activated. At that time, the border checkpoint enabled crossing from Turkey to the Soviet Union. Since 1991, it became an important connection link not only between Turkey and Georgia, but also between Turkey and the Caucasus by turning into a busy border crossing point for suitcase trade after the dissolution of the Soviet

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Union. While there were only 808 people crossing the Sarp-Sarpi Border in 1988, this number increased to 5,997,000 in 2013 (Deniz and Aslan 2014).

The main progress in economic relations between the two countries was realized in 2007 when the Free Trade Agreement was signed (Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Dışişleri Bakanlığı 2015). This progress, which was followed by the abolishment of visas and granting of passage without passport control, made Turkey the most important trade partner of Georgia. According to official data, the trade turnover, which was \$753 million in 2006, has increased to \$1.67 billion in 2014 (Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Dışişleri Bakanlığı 2015).

Georgia has active trade relations both with Armenia and Azerbaijan. According to the official data of the National Statistics Office of Georgia, from January 2012 to December 2015, exports from Georgia to Azerbaijan amounted to \$2.12 million and to Armenia just over \$1 million. Georgia imported goods in the value of \$2.52 million from Azerbaijan and \$634,000 from Armenia between January 2012 and December 2015 (National Statistics Office of Georgia 2016). In addition to direct trade relations, re-export to Azerbaijan and Armenia from Georgia is considerably large. As Georgia is the transit country between Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey, it exports the imported goods to other countries. According to the official data received from the National Statistics Office of Georgia, from January 2012 to July 2015 re-export from Azerbaijan amounted to \$1.35 billion, from Armenia to \$584 million, and from Turkey to \$41 million.

The South Caucasus does not play that much of a significant role in Russian-Turkish economic cooperation as it could, and Russian and Turkish companies do not implement any major joint projects in the region. The South Caucasus is rather a field for economic confrontation of the two regional powers promoting rival pipelines for energy supplies and routes for transit of Asian goods to Europe. Nevertheless, the region is still an important transit hub between Russia and Turkey. Georgia especially has benefited from the increased trade turnover between the two countries, which tripled in 10 years from \$10.9 billion in 2004 to \$31.2 billion in 2014 (Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation 2015). Moreover, small and medium-sized Turkish businesses operate very comfortably in Georgia and Azerbaijan, while large companies chiefly represent the Russian business sector in these countries (and also in Armenia).

Recently, though, the “era” of mounting Russian-Turkish economic cooperation has been turned around by Russia’s sanctions against Turkey after

the downing of a Russian warplane by Turkish air forces in November 2015 and Turkey's retaliatory policies toward Russia. According to some media reports, the Russian economic sanctions have already affected the crossing of the Russian-Georgian border checkpoint in Lars where trucks registered in Turkey are swarming on Georgian territory. This situation creates problems to Georgian exporters, and, if continued, it may bring significant financial losses to them (Dzhorbenadze 2015). Georgia may suffer even more losses from the ceased transit if the Russian and Turkish governments do not agree on the extension of permits for the transport companies in 2016, which expired on February 1, 2016. Since then, Turkish and Russian trucks have not been allowed to transport goods into Russia and Turkey, respectively (Fokht 2016).

Abkhazia also joined the Russian sanctions against Turkey, though Turkey is one of the few countries that has informal trade relations with Abkhazia. The Abkhaz diaspora in Turkey has contributed to building these business relations, and the trade turnover between Turkey and Abkhazia is estimated to be second after Russia and Abkhazia (Milliyet 2016). With the sanctions, these situations are expected to decrease and leave Russia as Abkhazia's only important trade partner.

Economic migrants also play a significant role in the relations between and among the countries of the South Caucasus and the larger region. After the dissolution of Soviet Union, many Azerbaijanis, Armenians, and Georgians went to work abroad due to the poor economic situation in their home countries. Most of the migrants went to Russia, and hundreds of thousands of Azerbaijanis, Armenians, and Georgians – not taking into account those who are citizens of Russia – live in Russia, according to unofficial figures. Throughout the 2000s Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia were among the top ten countries that received significant remittances from Russia. According to the Russian Central Bank data, in 2014 remittances from Russia amounted to \$1.55 billion to Armenia, \$1.31 billion to Azerbaijan, and \$813 million to Georgia (Central Bank of the Russian Federation 2016). In 2015-2016 these figures fell as a result of the Russian economic crisis.

Thus, despite the impenetrable Armenian-Azerbaijani border, the conflict-ridden relations between Georgia and Russia, and the tensions in relations between Turkey and Armenia, money and trade still flows across the problematic borders. In many cases pragmatism, mutual interest, and benefits of cross-border relations prevail over conflict disengagement.

Energy projects: New alliances and protracted conflicts

The energy projects in the region evolved from Azerbaijani hydrocarbon resources fueling the interest of big actors such as the US, the EU, and Russia. Azerbaijan developed its energy strategy towards the South Caucasus on the basis of its own energy security and the export of oil and natural gas resources of the Caspian Basin to international markets through routes bypassing Russia. While Kazakhstan is rich in oil resources and Turkmenistan is rich in natural gas resources, Azerbaijan has rich reserves of both oil and gas. Azerbaijan has a strategic position for Turkey in terms of transporting its own energy resources as well as transporting Kazakhstan's oil and Turkmenistan's gas to Turkey and Europe. Turkey, therefore, has actively cooperated with Azerbaijan in the energy sector, and this cooperation has strengthened their strategic partnership. The cooperation for energy resources between the two countries led to projects like the Baku-Supsa oil pipeline, the BTC oil pipeline, the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (BTE also known as the South Caucasus Pipeline) natural gas pipeline, the Trans-Anatolian Pipeline (TANAP, natural gas), and the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP, natural gas). Georgia takes part in all those projects except for the TAP as a transit country. So, a steady energy partnership has been established between Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. Thus, the design of energy projects has secured the division of the region with this partnership on the one side and Russia, Armenia, and Iran on the other side, where Iran tries to play by its own rules.

It is worth noting that Azerbaijan, in an attempt to claim the role of the strongest regional player, also uses all these energy projects for the economic blockade of Armenia. The official political rhetoric is constructed in a way as to emphasize the continued success of this policy. Meanwhile Azerbaijan, relying on the European Union (EU) and the US interests in oil and gas, hopes to gain their further support in resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in its favor. While the large energy projects remain relevant, the fragmentation of the South Caucasus – a potential regional common economic space – into different blocks is the only reality.

The Baku-Supsa oil pipeline was the first pipeline to help deliver Azerbaijani oil to Turkey and Europe. The pipeline, dating from the Soviet era, was launched with improvements in 1999 following the agreement signed in 1996 between Georgia, Turkey, and Azerbaijan. Via the Baku-Supsa line, Azerbaijani oil is transported to the Georgian port of Supsa, and from Supsa it is transported to Turkey and Europe (Azerbaijan.Az n.d.).

Following the opening of the Baku-Supsa oil pipeline, the BTC oil pipeline project was put on the agenda. Initially intended to pass from Baku through Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia to Ceyhan and dubbed as the “peace pipeline,” it eventually circumvented Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia. In 1998, Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Georgia agreed in Trabzon to carry out the project, and in 1999, the presidents of the three countries signed an agreement at the summit of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in Istanbul. The BTC oil pipeline project with a cost of \$4 billion was completed due to the political determination of the three states. The 1,768-kilometer-long pipeline became operational in 2006, and a 1,076-kilometer-long section passes through Turkey. About 1 million barrels of Azerbaijani oil a day are supplied to the world market through the pipeline to the port of Ceyhan. Despite the opposition of Russia and Iran, the pipeline was built with investments from the US and Western European companies and with the support of their governments. The BTC oil pipeline has strengthened Azerbaijan’s positions internationally, while providing Turkey with a strategic stance in the energy market.

The BTE natural gas pipeline, which transports Azerbaijan’s natural gas resources to Turkey, is significant in the Azerbaijan-Georgia-Turkey energy cooperation. The construction of the 970-kilometer-long BTE natural gas pipeline started in 2002 and was completed in 2006. The BTE natural gas pipeline has been supplying natural gas to Turkey from the Stage 1 bed in Azerbaijan’s Shah Deniz gas field. Turkey and Azerbaijan have also agreed on delivering natural gas extracted from the Stage 2 bed in the Shah Deniz gas field through the same pipeline to Turkey and then from Erzurum to other domestic pipelines and to Europe (Starr and Cornell 2005).

In addition to the BTE natural gas pipeline, the Nabucco natural gas pipeline was discussed between Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Georgia in the 2000s. Proposed by the US and the EU, this project would ensure that gas be extracted from the Shah Deniz Stage 2 bed and transported to Europe. However, Azerbaijan did not show a decisive approach in this project, making perhaps a strategic decision in order to keep its relations with Russia balanced. Russia explicitly opposed this project since it would undermine the Nord Stream project and could significantly reduce the Russian share in the European energy market. As a result, both Russia’s opposition and the global financial crisis that negatively affected the European economies made the realization of the Nabucco natural gas pipeline impossible.

Nevertheless, the failure to implement the Nabucco natural gas pipeline prepared ground for the TANAP and the TAP that Turkey and Azerbaijan agreed on in 2012. Turkey and Azerbaijan signed an agreement related to the TANAP in June 2012 whereby 16 billion cubic meters of natural gas extracted from the Shah Deniz Stage 2 bed would be delivered to Turkey and Europe through this pipeline. The TANAP, at an estimated cost of \$7 billion, is expected to transport 6 billion cubic meters of natural gas per year to the Turkish domestic market and 10 billion cubic meters to the European market. The total gas volume to be transported with this line as a joint project of Azerbaijan's SOCAR, Turkey's Petroleum Pipeline Corporation (BOTAŞ), and UK's British Petroleum (BP), is aimed to reach, together with additional resources such as those from Turkmenistan, 23 billion cubic meters by 2023 and 31 billion cubic meters by 2026. Turkey has taken a successful step in supplying natural gas to Europe with the TANAP, and the Azerbaijan-Georgia-Turkey route gained importance in supplying natural gas to Europe (Sandıklı, Gafarlı and İsmayılov 2014).

The TAP is different from other projects because it does not represent a geopolitically sensitive alternative to Russia's Nord Stream and is supported by the EU. The TAP is 450 kilometers shorter than the Nabucco natural gas pipeline and less costly. It does not target Central and Eastern Europe directly – something that differentiates it from the Nabucco natural gas pipeline and is less alarming for Russia. As of December 2015, the TAP's shareholding is comprised of the UK's BP, Azerbaijan's SOCAR, and Italy's Snam S.p.A. having 20 percent each, Belgium's Fluxys with 19 percent, Spain's Enagás with 16 percent, and Switzerland's Axpo with 5 percent of the shares (Trans Adriatic Pipeline 2015). The TAP practically provides an extension to the TANAP into Europe, and together with the BTE natural gas pipeline they connect the Caspian Basin to Europe, materializing the Southern Gas Corridor that is Europe's guarantee for the security and diversity of its energy supplies.

However, Iran's and Turkmenistan's gas have great importance for the implementation of the TANAP and the TAP, as Azerbaijan's natural gas alone is not enough to practically implement the projects (Gafarlı 2015). The projects also provide an opportunity to reduce the tension between Azerbaijan and Iran and to develop energy relations. With the lifting of sanctions against Iran, the discussions of new energy projects in both North-South and East-West directions have intensified.

As a whole, Azerbaijan meets 20 percent of Turkey's natural gas needs. The volume of the Shah Deniz gas bed is calculated to be 1 trillion cubic meters and

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is expected to meet 30 percent of Turkey's needs in the future. However, it is not the only benefit that Turkey gets from these energy projects. They also provide an opportunity for Turkey to create its own energy policy and security. Energy efficiency, new energy sources, and an important role for the European energy security are other potential benefits. Energy is among the core issues in the Turkey's EU membership negotiations and the above-mentioned projects improve the country's position as a candidate state (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey 2015).

As a transit country, Georgia also receives considerable benefits from the pipelines. For example, the BTC oil pipeline brings Georgia an estimated profit of \$50-70 million per year. Georgia is also a transit country for Russian gas to Armenia. The North-South Gas Pipeline (NSGP) has been in operation since the 1980s. This is the easiest and the cheapest way to transport gas from Russia to Armenia (Gochitashvili 2014). According to official statistics, 2.1 billion cubic meters of gas was transported from Russia to Armenia in 2014. For the transit of Russian gas to Armenia, Georgia receives 10 percent of the gas per year, which is currently 200 million cubic meters. If Georgia expands this agreement, then it would receive 10 percent of the expanded volume of the gas transit (Gochitashvili 2014).

Transportation projects: Old and new lines of connection and disconnection

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, transportation projects in the South Caucasus have been influenced by the conflict context and also served to sustain the conflicts. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the closed Turkey-Armenia borders have reinforced progress for an East-West route via the Turkey-Georgia-Azerbaijan axis and a North-South one via the Armenia-Iran axis.

Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Georgia reached a final agreement for the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway project in 2007, although the idea had emerged immediately following the 1993 closure of the Kars-Gyumri-Tbilisi railway passing through Armenia. As of February 2016, the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway is deemed to become functional by 2017. The proposed and much-awaited railway project will give an important impetus for the development of Northeastern Anatolia. In 2008, the Mayor of Kars Naif Alibeyoğlu said the new railway would become a crucial lifeline for the city – one of the poorest towns in Turkey. In his opinion, this line would also demonstrate that Kars is a natural bridge between the two geographical zones – Turkey and the Caucasus

Economic Cooperation in the South Caucasus and the Wider Region: Gained Losses, Lost Benefits (Dikkaya and Özyakışır 2008). Many other cities located along this transportation line would benefit similarly from this transportation project.

Iran and Armenia have an agreement of their own on the Southern Armenia Railway project connecting the Black Sea to the Persian Gulf – a link in the North-South Transport Corridor project that will ensure connection between India and Europe. This project, however, under current circumstances will connect only to the Georgian Black Sea ports since both a functional intersection with the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railroad and a route following on to Russia from Georgia seem implausible given the conflict context. There have been plans to revive a Russia-Georgia railway through Sukhum/i, Tbilisi, and Yerevan. Although Abkhazia and Armenia support this project, so far it has not been welcomed by Georgia, which has been trying to isolate Abkhazia. An alternative North-South plan, which would pass through the Caucasus but bypass Armenia and accommodate the conflicts, would be the modernization of the railways passing from Russia to Azerbaijan and Iran.

On a more global scale, initiatives that evoke the Silk Road have set the stage for new transportation routes passing through the South Caucasus. In 1993, an agreement was reached to establish the Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia (TRACECA) to create a major link between different countries. The agreement was reached in Brussels with the participation of ministers from Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia from the South Caucasus and Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan from Central Asia. The aim of this project is to integrate the European, Caucasus, Central and South East Asian markets developing transport and trade. The TRACECA is expected to ensure transport infrastructure and security of the East-West transportation through sea, air, and ground accelerating the inclusion of the South Caucasus into the global markets. The TRACECA is also expected to develop transportation between Turkey-Georgia-Azerbaijan and to increase Turkey's effectiveness in the South Caucasus markets (Sandıklı, Gafarlı and Ismayılov 2014).

Prospective transportation cooperation is crucial for Armenia, which exports its goods to the EU and the US mainly through Georgia. Currently, products loaded on trucks are transferred to ships in Batumi and Poti. Since Armenia became a WTO member in 2012, its exports have been increasing yearly. However, Armenian producers are not very competitive compared to Turkish, Georgian, or Mediterranean producers, mainly due to transportation costs. In the case when the destination is Russia, the efficiency is higher: trucks pass through Georgia and unload their cargo in their destinations in Russia. Transport and communication comprised 4.8 percent of the GDP of Armenia in

Economic Cooperation in the South Caucasus and the Wider Region: Gained Losses, Lost Benefits 2015 (National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia 2016). By comparison, the same indicator for Georgia, that does not have such severe issues with its borders, is at 10.7 percent (National Statistics Office of Georgia 2016).

Despite the absence of diplomatic relation between Turkey and Armenia, transport routes function through Georgia and Iran. There are regular bus routes through Georgia, travel tours from Armenia to Turkey, and several direct flights per week between Istanbul and Yerevan. A comparison between air and ground transportation presents a curious case of the possibilities of the two countries. Similar to ground transportation, air connection also requires bilateral agreements between countries. Despite the absence of an air transport agreement between Turkey and Armenia, flights take place through permits renewed for every flight happening through the H50 air corridor, which was closed in 1993. The reopening of this air corridor in May 1995 was requested by the Azerbaijani civilian aviation authority since Armenia and Azerbaijan have access to each other's air space for civilian aviation (Gültekin Punsmann and Gevorgyan 2012). The precedent of air connection between Turkey and Armenia could be used to expand ground transport as well.

In the future, the South Caucasus countries may have an important role as a transit route between Iran and Russia and the North-South line in general since the sanctions against Iran were lifted. However, Armenia's inclusion in the East-West route between Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey is not on the agenda, and the Kars-Gyumri-Tbilisi railway remains closed.

Even though closed borders hinder interstate communication and trade, in some cases such as Turkey and Armenia or Russia and Georgia, the borders are not impenetrable and alternative access points are available. At the same time, the most efficient routes of communication between Azerbaijan and Turkey, Georgia and Russia remain blocked because of the conflicts. In the post-Soviet reality, the newly emerged dynamics in the regional cooperation are characterized by both attempts to implement large-scale projects (such as the revived Silk Road) and efforts to cease previous communications due to multidimensional confrontational policies.

Education: As business, soft power, and mechanism of conflict protraction or resolution

The systems of higher education in the South Caucasus faced an ambiguous situation after the collapse of the USSR. A sharp decline in quality has been

visible in many areas of education, which led to a brain drain from the region with opportunities for getting high-quality education in the EU, the US, and elsewhere becoming available. Locally, the marketization of the education systems created possibilities for the development of the business sector in providing paid private education, especially at the higher education level. Providing services in this area became a very profitable business all over the South Caucasus as a significant part of the population strives to get higher education by all available means. However, it is hard to say how successful this experience has been. Although in each country the situation and progress has been different, a cautious evaluation suggests that the emergence of private education institutions have not significantly improved the quality of education.

As in the other areas of cooperation or lack of it, the patterns of student mobility in the South Caucasus also reproduce the political-economic unions and preferences conditioned by conflicts. At the state level the educational system is regarded as an instrument of influence – a soft power. A similar approach or pattern can be traced to the international level. Education is a dynamically developing sector between Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkey, and Russia in different flows of students and educational services. Some of the educational agencies primarily use their resources in order to attract students from countries with which they have formed alliances, aiming to maintain or increase their influence in those countries or seeing greater opportunities.

The Russian government supports programs that admit students from the South Caucasus to ensure a stable student flow to Russia. In 2010-2011 about 4,166 students from Azerbaijan and 1,964 students from Armenia studied at Russian universities. As a result, Azerbaijan and Armenia were number 6 and 12, respectively, on the list of top 15 countries with the largest number of students that went to study in Russia. Georgia was not on that list (Arefyev 2012).

In parallel, there is also an “export” of educational services to the region. There are eight branches of different Russian universities in Armenia. Azerbaijan has five including a branch of Moscow State University, which is the main Russian university (Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation 2016). This “export” of educational services has largely bypassed Georgia, where a now defunct branch of the Moscow State University of Economics, Statistics, and Informatics was operating.

Many Armenian students study in Turkish and Georgian universities. Yet, beginning in 2016, the number of students studying in Georgia may decrease

because the US State Department decided to cut the financing for Armenian students studying at the Georgian Institute of Public Affairs (GIPA). This opportunity used to be a platform for joint learning for Armenian, Georgian, and Azerbaijani students. There were 922 students, mainly Georgian citizens of Armenian background, from Georgia studying in Armenian educational institutions in 2014 (National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia 2015). In 2014 there was only one Turkish citizen studying in Armenia (National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia 2015).

The Turkish government and some Turkish private foundations continue providing educational services in Azerbaijan. Today tens of Turkish-initiated colleges and universities provide education to students in Azerbaijan, and 6,901 Azeri students studied in Turkish universities in 2014 (Erdoğan 2014). The Turkish Qafqaz University is currently considered one of the most prestigious universities in Azerbaijan providing students with the highest quality of education.

Opportunities for regional educational exchanges both for students and academics might be a valuable contribution to the prevention and transformation of the regional conflicts by facilitating interpersonal contacts and conducting joint academic activities, such as research and conferences. The existing mobility in this area demonstrates the younger generation's ability to ignore conflict ideologies and find common ground. At the same time, the attractiveness of studying abroad and the governments' support of mobility for education demonstrate the openness of the South Caucasus societies to the outside world.

Nevertheless, the South Caucasus governments increasingly attempt to control their students abroad. Students are viewed as some sort of a political resource, a solidarity group, which can be mobilized for the broadest possible representation of conflict positions. This leads to the trans-nationalization of local conflicts and their export into third countries in the region and beyond. Thus, not only big players, but also the smaller South Caucasus republics can and do use educational mobility as an instrument for soft power.

Tourism: Vacation space as a platform for contacts

Some of the most obvious long-term prospects for the region's economic development lie in the tourism industry. The potential here is not only in infrastructure projects that are implemented in order to transform the South Caucasus into a transit corridor but also in projects that could turn the region into a harbor of tourist destinations. In addition, the recent fall in oil prices,

which inflicted a serious blow on Russia's and Azerbaijan's budgets, suggests that the low cost of energy resources is the reality for the next several years. The tourism industry has strongly been affected by the economic crisis, and the fall in energy prices has limited investment capabilities for tourism projects in the South Caucasus.

The South Caucasus borders Turkey, which has one of the most developed and attractive tourism industries in the world. Therefore, for the South Caucasus countries, the actual and potential development of this sector lies with internal tourism and visitors from neighboring post-Soviet countries, as well as from Turkey (mostly to Georgia) and Iran (mostly to Azerbaijan and Armenia). The development of the tourism industry is regional in nature and dependent on average income levels.

Georgia is the most attractive country for tourism in the South Caucasus. The tourism boom started in recent years continues as hundreds of thousands of Armenian, Azerbaijani, Turkish, Russian, Ukrainian, and other tourists travel to Georgia, especially to the Black Sea resort towns for summer vacations and ski resorts for winter vacations. According to the Georgian national tourism administration 1,468,888 Armenians, 1,393,257 Azerbaijanis, 1,391,721 Turks, 926,144 Russians, and 141,734 Ukrainians visited Georgia in 2015 making the list of the top 5 countries whose citizens visited Georgia in the last few years (Georgian National Tourist Administration 2016).

In 2015, Georgia had almost 6 million visitors. Even though only part of them came to Georgia for tourism purposes and stayed more than two to three days, these numbers are impressive since the population of Georgia is less than 4 million people.

For many years now Georgia has been the physical space where citizens of Armenia and Azerbaijan (and more broadly Armenians and Azerbaijanis) continue making contacts in many different spheres. Visitors from conflicting countries come to Georgia for various activities, meet each other, and have the opportunity to hear the other side's point of view. A similar though a far less prominent role of a neutral meeting space has been acquired by Armenia in the context of Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-South Ossetian relations and by Turkey in the context of Armenian-Turkish and other regional relations.

At the same time, tourism in the region generally increases the interest level of people in each other enhancing the mobility of the populations and the diversity of contacts. Accidental and simple encounters between people vacationing in the same location also facilitate informal contacts allowing people from other

parts of the region to meet for the first time. Conflicts are humanized and informal meetings show that sharing common space does not necessarily lead to conflict.

Tourism is identified as one of the most important areas that can be developed between Turkey and the South Caucasus countries (Türkiye Ekonomi Politikaları Araştırma Vakfı (TEPAV) 2015). Tourism is important for developing contacts between Turkey and Armenia who share a conflict relationship. In addition to seasonal vacations, health and sports tourism, cultural-historical tours of Armenian historical sites in Turkey, such as the ancient city of Ani, have an important potential to be explored. The development of tourism between these countries would also contribute to the personal interactions between societies.

Georgia's attractiveness for tourists also creates some positive prospects for Azerbaijan and Armenia. There is a growth of interest towards this relatively small region. Many tourists that visit Georgia also try to visit all three countries (at least the capital cities) in order to form an opinion about the region. The geography of the region allows doing so relatively quickly and in the future tourism could become a powerful incentive for abandoning the policy of closed borders. The regional diversity, the richness of local cultural contexts together with geographic proximity, clearly demonstrates the great potential of regional cooperation in the tourism industry and at the same time the losses that this sector continues to incur due to conflicts that disintegrate the South Caucasus space. As this paper argues, all sectors of the regional economies suffer constant and permanent losses, and among them the most important one is the agricultural industry in the region.

Agriculture: Traditional and new markets

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the economy of the South Caucasus states suffered the same fate – a total collapse. In the post-Soviet era, the exit from the economic breakdown and the development of the republics was uneven and could not be otherwise. However, the preconditions that would allow the restoration of at least part of the old capacity were never re-established. The industrial factories (petrochemical industry, machinery, and others) that provided a huge number of permanent jobs for qualified staff disintegrated due to the breakup of a great many regional relations and the interconnectedness as a result of the emergence of conflicts, among other factors. Agriculture also suffered a huge blow due to the breakup of regional relations. With a constant shortage of food during the Soviet years, the Russian market brought the local

entrepreneurs and speculators operating in the shadow tremendous profits. During all the post-Soviet years, agriculture has been rebuilt and restored. However, the usual additional income is no longer available to producers, despite the variety of manufactured products.

Agriculture could be a sector wherein the South Caucasus countries could develop cooperation very productively, especially for the use of new technologies and techniques. For example, both Armenia and Georgia have many competitive advantages and traditions in the cultivation of certain types of fruits and vegetables. Armenia is experienced in the cultivation of apricots, grapes, peaches, apples, pears, tomatoes, and cucumbers. Georgia has very developed traditions in cultivating grapes, persimmons, kiwis, citrus fruits, and a long-standing winery sector. This complementarity can serve to both countries and contribute to the development of agriculture, not excluding each other and making use of each other's accumulated experience and expertise (Karapetyan 2015). Another area of cooperation could be the greenhouse business. While this is a new trend in the Armenian economy, Georgia already has a good tradition in greenhouse establishment and development. Many foreign companies, especially from Israel, are involved in greenhouse development in Georgia. A wide variety of fruits and vegetables traditionally are grown also in Azerbaijan. For example, in recent years the volumes of grape production, as well as of pomegranates, and the export of pomegranate juice are being rapidly restored.

In general, agricultural development is one of the priority areas in the region and to a greater extent than tourism, it demonstrates the need for regional cooperation. The geography itself encourages the cooperation of all South Caucasus countries in this area.

Russia plays a significant role for the sector of agriculture in the South Caucasus. In fact, for all three countries the northern neighbor is the only large and vital market for fruits and vegetables sales. The situation is complicated by Russia's willingness to apply restrictive measures and sanctions for political reasons yet with pretexts of unmet sanitary standards and health concerns against some of the South Caucasus producers, first and foremost hitting the agriculture sector. In addition, the agricultural production of the South Caucasus had to survive competition from such agricultural giants as Turkey and Iran, a situation that changed following the recent Russian sanctions against Turkey that opened new opportunities for the South Caucasus producers.

Regional cooperation is critically important for the development of a modern type of agriculture. The market division of manufactured products and avoiding excessive competition with each other is only one aspect of the process. The availability and rational use of water resources, the rehabilitation of abandoned conflict territories, and strict environmental control are impossible without broad regional cooperation. In order to go beyond being a poorly-developed agricultural “appendix” for the Russian market, there is a need to develop modern methods of farming taking into account environmental concerns. It is unlikely that a major breakthrough in this area is possible in the current situation of the regional fragmentation and permanent conflicts.

The defense industry and the militarization of the region

The South Caucasus conflicts contribute to the development of military enterprises producing weapons, ammunition, and other military attributes, the disproportionately large armies of the South Caucasus states, and the significant growth of interest toward arms procurement. The 2000s were a period of rapid militarization of the republics.

First of all, militarization impacted the state budgets with Azerbaijan registering the most massive increase. Azerbaijan’s 2014 military budget was \$3.8 billion, an increase from \$3.6 billion in 2013 and \$3 billion in 2012. In comparison, Armenia’s 2013 defense budget was \$447 million (Daly 2014). In both countries military expenses are significant portions of state budgets, which during those years averaged slightly over \$23 billion in Azerbaijan, and \$3 billion in Armenia. To comprehend the scale of this increase over years, we can compare for example the 2004 Azerbaijan spending of around \$150-170 million for its military needs and Armenia spending of around \$100 million in 2005 (Ziyadov 2005). The growth of military spending coincided with a general increase in income but regardless of this increase, throughout the 2000s it was an important part of the budgets of the two countries. The current trend is that military spending will decrease in Azerbaijan due to the decline in oil prices, but it certainly will still be quite significant.

After Mikhail Saakashvili came to power, Georgia started to increase military spending. In 2003, the military budget was \$30 million, and by 2007 the spending rose to a \$1 billion. Prior to the August 2008 War, the military spending reached 8 percent of the state GDP. After the war, it has declined and Georgia’s military budget for 2013 did not exceed \$400 million (Simonyan 2014). Despite this sharp decline in the defense budget, as compared with the beginning of the 2000s, military spending remains high.

A number of European countries and the United States are among the countries supplying arms to the region. However, Russia remains the main arms supplier to Azerbaijan and Armenia. Ukraine supplied Georgia before the August 2008 war. Among the biggest contracts in the post-Soviet years have been the Russian arms sales to Armenia of more than \$1 billion in 1996-1997 and to Azerbaijan since 2011 for over \$4 billion.

The militarization of the region brought attempts to recreate the defense enterprises locally. Azerbaijan, whose Ministry of Defense Industry was created in 2005-2006, leads in this sphere. According to the Head of Ministry Yaver Jamalov, "The diversity of production increases every year" (Radioazadlyg 2014). Azerbaijan inherited from the USSR two dozen different military production companies that did not survive the collapse of the Soviet Union. Currently, the companies operating under the Ministry of Defense Industry are engaged in the production of various types of small arms, ammunition, as well as modernization and repair of equipment.

In contrast, Armenia and Georgia have not inherited significant military-industrial enterprises from the Soviet Union. However, attempts to start some type of production were undertaken in these republics as well. Georgia achieved more significant results creating, in cooperation with Israel, aircrafts, "Didgori" armored vehicles, the "Lasik" infantry fighting vehicle, small arms, and other military attributes.

It is obvious that the high militarization of the region leads to considerable financial costs. However, it is unlikely that attempts to create different types of weapons as part of their defense industry will turn Azerbaijan or Georgia into significant arms exporters. Militarization keeps all the societies under constant pressure and is the most visible symbol of regional fragmentation. The maintenance of large armies and the large-scale procurement of arms are likely to lead to new conflicts and wars and do not contribute to the visions of peaceful transformation of conflicts in the region.

Main challenges and windows of opportunity

The processes that hinder regional cooperation in the South Caucasus are all linked to the conflicts within and around the region. Comprehensive and inclusive cooperation is hardly possible when the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict continues, Armenia is blockaded by Azerbaijan and Turkey, and South Ossetia and Abkhazia are recognized by Russia and treated as occupied territories by Georgia, the US, and the EU. The snowballing crisis in the Russian-Turkish

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relations brings further negative dynamics to the economic and political environment in the South Caucasus.

The anxieties in the South Caucasus countries are increasing also because of the greater geopolitical confrontation between the US with its allies, including Turkey on the one hand and Russia on the other, and it is certainly not conducive for shaping the South Caucasus as a transit hub between East and West as well as South and North. Now, all projects in the region are set to be reweighed by regional and global powers from the perspective of compliance of these initiatives to their own geostrategic considerations, and those seeming to be “rival” are proactively opposed. The lack of trust between the South Caucasus republics, even in the face of shared global threats, does not contribute to regional cooperation either.

Moreover, the economic crisis is observable to some extent in all these countries. Oil prices have plummeted since 2014. As the Azerbaijani and Russian economies are oriented towards exports of energy resources, they were greatly hit by this sharp decline in their export revenue. The high inflation rate, the devaluation of the national currencies, and the decline in GDP growth are common problems also for Turkey and Georgia. The financial resources to invest in large infrastructure projects in the region have become limited. The declining purchasing power of the populations in these countries and, especially in Russia as the biggest market for the South Caucasus agricultural and other products, affects local producers and exporters.

All in all, the worsening socio-economic situation leads to growing public discontent across the region. Still, despite apparent threats such as violent unrests, this situation opens a window of opportunity for the South Caucasus countries to launch proactive and flexible economic policies that would include constructive and pragmatic business cooperation with the neighboring countries. In this context, both challenges and opportunities emerge for the further cooperation in the region.

Amidst confrontations and separated by unions

The sharp deterioration of relations between Turkey and Russia at the end of 2015 defied the predictions of many analysts of a further rapprochement between the two countries and even the emergence of a Russian-Turkish alliance (Alaranta 2015). Indeed, the conservative, traditional, and anti-Western rhetoric of the political leadership of the two states as well as some of their coinciding economic interests for years prevailed over various disagreements they had on regional politics. The two states succeeded in avoiding

confrontation over such sensitive issue as the Ukrainian crisis, and especially the Crimea events of March 2014. Even the Syrian crisis did not rock the ground under the rapidly intensifying economic cooperation between the two states for almost five years until finally the securitization policies based on geostrategic considerations overcame the economic rationale.

Only two months before the November 2015 crisis, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in a meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin held in Moscow stated that the trade turnover between the two countries was expected to reach a figure of \$100 billion by 2023 (President of Russia 2015). Furthermore, until recent times the governments in Ankara and Moscow actively discussed different formats for establishing a free trade zone between Turkey and Russia (Sputnik 2014) (Kazimirko-Kirillova 2015). Should the bilateral relations between Turkey and Russia improve and the announced ambitious plans be implemented, their realization would contribute to the role of the South Caucasus as a transit region. However, the growing degree of the confrontation leaves little hope for this scenario. In these political circumstances, the South Caucasus republics are left with only short-term advantages and situational opportunities, such as substituting the banned Turkish agricultural products in the Russian market by their own exports.

When it comes to the official integrational projects that Turkey and Russia each offer to the South Caucasus countries, the difference is that the Turkish approach to regional cooperation is to bypass Armenia at least while the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is not resolved, while for its geostrategic considerations Russia cannot completely ignore any of the South Caucasus states including Georgia despite the tense relations between them. The rapidly deteriorating relations with Russia induce Turkey to intensify the implementation of its main infrastructure projects in the region – the TANAP, and the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway. The frequent visits of the Turkish officials to Azerbaijan following the worsening relationship with Russia demonstrate the serious attitude of Turkey in bringing these “projects of the century” to their completion (Vestnik Kavkaza 2015).

The approach of the policy-makers in Russia to regional cooperation in the South Caucasus is based on the promotion of cooperation with the EAEU. With Armenia joining this integration project, a new possible platform for dialogue between Armenia and Azerbaijan may appear. In Russia, some experts and policy advisors believe in the idea of peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan through economic cooperation within the framework of the EAEU (Romashov 2015). Although Azerbaijan is cautious about Russia-dominated integration

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initiatives in the post-Soviet space and puts forward the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in its favor as a precondition for the accession (Ponomareva 2015), Russia consistently works on persuading Azerbaijan to participate at least in selected areas of cooperation under the EAEU. Hypothetically, at some juncture, Russia's efforts may succeed. The Azerbaijani government, which is facing a worsening economic situation in the country because of the decreasing revenues from the oil and gas exports, may become more willing to engage with Russian initiatives if they appear to be profitable.

Another piece in this puzzle is Georgia with its pro-Western orientation and without diplomatic relations with Russia. Thus, the involvement of Tbilisi into the Eurasian project is out of Russia's short-term reach. However, the policy choices towards constructive dialogue with Russia made by the Georgian government led by Irakli Garibashvili brought some positive dynamics to the cooperation with Russia, including expanding trade and liberalization of the visa regime. If the Russian-Georgian relations continue their positive development under Giorgi Kvirikashvili's government, tensions in the region might considerably reduce. Eventually, this development could ameliorate the environment for regional cooperation, which prospectively might include the resumption of railway communication between Russia and Georgia via Abkhazia, and break a brick in the wall of the Armenian blockade.

Embedded opportunities in two different paths of integration

Regional integration between Armenia and Georgia has been complicated because of the different economic integration vectors of the two countries. Georgia signed the Association Agreement with the EU, and Armenia is a member of the EAEU. Engagement with two different customs unions may also hinder direct cross-border trade relations between Armenia and Georgia. However, this development can be seen as an opportunity. Access to the EU market may be attractive for Armenian businesses that want to export products and are also interested in investing in the Georgian economy. Similarly, the EAEU market can be attractive for Georgian businesses and trigger Georgian investments in Armenia.

For example, Georgian producers could export their goods to Armenia as semi-finished products and export them to the EAEU member states of Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan as a "Made in Armenia" brand. This type of cooperation now exists between Armenia and Iran. Armenian producers import large amounts of crawfish from Iran, keep them for a period in special

pools in Armenia, then export them to Russia as a product of Armenia. This is a real opportunity as the Russian food safety body announced recently that it will give a green light to more meat and fish producers from Armenia (Federal Service for Veterinary and Phytosanitary Surveillance 2015).

Azerbaijan is the only country in the South Caucasus that has not been integrating into the European or the Eurasian Union. However, this situation also provides an opportunity for Azerbaijan. The establishment of mutually dependent economic relations between Azerbaijan and Georgia gives hope for Azerbaijan to be closer to the EU. For further integration into the western economies, Azerbaijan needs to improve the relationship with the WTO, including the issue of its membership. Azerbaijan's integration into the WTO will provide its companies with access to the world market.

The Turkish-Armenian border: Still valid

In 2009, Armenia and Turkey were very close to opening the border. Both Turkish and Armenian governments started preparations: the roads were renovated, the railroad was upgraded, the road signs were updated and cleaned. While the normalization efforts between Turkey and Armenia eventually failed and the border remains close, opening it still has valid benefits for both sides (Schmidt 2011).

First of all, Turkish exports to Armenia are expected to at least double with the opening of borders (Jrbashyan, et al. 2005). Secondly, Armenian producers would have direct access to the Middle East and the EU markets; they can use the alternative port of Trabzon in Turkey to decrease export costs, as using the Georgian ports of Batumi and Poti is very expensive due to the distance between them and Armenian producers. Thirdly, an open border would contribute to the drastic development of bordering regions both in Turkey and Armenia. Turkey's border regions consider the closed border as isolation for themselves, too, and the open border would make this region "the starting point of Turkey, not the end" (Hrant Dink Foundation 2014). The trade between border cities would inevitably increase. Also, new infrastructure would be created such as hotels, guesthouses, restaurants, trade centers, and markets. Armenia would have an opportunity to export electricity to the bordering regions. Moreover, it would significantly contribute to the development of tourism and the establishment of small and medium-sized enterprises. Also, an open border would significantly cut the transportation costs between the two countries. Lastly, more interpersonal contacts would be made and reconciliation between the societies would start gaining ground.

The opening of the border seems to have drawbacks as well. Some Armenian experts have concerns, predicting that Turkey would start to invest considerable amounts in bordering Armenian regions leading to demographic and economic security problems in the future. As an example Chairman of Regional Development Foundation of Armenia Varazdat Karapetyan brings the Georgian experience (Karapetyan 2015). Turkish economic intervention in Adjara is very high and almost every significant business or construction is owned or run by a Turkish company (Regnum 2013). However, even with closed borders over 20,000 trucks with Turkish goods come to Armenia every year according to unofficial sources (Turkish-Armenian Business Development Council 2013).

Finally, if the changes in the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict are not happening to incite changes in the Turkish-Armenian border opening, then a reverse cause and effect logic might work: the opening of the Turkish-Armenian border could lead to changes in the situation around the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Such a shift in the situation could push all sides to search for solutions more actively.

Recommendations and conclusion

Speaking at the opening of the fourth Global Baku forum on March 10, 2016, the Azerbaijani President said, “Sometimes the questions related to energy security are being unnecessarily politicized, we are against this. Politics and energy must be separate from each other; energy should not be used as a political tool. At the same time, political instruments interfering into business development also sometimes create complications” (Official web-site of President of Azerbaijan Republic 2016). However, large transnational projects are not only economic in nature, but also political. That is the reality, and the future depends on political preferences and choices. Politicians representing all sides of conflicts in the South Caucasus have repeatedly stated their commitment to peaceful resolution. Economic cooperation is one of the most effective ways for this type of resolution. Even so, little to nothing has been done yet to advance in this direction.

On the contrary, voices that are highly skeptical of the possibility of such cooperation are the loudest. However, we believe that it might be possible. There are important precedents, perhaps most prominently the creation of the EU. “The solidarity in production thus established will make it plain that any war between France and Germany becomes not merely unthinkable, but materially impossible” (Schuman 1950). This is how Robert Schuman

summarized his intentions to create the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) with the Schuman Declaration on May 9, 1950. By pooling the two vital materials causing conflicts – coal and steel – and creating economic interdependency peace was reached in Europe after centuries of devastating conflicts and wars. The ECSC paved its way to the EU in the following decades, and despite all of its problems, it achieved one of its main goals of guaranteeing peace among its members. There has not been any armed conflict between the EU member states since its establishment in 1951. This is one of the most important reasons why it was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012. Another example of successful regional integration for conflict resolution is the Association of the Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The ASEAN was established in 1967 with one of its aims being to curb potential inter-state conflicts in Southeast Asia. Having so far realized this aim, it has also developed into an economic body that has been contributing to the development and wealth of its members.

Kanchan Chandra explains how this process might work in India among Hindus and Muslims, “Wherever Hindus and Muslims are dependent upon each other in the local economy, local Hindu and Muslim economic actors will co-operate to prevent violence in order not to incur economic losses on both sides. In such towns, if political entrepreneurs choose to play a polarizing strategy, Hindus and Muslims tied to each other in the local economy will resist. Over time, faced with resistance from these interdependent economic actors, political elites should switch to moderate strategies” (Chandra 2001). While conceptual problems for defining what type of “interdependence,” “economic relations,” or “conflict” should be taken into consideration (Crescenzi 2005), actors who run the risk of facing losses in a possible conflict would pressure politicians for less conflictual policies. Although mainly the material benefits are mentioned in this example, the effect of inter-societal communication derived from ongoing cooperation between the actors should not be underestimated.

We believe that equitable regional economic cooperation among the countries of the South Caucasus, while maintaining a balance in the system of influences of the big neighbors, is an alternative to permanent conflict. Business always strives for the best possible conditions that bring profit. However, in the context of the South Caucasus, business currently does not play an independent role and is closely intertwined with political power. At the same time, political will dominates the definition of the transnational goals and not vice versa. In order to change the situation, it is necessary to support independent business

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organizations and entrepreneurs. The more entrepreneurial pragmatism there is in the region, the more opportunities for conflict transformation will appear.

For example, the creation of a transnational regional bank that could finance regional projects with an equal participation of the South Caucasus countries could be such a step. It can start at least with the participation of Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey, but be open to Russia, Armenia, and Iran. New transnational associations of entrepreneurs and transnational entrepreneurial projects could be created, primarily in agriculture with a profitable division of production, and in tourism, by establishing schools of tour guides for cross-border trips, organizing regional festivals, and making other steps towards popularizing the region as a tourist destination.

Finally, it is crucial to maintain and develop the discussions and policy debates in the form of research, open public forums, publications exposing how much all the societies lose because of the policies of economic isolation, what the price of these policies is, and what the prospects of overcoming them are.

The biggest challenge is that conflicts become permanent and contribute to the acceptance of and adaptation to the policies of isolation and blockade. The conflict becomes the norm. Politicians, businessmen, and ordinary people can no longer build a vision for potential cooperation. Opportunities for cooperation fade away in the eyes of the citizens of the South Caucasus countries. Yet, it is obvious that the future of the region lies in the development of regional transport infrastructure, agriculture, and tourism. All these spheres suffer massive losses from the region's fragmentation and can gain a lot from regional cooperation. We believe that with closer cooperation and even integration among the South Caucasus countries, Russia, Turkey, and Iran might contribute to the resolution of the conflicts in the region.

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Review of Isolation Policies Within and Around the South Caucasus

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Policies aimed at severing communications and hindering the movement of goods and people by imposing embargos, blockades, and sanctions within the South Caucasus, and between parts of the South Caucasus and the immediate neighbors, namely Turkey and Russia, are qualified in this paper as policies of isolation. The paper starts with the analysis of the policy rationales behind cases of isolation as they appear on the level of the official discourses. It then questions the efficiency of blockades and sanctions by looking at their socio-economic and socio-political impact. Next, the paper looks at the impact that sanctions and blockades have on the policy preferences of the targeted entity which in turn often contribute to the continuation of its own isolation.

Introduction

The South Caucasus is considered foremost as a place of boundaries and divisions. It has been for centuries a border/borderland and is today fragmented by blockades and frontlines as a result of conflicts that following the collapse of the Soviet Union broke down the traditional transportation routes within the region and communications with the external world. Policies aimed at severing communications and hindering the movement of goods and people by imposing embargos, blockades, and sanctions within the South Caucasus, and between parts of the South Caucasus and the immediate neighbors, namely Turkey and Russia, are qualified in this paper as policies of isolation. More recently similar policies characterize Turkish-Russian relations as well.

This paper focuses on Russia's policies of isolation against Abkhazia in the 1990s as a reaction to the conflict in the early 1990s and the de facto secession from Georgia, Russia's isolation of Georgia as a result of the August 2008 war, and Russia's current sanctions against Turkey as a result of the downing of the Russian military jet in Syria; Georgia's isolation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as a result of their de facto secession; Azerbaijan's and Turkey's isolation of Armenia in reaction to its military advances during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict; as well as the response policies of Armenia and Abkhazia in coping with the sanctions and policies of isolation. The paper starts with the analysis of the policy rationales behind these cases of isolation as they appear on the level of the official discourses. It then questions the efficiency of blockades and sanctions by looking at their socio-economic and socio-political impact. Next, the paper looks at the impact that sanctions and blockades have on the policy preferences of the targeted entity and how political decision-making processes can internalize the context imposed by the isolation, producing policies that further isolates the side.

This paper is the result of a collaborative process which involved analysts from Turkey, Russia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, as well as Georgia and Abkhazia. The paper, while offering an integrated structure, tried also to preserve the specificity of each context. The paper does not intend to serve as an all-exhaustive comparative study.

Isolation as a policy option: the rationale

Many scholars have made attempts to develop a systematic taxonomy for understanding how linkages between countries, policy choices, and priorities can translate into leverage for the one side and exposure to pressure for the

other (Keohane and Nye 1977) (Way and Levitsky 2007). Linkages, therefore, can be seen as a source of power.

While isolation can take many forms from discrediting the target as an actor to putting travelling restrictions on the target, the most common form of isolation is economic and manifests itself through economic sanctions, boycotts, embargoes, freezing of assets and other means. In the case of economic ties, the leverage in the form of sanctions would have its best effect when its application incurs significant losses on the economy of the target state or target group. The significance of losses depends on the density of the existing economic linkages. The same is relevant for inducement and conditionality – the possible expansion of the existent economic or social contacts and creating new ones, gives the option for threatening with inhibiting these prospective benefits. Asymmetrical linkages give to the less dependent side a leverage over the more dependent side. Economic sanctions are a coercive foreign policy action of an entity, in which it intentionally suspends customary economic relations such as trade or financial exchanges, in order to prompt the targeted entity to change its policy or behavior. They are policy tools used by governments to constrain business activity across borders and divides with intended policy outcomes.

Sanctions can be classified according to their rationale. *Purposeful* economic sanctions are intended by the sender to inflict economic hardships and thus coerce the target into changing what are seen to the sender as objectionable policies. *Palliative* economic sanctions are imposed to publicly register displeasure with the actions or policies of the target. *Punitive* economic sanctions are intended to inflict harm on the target country without an explicit consideration of policy change. *Partisan* economic sanctions are intended to promote commercial or other interests (Askari 2003).

All the cases discussed in this paper appear to be *punitive* actions administered as a retaliation to what has been perceived as an act of offense. Some of them are also *purposeful* as they aim at inflicting economic hardship and thus coercing the target into changing objectionable policies. The prospect of the lifting of the isolation is envisaged as a bargaining chip in negotiations. Interestingly, while the capacity to isolate is a demonstration of power, it is often framed as a request for justice, restoration, and reparation.

Isolation policies of Azerbaijan and Turkey against Armenia

Azerbaijan's acquisition of independence came in package with a war with Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh. The loss of territories and the pain of losing the war have since been a powerful uniting factor for Azerbaijanis. The

humanitarian crisis related to the influx of refugees and IDPs into Baku and other parts of Azerbaijan led to the adoption of a forceful stance towards Armenia. The experience of war also changed radically the way most Azerbaijanis perceive Armenia and Armenians. In the official discourse and in popular culture, Armenia has become the enemy – a concept that is a common component of war ideology.

Introducing the blockade of Armenia's transportation routes and keeping it out of all regional cooperation and integration projects involving Azerbaijan has become one of the clear and pronounced goals of Azerbaijan's foreign policy in the last two decades.

The efficiency of this action has never been questioned domestically. Isolation in Azerbaijan is seen as 'natural' as a request for justice and restoration, as well as a form of punishment. In the context of the official discourse not communicating with the enemy is conceded to be a 'natural' response to the occupation of the Azerbaijani land by Armenia, while the blockade is also the demonstration of the power of the state.

Certainly, there are voices advocating the interest of reconciliation with Armenia. However, these remain marginal and increasingly more suppressed and branded by the government and nationalist groups as a 'fifth column' or 'traitors'. Re-escalation of the war in April 2016 has demonstrated how fragile the constituencies advocating for peace could feel when the official and patriotic forces take to the theater of action.

Turkey, for the past two decades has been a reliable ally of Azerbaijan, including in the latter's policies of isolating Armenia. Yet in the early 1990s, Turkey's position was less obvious. In parts of the political and bureaucratic elite, there was a clear understanding of the importance, both from a geographical and historical perspective, of establishing good neighborly relations with the newly independent Republic of Armenia. Turkey was one of the first countries to recognize Armenia's independence in December 1991¹⁸. Negotiations for the establishment of diplomatic relations with Armenia, however, did not proceed as smoothly as with the other ex-Soviet states, as

¹⁸ Turkey reacted very smoothly to the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Ahmet Mesut Yılmaz's government decided to take the risk of recognizing the independence of all the ex-Soviet states before the United States (US) and other Western powers made the same decision. One of its last acts, before leaving office was to recognize Azerbaijan on November 9, 1991. The incoming Süleyman Demirel's government followed this policy by recognizing all the other ex-Soviet states on December 16.

Turkey requested from Armenia a statement on the recognition of the common border that it did not receive.

The railroad connecting the Turkish city of Kars to the Armenian city of Gyumri that allowed communication between Turkey and the Soviet Union, however, for the time being remained operational. With the outbreak of the Nagorno-Karabakh war in the winter of 1992, Turkey agreed to contribute to international efforts to relieve Armenia's economic plight, which had been aggravated by an economic blockade on the part of Azerbaijan and the coincidental breakdown of transit routes across Georgia. In November 1992, Turkey agreed to the transit through its territory of 100,000 tons of wheat to Armenia and to supply urgently needed electricity via a grid connecting the two countries. The latter was cancelled after protests in Azerbaijan.

In March 1993, the Armenian forces launched an offensive to establish a second corridor between Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh through the town of Kelbajar, north of Lachin, causing a new flood of Azerbaijani refugees. On April 3, the Turkish government halted the supply of wheat across its territory to Armenia and sealed the Turkish-Armenian border. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey issued a statement bearing the signature of the Minister Hikmet Çetin stressing that Turkey decided to halt the delivery of aid transiting through its territory onto Armenia, to close the Turkish-Armenian border, and to interrupt all rail and air connection to Armenia, and lastly to cut trade including transit trade between Turkey and Armenia (Candan 2011, 531).

The obstruction of trade with Armenia does not have any ground beside the above-mentioned two paragraph-long decree that was addressed to the Secretariat for Foreign Trade and to the chambers of commerce. Since then, Turkey has been enforcing a *de facto* embargo against Armenia. Turkey does not issue customs declarations for goods from Turkey that are sold to Armenia or for goods from Armenia imported to Turkey through third countries. Interestingly, the on-line registration system of the Undersecretariat of Customs includes Armenia with the code 77. The registration of trade between Turkey and Armenia is technically possible; the refusal to do so stems from a political decision. The central and provincial offices of the Undersecretariat of Customs have claimed that they act based on a Ministry of Foreign Affairs' letter of 2003¹⁹.

¹⁹ During a research conducted in February 2011 by the Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey (TEPAV) in collaboration with Union of Manufacturers' and

Armenia has contested the legality of Turkey's closure of the border calling it a 'blockade' or an 'embargo'. Yerevan argues that Ankara's policies contravene the Kars Treaty, the free trade provisions of the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Millennium goals and other provisions in international law which refer to the need to guarantee access to the sea for landlocked countries. Turkey retorts that from the point of view of public international law, the closure of the border cannot be qualified either as a blockade or as an embargo, both being terms with specific legal definitions and meanings. Interestingly though, in 2002, prior to Armenia's accession to the WTO, Turkey notified the organization in exercise of its right provided by the Agreements not to consent to the application of WTO Agreements with Armenia²⁰. In 2003, when Armenia's and Azerbaijan's membership in the WTO was discussed, Turkey voted for Armenia's inclusion, but announced that it will not follow the WTO requirements towards trade with Armenia.

More recently, Turkish officials started publicizing the albeit informal existent links between Turkey and Armenia as a way of refuting the accusations of the Armenian government in blockade. The official discourse underscores the volume of trade between Turkey and Armenia, the direct flight connection between Istanbul and Yerevan, and the Armenian irregular migrants in Turkey as facts testifying that Turkey does not intend to impose an embargo on Armenia. This official discourse, however, makes understanding the reasons for keeping the border closed all the more difficult.

Businessmen of Armenia (UMBA), data was collected through interviews at the Turkish Ministry of Transportation, Maritime Affairs and Communications; the Undersecretariat of Customs, and elsewhere. The research was reflected in a briefing note "Impediment to Direct Trade between Turkey and Armenia" (The Union of Manufacturers and Businessmen of Armenia 2012).

²⁰ The following communication, dated November 29, 2002, from the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Turkey to the Chairman of the General Council, was circulated to WTO Members. "My authorities have instructed me to inform you and the General Council, prior to the approval of the agreement on the terms of accession for the Republic of Armenia, that the Republic of Turkey does not consent to the application as between it and the Republic of Armenia of the Marrakesh Agreement Establishing the World Trade Organization and the Multilateral Trade Agreements in Annexes 1 and 2 thereto." For more information, see: Gültekin Punsman, Burcu, and Anna Gevorgyan. "Review of Legal Issues Between Armenia and Turkey." *Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey (TEPAV)*. 2012. http://www.tepav.org.tr/upload/files/1353684848-2.Review_of_Legal_Issues_between_Armenia_and_Turkey.pdf.

The re-opening of the air corridor between Turkey and Armenia in 1995 constituted the only major shift in Turkey's stance towards Armenia since the closure of the border. On May 2, 1995 Turkey reopened the H50 air corridor which had been closed in 1993 to flight connections to Armenia. The reopening of this air corridor was indeed requested by the Azerbaijani civilian aviation authority. Azerbaijan and Armenia have access to each other's air space for civilian aviation. The closure of the H50 air corridor between Turkey and Armenia was affecting Azerbaijani flight connections to Turkey as well as other countries. In August 1996, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey authorized the Armenian National Airlines to start operating commercial passenger flight between Yerevan and Istanbul. (The Union of Manufacturers and Businessmen of Armenia 2012)

By 2007, Turkey and Armenia engaged in negotiations conducted under the Swiss mediation and opened a window of opportunity for the normalization of the relations. The protocols for the establishment of diplomatic relations were signed by the Turkish and Armenian Ministers of Foreign Affairs in Zurich on October 10, 2009. The protocols incorporated a detailed outline for establishing diplomatic ties, opening the common border and improving bilateral and people-to-people relations according to an agreed upon set of principles and a timetable. The border was to be opened within two months after the entry into force of the protocols. On the Turkish side, however, the Azerbaijani intervention prevented the ratification of the protocols in the parliament, effectively freezing the normalization process.

Since the failure of the protocols, the issue of the opening of the Turkish-Armenian border has been linked explicitly with the settlement of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict. Azerbaijan is pressing Turkey to maintain the border closed because the isolation can be effective only if Armenia is blockaded from both sides. In Turkey, the concern that as a result of the opening of the border, Azerbaijan would lose its main leverage on Armenia became widespread. It is believed that opening would jeopardize the Turkish-Azerbaijani relations, give economic and moral support to Armenia, and affect negatively the settlement of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict (Aslanlı 2015) (Gültekin Punsmann, *Azerbaijan in the Changing Status Quo: Adaptation Strategies* 2011). Turkey, therefore, subscribed to the Azerbaijani approach that the ending of the blockade should be clearly linked to the political settlement of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict and the withdrawal of the Armenian troops from the Azerbaijani territories, consistent with the reasons for the initial closing of the border in retaliation for Armenia's occupation of Kelbajar.

Turkey and Armenia, of course, have their own problems separate from Azerbaijan that have been complicating the bilateral relations. Turkey hoped to see Armenia to stop complaining for the recognition of the Armenian Genocide by foreign governments, and for Armenia to recognize the Turkish border: two issues on which Armenia has not been very cooperative, considering these to be both issues of justice and a leverage against Turkey.

Russian sanctions against Georgia and Turkey

The international cooperation on the territory of the former Soviet Union is characterized by asymmetrical interdependence between Russia and the other ex-Soviet republics. Russia as the former core of the unified state is able to effectively apply leverage towards the former Soviet republics without substantial harm to its own economic and political stability. Moscow has repeatedly employed this instrument of coercion in response to those political actions of the ex-Soviet states, which have been perceived by Russian policy makers to be undermining Russia's security (Markedonov 2007), such as aspirations towards the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) or the European Union (EU). This foreign policy tool has manifested itself in sanctions aimed at bringing economic hardship to the target political entity which eventually would lead to change in its objectionable policies. Similar to the cases discussed above, the pro-western policy choices of some of the former Soviet states in light of NATO's gradual advances into the countries of the former Warsaw Pact are seen from Moscow as unjust and threatening its security.

Russia's relationship with Georgia is illustrative of how this foreign policy tool that is based on leverage derived from extensive linkage can be applied. In the 1990s, Russia was supportive of Georgia's territorial integrity. It joined Tbilisi in its efforts to isolate the Abkhazian authorities that had proclaimed independence. In 1994, Moscow, concerned about the possibility of secession of its own autonomies, in particular Chechnya, used this as a pretext to join Tbilisi's blockade of Abkhazia. In a reversal of the situation, in September 1999, the Russian government cancelled its decision of December 19, 1994 "On measures temporarily restricting the crossing of the state border of the Russian Federation from Azerbaijan and Georgia", through which the blockade of Abkhazia was legitimized, as a response to Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze's reluctance to work in closer coordination with Russia on the Chechen problem (Tesemnikova 1999). Vladimir Putin, who by that time had taken the Prime Minister's office launched this toughening of policy towards Georgia at the time of the second campaign against Chechen insurgency that

was linked to the use of Georgian territory by the Chechen fighters. In December 2000, Russia introduced a visa regime for Georgian citizens with simplified procedures for residents of Abkhazia, Ajaria, and South Ossetia. As a response, Georgia started more actively developing its cooperation with NATO, further straining the Georgia-Russia relations.

After the fall of Eduard Shevardnadze in 2003 and advent to power of Mikheil Saakashvili with his even stronger pro-Western aspirations and anti-Russian rhetoric, the degree of political confrontation between Moscow and Tbilisi further increased. In the spring of 2006, it resulted in Russia's embargo on key Georgian export positions, such as wine, mineral water, and agricultural products, formally explained by quality and health concerns. Another round of Russia's sanctions against Georgia came in autumn after the Georgian authorities arrested four Russian officers and a number of Georgian citizens on charges of espionage for Moscow and launched a loud media campaign about this event. While explaining the rationale behind the new round of sanctions, Chairman of the International Committee of the Federation Council Mikhail Margelov said that the sanctions aimed to "bring the Georgian government to its senses" and "to then develop a constructive dialogue" (Ivanitskaya, et al. 2006). Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov explained that Russia views the "espionage story" as a manifestation of the *anti-Russian* and *pro-Western* policy of the Georgian government, hinting that the sanctions were a response to this Georgian policy in general and not only to the detention of the Russian officers (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation 2006).

Years later, Turkey became the first country outside of the post-Soviet space towards which Russia unilaterally applied a sanction regime. The shot down of a Russian warplane in Syria by the Turkish air forces on November 24, 2015, allegedly as a response for violating Turkey's airspace, triggered a sanctions campaign by Moscow against Ankara. The sanctions were implemented in a way that would "inflict minimal damage to the Russian economy", (Kommersant 2015) while maximizing the effect they would have on the Turkish economy. As the Russian government could not leave the downing of its warplane by a NATO-member state without a firm punitive response, the rationale for sanctions was above all to demonstrate Moscow's determination to Turkey and its allies.

Isolation policies of Georgia against Abkhazia and South Ossetia

On October 8, 1993, Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze gave up his reservations against the country joining the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). In February 1994, Georgia and the Russian Federation signed a “Bilateral Treaty on Friendship and Cooperation”, whose most significant provision was the re-establishment of the Russian military bases in Georgia. On January 19, 1996 the Council of CIS Heads (with the exception of Belarus and Turkmenistan) adopted the resolution on “Measures for the settlement of Conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia” which imposed economic sanctions on Abkhazia and led to its political and economic isolation. In its first paragraph, the resolution condemns “the destructive position of the Abkhazian side that creates obstacles on the way to mutually acceptable agreements for the political settlement of the conflict and the secure and dignified return of refugees and IDPs” and in its sixth paragraph states that the member states of the CIS, without the agreement of the Government of Georgia, “will not have economic, financial or transport transactions with the Abkhazian authorities” and “will not have official contacts with the Abkhazian authorities” (Council of the Heads of States of the CIS 1996). In a separate presidential decree adopted on January 31, 1996, the Georgian government declared “The seaport of Sukhumi, port sites and the marine area and the sector of the State border between Georgia and the Russian Federation within the territory of Abkhazia, Georgia, shall be closed to all forms of international shipments, with the exception of consignments of humanitarian aid shipped in accordance with this Decree” (Permanent Representative of Georgia to the United Nations 1996).

Following the worsening of Russian-Georgian relations in 1999, Moscow started easing its regulations on the Abkhazian border: the prohibition for men of military age to cross the border was lifted in 2000, and the citizens of the CIS countries have been authorized to enter the territory of Abkhazia. In April 2006, the Russian Federation authorized non-CIS citizens with a double entry Russian visa to cross into Abkhazia, effectively de-isolating Abkhazia from the north.

While today Georgia does not prevent travels to Abkhazia from its territory either, as it considers Abkhazia part of Georgian territory, entering Abkhazia from the Russian Federation is considered illegal by Tbilisi and is punishable by law in Georgia, since the Georgian border guards are not controlling the Adler/Psou border post.

However, the Adler/Psou has become the main gate for ordinary travelers to Abkhazia, namely for tourists, petty traders, and Abkhazians from the diaspora as crossing into Abkhazia from Georgia causes more practical problems such as the need to obtain the Abkhazian side's permission to enter and the absence of a nearby airport. The Georgian coastguard regularly detains ships which enter Abkhazian waters or seaports without Tbilisi's permission under the cause of "illegal crossing of Georgian territorial waters" and requires the payment of fines for illegally shipping goods to Abkhazia. From 1999 to 2003, the coastguard of Georgia's Border Protection Department detained over 40 ships. In 2003, the coastguard arrested 7 ships and a further 8 ships' captains were given official warnings. In July 2004, Georgia fired on a cargo ship approaching Sukhum/i and threatened to sink any ship, including those carrying Russian tourists entering its waters without permission (Gültekin Punsmann, *Abkhazia for the Integration of the Black Sea* 2009).

Reportedly, the Georgian authorities detained 22 vessels between 2004 and 2006. On October 30, 2006 the coast guard detained a Bulgarian ship whose owner was fined \$448,000. One Russian and one Ukrainian fishing vessels were detained on January 10, 2007, and the captains were held on pre-trial detention for two months. In 2009, two Turkish ships were detained: the ship "Densa Demet" on April 5 and the "New Star" on April 29. (International Crisis Group 2007)

The Russian Foreign Ministry issued a statement on September 3, 2009 warning that the further seizure of cargo ships en-route to Abkhazia by Georgian coast guard may cause "serious armed incidents" (Civil Georgia 2009). The Georgian officials decried the Russian Federation's decision to end the economic embargo on Abkhazia as "immoral and dangerous" and interpreted the Russian Federation's move as a step towards the formal annexation of Georgian territory (Lobjakas 2008).

Georgia's policies toward the other breakaway region, South Ossetia, followed a different path. Despite the conflict, for many years, the Ergneti market located on neutral territory between the Ossetian controlled Tskhinval/i and the Georgian-controlled villages of the Gori region allowed trade between Ossetian and Georgian populations caught up in the conflict and striving to survive. The Ergneti market was a rare economic mechanism in the post-violence period that became the dominant source of budget revenue for South Ossetians. 90 percent of the transfer of goods was considered illegal from the Russian and Georgian perspective. At the same time, a study undertaken with the support of International Alert in 2003 concluded that "the closure of the market by an

executive order in Georgia or Russia could cause the collapse of the economy of the entire region and result in further escalation of the conflict” (Dzhikaev and Parastaev 2004).

Yet Georgia’s government formed after the Rose Revolution in November 2003 did just that. Aiming to return South Ossetia to Georgian control, it cut off its economic lifeline. The move was done in the name of the anti-smuggling campaign and was part of Saakashvili’s larger effort to eradicate widespread corruption. The Ergneti market was shut down violently in 2004. The Georgian customs revenues collected at the Kazbegi checkpoint, the only land border linking Georgia with Russia that is controlled by official Tbilisi, went up dramatically (Civil Georgia 2004). At the local level, however, livelihoods were destroyed both on the Ossetian and the Georgian side of the former Ergneti market, taking down with them the collaboration between Georgians and Ossetians who relied on the market (Freese n.d.). The crackdown pushed South Ossetia further away from Georgia and toward complete economic dependence on Russia.

On August 26, 2008 following the August 2008 war, the Russian Federation recognized the Republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The “Treaty on Alliance and Strategic Partnership between Abkhazia and the Russian Federation” signed in November 2014 and a similar agreement with South Ossetia signed in March 2015 further increased Moscow’s influence on these regions pushing them further away from Georgia. The importance of developing relations with these regions has been underlined in “The Strategy of National Security of the Russian Federation” adopted in December 2015 that spells out the Russian interest in integrating the two secessionist republics into the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU).

Having failed to regain control over South Ossetia militarily, in 2010 the Georgian government applied a new approach toward Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The approach named the “State Strategy on Occupied Territories: Engagement through Cooperation” was more commonly known as the “Iakobashvili strategy” named after Georgian Minister of Reintegration (formerly called Minister of Conflict Resolution) who developed the approach. The strategy envisioned a certain degree of de-isolation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia adopting a “people-centered policy aimed at engagement”. The strategy, however, required any engagement with Abkhazia and South Ossetia to proceed only with a formal permission of the Georgian government, generating suspicion and rejection of communication on the side of the

Abkhazian and South Ossetian authorities and civil societies, especially as the wounds of the August 2008 war were still fresh.

The new Georgian government that came to power in 2012 tried to adopt a more conciliatory approach. As one of its steps, it once again renamed the above-mentioned Ministry of Reintegration (meant to reintegrate Abkhazia and South Ossetia into Georgia) into the Ministry of Reconciliation and Civil Equality and initiating a series of confidence-building measures. By this time, however, Abkhazia and South Ossetia found themselves in an almost complete dependence on Russia and cut off almost all relations with Tbilisi.

The impact of isolation policies

In theory, there is a difference between economic sanctions and economic warfare. The former represents a milder form of coercion employed to “inflict punishment on the selected target”, while the latter represents “economic coercive measures employed during wars as part of the general military effort to inflict as much havoc, destruction and deprivation as possible (Lopez and Cortright 1995). However, both sanctions and economic warfare affect the economies of the target entities, creating such serious problems as shortage of food, water, and medical supplies. They inflict a punishment directly on populations and lead to a systematic deprivation of entire populations of economic resources. The most harm done is to those who are least able to defend themselves, who at the same time represent the least military threat and who are the most vulnerable.

The following analysis will assess the impact of the Russian sanctions against Georgia and Turkey on the political and societal levels, followed by the analysis of the impact of the sanctions against Armenia, South Ossetia, and Abkhazia and the resulting response policies of Armenia and Abkhazia as examples.

Effects of the Russian sanctions on Georgia

As briefly mentioned above, in 2006 Russia implemented widespread sanctions against Georgia. The Russian Embassy in Georgia stopped issuing entry visas for Georgian citizens and started evacuating the families of diplomats and military personnel. Some 800 Georgians with no legal residence were expelled from Russia within a period of two months and the allowed period of stay in Russia for Georgians with visas was reduced from 180 to 90 days per year. Moscow and other municipalities conducted large inspections of businesses owned by Georgians. The visits of some Georgian and Russian artists and

sportsmen were cancelled, and the Russian ambassador to Georgia was recalled.

Abkhazia joined the Russian policy of sanctions against Georgia, and announced the tightening of border control on the Ingur/i River; the transportation of cargo was suspended, and only pedestrian crossings through the central Ingur/i bridge under a strict control was allowed.

As a result of these severe sanctions as well as the Russian involvement in the war of August 2008, Georgia moved away from Russia over the last decade. As the sanctions were extensive and comprehensive, they left almost no major dependencies that Russia could leverage as threats in geopolitical disputes. This is best illustrated on the example of the gas supply: Russia often uses gas as a geopolitical weapon. By 2006 Georgia was 100 percent dependent on Russian gas imports. However, after this supply was cut by an explosion in the North Caucasus, Georgia switched to importing its gas from Azerbaijan and in recent years has imported only 15-20 percent from Russia. Similar decreasing dependency is relevant about the export of the other goods: if until 2006 Russia was Georgia's main market, as of February 2016, the exports to Russia constitute only about 8 percent of Georgian exports, limited mainly to wine (about 1/2) and mineral water (about 1/4)²¹.

The sanctions, therefore, while causing a short-term harm to the Georgian economy, in the long-term have weakened the Russian presence and influence over Georgia, prompting it to pursue closer integration with Western institutions.

Effects of the Russian sanctions on Turkey

Starting from January 2016, Russia started implementing sanctions also against Turkey. It banned imports of certain Turkish vegetables and fruits, poultry meat, salt and carnations for bouquets. Moscow also introduced a ban on some of the activities run by Turkish companies and restrictions on the employment of Turkish citizens. Companies from Turkey were prohibited from providing services for the state and the municipalities.²² (Vinogradova and Bazanova 2016)

Tourism, an essential sector of the Turkish economy, was also restricted. On November 28, 2015, President Vladimir Putin imposed a ban on charter air

²¹The data was compiled by the Georgia-based think tank GeoWel within the EU-financed research project Intra- and Inter-Societal Sources of Instability in the Caucasus and EU (ISSICEU).

²² The data was collected from Russian official documents and media reports.

transportation between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Turkey and urged travel agents to abstain from selling tours to Turkey (President of Russia 2015). The regular flight connection of the Turkish Airlines has not been affected. Turkish Airlines flights still fly to Moscow, St. Petersburg, Ekaterinburg, Kazan, Rostov-na-Donu, Ufa, Sochi, Astrakhan, and Stavropol. Starting January 1, 2016, Turkish citizens are required to have touristic visas to enter Russia. However, reports about deportations of Turkish citizens and denying them entry into the country started appearing earlier, right after the incident with Russian military jet in Syria (Petelin and Gromov 2015) (Rozhdestvenskiy 2015) (BBC Russian Service 2015).

The number of Russian nationals visiting Turkey has been affected by the sanctions. The number of Russian nationals who travelled to Antalya during January 2016 decreased by 81 percent compared to the previous year²³ (Hurriyet Daily News 2016). Between January and March of 2016, the total number of Russians who travelled to Turkey decreased by 56 percent compared to the same period of the previous year (Interfax-Tourism 2016).

The sanctions also impacted the relations between the Turkish citizens of the Caucasus origin and the citizens of various entities in the Caucasus. Today millions of Turkish citizens have Caucasus origins. The November 24 crisis had far-reaching effects on North Caucasus-Turkey relations and affected mostly Turkish citizens living in the republics of the North Caucasus and in Abkhazia as well as the Turkish and Russian business people involved in trade relations.

The total volume of exports from Turkey to Russia have decreased in January 2016 to \$110 million from \$315 million in January 2015. The sanctions did not close the access to the Russian market for Turkish agricultural producers entirely. Nevertheless, small and medium exporters to Russia have lost their access, leading to the monopolization of the flow to Russia and distribution channels of those fruits and vegetables which are not under the Russian embargo. The loss of access has also led to re-routing of channels through other countries²⁴.

The overall effects of the Russian sanctions on the Turkish economy remain limited, with the latter benefiting from being diversified, open, and well-integrated with the world economy. Moreover, while the sanctions did not

²³ As a result, the flow of the Russian tourists to Georgia has sharply increased.

²⁴ The data was compiled by the Ankara Policy Center within the research project ISSICEU.

directly target the energy relations between Turkey and Russia, the worsening of relations had a negative impact, for example, on the “Turkish Stream” project, prompting Turkey to intensify its exports from other suppliers, including Azerbaijan. The perceived vulnerability vis-a-vis Russia is likely to have impact on Turkey’s energy policy in the future. Therefore, while the economic impact of the sanctions might not be very visible for each country, the political impact, the trajectory of strategic economic relations and policies, as well as the people-to-people relations have been severely affected and the results will be felt for decades to come.

Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Armenia: Blockaded communities. Impact on conflict settlement and confidence building

As the cases of sanctions against Georgia and Turkey demonstrate, isolation policies are harmful to long-term strategic relations, and severing links destroys interdependence. Isolation policies are even more harmful for the settlement of conflicts. Blockades and sanctions considered from Baku toward Armenia and from Tbilisi toward Abkhazia and South Ossetia are symbolic ways of defending their territorial integrity and are proclaimed to be done in the name of advancing the settlement of the conflicts. Yet they tend to solidify political positions without encouraging political compromise and they tend to generate a siege mentality halting economic integration. Closing a region or a country to the outside world also contributes to the development of a shadow and resistance economy that undermines prospects for the entrenchment of the rule of law. Isolation deepens political and mental divides. Fences erected at the borders of ethno-territorial entities sustain the image of the enemy, while the grievances and ongoing issues remain unresolved. A survivalist mentality and the spirit of innovation can emerge under the conditions created by blockades and embargoes that along with benefits for the communities that have developed these, normalize the isolation and render it ineffective. Isolated communities have proven to be highly resilient.

The situation in Abkhazia and South Ossetia on the one hand and Armenia on the other, of course, is not identical. Armenia is an internationally recognized country, member of the UN, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and other international organizations and with open borders with Georgia and Iran. Meanwhile, South Ossetia and Abkhazia were recognized only in 2008 and only by four countries, and have only one border open, connecting them with Russia. A closer comparison could be drawn

perhaps between Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh, however the limitations of human resources for this research have not allowed for the examination of every entity in the South Caucasus. The contexts of Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Armenia are discussed here, therefore, not based on their international status, but to compare their respective responses to their isolation.

Impact of the blockade on Abkhazia and South Ossetia

As already discussed above, as a result of the CIS decision to join the Georgia-imposed sanctions of Abkhazia, the unrecognized republic was virtually cut off by land from the outside world for the good part of the 1990s. The dire situation of the war-ruined economy was further exacerbated by the Russian-Georgian maritime and land blockade which caused a total economic and social breakdown. The airport was shut down for external flights and the railway functioned only within Abkhazia. The seaports were closed for passenger boats, and the Abkhazian boats could not leave port to bring goods from Turkey. The movement of people beyond Abkhazia was restricted. Men aged 16 to 60 were prevented from crossing into Russia at the Psou river. The postal services were also blocked.

In April 1997, Russia tightened the blockade of Abkhazia, cutting it from the international phone service. Turkey as well responded positively to the CIS call for imposing economic sanctions on Abkhazia and canceled direct cruises between the ports of Trabzon and Sukhum/i in 1996. Officially the maritime link between Turkey and Abkhazia remains closed up to date. Turkey is justifying its compliance with the isolation regime by respect for the territorial integrity of Georgia. The attempts of Turkish business people from the Black Sea coast to trespass the sanctions, either guided by profit or socio-cultural ties, brought a relative degree of relief for the Abkhazian population. The informal trade and economic relations with Turkey have helped the Abkhazians to survive under circumstances of almost complete isolation. A small clandestine and seasonal economy of mandarin and hazelnut trade along the officially closed borders provided a source of income for a few businesses in Abkhazia.

Unlike Abkhazia, South Ossetia was not completely isolated in the 1990s and the early 2000s. Travel and trade between South Ossetia and Georgia continued albeit with some difficulties. By 2004, the new Georgian government led by Mikheil Saakashvili severed the relations with Tskhinval/i and closed the Ergneti market where the Georgians and Ossetians unofficially conducted trade. An alternative to Tskhinval/i, South Ossetian government was installed

led by loyal to Georgia Dmitry Sanakoev and based in the Georgian-controlled parts of South Ossetia. The aim of these measures was to isolate South Ossetia and to pressure it into rejoining Georgia.

However, after the August 2008 war in South Ossetia, the Georgian government has come to rethink its policy. With Abkhazia and South Ossetia recognized by the Russian Federation, isolating them was no longer a viable policy option, and the approach was to change considerably. Nevertheless, having to give in to the domestic pressures to keep in place the isolation policies, the successive Georgian governments have not been able to bring about a qualitative change or advance conflict settlement in the way desirable for Tbilisi. Having fenced themselves off from Georgia, Abkhazians and Ossetians no longer see Georgia as a threat or a desirable development resource. The Abkhazian and Ossetian elites is inclined to believe that with partial recognition and the growing Russian military and economic presence in the region, the “Georgia factor” has lost all significance.

Moreover, years of international isolation of these societies has contributed to their mistrust of the outside world. Anti-western stereotypes are running high, promoted in the name of preserving identity and traditional values. The feeling that the opening of Abkhazia and South Ossetia to Europe and to the western community will jeopardize “traditional” values, customs, traditions, and culture is taking root.

The two societies also differ. The land-locked South Ossetian one increasingly looks toward Russia as their savior and strive for integration into Russia, while the open to the Black Sea Abkhazia seems determined to preserve its independence.

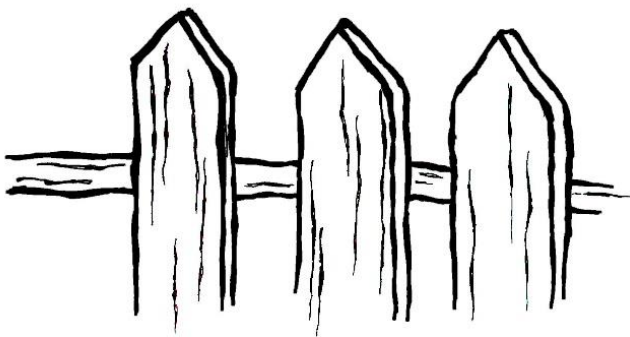
The closed Turkey-Armenia border

The closure of the Azerbaijani and then the Turkish borders became a significant obstacle to land communications to and from Armenia. Connected to its distant markets via uncertain and expensive routes through Georgia and Iran, Armenia’s development is constrained and the markets are both internally and externally monopolized harming consumers. The route from Yerevan to the Turkish border town of Iğdir lying only dozens of kilometers away is lengthened by a factor of 10 by the closed border, as traffic must transit through Georgia. It takes 14 hours to travel from the Armenian industrial city of Gyumri to Kars in Turkey despite a mere distance of 20 kilometers.

Despite the legal obstructions, trade with Turkey exists and is estimated at \$200-300 million per year (Directorate-General for Trade of the European Commission 2016). It takes place via Georgia, with the Turkish trade records showing Georgia as the final destination. Trade between Turkey and Armenia is conducted mostly in one-direction. Armenian exports to Turkey are almost non-existent; whereas, Turkey ranks among the first countries from where imports come to Armenia. According to unofficial sources, at least 20,000 vehicles bearing Turkish number plates carry goods to Armenia over Georgia every year. Opening of the Turkish-Armenian border is estimated to have far-reaching effects in Armenia that go beyond economic performance. Armenia is a small country, with a population of 3.2 million, while Turkey's population is 71 million. One can reasonably expect that Turkish human and cultural involvement in Armenia following the border opening would make a significant impact on the Armenian society.

The two countries have been separated since the 1920s. The closed border has been definitively a significant barrier to human and business interactions, preventing the populations from bridging the century-old gap dividing them. The isolation policies of Turkey and Azerbaijan also led to hardening of stereotypes against them in Armenia, supporting the perception that Armenians are in an existential conflict with one common enemy both in the east and the west. Similar to Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the growing mistrust toward these immediate neighbors led Armenia toward increasing reliance and eventually dependence on Russia for its security and economic needs, pushing it even further away from possibility of improving relations with Azerbaijan or Turkey.

When 'self-isolation' as a convenient second best option further consolidates the status quo



Sanctions and blockades have an impact on policy preferences of the targeted entity which in turn often contribute to the continuation of its own isolation. This part brings two local insights, one from Abkhazia and another from Armenia. The paper does not intend to compare these two different cases. Through two

distinct examples, it aims to shed light on how political decision-making processes can internalize the context imposed by the isolation, producing policies that further isolates the side. 'Self-isolation' is used here as a conditional term that does not mean a full isolation of oneself from everyone. It means streaming foreign and economic integration policies in the direction of one hegemonic actor, in this case Russia, at the price of depriving oneself of the possibility to develop existing and potential ties with other actors and markets. Therefore 'self-isolating' oneself from relations disapproved by the hegemon gives the latter almost unlimited leverage and influence over oneself.

'Self-isolation' or the permanent dependence on a hegemon can be perceived by the 'self-isolating' actor as the second best option to diversified foreign and economic policy – the option that is preferred to compromises that have to be made to a neighbor considered to be the 'enemy' in order to develop such a diversified policy. This option seems all the more acceptable since it offers a context where the parameters are well known. Political power consolidates in the hands of a few in a context where economic competition is restricted because of the scarcity of external connections. On the discursive level, neither Abkhazia nor Armenia consider pursuing a self-isolationist policy: yet the normalization of their relations with their immediate neighborhood is not a priority and cooperation with their immediate neighborhood requires compromises to the 'enemy' that are considered unacceptable. The second best option implies integration into the EAEU led by Russia that gives access to a large economic zone, yet that is also a protectionist commercial bloc restricting relations with alternative partners.

Abkhazia's policies in response to isolation

The signing of the Russian-Abkhazian "Treaty on Alliance and Strategic Partnership" on November 24, 2014 propelled Abkhazian-Russian relations to a new level. The overwhelming majority of the Abkhazian political and social groups positively evaluated this treaty which largely relieves its isolation and opens wider access to Russian markets and other benefits. Nonetheless, segments of the Abkhazian society that advocate for meaningful independence remained skeptical.

The baggage that came with the agreement soon became apparent. After the meeting of the adviser to the Russian President Vladislav Surkov with the Abkhazian leader Raul Khajimba on December 29, 2015, the Abkhazian government announced joining the Russian sanctions against Turkey. Addressing Abkhazian-Turkish relations, Surkov after the meeting with

Abkhazia's president Khajimba stated, "Abkhazia has no official relations with Turkey. Turkey, as everyone knows, does not recognize Abkhazia. Nevertheless, at the same time, Turkey is trying to solve here some economic and political issues. Certain circles inside Turkey, for some reason, include Abkhazia into the sphere of their possible influence." (Surkov "Turtsiya Abkhaziyu ne priznayet, no pri etom pytayetsya zdes' reshat' ekonomicheskiye i politicheskiye voprosy" 2015).

The sanctions that Sukhum/i has imposed on Turkey are considerably more harmful for Abkhazia than for Turkey, which as Abkhazia's second largest trade partner following Russia had the 14.2 percent share of the total trade volume in 2014 (EurAsia Daily 2016). The Abkhazian order on the implementation of sanctions against Turkey explicitly states that they are imposed according to "Article 4 of the Treaty between the Republic of Abkhazia and the Russian Federation on alliance and strategic partnership of November 24, 2014, providing for a coordinated foreign policy of the Republic of Abkhazia and the Russian Federation" (Cabinet of the Republic of Abkhazia 2016). Abkhazia announced banning the access of Turkish fishing vessels to Abkhazian territorial waters. The sanctions are hardly in Abkhazia's economic interest. At the same time, the Russian sanctions against Turkey opened an unexpected window of opportunity for Abkhazia, as well as the members of the EAEU, as gateways to the Russian market. Abkhazian economic circles have started making use of this argument to attract investments from Turkey.

Armenia's policies in response to isolation

Twenty-five years of semi-closed borders surely had its effects on Armenia's policy making. With no recent experience of open borders with all its neighbors, the Armenian society has grown accustomed to the situation.

Through the years of independence, changing political elites in Armenia have had different approaches to the relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan. The thesis of the first president Levon Ter-Petrosyan that envisioned considerable concessions to Azerbaijan in exchange for peace and open borders was defeated by the members of his own ruling regime. The subsequent presidents adopted a more hardline approach and the *Modus Vivendi* since then has changed towards ensuring Armenia's survival through maintaining the status quo. The third president Serzh Sargsyan's foreign policy went from somewhat pro-Western to clearly pro-Russian and in the direction of 'self-isolation' closing the door on possible alternative developments in the future.

In his 1997 article “War or Peace: Time to be Thoughtful”, Ter-Petrosyan warned his political team that without resolving the Nagorno Karabakh conflict and opening of Armenia’s borders the “normal development of the Armenian state would not be feasible” (Levon Ter-Petrosyan's Speech at the Expanded Session of the Security Council (January 8, 1998) 2006 (in Armenian)). The ‘antithesis’ of this approach was advanced by the second president Robert Kocharyan’s policy that had expressed a belief that the Armenian state will be able not only to survive but also to develop despite closed borders (Levon Ter-Petrosyan's Speech at the Expanded Session of the Security Council (January 8, 1998) 2006 (in Armenian)). Kocharyan legalized the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF), the nationalist party that was preserved in the diaspora and that had been banned by Ter-Petrosyan in 1995. This party became one of his main power pillars and the diaspora’s role in Armenia was strengthened. At the same time, the two-digit economic growth in the early 2000s, largely due to the development of the construction sector, earned Armenia even the title of the ‘Caucasian Tiger’, vindicating Kocharyan’s approach. However, Kocharyan and his entourage understood very well, that this was more a ‘paper tiger’ and that without opening the borders, Armenia’s economy would not be able to sustain its growth.

With the growing confrontation between the West and Russia in the late 2000s and the increasing Turkish-Russian standoff in Syria, the Armenian leadership’s ability to maintain collaborative relations with both Russia and the West was constricted. Armenia increasingly leaned on Russia at the expense of all other relations. While the failure to reach the opening of the Armenian-Turkish border was the first setback of Sargsyan’s presidency, the failure to sign the Association Agreement with the EU was certainly the one that sealed Armenia’s move toward ‘self-isolation’. Of course, one can contend that the inability to reach these agreements was not necessarily Sargsyan’s choice but rather a necessity dictated by the assessment of the geo-political environment; nevertheless, the root cause of Armenia’s limited geo-political maneuverability has been first and foremost the unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Few would disagree that Armenia’s accession to the EAEU and turning down the Association Agreement was preconditioned by Russia’s security leverage on Armenia, as voiced by Sargsyan in his speech on September 3, 2013 (Armenpress 2013). According to some Armenian commentators, the price for joining the EAEU was not only the loss of ability to further integrate with the European structures, but also economic losses. Russia, finding itself under growing international isolation and in a context of freefalling oil prices, was not

able to sustain the EAEU, making the participation in the union economically harmful for Armenia (Standish 2015) (Karapetyan 2015). Furthermore, the attempt by the Russian energy monopolist to increase prices of electricity for Armenia's residents brought thousands of protesters into the streets in what became known as the "Electric Yerevan" of the summer of 2015 (Mackey 2015), although failing to bring significant changes to the energy policy. At the same time other commentators argue that EAEU was beneficial for Armenia's economy (Ria Novosti 2016) (Chichkin 2015) (Materik 2015).

These years left a watermark also on Armenia's relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan. Armenia's ability to negotiate in the circumstances of increasing dependence on Russia has been questioned; while the commemoration of the centennial of the Armenian Genocide crystalized the rhetorical loci of redefining Armenia's relations with Turkey. In February 2015, President Sargsyan officially recalled the protocols on the establishment of diplomatic relations with Turkey from the Armenian National Assembly (News 2015 (in Armenian)), burying the normalization process on the Armenian end. In this same period, the negotiations with Azerbaijan have effectively hit a dead end, paralleled by an unprecedented growth of militarization and war rhetoric that resulted in an on-going escalation culminating in the Four Day War of April 2016 and nullifying any possibility for political settlement in a medium-term future.

Ending isolation and re-establishing linkages

As shown in this paper, isolation can hardly prove as an effective strategic policy choice towards its initial objective. The common final goal of the entities exploiting leverage is to draw the target entity closer into their orbit of influence, that is, to establish even closer ties with the target entity. The long-standing policy of sanctions, blockades, and isolation, however, is fraught with a threat for the dominant power of not only alienating the target entity, but also losing the linkages and therefore the tools of influence.

In none of the discussed cases did the isolation policies help to reach the policy aims. Yet the political powers that impose sanctions and blockades rarely conduct efficiency tests. More than the harm caused by the sanctions, it is the possibility to lift them that can give an additional incentive when sides are already in talks about the normalization of relations. The context of the progressive normalization of relations between Russia and Georgia provides a good illustration.

Daniel Drezner who analyzing Russia's economic coercion and trade disruption in the former Soviet space (Drezner 1999) reached the conclusion that such policies are more successful when directed toward allies rather than political adversaries, which can be confirmed by the example of the Russian-Armenian relationship. In adversarial relationships, states will be aware of the likelihood of future confrontations, and therefore less likely to offer short-term concessions.

Turkey and Azerbaijan, at the same time, were unable to extract any concessions from Armenia, despite two decades of sanctions aimed towards that end. With independent Armenia never having lived in conditions of open borders with Turkey or Azerbaijan and having built its economy accordingly, the sanctions have had little effect on the policy making in Armenia and if anything, they have contributed to mistrust and adoption of a harder-line rather than softening of positions. Moreover, with the memory of the Armenia Genocide constituting the core of the Armenian identity, the mistrust towards Turkey remains high, and the opening of the border and the improvement of economic relations is not always seen as desirable. Many circles in the Armenian government and society fear that the open border will give Turkey too much leverage vis-à-vis Armenia, which can jeopardize its security should the relations take another negative turn.

In case of Georgia, since Moscow explicitly ruled out any possibility of cooperation with Mikheil Saakashvili's government after the war of August 2008, negotiating a lift to the embargo became possible only for the opposition, and the latter included this carrot in its basket of pre-election promises to the population. Thus, Bidzina Ivanishvili and his opposition party "Georgian Dream" proclaimed the normalization of relations with Russia as one of their priorities. After winning the elections in 2012 and Saakashvili's resignation in 2013, the new government started building dialogue with Russia to end the economic sanctions. Georgia no longer conditioned the relationship exclusively by the disagreement over the status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, while at same time, it remained rhetorically committed to territorial integrity. Upon receiving some positive signals from the new incumbents in the Georgian government and seeing a decrease in anti-Russian rhetoric, Moscow started gradually lifting the sanctions, opening its market for Georgian exports, re-launching flight connections, and softening visa regulations for Georgian citizens. However, one of the main goals of the Russian strategy towards Georgia – the prevention of Georgia's integration into the Western structures – remains only partially achieved with Georgia not joining so far NATO yet

signing the Association Agreement with the EU. Apparently at this stage, the Russian policy makers count on the increasing linkage beneficial for Georgian economy. Improving the general environment for the Russian-Georgian cooperation, initiates positive changes in the Georgian public opinion about Russia and increases the latter's leverage in the relationship.

The normalization of relations, however, can prove to be difficult as the side that was once the object of sanctions tends to mistrust the relationship and to fear re-entering into a relationship that creates asymmetrical dependency. This is illustrated not only by the Russian sanctions against Georgia, but also Georgia's isolation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Tbilisi's policy of isolation in its present form stopped being an instrument of coercion on Sukhum/i or Tskhinval/i, that during the years of conflict and isolation developed strong mistrust toward Georgia and rebuilt their infrastructure economy centering on relations with Russia. Nor did the policies of isolation promote conciliation between the conflicting sides or led to conflict resolution. The current Georgian government has acknowledged the inefficiency of the policies of isolation, yet remains torn between the desire to promote de-isolation and the fear that the de-isolation might ultimately legitimize the secessionist regions and prompt international recognition of their independence. Georgia today tries to balance between 'softer isolation' and 'engagement without recognition' approaches, which are viewed with suspicion from Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

The Abkhazian and South Ossetian authorities are concerned that Georgia might exploit the opening of these regions to the outside world. Some fear that the process of de-isolation and increased interaction with Georgia might lead to eventual restoration of Georgian control. The Georgian approach to the engagement supports these fears. While offering to engage with Abkhazia and South Ossetia in areas such as healthcare, education, and business, the "Georgian State Strategy on Occupied Territories" provides that all areas of cooperation of Abkhazian and South Ossetian populations with foreign countries should be controlled by the Georgian government and contacts should be made only with the permission of the Georgian government. Thus, the work of international organizations operating on the territory of Abkhazia are coordinated with Georgia's state strategy of engagement, which discredits these initiatives in the eyes of the population of Abkhazia, while no international organizations other than the Red Cross operate in South Ossetia as of today.

According to many Abkhazian and Ossetian experts, the political bias of international institutions, and, consequently, their goals and objectives, result

in a very limited international presence and effectiveness. South Ossetia is not engaged with many international organizations, and Abkhazia's engagement with Western institutions is often made conditional on the need to maintain contacts with Georgia. Almost all international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) working in Abkhazia have a mandate as institutions which specialize in peacebuilding and confidence building or the provision of humanitarian aid, rather than institutions directly involved in implementing development programs. The experts point out that international institutions do not take into account the inequality of conflicting parties' 'starting' positions after the 1992–1993 wars and the August 2008 one. While Georgia was given massive assistance for state building and the development of democratic institutions and infrastructure, Abkhazia and South Ossetia whose territories were devastated by the wars, found themselves with no assistance and in isolation for many years, adding insult to injury to the societies traumatized by violence.

Conclusion

Sanctions, blockades, and embargos are considered policy tools because of the existence of asymmetrical linkages that give to the more powerful entity leverage over the dependent one. As far as the cases discussed in the paper are concerned, isolation policies have not been effective in extracting any concessions and have served primarily as punitive actions administered in retaliation. Interestingly though, while the isolation policies are a demonstration of power on the one side, they have often been linked to considerations of justice, restoration, and reparations on the other. The prospect of the lifting of the isolation has also served as a bargaining chip during negotiations, although with mixed efficiency as the isolated entities often become accustomed to the situation, develop mistrust toward the sanctioning side, build alternative economic linkages, and are suspicious of the benefits of normalizing relations, in the extreme cases preferring 'self-isolation'.

Isolationist policies, in all cases, cause economic hardships, limit economic opportunities, and prevent the creation of sources of income generation that require the opening up of local economies to the outside world. Furthermore, sanctions and blockades restrict mobility and curtail people-to-people contacts. This cost is particularly high for the societies that used to intermingle extensively and develop strong cross-communal and transnational cultural ties, including in the form of intermarriage as was the case for with Georgians and Ossetians. Moreover, isolation deepens conflict divides, keeps communities at

both sides in fear, and contributes to the perpetuation of the enemy image, hindering the establishment of trust and the possibilities of finding a common ground.

The policies of isolation, therefore, are counter-productive for the settlement of conflicts. They tend to solidify mutually exclusive positions and discourage compromise. They generate a siege mentality and make the economic integration seem unappealing. Contrary to the accepted rationale, isolation policies do not make the target entity more cooperative, but reduce the propensity of societies to compromise. The consolidation of power structures in the hands of a few in a context where economic competition is restricted leads to the monopolization of entire sectors of economy and the resultant interest of economic elites to preserve the status quo that benefits them. It is, therefore, the ending of isolations and the re-establishment of linkages and connections, rather than the isolation policies, that contribute to normalization and conflict resolution.

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Transcending Borders: Federal and Transnational Approaches to Conflict Resolution

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This paper starts off with a brief discussion of the essence of the political theory and practices of federalization. It then moves to the consideration of the significant experience of federalization in the South Caucasus on the official or state level in the 20th century followed by the peculiarities of the Soviet legacy. After summarizing the learning form these past experiences, the authors look into the current period, identifying forces for and against federalization and integrational processes in the region on the official or state level. In order to identify other resources or possibilities for federalization, the paper then changes the level of analysis taking the discussion to the level of the society. A reflection on societies and the routine as well as civil society transcendence of borders is presented. This reflection analyzes how the emergence of tight social networks among the communities in the border areas and the supranational networks of individuals and civil society organizations create potential and prospects for integration and conflict transformation in the region of the South Caucasus.

Introduction

Various international organizations and the “big” powers often propose to draw on the experience of federalization to help end the conflicts lingering in some post-Soviet countries for over a quarter century now. Several questions arise when considering the option of federalization. Is it a political panacea that can ensure security and protection of rights for ethnic groups (so called minorities)? Or is it a leverage of pressure for the “big” powers, which have national interests all around the world and use it to influence smaller states? What is the relationship between the federal and autonomous (political and cultural) types of territorial governance? Does federalization provide options for the integration or disintegration of state structures?

This list of questions can be complemented by a series of more nuanced ones. Since federalization is no longer a theoretical construct, but has precedents of application, what are the lessons learned based on the available experience? Is an increase in the number of federal states predictable, or, on the contrary, is the collapse of the already existing ones more likely? In the *era of post-Cold War* politics, how independently from outside influence do the states and societies in the post-Soviet space choose their constitutional order? What (if anything) does the idea of federalization mean to the South Caucasus states and the region as a whole? What are the chances that the immediate neighbors in the region – Iran and Turkey – will become federal states in the future? Obviously there are many questions, and this paper will address only a few of them.

First of all, the paper will concentrate on the significant experience of federalization on the official (state) level in the 20th century. The authors believe that the idea of federalization of the South Caucasus today is purely utopic. The level of trust among political regimes is almost zero. The memory of recent wars is still alive, and a new war in Nagorno Karabakh seems increasingly inevitable. It would be very naive to expect any, even the weakest, form of unification within a confederation framework similar to the European Union (EU). Each country looks at the neighbors with suspicion, if not outright hostility. Most borders are either difficult to cross or firmly sealed.

However, these statements are true compared to the ideal models of relations among states at the macro level. In real life, everything is much more complex and simple at the same time. Thinking about the so called geopolitics, the focus usually tends to be on “state interest” leaving out individual interests of the citizens of these countries and the civil society in general. Meanwhile, history knows many examples of how civic initiatives have changed the meaning of

borders in people's lives. Following the citizens' change of perception of the neighbors on the other side of the border, the governments have set new rules of communication with the neighboring countries. This is, for example, how the EU was created and developed.

Federalism: to the core of the concept

The authors of this paper do not aim at contributing to the discussion on the history and theory of federalism. However, in order to clearly define the authors' position, a brief discussion of the essence of the political theory and practices of federalization is included. The peculiarities of the Soviet legacy will also be discussed.

During the last years of the 20th century, Vincent Ostrom and Daniel Elazar made a significant contribution to the understanding of this phenomenon within the American federalist school of thought. According to Michael Burgess, "It is, above all, a biblical perspective of federalism. According to this perspective, the concept of covenantal federalism embodies a set of normative principles which bind partners together in a moral contract or agreement of trust. The act of coming together remains a 'political bargain' but it is much more than just this; it is also based upon mutual recognition, tolerance, respect, obligation and responsibility" (Burgess, *Comparative Federalism: Theory and Practice* 2006, 49). Of course in this case – as probably in any attempt to define such a complex phenomenon – an ideal model of relationships is offered where federalization is viewed as a means of establishing the most encompassing mutual trust and conflict-free coexistence possible within a single state or in some form of an inter-state union.

Today there are at least a dozen definitions trying to convey the essence of this socio-political process (Elazar 1987, 5) (Kelemen 2003, 185) (Hueglin and Fenna 2006, 32-33). One of the most successful ones is the definition offered by Ronald Watts: "Federalism refers to the advocacy of multi-tiered government combining elements of shared-rule and regional self-rule. [...] Within the genus of federal political systems, federations represent a particular species in which neither the federal nor the constituent units of government are constitutionally subordinate to the other, i.e. each has sovereign powers derived from the constitution rather than another level government, each is empowered to deal directly with its citizens in the exercise of its legislative, executive and taxing powers and each is directly elected by its citizens" (Watts 1996, 6-7).

Summarizing the definitions presented in literature, federalization implies a

decentralization of power, a greater proximity of state institutions and actors to each individual citizen, the formation of equal and horizontal relations, and more freedom in decision-making processes that affect the everyday life of the citizens. It is important to underline that all the definitions imply a democratic form of governance.

Different forms of a political federative order are possible, but it is important to pay attention to “key distinctions between intrastate and interstate federalism” (Burgess, *Federalism and the European Union: The Building of Europe, 1950-2000* 2000, 1). In the case of the South Caucasus, this implies the prospects of federalization within each country, as well as the possibilities of developing such relationships on the regional level – between countries.

The incentives for federalization also vary greatly. Three different experiences (the US, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), and the EU) indicate that federalization, a process largely determined by the level of development of the political system and the economy of the state or states, can be voluntary as well as forced. In the period after the Second World War and during the Cold War era, when two superpowers were competing for hegemony in the world, local or regional trends in federalization were often influenced by external forces which supported or obstructed these tendencies based on their own interests.

Discussions on borrowing the international experience in this sphere remain relevant for many post-Soviet states. Such discussions expose a lot of auxiliary issues determined by the specific socio-political and conflict contexts. It is often said that focus on federalization streams not from global principles or legal norms, but from the influence of external political forces often driving the situation into a deadlock. Due to “frozen” conflicts, which basically means that neither of the sides has enough resources to accomplish the desired outcome, external powers have no other choice than to support the status-quo. Almost three decades of lingering conflicts show that the prospects of conflict resolution may include provisions on possible federalization or autonomies (political, cultural, or territorial), but the shape of the political regimes, as well as the overall mood within the societies are also important. The latter are often not ready for a decentralization of power. However, this should not impede the theoretical study on the potential of federalism in addressing the consequences of conflict.

Federative states and autonomies

Currently there are about three dozen states in the world that consider themselves federations. With very different forms of governance, a number of regions enjoy different and often very high levels of autonomy from the center²⁵. Such governance approaches are usually driven by a desire to avoid serious conflicts or solve the already existing ones. Often it is also a way to preserve the state itself.

Federative systems and autonomies, similarly to any other form of governance, are not static. This approach should not be regarded as a one-time and final solution to any conflict. Throughout the 20th century, there have been many cases of federalization and de-federalization of states. An example of such a short-lived association of states is the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic proclaimed on April 22 of 1918 and which lived only until May 26, 1918 (Świętochowski 1985, 105-128) (Suny 1994, 185-195).

Obviously in modern states, factors affecting the design of a federative administrative-territorial division or autonomous regions can be very different. Importance lies not only with how these states emerged on the contemporary political world map of the world, but also with their political traditions, economy, the ethnic and religious composition of the population, as well as the geography. The nuances of compliance with or dismissal of factors that contribute to federalization or the formation of autonomies determine whether these formations are *real* or *formal* in nature.

After this general discussion of federalism and autonomies and their possible “pitfalls”, let’s now have a closer look at the first quarter of the 20th century when federalism was implemented in the South Caucasus.

²⁵ For example, there is a very high level of autonomy for a number of regions in Spain, which is a parliamentary monarchy; in the parliamentary-presidential republic of Ukraine, Crimea is an autonomous republic; South Tyrol enjoys a high level of autonomy in the unitary-parliamentary republic of Italy and so on. See more on this: Benedikter, Thomas. *The World’s Modern Autonomy Systems: Concepts and Experiences of Regional Territorial Autonomy*. Bolzano: Institute of Minority Rights, EURAC Research, 2009. (Benedikter 2009).

The Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, and the South Caucasus: Beginning of the 20th century

An autocratic king stood at the head of the Russian Empire. A reform of the governance practices and the formation of a new administrative and bureaucratic apparatus that would be a match to the other systems of the second half of the 19th century began after the Great Reforms of 1861. At the same time, the modernization of governance in the Transcaucasian²⁶ provinces was facing a number of specific problems. According to Jörg Baberowski, nowhere the dilemma of state bureaucracy was so obvious as at the multiethnic peripheries of the empire. The bureaucratization of these regions was synonymous to the marginalization of the indigenous elites who represented the power of the center on the periphery during the pre-reform period. Strange people using a strange language explained and enforced strange laws – this is how bureaucratization of the outskirts was perceived by the local elites and the peasant population (Baberowski 2008, 87).

Among local officials, there were many Christian Georgians and Armenians, while Turkic Muslims were less integrated into the governance and the bureaucratic structures. As everywhere else in the Russian Empire, the territory of Transcaucasia was administratively divided into provinces and districts. The second half of the 19th century and the early 20th century was the period of the establishment of national elites and the promotion of the ideas of autonomy in the region of the Caucasus.

The Special Commission on drafting the “Fundamental Laws of Provisional Government” took up the issues of governance after the February Revolution of 1917. At that point, Poland and Finland were already demanding independence, while the Caucasus elites were merely dreaming about some type of autonomy from the central government. Perhaps, the desire of the Provisional Government to preserve Russia as a unitary state became one of the reasons of its rapid collapse.

Even before the collapse of tsarism, the question about the future political structure was the central question in the programs of all parties. Gradually the urgency of the choice between federation or autonomies (cultural or other) was replaced by the urgency of the choice between national and territorial division of the future subjects of the Russian state entities. The most influential parties

²⁶ In this paper, the denomination “Transcaucasia” is used in reference to the South Caucasus because it narrates a particular period in history.

proposed divergent solutions. The social-revolutionary party sought to create a federation, while the social-democrats wanted to preserve the centralized state.

In literature, arguments are made that events in the South Caucasus after the collapse of the USSR surprisingly resemble or even repeat the events in the South Caucasus after the collapse of the Russian Empire (Abasov and Khachatryan, *The Karabakh Conflict. Variants of Settlement: Concepts and Reality* 2005, 33) (Dilanyan, Abasov and Javakhishvili 2006, 53-70) (Furman 2001, 9, 496). Of course, history does not repeat itself even if the same subject has to go through the same challenges and risks reminiscent of those it faced in the past. However, the previous experience with its mistakes and achievements has an independent value which can help to adjust the new path.

In the case of the South Caucasus, a direct reliance on past experience is possible since during the 20th century, federalization was implemented twice in the region through the Transcaucasian Federation of 1918 and the Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic (TSFSR) of 1922-1936 (Abasov, *Mezhdunarodnyye otnosheniya Azerbaydzhana i Germanii ot istokov i do nachala XX veka: politicheskiy aspekt*. 2015). After the start of the First World War, the ideas of federalism became more popular. Bihl Wolfdieter says that Georgia sought complete autonomy. It was ready to fight against Russia if the German Reich and Austria-Hungary guaranteed its full independence. On September 27 of 1914, the Georgian committee operating in Berlin under the leadership of Giorgi Machabeli and Mikheil Tsereteli sent an academic article to Vezendok entitled "The Project on the Neutralization of the Caucasus and its Future Political Structure". According to this project, neutral Caucasus state unions were to be established – 'Kingdom of Georgia', 'Armenian-Tatar (Azerbaijani) Canton' and 'Union of Mountainous People' (Wolfdieter 1975, 402).

The Special Transcaucasian Committee (*OZaKom*) and its replacement the Transcaucasian Commissariat, and the Transcaucasian Sejm were created in 1917-1918 as transitional governance bodies toward the Constituent Assembly, which would allow Transcaucasia to become part of a renewed Russia again. Politically there were two options – three autonomies or one united federative structure as part of a single state. As it was expected, being part of the Russian Empire for a century did not allow the ideas of national independence and a sovereign state to develop in the social consciousness of the South Caucasus societies. At the same time, this period was sufficient for Transcaucasia to be viewed as a single space despite the differences among national communities living here.

On February 23 of 1919 in Tiflis, the All-Russian Constituent Assembly deputies established a 133-person executive body – the Transcaucasian Sejm, after the Bolsheviks dissolved the Assembly on January 6 of the same year. On April 22 of 1918 under pressure from Turkey, who refused to negotiate with the structures deprived of sovereignty, the Sejm adopted a resolution on independence of the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic. On April 26 this government proclaimed sovereignty and the independence of Transcaucasia. However, on May 25, the representatives of Georgia made a statement stressing that the attempt to unite the people of the Caucasus around the slogan of “independence” was not successful and disintegration of the Caucasus was evident. On May 26 of 1918, the Transcaucasian Sejm adopted its last decision: “Due to fundamental divergences on the issue of war and peace among the nations of the Transcaucasian independent republic, and the inability to establish one united authoritative power speaking on behalf of the Caucasus, the Sejm announces the dissolution of Transcaucasia and lays down its powers” (Arkomed 1923, 100) (Bagirova 2007).

Starting from 1918 and in the 1920s, unsuccessful attempts were made to establish a confederation under the auspices of the Triple Entente. The main impediment to these endeavors were territorial disputes that would turn into full conflicts. In April 1920, the Bolsheviks occupied Azerbaijan; they took over Armenia in November 1920 and Georgia in February 1921. This put in motion the process of the Sovietization of the Transcaucasia. According to Terry Martin the support to the national status was the foundation of the Soviet national policy and the establishment of the Soviet Union in 1922-1923 created a territorial national entity and not a federation of autonomous national territories (Martin 2002, 81).

In the early 1920s, a heated debate on the structure and the system for the delegation of authorities accompanied the formation of the Transcaucasian Federation. Moscow sought to control the economy and administrative governance allowing some degree of autonomy in cultural and national aspects. From the very first days of the Sovietization, Moscow set an objective for the new government on unification “within one big communist family”. Initially this was meant to be a unification at the level of a region which would then become part of the Soviet Union which was established in 1922. One of the first government acts was on the unification of the Transcaucasian railroads. In 1921, the “Georgian, Azerbaijani and Armenian Union on Foreign Trade” was established.

In the December of 1921, the Plenum of the Caucasian Bureau of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) and later the first Congress of the Communist organizations of Transcaucasia, held in February 1922, ruled to accelerate the establishment of a common political center of Transcaucasia. The Congress approved the draft Union Treaty of the Soviet Socialist Republics of Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia, as well as the provisions on the Supreme Economic Council. At the same time, despite the pressure from the Center, many Communists continued to oppose the establishment of the federation considering it premature and erroneous (Bagirova 2007).

On March 12 of 1922, at the conference of the Central Executive Committee (CEC), the representatives of the three republics adopted the Union Agreement on the establishment of the TSFSR declaring that in that the Soviet Socialist Republics of Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia were joining a close military, political, and economic union. The Union Council officially assumed military and fiscal matters, foreign policy and trade, transport and communication, the administration of economic policy, and the fight against counter-revolution. The Union Council organized a united Caucasian People's Commissariats, settled border disputes as well as questions on use of forests, water resources, and pastures in the provinces (Bagirova 2007).

In January 1923, the Transcaucasian CEC (*ZakCIK*) established the People's Commissars of the TSFSR within which the Supreme Economic Council was created. During the first congress, the constitution of the TSFSR was adopted stating that the union of the three republics was voluntarily and each of them remained a sovereign state with its own constitution that was in agreement with the constitution of the TSFSR, and later the USSR. Each republic also retained the right to leave the TSFSR. The TSFSR represented a new form of relations among the Soviet republics. Unlike the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic (RSFSR) built not on the basis of autonomies, the TSFSR was built on contractual relations of three equal and sovereign Soviet republics and it was effectively the first step towards the establishment of the Soviet Union (Bagirova 2007).

The early years of the Transcaucasian Federation coincided with the economic crisis and devastation all across the country. To overcome this, Vladimir Lenin proposed the implementation of the New Economic Policy. On January 10 of 1923, a decree on introducing a single Transcaucasian banknote – the bon, was made. However, in 1924 Transcaucasian CEC and the Council of the People's Commissars published a decree on the introduction of a new hard currency on the territory of the entire Union (Bagirova 2007).

The Caucasian Bureau and the Congress of the Councils of the Republics adopted resolutions on the creation of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic in 1921 and the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast in 1923 as part of Azerbaijan. The Abkhazian Soviet Socialist Republic that existed from 1921 to 1931 later became the Abkhazian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic and together with the Adjarian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (established in 1921) and the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast (established in 1922) constituted part of Georgia. The Transcaucasian Federation existed as part of the Soviet Union until 1936. With the adoption of new Constitution of the USSR, the Transcaucasian Federation was dissolved, leaving behind a rather contradictory experience.

One of the positive aspects of federalization was the strengthening of integrative processes across the full range of political, economic, social, and cultural issues. It somewhat resulted in a unison of the region itself as well as its various territories that were formally part of different state entities. The development of industry and other branches of economy, even though implemented forcibly, resulted in the development of specialized production in the republics uniting them within a single system. Due to the absence of formal borders between the republics, the conflicts – even though lingering in a latent form – were pushed to the periphery of political life. The years spent as part of the Transcaucasian Federation brought people of the region together and contributed to the development of a common Soviet identity.

On the other hand, the sharp disconnect between the legal foundations and the everyday practices of the implementation of federalism brought out its negative aspects. The attempts to level all republics to uniform standards of economic development led to a situation when this policy was implemented in one region at the expense of the others²⁷. The comparison of the share of the South Caucasus republics in the Soviet gross domestic product (GDP) makes it evident that Georgia was always in leading positions. Moreover, the unhealthy competition for resources gave birth to a new Soviet nationalism. And when the Transcaucasian Federation dissolved, nobody on the ground (even formally) stood up to preserve it, which speaks about its imposed nature.

²⁷ This problem exists in various countries today as well and is cause to separatist movements in Canada, Spain, Italy, and other places.

Federalization after the collapse of the USSR

The independence of the South Caucasus states and multiple conflicts revived the ideas of different models of unification, integration, and formation of autonomies even though nobody wanted to give up the recently gained independence. In the early 1990s, the idea of the Caucasian house emerged first was advocated by the people of the North Caucasus in 1992 and later by Eduard Shevardnadze. In March 1996, Georgia and Azerbaijan signed a “Manifesto on Peace, Security, and Cooperation in the Caucasus Region” known as the Tbilisi Declaration. The 1997 Kislovodsk meeting between the presidents of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia, and Russia yielded the Declaration “On peace, economic and cultural cooperation in the Caucasus”. In November 1999, a pact on regional cooperation was discussed at the Istanbul Summit. Nevertheless, all these declarations had little impact at the regional level, except for the establishment of bilateral and trilateral contacts – Georgia-Azerbaijan, Georgia-Armenia, Azerbaijan-Georgia-Turkey. Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili also expressed a wish to form a confederation between Azerbaijan and Georgia which Baku neglected.

The West regularly proposes programs for regional cooperation. The desire to diminish Russia’s role resulted in proposals by the EU and the US to start building structures of regional security in the South Caucasus. At different international forums, the idea of a South Caucasus federative state with the prospects of EU membership is being discussed²⁸.

Some Western and local political analysts consider that a union with a respective limitation of the sovereignty of member states, coordination, and a

²⁸ One of the first events with a detailed analysis of this prospect was the international conference “The Caucasus – Region of Frozen Conflicts” organized by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung in Berlin (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung 2002). Within the framework of the conference, nine thematic blocks were presented. The block “Regional Economic Cooperation: Reality and Vision” argued that through such partnership the intensity of conflicts could diminish. The block “Integration of the Caucasus into Supra-Regional Cooperative Structures” analyzed the work of the Organization for Democracy and Economic Development (GUAM), the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) and suggested new models of supra-regional cooperative structures. The block “Europe and the Caucasus: The Pact of Stability?” discussed the models for stabilizing the situation in the Caucasus and expanding Europe’s role in the South Caucasus and so on. Similar conferences have been organized regularly in Georgia and abroad and also included in the agenda of almost all the summits of European institutions.

concept for joint security could foster compromise and eventually lead to the peaceful resolution of the conflicts in the region. However, many regional experts are very skeptical about the possibility of such integration arguing that the societies of the South Caucasus are not ready for such integration, and the West is not consistent and active enough in promoting this issue (Dilanyan, Abasov and Javakhishvili 2006). Without a doubt ongoing military conflicts in the South Caucasus and the authoritarian political regimes are responsible for delaying the integration process. In addition, ethnocratism with a virtual and formal privilege of the “titular nation” – the dominant group – as a form of political domination in the South Caucasus republics and the reluctance of the privileged groups to give up this system is another factor in this process.

Conflicts and the role of Russia

The views of some Russian political analysts represent the position of the ruling elites who publically prefer to support the principle of “let people decide themselves how they should live”²⁹. The precedent of Kosovo became a turning point in Russia’s engagement with the “near abroad” states. Moscow used this to recognize the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia connecting this decision with “Georgia’s aggression”³⁰. At the same time, Moscow stressed that this is not applicable to situations in Transnistria and Nagorno Karabakh. The hybrid war in Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea solidified Russia’s new foreign policy toward the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries that were gravitating towards the US and the EU. Russia introduced the program of the “Eurasian Union” that unlike the EU Association Agreement, it is not only inviting but also compelling new members into this organization³¹.

²⁹ This opinion has come across in the speeches and statements by Vladimir Putin, Dmitry Medvedev, and other Russian officials. This approach although meant to be democratic speaks strongly in favor of the right of the self-determination of nations and therefore comes with implications.

³⁰ Both Russian leaders even labeled Georgia’s actions as genocide. Vladimir Putin is quoted to have said, “In my opinion, these are already elements of genocide against the Ossetian people” (Obroskov 2008).

³¹ Moscow tried to coerce Kiev into joining the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) (Rossiya potrebovala ot Kiyeva vstupleniya v YevrAzES 2011). It also repeatedly offered Azerbaijan to join this organization, especially before the confrontation between Turkey and Russia when there were no objections on the side of Turkey. Due to Russia’s pressures, Armenia’s signing of the Association Agreement with the EU was

This led to the resumption of discussions on federalization in Georgia, which at some point culminated in a direct appeal to the Abkhazian authorities to join a confederate state. This proposal was rejected by the Abkhazian authorities (Podrobnosti 2004) (Coppieters, Kovziridze and Leonardy 2003) (Lebanidze 2015). Some Russian experts argue that Azerbaijan “faces several potential ‘South Ossetia’ situations – territories with a compact residence of Lezgins, Avars, the Talysh, and Kurds, and thus also has to consider federalization” (Sukhov 2008).

Some Russian experts believe that Georgia is more inclined toward federalization. The underlying logic is that a change in the relations between Tbilisi and the region of Samtskhe-Javakheti populated by ethnic Armenians and the region of Kvemo Kartli populated by ethnic Azerbaijanis will result in the empowerment of these regions and will not only prevent them from taking the route of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, but will also attract back these latter breakaway regions. “Federalization of Georgia is the cornerstone of Russia’s vision of the ‘new security architecture of the South Caucasus’” (Sukhov 2008). However, many Georgian experts believe that federalization will lead to the disintegration of Georgia and a destabilization of the entire region including the North Caucasus (Coppieters, Kovziridze and Leonardy 2003) (Sputnik Georgia 2015) (Memo 2011).

At the same time, the EU repeatedly offers federalism as an alternative to separatism to different states. Back in 2004, the members of European Parliament supported the federalization of Georgia and Azerbaijan. Later other political structures put forward similar proposals to these countries as well as to Ukraine and Moldova.

In the post-Soviet space, federalization along with other political processes still carries the imprint of Soviet practices. Federalization is understood exclusively as territorialization of ethnic groups. This is a product of the politics of memory which emphasizes that in the past only by the granted right of control over a certain territory prevented the expulsion of its population. Such a narrow vision of federalization impedes the development of serious discussions on the perspectives of a decentralization of power.

Federalization proposals at the official level in Georgia are different for Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In his recent interview, the Georgian Minister of

postponed. A rally against Armenia’s accession to the EAEU took place in Yerevan in October 2014 (Martirosyan 2014).

Reconciliation and Civic Equality Paata Zakareishvili stated that “Georgia should introduce asymmetric regionalism, in the framework of which Abkhazia should be granted a special status [...]. I always stress that this is the best option for Abkhazia that is almost void of its independence ‘thanks’ to the treaty signed with Russia that recognized the independence. This treaty, illegal from the viewpoint of international law, effectively razed to the ground all achievements of the Abkhazian society directed at sovereignty. In case of a federative governance in Georgia, where Abkhazia will enjoy a special status, all the values that are critical for the Abkhazians can become part of the system. [...]. A different approach should be applied toward South Ossetia. It is an enclave with a population of about 20 thousand people. With them we need to talk about a different status. Within the approach of regionalism, the idea is that different regions of Georgia will have a different status: While Adjara will have one status, Abkhazia will have another, and Imereti will enjoy yet a third one...” (Simonyan 2015). As a comparison, the Azerbaijani authorities view federalization very negatively, although the unresolved conflict can make this an urgent issue.

The influence of the US and the EU

The EU and the US repeatedly proposed integration models for the South Caucasus, but all of them eventually failed. One example was a model of economic cooperation that would lead to the resolution of the conflicts later. As part of western innovation programs, the legislative, economic, and social governance systems (financial accounting, banking, information technologies, and other) in all of the three recognized republics have already been brought to a certain standard during the post-Soviet development period. In the political dimension, the tentative initial steps (i.e. creation of a regional inter-parliamentary assembly of the South Caucasus or the joint participation in the EU and Council of Europe (CoE) development programs) have been suspended or completed with varying results. The participation of some of these countries in the GUAM programs or organizations under the auspices of Russia still are only formal and symbolic in nature.

There is a possibility, of course, for the EU to initiate a second round of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) program aimed at the integration of the South Caucasus states. However, the question is whether there is a desire and means to carry out such a program, especially considering Russia’s reaction to the advancement of the EU into the post-Soviet space as has been the case with Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia.

It seems that in the short perspective, the US and the EU will leave the South Caucasus under the auspices of Russia that urges the post-Soviet states to join the EAEU. The question of Azerbaijan's membership in this organization halted due to an unexpected cool wind in the Russian-Turkish relations, that until recently demonstrated a steady rapprochement in the political space.

Political reforms in the South Caucasus largely depend also on the foreign policy situation. At the beginning of the previous century, it was Russia and Turkey that decided the fate of the three countries of the region. A direct binding imposition was applied by Russia during the Soviet period, in the case of the Transcaucasian Federation by Turkey that put the unity of the South Caucasus states as a mandatory prerequisite for negotiations. The two models of federalization were carried out under pressure from these two countries.

Today also, the South Caucasus political elites are in no rush to transition to federalism since it will diminish or even eliminate their authoritarian rule. The diminishing role of the region in international politics could be another obstructing factor. Since federalization bears a large number of risks, the South Caucasus states are likely to soon follow the example of the Russian Federation that is consistently sealing off mechanisms enabling federalization and the formation of autonomies. However, Georgia's and Armenia's planned transition to a parliamentary government may lead to a softening of authoritarianism and ethnocracies, however this process is only at its initial stage. Perhaps, a synergistic effect of internal motivation and external factors is still possible leading to the federalization of the region as a necessary measure. Meanwhile, going beyond the passive expectancy of a possible synergy between internal and external factors, there are other resources and possibilities for integration and federalization to be explored and the following section is dedicated to their consideration.

Societies and state borders

In order to identify other resources or possibilities for the federalization, a change in the level of analysis is needed taking the discussion to the level of the civil society. The activities of the civil society on developing strategies that overstep borders can be condensed into two main types.

The first is typical to the behavior of the communities living in the border areas, where residents use the existence and the possibility of crossing the state border in their everyday strategies. This is the level of the *routine* and the casual everyday practices aimed at certain gains.

The second type of activities that are aimed at transcending borders can be characterized as *projects*. If at the routine level, citizens use quite pragmatic private goals (primarily improving personal livelihoods), then at the project level, these goals are part of a certain ideology. Civil society activists gradually come to understand that globalization processes dilute borders within various fields and promote the development of cross-border links and networks. And it's not just about the movement of capital and labor, but also about the formation of transnational networks of civil society activists and organizations who are united by virtue of common interests and joint activities (including peacebuilding).

What follows is a reflection on the examples of both types of societal activities that compel politicians to take into account the citizens' interests when establishing the rules of interactions with the neighbors.

The routine use of borders

In the routine use of borders for everyday strategies, the residents of the border regions develop their own codes of conduct in relation to the neighbors living across the border. Regular people, businesses, nonprofit organizations, and even local administrations devise strategies for stepping across the borders.

Undoubtedly, over time processes that have been typical for many border areas in the European countries during the last several decades of the 20th century, will develop in the South Caucasus as well. This vision of the predictable future was borrowed from literature reflecting the development of the so-called "Euroregions³²", as well as our long-term studies of border areas in the countries of the South Caucasus, as well as Russia, and several other countries.

The emergence of these processes is rather simple. Often international borders are home to underdeveloped peripheral regions. The remoteness of these regions from the capital and the scarcity of own resources dim the prospects for closing the increasing gap in economic development and quality of life between the population of the center and the periphery. In rare cases – and only in developed countries – a special economic policy that directs significant investments into these areas through tax reduction and incentives enabling the movement of capital, provides new opportunities for social and economic growth.

³² Publications in this field, including sociological ones, number probably over several hundred. It seems that a new interdisciplinary field studying cross-border cooperation is emerging. See, for example: (Garcia-Duran, Mora and Millet 2011) (Medeiros 2015) (Sezgin and Gülden 2014).

In contexts of impenetrable borders, these areas usually turn into zones of social disaster. Low employment, backward industry structure, poor engineering and social infrastructure, poverty, poor quality of life characterize these areas. Consequently, the escape of the most vigorous parts of the population to the more developed regions of the country (or abroad) further exacerbates local problems.

However, as the border regimes weaken, new development strategies are possible for the peripheral areas. The close cooperation between neighboring regions on both sides of the border could lead to a new focus of development on the border of the two states. Such cross-border strategies that are primarily economic lead to the development of new socio-economic networks that include residents on both sides of the border areas. In Europe, these regions that evolved within the last two decades along various international borders, are called Euroregions. The obvious analogy leads us to the concept of the *Caucasus-zones or Caucasus-regions*, that is a relevant description for the prototype of such a cross-border space presented below.

The level of routine: The case of Sadakhlo

Today border areas with prospects for mutually beneficial cooperation already exist in the South Caucasus (Yalçın-Heckmann and Demirdirek, Introduction: Encounters of the postsocialist kind; the movement of goods and identities within and beyond the former socialist world 2007) (Yalçın-Heckmann, Openings and Closures: Citizenship regimes, markets and borders in the Caucasus 2007). The following areas adjacent to state borders can be cited as examples: Sadakhlo (Georgia) – Bagratashen (Armenia), Sarpi (Georgia) – Sarp (Turkey), the village Vesylloe (Russia) located on the border with Abkhazia, the city of Astara that is divided by the Azerbaijani-Iranian border. Perhaps, as international conflicts get resolved in the future, other prospective areas for such development will evolve³³. The highlighted cases are unique, because the

³³ Make no mistake about the absence of developed cities near the borders of any of the Caucasus states. The prospect of economic benefits works wonders. A prime example is the case of the Chinese municipality of Heihe on the banks of the Amur River across the Russian city of Blagoveshchensk. The beginning of the 21st century witnessed a real miracle here. Just within one decade, from a gray and ordinary small town Heihe turned into a bright and attractive popular center for shopping, healthcare, and tourism with a population of about two million(!) people. See, for example: Ryzhova, Natalya. "Blagoveshchensk. V poiskakh "chaynatauna"." *Etnograficheskoye obozreniye* 4 (2008): 17-31.; Ryzhova, Natalya. "Rol' prigranichnogo sotrudnichestva v razvitii okrainnykh

border crossing points here are very busy and play an important transit role. In a sense, these are divided settlements on each side of which the state border created a certain model of development.

The analysis of the situation on the Georgian-Armenian border in the region of Sadakhlo-Bagratashen can help understand the prospects for development offered by different forms of border cooperation. The Red Bridge border crossing between Georgia and Azerbaijan³⁴, located nearby, and can add to the value of this area if a different political environment emerges.

Sadakhlo is a big village (according to the 2002 census it had 9.5 thousand inhabitants). It falls under the jurisdiction of the Marneluli municipality in the Kvemo Kartli region. The city of Marneuli is 28 km away. The village became famous due to the border market that stretched into Bagratashen on the Armenian side of the border, and where buyers and vendors from the three countries – Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia – would meet. Goods from Azerbaijan, Turkey, and other countries were sold here.

The market provided income for the 90 percent of the local population. Commercial relations and friendly ties were emerging among the residents of the three neighboring countries. All the relationships were built on trust. Local traders would get goods for significant amounts in credit from vendors that arrived from Azerbaijan, and would send them to Armenia again in credit. Thanks to the market, both villages were quickly developing (“People drove SUVs and built two-story houses.”³⁵). Such a market could become a development center for the entire surrounding territory.

However, in 2006 the market was shut down by the order of the Georgian government. Later there was an attempt to recreate a similar market in Bagratashen, but the “reboot” was not successful. In a matter of hours, all local entrepreneurs and traders went bankrupt. The flow of goods (in some cases worth tens of thousands of dollars) was stalled. Huge debts accumulated. The

gorodov Kitaya i Rossii." *Problemy Dal'nego Vostoka* 4 (2009): 59-74. (Ryzhova, Blagoveshchensk. V poiskakh 'chaynatauna' 2008) (Ryzhova, Rol' prigranichnogo sotrudnichestva v razvitiі okrainnykh gorodov Kitaya i Rossii 2009).

³⁴ For a long time, this segment of the border was also a very dynamic space of cross-border trade (Yalçın-Heckmann and Aivazsihvili, *Scales of Trade, Informal Economy and Citizenship at Georgian-Azerbaijani Borderlands* 2012).

³⁵ Hereinafter, regarding to the situation in Sadakhlo, the text presents the observations of Victor Voronkov collected during a research school conducted in 2007.

lifestyle that had been common as a result of good income changed significantly (“Now fewer people attend weddings and give smaller gifts.”).

Nowadays, there are very few job opportunities in the village. People mostly engage in agriculture; however, this happens on a very basic level since there are difficulties with irrigation due to the lack of water and basic trade. The latter is more vibrant on the train station. The village is conveniently located on the Tbilisi-Yerevan train route and highway. Remittances sent by relatives working in Russia and Azerbaijan play a significant role in maintaining life in the village.

A random observer, operating with the usual “ethnic lens” could be surprised that the vast majority of the Sadakhlo residents consider themselves Azerbaijanis and their neighbors on the other side of the border identify themselves as Armenians³⁶. At the same time, the same observer wearing the “ethnic lens” will keep in mind the Nagorno Karabakh war, in the context of which the Armenians and Azerbaijanis are seen as mortal enemies. Some politicians who capitalize on Georgian nationalism add fuel to the fire by intimidating the residents of Georgia by the irredentism of Azerbaijanis in Kvemo Kartli or Armenians of Samtskhe-Javakheti.

Based on this perspective, some researchers consider the economic ties between Armenians and Azerbaijanis in Georgia as peacebuilding³⁷, believing that the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia should naturally cause mutual hatred among those who consider themselves Azerbaijani or Armenian. However, specific studies refute this persistent misperception. People are not necessarily loyal to the regime; they do not belong to the state that requires them to hate the “enemy”. Business or friendly relations among Armenians and Azerbaijanis in Sadakhlo, St. Petersburg, and Berlin are the common pattern rather than a reason for surprise. In view of this, business activity in between Sadakhlo and

³⁶ By the way, next to the Sadakhlo on the Georgian side is located the village of Tsopi that is divided by the Azerbaijani and Armenian communities.

³⁷ Of course, business contributes to peacebuilding. However, in this particular case it has nothing to do with peacebuilding. See: Juvary, Togrul, and Ilham Shabanov. "The potential impact of Sadakhly market on the settlement of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict." In *From war economies to peace economies in the South Caucasus*, edited by Phil Champain, Diana Klein and Natalia Mirimanova, 216–238. London: International Alert, 2004.; Poghosyan, Anna. "Sadakhlo Neutral Zone for Armenian-Azerbaijani Contacts: Use of Trade as a Tool for Conflict Transformation." *Caucasus Edition: Journal of Conflict Transformation*. April 1, 2011. <http://caucasusedition.net/analysis/sadakhlo-neutral-zone-for-armenian-azerbaijani-contacts-use-of-trade-as-a-tool-for-conflict-transformation/>. (Juvary and Shabanov 2004) (Poghosyan 2011)

Bagratashen has nothing to do with peacebuilding. A stable peace is already in place here.

In this case, all the people are neighbors regardless of self-identification and native language. Local Azerbaijanis are citizens of Georgia the same way as local Armenians or Georgians. Armenians do not have an urge to move to the neighboring “ethnic homeland”, where the living conditions are no better than on Georgia’s periphery. In search of income, local residents leave for Russia or Europe.

The residents of both villages often visit each other since the border crossing is extremely simplified. However, local residents often simply cross the narrow border river. Usually they are not detained for that. In routine life, for the local population a real border exists only near the official crossing point. A short distance away, one can easily walk into another country. For example, some Sadakhlo residents have their favorite recreation areas on the Armenian side. From time to time, of course, the border guards patrol the area along the border (that in reality is only a drawn line on the map), but they try not to notice the “offenders”. At the same time, very often one can see an Armenian border guard walking into a restaurant on the Georgian side to discuss some commercial issue with Sadakhlo businessmen over a glass of wine.

This is relevant for the development of mutually beneficial business projects on both sides as well. For example, the river crossing is also used for smuggling (from single suitcases to whole trucks). Sometimes under the cover of the night, trucks laden with cargo transit in haste to return unloaded before dawn. A local reputable businessman told in detail how smuggling takes place here. Most of the business rests on the price difference on both sides of the border.

Unfortunately, the research ethic does not allow for a detailed elaboration of the exchange of services between the neighbors from the two countries (these relationships are often on the verge of the law, or outright illegal). Nonetheless, the observations from the Sadakhlo-Bagratashen area lead to the conclusion that on the peoples’ level, the border is not an impediment for the development of good neighborly relations; on the contrary, it is a powerful incentive for their development.

Very little is known about the local authorities’ official attempts of cooperation across the border; quite possibly these are limited to the friendly exchange of delegations on festive occasions. However, time will come when resources, as scarce as they might be, will be invested in the implementation of joint

ambitious projects (for example, the construction of a modern hospital complex or other similar projects).

The border does not divide people into “friend or foe”. The state attempts to do so. However, official border management rules are viable only in certain situations. In the majority of cases, customary law dominates; informal rules formed as a result of routine life near the border region prevail despite the contradiction with the declared rules. Throughout the years, tight social networks among residents of the border areas have developed including also between the border guards. In general, the topic of convergence through economically beneficial strategies of joint development for all sides have their history in the Caucasus (Champain 2004) (Huseynova 2009) (Nelson 2000).

The civil societies and borders

Discussing civil society initiatives on “blurring borders”, the *project-oriented* form of these activities becomes clear through concrete examples. Two of these examples showcase how group interests of the citizens of different countries change their perception about the neighbors and form an environment of goodwill and mutual cooperation instead of the previous suspicion and even hostility. Often such “citizen diplomacy” lays the way for the states’ options for engaging in close and friendly relations and, for the least, contributes towards the normalization of relations between societies.

*The pan-Caucasus peacebuilding experience: The Caucasus Forum*³⁸

The idea of the Caucasus Form (CF) – a network of non-governmental organizations came up in July 1998 during the meeting at the foot of Mount Elbrus within the project framework of building trust between Georgian and Abkhazian non-governmental organizations (NGO). Upon the suggestion of Abkhazian and Georgian colleagues, the representatives of the NGOs from twelve regions of the North and South Caucasus, as well as from Moscow were invited to this meeting. Offering a pan-Caucasus format, the Abkhazian side explained that in bilateral Georgian-Abkhazian dialogue, they feel a certain

³⁸ For a more detailed account of the experience, see: International Alert. *Mediatsiya i dialog na Yuzhnom Kavkaze: osmysleniye pyatnadtsatiletnego opyta po transformatsii konfliktov*. 2012.

<http://www.international-alert.org/sites/default/files/publications/201208MediationSCaucasusRu.pdf>.

(International Alert 2012)

pressure and the peace process is perceived as an attempt to return Abkhazia to Georgia.

Another argument in favor of the pan-Caucasus format, was the view that the peace initiatives should be discussed in a regional context, since virtually all the post-Soviet Caucasus became an arena of armed political conflicts (which were immediately ethnicized) – the Nagorno Karabakh conflict, the Abkhazian and South Ossetian conflicts, the Ossetian-Ingush conflict, the conflict in Chechnya. Some of these conflicts were complicated by the presence of volunteers from other regions of the Caucasus. For example, voluntary armed groups from Chechnya, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachay-Cherkessia, and Adygeya were involved in the war in Abkhazia.

The London-based international non-governmental organization (INGO) International Alert (Alert), who was the organizer and mediator of the Georgian-Abkhazian peace projects, welcomed the proposed initiative for the sake of a more effective implementation of the project.

However, during the meeting in the Elbrus region, the initiative that was based on the idea of using the pan-Caucasian format to improve the efficiency of an existing process took a completely different vector: the pan-Caucasian aspect become more dominant. During the discussion of the situation in the Caucasus at the Nalchik meeting, attended by more than forty activists, including experts and NGO leaders, the participants concluded that the efforts of the representatives of the civil societies should be directed at overcoming alienation and the development of a pan-Caucasian civic space. The decision to establish a pan-Caucasian NGO network was reflected in the “Elbrus Declaration” – a document adopted at this meeting. It proclaimed the establishment of the Caucasus Forum NGO and defined the goals and objectives of the network. The declaration was not simply the founding charter, but also became the bylaw of the CF throughout its existence.

The “Elbrus Declaration” focused on strengthening trust and cooperation between the peoples of the Caucasus, contained provisions on the revival of the Caucasus culture and support for joint civic initiatives aimed at building tolerance, development of political culture, assertion of civic consciousness, the revival of traditions of peaceful coexistence, and overcoming ethnic hostility and prejudice. The main goals of the Forum included: ensuring regular contacts and political dialogue in the Caucasus; establishing an effective communication network among the Forum participants; and supporting the development of the NGOs and specific projects initiated by the Forum.

The institutional development of the Forum with its network structure continued virtually throughout its whole lifetime. Besides the “Elbrus Declaration”, the Forum adopted two other documents regulating the activities and reflecting the dynamics of its development – “Resolution of the Caucasus Forum: Towards Peace and Stable Development” (Vladikavkaz, March 2002) and “Regulatory Standards of the Caucasus Forum” (Vladikavkaz, March 2004).

The main organizing body was the Coordinating Council, staffed by one NGO representative from each of the Caucasus regions represented in the Forum at that time. If initially the Coordinating Council had 12 members, later the number increased to 16 people as new regions joined. It was later decided to rotate the post of regional coordinators. An executive body was also created. The overall coordination was trusted to the Executive Secretary, who worked in tandem with a regional representative. All positions were rotation based.

The decisions were made only if a consensus was reached, which meant that each member of the Coordinating Council of the Forum had a right of veto. However, there was no case when any one of the members had to use this right. This was another important aspect of the Forum’s work, which was very precisely described by Gevorg Ter-Gabrielyan, then the Eurasia Program Manager at International Alert. It has to be mentioned that the establishment and development of the Forum was made possible through the active contribution of this organization and Ter-Gabrielyan’s personal efforts. He called this particular aspect “minimal consensus”, when, for example, the suggestion was supported by the main “opposing sides” (for example Armenian and Azerbaijani) and they were joined by one other neutral member, then the rest would easily accept the proposal.

One of the factors usually impeding the work of different Caucasus networks has been the issue of the difference in status of the various regions. The NGOs involved in the Forum came from entities within the Russian Federation, sovereign states in the South Caucasus, and unrecognized republics in the South Caucasus. In the Forum, this problem found its solution: the Forum’s coordinators were not authorized to represent their territories or any political formations or forces. They merely represented themselves and their NGOs. Geographically their location was identified by the city and not the region. This transformed the Forum into a community of citizens-experts sharing the ideas of the Forum, exercising tolerance, adhering to civic values, and believing in and prescribing to a pan-Caucasus identity. In addition, this depoliticized the

activities of the Forum, making it an exclusively civic process. Hence, the Forum truly rested on shared civic values.

An important part of the Forum's work was the dissemination of its ideas. Here too the context was kept in mind – for example, the different levels of interest of various participants towards different ideas. The civil societies in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia were developing actively, without any limitations in their cooperation with the donors. Being part of multiple networks and working on dozens of projects, they did not see the Forum as particularly special, in any way different from others or a vitally necessary structure.

The perception of the network was completely different in the North Caucasus and the unrecognized republics of the South Caucasus. Here they saw the Forum as a way out of their isolation, an opportunity to establish connections in the Caucasus and internationally, and an opportunity for development. The level of interest in the Forum also varied between Baku, Yerevan, and Tbilisi. Tbilisi was always happy with the pan-Caucasus idea. Part of the Yerevan-based NGO establishment supported the Forum for the sake of the idea, while others supported it for the sake of Stepanakert³⁹. In this situation, Baku simply could not afford to be left out. Everyone knew that the interest towards the network would grow naturally once the Forum gained credibility as a structure in the region.

Both the executive bodies and coordinators in the regions were involved in disseminating the Forum's ideas. The position of the regional coordinator was unpaid. Besides being involved in the Form, many participants worked in other projects or had their own projects. At one stage, the coordinators themselves offered to integrate all the work they did locally into the Forum; they expressed willingness to contribute their own efforts and those of their NGO colleagues to one Forum "piggy bank".

However, for a large-scale impact, only human resources are not enough. Financial support plays a huge role. In addition, large-scale effect takes time. The seven years of the Forum's activities involved around 600 to 700 activists. Even though the Forum possessed potential and legitimacy to implement its ideas, at that particular moment in times, there was no opportunity to transform these ideas into a sustainable ideology that could serve as a conceptual platform for the establishment of a system of regional interaction. First of all, this was due to a strong political divide in the Caucasus. Neither state authorities in the

³⁹ The city is called Khankendi in Azerbaijan.

Caucasus countries, nor the external forces were interested in a model of cooperation advocated by the Forum.

The goals outlined in the “Elbrus Declaration” only provide an idea about the desirable historical perspective. The document is called a declaration because the goals outlined in it are declarative in nature. They reflect a value-based and civic approach, and in no way are a strategic plan for building a stable and peaceful Caucasus. In any case, the Forum could not have other goals. In the margins of the Form, people expressed the need for more specific aims, for example, using the foundation of the Form to create an organization similar to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). However, there was never a formal proposal as such. Everybody knew that on the one hand, this idea would never gain consensus, and on the other hand, the majority did not believe in such a possibility considering the idea unrealistic.

With time, the Forum realized the need of a dramatic institutional transformation in becoming independent and influential. However, soon after that it ceased operations. Why? Perhaps it was because of the circumstances. The funding ended; the donors lost their interest in regional projects; the position of the Russian authorities toward international non-governmental initiatives tightened and the latter significantly affected the partners in the North Caucasus. The unfortunate lineup of external circumstances is obvious, but there was also an internal rationale. The ascend of the Form to a new level of institutionalization required new goals and objectives – things that were not developed.

In a nutshell, the Forum operated within the framework of its goals. The main vectors of activities were related to the development of the civil society in the Caucasus; the support to peace initiatives, peacebuilding, and humanitarian missions; the analysis of the ethno-political situation with the aim of conflict prevention. The Forum had a diverse portfolio of activities: seminars and conferences, trainings, monitoring, creative games, humanitarian events, as well as statements and petitions directed at the protection of human rights when their violation threatened the peace and stability in the region.

The list of the Forum’s success stories can take up several pages. However, the most prominent ones are worth a mention:

- A conference on traditional forms of conflict resolution in the Caucasus. A book based on the conference materials was subsequently published in two editions, demonstrating the high relevance of the topic.

- The project “Forgotten Regions, aimed at supporting and developing civil society in Nagorno Karabakh, South Ossetia, and the regions of the North Caucasus.
- Meetings between ex-combatants of the Caucasus and between people with disabilities affected by armed conflict.
- The meetings of women civil society leaders which later led to the formation of the new pan-Caucasus network – “The Caucasus Women’s League”.
- The peacebuilding mission to Karachay-Cherkessia in 1999. This marked the start of real peacebuilding by the Forum. Moreover, according to international experts, the report with the mission’s findings contained an outstandingly objective and comprehensive analysis.
- The monitoring of the presidential elections in Kabardino-Balkaria in 2002. At the time, a serious new force appeared on the political scene representing a real alternative to the incumbent president and potentially destabilizing the situation. The Forum’s report was used by presidential candidates who disputed the election results at an international court.
- The publication of a collection of short stories by writers from the South Caucasus, entitled “Time to Live”.

The Caucasus Forum was a unique model for regional cooperation. Its experience can serve to build transnational systems of collaboration that are indispensable for security and peaceful development in the wider region. The pan-Caucasian format of mediation that launched the Caucasus Forum confirmed an old and crucial principle: if a community cares for each individual, each individual will care for the community. It reconfirmed that an evolutionary and transformative form of conflict resolution is the way to achieve long-lasting peace. Cooperation and joint development on their own, regardless of the conflicts, give rise to a sustainable model of peaceful coexistence. The pan-Caucasian format demonstrated that in a regional context, it is much easier to ensure such processes and to achieve concrete results.

The main methodological achievements of the Forum were the flexibility in the choice of methods, the openness to new and creative methodology, and the ability to adapt work schemas to peculiarities and the geography of the project. A project team could include representatives of conflicting regions and such a team evoked trust among project participants. With time, the Forum adopted other criteria for team member selection – commitment to the Forum ideals, professional qualities and personal abilities, and only then affiliation with a region.

An analysis of the Forum's history allows to conclude that, despite the termination of activities, the Forum helped many representatives of the civil societies of the Caucasus to acknowledge the shared goals and values, and it greatly changed the perspective on the neighbors in the region.

Many different organizations whose activities transcend state borders can stimulate federalization. These can be, for example, transnational professional associations and unions of non-governmental organizations in the fields of science, culture, education, health, sports, and others. The very activity of these organizations implies common interests aimed at the "blurring borders". In this regard, a union of professionals whose main goal is the immediate influence on peacebuilding processes in the region would be even more effective. What follows is the history of the development of a successful initiative which directly impacted the collection of articles presented in this publication.

A brief history of the Imagine Center for Conflict Transformation⁴⁰

In 2005, a group of Armenian and Azerbaijani students working on their graduate-level degrees in conflict resolution in the US pitched the idea of an Armenian-Azerbaijani dialogue for youth. In the beginning, the plan was to raise funds for the dialogue from Azerbaijani and Armenian business people since it would serve to a two-level cause: a dialogue among youth and a case of collaboration among business people. Soon enough funds were raised. However, in the last moment, the meeting was cancelled due to the interference of the governments.

Two year later, at the beginning of 2007, in cooperation with the US Embassies in Baku and Yerevan, the aspired dialogue program became reality for the Armenian and Azerbaijani fellows of the US State Department-supported Edmund S. Muskie Graduate Fellowship Program that is led by the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX). The aim was to build a cross-border network of US alumni.

The first dialogue for 12 participants took place in May 2007 on a remote island in Maine, US. It was led by a team of one Armenian, one Azerbaijani, and one American facilitator. Two similar dialogues were organized in the US in 2008 and 2009 for the Muskie and later also the Global Undergraduate Exchange Program (UGRAD) fellows. This led to the gradual growth of the alumni

⁴⁰ The Imagine Center for Conflict Transformation is an independent, non-political organization that is dedicated to positively transforming relations and laying foundations for lasting and sustainable peace in conflict-torn societies.

network. In 2009, the fourth dialogue was held – this time in the region of the South Caucasus.

Already for the first dialogue initiatives, the team of organizers and facilitators faced a conceptual choice of methodology. In peacebuilding, there are three distinct approaches each with its own conceptual foundations. *Conflict management* is close to the realist school of thought and rests on the belief that conflicts are practically insolvable, and the best one can do is manage them and minimize violence. The approach of *conflict resolution* is closer to the liberal school of international relations and believes in a cooperative human nature and that win-win solutions are possible among antagonists. The approach of *conflict transformation* is based on a constructivist paradigm; it does not accept identities or relations as givens and aims to transform relations between identity groups, as well as the identities themselves.

The team chose *conflict transformation* as it is an approach with a long-term vision and implies a deep transformation in the societies of their relationship to one another and to the conflict. This choice was reflected in the name of the organization – Imagine Center for Conflict Transformation (Imagine Center). Based on the general frames of conflict transformation, the Imagine Center developed its own detailed methodology for dialogues that are usually led by a team of moderators originating from the societies in conflict, as well as from Europe and the US.

The dialogue methodology evolves first and foremost around personal transformation. Throughout the entire dialogue process, informal and formal sessions help to establish personal relationships among the participants. Confidence-building exercises make the process more dynamic at the same time addressing important issues of communication and group work. Events held in the evenings after a day of intensive dialogue sessions help to blur the lines dividing the participants and establish a spirit of collaboration among them regardless of the tensions that build up during the day. The joint living and structured leisure time also contribute to the building of mutual understanding and trust between participants.

In between dialogue sessions, conflict transformation workshops are conducted. Participants learn how to manage difficult conversations, articulate emotions and vulnerability without confrontation, recognize and address their own stereotypes and triggers. Applying the knowledge and skills built together, participants can engage in a more informed, aware, and constructive dialogue.

Dialogue sessions – the core part of the program – include discussions of the key issues related to the conflict, such as history, war and violence, and present-day relations. Throughout the dialogue, with the support of the facilitators, participants process the dynamics of interaction between groups in conflict. Different from many conflict resolution projects that deliberately put aside differences and focus on commonalities, the Imagine Center’s methodology allows the participants to express their differences, understand each other, and analyze the underlying drivers of the conflict. The participants are encouraged to step back from the traditional adversarial positions and discuss the conflict as a common problem that needs to be solved jointly and in a way that meets the basic security needs and interests of all the parties involved.

Putting individuals at the heart of the program, the dialogue methodology gives an opportunity to the participants to articulate the impact of the war and the conflict not only on the societies, but also on their own lives through sharing personal stories. Only after working out their differences and developing strong relationships, the participants move on to the final phase of the dialogue program – future planning. This phase challenges them to identify activities and directions of collaboration for addressing the existing issues between the two societies.

The dialogue program that brings together people from across conflict divides is the core program of the Imagine Center. Hundreds of participants have been part of these dialogue processes and are now a strong support network for the Imagine Center.

While the methodology of the dialogue program was initially designed to work in the Armenian-Turkish context in 2005-2007, starting from 2007, the Imagine Center has been employing its methodology with the Armenian-Azerbaijani, Syrian, Georgian-Abkhazian, Georgian-South Ossetian, as well as Caucasus-wide, and other regional contexts.

By 2008, a new component was added to the portfolio: planning workshops bringing together the most active alumni of the dialogues and bridging them for the follow-up activities. During the workshops, the participants design and plan specific joint activities or entire projects. This allows the participants to build on the skills acquired and to become coordinators of new projects.

Today the organization has expanded to include an office in Georgia and team members in Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Turkey. Currently, the organization carries forward several directions of work.

The “Breaking the Impasse” Series was launched in 2008 as a joint Armenian-Azerbaijani analytic initiative that brought together conflict resolution experts, civil society representatives and diplomats from Armenia, Azerbaijan, the OSCE, and the US. The goal of these meetings was to provide input to policy making and facilitate the coordination between the official (Track I) and citizen (Track II) diplomacy efforts in resolving the Nagorno Karabakh conflict. By 2015, the “Breaking the Impasse” Series became a regional initiative bringing together into a virtual think tank scholar-practitioners and analysts from all corners of the South Caucasus, as well as Turkey and Russia.

In April 2010, a journal focused on the Nagorno Karabakh conflict with a joint Armenian-Azerbaijani editorial board was launched. By 2015 the Journal became regional focused on all conflicts in the South Caucasus, as well Turkey, and is managed by a joint Armenian-Azerbaijani-Georgian-Turkish editorial board. Today, the Caucasus Edition – Journal of Conflict Transformation is an independent online publication that provides a forum for scholars, practitioners, policy analysts, journalists, and novice researchers others to discuss conflicts and related issues in the South Caucasus and Turkey.

Another direction of work led by the Imagine Center are the dialogues, trainings, and workshops for journalists. This direction resulted in the establishment of professional networks of journalists across conflict divides who, going through joint skill building, exchange of experience, and dialogue, contribute to building alternative discourses in the media that counter the biased coverage of the conflicts.

The most recent projects in the area of media and journalism, the project on “Ethical Conflict Coverage in the South Caucasus” and the “Fall School and Dialogue for Journalists and Analysts” have mobilized a group of analysts and journalists from the South Caucasus and Turkey. They have come together in the framework of the Caucasus Edition as a source of alternative media coverage, policy analysis, and applied research, to develop a shared vision and strategy, and advance transnational professional networks.

Yet another direction of work crucial for conflict transformation is aimed at the development of a critical view of the official ideological and conflict-promoting approaches to historiography and history education. Through efforts in this direction, the Imagine Center has established a network of historians across conflict divides, who identify the current problems in historiography and history education and work together on the creation of alternative approaches to these disciplines contributing to the transformation of narratives and

discourses. Within this direction, in 2013-2014 historians and history educators originating from the South Caucasus authored a methodological manual titled “Challenges and Prospects of History Education and Textbook Development in the South Caucasus”. Based on the Manual, professionals engaged in this direction of work have been producing Pilot History Lessons illustrating the application of the new methodologies. The Pilot History Lessons have been piloted in Georgian, Armenian, South Ossetian, and Azerbaijani schools and have gained positive feedback from the teachers and the students alike.

To date, the Imagine Center remains a unique organization co-founded and co-managed initially by a joint Armenian-Azerbaijani team and today by a regional team.

Conclusion: Prospects for state and non-state federalization of the South Caucasus

The analysis of political history of the South Caucasus demonstrates the failure to unify or integrate the countries of the region. However, unresolved conflicts in the region dictate the urgency of a renewed discourse on a joint South Caucasus social-economic and political space. This renewed discourse sees integration and perhaps federalization as a possible model of building sustainable peace in the region.

It is clear that precisely these unresolved conflicts dictate the agenda of the states in the region. They are often used to solve internal policy problems and are manipulated by external actors to promote and strengthen their own interests. As a result, the recognized states of the region are not self-sufficient or independent politically and economically. The unrecognized or partly recognized states are limited in their development, unable to implement their full potential, and are also not self-sufficient.

The analysis of the past experience and the current system of relations between the existing and emerging actors of the South Caucasus, as well as their relationship with the outside world leave no real prospects for unification. On the contrary, the process of forming two or three “global alliances” is underway, and all six entities of the South Caucasus involved in this arrangement (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Nagorno Karabakh, Georgia, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia) have different, and even opposing political systems.

In the South Caucasus, conflicts were the cornerstone for building states and state entities in the region. Conflicts have determined the course of economy resulting in huge military budgets, formed internal and foreign policies, and

determined the alignment of political forces. Political decisions are largely determined by the security issues. Ongoing conflicts make security a priority, and joining any political union either provides military security or hopes to resolve conflicts in one's favor. Conflicts are at the core of not only tactical decisions on international cooperation, but also the overall strategy of foreign policy and decisions on joining one or another geopolitical block.

Thus, the desire to create an environment that is the most comfortable and stimulating for development is not the dominant force in decisions that determine the fate of nations and states in the South Caucasus. Rather those decisions are driven by security issues first of all related to the existing conflicts. However, these two sets of priorities are linked to each other; the global strategies for development are tied to the security doctrine.

At the same time, the dynamically changing situation around the world leaves no room for assumptions although news with often questionable conclusions floods the media. Sometimes, it is difficult to distinguish analysis from sponsored propaganda material.

Against this background, in public discourses, the bankruptcy of the state as an institute gains momentum when it becomes evident that the state is not the citizens, but the power and that the state serves the interests of the authorities and not the people. In order to determine whether in the current "global chaos", the prospect of integration for the South Caucasus can become a lifeline for the people living here, comprehensive research is needed going beyond theoretic considerations. To begin with, the level of the need for South Caucasus integration should be determined. Is there a public demand for such integration? What can motivate and become a push factor for the emergence of societal intention to integrate with immediate neighbors in the region? Are there any indicators of the inevitability of such a process?

Reasons that drive the unification of developing countries often differ from the reasons that drive developed countries into this process. For the developed countries, integration is a need derived from the availability of productive forces. Integration among developing countries is driven by the willingness to develop economies, maximize the benefits of international cooperation, and strengthen positions on the international arena. All these factors can be at the core of a societal demand for unification. However, there are obstacles that can dominate the needs – conflict, power regimes, and the fear of loss of identity.

These obstacles themselves have the potential of transforming into an intention to integrate into an international or supranational union, but only if there is

change in the relations of power between the subjects involved. This transformation should be based on the emergence of equality for all the subjects involved. The guarantee of equality is a key condition, without which integration will not be possible. While such equality is unlikely in the current situation, it is possible. The Caucasus has had positive experiences of the civil society finding effective solutions to various issues. These precedents indicate that the effectiveness in achieving the goal was higher when the number of involved actors was bigger. At some point, in the strategy of achieving the goals, ethnicity ceases to be the dominant component and the desire to solve issues comprehensively and working together dominates.

The realities of the Caucasus until transnational regional organizations and today are two different types of realities. It seems that despite state-led propaganda aimed at inciting hostility toward the people living on the other side of the divides, the societies of the Caucasus will never be plunged into total xenophobia, suspicion, and hostility towards neighbors. The civic initiatives described above as well as many others inspire hope in the hearts of thousands of citizens that political conflicts can be resolved, that borders can become simple lines on the map, and that the day will come when the people of the region will be able to coexist without conflict in a shared Caucasus space in a confederation or another alternative form of organization

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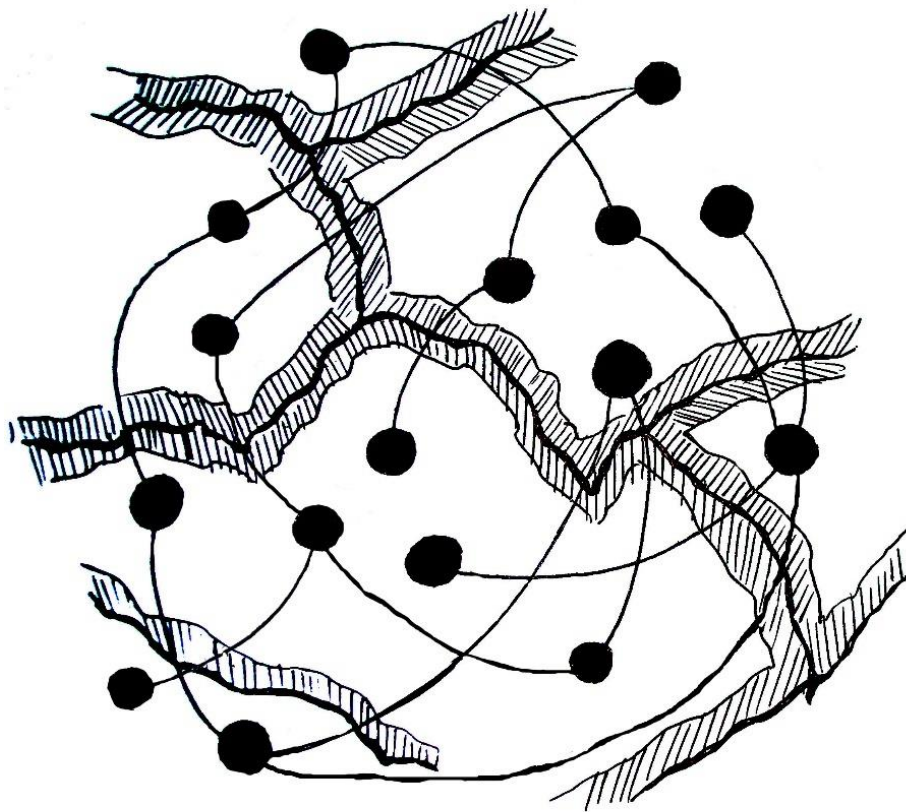
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Conflicts and Group Rights



Ethnic Groups and Conflicts in the South Caucasus and Turkey

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This paper discusses the implementation of various national and nationalistic policies, the creation of institutions regulating the relations between the dominant group and ethnic groups (so called minorities), as well as ideologies and discourses of national unity, tolerance, and multiculturalism (principles of inclusion and exclusion) in the South Caucasus and Turkey. This analysis is carried out in the context of conflicts and addresses the changes in the relevant official policies in the past two decades and their impact on the status of ethnic groups. The authors hope that this paper would contribute to the popularization of contemporary methodological and theoretical approaches and of a new language of conflict discussions fostering the formation of new frameworks conducive to positive transformation.

Introduction

For the South Caucasus republics and Turkey, the past century was a period of nation building and the creation of modern states, the national republics. For Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, and Turkey the *age of extremes* was both shorter and longer of Hobsbawm's *short 20th century* (Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914-1991* 1994)⁴¹. With the end of the First World War and the dissolution of the Russian and Ottoman empires in 1917-1921, the *short 20th century* and the formation of the national republics begins in the South Caucasus and in Turkey.

The Turkish Republic replaces the Sublime Porte and Kemalism, the ideology underpinning the modern Turkish nationalism, is formed. Similarly, on the territory of the South Caucasus, according to Rogers Brubaker, three *quasi-national states* are formed after a short break between the Russian and Soviet empires. The three Soviet republics with their "fixed territories, names, legislations, administrative personnel, cultural and political elites" emerge (Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* 2000, 41). In each of them, as in the rest of the Soviet national republics, the nationalization of education, culture, and politics of memory were carried out with varying intensity (Martin 2001). Similar intense processes were taking places in Turkey, only without looking up to an "older brother" (Çağaptay 2006).

According to Hobsbawm, the collapse of the USSR in 1991 marking the end of the last century played a decisive role in the newest history of the South Caucasus republics. It had a less important, but still significant impact on Turkey as well. For Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, the post-Soviet period became one of transformation from quasi-national states to independent republics. It was the period of the discursive construction of the basic postulates of the modern *nationalizing nationalisms*, the time of creation of new national ideologies to replace the already unpopular Soviet myth of the "friendship of nations". For Turkish politicians, the end of the Soviet empire opened new opportunities for the construction of discourses on the unity of Turkic nations

⁴¹ In the large-scale historical works of Hobsbawm, who undertook an interesting attempt to rethink the historical processes that created the modern world, the long 19th century beginning with the Great French Revolution of 1789 and lasting until the start of the First World War in 1914, is followed by the short 20th century (the age of extremes) that lasted from 1914 to 1991.

and the revision of the foreign policy towards the republics of the South Caucasus and Central Asia.

New experiences shared by all four countries to varying degrees can be found in the nation-building processes and conflicts accompanying them, with which this short 20 century started. These were not only conflicts between the republics, whose political elites saw their borders rather differently, but also clashes within them (in 1918-1921). The century of nationalism was marked by a new type of conflict currently called ethnoreligious, interethnic, or ethno-national. In the 1920s, driven by the ideology of Kemalism in Turkey, and by the Soviet national policy in the South Caucasus, attempts were made at the ethnic and cultural homogenization of the population. The phenomena of ethnic boundaries, group and individual rights were reinterpreted once again. This was also the time when various attempts – successful or less – were undertaken to resolve conflicts.

Different types of intrastate conflicts, instances of critical rethinking of state ideologies and official nationalisms, processes of ethnic and cultural homogenization did not end when the short century ended. For all four states, the new XXI century (which, again according to Hobsbawm, started with the dissolution of the USSR) was marked with new extremes and conflicts, as well as with the quest for means and ways to their transformation.

The accumulated experience of transformation

This paper discusses the implementation of various national and nationalistic policies, the creation of institutions regulating the relations between the dominant group and ethnic groups (so called minorities), as well as ideologies and discourses of national unity, tolerance, and multiculturalism (principles of inclusion and exclusion). This analysis is carried out in the context of conflicts. The religious aspect is of interest to authors only if the boundaries of an ethnic group and the conflict discourses are shaped also through its differences in faith or observance of rituals from the dominant group. The analysis also addresses the changes in the relevant official policies in the past two decades and their impact on the status of ethnic groups.

We suggest looking at this paper as an analytical overview based on academic research conducted by the authors at different times and integrated into one paper to reach a wider range of readers. We also hope that this paper would contribute to the popularization of contemporary methodological and theoretical approaches and of a new language of conflict discussions fostering the formation of new frameworks conducive to positive transformation. It

should also be emphasized that the discussion of conflict situations will be about different types of intrastate conflicts that are happening within state borders recognized by the international community. The authors will not be discussing inter-state conflicts.

What is common for Turkey and the South Caucasus republics?

The differences and similarities in the experiences of the four republics allow for an interesting comparative analysis. It is important to emphasize that despite the differences in institutions, national models, ideologies, discourses, etc., conflicts labeled as interethnic or waged between national communities have erupted and are still erupting in all four countries.

Both Turkish nationalism, Kemalism, and the Soviet national policy were aimed at constructing solidary ethno-national communities out of the diverse groups that were populating the new (quasi-) states that emerged on the world map. It was assumed that the unification under one Turkic nation, or under the Soviet ethno-national republics would put an end to the multiple nationalistic and religious conflicts.

In order to understand the peculiarities of these political projects, one should pay close attention to the discourses of official nationalisms. In the Turkish version of nationalism, it is practically impossible to separate the ethnic version from the civic one. Even though constructed in analogy with French civic nationalism, the assimilating Turkish nationalism strictly denies any possible internal linguistic and cultural diversity. In all major aspects (common history, territory, language, strict secularism, high degree of statism), the definition of a nation in the Kemalist ideology, even if more refined and expanded, is still astoundingly close to Stalin's definition⁴². Ethnic, linguistic, and cultural homogenization is the official goal of Turkish nationalism, as well as of the Soviet versions of Georgian, Armenian, or Azerbaijani nationalisms.

All these versions of nationalisms are also dogmatic. Formulated at approximately the same time in the 1920-30s, the *primordial and essentialist*⁴³

⁴² "The nation – Stalin wrote in his first scientific work – is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of common language, territory, economic life and psychological make-up that is manifested in a common culture" (Slezkine 1996, 203).

⁴³ The term "primordialism" (primordial – original, aboriginal) is used to indicate an approach in which the nation is a product of the development of ethnic groups, which

postulates of Kemalism and of the Soviet national policy became the highlights of national ideology and thought. These approaches took deep roots in the minds of both intellectuals and of ordinary people. Even now they successfully resist the attempts at critical rethinking. The image of a nation and the principles of solidarity formulated within the framework of these ideologies set the norm and determined the language of discussions that are very hard to transcend and replace with something new without questioning the entire system of loyalty to the *imagined communities*⁴⁴. As a result, any attempts to transform these systems are perceived as dangerous. In other words, all these systems (nationalisms) successfully breed enemy images and demand absolute loyalty to the ethno-nation. Any deviations from the official canon are interpreted as betrayal of national interests. The latter are always seen to be above the individual and even the collective rights of the citizens.

What is different for Turkey and the South Caucasus republics?

The level of cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity has been different for the four republics. Similarly, the resources for cultural and linguistic homogenization, as well as the construction of solidarity to the imagined communities were different in Turkey and in the South Caucasus. In the Soviet

in their turn, are natural integrities that can be understood by analogy with biological populations. Essentialism (from the Latin *essentia* – essence) often appears as the methodological satellite of primordialism. This method involves the discovery of “the nature of things”, the attribution of certain essences, mandatory set of immutable characteristics, qualities and properties to social phenomena. It is the belief that the disclosure of the true nature of the observed phenomenon is the aim of science and is achievable with certain theories and approaches. The belief in the existence of such essential knowledge puts it above criticism. (Malakhov 2005, 52-58)

⁴⁴ Anderson stated the following in regard to the nation: “This is an imagined political community, and it is imagined as something inevitably limited, but at the same time, sovereign. It is imagined, since the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow brothers in the nation, will never meet them, or even hear of them, whereas in the minds of each of them lives the image of their community” (Anderson 1998, 6). It is necessary to present Benedict Anderson’s entire definition of a nation, because the common and misplaced criticism of Anderson’s definition (or, according to Malakhov, the vulgarization of his approach) stems from the hasty assumption that the very designation of “imagined communities” (as well as the methodological terms “construct” and “construction”) testifies to Anderson’s denial of the existence of the nation as a real entity.

version, largely inherited by post-Soviet Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia, a strict hierarchy existed giving the highest status to the “titular nation” (the dominant group) which governed a Soviet republic. Correspondingly lower, but guaranteed statuses were allocated to ethnic minorities (groups). If an ethnic group was not recognized by the state and did not receive a status, then all its representatives became part of the dominant community. In statist ideology (as well as in Turkey), collective rights were always above those of an individual. In addition, the 20th century became the era of mass violent deportations and forced migration leaving a special mark on the composition of the populations in all four countries.

In the post-Soviet period, Armenia practically turned into a mono-ethnic state. The most significant ethnic group remaining are the small communities of Yezidi Kurds. In Azerbaijan, rapid ethnoreligious and linguistic homogenization is taking place even though certain diversity is maintained. Officially, the collective rights of Russians, Jews, Lezgins, Avars, Talysh, and a few other groups are guaranteed. Georgia remains the most ethnically diverse in the South Caucasus; homogenization is met with numerous difficulties, and the collective rights also remain the topic of constant discussions (especially for Azerbaijanis and Armenians). Turkey in the past two decades went a long way toward European integration; a lot has been done for the recognition of the collective rights of various groups (primarily of Kurds, Armenians, and Greeks), but conflicts are getting even more acute. Despite these differences, in all four cases, national civil societies, in essence, have never been constructed, and we are dealing with ethno-nations.

In terms of nation building, the last 20 years have been extremely important for all four states even though in different ways. One of the central developments has been the newfound rejection of strict secularism. In the last two decades, we have witnessed the process of religious institutions, traditions, and practices stepping out of margins and private spaces and into the public sphere as the rethinking of state regimes of secularity takes place.

In the words of Jose Casanova, it can be argued that none of the regimes is strictly secular and is living in accordance with the myth of secular neutrality. Today all four officially secular regimes promote the active circulation of religious symbols, moral principles, and discourses in the public sphere. The state regimes remain the key supporters of religious institutions, simultaneously engaging in various conflicts with networks and groups perceived to be illegitimate (radical). Often the contradictions and conflicts in

the religious sphere coincide with the tensions between dominant communities and ethnic groups in each of these countries.

In what follows, this analytical review is divided into four parts – one for each country. The authors describe the current situation, identify the main challenges, accomplishments, and the main factors impeding or supporting the creation of inclusive communities where all citizens can feel equal owners of their countries. When it comes to conflicts, the authors try to identify possible ways and prospects of their peaceful transformation. We discuss the peculiarities of the official national ideologies and discourses, as well as institutions that are there to monitor and/or control intergroup relations. The authors do not claim to be conducting a complete analysis, but see their goal in raising the most urgent and complex issues and problems. At the end of the paper, a comparative summary of the current state of affairs is presented.

Ethnic Groups and Conflicts in Armenia

Majority-minority relations: an overview

A recent discussion in a leading Armenian newspaper illustrated the informal restrictions faced by Armenia's ethnic minorities today. When asked about leadership prospects of Deputy Speaker of the Armenian National Assembly Eduard Sharmazanov, a political commentator opined: "His prospects are quite questionable: in our country, everyone has a positive attitude towards national minorities, but I cannot imagine that in a country, where [more than] 95 percent of the population are ethnic Armenians, an ethnic Greek could become the leader. While I respect all ethnic groups living in Armenia, there are positions, such as those of the president or prime minister, where it is hard to imagine a Greek, Assyrian, Yezidi, Georgian, or Russian (Arevshatyan 2015)."

Since Armenia's independence, Sharmazanov is the first non-ethnic Armenian to rise to a senior position in a ruling party and the nation's parliament. Prior to his election in 2007, the only precedent for an ethnic minority member elected to the parliament was Nana Togoshvili, who was in the National Assembly between 1995 and 1999 as part of a short-lived pro-government women's party.

Members of Armenia's ethnic minority groups, particularly the Yezidis (Martirosyan 2014), have long complained about their lack of representation in Armenia's parliament. This might change now that the government-proposed constitutional reform package was approved in the December 6 referendum. That proposal includes a constitutional requirement for four out of 101

members of the parliament to be representatives of ethnic minorities (Galyan 2015). Comments by officials suggested the represented groups would include Yezidis, as well as Assyrians, Russians, and Greeks, but the selection and nomination process remains undefined and has already become a subject of controversy (Harutyunyan 2015) ("Hraparak": Poka neyasno, kakiye natsmen'shinstva budut predstavleny v parlamente Armenii 2015).

Political representation is of course only the tip of the iceberg as far as majority-minority relations within contemporary Armenia are concerned. At the basis of these relations is the prevalence of the dominant nationalist discourse that imagines Armenia as a national state for ethnic Armenians, rather than all who make their home in Armenia. This discourse, strengthened through nativization policies of the Soviet period, is primarily focused on who should be considered an ethnic Armenian (applied to people living in Armenia or not) and which of these ethnic Armenians should enjoy the rights of Armenian citizens, making the consideration of demographically marginalized ethnic communities largely an afterthought.

The sections below part considers the emergence of this nationalist discourse, its evolution through the practical implementation of the Armenian national project, and conflicts it has engendered and continues to produce in the country today.

A religious minority

Through the 19th century, the vast majority of people who identified themselves as Armenians were members of the Armenian Apostolic Church, living as a religious minority in the Muslim-majority Ottoman and Persian empires. Those Armenians who adopted Islam or joined other Christian churches were no longer considered Armenian by the Apostolic Church, the main institution involved in defining the Armenian identity at the time, and very few retained other identity markers, such as Armenian names or language. Like other churches of the Middle East, the Armenian Church generally guarded the centuries-long status quo that saw Christians acquiesce to their politically restricted status afforded by the Sultan and the Shah.

In the late 18th and early 19th century this state of affairs began to be challenged through the Russian military successes in the wars against the Ottomans and Persians and the spread of secular nationalism from Europe. It is notable that the Armenian nationalist ideology was first articulated by activists through texts written and published in far-flung Diaspora communities of the time – the Catholic Armenian Mekhitarist congregations in Venice and Vienna and the

mercantile Armenian communities of Madras and Calcutta. The dominant discourse of the time was not for an independent Armenian state, but rather a European or Russian protectorate for Armenians in the territories where Armenian kingdoms and principalities previously existed.

As estimated by historian George Bournoutian, at the time of the Russian conquest of the South Caucasus (1801-1828), the area that constitutes the modern Republic of Armenia was sparsely inhabited and had an 80 percent Muslim majority, with Armenians comprising the remaining 20 percent (Bournoutian 1980). There were also sizable Armenian populations outside the modern Republic of Armenia boundaries that also came under Russian control – in Karabakh and throughout future Azerbaijan, Georgia, as well as parts of the North Caucasus and elsewhere. By the 1870s, Yerevan, the eventual Armenian capital, still had a population of less than 12,000, and was roughly half-Armenian and half-Muslim. At the time, twice as many Armenians lived in Shusha and seven times as many lived in Tbilisi than did in Yerevan.

The 19th and 20th centuries saw a persistent process of ethnic homogenization of what today is Armenia with large numbers of non-Muslims, mostly Armenians, but also some Greeks, Assyrians, and Yezidis, resettling from the Ottoman and Persian empires within the Russian realm, and Muslim groups moving in the opposite direction. By 1897, Armenians became a 53 percent majority in the Yerevan governorate, with Muslims comprising much of the remainder. The overall population increased from about 165 thousand in 1831 to 830 thousand in 1897. Following the major population losses and displacements between 1914 and 1920, by 1926 the population of Soviet Armenia was 880,000 and 85 percent Armenian and about 10 percent Azerbaijani.

Thus, Armenians became a large majority in a politically distinct unit with a substantial geographic area, even though the majority of Armenians remained as minorities in other Soviet republics and elsewhere.

A secular republic

Pro-reform Armenian political parties first established in the Ottoman and Russian empires came to challenge the Church as the dominant Armenian institution, which had generally acted in concord with imperial powers. Turkish nationalists viewed this secular Armenian nationalism as a threat, unleashing large-scale violence against Ottoman Armenians since the 1890s. Following the 1915 genocide, roughly half of the Ottoman Armenians, making up one-third of all Armenians, were killed.

By 1918, with the collapse of the Russian empire, the first Armenian republic was established in the area around Yerevan left unoccupied by the Ottoman Turkish army. Turkish withdrawal saw an effort by the Armenian republic to establish sovereignty over the entirety of the Yerevan Governorate, the Kars Oblast and adjacent areas, all with substantial Muslim populations that in turn resisted this. Where Armenian forces succeeded, such as in Zangezur, Muslims were expelled; where they did not, such as in Nakhichevan, Shusha, and Kars, Armenians were forced out.

The 1920s Sovietization of the South Caucasus led to policies of ethnic *apartheid*. The Bolshevik Russian leadership decided to accept the military status quo as the basis for dealing with the multitude of territorial disputes. The embryonic national states of the South Caucasus served as a basis for the Soviet republics on the condition that they in turn embrace Bolshevik leadership and tenets of socialism, including the ideology of the “friendship of people” and marginalization of religion.

In the next seven decades, the process of Armenia’s ethnic homogenization continued apace with the share of ethnic minorities declining from 15 percent in 1926 to 10 percent in 1979 and under 5 percent by the 1990s. This was achieved through ethnic Armenian resettlement from other Soviet Republics, as well as the Middle East and Europe, and also through the resettlement of Azerbaijanis that concluded with the expulsion of the remaining Azerbaijani communities by 1990.

The “repatriation” programs for Diaspora Armenians were peculiar for the Soviet Union in that they did not target people who left the Soviet or pre-Soviet Russian Armenia, but survivors of the Ottoman Armenian massacres spread around the world, as well as the long-established Armenian community of Iran. More than 150,000 Diaspora Armenians came to settle in Soviet Armenia. By late 1940s, one of every ten Armenians in Armenia was a repatriate, effectively establishing a new majority-minority dynamic between native *hayastantsi* and newly arrived *akhpar*⁴⁵ populations that already then substantially sidelined the Armenian-ethnic minority relations within Armenia.

By 1970s and 80s, the repatriates were also contributing to growing rates of Armenian emigration to the West, with *akhpar* families reuniting with their

⁴⁵ *Hayastantsi* derives from *Hayastan* (Armenian for “Armenia”). *Akhpar* is both a pejorative and endearing term for Diaspora Armenians and a slight corruption of *akhper*, the Armenian colloquial word for “brother”.

relatives who stayed abroad, followed by *hayastantsis* now related to Diasporans through marriage.

A nation state

The Russian leadership's decision to dissolve the Soviet Union left Armenia and the other republics once again on their own. While the initial public support for independence was strong, Armenia was also coping with the disastrous consequences of an earthquake and the conflict with Azerbaijan that displaced about one-sixth of the Republic's population. The energy crisis and the end of the Soviet subsidies sent the economy into a free fall, resulting in massive emigration throughout the 1990s.

The government of the newly independent republic was also facing a political challenge from part of the Diaspora leadership that saw itself as the rightful heir of the Armenian independence movement in exile. Between 1992 and 1995, President Levon Ter-Petrosyan, himself a native of Syria whose family moved to Armenia in the 1940s, expelled Diaspora political figures, banned the Diaspora-led Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF, Dashnaktsutyun) and mandated a constitutional prohibition on dual citizenship, intended to restrict Diaspora influence on Armenia.

Ter-Petrosyan's measures were undone by his successor Robert Kocharyan, who allied with the ARF, particularly on the topic of worldwide recognition of the Armenian genocide, as he sought and secured Diaspora investments to stem Armenia's economic decline. By 2005, Kocharyan also succeeded in amending the constitution to lift the ban on dual citizenship. At the same time, Kocharyan introduced his own safeguards against Diaspora influence, by eliminating public voting at Armenia's diplomatic missions and delaying citizenship applications from his Diaspora-born political opponents.

Since the early 2000s, Armenia has seen a fresh stream of repatriation/immigration, primarily from Iran and war-riven parts of the Middle East (including a small number of Yezidis and Assyrians), but also some from the West. While still relatively small and unstable – many Middle East repatriates see Armenia as a temporary stop in their effort to emigrate west – the total number of these new Armenian repatriates is comparable to the total number of Armenia's ethnic minorities (30-50,000).

These former Diaspora Armenians also have a greater role in the Armenian political mainstream than ethnic minorities do. Raffi Hovannisian, a U.S.-born politician who repatriated in 1990 and struggled to be granted citizenship well

into the 2000s, won more votes in the 2013 presidential election than any challenger before him. Diaspora-born activists are also prominent among Armenia's civil society movements, with "Electric Yerevan" protest movement as the latest among them. Possibly reacting to these "Western" influences, prominent figures in the Russian-Armenian community, themselves mostly natives of Armenia, recently hinted at plans to participate in Armenia's elections.

Another wrinkle for the Armenian national discourse has been introduced recently, with the reemergence of the previously Islamicized Turkish Armenians, who are challenging the original Armenian identity marker, the Christian religion.

The present-day majority-minority dynamics

According to the latest available data, currently there are about 35,000 Yezidis, 12,900 Russians, 2,800 Assyrians, 2,200 Kurds, 1,300 Ukrainians, 900 Greeks, 600 Georgians, and 500 Persians living in Armenia (National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia 2011). Compared to data from the last pre-independence poll of 1989, the number of Yezidis and Kurds has fallen by one-third, the number of Russians, Ukrainians, and Greeks has decreased by more than three-quarters, and the number of Assyrians and Georgians has gone down by one-half, with the Persians being the only group to have increased in number. Out of Armenia's largest ethnic group throughout the Soviet period, about one hundred Azerbaijanis remain in Armenia – the majority of them in mixed families or choosing not to report their ethnic background.

Aside from Azerbaijanis, most of whom fled Armenia in fear of ethnic violence, representatives of other minorities primarily followed the national pattern of emigration caused by economic crises and attracted by respective ethnic community ties outside Armenia. Still, the overall rates of population decline are higher among ethnic groups than the national average. In addition to emigration, there is also considerable population decline through assimilation, particularly through marriages with ethnic Armenians. Significant segments of the ethnic communities are affiliated with the Armenian Apostolic Church rather than minority religious institutions. Other than Yezidis and Kurds, the majority of whom (25,000) practice their own religion, Armenia's largest religious groups are comprised of ethnic Armenians, including Evangelicals (30,000), Catholics (14,000) and Jehovah's Witnesses (8,600) (National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia 2011).

Judging by their age breakdowns, in coming years the numbers of Russians, Ukrainians, Greeks, and Georgians will continue to decline faster than other groups, with some growth likely in the number of Kurds and Persians. (National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia 2011). In recent years, small numbers of Yezidis and Assyrians fled to Armenia from violence in Iraq and Syria, and this number might still increase.

The majority of the Yezidi, Kurdish, and Assyrian populations are concentrated in rural areas of Armenia, with two dozen Yezidi villages in the regions of Aragatsotn and Armavir and two Assyrian villages, one in the Ararat region and another in the Kotayk region. Whereas one ethnic Russian (Molokan) and one Greek village survive in the Lori region, the majority of Armenia's Russians, Ukrainians, and Greeks, as well as nearly all Georgians and Persians, live in the cities, primarily in Yerevan.

The majority citizens are fluent in the Armenian language and those living outside rural communities often speak Armenian as their primary language (National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia 2011). In fact, native Russian speakers in Armenia are more likely to be ethnic Armenians (12,000) than Russians or Ukrainians (11,000) (National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia 2011). At the same time, about half of Armenia's residents claim fluency in Russian, with this rate lower among most minority groups – about one-third of Yezidis, Kurds, and Greeks, one-quarter of Georgians and only one in ten Persians. Compared to the national average rate of adults with college degrees which is at about 25 percent, Persians are Armenia's most educated group (45 percent), while this rate is lowest among Yezidis and Kurds with under 3 percent (National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia 2011).

Armenia's largest group, Yezidis are also Armenia's most visible community, staging public protests in Yerevan over cases of domestic injustice and associated government inaction, and more recently also related to anti-Yezidi and anti-Kurdish violence in Iraq, Syria, and Turkey. While nearly all Yezidis in Armenia have "yan" endings in their last names, their first and last names are discernable from those of ethnic Armenians. In December 2015, for example, news reports highlighted the ethnic Yezidi background of an Armenian army draftee Sidar Aloyan killed in a combat engagement in Nagorno Karabakh (EzidiPress 2015).

Armenia's main majority-minority dynamics is not with the few ethnic minority communities resident and mostly well-assimilated or marginalized in Armenia.

It is rather with those segments of the Armenian Diaspora communities who seek to be active in Armenia's political and economic life. While Armenia remains reliant on support from its Diaspora, the perception of their growing involvement in Armenian politics is bound to produce more friction. The deepening Russian-Western rivalry that is also reflected in Diaspora politics, as the two largest communities are in Russia and the US, is likely to be another contributing factor.

In 2013, the government of Serge Sargsyan acquiesced to Russian pressure to drop association talks with the European Union, and Armenia has since joined the Russia-led Eurasian Union, causing much consternation in some Diaspora circles. But Sargsyan has also resisted Russian encouragements to restrict Armenia's NGO laws along the lines of what Russia had done, at least in part because this would hurt the many Diaspora-funded charities working in Armenia. Sargsyan's reform of the Armenian constitutional framework closer to models in Georgia and Moldova, could also nudge Armenia towards a more decentralized form of government, where minority groups – both non-Armenian and Diasporic – might have a better opportunity at representation.

Ethnic Groups and Conflicts in Georgia

Ethnic diversity in 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries

Georgian kingdoms and princedoms (Kartli-Kakheti, Imereti, Guria, Svanetia, Abkhazia, Megrelia) had hardly ever been mono-ethnic states, but became especially diverse in ethnic and religious terms after the gradual annexation by the Russian Empire. During the first half of the 19th century, an organized group resettlement of non-Georgian populations was implemented (Komakhia 2011 (in Georgian)) leading to a numerical growth of different ethnic groups in Georgia.

Before the 19th century, the Georgian kingdoms were home to small groups of Armenians and many of them were assimilated with the local population (Jioshvili 1996 (in Georgian), 308). Experiencing ongoing oppression on the territories of their settlement, Armenian refugees often resettled into the Georgian kingdoms, mainly near the borderline regions. After Georgia's annexation by the Russian Empire, the number of Armenians also increased. During 1829-1831, 30,000 Armenian refugees from Arzrum resettled to Samtskhe-Javakheti.

A Russian population appeared on the Georgian territory almost at the same time (Jioshvili 1996 (in Georgian), 312). At the beginning of the 19th century the quantity of Russians was equal to zero, whereas by 1865 and 1897, their number had reached respectively 2 percent and 5 percent of the overall population of nowadays Georgia (History of Georgia, 19th Century, Handbook for Students 2004 (in Georgian), 22). A wide-scale migration of Muslims also took place. Among the relatively small ethnic groups, more than 5,000 Greeks were settled in Tsalka, approximately 2,000 Germans in Kvemo Kartli (History of Georgia, 19th Century, Handbook for Students 2004 (in Georgian)). As a result, during 30 years, the population of Georgia increased by 100,000 people, while the number of ethnic Georgians decreased: between 1801 and 1897 from 79 to 69 percent (Jioshvili 1996 (in Georgian)).

An important dimension in the 19th-century Georgian nationalism was that the formation of the Georgian people as a nation and their sense of their own ethnicity were in part shaped by contacts and repeated confrontations with other nationalities. The nationalist movement shaped a sense of Georgian nationality along an alienation from the dominant Russian and Armenian nationalities (Suny, *The Making of Georgian Nation* 1994, 113). While the Russian Empire was considered as the “external other”, Armenians were perceived as the “internal other”. Increased contacts with Armenians, who had long dominated Georgia’s urban centres, was a prime stimulant to Georgian self-definition (Suny, *The Making of Georgian Nation* 1994, 115).

At the verge of 20th century, Georgian national aspirations were mainly limited to cultural nationalism and issues such as the preservation of the Georgian language. Georgian nationalism found its determined political dimension only after the collapse of the Russian Empire, in 1917 (Nodia, *Causes and Visions of Conflict in Abkhazia* 1997, 27). It was then that the Georgian national paradigm was outlined, which, almost unchanged, was absorbed by the Georgian independence movement in the late 80’s of the 20th century.

The exclusive national discourse at the end of the 1980s-1990s

Members of ethno-religious groups (“minorities”) populating Georgia were left out of the new official national discourse that was constructed during the first decade of Georgia’s independence. The core principle of the *nationalizing nationalism* was the confirmed priority position of the dominant group – ethnic Georgians (Brubaker, *Nationalizing States in the Old “New Europe”* – and the

New 1996). Up until today, this approach negatively affects the creation of an inclusive and unified citizenry.

The policy toward ethnic groups is determined by the ideas of ethnic nationalism that are quite influential in the country. During the last stage of Perestroika, Georgian nationalism was manifested in the most radical form ever. In that period, the ideas of public figures of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century became widely popular and were interpreted through the prism of the Soviet experience (Losaberidze 1998, 8). Later there were attempts to depart from the constructs of that “romantic” period, and ideas of civic nationalism stirred more interest. However, the refusal to include members of ethnic groups into country’s social-political and cultural processes led to an increased mistrust and alienation between them and the dominant community.

Ethnic groups and boundaries in Georgia

According to the recent census, 16 percent of the entire population in Georgia are “non-Georgians” (National Statistics Office of Georgia 2002). In addition to Abkhazia and South Ossetia (which are not under Tbilisi’s control), Kvemo Kartli, Samtskhe-Javakheti and the Pankisi Gorge are the areas where different ethnic groups reside in compact communities. Many cities also have a multiethnic population (Komakhia 2011 (in Georgian), 20).

The analysis that follows will be focused on the official policy, as well as the specific situation that the Armenian and Azerbaijani populations in Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti are facing. The selection of these specific cases is justified by a number of factors. First of all, the Azerbaijani and Armenian communities are the biggest ones and constitute 12 percent of the total population (National Statistics Office of Georgia 2002). In addition, in the districts of Bolnisi and Marneuli in Kvemo Kartli and in the districts of Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda of Samtskhe-Javakheti, Azerbaijanis and Armenians are the absolute majority. It is widely believed that these communities have the lowest level of civic integration (BTKK - Policy Research Group 2008, 26). It is important to also underline that both in Kvemo Kartli and in Samtskhe-Javakheti, episodes of tensions have occurred previously, which increases the attention paid to these regions in the context of Georgia’s national security discourse.

The significance of intergroup ethnic boundaries can be attributed to various pre-Soviet, Soviet and post-Soviet practices. However, a major importance is attributed to the national policy of the USSR, which in many cases contributed

to the construction, consolidation and upholding of such boundaries. The Soviet practice of territorialization of the nations, together with the provision of certain collective privileged treatment in the areas of language and culture, implied the existence of a relatively rigid group status hierarchy, which to a certain degree was sustained in Georgia also after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The state, ethnic groups, and conflicts

Georgia's national policy during Zviad Gamsakhurdia's presidency (1991-1992) (Reisner 2009) was radical and ultra-right conducted under the motto "Georgia for Georgians". Using Lowell Barrington's classification, the official nationalism of this period in Georgia can be classified as sovereignty-protecting nationalism (Barrington 2006). Gamsakhurdia was guided with some "mystical" vision of a united Georgia that was based on a primordial understanding of the nation. He viewed ethnic groups as a force endangering the national unity, and thus the protection of Georgia's sovereignty *a priori* led to the marginalization of these groups.

Georgia's political elite viewed the fears and "inconvenient" aspirations of the members of the ethnic groups as artificial and instigated by the central Soviet government (Suny 1994, 325). However, the problem was that due to the Soviet national policy, Georgia was an asymmetrical and hierarchical state. In such an environment, the official ideology of the "purity of the nation" and the growing popularity of the ethno-national discourses stimulated the growing popularity of separatist ideas and movements that started brewing in places of compact residence of the representatives of different ethnic groups.

In cases of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, these factors led to *de facto* territorial disintegration (Nodia, Causes and Visions of Conflict in Abkhazia 1997). The Georgian government's discriminatory national policy toward the Abkhaz and the South Ossetians led to tensions in Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti – areas of compact residence of ethnic minority communities. Demands to create autonomies were voiced. There were cases of standoff between Georgians on one side and ethnic activists representing their groups⁴⁶ and sympathizers of nationalistic organizations on the other side⁴⁷. Acute and open conflict was

⁴⁶ As a result of the confrontation between Azerbaijanis and Georgians in the districts of Bolnisi and Marneuli, demands to create a Borchali autonomy were voiced.

⁴⁷ In Samtskhe-Javakheti, the "Javakhk" movement was an example of such an organization whose main goal was the protection of the rights of the Armenian

avoided, but the tension in the relations became a defining factor in the further consolidation of ethnic and religious group boundaries.

Eduard Shevardnadze's presidency (1995-2003) (Wheatley 2005) (Jones, *Georgia: A Political History Since Independence* 2012) was marked by a departure from the radical nationalistic rhetoric at the face of military conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. He is credited for defining Gamsakhurdia's policy as "backwoods fascism" (Nodia, *The Polyethnicity of Georgia: The Fact, the Attitude Towards the Fact and Thoughts Political Strategy* 2003 (in Georgian), 71), as well as for easing the tensions in Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti. The nationalism of that period became a tool for strengthening the state and the further nationalization of the republic.

Shevardnadze's "institutional" nationalism was based on the reinterpretation of history and the concept of citizenship by ethnic Georgians and minorities. On the official level, the integrative aspects among the citizens were emphasized instead of the differences (Jones, *Georgia: Nationalism from under the Rubble* 2006, 264). Ethnic groups lost their status of "guests" that the former government had informally ascribed to them (Nodia, *The Polyethnicity of Georgia: The Fact, the Attitude Towards the Fact and Thoughts Political Strategy* 2003 (in Georgian), 71). At the same time, targeted state policy was non-existent, and the government's actions in this area were minimalistic.

On the one hand, Shevardnadze's government created a basic constitutional framework for the development of a multiethnic democratic society; on the other hand, the Georgian parliament did not adopt a single important piece of legislation to regulate group relations (Nodia, *The Polyethnicity of Georgia: The Fact, the Attitude Towards the Fact and Thoughts Political Strategy* 2003 (in Georgian), 260). In addition, according to the Constitution adopted in 1995, the state recognized "the unparalleled role of the Georgian Orthodox Church" (*Konstitutsiya Gruzii ot 24 Avgusta 1995 g. n.d.*). Such nuanced relations between the state and the church even today create an environment where the majority of the population does not perceive the adherents of various Christian denominations and other religions as equal citizens.

Azerbaijanis and Armenians of Georgia were left out from the development of the post-Soviet Georgian national identity. At the same time, the government

population. Today, the representatives of the local organizations "Javakhk" and "Virk" occasionally voice demands for the establishment of an autonomy. At the same time, the influence of these organizations significantly decreased after the closure of the Russian military base in Akhalkalaki.

tried cooperating with the representatives of the political and/or economic elite of the ethnic minorities (Nodia, *The Polyethnicity of Georgia: The Fact, the Attitude Towards the Fact and Thoughts Political Strategy 2003* (in Georgian), 74), with an aim to soothe any potential source of tensions. Ethnic patchiness of the population was considered dangerous, and denial to openly discuss this question at the political level was seen as the way out (Nodia, *The Polyethnicity of Georgia: The Fact, the Attitude Towards the Fact and Thoughts Political Strategy 2003* (in Georgian), 72). The negative attitude towards the political recognition of the collective social and cultural rights of ethnic groups led to the strengthening of isolationist tendencies instead of advancing towards a single political community. The country, in fact, was divided between the dominant group and the significantly smaller ethnic groups. None of them considered themselves members of a unified citizenry.

From Mikheil Saakashvili to the “Georgian Dream”: the legislative framework

When in 2003 the United National Movement headed by Mikheil Saakashvili (2003-2012) came to power (Karumidze and Wertsch 2005) (Cornell 2013), this led to a fundamental reassessment and revision of the official policy towards ethnic groups. Several state agencies were created in 2004 with an agenda to protect minority rights. Within the Ombudsman’s office a “Council on Ethnic Minorities” was created. Georgia acceded to all fundamental international legislation on the protection of human rights. In 2005, the Georgian parliament ratified the “Framework Convention for Protection of National Minorities”, which implies acceptance of the burden of responsibility for the preservation of ethnic identity and the creation of conditions for the realization of collective rights. In Georgia’s first ever “National Security Concept”, where there is a clear shift to liberal and civic nationalism, one of the fundamental interests of the state is the achievement of national unity and civil accord:

“Georgia ensures the protection of the interests, rights, and freedoms of all ethnic and religious groups residing in the country. For this purpose, Georgia is building a society based on the principles of pluralism, tolerance, justice, solidarity, and non-discrimination. Georgia strives to foster respect for the Constitution among its citizens and to ensure their self-identification as citizens of Georgia (Kontseptsiya natsional'noy bezopasnosti Gruzii (2005 g) - polnyy tekst 2015).

The 2012 “National Security Concept” also includes clauses on the protection of minority rights and underlines the importance of their participation in the social

and political life of the country (Kontsepsiya natsional'noy bezopasnosti Gruzii (2005 g) - polnyy tekst 2015).

During Saakashvili's time in office Georgia also adopted the "Concept on Tolerance and Civil Integration" one of the central principles of which, along with the recognition of the equality of all citizens and non-discrimination, was the balance between civil integration and the protection of the ethnic groups identities (Concept on Tolerance and Civil Integration 2009 (in Georgian)). There was an increasing emphasis to present Georgia as a traditionally tolerant multiethnic state. A civil and inclusive concept of the Georgian nation was being advocated (Sabanadze 2013, 87). Nevertheless, along with this policy, the speeches and public statements of President Saakashvili, who emphasized the need to restore the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Georgia, were often filled with ethno-nationalist rhetoric. The tacit union and agreement with the Georgian Orthodox Church remained unchanged (International Crisis Group 2006, 11).

In 2015, the new Georgian government led by the "Georgian Dream"⁴⁸ adopted the "State Strategy of Civil Equality and Integration", as well as an action plan for the years 2015-2020. The strategic objectives include the "equal and adequate participation of ethnic minorities in the civic and political life of the country, ensuring equal social and economic conditions" (State Strategy of Civil Equality and Integration and Action Plan for 2015-2020 2015).

Summarizing the legislative activity of the last two political regimes, it is obvious that there is no discrimination of ethnic groups on the legislative level with a caveat that the legislature guarantees primarily *negative liberty*, which implies the removal of barriers for the collective exercise of rights and freedoms. However, this approach does not create sufficient conditions permissive for the effective realization of individual civil rights. This fact still is and can be the future reason of indirect discrimination.

Ethnic groups in Georgia: Azerbaijanis and Armenians

The unwillingness of Georgia's political elite in the 1990s to integrate the members of ethnic groups in the process of the construction of the Georgian statehood resulted in the perception of ethnic asymmetry and civil alienation as

⁴⁸ In 2012 as a result of the parliamentary elections, a new parliament was formed and the cabinet was approved. It was formed by the "Georgian Dream" coalition that received 54.97 percent of the votes (Jones, Democracy in Georgia: Da Capo? 2013) (Fairbanks and Gugushvili 2013).

a given status quo. Among Azerbaijanis and Armenians of Georgia the phenomenon of alienation from the dominant society can be seen on several levels.

The socio-cultural separation of the members of these groups from the dominating Georgian group is worth a mention. In fact, the country is divided into several cultural areas that have very little interaction with each other. One of the reasons is the extremely low level of horizontal communication between Georgians on the one side and Azerbaijanis and Armenians on the other, which is often replaced by vertical communications. It is important to note that all sides recognize the legitimacy of such an unequal hierarchical style of relations (Dundua and Abashidze 2009 (in Georgian), 133).

Azerbaijanis' level of integration into the dominant socio-cultural tradition is much lower than that of Armenians due to their religious affiliation (Dundua and Abashidze 2009 (in Georgian), 147). This however does not result in an open conflict. At the same time, the privileged position of the Georgian Orthodox Church and the high level of religious practice among the dominating Georgians is an additional obstacle for the integration of Muslim Azerbaijanis (Dundua and Abashidze 2009 (in Georgian), 147).

The Armenian community protests more often than Azerbaijanis (International Crisis Group 2006, 6). The reasons of discontent are different. During the protests in 2005-2006, Armenians claimed that in Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda Armenian judges were being fired and were demanding to use the Armenian language in judicial and any other official business practices.

In addition, mass demonstrations and political meetings were organized by Samtskhe-Javakheti activists, whose demands included autonomy within Georgia for Samtskhe-Javakheti and Tsalka Armenians, the use of Armenian in public administration in Armenian-populated municipalities, an end to the settlement of ethnic Georgians from the other parts of the country in Samtskhe-Javakheti, and improved Armenian representation in state institutions (International Crisis Group 2006, 4).

Since 2004, protests of the Azerbaijani community have centered mainly on unequal land privatization. Ethnic Azerbaijanis, predominantly farmers, claim Georgians were favored when land was privatized (International Crisis Group 2006, 6). Some demonstrations have led to violence.

Armenians and Azerbaijanis living in Georgia see different solutions to the current situation. While for Armenians gaining autonomy would resolve all

their problems, most of Azerbaijanis do not consider this option. Since Azerbaijanis are not represented in the power structures, the autonomy would not give them any significant advantages. As a result, Azerbaijanis prioritize representation in state structures.

It is important to note the political and civil dimensions of alienation between Azerbaijanis and Armenians on the one side and dominant Georgians on the other. Despite the fact that national minorities often point out the low level of corruption and intensive state-building in Georgia as positive developments, their own access to participation in the public and political life of the country remains constantly low.

Members of ethnic groups living in Georgia are not active political subjects. This is the conclusion that results from the analysis of the level of representation of these groups in the country's power structures. The 1992-1995 convocation parliament had the smallest number of Armenians and Azerbaijanis represented (BTKK - Policy Research Group 2008, 18). While in the following convocations their percentage has increased, often their presence in the parliament is only formal. Their activities are limited to meetings with the political leadership of the country in Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti or being included in the state delegations during official visits to Armenia and Azerbaijan. As far as the local administration is concerned, Armenians are well represented in the governing bodies of the two municipalities where they constitute the absolute majority, while there are no Azerbaijanis among the heads of even those municipalities where they are the majority of the population (International Crisis Group 2006, 12-13).

To summarize the above-mentioned in simple terms it can be stated that during different periods the political elite of the country considered Azerbaijanis and Armenians of Georgia as a resource to consolidate power and control over Georgia (Dundua and Abashidze 2009 (in Georgian), 133). A number of studies suggest that Armenians and Azerbaijanis living in Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti tend to support the ruling political parties (BTKK - Policy Research Group 2008, 18) regarding this as their loyalty to the state which they consider their political homeland.

The low level of knowledge of the state language is considered to be the main reason that leaves national minorities out of the mainstream political and

cultural processes⁴⁹. This is a significant obstacle to the dissemination of information about events in the country and results in a secluded lifestyle within the boundaries of own group. The low level of interest and participation in socio-cultural and political processes, the compact residence in the border areas affects the perception of the regions of Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti as potential spots of internal conflicts where third parties can be involved. Often political analysts underline that these regions can be used by external powers (including the friendly ones) to influence internal and external policies of the Georgian authorities.

On the official level, the Georgian policy is aimed at overcoming the boundaries between dominant Georgians and ethnic groups. However, in the post-Soviet period, these boundaries are becoming even more rigid. This is the result of a lack of a systemic approach in the official policy, which does not contribute to the creation of more or less unified citizenry-based society. Even though the radical state ethnic nationalism of the 1990s is replaced with a liberal discourse, the involvement of ethnic groups in political, social, and cultural processes remains minimal.

Ethnic Groups and Conflicts in Azerbaijan

Before the “friendship of peoples”

As argued by historian Jorg Baberowski, before the advance of the Russian Empire into the South Caucasus, the territory of today’s Azerbaijan “was part of the Persian Empire both politically and culturally” (Baberowski 2003, 28). There are no trustworthy sources of the demographic data until the 19th century. Over the course of centuries, the composition of the population underwent changes also due to many prolonged wars. Nevertheless, it can be argued that similar to today, this territory was home to several ethnic groups speaking Persian (among them the Talysh, Mountain Jews, and Kurds), dialects of the North Caucasus (among them Lezgins, Budukhs, Kryts and others), as well as Turkic dialects. The territory of today’s Azerbaijan was also inhabited by Christian populations that were predominantly Armenian and Georgian. By the 18th century, Turkic people and Shia Muslims prevailed.

⁴⁹ It should be noted that the “1+4” state program allows students to learn the Georgian language for one year after they pass the university entrance exams in their native language. Upon the successfully completion of the one-year course, students begin their studies in the first year of an undergraduate degree. The program was initiated in 2010.

The advance of the Russian Empire onto the semi-independent Muslim Khanates that were vassals of the Persian Empire, the situation gradually changed. After the 1828 Treaty of Turkmenchay, the former Khanates saw the settlement of dozens of thousands of Armenians, Russian (Molokans, Doukhobors, Orthodox populations and others) later followed by a wave of German settlers. Несколько позже к ним присоединяются немецкие колонисты. With the start of the oil boom, Azerbaijan's future capital city Baku started attracting many European Jews – the Ashkenazi. Baku became one of the most multiethnic cities in the empire, and the Turkic Muslims relinquished the dominating position to Russians, Armenians, Ashkenazi Jews, and Georgians. By 1913, there were 38 percent of Turkic Muslims in the city while Russians and Armenians made up 51 percent of the population with 34 percent and 17 percent respectively (Badalov 2001, 267).

It was exactly in Baku where amidst the controversial imperial politics, the most complex competition between different ethnic and religious groups emerged, that the winter of 1905 saw the ethnic pogroms. The confrontation took place mainly between Armenians and Turkic Muslims and the clashes that spilled over to other cities and the rural areas continued until 1908 taking the lives of thousand od people. In March and September 1918 as the revolution was in full swing, Armenian-Turkic clashes flared up again claiming lives and lead to a wave of tens of thousands of refugees (Świętochowski 1995, 37-42) (Świętochowski, Russian Azerbaijan, 1905-1920. The Shaping of National Identity in a Muslim Community 1985, 37-83) (Altstadt 1992, 27-49, 89-107).

Despite the tragic events of the beginning of the 20th century, Russians and Armenian remained the most significant ethnic groups until 1988-1990. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the new Nagorno Karabakh conflict, the Pogroms in Sumgait and Baku turned the absolute majority of Armenians into refugees. Out of the hundreds of thousands of Armenians that used to live in Azerbaijan, hardly a few hundred have remained who are mostly women married to Azerbaijani men. (Huseynova, Ethnicity as social status and stigma: Armenians in post-Soviet Baku 2011) (Huseynova, Ethno-Cultural Diversity in the Imperial and Post-Imperial City: Communal Violence, Nationalist Conflicts and Inter-Ethnic Cooperation in Baku in the 19th-21st Centuries 2013). The same events and economic hardships led to a three- or even four-fold reduction in the number of Russians. Most of the Ashkenazi Jews left the country as well. As a result of these shifts, since the beginning of the 1990s, the most significant ethnic groups in Azerbaijan were the Lezgins and the Talysh. This paper will

look further into these two cases; however, prior to that the Soviet experience needs to be brought into the context.

From “friendship of people” to discourse of “tolerance”

The Sovietization of Azerbaijan began with the arrival of the 11th Red Army to the region in April 1920 and marked the beginning of the era of the “friendship of people”. Azerbaijanis (Turkic people) became the “titular nation” of the republic. At the same time, all the citizens of the Azerbaijani SSR were given their “obligatory ascribed status” – a personal ethno-national identity indicated in a number of official documents and in particular in the notorious 5th field of the Soviet passports (Kostyrchenko 2009).

After Azerbaijan’s independence there was a need to create a national policy that would be different from the Soviet one. This resulted in the new stage of nationalization that bore the motto of the transformation from the totalitarian-authoritarian Soviet regime to a democratic rule. All these events mandated the revision of the previous schemes, relationships, and statuses. The question is whether the transformation of the Soviet legacy of the national policy into a qualitatively new one in line with the proclaimed course of democratization of political and social life was successful.

Changes did take place. However, they did not affect the basic perceptions of a personal ethno-national identity, and the changes in the society in terms of ethnic groups ranking were insignificant. The core characteristic of any citizen of Azerbaijan remained their personal ethno-national identity, or their “biological nationality”. Similar to the Soviet period, the republic did not belong to all its citizens, but first and foremost was “the state of and for a particular nation” (Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* 2000, 27).

At the same time, certain changes should be highlighted. For example, public discussions on “national ideology”, or, more precisely, on the content of post-Soviet nationalism, again became possible. These were discussions on whether or not this nationalism should be exclusive or inclusive, ethnic or civic. During the Soviet era, such discussions were impossible. However, in this new environment, these discussions recreated a quasi-Soviet civilian model. In the Soviet model, the ethno-nations (or peoples) were discursively united into yet another category of a supranational Soviet people.

In this same spirit, certain scientists and politicians began constructing the idea of the *Azerbaijani nation* as a community based on the co-citizenship of all people

in the country, however maintaining the obligatory group statuses and the personal ethno-national identity recorded in number of documents (Rumyansev 2011). As a result, the rejection of any individual, even symbolically important practices does not imply the revision of the overall system of perceptions.

Post-Soviet nationalism

For more than two decades Azerbaijan has been carrying out programs of the post-Soviet nationalization of the state. Throughout this time, they underwent quite significant changes, but from the mid-1990s and, more so from the early 2000s, these programs are strongly tied to the post-Soviet nationalistic ideology, to “Azerbaijaniness” or “Azerbaijanism” (in Azerbaijani *Azərbaycançılıq*).

This is a rather contradictory ideology, and so far has been discussed only in a few dozens of scattered texts. Its main author is considered to be the former president Heydar Aliyev (1993-2003) during whose presidency it gained an official status. A number of politicians and officials, social scientists, journalist, writers, and poets authored a variety of texts with an attempt to interpret or further develop this ideological doctrine⁵⁰.

The core tenets of Azerbaijanism can be summarized as follows: Azerbaijanis are “a people with an ancient history” and “with a national authentic identity” who “have made a valuable contribution to the world civilization”, and are also a state-forming group. The political regime that is ruling in Azerbaijan since 1993 (since Heydar Aliyev first came to power) is the only guarantor of stability in the country. According to the main author of this ideology:

“We, Azerbaijanis are united by our national identity, historical roots, national and spiritual values, by our national culture – literature, arts, music, poetry, songs, customs, and traditions of our people. [...] All these factors unite us. The idea of Azerbaijaniness unites us. [...] Azerbaijaniness means maintaining our national identity, preserving the national and spiritual values, and at the same time enriching them through synthesis and integration with universal values, and ensuring the development of every individual” (Aliyev 2001).

This excerpt from president Heydar Aliyev’s speech delivered at the First Congress of World Azerbaijanis in 2001 is considered the foundation of the concept of Azerbaijanism. It is clear that the president was addressing all ethnic Azerbaijanis regardless of their citizenship, but not the citizens of the Republic

⁵⁰ See for example (Sərdarov 2008) and (Abaskuliyeva 2010).

of Azerbaijan. At the same time, in the later interpretations of this speech, we can see attempts to introduce some ideas of civic nationalism into the ideology of Azerbaijanism. However, all such attempts center on the essentialist ideas of tolerance of the Azerbaijani nation and the description of the population of Azerbaijan as multiethnic and divided into different ethnic groups.

Discourse of tolerance

If during the Soviet years, interethnic relationships were described in the context of the “friendship of nations”, nowadays they are dominated by the discourse on the tolerance of the Azerbaijani people. In the post-Soviet discourse of tolerance, the concepts of the “titular nations” and the “Soviet people” came to a logical end.

Similar to the Soviet period, the state is perceived to belong to one dominating (“titular”) group, ethnic Azerbaijanis. The statuses of all other ethnic groups (“minorities”) are subject to discussion. In all cases however, all those who are not ethnic Azerbaijanis are entitled to citizenship first and foremost because of the tolerance of the dominant group. In their turn, the former must demonstrate unwavering “gratitude” and loyalty to the unwaveringly tolerant dominant group. This official discourse of tolerance is in a clear contradiction with the state law on citizenship.

The official legislation does not reflect the real attitudes and the state of relationships in post-Soviet Azerbaijan. The law on citizenship is a product of modern liberal legal establishment, while the widespread and widely popular discourse of tolerance is a prime example of the Soviet essentialist tradition in defining nation and ethnicity.

This discourse defines that Azerbaijani Turks are tolerant by nature inherited through “ethnic genes” and “blood”. Such “genetically congenital tolerance” becomes a certain guarantee of conflict-free coexistence of different ethnic groups within Azerbaijan. All conflicts are interpreted through various conspiracy theories and theories of political manipulation, as well as essentialist myths on “historic enemies”. With the help of these interpretative models, Azerbaijanis remain unchangeably tolerant in all situations and under all conditions since one cannot change genetics. This version stipulates that conflicts are possible only because of intolerance of the other groups.

Discourses of threat

The development of these discourses will be discussed on the example of the Talysh and Lezgins. In the routine life, “intergroup” and identity boundaries between Lezgins, the Talysh, and Azerbaijanis are blurred. However, at the same time, the representatives of all these three groups witness a process of politicization of ethnicity.

For example, in one of his articles the political scientist and a member of the parliament of the last two convocations Rasim Musabekov aims not only to explain the conflicts that have already occurred, but also to speculate about the dangers of “potential conflicts” – those that could have occurred, but were avoided, or did not escalate to open hostilities. Musabekov’s political analysis is based on one basic premise that the mere existence of different ethnic groups with the boundaries of one country essentially implies the existence of a serious conflict potential. At the same time, these ethnic groups are discursively defined to be different highlighting the differences rather than similarities. An analysis developed from such a premise inevitably implies a search for why ethnic conflicts happened or why it was possible to avoid them.

In this context, Lezgins being a “Dagestani-language speaking ethnic group” that is different from Turkic Azerbaijanis is perceived as an unstable “risk group”. They can become a “weapon” in the hands of ill-intentioned external forces, particularly since as an ethnic group they are divided by a state border. In this case, a discourse on the threat to territorial integrity emitting from “smaller ethnic groups” is being constructed. According to Musabekov:

“...in some political circles in Russia, there is a temptation to take advantage of popular discontent among Lezgins that is due to current difficulties [i.e. a single ethnic group is divided by a state border] and instigate anti-Azerbaijani and separatist sentiments that can be further used as a leverage against Azerbaijan. [...] It even got to the point of terrorist acts. However, provocations aimed at stirring up Azerbaijani-Lezgin confrontation have not succeeded. The Russian power structures apparently realized the threat that Lezgin nationalism carries for the stability of the Republic of Dagestan. [...] Through joint effort [of Azerbaijan and Russia] the situation on both banks of the Samur river [state border passes along this river] was stabilized and currently does not pose a threat of getting out of control (Musabekov 2009, 41-42).

Dominant groups (those to whom the state belongs) are assigned a leading role in overcoming conflicts (that are *a priori* possible when two or more ethnic groups live side by side). The absence of conflict is first and foremost the

achievement of the policies of the dominant group. A secondary role is also assigned to the “religious commonalities and century-long good neighboring traditions”, the bilingualism common in the Lezgin community, mixed marriages between Lezgins and Azerbaijanis are pushed to the background.

Special attention has to be paid to the role that is assigned to the “small ethnos” in the threat discourses. Viewed as a collective actor, they are either manipulated and pushed to instigate conflict, or are “pacified” in cases when the dominant groups are not interested in conflict. “Pacification” takes forms of “positive reinforcements” such as primary education in the native language, seats in the local administration and in the parliament, as well as harsh political actions such as bans on nationalistic organizations, halt of the policies motivating radicalism, and so on. In other words, it can include all the benefits and restrictions that were in fact developed as part of the Soviet national policy.

It is clear that this approach though popular discourse portrays an ethnic group or a “small ethnos” as a collective actor that can easily be manipulated politically by other “big ethnic groups” from neighboring states. In all cases this “small ethnos” is a “risk group” and an obstacle (small or big) on the way of the cultural, linguistic, and territorial homogenization and stability of a country. This “risk” (threat discourse) heightens if the given ethnic group lives as a compact community along the border, especially if the “small ethnos” is perceived to be divided by a state border.

Following the pattern of this approach, we can also see a number of significant similarities between Lezgins and the Talysh. The latter live as compact communities along Azerbaijan’s southern borders, while Lezgins are in the northern part. And again, within the threat discourse they are also represented as an ethnic group divided by a state border.

“The Talysh live in the south-eastern part of Azerbaijan mainly in the regions of Lankaran, Astara, and also partly in Masally and Lerik. Nowadays many Talysh live in Baku and Sumgait. [...] The Talysh are deeply integrated into the Azerbaijani nation. The traditions, culture, and way of life of the Talysh are not very different [from those of Azerbaijanis]. There are also no historical records of ethnic clashes between the Talysh and Azerbaijanis. However, the revival of the Talysh identity on the background of the Turkic nationalism when Azerbaijan was fighting for independence as a republic, contributed to tension in this part of the country. [...] As of today, despite the dire social-economic conditions, the situation in the southern part of Azerbaijan is stable and is under the full control of the government. Nevertheless, Iran, where more than 100

thousand Talysh reside, is attempting to use zealous Shiism and the language similarities with the Talysh to increase its influence over Azerbaijan. [...] However, they can't claim any visible successes" (Musabekov 2009, 43-44)⁵¹.

In the threat discourses, as well as the portrayal of the country divided into different ethnic groups, the status ranking of groups becomes very clear. It is important to stress that the voices from these ethnic groups are not included in this discourse analysis. Usually this is a macro level analysis that describes an unchangingly unified groups presenting it as a collective body.

Soft and hard lines

The political regime in post-Soviet Azerbaijan is trying to maintain ethnic boundaries and personal ethnic identities. This policy has two approaches. The first one can be described as a "hard line" control over the "small ethnē" with an aim to curb any real or, more often, imaginary ideas of separatism and any other form of disloyalty to the political regime. The threat discourse is being constructed along these lines. The "small ethnē" are regarded as different from the "dominating" Turkic Azerbaijanis, and, to a certain degree, are a threat to the unity of the country. As part of this approach direct pressure on them is also possible (interdiction of ethnic organizations, arrests of ethnic activists, and so on).

The second approach is the "soft line". In this case, the operations of ethnic activists and organizations that are ready to demonstrate their loyalty toward the ruling regime and the "dominant ethnē" are being supported. This allows the government to present itself as tolerant, and ethnic activists as unchangeably loyal and "grateful" to the regime and the "dominant ethnē" for their tolerance.

The difference between these two approaches is less important than the fact that in both cases, the government and ethnic activists maintain and reconstruct the ethnic boundaries, even in cases where they were becoming obsolete.

The discourses of threat and of tolerance play a significant role in the maintenance of ethnic boundaries. They feed on the personal ethnic identity and status boundaries between the "titular nation/ethnē" and "small

⁵¹ Other examples of the construction of such discourses and analytical schemes are the work of Arif Yunusov, another political scientist and historian well-known in Azerbaijan (Yunusov 2007, 148-169) and sociologist Aliaga Mammadli (Mammadli, *Sovremennyye etnokul'turnyye protsessy v Azerbaydzhanе: osnovnyye tendentsii i perspektivy*. 2008) (Mammadli, *Soviet-Era Anthropology by Azerbaijani Scholars* 2011).

nations/ethnic groups” that were institutionalized as part of the Soviet national policy. Scientists in the fields of social sciences and humanities, media representatives together with politicians are active participants in the construction of these discourses.

To summarize, the policy of solidifying ethnic boundaries and identities leads to their politicization and maintenance (and not mitigation) of the conflict potential within the country. Politicians, scientists, and the mass media are the primary creators of the conflict discourse. It is rooted in the discursive division of the country’s population into different ethnic groups, something that has been practiced since the Soviet times, as well as in the essentialist discourse on the tolerance of the “dominant ethnos”.

Ethnic Groups and Conflicts in Turkey

National identity construction in the Turkish Republic

The Turkish Republic was among the nation states that emerged after the collapse of the empires in the era of the *apogee of nationalism* (Hobsbawm, Nations and Nationalism Since 1780 1990). The aim of the political elite at that time was to create a nationhood for the newly-established Republic, and the political and national units had to be made congruent to realize this aim (Gellner 1994). During the last decades of the Ottoman Empire, it was already possible to see patterns of nationalism in various forms including aspects of Turkish ethno-nationalism. However, the policies of ethnic and cultural homogenization of the population started during the rule of the Committee of Union and Progress in the early 1900s gained a systematic form and pace especially after the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923⁵². The national identity construction that started in the 1900s and intensified with the establishment of the Republic in 1923 has not been completed until today. This process has been causing the intrastate conflicts between the Turkish state and its ethnic groups. This has been the result of the persistence of the discourses of ethno-cultural homogenization of the population embedded within the state institutions towards the ethnic and religious groups (“minorities”) despite the changes in the time period and/or context. That’s why the history of the Turkish Republic has also been a history of conflicts.

⁵² It would make more sense if the Turkish Republic is thought of as the continuation of the Ottoman Empire. Otherwise, if this process is disrupted, it would hinder the comprehension of the main issues of Turkish nationalism.

The explicit aim of the domestic policy of the Turkish Republic since its establishment has been to transform its multiethnic, multicultural, and multi-religious population into a homogenous nation through its modernization project and that was reflected in the Lausanne Treaty of 1923 (Kirişçi, *Disaggregating Turkish Citizenship and Immigration Practices* 2000, 1). The modernization project led by the Kemalist elites aimed to reform almost all areas of the social and political life in order to transform the debris of the Ottoman Empire into a modern republic (Yeğen, *Turkish Nationalism and the Kurdish Question* 2007). They adapted the notions of nation-state, national identity and industrial economy that were seen as the prerequisites of the modern republic (Keyman and İçduygu 2013). Thus, while creating this homogenized nation-state, a national identity based on the characteristics of the one particular ethno-religious group – Turkishness and Islam – was built.

Since Turkishness and Islam (Muslimhood) were regarded as the spiritual ground for the production of the new modern national identity of the Republic, the citizens who did not define themselves through such frames could not enjoy equal rights (Yeğen, *Turkish Nationalism and the Kurdish Question* 2007). Although the citizenship definition seemed inclusionary and reflective of the diversity of the society, in practice, it did not function as such. There was a big difference between the substantive and formal citizenship of different groups (Kirişçi, *Disaggregating Turkish Citizenship and Immigration Practices* 2000). Those who were considered ethnically non-Turkish were repressed and denied the public expression of their cultural, political, and ethnic differences (Akman 2004). The state did not recognize the cultural and ethnic diversity of the population and the rights of different individuals and groups stemming from such diversity.

Turkey recognized only its non-Muslim minorities with the Lausanne Treaty. Jews, Armenians, and Greeks were given the minority status, thus the institutions that could sustain their culture and language continued to exist (Kirişçi, *Disaggregating Turkish Citizenship and Immigration Practices* 2000, 1). However, it is not a coincidence that only non-Muslims were recognized as a minority and granted cultural rights by the treaty. The state considered the non-Muslim groups as “others”, who were not part of the new national identity, thus did not belong to the new nation (İçduygu, Şule and Soner 2008).

In order to create an ethnically and religiously homogenous nation-state, the Turkish Republic relied on the tested tools of extermination, assimilation, and expulsion. In this regard, the nation-building process went hand-in-hand with the nation-destroying practices (Kymlicka 1999, 73). Although the status of the

non-Muslim minorities was recognized in the Lausanne Treaty, they were not shielded from those practices. The major examples of expulsion and extermination were the exchange of the Greek population of Anatolia with the Turkish population of Greece in 1923-1924 following the Lausanne Treaty, and the gradual obliteration from the official memory the existence of the Armenian population of Anatolia that greatly diminished in numbers in the aftermath of the Armenian genocide of the pre-republican era⁵³. In this regard, it can be said that the Republic wanted to eliminate the populations that could not be assimilated into the new national identity because of their religion.

On the other hand, the rest of the populations, which did not fit into the national identity ideal, faced assimilation policies, starting from the early period of the establishment of the Republic. Unlike their non-Muslim counterparts, Muslim populations were granted the same rights as the majority on the condition of accepting their ethnicity as Turkish (Ergil 2000). Instead of expelling or exterminating them, the state preferred to assimilate those populations by eradicating their cultural characteristics (mainly linguistic), which could hinder their full integration into the Turkish ethno-national identity. Since Muslimhood was regarded as a key component of Turkishness, all Muslims were seen as prospective Turks (Yeğen, "Prospective-Turks" or "Pseudo-Citizens": Kurds in Turkey 2009).

This ideological nation-building process conducted by the state and its elites affected the perception of the various groups in the society of each other and therefore the overall coherence of the society tremendously. The conflicts in Turkey, therefore, are not only those that are violent and visible. The conflicts have been present in a protracted and latent form and embedded within the institutions through which the polarization of the society became inescapable.

The Armenians and the Kurds in Turkey

Today Turkey faces two major conflicts related to its nation-building policies. The first one is the conflict between the Turkish state and Greeks and Armenians dispersed around the world as a result of the extermination and expulsion from the Ottoman Empire. The second one is the conflict between the Turkish state and the non-Turkish Muslim populations as a result of the

⁵³ Although the genocide and the mass killings took place before the establishment of the Turkish Republic, they can be regarded within the context of national identity construction of the republic. Turkish nationalism emerged before the establishment of the Republic; it is a process that dates back to the late Ottoman Empire.

assimilation policies. To look into the conflict consequences of those nation-building policies, we will discuss two of the most visible examples – the treatment of the Armenians and the Kurds.

The Armenian genocide is crucial for understanding the specific character of the national identity production by the state. Although the genocide itself took place before the establishment of the Republic, the exclusion of Armenians from the nation-constituting groups cannot be understood without taking into consideration the extermination of the entire Armenian population of Anatolia. After the establishment of the Republic, actions aimed at taking over the property of the non-Muslim populations and redistributing the wealth in favor of the national bourgeoisie can be understood as the continuation of that process. In 1942 with the law on capital tax, the government claimed that non-Muslims had been gaining undeserved income by creating a black market in wartime conditions, and they were obliged to “repay” their undeserved income to the state (Kuyucu 2005). Those who refused to pay or could not pay were transferred to the working camps. The result of this act, along with similar others, was the transfer of the property of the non-Muslim bourgeoisie to the new national Muslim entrepreneurs (İçduygu, Şule and Soner 2008).

The pogroms of September 6-7 in 1955 can also be regarded in this context. People who were provoked by the discourse and actions of the government attacked and plundered the non-Muslim property and belongings. In addition to the harm to property, non-Muslim people were explicitly threatened, if not killed, during these two nights. After this incident, part of them left the country, and the number of the non-Muslim population decreased dramatically. These incidents can be regarded as examples of how the state was trying to homogenize its political, social, and economic domains while brutally excluding its non-Muslim minorities.

The attitude towards the Armenians in Turkey is not very different today. The assassination of the Agos journalist Hrant Dink in 2007 (Gazeteci Hrant Dink silahlı saldırıda öldü 2007), the murder of Sevag Balıkcı during his military service in 2011 (Armenian private killed intentionally, new testimony shows 2012), the murder of Maritsa Küçük in her home in Samatya in 2012 (Maritsa Küçük nefret suçu kurbanı mı? 2013) are all connected to their Armenian identity. These events reveal the perception of the state and big parts of the society towards Armenians. Although these incidents caused public unrest and protests, they did not shake the structures supporting such attitudes or the indifference of the society at large that also perceives Armenians in particular, and non-Muslims in general, as the “others”.

The Kurdish Question is the other major consequence of the state's nation-building policies. The Kurdish revolts that started in the 19th century against the centralization policies of the Ottoman Empire gained a nationalist tendency in the context of the late Ottoman Empire and intensified during the Turkish Republic's national identity construction phase. Whereas the revolts started with the aim of maintaining the religio-tribal structure, they adopted nationalist language later prioritizing demands for identity preservation in reaction to the assimilation policies.

After a series of revolts, the settlement law of 1934 was put into action aimed to control the Kurdish population. By the law, the state had the authority to designate who could move and where they could move (Yavuz 2007). When the state could not suppress the revolts with the help of this law, it resorted to violence, of which the Dersim Massacre in 1938 is a very tragic example. When the state could not repress the revolt in Dersim, it bombed the villages, erased the city from the map, and renamed it as "Tunceli". Incidents similar to Dersim made living in these cities really difficult, if not impossible.

After the *coup d'état* in 1980, the state adopted even tougher policies towards its Kurdish minority. An unusually high national quota for entrance into the parliament was imposed (10 percent) in order to impede the presence of Kurdish political parties (Çelik 2010). This created a representation problem for the Kurdish-populated cities. Along with the high electoral threshold, Kurdish political parties were also subject to forced closures by the decisions of the constitutional court with the claim that they were a threat to the national integrity of the Turkish state. These and similar practices prevented Kurds from expressing their demands democratically and consequently pushing some of them toward a violent response.

After the military coup and the establishment of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, the PKK, in 1978, the conflict became violent. Following the severe violence enclosing the Kurdish-populated regions in particular, in 1987 the state declared martial law, which put 13 cities under extraordinary harsh conditions. This meant that the population in these cities was subject to laws different from the rest of the society living in the other regions of the country (Yavuz 2007). The state of emergency lasted 23 years, was renewed 46 times, and was finally abolished in 2002 following the ascent to power of Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (known by its Turkish acronym AKP).

From the start of the conflict, but mainly after the 1980 *coup d'état* when the violence escalated, the state used various tools and tactics in order to suppress

the Kurdish expression of a distinct identity. After 1985, the state forced people in the villages either to become village guards and to fight on behalf of the state or to leave their homes. Through internal displacement policies, the Kurdish population was sent from their villages or cities to the designated places.

Minority rights in modern Turkey

With the acceleration of the EU accession process in the early 2000s, small steps toward changes started to emerge in this very particular subject. With the Helsinki Summit of the EU in 1999, Turkey was accepted as an official EU candidate. Therefore, eight packages of reforms were implemented in Turkey between the years 2000 and 2004 in order to comply with the Copenhagen criteria and to start the EU negotiation process (International Crisis Group 2011) (Ulusoy 2010) (Kirişçi, National Identity, Asylum and Immigration: EU as a Vehicle of Post-National Transformation in Turkey 2006) (Grigoriadis 2008). Particularly critical was the third reform package enacted in 2002 that abolished the death penalty, allowed broadcasting in languages other than Turkish, and recognized the property rights of non-Muslim foundations (Ulusoy 2010). It would be naive to think that the EU accession process alone could bring civic (post-ethnic) citizenship to Turkey. However, it contributed to the awareness of the ethnically and religiously diverse society, and the policies of multiculturalism (Kirişçi, National Identity, Asylum and Immigration: EU as a Vehicle of Post-National Transformation in Turkey 2006).

Later, in 2009, the government issued a democratic opening package. This package could also be understood as the continuation of the reform packages started with the EU accession process. It aimed to transform the institutional structure of the post-1980 *coup d'état* regime while, at the same time, broadening the cultural rights of the minorities (Ulusoy 2010). However, the move remained superficial in understanding and resolving the problems of the minorities and the conflicts.

Starting with the reforms in 2002, the new AKP government's discourse on "democratic opening" created hope towards the democratization of Turkey in general and the amelioration of ethnic group rights in particular. However, the extension of the minority rights into the political and cultural scenes remained only as a lip service. At the practical level, we can see only small steps taken in these direction. Turkey is not a signatory of the 1995 Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, the 1997 European Convention on Nationality, or the 1992 European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages of the Council of Europe (Grigoriadis 2008).

Having failed to achieve significant progress towards the EU accession, Turkey shifted from committed Europeanization to loose Europeanization and finally to a soft Euro-Asianism (Öniş and Yılmaz 2009). The shift had grave repercussions with respect to the democratization process in general and ethnic group rights in particular and a new cycle of violence in the South East.

Conclusion

Concluding this review, it should be noted that within the framework of this approach it is not possible to address all issues, to convey all the multi-faceted specifics of complex processes, or even to mention all the important cases. The authors of the review did not have such an objective to start with. We saw our goal as focusing on the most urgent and long lasting tendencies that define intergroup relations and collective statuses in the *era of nationalism* or in the era of the so called “interethnic conflicts”. The objective was to present an overall parallel description of the situation in all four countries that are connected by regional political, cultural, economic projects, contacts and conflicts. The authors of the review hope that such an approach not only allows the readers to gain insight into the region, but also provides an opportunity for an interesting comparative analysis. Nevertheless, in conclusion some important trends and aspects that the authors had to leave out from this analysis need to be mentioned.

Migration, diasporas, and conflicts

First of all, the current analysis did not cover migration processes and issues around diasporas were not touched. For all the imagined communities included in this analysis, the 20th century became an era of mass migration – often a forceful displacement of populations as a result of conflicts. The last mass migration of Georgian, Armenian, and Azerbaijani populations following the collapse of the USSR, even though often regarded as economic or work-related, to a certain degree was a forced migration. Economic issues were further exacerbated by the conflicts. Conflicts also instigated migration flows in Turkey after the Second World War. Kurds were leaving their densely populated areas not only in search of jobs, but also with the desire to leave the conflict-stricken areas.

At the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century was the period of diaspora formation on the basis of migration networks and communities. With the current level of development of communication and access to information beyond state borders, diaspora networks, created by

ethnic activists, are increasingly getting involved in the political processes taking place in the countries of origin. Activists of ethno-national diasporas in various forms increasingly participate in conflicts (public events, demonstrations, publications, etc.). Political regimes in the countries of origin use the cross-border trans-nationalism for various goals, including for a most far-reaching representation of “our” version of the conflict and the mobilization of the diaspora. In the case of ethnic groups, such expatriate activities are perceived by the dominant communities as threatening and separatists. This topic is extremely important, but the authors considered that it is worth a separate analysis.

Nationalism and religion

Not all has been said about the imperial heritage and nationalism. The modern history of the region goes back to the middle of the 19th century, when the first intellectuals who sought to disseminate European ideas of nationalism came forward in future Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey. For each of the imagined communities that these nation-states were named after, the era of nationalism came at different times. At the same time, a relatively short period from the late 19th to the early 20th centuries was key to the nationalist discourse becoming really influential at least among the intelligentsia⁵⁴. The origins of the politicization of ethnicity and cultural differences belong to the same time period that marks the beginning of new “ethnic conflicts”.

In the 20th century, the growing popularity of secular nationalistic ideologies overshadows religious influences, and in some cases or certain periods, religion loses a significant or even the major part of its influence. Yet, religious institutions and discourses largely remain influential, and in recent years are very successfully regaining former positions. Limited with the framework of this review, the authors almost did not touch the subject.

Imperial heritage and nationalism

The large territory that now belongs to Turkey, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan was divided between Russian and Ottoman empires up until the beginning of 20th century. The major part of the same century the South Caucasus was part of the Soviet Union. Extended imperial rule on these

⁵⁴ The degree of influence was different for Georgians, Armenians, Turks, and Azerbaijanis (at that point Turkic Muslims). The order of the mentioned communities conditionally reflects the growing popularity of the ideas of nationalism in each of them – from highest to lowest.

territories inevitably encourages researches to look for answers to certain questions guided by the framework of post-colonial theory.

In the 20th century, there is an increased desire in the region to be *European*⁵⁵, which leads to the popularity of the Orientalist discourse of dividing the world into East and West among politicians and intellectuals. At the same time, European and/or Western aspirations encourage legislative reforms following the European model. These include changes of relations between the “majority” and the “minorities”. However, authors had to leave the specificity of *post-colonialism* and *European aspirations* out of the scope of this analysis considering these to be topics for a separate paper.

It has to be underlined that discourses of nationalism and imperial discourses were always competing with each other in the region. In 2016, on the eve of the 100th anniversary since the demise of the Ottoman Empire, the Turkish ruling elite is constructing a new nationalist ideology drawing on the resources of the inheritance of the Sublime Porte. At the same time, many Georgian, Armenian, and Azerbaijani people and even middle-aged and older intellectuals, “cramped” within the borders of small nation states are nostalgic about the Soviet *superpower* and the friendship of nations.

This example of an ambivalent attitude toward imperial power shows that any attempt to talk about nationalist ideologies and discourses as strictly anti-imperial and unchangeable over time inevitably leads to a reduction of very complex and contradictory processes. The content of Georgian, Armenian, Turkish, and Azerbaijani nationalist ideologies and discourses is visibly changing throughout their one and a half century-long existence. The same mutability applies to the views of intellectuals claiming the right to represent various ethnic groups (Kurds, Lezgins, and others.). Modern nationalism and contemporary situations often have very little in common with the beginning and even the middle of the 20th century.

The key trends

At the same time, there are some more or less constant trends that are outlined in the kaleidoscope of dynamic processes of nation building. One of these extremely important trends that this analysis targeted is the constant domination of the ethno-nationalist ideology, as well as the primordialist and essentialist understanding of ethnicity, culture or group boundaries, and

⁵⁵ In some cases, such as in Georgia, it became the core of the political activity and state ideology.

collective rights. At different periods with different political leaders and under different regimes, the need for a radical break from the past was voiced. Although Atatürk's reforms aimed at the construction of an imagined community of Turks were far less bloody, they are still comparable to the radical experiments of the Bolsheviks. At the time of the collapse of the USSR and to this day, there are calls to break with the Soviet past. However, such appeals are usually not applied to the understanding of the phenomenon of the nation.

Certainly ethnic nationalism never comes in a "pure" form⁵⁶. In this sense, Turkish, Armenian, Georgian, and Azerbaijani nationalisms are not different from other types of ideologies. In all cases, the past legacy with certain changes and modifications continues to influence the present state of affairs. The creation of an ethnically homogeneous Turkey on the remains of the "sick man of Europe" was impossible, given the legacy of imperial diversity. The same way, the policy of "return" to and "revival" of the Ottoman heritage of modern Turkey is a new form of ethnic and religious homogenization of the population that was never pursued by the imperial authorities before the age of nationalism.

The quick homogenization of an ethnically diverse population on the remains of a "Colossus with feet of clay" was also impossible. In the framework of the dominant ethnic nationalism, the pursuit for homogenization was accompanied by violence and armed confrontation already in pre-Soviet years. In order to solve many conflicts that were the legacies of collapsed empires, the ideologists of the Soviet national policy institutionalized rules that contributed to the preservation of group boundaries and individual ethnic identities.

The Soviet project provided ethnic groups with integration either into national republics (into "own" dominant communities) or into Soviet people as a form

⁵⁶ When specifying the type of nationalism, there is always the choice of the theoretical model that allows researchers to provide a framework for the analysis. In the "pure" form, there is no civil or ethnic, or any other type of nationalism. In practice, the researcher always has to deal with some "mixed" situation and should speak only about the dominance of one or the other type. The most common version of what constitutes a nation that is widely accepted in the official discourses of the Turkish, Georgian, Armenian, Azerbaijani, as well as the dominant discourses of the Kurdish, Lezgin, and others nationalisms, always was the understanding of the nation as "blood and land" and not as a political community. Until now, any attempt aimed at the construction of a national community as co-citizenship failed due to ethno-nationalist views rooted in the minds of the elites and ordinary people.

of a quasi-civil imagined community. As a result, Azerbaijanis and Armenians living in Georgia or Azerbaijanis in Armenia were not trying to invest in the integration into the Georgian and Armenian communities. Especially when the dominant Georgians or Armenians in their turn were not ready to invest in this process. In the Soviet scheme, an Azerbaijani or an Armenian could never become a Georgian, unless he is an offspring of a mixed marriage. Declarative attempts to make changes to these established practices and representations did not yield any results in almost two decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Therefore, nowadays homogenization in the post-Soviet countries means gradual ousting of the ethnic “other”, and not their inclusion into a single political community.

In the framework of this analysis, the authors attempted at a critical rethinking of the entire heritage and key trends. The era of nationalism, intensive nation building, and the nationalization of Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, has also become the era of large-scale violence and mass movements of populations. Already mundane practices of politicization of ethnicity and influential threat discourses of ethnic diversity are powerful impediments to the construction of citizenry-based societies. They draw their strength from the continuity of political traditions, influential national discourses, the past manas, and often from the visions of the “fathers of the nations”. Such a continuity is difficult to overcome but is not inescapable. The possibility of the transformation of dominant practices and discourses is closely linked with the prospects of a critical rethinking of the phenomenon of the nation. The authors would like to see this paper as another, even if a small step in the direction of such a rethinking.

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Minority Rights as an Instrument of Conflict Transformation

Şirin Duygulu and Maria Karapetyan

This paper begins by highlighting some of the policies that have underpinned hierarchies and discrimination in the South Caucasus countries and Turkey. The paper then puts forward the principles upon which policy initiatives could be developed in the interest of promoting inclusive and non-discriminatory societies. Following these principles, the paper outlines policies for respective legal frameworks, the empowerment of minorities through better language policies, and the instigation of positive shifts in the societal discourses. The aim of this paper is to offer possible avenues of transformation of the intergroup relations in the South Caucasus countries and Turkey through recommendations for policy interventions in line with the values advocated by international conventions. The immediate step to be taken in these countries is the implementation of good practices from around the world in terms of minority rights and anti-discrimination context-tailoring them to the local needs. A true transformation of intergroup relations, however, asks for a wide awareness and rethinking of the language used in everyday communications and policy analysis.

Introduction

In states where equal rights and opportunities are declared for every citizen irrespective of their background, it is still observable that not every citizen enjoys these rights equally or can make use of opportunities through equal effort. Often the patterns of these experiences of advantage/disadvantage and privilege/under-privilege align along race, gender, class, ethnicity, or other categories of difference. In the context of the South Caucasus countries and Turkey, which are the focus of this paper, such categories of difference and resulting hierarchies and discrimination were constructed through the politics of ethnicity in the Soviet and the Republican Turkish periods respectively and continue to be reinforced through the present-day conflation of ethnicity and the state.

This paper begins by highlighting some of the policies that have underpinned these hierarchies and discrimination in the South Caucasus countries and Turkey. The paper then puts forward the principles upon which policy initiatives could be developed in the interest of promoting inclusive and non-discriminatory societies. Following these principles, the paper outlines policies for respective legal frameworks, the empowerment of minorities through better language policies, and the instigation of positive shifts in the societal discourses.

Building on the paper “Ethnic Groups and Conflicts in the South Caucasus and Turkey” co-authored by Abbasov et al. (2016) for the Caucasus Edition, this paper concentrates on the intrastate relations in the South Caucasus countries and Turkey. More specifically, this paper speaks about the Armenian population of the Samtskhe-Javakheti region of Georgia, the Azerbaijani population of the Kvemo Kartli region of Georgia, the Talysh and Lezgin populations of Azerbaijan, the Kurdish population of Turkey, and the Yezidi population of Armenia. These populations are selected as the focus of this paper not only because of compact living but also because of the conflict potential that is often attributed to them. The paper also speaks about other populations such as Assyrians, Tatars, Udis, Tsakhurs, Jews, Ukrainians, and others that do not always live in compact communities; however, the transformation of relations and perceptions related to these groups is also key to rethinking the approaches to groups and groupness in the South Caucasus countries and Turkey.

This paper does not touch upon the on-going territorial conflict contexts (namely the contexts of the Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazian-Georgian, and Ossetian-Georgian conflicts) for the mere reason that outlining policies for dealing with equal access to rights and opportunities would be pointless in the

contexts of contested jurisdiction. However, it is the hope of the authors that in case of the successful implementation of inclusive and non-discriminatory policies in general, a greater space for the transformation of the territorial conflict contexts can be created as well.

A note on terminology

There is well-developed literature dwelling on the meanings and implications of using particular terminologies in referring to groups that are likely to face discrimination due to ethnic, religious, racial, cultural, gender, and other reasons. The literature also discusses the potential unintended consequences of using vocabulary that classifies humans, such as ‘minorities’ or ‘ethnic groups’, as it might lead to the reproduction of the discriminatory practices. The current international human rights framework, however, uses vocabulary such as ‘minorities’, ‘ethnic groups’, ‘ethnic minorities’, and ‘national minorities’ acknowledging also that there is not a widely accepted agreement on terminology and definitions (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights 2010). This vocabulary is commonly used also on the intrastate level in the South Caucasus countries and Turkey.

The meaning of the word ‘national’ is particularly contested. While in the international human rights framework ‘national’ usually refers to citizenship, in the South Caucasus countries and Turkey the word often takes the meaning of ‘ethnic’. For instance, the Constitution of Georgia states, “Citizens of Georgia shall be equal in social, economic, cultural and political life irrespective of their national, ethnic, religious or linguistic belonging” (Parliament of Georgia 2006). It is ambiguous as to what type of ‘national belonging’ if not one’s citizenship this refers to. With an ethnic coloring given to the use of the words ‘nation’ and ‘national’, patterns of exclusion are inevitable and a civic sense of membership to a nationhood is an escaping vision.

There is an entire corpus of charters, declarations, and other documents that have provisions for the states that adhere to these documents to implement adequate measures to achieve full and effective equality among all citizens. Among them are the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights⁵⁷ of

57 Article 27 of the Covenant states, “In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or to use their own language” (United Nations 1966). In ratifying the Covenant, Turkey has made a reservation to

the United Nations of 1966 (ratified by Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey), the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities of the United Nations of 1992, the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities⁵⁸ of the Council of Europe of 1994 (ratified by Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia; not ratified or signed by Turkey), the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages of the Council of Europe of 1998, the Copenhagen Document of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) of 1990 and others. Regardless of the particular vocabulary used in these documents and the need to further develop the overarching international frameworks of reference for the protection of group and individual rights, the provisions of these documents in essence providing for inclusive and non-discriminatory societies still need to see their full application in the context of the South Caucasus and Turkey.

Therefore, the aim of this paper is to offer possible avenues of transformation of the intergroup relations in the South Caucasus countries and Turkey through recommendations for policy interventions in line with the values advocated by the above-mentioned conventions. The immediate step to be taken in these countries is the implementation of good practices from around the world in terms of minority rights and anti-discrimination context-tailoring them to the local needs. A true transformation of intergroup relations, however, asks for a wide awareness and rethinking of the language used in everyday communications and policy analysis.

State-building and the emergence of the majority/minority relations

Policies aimed at addressing some of the difficulties experienced by minorities have been initiated with varying success in the South Caucasus countries and Turkey. Some of them are discussed in the paper “Ethnic Groups and Conflicts

this article stating, “The Republic of Turkey reserves the right to interpret and apply the provisions of Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in accordance with the related provisions and rules of the Constitution of the Republic of Turkey and the Treaty of Lausanne of 24 July 1923 and its Appendixes” (United Nations 1966).

⁵⁸ The Convention is a legally binding instrument under international law. However, the word “Framework” highlights the scope for member states to translate the Convention’s provisions to their specific country situation through national legislation and appropriate governmental policies (Council of Europe 1995).

in the South Caucasus and Turkey” of this publication (Abbasov, et al. 2016). Putting the problems associated with the designs and the implementation of these policies aside, the main reason of an actual negative difference in the lives of the people who identify themselves or are identified by others as minorities is how these groups are perceived and portrayed by the states and the majority populations.

Two main dynamics contribute to the shape of that perception. The first one is related to the state-building processes through which ethnonational-states were established in the South Caucasus and Turkey. As McCrone and Bechhofer put it “[a]ll forms of social identity involve ‘othering’; the positioning of a notional other against whom one compares the nature and strength of one’s own identity” (McCrone and Benchhofer 2015). Creating a national identity, thus, has involved a process of defining who is and who is not a part of that nation. As a result of the political and social history of both the South Caucasus and Turkey the ‘other’ did not just include those outside the national borders but also some groups that live within the borders of the state.

Today, the countries in the South Caucasus have varying percentages of ethnic minorities within their borders. In Armenia, they make only 2 percent of the population. The latest population census of 2011 in Armenia asked to answer the question on ethnicity though choosing from: Armenian 2,961,801, Yezidi 35,308, Russian 11,911, Assyrian 2,769, Kurd 2,162, Ukrainian 1,176, Greek 900, Georgian 617, Persian 476, and other 1,634 (National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia 2011).

In Azerbaijan minorities make 8.5 percent of the population⁵⁹. The latest population census of 2009 in Azerbaijan reveals the following picture: Azerbaijani 8,172,800, Lezgin 180,300, Armenian 120,300, Russian 119,300, Talysh 112,000, Avar 49,800, Turk 38,000, Tatar 25,900, Tat 25,200, Ukrainian 21,500, Tsakhur 12,300, Udi 3,800, Kryt 4,400, Georgian 9,900, Khinalug 2200, Jewish 9,100, Kurd 6,100, and other 9,500 (The State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan 2009).

In Georgia, minorities make up 13 percent of Georgia’s population⁶⁰. The latest population census of 2014 in Georgia reveals the following picture: Georgian 3,224,564, Azerbaijani 233,024, Armenian 168,102, Russian 26,453, Ossetian

⁵⁹ The official statistics includes ethnic Armenians who live in Nagorno Karabakh.

⁶⁰ The official census could not be carried out in Abkhazia and Ossetia.

14,385, Yezidi 12,174, Ukrainian 6,034, Kist 5,697, Greek 5,544, Assyrian 2,377, and other 14,346 (National Statistics Office of Georgia 2014).

Since the population censuses after 1965 in Turkey do not include questions about the native language or ethnic self-identification of the people, the ethnic make-up of Turkey is based on estimates by the media or sociologists. The following numbers are suggested to be the approximate indicators of different groups in Turkey: Turk 55,000,000, Kurd 9,600,000, Zaza 3,000,000, Circassian origin 2,500,000, Bosnian 2,000,000, Albanian 500,000-1,300,000, Georgian 1,000,000, Arab 870,000, Roma 700,000, Pomak 600,000, Laz 80,000, Armenian 60,000, Assyrian/Syriac 25,000, Jewish 20,000, Greek 15,000 (Milliyet 2008).

The existence of ethnic groups within a country does not automatically turn these groups into minorities. The 'minority' position in the South Caucasus is a consequence of the peculiar state-building processes and the political and social heritage of the Soviet rule. The Soviet ethnonational policy institutionalized the hierarchy of ethnicities, when some received the status of 'titular' in particular entities, while others received a minority status or no status at all. Even though the initial goal was emancipatory, aiming to vest with rights the previously discriminated groups, in practice juxtaposing the societies in such a way politicized the ethnic differences creating a source of othering in the South Caucasus. Once the Soviet rule came to an end, the process of independent state building began, and the nations continued to be defined explicitly or tacitly on ethnic grounds. As Bardin states "the pro-independence aspirations of the South Caucasus countries have given rise to competing ethnic nationalism [...] and have severely affected state and nation building, as well as inter-ethnic relations in the region" (Bardin 2015). Ethnic nationalism, then led to the othering of the peoples whose name did not take part in the formation of the state within these countries and they remained as 'minorities' this time, however, without the overarching Soviet civic identity.

Turkey went through a different path to state building, yet one that similarly resulted in dividing the country into a majority and *de jure* or *de facto* 'minorities'. In the Turkish context, national identity was built on the social legacy of the Ottoman Empire – on an implicitly stated Muslim and explicitly stated Turkish identity. As a result, it created varying degrees of legal and/or social constraints for those who are not Muslim and those who are not ethnically Turkish. Turkey limited the legal definition of 'minorities' (and therefore, extended the legal protection) only to non-Muslim groups and effectively excluded Muslim but ethnically non-Turkish groups from such protection. Articles 37-45 of the Treaty of Lausanne, which marked the

foundation of the Republic of Turkey, recognize non-Muslim communities as ‘minorities’ and guarantees them “the right to use their own language, the right of political and civic equality, the right to establish religious, educational, and social welfare institutions, and the right to freedom of religion, travel, and migration” (Hurewitz 1956) (Toktas and Aras 2009). Yet, this recognition was not enough to protect non-Muslim groups, and the legal and social discrimination these groups faced gradually decreased their numbers over time through assimilation, outmigration, and other means. Today, of Turkey’s 80 million people, non-Muslim groups make less than 1 percent of the population (The Economist 2015).

The situation of groups who are Muslim but not ethnically Turkish has been and still is more complicated than those of recognized ‘minorities’. The legal structure is based on the principle and the assumption that “[e]veryone bound to the Turkish State through the bond of citizenship is a Turk” (The Grand National Assembly of Turkey 2011) and therefore, citizens of different ethnic backgrounds are considered and treated as Turkish and are legally granted with the same rights as those of Turkish ethnic background are. However, in practice this approach led to the overlooking of the needs and demands of Muslim minorities in Turkey, the biggest of such groups being the Kurds estimated to range from 10 to 23 percent of the entire population (Minority Rights Group International 2015).

What complicates the situation even further is the second dynamic that shapes the perception about groups and groupness in the South Caucasus countries and Turkey; that is the intrastate and interstate conflicts – ongoing, frozen, and potential. The common denominator in these countries in terms of how minorities are perceived is the (visible or invisible, voiced or implied) connection between these groups and conflicts. For instance, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict took a toll on ethnic Azerbaijanis in Armenia and ethnic Armenians in Azerbaijan and forced them into displacement. The Georgian-Ossetian and Georgian-Abkhazian conflicts similarly displaced hundreds of thousands of people. These conflicts instigate the fear of the majorities that secessionist movements might spread to other minorities, and this in turn affects the attitudes towards them.

Not only the conflicts within these countries, but the ongoing and potential conflicts in the broader region also affect the perception of minorities within the society. The position and daily experiences of Armenians and Greeks in Turkey fluctuated over time based on the relations between the Republic of Turkey with the Republic of Armenia and with the Hellenic Republic. The perception

about Kurds, on the other hand, reflects the concerns about the territorial integrity not just of Turkey but also of Iraq, Iran, and Syria. The perception of the Azerbaijani state about Lezgins as a “potential risk group” who can “become a ‘weapon’ in the hands of ill-intentioned external forces” is similarly closely related to the politics of the broader region with the Republic of Dagestan of the neighboring Russian Federation (Abbasov, et al. 2016).

Therefore, not just the repercussions of the state-building processes but also the connection between the conflicts these countries face or fear and the perceptions about the actual or potential role that minorities might play in them make it difficult for the needs of these groups to be effectively addressed. For that reason, addressing the problems of minority groups can only be done by developing mechanisms that would disassociate these groups from the existing and potential conflicts fought in the name of ethnicity in the perceptions of policy makers and the public. This will ameliorate the concerns, fears, and mistrust that individuals from various groups might have towards each other. With such a transformation of intergroup relations, turning the vicious circle into a virtuous one, the conflictual potential will subside and alternative paths of coexistence and conflict transformation for existing conflicts might gain vision and ground.

Guiding principles for policies promoting inclusive societies

Before outlining concrete policies, it would be useful to lay out some general principles upon which policies concerning minorities could be developed in order to create real changes on the ground.

The first principle that needs to guide any policy initiative is the understanding that the transformation from the status of ‘minorities’ to fully integrated, equally entitled members of the society can only be realized with an appreciation of the complexity of the issue. Mere legal protection on its own cannot solve for example the economic integration problems or, similarly, increased access to economic resources will not automatically bring an end to social discrimination or segregation. Any policy initiative has to be built on an extensive understanding of the multifaceted reasons behind the problems as well as their complex implications and offer ways to address both.

The second principle that needs to be taken into account when building policies is to avoid the ‘one size fits all’ approach. Each country discussed in this paper has a different ethnic composition. The size of all ethnic groups, the source of

the ‘otherness’ (i.e. whether it has just an ethnic underpinning or it coincides with other differences such as religious), and the history of relations matter in how a particular group is perceived by others and by the state. As a result of this, minorities experience different degrees of inequalities and discrimination. The challenges that Greeks and Armenians face as recognized minorities are not the same as those faced by Kurds who are not recognized as a minority in Turkey. Or the lack of knowledge of the state language presents a challenge for ethnic Azerbaijanis in Georgia and they need to learn the state language to be able to integrate, while in Azerbaijan all groups have a good command of the state language and the focus needs to be on the protection and preservation of the languages of the minorities (Garcés De Los Fayos 2014).

The experiences of belonging to a group and how this is perceived and treated by the state and society vary not only from group to group, but also from individual to individual. People that belong to the same group might experience fluctuating forms of ‘otherness’ based on where they live – in urban settings or in rural areas or from one region to another. Similarly, individuals that live in concentrated locales with others from their group have different experiences than those who live in mixed settings. The legal protection (or lack thereof) can be the same for all individuals but what they might be affected by and what they might think should be addressed differs. For instance, land rights would be a priority for someone who lives in a rural area whereas access to the job market might be the most urgent need for someone who lives in a city.

Thus, to be effective, policies should account for these various experiences and should be careful not to treat groups as monolithic blocks. At the same time, the needs and vulnerabilities of one particular group should not be prioritized over the others. On the contrary, policies should be developed with an understanding of these differences so that the needs and the vulnerabilities of some groups are not overlooked or left behind.

The third principle that this paper highlights is the need to involve minorities in the policy-making process itself. Such an approach would make three important contributions to the process. First, listening to the voices of these groups is crucial in better identifying the sources and the implications of the problems at hand. Second, such an involvement, in and of itself, leads to intergroup dialogue which is necessary in overcoming prejudices and hostile attitudes and positively transforming intergroup perceptions. Third, being involved in the policy-making process would create a sense of ownership of the nation among all groups which is important in increasing their willingness and capacity to better integrate with each other.

In addition to these principles, an important aspect of policy making is staying flexible, following advancements in policy analysis and the academic discourse on the topic as well as reevaluating and accommodating the variable and contingent nature of groupness. Most importantly, policies need to be conceived bearing in mind that high levels of groupness may be more the result of conflicts especially the violent ones than their underlying cause. As Brubaker points out, this will help concentrate analytic attention and policy interventions on the processes through which groupness tends to develop and crystalize and those through which it may subside (Brubaker 2006). This approach will open up avenues of transformation where the current intergroup dynamics in the South Caucasus countries and Turkey will not be viewed as potentially conflictual to be contained and suppressed but as opportunities of transforming perceptions, relations, and actors themselves and creating precedents of transformation for existing conflicts.

Policy initiatives to consider

Based on the principles identified above, there are a number of policies that can help address the needs and vulnerabilities of minorities, while there can be no one policy option that is both useful and feasible in all of the countries and in all contexts within the same country. Therefore, the policies discussed in this section are intended to serve as discussion openers about a few alternative ways to approach the issue with the ultimate goal of disassociating the rights of groups from intrastate and interstate conflicts and contributing to the transformation of intergroup relations.

The policies discussed in this section are categorized into three themes. The first part focuses on potential legal frameworks for political representation and participation. The second part discusses language policies that could empower minorities so that they can actively seek and enjoy the rights they have or demand the ones they are yet to have. The third section then focuses on policies that would help perpetuate the success of the already developed policies and also contribute to the efforts to change the public discourse on the topic.

Creating a legal framework

In contexts of ethnic diversity, it should be a priority to create legal frameworks that (i) guarantee all groups equal access to the opportunities and benefits that the state has to offer and (ii) take necessary measures to compensate for the social, economic, and political lag that has been experienced by these groups.

Therefore, the legal frameworks should both aim to level the playing field and also address the injustices done in the past.

Coming up with legal mechanisms that would guarantee political participation of all groups is an important step to be considered. As discussed in the previous sections, ethnic groups vary in size, geographical distribution, and how they are perceived and treated by the society they live in. These differences should be taken into consideration in order to make political participation a viable option for these groups.

All of the countries discussed here have legal frameworks that provide, albeit limited, legal protection for ethnic minorities. These legal frameworks function both as an opportunity and as an obstacle. They provide an opportunity in that they are a starting point for furthering the protection of minorities. Yet, they also constitute an obstacle toward that end as they allow states to use the existence of these legal frameworks to claim fair treatment of all groups and overlook the specific needs of some of them.

In Armenia, the Constitution prohibits discrimination based on “race, color, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, membership of a national minority⁶¹” (National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia 1995). There is also the Division for Ethnic Minorities and Religious Affairs under the Government Staff that is charged with the responsibility to draft legislation on minorities “in consultation with representatives of minority communities”. Yet, “according to a number of surveys, it [the Division] does not always take into consideration the concerns voiced by minority representatives” (Garcés De Los Fayos 2014).

Similarly, the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan indicates that the state guarantees equal protection of citizens regardless of “race, nationality⁶²,

61 In the Constitution, as well as in other laws and policy documents, the use of the word ‘national’ (in Armenian ‘*azgayin*’) is ambiguous. It is sometimes used in reference to the political nation (e.g. “National Assembly” or “national security”) which should include all the citizens of the country. At the same time, it is used in the sense of ‘ethnic’ as in “development of the national culture and preservation of the national identity of the people of Armenia”. As of the writing of this paper, the definition of the term ‘national minority’ does not exist in the legislative acts of the Republic of Armenia.

62 The use of the word ‘nationality’ (in Azerbaijani ‘*milli*’) is ambiguous in the Constitution. It is used both in reference to the political nation (e.g. “Central National Bank”) and to something different from it since in the cited phrase it is assumed that the citizens can have varying nationalities and no discrimination is supposed to take

religion, language, sex and origin” and protects the right to receive education in one’s native language (Milli Majlis of the Azerbaijan Republic 2009). Yet there is no comprehensive legislation to address the issues of minorities. The Office of the Ombudsman is the only body through which these groups can seek to tackle the problems they face but the reach of that office remains limited. Moreover, the centralized state structure as well as the lack of legislative provisions represent a significant obstacle toward guaranteed political representation of all groups (Garcés De Los Fayos 2014).

The Constitution of Georgia also declares equality irrespective of “national⁶³, ethnic, religious or linguistic belonging” (Parliament of Georgia 2006). However, as the “Law on Political Unions of Citizens” prohibits political parties to be established on a regional or a territorial basis in an attempt to prevent the development of secessionist movements, the minorities are poorly represented in the political system, especially in senior positions. The situation is a little better when it comes to local councils and municipalities.

A similar approach can be observed in the Turkish legal system. The Constitution guarantees the rights of individuals and the Article 10 states that “[e]veryone is equal before the law without distinction as to language, race, color, sex, political opinion, philosophical belief, religion and sect, or any such grounds” (The Grand National Assembly of Turkey 2011). Article 12 further states that “[e]veryone possesses inherent fundamental rights and freedoms, which are inviolable and inalienable” (The Grand National Assembly of Turkey 2011). Yet, the Constitution limits these rights and principles of equality by stating in the Preamble that “no protection shall be accorded to an activity contrary to Turkish national interests, Turkish existence and the principle of its indivisibility with its State and territory, historical and moral values of Turkishness...” (The Grand National Assembly of Turkey 2011).

place on that basis. As is the case in Armenia, there is no definition of the term ‘national minority’ in the Azerbaijani legislation.

63 The use of the word ‘nation’ in the Constitution of Georgia was discussed in the section “A further note on terminology” of this paper. Unlike Armenia and Azerbaijan, Georgia has defined ‘national minorities’ as persons who have Georgian citizenship, are distinct from the dominant part of the population in terms of language, culture and ethnic identity, have lived on Georgian territory for a long time and who live compactly on Georgian territory (The Parliament of Georgia 2005).

Thus, while the basic legal framework that should guarantee legal and political equality exists in each of these countries, there is still significant room for improvement, especially in guaranteeing political representation.

The quota system can ensure that the voices of the minorities are heard, specifically in the case of smaller groups or groups that do not live in compact communities but rather live spread around the country along with other groups. Turks, Tatars, Ukrainians, Georgians, Kurds, Jews, Udis, and Tsakhurs each make less than 1 percent of Azerbaijan's population (Ferrari 2014). The quota system is more useful in addressing the political participation needs of these groups primarily because the demographic structure of these groups makes it extremely difficult for them to get enough votes for a candidate who focuses on their concerns to get elected.

The new quota system introduced in Armenia, as described in the paper by Abbasov et al. (2016), can be a potentially positive step toward that end, but as it is also discussed in that paper, how the four parliamentary seats reserved for minorities will be distributed among them is already a source of tension. Therefore, for the quota systems to serve the function of providing all groups an opportunity to get their voices heard in policy making, they need to be designed in a way that does not create further tension among groups.

One example evaluated as a "good practice" by the Council of Europe and United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) is the electoral law in Slovenia, which "provides for a separate election for a Roma representative in municipalities that have a significant Roma population if, during the general local elections, no Roma representative succeeded in securing enough votes to be elected" (Council of Europe 2000). In the above discussed contexts of Azerbaijan and Armenia, a similar approach can be adopted in guaranteeing political representation of smaller groups. Quotas can be distributed proportionally, reflecting the demographic composition of the locale, but also guaranteeing at least one seat for even the smallest group to make sure that no group is left behind.

Another approach that can be adopted to better the opportunities for political participation of minorities is to create and support advisory and consultative bodies which would give minorities a direct voice in policy making. In order for these bodies to work, they need to have rights and responsibilities clearly defined and they need to be representative of the group in whose name they speak as well as have access to necessary funding (OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities 1999).

A number of successful examples were initiated in different parts of the world. For instance, in Peru, there is the National Institute for the Development of Andean, Amazonian and Afro-Peruvian Peoples which enjoys a ministerial status. Similarly, a Council of National Minorities was established in Serbia. The Council has competencies in the areas of “culture, education, information and the official use of language and the alphabet” and the ministries are responsible for consulting with the Council when they are developing policies in these areas (United Nations Development Programme 2010).

In Armenia, the Coordinating Council for National and Cultural Organizations of National Minorities operating under the President’s Staff composed of twenty-two members (2 from eleven national minority groups) functions as a consultative body responsible for providing recommendations on issues pertaining to minorities. However, “its influence on the decision-making process remains limited” (Garcés De Los Fayos 2014). This is both a function of limited funding and also how the limited funding is distributed. The funding “is allocated to all minorities on an equal basis, irrespective of their size” (Garcés De Los Fayos 2014, 7). Such a distribution creates both questions of fairness and efficiency. Thus, in order for such bodies to function, they should receive adequate funding that is also distributed fairly.

In Azerbaijan, the State Committee for Work with National Minorities and the Consultative Council for National Minorities that used to exist in the past stopped functioning and no institutional structure dealing specifically and on a regular basis with national minorities is left (Ulasiuk 2013). In Georgia, the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality (previously the State Minister of Conflict Resolution and later State Minister for Reintegration) and the Council of National Minorities under the auspices of the Public Defender of Georgia work to create dialogue, yet their capacity remains limited due to the lack of adequate staff and funding (Garcés De Los Fayos 2014).

Using such bodies as a means for political participation has four potential benefits. First, these bodies provide an opportunity to bring in the voices of minorities into the policy-making processes which improves the chances of properly identifying their needs. Second, rather than assuming these groups as monolithic with one single set of priorities, incorporating such bodies into the decision-making processes would allow different priorities and demands within the group to find a voice. Such plurality in voices may not be possible by a parliamentary participation of a group through a limited number of representatives. Third, such bodies create an environment for dialogue among different groups and may help overcome prejudices that come from the lack of

interaction. Fourth, they provide a better chance for concrete changes in policies in contrast to the symbolic, albeit important, role of parliamentary quotas.

In Turkey, establishing consultative bodies in enhancing the political representation of recognized ethnic minorities would be a step in making sure that their voices are effectively heard at different stages of policy making, especially with regards to evaluating the consequences of policy initiatives for these groups. For Kurds in Turkey neither the quota system nor consultative bodies would necessarily be productive as the size of the Kurdish population is big enough for political representation to take place even in the absence of such measures. Yet, the biggest legal impediment in front of political representation of Kurds is the electoral threshold which is set at 10 percent (Cengiz and Hoffmann 2013). Thus, for Turkey, lowering the threshold would be more important than any other legal measure as a first step toward fair representation of different groups.

To summarize, in order for any of the proposed measures to deliver their intended consequences, they should be supplemented with mechanisms that provide minorities fundamental abilities to take part in politics. According to United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) documents “[a]t the simplest level, voter education and registration initiatives could be made more accessible to minorities. This may entail measures like producing materials in minority languages, hiring minorities to help with voter registration or providing transportation for minorities to enable them to vote securely or if they live remotely. These initiatives could take account of literacy rates of men and women among minority communities and make accommodations if necessary” (United Nations Development Programme 2010). And most importantly, these measures need to be accompanied by shifts in official and public discourses so that the legal frameworks are not perceived by different groups in a state as stepping stones to diverging ideological projects but rather as possessing intrinsic value in their own right.

Empowering groups: the case of non-state languages

While creating the legal frameworks for minorities to voice their concerns and needs is crucial, such frameworks are bound to remain symbolic unless people themselves get empowered to claim and experience equality. This is important because, as discussed above, every state analyzed in this paper has some regulations that provide, albeit imperfect and limited, opportunities for minorities; yet these opportunities are not necessarily taken by these groups because they either are not aware of them or do not feel that it is within their power to pursue them.

One of the obstacles on the way to the benefits that the state has to offer are language barriers. Some minorities have limited opportunities to learn, use, and develop their languages. In some cases, the use of these languages has been

perceived as a source of threat by the states and therefore stigmatized if not outlawed. The presidential decree “On the Protection of the Rights and Freedoms and on State support for the Promotion of the Languages and Cultures of National Minorities, Numerically Small Peoples and Ethnic Groups living in the Republic of Azerbaijan” initiated in 1992 was a positive step toward the protection of non-state languages as it not only assigned “the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the ministries and organizations of the Republic of Azerbaijan, heads of local executive bodies [...] the mission of the state assistance and government policy in [...] safeguard[ing] and develop[ing] the cultural, linguistic and religious specification of the nations in minority, small numbered peoples and ethnic groups” but also envisioned the creation of philology departments and support for broadcasting in minority languages (Administrative Department of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan n.d.). However, the political developments that followed stalled the implementation of the decree and led to the adoption of the “Law on the State Language” in 2002 (Minority Rights Group International 2015), which emphasizes the protection of the Azerbaijani language at the expense of other languages and in doing so limits the use of non-state languages in broadcasting and in citizens’ interactions with the state.

Article 38 of the Constitution of Georgia also protects the citizens’ rights to use “their mother tongue” both in private and in public. However, the same article of the Constitution allows this right as long as it does not oppose “the sovereignty, state structure, territorial integrity or political independence of Georgia” (Parliament of Georgia 2006). This effectively translates into an inconsistent application of the rights and presents a significant challenge for the minorities.

Minorities face similar language problems in Turkey as well. The population census does not take account of ethnic origins, yet research conducted by private entities illustrate that “85 percent of the population in Turkey speaks Turkish as their mother language, and there are other mother languages spoken in Turkey such as Kurdish, Zazaki, Arabic, Armenian and Romaic” (KONDA 2010). Even though the non-Muslim minorities are granted the “right to establish religious, educational and social welfare institutions” by the Treaty of Lausanne, the schools of the minorities have been facing significant difficulties in not just funding, but also in the appointment of teachers (Oran 2004).

The situation is even more dire for groups not recognized as ‘ethnic minorities’, as for instance the Kurdish language was not allowed even in daily conversations until 1991 (Anter 1992). Kurdish was not allowed to be taught in

schools until 2012 and can only be taught as an elective course since then (Aydın and Ozfidan, Perceptions on Mother Tongue (Kurdish) Based Multicultural and Bilingual Education in Turkey 2014). Many steps have been taken as a part of the European Union (EU) membership accession negotiations process, yet those reforms fell short of fully addressing the problems and “multicultural education and bilingual education is still a controversy in Turkey” (Aydın, Literature Based Approaches on Multicultural Education 2013) (Kaya and Aydın 2013).

The policy mechanisms developed in Romania offer one potential model for Georgia. Romania and Georgia have similar ethnic compositions in terms of the percentage of the minorities as well as the geographically concentrated nature of their distribution. In Romania, the “Law on Public Administration” was introduced in 2001, and it led to the amendments to the Constitution in 2003. With these changes the principle that “administrative-territorial units in which a national minority exceeds 20 percent of the population, the language of that minority can be used in both written and oral communication between the local authorities and citizens” was incorporated into the Constitution. While making no changes to the official language of the country, these steps developed mechanisms for the local communities to actively take part in policy making (Wheatley 2006).

In recent years, mostly as a result of international incentives and pressures, there has been a change in the official positions of the states that allowed the teaching of languages other than the state one in schools, the use of those languages in broadcasting and in literature and more. However, these initiatives, while important early steps, cannot fulfill the idea of the protection of minority languages unless followed up by necessary support. For instance, in order for regulations that allow schooling in a non-state language to perform its function, qualified teachers should be trained and provided with quality instructional materials. Similarly, broadcasting in non-state languages should be financially supported so it can have more than a symbolic value. For instance, Lezgin is taught as a second language in schools in Azerbaijan in areas where Lezgins are densely populated, but “teaching resources are scarce. Lezgin textbooks come from Russia and are not adapted to local conditions” (Minority Rights Group International 2015).

One way to turn symbolic steps aimed at protecting the rights of minorities into meaningful changes in the daily experiences of people is to guarantee their effectiveness through using international standards as benchmarks by integrating into the international normative regimes. To this end, signing the

European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages would be a step toward that direction. As of the beginning of 2016, Armenia is the only country in the South Caucasus who ratified the Charter; Azerbaijan has signed but has not ratified the Charter, while Georgia and Turkey have not signed the Charter yet (Council of Europe 1998).

Guaranteeing the protection of non-state languages would not address the needs and problems of every minority group, however. For some minorities who have the infrastructure to maintain their native language, the main difficulty they face is the acquisition of the official language of their country. Especially for minorities who live in concentrated areas, the lack of access to learning the official language presents a significant challenge to their ability to integrate into the society and gain access to higher education and jobs outside the rural regions. According to the 2002 census, “Azeris have one of the lowest levels of proficiency in Georgian of any minority group in Georgia (15 percent)” which presents a significant obstacle in front of their integration into the society (Minority Rights Group International 2015). Similarly, a study conducted in the Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti regions of Georgia reveals that the minorities living in these regions identify “a complete or partial lack of knowledge of the state language” as one of the main problems they experience (Dvali and Badasyan 2014). However, changing the curriculum or sending teachers to the regions would not be enough to overcome these problems. As the aforementioned study revealed the “Georgian language is taught in all schools, however, as respondents point out these programs have not yielded significant results. State Programs – Bilingual teaching and the volunteer teachers program are ineffective, since Georgian-language teachers do not know the Azeri / Armenian language, making communication between student and teacher difficult...” (Dvali and Badasyan 2014). This insight illustrates the importance of complementing these steps with accessible instructional materials and qualified teachers for both formal and adult education.

In Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli, it is important to instigate bilingualism and multilingualism (knowledge and use of Georgian as well as Armenian and/or Azerbaijani) even before children enter the formal education system, for example through sponsoring the release of children’s cartoons and songs in both languages. This would facilitate the conceptualization of the world through more than one language simultaneously as early on as possible.

Access to higher education is another issue that needs to be addressed when prioritizing the empowerment of minorities. Access to higher education is important for gaining access to social and economic opportunities in a way that

promises them upward mobility. One important step toward that goal would be to implement positive discrimination in supporting the minorities' access to higher education. Another potentially positive step could be the initiation of multilingual departments at universities which proved itself to be a useful policy approach in the example of the Serbian-Albanian relations in Serbia (High Commissioner on Minorities, OSCE Mission to Serbia 2015).

In Armenia "teaching of Armenian is obligatory in schools and an entrance exam in Armenian is one of the requirements for entering higher education institutions, except where the language of instruction of a given course is Russian. While Russian is used as the language of instruction in certain schools and universities, other minority languages are less privileged. Throughout the country, only a few schools at the primary and secondary level offer classes for the Assyrian, Kurdish, Yezidi, and Greek languages – the languages that along with Russian have a status of a minority language⁶⁴. The number of these classes is usually very limited. A common problem is the lack of qualified teachers and available textbooks. As a result, many minority groups choose to receive their education in Russian" (Garcés De Los Fayos 2014, 8).

In Azerbaijan, since minorities generally have a good command of the state language and/or Russian (which are the languages of instruction in higher education), access to higher education does not present an important challenge. Nevertheless, studying non-state languages themselves at the university level remains a rare opportunity and especially ethnic Georgian students prefer to go to Georgia for studies of their language (European Centre for Minority Issues 2011). A similar problem exists in Turkey for minorities who want to study their languages at the college level.

However, it is important to note that opportunities of higher education do not automatically mean that the minorities would enjoy the benefits that come with such an access. It is equally, potentially even more, important to provide resources for minorities to pursue higher education. For instance, the newly established 1+4 system in Georgia allows the students who belong to minorities to get a one year of instruction of the Georgian language before they begin their bachelor's degree. While it is an important step in the right direction, lack of

64 It is interesting to note that some representatives of the Assyrian community in Armenia have made a statement to the officials pointing out that they do not accept the concept 'minority language' and prefer instead the expressions 'native language' and 'national language' (Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Armenia 2015).

necessary support systems for these students to stay in higher education presents a problem. In order for the promise of higher education to be realized, several resources such as scholarships, accessible instructional material, housing for students who need to relocate from their hometowns should be introduced.

Changing the discussion in the society

Establishing the legal framework that would guarantee all citizens' equal access to the benefits and opportunities and empowering minorities so that they can actively seek those opportunities need to be supplemented by policies that target mutual perceptions of the majority and minority groups. This is important for facilitating the dialogue between different groups in the society and also for guaranteeing the implementation of legal initiatives.

One such policy could be the initiation and implementation of anti-hate speech laws. Each country analyzed in this paper has a law that addresses hate speech. However, these laws aim at the protection of the state and the majority group and not the protection of any disadvantaged or vulnerable group. In order to develop a hate speech law that adequately protects minorities, there needs to be a meaningful agreement on what constitutes hate speech. Such an agreement can only be reached through dialogue and active participation of the minorities in the process.

Effective implementation of such laws is also necessary. Cleaning textbooks from derogatory language (including the portrayal of minorities as enemies) and tackling the use of such language in the media should be prioritized. Such an implementation cannot be solely done by the state. The civil society must have a major role in monitoring the situation, naming and shaming the violators, offering alternatives. Another direction that the civil society can take up is the raising of awareness of the issue. A fundamental problem with hate speech and the use of derogatory language is that such use is normalized and often does not get noticed by those who use it or those who hear it.

In Turkey, as a part of the EU accession process, using certain derogatory language about minorities was defined as a punishable offense (Taşdemir and Saraçlı 2007). Yet the use of such language is still common not only among the public but also in the political discourse⁶⁵. In the beginning of the 2000s, a civil

65 In a television interview in 2014, President Erdoğan said "I was called a Georgian. I apologize for this, but they even said [something] worse: They called me an Armenian." (Taylor 2014).

society initiative took the lead and evaluated the school books in an attempt to eliminate the use of discriminatory language against the Greeks. Such attempts should be expanded to all forms of discriminatory and derogatory language against all groups.

An important component of eliminating discrimination embedded in the use of language is to actively work towards developing a neutral and inclusive vocabulary for describing membership in a nation. The policies outlined in this paper depart from the premise that the states and the respective governments want to build civic nations where membership to the nation means citizenship, where the adjective derived from the name of the state is applied to all citizens of that nation. For example, in the Armenian language, not having means to name a citizen of Armenia in one word without making a reference to ethnicity limits the ability of developing an inclusive civic nation. Calling someone or oneself '*hay*' (the Armenian word for 'Armenian') is a way of evoking their ethnic belonging rather than their citizenship. As a possible solution, the word '*hayastantsi*' that is currently used to denote 'an Armenian from Armenia' as opposed to 'an Armenian from the diaspora', can also be used to denote a 'citizen of Armenia' if introduced into the public and official discourses to ensure equal access and membership to a nation for everyone through tangible and intangible expression.

Conclusion

In the various international documents references to national, ethnic, religious, linguistic, and other minorities are in abundance without coming to a consensus over the definition of these terms. On the national level, case in study in the South Caucasus countries and in Turkey, there is an even larger ambiguity in the use and meaning of these terms in official and public discourses. Quite often, these various actors – national (official and public) and international – are talking to each other across divergent paradigms in the meantime conflating notions. In a context of conflictual intergroup relations, this leads not only to ambiguity of terms but also to paranoia about addressing such ambiguity.

In new policy initiatives, there could emerge new formulations and language to accommodate the shift from hierarchical to inclusive societies where shared membership to the nation is secured. In the study of ethnicity and nationhood, there is a tendency to think about diversity as a juxtaposition of internally homogeneous blocks hemmed in boundaries or the tendency to represent the social and cultural world as a multichrome mosaic of monochrome blocks (Brubaker 2006). However, pluralism or diversity can also take more

individualized forms, resulting in the erosion of group boundaries and in this case, the bestowment of group rights, within itself, does not address the whole matter of equality.

Tackling nationhood and group rights is a tall order. Tackling these issues in a context where they are entangled with intrastate and interstate conflicts is even a taller one. Yet, it is not an impossible one. On the contrary, it is a necessary one for changing the conversation in the South Caucasus countries and Turkey from conflict perpetuation to conflict transformation. The successful implementation of inclusive and non-discriminatory policies in general will open a greater space for the transformation of the territorial conflict contexts as well. The road in that direction is through developing well-articulated policies that capture and reflect the needs and vulnerabilities of all communities and the degree to which they are shared and develop mechanisms that further the dialogue between all groups rather than antagonizing them.

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Minority Language Education in Georgia

Giorgi Bobghiashvili, Arsen Kharatyan, Irine Surmanidze

Georgia is the most diverse country in the South Caucasus region in terms of ethnicities and the identification and development of integration and inclusion policies for ethnic minorities has been ongoing throughout years offering many lessons learned. The sphere of education in these policies is an important one, and within education policies, the biggest challenges still remain on the general education level. This paper aims to analyze the current ethnic minority education policies in Georgia, to assess the existing challenges, and provide recommendations that could be helpful for policy makers as well as relevant stakeholders working in this direction.

Introduction

Georgia is the most diverse country in the South Caucasus region in terms of ethnicities. Although the currently published results of the official census reveal a decline in the share of ethnic minorities from 16.2 percent in 2002 to 13.2 percent in 2014, there are still around half a million ethnic minorities living in the country (National Statistics Office Of Georgia 2014).

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Georgia has been struggling with the identification of an integration policy for ethnic minorities. For many years, different governments of Georgia have attempted to formulate strategies which would supposedly enable proper inclusion of the minorities. Despite this, many international and local organizations still claim that the governments' approaches are far from being adequate and effective in implementation.

Much of the criticism comes towards the educational policy for ethnic minorities. The latest opinion of the "Framework Convention of Protection of National Minorities" (FCNM) on Georgia emphasizes the lag in Georgia's progress regarding minority education in particular (Advisory Committee On the Framework Convention for the Protection Of National Minorities 2015). Although the current government attempts to introduce some best practices, they are predominantly *ad-hoc* and do not demonstrate a strategic and comprehensive approach.

Within the education policies, the biggest challenges still remain on the general education level. There are systemic problems which different governments of the country have not been able to deal with for decades, while consistently offering poor quality education to new generations of ethnic minorities.

This paper aims to analyze the current ethnic minority education policies, assess the existing challenges, and suggest recommendations which could be helpful for policy makers as well as relevant stakeholders working in this direction.

Methodology

Due to the complexity of the subject, a mixed methodological approach has been selected for the research in general. The paper has included two primary instruments for the identification and analysis of the current challenges:

1. Analysis of the existing reports and articles from international and local organizations on this specific issue. Further on, deep contextual research has been made on the existing strategic documents and programs/actions plans of the relevant governmental bodies and institutions.

- Interviews with the representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science of (MoES) Georgia, municipality Education Resource Centers (ERC), and school administrations. Further on, interviews have been conducted with the parents and school students from ethnic minority communities and local NGOs in order to identify the perceptions of the target group itself.

General education for ethnic minorities in Georgia

In Georgia, education is organized by the a three-level approach – Pre-school, General, and Higher education with an addition of vocational and life-long education. Out of the three above-mentioned, the most vulnerable situation still remains at the general education level.

In general, it can be argued that the MoES of Georgia up until now had been dealing with the ethnic minority education in an *ad-hoc* manner – several programs have been designed and introduced to address some problems in this regard. However, there has never been a strategic and comprehensive approach employed besides the “National Concept for Tolerance and Civic Integration” (with Action Plan for 2009-2014) and its substitute the “State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration” (with Action Plan for 2015-2020). Nevertheless, the latter two documents have provided rather mediocre approaches in terms of education related problems.

Article 2, Paragraph “n” of Georgia’s Law on General Education states that education in Georgia is organized into three levels – Primary, Basic, and Secondary (The Parliament of Georgia n.d.).

Realizing the significance of a comprehensive approach to the existing problems for ethnic minorities, in November 2015, the MoES decided to start working on the elaboration of the strategy document, which would target ethnic minority education policy. Currently, it is still in the process of drafting and revision in cooperation with international and local organizations. The initial draft, prepared and presented by the Ministry staff in early December 2015, was a mere consolidation of information on the existing programs and it was missing a strategic vision and concrete plans for achieving

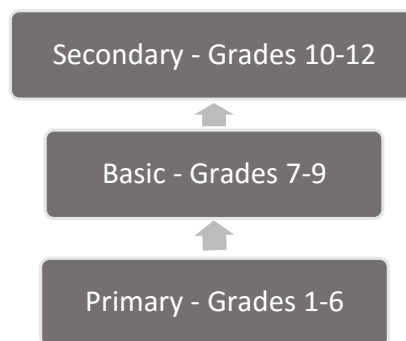


Figure 1 General Education System in Georgia

the desired objectives. Therefore, a consultant has been hired to work on the document, but results still remain to be seen.⁶⁶

Current situation

In order to better understand any issue concerning ethnic minorities of Georgia, it is of crucial importance to consider the general background. As mentioned above, 13.2 percent of Georgia’s population represent ethnic minorities. The significant majority of which (10.8 percent) are ethnic Armenians and Azerbaijanis. Therefore, problems peculiar for these two communities do not necessarily resemble the ones experienced by other ethnic minority groups.

Ethnicity	2014 #	2014 %	2002 #	2002 %
Georgian	3,224,564	86.83	3,661,173	83.75
Azerbaijani	233,024	6.27	284,761	6.51
Armenian	168,102	4.53	248,929	5.69
Russian	26,453	0.71	67,671	1.55
Ossetian	14,385	0.39	38,028	0.87
Yezidi	12,174	0.33	18,329	0.42
Ukrainian	6,034	0.16	7,039	0.16
Kist	5,697	0.15	7,110	0.16
Greek	5,544	0.15	15,166	0.35
Assyrian	2,377	0.06	No info	No info
Other	14,346	0.39	23,329	0.53
TOTAL	3,713,804	100.00	4,371,535	100.00

Table 1 Ethnic Composition of the Population of Georgia According the Official Census

In addition, an important factor is that ethnic Armenians and Azerbaijanis are compactly populated respectively in the Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli regions of the country. This again makes the issues of these populations different from the other minority groups which are predominantly urban

⁶⁶ This information was received in an interview with a representative of the MoES of Georgia in charge of Ethnic Minority Education Policy.

(Russians, Ukrainians, Assyrians, Yezidis) and living in the villages next to the Georgian ones (Avars, Udis, Greeks).

Therefore, the paper will be analyzing the situation regarding the two largest ethnic minorities in a separate chapter from the smaller ethnic minority groups. Considering the significance of the former, the body text of the paper concentrates on the issues of Azerbaijani, Armenian, and Russian language instruction schools.

A limbo for Azerbaijani and Armenian students?

Nowadays more than 300 Azerbaijani, Russian, and Armenian language instructed schools/sectors⁶⁷ exist in Georgia with most of them located in the two regions of Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli. According to the information provided by the local non-governmental organization (NGO) “Center for Civil Integration and Interethnic Relations”, graduates of non-Georgian language schools show 25-30 percent lower scores in the final school exams than the graduates of Georgian-instructed schools. This problem has been lingering on for 25 years with its root causes deriving from many aspects. The next sub-chapters attempt to identify these problems.

Adequate personnel

Human resources and their management in the field of general education is a challenge for all of Georgia. However, it is more intensive for non-Georgian language schools. The reforms which have been conducted in order to address problems have not necessarily been introduced in minority language-speaking schools. According to the data provided by the MoES’s National Center for Teacher Professional Development (NCTPD), there are 7,500 teachers at non-Georgian language schools/sectors amounting to 12.55 percent of the total number of teachers in the Georgian general education system while the number of schools/sectors 10.22 percent. The NCTPD admitted that out of these 7,500, only 31 are certified teachers (0.4 percent).

Lack of specialist in the field

In non-Georgian language general education institutions, it is a general practice for the personnel to teach several subjects at the same time, although they may have no competence. This to some degree is also the case for the high

⁶⁷ A sector in Georgian education system is a division within a school where the language of instruction is different than of the school itself.

mountainous regions and villages of Georgia, from where people tend to migrate for living conditions, and the number of local inhabitants is very low.

# of Subjects Teaching	# of such Teachers
9	2
8	12
7	129
6	395
5	215
4	1740
3	2,310
2	2,856
1	3,303

Table 2 Number of Teachers in Ethnic Minority Schools teaching such languages. Source: Tabatadze & Gorgadze (2015)

In the case of minority-populated villages, the main problems are regarding lack of qualified people with adequate expertise and skills to deliver the courses. This mainly goes to the subjects of natural sciences.

In an interview a schoolgirl from Akhalkalaki mentioned that her teacher “delivers Math, Chemistry, Physics and Geography at different times”.

According to the information indicated in a research there are cases when one teacher teaches 9 subjects (Tabatadze and Gorgadze 2015, 15). Table 2 describes the concrete number of the teachers at ethnic minority language schools that deliver several subjects at the same time.

The same study identifies that in one of the Marneuli municipality public schools, one teacher teaches following courses:

1. Natural Sciences (for Grades 1-6)
2. Math (for Grades 1-12)
3. Music (for Grades 1-9)
4. Native Language (for ethnic minorities, Grades 1-12)
5. Fine and Applied Art (for Grades 1-9)
6. Sport (for Grades 1-12)

Although during the interviews, most of the respondents from school administrations ruled out any possible damage this approach can bring to the quality of education, but the results prove otherwise.

Ageing

25 years have not been enough to overcome the Soviet legacy which has been kept within the system of education in Georgia. A teacher’s position still remains one of the lowest paid. Pursuing this carrier is not very popular and

there are no visible prospects for future development either. Thus, in the last two decades, the inflow of the new teachers and professionals has been quite low. This has caused ageing of the human resources in the education system of the country.

This is presented in dramatic terms in case of the minority schools. According to the quantitative study conducted by the Centre for Civil Integration and Inter-Ethnic Relations (CCIIR), teachers aged 60 or more comprise almost 25 percent of the total number, while practitioners or newly incoming teachers aged 21-25 are only around 4 percent. (Tabatadze and Gorgadze 2015, 5)

A recent study of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) High Commissioner for National Minorities on multilingual education in Georgia also confirms these facts, arguing that teachers continue teaching past the retirement age because they receive a very low pension from the state, and teaching is an additional source of income to supplement the pension (Wigglesworth-Baker 2015, 15). A representative from the Sulda village school administration in the Akhalkalaki municipality, when asked to reflect on this issue, responded: “In our village, there are no adequate human resources to substitute our teachers, while nobody wants to travel from the municipality center daily to deliver classes, since the salary is very low”.

When the same issue was brought into the conversation with the leader of one of the local NGOs in Akhalkalaki, the respondent mentioned that the local environment is organized in a way that the new-comers are not “well accepted”. Every time there is a job opening, the school administration, enjoying its administrative autonomy, always tries to fill it with the local inhabitants – ignoring the level of qualification.

In a private discussion with a representative from the MoES, it was argued that they try to distance themselves from this process since they do not want to be accused of “infringement on school autonomy or minority rights (in the case of job openings for a Georgian language teacher)”.

As a result, it seems that all stakeholders have some sort of a justification for this problem, while the Ministry, which is in charge of the implementation of the education policy, has been so far negligent in terms of ageing problems faced by minority language instructed school.

Failures of inclusion into teachers' development processes

In an attempt to cope with some of the issues described and aware of the shortage of qualified teachers in Georgia, the MoES elaborated and adopted a

Teachers Professional Development program in 2009 – one of the first ever comprehensive approaches towards teachers’ professional development in the country. However, after realizing the shortcomings of this program (mostly due to the very poor performance of the teachers), the MoES decided to update it. Eventually, in 2015 a new “Teacher Induction, Professional Development and Career Advancement Scheme” was adopted by the government of Georgia (Resolution of the Government of Georgia #68 2015 (in Georgian)).

Although the new scheme has been described as the most fitting solution of the current situation in the country (directed towards professional development, rather than certification), both schemes have failed to meet the needs of minority language school/sector teachers. The main reasons for this, as identified by the local teachers, can be found in the design of both of the professional development schemes:

1. The exams that the teachers had to pass for certification (one in the respective subject, another in professional skills) were available just in the state (Georgian) language.
2. Capacity development trainings available for teachers within these schemes were also available just in the state (Georgian) language.

Due to the lack of academic and professional competencies in the Georgian language of those teachers, they have nearly stayed out of the teachers’ development programs so far. As the interviews have found out, most of the teachers as well as school administration representatives are willing to be involved in the process, but the language barrier still prevents this from happening. The MoES’s negligence to take into consideration the needs of non-Georgian language school/sector teachers have further estranged them from the Georgian education system.

Currently, the NCTPD is running a 3-year program to address these problems. The program is further explored in the last chapter on state policies.

Textbooks

The second most frequently named reason for the relative lower performance of the education system among non-Georgian language general education institutions is textbooks.

The MoES of Georgia, according to its regulations has a “textbook approval procedure” determining the list of textbooks which can be used in the education process both in public and private schools.

Translation

For ethnic minorities language schools (Azerbaijani, Armenian, and Russian), only approved textbooks that are then translated into their respective languages can be taught. According to the information provided by the MoES, so far the number of approved textbooks prepared in accordance with the new National Curricula 2011-2016 and then translated into Armenian, Azerbaijani, and Russian are for the following subjects: Math, Nature, Art, and Music for Grades 1-6; “Our Georgia” and Information Technology for Grades 5-6 and Civil Defense and Security for Grade 6. Meanwhile, the rest of the textbooks for Grades 7-12 are those translated according to the old National Curricula. (Ministry of Education and Science (in Georgian)).

In general, the main concerns regarding textbooks are associated with the quality of the translation. Except for the Russian versions, both Armenian and Azerbaijani translations are done in a very poor level. “Sometimes it is even impossible for me to understand what is the idea of some sentences, and how are my students supposed to make a point out of them?!” , one of the Math teachers at a Marneuli municipality school commented adding that, due to this issue, textbooks from Azerbaijan are frequently used. An Armenian school student from the Ninotsminda municipality interviewed for this paper shared a similar point.

The bilingual approach

Bilingual textbooks, introduced as a component of the bilingual education pilot project, further estranged students from their textbooks. The methodology used for them implies translation into the minority language (Armenian, Azerbaijani, and Russian) of the 70 percent of the text, while 30 percent remains in the Georgian language. The above listed books written according to the new curricula are done in this style. Due to a fact that the academic-level competence in the Georgian language and especially the knowledge of terminology used in the book is at a very poor level among teachers as well as students, the effectiveness of the bilingual approach is very limited.

Upon the inception of the bilingual education pilot project by the Ministry, the target group teachers had undergone 3-month Georgian language courses. However, without any doubts, this was not enough for any of them to successfully uphold the objectives of bilingual education. As a result, some of the respondents frankly admitted that they have been skipping the parts in the textbook that are in the Georgian language.

One teacher noted that frequently a paragraph in the textbook in the minority language is followed by Georgian text which is contextually somewhat different than the idea developed by the previous paragraph. Therefore, it is hard for a student to follow this kind of shifts especially when those texts do not relate to each other.

A representative from a Marneuli municipality school administration maintained, “Bilingual textbooks can be very useful in the case when the teacher is capable of delivering the subject in the proper way. That person needs to be a virtuoso”. However, as it has been outlined, such skilled human resources are very few, if any.

Multiculturalism in general education

One of the dimensions of the “State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration” is the support to a tolerant environment not only among the ethnic minorities but also the population at large. General education is one of the instruments how this approach can be translated into practice. Although the general education curricula, in theory, also support the idea of promotion of ethnic and cultural diversity, the overall assessment of the approved textbooks indicate that this is not necessarily the case. A research of the textbooks of Grades 9-12, done by the “Tolerance and Diversity Institute” exposes the narratives of ethnocentrism and even xenophobia (Tolerance and Diversity Institute 2016).

Yet another study made on the textbooks of the primary level describes concrete passage that could lead to intolerant attitudes towards ethnic minorities (Tabatadze and Gorgadze, Intercultural Education Research in Primary Grades of Georgia 2013, 66). For example, a textbook of the subject “Our Georgia” reads:

“The inhabitants of our country went through a very difficult life. They went through wars, epidemics, forced displacement, natural disasters, crop failures, starvation, etc. This all hindered the population growth, reduced the life expectancy. In addition to this, throughout centuries, various ethnic groups from many countries moved and settled in Georgia. Their descendants are citizens of Georgia and enjoy the same rights as Georgians.”

The wording and sequencing of phrases used in this passage makes a reader think that ethnic minorities are some sort of a burden for the country, while emphasizing the dominant role of ethnic Georgians in the country – a clear indicator of ethnocentrism.

Furthermore, the textbook of the subject “History of Georgia and the World”, taught in Grade 11 includes a phrase from Ilia Chavchavadze’s diary-style novel “Mgzavis Tserilebi” (Letters of a Passenger) with the following xenophobic passage against Armenians:

“Today a newcomer Armenian robs us, our home more. In the old days, we were at least with a sword and a shield defending ourselves against the enemy, and what to do with the Armenian with whom you are not at war?”
(Jnews 2015)

Although this excerpt is a bit distorted from the original version, the main idea expressed by a local villager (in the novel) is completely out of the context for any history textbook. Citing this concrete paragraph of Chavchavadze who, by the way, also has more positive passages about Armenians, has a clear intention of suggesting xenophobic attitudes towards this ethnic group.

Approving such textbooks by the Ministry (and its translation in the relevant minority language) has consequences not only on the general tolerant environment in the country, but also dramatically affects students from this certain ethnic group, their perception of the country, and the willingness for further integration.

Management of the schools and subordination within the system

Since 2005, the Ministry has officially announced the decentralization of the general education as one of its priorities. The school administrations have been given the right to autonomously decide the course of the development of the school as well as the budgetary mechanisms and financial priorities.

Article 3, Paragraph “f” of Georgia’s Law on General Education provides that the “state ensures administrative and financial autonomy of general education institutions” (The Parliament of Georgia n.d.). The schools are given a status of a “legal entity of public law”, and their administrative and financial autonomy is guaranteed. A general education institution is to include a Board of Trustees, an Administration, a Teacher Council, a Self-Government of Pupils, a Disciplinary Committee, as well as an Appeals Committee. (The Parliament of Georgia n.d., Article 2, Paragraph “q”)

However, in practice, school administrations inherently still remain under the supervision of the municipality ERC which are structural local units of the Ministry. A research in the target municipalities revealed that non-Georgian

language school administrations are more frequently consulting their decisions with representatives of the ERC.

Although in the communication with the representatives of the municipality ERCs, respondents ruled out any kind of involvement in any affairs of public schools within their geographical areas, civil society activists believe that school administrations always make strategic decisions in accordance with the respective ERCs.

A representative of one of the ERCs of the Kvemo Kartli region maintained that it is against the law to get involved into the affairs of a school, but also admitted that if they seek “consultations”, they are always granted.

A representative of the Ministry shared the same position adding that in the official correspondence, they always indicate that each cooperation offer with any school needs to go through the school administration as much as the MoES does not have any leverage on them.

Two respondents from non-Georgian school administration also subscribed to this point, but one of them further added that “real autonomy” much depends on the management of the school: “There are some school principals which held the same position even during the Soviet Union, and they are used to hierarchical governance and always expect orders from the top.”

Poor management is also characteristic of the non-Georgian general education institutions. The issue of ageing is the case here as well as is the inefficiency due to a lack of sufficient Georgian language skills that are important for access to current procedures and modern approaches to better management.

According to an expert in the field of education, after the introduction of the voucher system funding for schools, the state finances students at non-Georgian language schools 15 percent more than the other students. This has accumulated for large schools into enormous additional funding. However, due to the lack of competence in administration and the lack of knowledge in using public funds, any extracurricular activities or infrastructural problems of the school are not funded even though close to half a million Georgian lari exists in their bank account.

Knowledge of the state language

As mentioned above, in many cases for both teachers and administration, the lack of knowledge of the Georgian language results in shortcomings for their development. However, in the case of students, the situation is even more

dramatic: due to the inability to get proper Georgian language courses, they can be left out of the process of civic integration in the future.

The Ministry, judging by its strategic documents and programs, sees the lack of knowledge of the Georgian language as the primary reason for other shortcomings and inefficiencies in the non-Georgian language school/sectors. However, the lack of state language competencies cannot be a balancing factor of the students' rights to get quality education in their native language.

The recent report of the FCNM notes that the "Georgian language skills are generally improving among persons belonging to national minorities, in particular among younger generations". However, these are mostly communicative skills, while neglecting the acquisition of higher literacy skills and the ability to pass exams. (Advisory Committee On the Framework Convention for the Protection Of National Minorities 2015)

A school student from the Azerbaijani community, when asked about the Georgian language, explained that her teacher "herself does not know enough Georgian" and that they have been given some handouts and were supposed to study themselves.

The NCTPD has elaborated and freely distributed textbooks of "Georgian as a Second Language" for Grades 1-12. A school administration representative in Akhalkalaki municipality explained that they "already have considerable improvements in teaching the state language" but he also expressed that the state officials are too much occupied with the Georgian language, while neglecting the quality of other subjects.

The forgotten – numerically small ethnic minority groups

A very unfortunate tendency in the field of education is that international observers, journalists, and organizations frequently neglect the problems faced by the minorities beyond the Armenian, Azerbaijani, and Russian language communities in Georgia.

Numerically small ethnic minority groups in Georgia have, in some cases, cultural and ethnical existential problems out of which education plays one of the most important roles. Since 2012, minorities other than Armenians, Azerbaijanis, and Russians face the problem of inability to learn their native language in public schools. Depriving the right of studying their native language was a clear breach of the 14th article of the FCNM – a document

ratified by Georgia in 2005. Moreover, removal of their native language – an important part of ethnic identity – from the school curriculum, further intensified the assimilation process of some of the ethnic groups in Georgia (Udis, Assyrians). (European Center for Minority Issues, ECMI Caucasus and others 2015)

Furthermore, the government is reluctant to provide effective measures to support, promote, and protect their cultural heritage. No museums, theatres or libraries work to preserve the identity of the numerically small ethnic groups though in most cases, they live compactly in certain villages.

These two problems (linguistic and cultural) are identified as a threat to the preservation of their identity by the numerically small ethnic groups. Assyrians and Udis, as well as the Batsb (a linguistic minority) living in Georgia are facing this issue most problematically as their communities in Georgia are the smallest and are diminishing. The younger generations are not able to speak in their native language.

In 2015, there were a number of positive developments in this direction. In particular, Decree 118 by the Minister of Education and Science of Georgia, signed on September 9 of 2015, introduced the teaching of the native languages of small minority groups in Georgia in the national general education curricula. These were to be elective subjects of study. A follow-up legal act of the Minister of Education and Science enlisted those minority languages and the applicable schools for this purpose:

1. The Ossetian language – in 3 public schools (villages of Fona, Tsitskanaantseri, Areshferani)
2. The Kurdish (Kurmanji) language – in 1 public school (Tbilisi Public School #79)
3. The Assyrian language – in 1 public school (village of Dzveli Kanda)
4. The Avar language – in 3 public schools (villages of Saruso, Chantliskure, Tivi)
5. The Udi language – in 1 public school (village of Zinobiani)
6. The Chechen language is also planned to be introduced as an elective subject from September 2016 in up to 5 villages.

The process leading up to the issuance of this Decree was primarily driven by the Council of National Minorities under the Public Defender's Office and by minority NGOs. However, textbooks as well as qualified teachers, here also, still remain a challenge. Although, the Ministry has approved standards of those languages, in practice the schools are using textbooks imported outside

of the country and thus, it is unclear how they follow the existing standards. The same is relevant about the teachers; there is no mechanism elaborated for the assessment of how qualified they are. However, the positive development of the reintroduction of these languages in the school curriculum is very much appreciated by the locals.

State policies

In the immediate post-independence period, the governments of Georgia did not have any vision, even will or resources to work towards policies for ethnic minority education. Zviad Gamsakhurdia's nationalistic policy also somewhat affected this. For example, the poor multicultural performance of the education system and the intolerant passages in the textbooks discussed above are traces of the policies of that time.

Eduard Shevardnadze's period resembled a stasis: nationalistic sentiments had dropped, while no further steps for civic integration including an education policy was at sight. It was only after 2004 when the government started to take into account the problems and challenges which ethnic minorities had specifically in education. However, the major reform started in 2007-2008 when the OSCE High Commissioner for National Minorities engaged actively. The first ever multilingual education attempts were also tested in this period.

A brief assessment of former programs

Beside bilingual education (its aspects have been already explored above), the MoES, through the NCTPD has implemented 2 targeted comprehensive programs which aimed at capacity building of the Samtskhe-Javakheti, Kvemo Kartli, and Kakheti regions schools in teaching the Georgian language. Meanwhile there are some *ad-hoc* style programs implemented by the Ministry itself aimed at supporting civic integration and networking between minority and Georgian teachers and students (e.g. "Multicultural Summer School for Ethnic Minorities", "Support of School Initiatives").

"Teach Georgian as a Second Language"

A program designed and implemented by the NCTPD was initiated in 2009 with ambitious objectives – to promote the knowledge of the Georgian language among ethnic minority populations, to support local teachers in professional development and in teaching the Georgian language as well as to facilitate the civic integration process. (National Center for Teacher Professional Development 2014)

The main concept of the program was to recruit highly professional teachers of the Georgian language and insert them into non-Georgian language schools/sectors where they would deliver not only courses of the Georgian language but also mentor the local teachers in teaching. It is worth mentioning that these teachers earned a salary for the instructional hours as well as an additional 1,000 Georgian lari paid through the program. This created some strains in the relations to the local teachers as they are paid 3 times less. In general, the program has been well funded from the state budget; in 2014 it was budgeted at 1,527,720.00 Lari.

One of the school directors mentioned during an interview that “bilingual education has worked the best in the places where teachers under this program have been placed”. Overall, judging by the achieved results, if we see positive developments in terms of knowledge of the state language, to some degree it can be attributed to this program. However, the data about the professional development of ethnic minority teachers reveals that in this dimension, the program has failed.

“Georgian Language for Future Success”

Yet another program elaborated by the NCTPD was launched in 2011. The main concept of the program was sending recent bachelor graduates for one academic year to *all* non-Georgian language schools to teach the language as well as organize extracurricular activities for the school students. The aim here also was to promote the Georgian language in the regions as well as to facilitate interethnic and intercultural dialogue among the communities. The graduates were motivated by the above-average salary as well as the possibility of funding of their MA degree by the NCTPD.

This program was larger in scope and covered nearly all schools in the target villages. The overall budget amounted to 3 million lari in 2014.

The assessments of the program, like in the previous one, are very different. In Akhalkalaki one of the teachers was quite skeptical about the implementation of this program. While a principal of the same school mentioned that their guest-teachers have assisted them in the teaching process of not only the Georgian language, but also other subjects.

The interviewed participants of the program positively assessed the programs and maintained that the younger generation of students have been much more cooperative and easy to interact with. An expert in minority issues mentioned that the teaching process, at some point, went the other way around; it was not

the minorities who studied the Georgian language, but the guest-teachers who developed skills in the Armenian and Azerbaijani languages.

However, judging by the results, the fact that the younger generation has better competences in the Georgian language can be attributed to this program, while the assessment of the success of the program in terms of facilitating intercultural dialogue and civic integration is a matter for an evaluation study of the entire program.

Future plans and capacity for improvements

In 2016, the NCTPD shifted its annual working structure. The two above-mentioned programs have been incorporated into a new targeted program titled “Non-Georgian teachers’ professional development program”.

Unlike the previous ones, it has a 3-year timeframe. According to the information provided by the NCTPD, the program aims at the “promotion of non-Georgian school/sector teachers’ professional development and improvement of teaching/learning in order to enhance the quality of instruction for the state language.” Furthermore, an integral part of the program has become the focus on “the preparation of local non-Georgian school teachers for the subject examination and teaching them the state language”. The annual budget for 2016 is 3 million Georgian lari.

The main novelty introduced within this program is that, the focus has shifted on the professional development component of the teacher in minority language schools. In view of the problems described above, this can be considered a positive development. The first program is kept almost as it used to be with the one difference of the title of those teachers rephrasing into “Consultant teachers of Georgian as a second language”. Another addition is that they will also be in charge of training the local teachers in the state language and assisting them in their professional development such as filling out self-assessment surveys and following the new teacher development scheme.

As for the second program, there have been more changes in the design. Assistant Teachers will be taken from the pool of the 1+4 program – graduates of the Georgian higher education institutions with an ethnic minority background. They will be assisting the local teachers in bilingual education as well as in professional development in accordance with their competences. Furthermore, regular Assistant Teachers will also be sent to these schools which will be specifically concentrating on the subjects of Georgian language, History, and Geography. Various subject-related and professional skill development

trainings are planned annually for the beneficiary teachers. (National Center for Teacher Professional Development 2016)

Overall, the programs aim to include at least 90 percent of the targeted teachers in the professional development scheme as well as to significantly increase the performance of the students in the Georgian language by 2019.

Some shortcomings of the programs at the initial stage are the following:

- Still too much emphasis is put on the promotion of the teaching of the state language, while the development of their native language is lagging behind.
- Teachers may not show interest in participation in these activities and events considering that motivation is still very low.
- The program ignores the ageing factors as well as the lack of specialists, that are serious problems for minority language schools; over 70-year-old teachers attending capacity development trainings would be hardly manageable.
- The introduction of the Assistant Teachers in Geography and History courses may be perceived as “supervision” by the local teachers and school administrations and could create some discontent.
- Considering the existence of relatively expensive activities in the program, it can be assumed that all the target schools will not become beneficiaries of the program. So, presumably, coverage will be reduced in comparison to the previous programs.

In financial terms, it could be argued that the overall budget allocated for these programs has decreased which can be seen as a negative development.

Considering the other above-described burning issues in this direction, this suggested program could have been more comprehensive. Or yet other programs could be designed in order to address the educational needs of the ethnic minorities. It is still not clear how the MoES will be dealing with the issues related to the textbooks, how bilingual education will be reformed, what measures will be taken to increase the performance of the school administration in management, and what the small minority groups can expect in the future. Many hopes are put on the strategy document.

Recommendations

Based on the analysis suggested above, the following recommendations can be drawn for the main stakeholders of the education system.

For the MoES:

- Finalize and adopt the Strategy/Concept document for the education of ethnic minorities.
- In this process, ensure the participation of representatives of ethnic minorities, the ERCs, and minority language school administration and teachers.
- Follow up on the adoption with appropriate action plans so that there are no delays in implementation.
- Start work to raise the quality of translation of the approved books by establishing a special commission with the task of quality assurance.
- Reform the methodology of bilingual textbooks. Many teachers have suggested that a methodologically more effective approach would have been the consecutive translation in both languages.
- International experience shows that the direct active participation (such as exchange programs, placement or twinning in the majority-populated region schools) have much more positive results than passive participation in trainings in learning foreign language skills, professional development and sharing best teaching practices, or the promotion of trust-building and civic integration process. ECMI Caucasus has implemented such type of a pilot project “Twinning of Teachers” which placed 10 Armenian teachers for one month in different schools of the Adjara region. The results have been promising.
- Elaborate special measures to deal with the ageing problem of the ethnic minority teachers, by promoting teaching positions among the graduates of the 1+4 program.
- Clearly define within the National Curricula the importance of textbooks with the messages of multicultural values.
- Introduce special criteria and requirements for approving a textbook ruling out any forms of ethnocentric and xenophobic passages cited even from well-respected authors that would make the minorities feel discriminated and excluded.
- Work all across Georgia towards raising tolerance and sensitiveness of teachers and develop a special module on this topic in the framework of the Teacher Professional Development Scheme.
- Elaborate special mechanisms for a renewal of the human resources of school administrations and include managerial experience and skills within the criteria and exams for the selection of the school principals.
- Monitor and evaluate the programs run by the NCTPD as well as by its internal units for quality assurance and achieving desired outcomes.

- Ensure that the representatives of the municipality ERCs are not abusing their authority and are taking into account the local environment and nature of social and cultural affairs.
- Allocate resources for developing and publishing textbooks and teachers' guidebooks for the small minority languages, so that they are in line with the approved standards.

For the NCTPD:

- Prioritize within its funding the challenges of the ethnic minority education system, including the development of the capacity of the school administrations and support school/teacher twinning projects.
- Elaborate teachers' certification exams in minority languages. The measure in the current program of raising the competences in the Georgian language and then passing the exams can be ineffective and after the completion of the 3-year program, the targeted teachers may still be left out of the professional development scheme.
- The Center needs to elaborate a mechanism for the evaluation of their programs – an internal as well as an external (that can be outsourced) evaluating the input of enormous financial resources spent on education and identifying whether the programs are being developed in the proper directions for achieving the desired results.
- Closely work with the pool of the 1+4 program graduates and use these human resources for the further advancement of its programs.
- Actively consult with teachers and school administrations while in the process of designing any program in order to avoid top-down driven processes and ensuring that the minorities do have ownership of any program.
- Develop a separate training module for the teachers of the numerically small ethnic minority languages to make sure that the courses they deliver are in line with the adopted standards. Work for their further development.

Other stakeholders:

- Municipality ERCs have to be actively involved in the process of elaboration and implementation of the new policies as well as the programs of the NCTPD. They need to act as entities making recommendations from the "ground".
- ERCs have the capacity of engagement and collaboration with the local civil society organizations in terms of raising the civic awareness of the school students.

- Minority school administrations should enjoy their right of administrative and financial autonomy. Its institutions and self-governing bodies need to be aware of their rights and responsibilities as well.
- Minority language school administrations, within their financial capacity, should also organize extracurricular activities aimed at promoting civic integration and sharing best practices among each other.
- Informational campaigns need to be conducted for the local populations and parents in order to raise awareness among them of their rights and responsibilities within the board of trustees and ensure that schools are administered by an effective team of managers while all the resources available from the state budget are used for the good of the schools and the advancement of the quality of teaching.
- NGOs need to be involved in the monitoring process of the state strategical documents as well as the programs. NGOs, especially those from minority communities, need to be open for cooperation with the Ministry and its entities for consultations and recommendations.
- NGOs need to work more with the community in order to raise awareness among them of their rights and how to uphold those rights.
- NGOs need to be activated in the field of education of ethnic minorities at least in non-formal approaches in cooperation with the school administrations

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From the Cinderella of Soviet Modernization to the Post-Soviet Return to “National Traditions”: Women’s Rights in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia

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This paper aims at providing a comparative discussion of women’s political participation in the countries of the South Caucasus, focusing both on differences and common trends of policies toward women in the Soviet and post-Soviet periods. The analysis of the Soviet heritage in the area of women’s emancipation allows to track the trajectory of post-Soviet transformations without fragmenting or decontextualizing the post-Soviet experiences. This approach allows to identify the contemporary processes that are rooted in the Soviet past and those that have new origins. Attention is focused on the changes in the system of spaces reserved for women and the discourses that are formed around this topic. The paper exposes patterns impeding and promoting female leadership and involvement in the public sphere. The paper also deciphers what verbal, non-verbal, and other strategies women use in politics and the public sphere in order to be accepted professionally.

Introduction

This paper aims at providing a comparative discussion of the issues of women’s political participation in the countries of the South Caucasus, focusing both on differences and common trends of policies toward women in the Soviet and post-Soviet periods. The main research questions have been: how have the Soviet and post-Soviet transformations and social cataclysms affected the political rights of women? How does (or doesn’t) women’s political participation influence social processes in the South Caucasus? What avenues lead women to politics?

The analysis of the data collected in these countries through different types of interviews and conversations, together with the analysis of secondary sources has allowed to outline key dynamics that can shed light on these questions. To this end, attention is focused on the changes in the system of spaces reserved for women (i.e. the quota system) and the discourses that are formed around this topic. The paper exposes patterns impeding female leadership, and, on the contrary, promoting women’s political participation and involvement in the public sphere. Since politics is conventionally “not a female thing”, the paper also deciphers what discursive or verbal, non-verbal, and other strategies women use in politics in order to be accepted professionally. An array of key questions of regional relevance has been touched upon in the paper. In particular, the paper looks at the effect on women’s empowerment of:

- the memory of the Soviet past;
- the conflicts in the region;
- the mass media;
- the activities of international organizations, civil societies, and activists;
- the system of traditional values.

According to the authors, the analysis of the Soviet heritage in the area of women’s emancipation allows to track the trajectory of post-Soviet transformations without fragmenting or decontextualizing the post-Soviet experiences. The diachronic approach allows to identify the contemporary processes that are rooted in the Soviet past and those that have fundamentally new origins.

The contribution of the three authors allows the identification of shared and specific elements in the area of women’s rights in the state entities of the South Caucasus that are still under transformation including the *de facto* Nagorno Karabakh Republic (*de facto* NKR), unrecognized by the international

community. The inclusion of the latter in this research (and the leaving out of Abkhazia and South Ossetia – similar entities on the *de jure* territory of Georgia) is conditioned by the fact that one of the authors has immediate knowledge through own research to the area of women’s political participation in Nagorno Karabakh.

Women’s political rights and representation in the Soviet era

State feminism and the “working mother contract”

Undoubtedly, the experience of women’s emancipation in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) had a significant influence on post-Soviet state building. Raising the status of women and their political participation in the USSR had its specific stages and ambiguities. The Bolsheviks’ attempts at restructuring and reconstructing social relationships between men and women is particularly noteworthy⁶⁸. However, along with the adoption of decrees that fully and unconditionally equated men and women in their rights, the Soviet government banned all independent women’s groups. As in all other areas, the government monopolized the protection of women’s interests. The emancipation of Soviet women through a revolution on the cultural and everyday routine levels gave start to an entirely new phenomenon – *state feminism*. The years between 1925 and 1928 became the apogee of the *cultural revolution* with an emphasized gender component. Social programs targeting women were based on the fundamental studies of August Bebel who claimed that women were structurally the weakest and suppressed link throughout the entire human history, including the era of industrialization (Bebel 1959, 267-274).

Within the framework of this policy, the single-party government took under its protection *women’s departments (zhenotdel)* and later *women’s councils (zhensovet)* that were created by the party itself. In his address “To the Working Women” Vladimir Lenin stressed, “The proletariat cannot achieve complete freedom unless it achieves complete freedom for women.” (Lenin 1919). The prominent Bolshevik theorist Alexandra Kollontai contributed significantly to

⁶⁸ The principal approaches to women’s issues adopted by the Bolsheviks were based on Friedrich Engels’s famous work “The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State”, a concept which he developed together with Karl Marx.

the articulation of the special state policy towards women⁶⁹ (Kollontai 1923, 199).

The public policy of solving women’s issues from 1920 to 1930 was based on the theoretical principles of Marxism arguing that participation in production is crucial in determining the social status of women. The idea that women may not work in the line of production was completely eliminated from the Soviet social consciousness. The second half of the 1920s was the era of industrialization, collectivization, and the “great construction projects of socialism” (Rogachev 2014). The state was therefore in a desperate need of cheap labor, and women were a perfect fit for that role. In this regard, gender relations in the Soviet era are referred to as the “working mother contract”. In a climate of inadequate social infrastructure and the old household routine, this meant a double load (Ayvazova 2002) (Zdravomyslova and Tyomkina 2002). This was an example of explicit state intervention into the construction of gender codes particularly a new type of hegemonic femininity which marginalized the traditionally feminine characters of passivity and invisibility in favor of a role model of a woman who manages to combine her public role with the tasks of everyday routine.

Orientalism – socialism – gender

The *women’s departments* that were created as part of the central and local government bodies existed up until 1929. In the 1920s and 1930s, women’s delegate meetings organized at the workplaces or in residential areas in the case of housewives, emerged as the main forms of women’s movement. A particular emphasis was put on the emancipation of women in the Muslim republics and autonomies, deploying a strongly orientalist rhetoric. In December 1924, the Central Committee of the All-Soviet Communist Party of the Bolsheviks adopted a decree “On the immediate objectives in the sphere of labor of female employees, peasants, and workers of the East” where the primary objective was the integration of women into the workforce (Kirilina 2000, 48).

Within the framework of different Soviet institutions, centers for the elimination of illiteracy or the so-called “*Vseobuches*” (universal learning) were opened everywhere. These centers were maintained by the most active and educated citizens of both sexes. The women of the Soviet republics were taking

⁶⁹ Alexandra Kollontai was People’s Commissar for social welfare in first Soviet government in 1917-1918 and she was the first woman-minister in history (Condit n.d.).

expedited literacy courses and soon themselves were becoming trainers at *Vseobuches*.

Special measures were taken to increase not only the cultural but also the agrarian education level of the women from the “East”, creating a special role of “promoted” or “nominated” women-peasants from the “East” – “*vydvizhenka*”. On April 22 in 1929, the collegium of the People’s Commissariat of Agriculture of the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic (RSFSR) issued the protocol N21 signed by deputy People’s Commissar of Agriculture Alexander Muralov ordering the organization of courses to train administrative agricultural staff from the “promoted women-peasants from the East”. The first article of the decree was deeming it “necessary in the current year to organize special four-month training programs at the Agriculture Academy named after Timiryazev (Ulasevich 1930).

The delegates of the British trade unions, who visited the Soviet republics, described their impressions about the new soviet gender policy in the “East” as follows: “In Baku... native Eastern women showed us around the Central Model Club for Eastern women, which has a membership of 2,000 working women. Attached to the club is a crèche, dispensary, and workshops for the teaching of all kinds of handicrafts, including bookbinding, sewing, embroidery, shoemaking, etc. In addition, there are educational courses which prepare women for the Worker’s Faculties, the Teachers’ Training Collages and Soviet Party Schools. There are also musical and drama circles. Special clubs for women are the exception. They are only organized for the women of the East and of the backward [original language such as “native women”, “backward” are kept as they were used in the original quotation] nationalities, because it was impossible to attract women into the clubs where men were present” (Otchet zhenskoy delegatsii britanskikh tred-yunionov 1935, 39). The orientalist language was characteristic not only to the Soviet discourse but also to the outside observers of the *state feminism* in the Soviet Union.

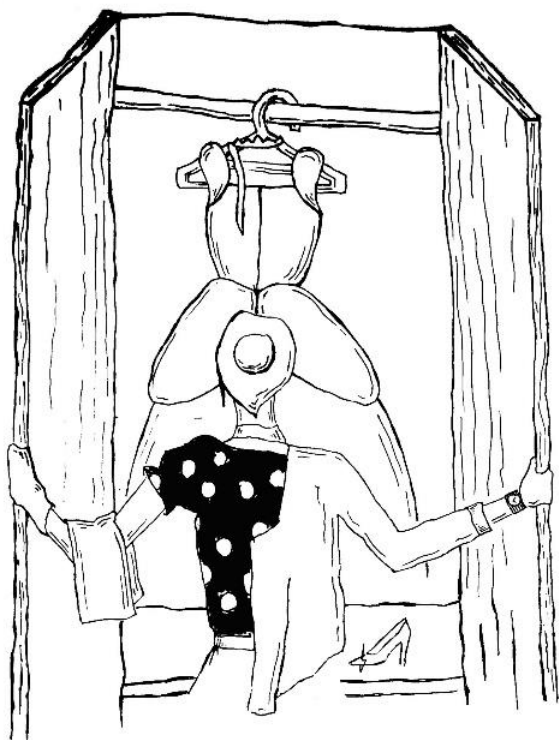
Cinderellas for the Soviet Industrial Revolution

By the 1930s, the excitement around women’s issues in the USSR peaked and there were significant advancements toward the “solution”. “Later, when industrialization was set as a course, the demand for labor increased dramatically, and the involvement of women in the labor force became more intense” (Kirilina 2000, 48). In 1936, a book called “The Woman in the USSR” was published in Moscow. The book was prepared at the Central Office of the

National Economic Accounting of the State Planning Committee (*Gosplan*) and contained statistical data on the situation of women in the Soviet Union during the first and second five-year plans. It also provided data on pre-revolutionary Russia and the capitalist countries of the West for comparison.

In this book, it is noted that “the native nationalities of Azerbaijan and the Central Asian republics significantly fall behind in the inclusion of women’s labor force in the process of production” (Central Office of the National Economic Records of the State Planning Committee (*Gosplan*) of the USSR 1936, 11). In the rest of the Soviet Union, the motto introduced by the government was supported by women often not just with enthusiasm, but also with certain fanaticism. An example of such working enthusiasm were the women participants of the *Stakhanovite movement* – encouraging hard work and overachievement at work. Another initiative marked by the emergence of the neologism “*khetagurovka*” was prompted after the publication of an open letter

by Valentina Khetagurova calling on young girls to take part in the development of the Far Eastern region to which 250 thousand girls responded. The tractor driver Pasha Angelina’s initiative “100 thousand female friends – onto the tractor!” gathered 200 thousand supporters (Kirilina 2000, 51).



The analysis of the Soviet legislation on gender roles shows that an asymmetry was still persistent in the “socialist family”. However, it was an asymmetry different from the previous traditional forms, discourses, and practices. A mother’s function in the family became much more complicated. From now on, she was performing all the previous tasks

imposed by the traditional model, including the upbringing of children and household chores and in addition, she was supporting the family budget with her paycheck. Promises made by the government on easing this burden always had less importance than other “priority” tasks. Thus, the *state feminism* of the

Soviet era in essence not only left untouched the traditional division of labor between the sexes, but also legalized a double load for women, who were never relieved of their household and childcare duties. The combination of family and professional life gradually emerged as a new distinct social problem. The Soviet woman bore on her shoulders “the great construction projects of socialism” (Rogachev 2014) becoming the Cinderella of modernization. (Barsukova 1998).

The Soviet social experiment resulted in a dilemma. On the one hand, the inadequate social infrastructure and the traditional domestic labor led to an increased workload for women, who in addition to traditional roles, were forced to deal with the burden of a public role and a professional career. On the other hand, a woman’s education and especially her labor, often going beyond ordinary exploitation (hence the metaphor of the Cinderella), became a stimulus for the status of women and paved the way for possibilities for female emancipation. It was precisely the unprecedented practices of that historical period created by the doctrine of *state feminism*, that reconfigured the role model gendered subject, producing the *Femina Sovietica*.

The system of reservation: Quotas

In later years, the vigorous political activity advocating for Soviet women of the 1930s gradually declined. The thesis that “the women’s issue has been resolved” resulted in the elimination of the *women’s departments* from the party structures. In 1934, the women’s sector of the Central Committee of the All-Soviet Communist Party of the Bolsheviks was dissolved. However, the involvement of women in the political life through the quota system became an important part of the Soviet policy of affirmative action. Adjusting the election system, the Soviet government challenged the alienation of women from politics and power that dominated in the rest of the world. The share of women in the Supreme Soviets of all levels was relatively high. By the early 1980s, for example, in the USSR it was 32.8 percent; in the RSFSR it was 35 percent; in the Union republics it was an average of 36.2 percent; in the autonomous republics it was 40.3 percent. Thus they constituted the so-called “critical minority” in the parliament of the country ranging anywhere from 30 to 40 seats. Despite the drawbacks and abuses, the quotas became the steel crown of the Soviet egalitarian ideology. The first elections to representative bodies without the quotas in 1989 and 1990 showed that “the women’s issue” was far from being solved in the country. Women lost these elections. In 1990, female members in the Supreme Council of RSFSR were only 3 percent and in the Supreme Council of the USSR, the share was 8.9 percent from the total number of members.

The level of gender equality in the Soviet period even when it comes to the quota system should not be overestimated. The system of granting women their political rights and representation had serious flaws locally. For example, in all the three South Caucasus republics, men dominated in the higher positions of the power structures. In addition, their labor was paid five times higher than the same work performed by women (Dudwick 1997, 238-239) (Ishkanian 2003, 482). At the level of the Union republics, there were no women with ministerial portfolios. Most often, women were appointed as second deputies of the local Central Committees of the Communist Party, and this was their “glass ceiling”. Since the 1980s, women appeared in the dissident sphere, but not in conventional politics.

Women made it to power only during times of crises – when there was war, chaos, and devastation. The Second World War is a vivid example, when the entire burden of the work “behind the lines” fell on the shoulders of women. This period accounts for the peak of female appointments to high-ranking positions in urban and rural areas. For example, the war played an important role in Zakhra Kerimova’s career. In 1941, she was appointed as the minister of social security of the Azerbaijani Soviet Socialist Republic, and maintained this position for almost ten years. During the war, Zakhra Kerimova mobilized women to work at the oilfields taking the place of men who had left for the frontline. She personally was present at the production sites to ensure uninterrupted supply of fuel to the frontline. After the war, Zakhra Kerimova held high-ranking positions in the Party and in the government: in August 1952, she was appointed as Chairman of the Azerbaijan Council of Trade Unions and from September 25 of the same year and until 1954 she was a member of the Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan (Nəzərli 2015).

The number of chairwomen of the collective and state farms (*kolkhoz* and *sovkhos*) in the South Caucasus republics and the Nagorno Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) was at its all-time high when the general military mobilization did not leave another choice. In other words, despite the egalitarian mottos, women were delegated supporting roles, and the access to prestigious positions was available on a residual basis.

Women’s rights in the post-Soviet period

The realities of the nation-states: the dashing 1990s

The political processes and conflicts of the past two and a half decades and the dominant trend of the politicization of ethnicity have led to violent clashes, refugees and forcibly displaced persons, and have contributed to the rapid intensification of economic emigration of the population of the South Caucasus countries.

“The late 1980s, along with the establishment and development of national movements in the republics of the USSR and the radicalization of the struggle for national independence, were marked by an interesting phenomenon – an active participation of women in political processes (but not in the government)” (Abasov, *Demograficheskiye protsessy i analiz gendernoy situatsii v Azerbaydzhane. Tsentral'naya Aziya i Kavkaz* 2001). After the collapse of the USSR, the National Front came to power in Azerbaijan. With this, the status of women in the country changed in several ways: there was a complete shift in the construction of the hegemonic image of a woman. While the image of a *woman-laborer* was promoted during the Soviet times, the “woman-patriot” became more appreciated in the era of national movements. Socially active women-nationalists vehemently advocating for the restoration of “national roots” were honored. The ethno-nationalistic bias of these trends was reflected in slogans that called for the restoration of the “Turkic world” and the “Turkic blood”, the creation of an ethnically-homogenous state, and the support for the “autochthonous national values”. For obvious reasons, the conservative pathos of these statements could not promote women’s participation in the government bodies. In a conservative climate, the woman’s role and, in a way, her “honorable mission” was to adhere to the traditional codes of femininity – modesty, chastity, and obedience within the strict boundaries of the home and family. Thus, the woman was invisible in the public sphere.

The construction of this type of femininity with an emphasis on a woman’s role as the keeper of the home and traditions became a powerful trend within the post-Soviet transformations. In an attempt to match the image of a “truly-national” Azerbaijani woman, as opposed to the Soviet image, and under the powerful influence of the post-Soviet ideology of “patriotism”, women would voluntarily hand over their gold jewelry to arm nationalist military groups leaving to fight in Nagorno Karabakh (similar phenomena took place in

Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh as well). Women stood in the front rows during the protests without being afraid of clashes with the police and later with the military. At the same time, some Azerbaijani women appealing to the symbolic traditional power of *adat* (customary law) tried to stop the bloodshed, even if unsuccessfully, by using the Caucasus-wide tradition of throwing their headscarves under the feet of the aggressive mob.

In Georgia, during the same period, activities aimed at servicing the conflicts were carried out by the so-called “black tights” – Zviad Gamsakhurdia’s most fanatical and devoted followers who were organized akin to fighting squads. In Armenia, in addition to the efforts to support the logistics of the frontline, about a hundred women took an active part in the military operations during the Nagorno Karabakh war of 1992-1994. Women in Armenia also participated in coordinated actions including the reproduction and distribution of printed information representing the Armenian version of the conflict in the years of the Karabakh movement (N. R. Shahnazaryan, Unpublished field materials and observations 1988-1991), (N. R. Shahnazaryan, Unpublished field materials and observations 2000-2001).

Azerbaijani scholar Ali Abasov underlines that in concurrence with the establishment of the new national elites of the 1990s “in the streets of the capital city of Baku, one could see well-organized groups of women who were establishing ‘their order’ in the city. Through public protest (chanting radical slogans and so on), these groups could achieve resignations of unwanted ministers and high-ranking officials and prevent people from getting to their work places. At times, women were against the government more aggressively and uncompromisingly than ‘male’ popular fronts and movements. Of course, this mobilization was orchestrated behind the scenes by seasoned puppeteers of the opposite sex, who had an excellent understanding of the role of women in the ‘fight against the empire’. Women united and sought from the authorities the impossible, resisted the law enforcement authorities, and later the army in a way that men were unable to do” (Abasov, *Demograficheskiye protsessy i analiz gendernoy situatsii v Azerbaydzhane. Tsentral'naya Aziya i Kavkaz* 2001). Nevertheless, despite the shifts in the dominant, officially-promoted criteria of femininity (that were socially marginalized in the Soviet period) and the clear social and political activism of the time, women’s political participation and representation in the power structures in the post-Soviet period, decreased sharply.

Women as parliament decor: New facets of political object- /subjectivity

The three South Caucasus countries gained independence in 1991, after the collapse of the USSR, at the same time inheriting the culture of women’s mandatory participation in political and public processes. The quota system used in the Soviet Union ensured women’s participation in all state and party structures, including a 30 percent quota in all-Union and republican legislatures, as well as local councils. What changes has this inherited political culture of the quota system undergone in the post-Soviet period?

The dissident period of transition towards independence and the reforms in the political systems of the republics began with a reversing logic: everything associated with the Soviet experience was rejected. The abolition of the quota system began during the *Perestroika* at the end of the 1980s (Posadskaya 1993). As in the majority of post-Soviet states, in the countries of the South Caucasus, women were practically excluded from the new governments. In a way, these changes can be viewed as a reaction to the artificiality of the Soviet quota system that contributed to the appointment of “compliant” and “pliable” women rather than competent female politicians as a result undermining women’s political participation in general (Dudwick 1997, 243).

In Armenia, for example, in 1985 out of the 219 members of the Supreme Council, 121 were women. In 1991, the first National Assembly of independent Armenia had only eight women despite their active participation in the national movement (Ishkanian 2003, 487). Nevertheless, there have been certain changes in this area. In the 1990s, the main advocate and fighter for women’s participation, or more precisely, for women’s *presence* in the public sphere in Armenia was the then-Minister of Internal Affairs Vano Siradeghyan, who saw in it a “decorative value”. He initiated the creation of women’s divisions within the structure of traffic police, which was highly unpopular because of the lack of professionalism and unethical behavior of these divisions during routine interaction with ordinary citizens. He also advocated for the mandatory presence of women in the National Assembly considering meetings exclusively with men very boring. He is the author of the phrase “Our ladies should decorate the parliamentary hearings with their presence”. In 1997 women made up only 8 percent in the National Assembly, and held only one ministerial portfolio (Dudwick 1997, 243). This number doubled by 2008.

During the first years of independence, the opinion that economically and politically successful women achieved everything through the patronage of influential men prevailed. Nora Dudwick underlines that such an attitude signals the dilemma that women participating in political activities in Armenia face (the same trends exist also in Azerbaijan and Georgia). It was believed that without approval and support of men, such careers would be practically impossible. This attitude confirms the “popular prejudice that women in politics are simply tools for men” (Dudwick 1997, 244-245).

Even today, women-public figures continue to face serious criticism especially if they prioritize career at the expense of the family duties ascribed to them through “tradition”. Social portrayal of their own image first and foremost as *bona fide* mothers and wives (Beukian 2014) continues to be a vitally important strategy for gaining approval in political life (G. N. Shahnazaryan 2015, 11). Neo-traditional trends are reflected in the patterns of women’s appointments as cabinet members in Armenia: after independence only few ministers were women and they are usually appointed for underfunded positions that don’t provide for real power (for example, the current Minister of Culture and Minister of Diaspora)⁷⁰.

There are no grounds to believe that women appointed to high-ranking positions have been using their position for the advancement of the idea of gender equality. Instead, they are publically supporting patriarchal relations. For example, in her public statements, Hranush Hakobyan has noted repeatedly that the Ministry of Diaspora sees its mission, among other things, in the “promotion of the traditional” Armenian family and gender roles. She has made media appearances advocating for the preservation of the hegemonic role models of behavior for Armenian women (including traits such as modesty, motherhood, and the understanding of “boundaries” and “limits” of one’s claims to public visibility). In support of the idea of big families, the Minister of Diaspora authored one of the ministry’s slogans as “Let’s gather around a dinner table with at least three sons”. She also “mourned” the issue of mixed marriages in the diaspora (Epress 2010) (Ministry of Diaspora of the Republic of Armenia 2012).

⁷⁰ The Ministry of Diaspora was established in 2008 with Hranush Hakobyan as the minister unchangeably since then. The Ministers of Culture have also been women since 2003 – Tamara Poghosyan (2003-2006) and Hasmik Poghosyan (2006-present).

In Azerbaijan, there were women with successful political careers during the Soviet years as well. In 1980, Elmira Kafarova replaced Mehdi Mehdizade at the post of the Minister of Education of the Azerbaijani Soviet Socialist Republic. In 1983, she was appointed as the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic (Worldwide Guide to Women in Leadership 2015). Kafarova stayed at her post also during the troubled period in Azerbaijan’s history. On December 30 in 1989 Kafarova was successful in renaming the city of Kirovabad (named in 1934 after Sergey Kirov) back to its historical name – Ganja⁷¹. On March 2 in 1992, Azerbaijan became a member to the United Nations (UN). Right after that, Kafarova resigned due to health issues. Elmira Kafarova’s resignation coincided with the first years of Azerbaijan’s independence. For comparison, there were no female ministers in Soviet Georgia (Sabedashvili, Gender and Democratization: the Case of Georgia 2007).

Lala Shevket took the first prestigious position in independent Azerbaijan. With Heydar Aliyev coming to power in 1993, she was appointed as the Secretary of State. In 1994, she was assigned the rank of Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, and the culmination of her successful career became the President’s decree on appointing her to the post of the representative of Azerbaijan to the UN. However, “in protest against the corruption in the higher echelons of power” and because of disagreements with the policy carried out by Heydar Aliyev, Lala Shevket resigned (Shevket n.d.). After leaving the President’s team, she established the opposition Liberal Party of Azerbaijan. In the presidential elections in 1998, Lala Shevket was part of the so-called combined “top five” candidates for the post (Abasov, Demograficheskiye protsessy i analiz gendernoy situatsii v Azerbaydzhanе. Tsentral'naya Aziya i Kavkaz 2001).

The Azerbaijani authorities took measures meant to be geared towards women’s needs largely guided by their own goals. One example of this is the decree “On measures aimed at strengthening the role of Azerbaijani women” adopted on January 14 in 1998, which included a set of activities. Another very typical presidential decree “On strengthening the role of women in the society” adopted recently in essence re-introduces the “women’s quota” system for

⁷¹ Ganja is the pseudonym of the first Azerbaijani poetess Mehsati Ganjavi. According to a legend, Ganja was the first city of women’s freedom in Azerbaijan, when in the 12th century Mehsati Ganjavi gathered around her a group of forty ladies and taught them oratory, dance, poetry, and music.

power” (Abasov, *Demograficheskiye protsessy i analiz gendernoy situatsii v Azerbaydzhanе. Tsentral'naya Aziya i Kavkaz* 2001)

In the period from 1990 to 2000, there were relatively few women in the upper echelons of power in Georgia. In the period from 1998 to 2000, Tamar Beruchashvili was the Minister of Trade and Foreign Economic Relations, and Nino Chkhobadze held the post of the Minister of Environment Protection and Natural Resources from 1995 to 2004. One of the most prominent women-politicians in the 2000s in Georgia, Nino Burjanadze became the first chairwoman of the Parliament of Georgia holding this post from 2001 to 2008. At the same time, from 2003 to 2004 and from 2007 to 2008 she was the Acting President of Georgia (Sabedashvili, Unpublished interview “Polozheniye zhenshchin v SSSR i nachalo 90-kh godov” 2016). In the 2000s, there were several other women-ministers in Georgia – Cecily Gogiberidze, Vera Kobalia, Khatuna Gogoladze, Eka Tkeshelashvili, Khatuna Kalmakhelidze. These and other appointments are gradually transforming the image of a woman-minister in Georgia.

The debate on quotas: A redeeming solution or a conflation of concepts?

The objective of the quota system is to allow women, who make up at least half of the population in most countries in the world, to have at least the so-called “critical minority” of 30 to 40 percent of the seats in party-representative bodies, including the parliaments. The quota system is important as it ensures the creation of a “critical mass” of women in politics capable to significantly influence the political decision-making process and political culture as a whole, so historically it is justified as an effective tool of redistribution of power (alas, it is too early to speak about equality). The principles of representative democracy are difficult or even impossible to uphold with other ways. (Shvedova n.d.)

Currently, there are two legislative initiatives in Georgia relevant to the quota system. The first initiative purposes proportionality in party lists, which assumes equal numbers (50 percent each) of –women and men. In case this law was passed, only 38 out of 150 parliament members might have been women, which in any case is less than 50 percent. This draft law was initiated by the NGO coalition “Task Force on Women’s Political Participation” which was carrying out a campaign to change the existing system of gender inequality. However, this initiative did not move beyond public debates (Rusetskaya 2016).

The second initiative envisions to allocate 30 percent of the slots to women in party lists. Masterminds of the draft law were Nana Keinishvili and Tamaz Chkuaseli, members of the “Georgian Dream” party. On the 25th of May the initiative was discussed at the first reading of the plenary session of the Parliament.

In general, in Georgia the level of women’s’ political activity is very low, including in the Parliament with only 11.8 percent women. Of course, if compared to 1918-1920, when there were only 5 women in the Parliament, which was about 3 percent, then the current situation can be regarded as a certain positive change. It is evident that quotas are being used to change the index in an accelerated way. Experts consider that if a quota system is not introduced, it will take Georgia about 50 years to get to a 30 percent threshold of women’s participation in political structures (Rusetskaya 2016).

Armenia currently restored the reservation system for women through making amendments in the electoral code. The other two reservation methods – the direct reservation of seats in the Parliament or through party lists, the latter depending on the good will of the parties, are not implemented in Armenia (Hovnatanyan, Women's Movement and Gender Quotas in Armenia 2016). This decision was accompanied by heated public debate. Lara Aharonyan from the Women’s Resource center says, “I would insist on a 50 percent quota. Going below that is not even worth discussing. They need to be visible. Perhaps then they would fear less of the membership to the “boy’s club”. But if there is one woman per hundred men... Weather they are good or bad parliamentarians is unimportant especially since in any case they are not going to be worse than men...” (Aharonyan, Unpublished interview "Women in Politics" 2016).

Reforms have yielded significant result in the *de facto* NKR.

In Azerbaijan there is no polemics on quotas. Women are represented in the Milli Majlis in proportion of 18 out of 125 parliamentarians.

In general, the quota issue is being widely discussed in Georgia, Armenia, and in the *de facto* NKR, and during encompassing public debates all pro et contra are meticulously considered. On the one hand, the proposed innovations oblige men at the power to think about involving women at the political level of decision-making. This means that men have to “scooch over” and designate part of the political space for women. On the other hand, there are significant risks of obstructionist behavior, when male politicians will specifically look for

those women whom they can easily manipulate and who are socially ready to accept the “traditional” dominant position of men.

In addition, a special research on women’s participation in different political and public spaces has showed that women politicians can behave in an anti-feminist way showing a low level of tolerance toward the idea of women’s solidarity⁷². (N. R. Shahnazaryan, *V tesnykh ob'yatnykh traditsii: voyna i patriarkhat* 2011, 135-157, 229-235). In the best case scenario, female politicians act as gender-free professionals distancing themselves from advocating for a more proportional women’s participation. In such a situation, earmarking of seats for marginalized groups can operate as a *deus ex machina*, offering a simple solution to the problem.

The authors of the article consider that the quota system can be used as a temporary measure until the results of the struggle of the ideological battle between patriarchy and gender equality become tangible. When the “natural” barriers against women in politics that have been forged and nurtured in the mainstream patriarchal tradition are removed, the quota systems can be revised. Until then, undoubtedly, the quota system is a state guarantee of equal rights and opportunities for both sexes (Shvedova n.d.).

At the same time, this raises a number of serious problems with the doctrinaire simplification of the gender spectrum. For example, observations in the South Caucasus countries reveal that often a woman coming to power as a result of the quota system tries to adapt the masculinist behavior. In this case, the survival strategies of a woman-politician in an unfriendly male-dominated environment aim to legitimize her access to power and achieve recognition as an equal. In an alternative scenario, a female politician publicly demonstrates adherence to the “traditional” rules, conveying and, and by virtue of authority, replicating the values of “national” femininity and the entire feature-set for a

⁷² For example, the former Lieutenant Colonel of the *de facto* NKR defense army Elmira Aghayan both verbally and in her behavior, manifested extreme patterns of a masculinized dominant mindset. Aghayan’s case illustrates how a woman (despite her biological sex) shows minimal sympathy towards women’s social issues. As a balancing act, the opposition “brought up” a new cohort of women activists with the ambition of applying for ministerial portfolios in the case of victory in the elections. These new women-politicians have nothing to do with the military experience and are determined to combat internal social problems. The opposition has already designed a prospective cabinet with female ministers comprising half of it. (N. R. Shahnazaryan, *V tesnykh ob'yatnykh traditsii: voyna i patriarkhat* 2011, 229-235)

“normal” woman – a good mother and wife that is modest, hardworking, and so on. This circumstance may maintain the myth about the uselessness of increasing women’s representation in government institutions, since “the existence of rules and regulations themselves are a necessary but not a crucial component: whether or not the quotas will reach their goal depends largely on the application process” (Shvedova n.d.).

Effectiveness of quotas is being undermined by post-election self-withdrawal. This is a usual practice in the countries of the South Caucasus. For example, in Armenia in 2012 from 102 candidates who self-withdrew after the elections 26 were women. And while the majority did not even provide an explanation, it is obvious that the whole procedure was originally initiated only formally to ensure that the quota requirements are fulfilled. In an extreme case of 2012, the share of women in the party “Prosperous Armenia” decreased from 21.8 percent in the party’s election list to 5.4 percent of the seats in the legislature (Woman and Politics 2012 (in Armenian)) (G. N. Shahnazaryan 2015). “However, at present there is a special clause in the election codex that calls for a woman substitution in case of a self-withdrawal of a woman. The same is true for any public position; if a woman resigns, she is replaced by a woman.” (Aharonyan, Unpublished interview “Women in Politics” 2016). Tamara Hovnatanyan points out that the law calling for the substitution of a woman withdrawing from office by another woman is relevant only for the proportional system that is through the party lists (Hovnatanyan, Women’s Movement and Gender Quotas in Armenia 2016).

The quota system and the national structures of state power

Armenia switched to a semi-presidential system with a president, a prime-minister, and a single-chamber parliament. The National Assembly has 131 members elected every five years (41 seats are elected through the majoritarian system, and the remaining 90 through proportional representation)⁷³. The official quota that ensures women’s participation refers only to the 90 seats of proportional representation and touches the gender composition of political party lists (candidates are being selected from those lists). According to the law

⁷³ On December 6, 2015 Armenia held a referendum on changing the Constitution and limiting the power of the president; thus significant changes are expected in 2016 beyond.

starting from number two every fifth candidate in the list should be a woman, which in theory means that 20 percent of elected members of party are women.

The National Assembly of Armenia returned to the quota system in 1999, adopting a law providing for mandatory inclusion of women in the party lists – no less than 5 percent (in 2007 the quota increased to 15 percent, and in 2012 to 20 percent) (Hovnatanyan, *Women in Armenian Parliament: Metamorphosis of Gender-Based Quotas* 2015). In essence, according to the Gender Policy Strategic Action this number can increase up to 30 percent (Government of the Republic of Armenia 2011). After the recent elections of 2012, 14 out of 131 members of National Assembly were women (11 percent). As a result, women representation was less than envisioned by the current quota of 20 percent.

Very few women run and get elected to regional and local governments, where specific quotas do not exist. Female mayors or governors of regions are non-existent, and there are only a small number of women working as heads of village administration. According the UNDP report, women make up only 9 percent of district and local councils. This social pattern eloquently testifies to the effectiveness of gender quotas as an important lever to ensure women’s representation in government.

As it was mentioned, in Georgia out of 150 Parliament members, women take up only 18 seats – 11.8 percent. Only one Parliament committee out of 15 is headed by a woman. The same pattern is present at other state structures. Three of 19 state ministers are women. But this is one of those cases when quality overrides the quantity. These three ministerial portfolios are a rare combination and challenge the stereotype of the gender-based division of labor.

Tinatin Khidasheli, in May 2015 became the first female Minister of Defense of Georgia. The second portfolio is held by Minister of Education and Science Tamar Sanikidze, and the third position is occupied by Minister of Justice Thea Tsulukiani. This is only 16 percent of ministerial posts, but it is more important that we are not talking about positions artificially created for women (such as a Minister of Youth Affairs, or an Assistant to the President for Cultural Affairs). However, this has been the limit of such positive dynamic. There is no single woman among the nine incumbent governors across the country. Rural peculiarities are also important. There are no woman ministers in the Autonomous Republic of Adjara.

In Azerbaijan, during Heydar Aliyev’s administration, a few women were appointed to government positions. Fatma Abdullazadeh took over as the head

of Humanitarian Policy Department of Administration of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan and until now continues her career in that position (Official Website of the President of Azerbaijan n.d.).

In 2006, only 14 women were elected to the Azerbaijani Milli Majlis (125 seats). In 2010 the number of women members of the Milli Majlis increased slightly and reached 20. As of today, there are 18 deputies (Azerbaijani Milli Meclisi n.d.). There are no female ministers in the government. Even despite the fact that in Azerbaijan female teachers and doctors generally enjoy public approval and acknowledgement, in secondary schools and universities the highest positions are held by men. For example, there are no women in the position of a rector of a university. Although, the situation is better at the level of faculty deans and departments chairs, it is still far from balance. Statistical data for 2010 shows that only 14.1 percent of the total number of department chairs at universities were women. 19.8 percent of deans also were women. The number of male and female high school principals is 62.6 to 37.4. (Rumyansev 2012, 7)

The attitude toward female leadership: Mass media

In the South Caucasus republics, the attitude toward female leadership is wary. First of all, it can be due to the dominance of patriarchal norms that impose a passive social behavior model on women and provide men all the public space. The level of female solidarity is extremely low in the South Caucasus. Women in the society highly mistrust female politicians thinking that “a woman has to know her place” (which seems to be housekeeping chores). To put it differently, the locomotive of sexism is often headed by the women.

In Azerbaijan patriarchal-traditional mores and practices are a powerful impediment for not only women’s participation in the politics, but at a larger scale their presence in the public sphere. Female executives often face disapproval and disbelief. In Azerbaijani mass media that is filled with sexist clichés this phenomenon is called “sensitivity towards the mentality”. Mass media directly popularizes sexist views and outlooks. The analysis of Azerbaijani press shows that in any negative news report where the protagonist is a woman the news makes the headlines and is purposefully overemphasized. For example, if a murderer or the cause of a traffic accident is a woman then this is presented to the readers as something worthy of special attention, something out of ordinary.

In fact, there is tendency to consciously exoticize the presence of women in the public sphere especially as an active actor. The issue of sexism and this type of assessment of women’s presence in the public sphere not only remain without proper exposure, but are openly trivialized. Thus, in the public consciousness the (pseudo)morality and the right of access to power and publicity go hand in hand.

The press pays particular attention to women’s political participation. A photo of one of the female candidates for the election to the Azerbaijani Milli Majlis in 2015 holding a cigarette and a glass of beer was published on October 30, 2015 in the news feed of nezermedia.az webpage. Numerous times it was underlined that she is a candidate for the position of a parliamentarian, and this “event” from her private life was delivered as a scandalous story. The national press has never created a problem around smoking or alcohol abuse by men. Photo of a smoking or drinking male parliamentarian or a parliament candidate was never presented as breaking news on the front pages. It is clear that the public sees nothing criminal or forbidden in consumption of alcohol or smoking by an adult man. However, as soon as a woman is involved, the issue of consumption of alcohol or smoking is framed as an issue of morality. Ayten Mustafayeva’s photo was presented as a front-page news, and the headlines underlined that a female candidate was at the casino drinking alcohol and smoking (Azinform 2015).

There are also examples of hegemonically legitimate images of women in politics. For example, Milli Majlis member Ganira Pashaeva is considered one of the most influential people in the country. She is addressing the issues of not only her constituency but also of all the citizens that turn to her. Pashaeva has a significant influence not only in the Milli Majlis and her constituency, she is highly respected by the media, all active parties, opposition and wide circles of public, including the youth. This attitude is due to her highly conservative views, upholding of “national-moral values”, and purposeful rejection of “joys of a personal life”. Ganira Pashaeva in her frequent interviews stresses that in order to avoid being compromised by the members of the society a woman who is active in public-political life has to “put on some sort of armor and live a lifestyle of an ascetic-dervish” (Gün 2014).

Election campaigns allow to learn lessons on hidden – implicit and direct – explicit gender discrimination. Media monitoring of the Women Information Center in Tbilisi during the election months in 2014 revealed several abuses that took place prior and during the elections for the local self-governing bodies and

city mayor elections (Women's Information Center, Charter of Journalistic Ethics of Georgia 2014). The main conclusions were highlighted in the final monitoring report: male candidates got the most TV airtime; mass media paid little attention to gender-sensitive issues during the pre-election campaign, news stories covered only issues of domestic violence, and even then superficially, without looking deep into the issue; often journalists used discriminatory terminology, such as “the weaker sex” which implied that women don’t have place in politics; neither the public television nor private channels allocated time to cover gender issues; in regional news reports gender stereotypes often were only further strengthened.

At the same time, cartoons and memes often create and reinforce a non-feminine, brutal image of female politician especially in the social media. For example, Nino Burjanadze was called “Tutsi”, Tina Khidasheli was compared to a man and portrayed in military uniform in ridiculed situations. In the Georgian society there is a prevailing opinion that “politics is not for women”. This attitude is taken to the extreme in the regions, which is immediately reflected on the election results.

According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union’s data as of February 1, 2016, in the ranking of the representation of women in the national parliaments Azerbaijan ranks 106th, Georgia the147th and Armenia the151st position (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2016).

“Non-feminine” professions: Police and army

Inclusion of women in “gender-specific” professions and professions that are “not recommended” for women can be regarded as efforts aimed at leveling gender hierarchies that may contribute toward political participation. On the surface, in all the republics of the South Caucasus, visible changes in the state-sponsored leveling programs in the area of gender hierarchies can be noted.

In 2009 admission of women to the military universities in Azerbaijan was suspended. But in 2014 discussions on the intention to restart recruitment of women for military institutions, and for the Ministry of Defense and other power institutions commenced again in the Milli Majlis (Oxu 2014). In Armenia, since 2006, when the decree on the reform of the national police was announced, the idea of free access of both genders to this profession was being discussed. As a result, in November 2011 women’s departments in the new elite battalions of reformed police were created. The special unit – a female squad of 12 officers ages 19 to 32 – is being trained for seven months with other officers at the Police

Academy. There are also special women’s units in the Armenian professional army. In this regard significant work has been done in Georgia. The motivation of the women who choose these “non-feminine” professions is often a mix of patriotic and economic reasons.

From Soviet-time women’s councils to civic activity: Women in the civil society

With its report “Nations in Transit”, the Freedom House assessed Georgia’s civil sector for the period from 1 January to December 1 of 2012 on a 7-point scale to be 3.75 (where the greater number means lower score). It is interesting to compare this figure with the data for the same period for Armenia which is also 3.75 and for Azerbaijan that scored 6.75 (Freedom House 2013) (Freedom House 2013) (Freedom House 2013).

In Azerbaijan there are about a dozen NGOs specializing in gender issues, but in reality only less than half of them are functioning. In fact, only three organizations have visible activities: LGBT – Azerbaijan, “Pure World” and “Women’s Crisis Center”.

By 2005 out of 28 women’s organizations officially registered in Azerbaijan only the “Society for Women’s Rights Protection” could be classified as a political and oppositional structure. Several years ago, the chairman of the organization claimed that 75 thousand women are involved in the organization. Other women’s organizations “specialize” in national, religious, professional and economic issues. Several organizations address issues of families, peace, refugees, social issues within the army such as the “Committee of Soldiers’ Mothers” (Abasov, Demograficheskiye protsessy i analiz gendernoy situatsii v Azerbaydzhanе. Tsentral'naya Aziya i Kavkaz 2001).

A whole group of individuals needs to be mentioned separately. For example, Chairman of the Helsinki Citizens’ Assembly in Azerbaijan Arzu Abdullayeva (member of the Presidium of the Social Democratic Party and part of the leadership of the first convocation of the Board of the Popular Front) is one of the most prominent human rights defenders. Director of the Institute for Peace and Democracy Leyla Yunus has been on the political arena of the country for a long time. She was also a member of the leadership of the first convocation of the Board of the Popular Front and for some time she led the party that branched out of the social-democrats party. In recent years, Yunus was imprisoned due to her human rights activities. In April 2016, the authorities

allowed her to leave the country for the Netherlands. Novella Jafarova is the co-chair of the “Association for Women’s Rights Protection named after Dilara Aliyeva” (named after the activist, who stood at the origins of the organization and who died in unknown circumstances). In fact, this organization is an influential “women’s wing” of the Popular Front.

According to Ali Abasov women’s movement in Azerbaijan is quite strong, but they are still in the margins when it comes to the decision-making level. “At the decision-making level in the state apparatus women are represented (in percent): ministries – 6.2, justice structures – 15, public administration – 30, executive government – 9.2”. One of the reasons contributing to the growth of women’s activity has been the Beijing Conference in 1995 which set rigid requirements for the states to strengthen the role of women in social, economic and political spheres. In Azerbaijan a State Committee on Women’s Affairs was established. Armenia does not have this type of committee. However, on June 26 of 1998, the decree “On the National Plan for the Improvement of Women’s Status and Enhancement of Their Role in the Society for the Period 1998-2000 in the Republic of Armenia” was approved. In Georgia, a presidential decree established the State Commission on the Elaboration of a State Policy for Women’s Advancement, and another presidential decree on the “National action plan for improving the condition of women in Georgia for 1998-2000” was signed. (Abasov, *Demograficheskiye protsessy i analiz gendernoy situatsii v Azerbaydzhanе. Tsentral'naya Aziya i Kavkaz* 2001)

The formation of the civil society in the independence period in Armenia had its peculiarities due to the existence of the western diaspora several representatives of which moved to Armenia bringing along set packages of ideas on women’s equality. However, no serious changes took place at the institutional level one of the reasons being the conservative position of the Armenian International Women’s Association (AIWA). The latter took a passive position “electing” the current Minister of Diaspora Hranush Hakobyan, who had no relation to the women’s movement, as the president of the association. Raffi Hovannisian became a balancing force in the political field through promoting women’s leadership in his opposition “Heritage” party with the 20 percent of the party members being women. For comparison, based on the party lists the other pseudo-opposition party “Prosperous Armenia” led by a woman – Naira Zohrabyan, has only 5 percent female members.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, women who were used to actual power or at least to “catching its rays” were the first to react to the changing situation.

After the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action for Equality, Development and Peace, the Ministry of Education and Science and the women’s organizations started the process of institutionalization of gender education in 10 universities and 35 secondary schools in Armenia (Hasratyan, Hovhannisyan, et al. 2005) . Two women’s organizations in Armenia have become the beacon of the Beijing trends. One of them was the women’s party of intellectuals, wives of ministers and other political leaders with the symbolic name “Shamiram”⁷⁴; the second has been the “Armenian Association of Women with University Education” (AAWUE) that united women who occupied a certain professional niche during the Soviet era. In this case, we are talking about former nomenclature which tried to find alternative niches to keep themselves within the boundaries of the diminishing “culture of privileges”. Nevertheless, although the party “Shamiram” did not live long, AAWUE, headed today by Jemma Hasratyan, proved to be a viable and effective structure.

The next type of organizations can be classified as “youth” (often young people 20-35 years old work here) or “activist”, which unite intellectuals devoted to their work, having an active civic position, with visible attention toward human rights protection. They purposefully nudge the public, draw attention to social injustice (the so-called “whistleblowers”). They try to carry out various kinds of public events. This category of NGOs includes the Women’s Resource Center (Lara Aharonyan, Gohar Shahnazaryan) with branches in the regions and Nagorno Karabakh, the Women’s Support Center (Maro Matosyan), “Society Without Violence” (Lida Minasyan, Anna Nikoghosyan), “Democracy Today” (Gulnara Shirinyan), and several others. The latter works actively in the regions organizing trainings on running a family business and other themes.

There are some structural problems in the women’s movement in all of the societies of the South Caucasus. Quite often, women’s civil society organizations are building their discursive strategies on a dual game: speaking the language of gender equality for the international audience, and at the same time, disseminating the position “we, women, are the weaker sex” within the local environment. Because of this and other reasons, the women’s movement remains weak and divided despite the presence of many active organizations

⁷⁴ Shamiram is a character of the Armenian mythology, the goddess of love and lust, and the queen of Assyria, who fought with the kings of Urartu. According to the epic poem told by Movses Khorenatsi, Queen Shamiram killed King of Armenia Ara the Beautiful-Geghetsk on the battlefield.

in the field (Hovnatanyan, Women's Movement and Gender Quotas in Armenia 2016).

Gender and the law: Domestic violence: Personal is political

According to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) data of 2007, 600 women die of domestic violence in Europe every year. However, this did not prevent the prevailing nationalist voices in all three South Caucasus republics from denying the existence of domestic violence in these countries. A scandal unfolded in Armenia in this regard. In the early 2000s, the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) published a short report highlighting the story of an Armenian married woman, who attempted to get shelter from her husband’s and his brothers’ tyranny at the Women’s Crisis Center. For this, her husband splashed her face with nitric acid, leaving her blind. This case was not enough for the authorities to stop the denial of the existence of domestic violence in the country. In the last decade, the discourse of denial of domestic violence has been marginalized.

For nine years, Armenia has been failing to pass a law on domestic violence. A coalition of organizations against domestic violence was formed in 2007. The backbone of this coalition are the active NGOs and civil society activists. The Coalition to Stop Violence Against Women with support from the Open Society Institute (OSI) issued a brochure in May 2016 entitled “Femicide in Armenia: A Silent Epidemic” that presents shocking statistics: since 2013, the authors have counted 27 cases with names and photographs of young women falling victims with a deadly outcome to domestic violence (Aharonyan, Unpublished interview “Women in Politics” 2016) (Coalition to Stop Violence Against Women 2016).

Director of the Center for Support to Women, Maro Matosyan notes that Armenia does not have specific policies towards victims of domestic violence. There are no governmental mechanisms or means of support or services to the victims and their children. The police are also idle; there are no mechanisms of investigation or fair treatment towards the victims. The divisions of social support also lack qualified specialists. Maro Matosyan identifies the lack of a law on domestic violence as the underlying cause for such a dire situation. (Khachatryan 2016)

Lida Minasyan from the NGO “Society Without Violence” suggests that the reasons for the stalemate lie not with the judicial or legislative procedures, but rather the inertia in the traditional relations and the victims’ acceptance of the unequal gender roles as natural. A case in point that took place in one of the provincial cities of Armenia is the story of a young woman and a mother of three children that was stabbed 21 times by her husband. By mere miracle, she survived the assault and with the support of the “Society Without Violence” activists and a lawyer from the organization went through the entire litigation process. However, a call from her husband – at the time already a criminal in prison – forecasting a future of a single mother without a husband was enough for her to withdraw the charges in order to return him into the family. This is not an isolated case although it is one of the most dramatic.

A 2008 study on “Violence against Women” carried out in Azerbaijan indicates that about a quarter of the surveyed women reported violence against them by a partner or other family members. In the 21 percent of the cases the cause of the violence is jealousy. According to the study, 18 percent of the abused women had suicidal thoughts, and 8 percent have actually attempted suicide. Only 1 percent of the women subject to violence have applied for assistance from the relevant authorities. The reasons behind non-reporting are the fear of recurrent violence, “shame”, concerns of condemnation by the society, and the fear to lose the family and kids (Orudzhev 2013).

The official website of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan features the 2014 UN report on the violation of women’s rights, domestic violence, and selective abortions stating that “in the period from January 1 to November 30 of 2013, 4053 cases of domestic violence were reported” (Orudzhev 2013). For the past few years, news about domestic violence has been flooding the Azerbaijani media. Fathers, brothers, uncles, husbands subject women to physical (beatings, murder), sexual, and psychological violence. Sometimes violation of women’s rights begins already in the mother’s womb. In most cases, learning that the future baby is a girl, parents at best are upset and at worst abort the pregnancy.

The situation in Georgia is not very different. In the troubled years of the early 1990s, when war and other reasons effectively led to the collapse of the Georgian economy with a loss of the 70 percent of the previously achieved development, women’s labor migration saved the country from famine. At a meeting with women’s NGOs the then-president of the National Bank of Georgia Giorgi Kadagidze said that remittances from women working abroad

make up to \$800 million annually, which is comparable to the amount received from the export of nonferrous metals, nuts, wine, and mineral water combined. Despite this, women remain a vulnerable part of the population. (Badasyan, B'yet, znachit, lyubit? Nasiliye v gruzinskoy sem'ye kak zapretnaya tema 2015)

There is a widespread stereotype in Georgia that victims of domestic violence are mostly poorly-educated women in the regions. Nevertheless, the scandalous murders that occurred in Tbilisi in 2014 changed the perspective on this problem. According to the crime statistics, 34 women were killed in 2014 and 742 were subject to violence in the family. A series of murders resonated loudly in the society stimulating a more aware assessment of the situation. It became clear that violence can happen to anyone and anywhere, regardless of the place of residence, education, and social status. University lecturer Maka Tsivtsivadze was shot by her ex-husband in the university hallway. Justice House employee Sopo Zurabiani was shot and killed by her ex-husband at a bus stop near her house. Sadly, even in these cases, there were people who tried to justify the killings.

Georgian writer and journalist Nino Tarkhnishvili points out in one of her works that in Georgia, women are often given the blame for falling victims in a murder. After watching a TV show featuring the mothers of the murdered women confessing that they knew about the beatings but did not think it would end with a murder, Tarkhnishvili decided to write a vignette on the responsibility of these mothers. According to her, “If reading this vignette leads at least one woman to a deep reflection and a shift from the opinion that a woman should tolerate violence, because it is her destiny, then it was not written in vain”. (Badasyan, B'yet, znachit, lyubit? Nasiliye v gruzinskoy sem'ye kak zapretnaya tema 2015)

The regional coordinator of the nation-wide network “Protection from Violence” Eliso Amirejibi who has years of experience in providing assistance and legal protection to victims of domestic violence recalled that in 1998 when NGOs initiated a discussion on domestic violence in Georgia, it was not regarded as a burning problem. Now the problem is being discussed publically. However, according to the expert, a patriarchal ideology dominates in the Georgian society negatively affecting these discussions. (Amirejibi 2016)

The representative of the “Sukhumi” Fund Lali Shengelia, who has been working on these issues since 2001, states that in 2006 Georgia adopted the law “On the Elimination of domestic violence, protection and assistance of victims

of domestic violence”. Lali Shengelia thinks that despite the law, victims of domestic violence are left on their own with the problem and the further improvement of the legislation should be a priority.

Lali Shengelia also points out that significant barriers are due to the absence of state funding and relevant programs. These are crucial for the increase in the number of rehabilitation centers with free legal and psychological counseling and the development of the institution of the school psychologist. Funds are needed also for renting temporary accommodation for sheltering the victims of domestic violence from the perpetrators and conducting awareness campaigns among youth on domestic violence. To tackle the scarcity of resources, the state can actively cooperate with the non-governmental sector making use of its services. Lali Shengelia believes that systematic work towards changing public opinion is necessary and can be achieved through the active involvement of mass media in the process. (Badasyan, B'yet, znachit, lyubit? Nasiliye v gruzinskoy sem'ye kak zapretnaya tema 2015)

Routine discursive construction of gender inequality

The analysis of the routine discourses interestingly points out that everyday speech practices constantly support the legitimacy of the social and, in particular, gender inequalities. There are numerous examples of domination over women through linguistic means. For example, the languages of all South Caucasus societies, as well as the Russian language, have the expression “woman-man” or “male woman” – a phrase that seemingly praises a woman. It suggests that a strong character, determination, courage, and dignity are exclusively masculine qualities.

In an average Azerbaijani family, a woman plays the role of a “home-keeper”, “the honor of the man”, and “the mother of the family”. These concepts circulate in the routine consciousness in the other republics as well. In the traditional understanding, a woman nourishes with her milk children as the “future of the nation”. For the “firm future of the nation” she is obliged to uphold “the family honor” and be obedient. In the Azerbaijani language and, thus in the routine perception, the words “wisdom”, “knowledge”, “mind” are of enshrined in the male sex. Such concepts as “power”, “mind”, “luck”, “leadership” are exclusively synonymous with masculinity.

A number of canonical texts sustain and reinforce such idiomatic expressions and figures of speech. Popular sayings that are thought to be “the testaments of forefathers”, are the quintessence of these ideas and include many “wise”

statements designed to approve the inequality between the sexes and justify derogative attitude toward woman. Here are some of them: “A woman can have long hair, but her mind is short”; “A smart man consults with his wife but does the opposite”; “A woman should cook *bozbash* and not interfere in the affairs of men” (Beydily Mamedoff 2004).

Both Islam and Christianity support and strengthen the idea of the inequality of sexes. Islam legitimizes inequality between men and women in favor of men. The 34th verse of the 4th Chapter (called “Sūrat an-Nisā” meaning “Chapter on Women”) of the Qur’an states, “Men are in charge of women by [right of] what Allah has given one over the other [...]. So righteous women are devoutly obedient, guarding in [the husband’s] absence what Allah would have them guard. But those [wives] from whom you fear arrogance, [first] advise them; [then if they persist,] forsake them in bed; and [finally,] strike them.”. Ephesians 5:22-24 of the Bible states, “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.” To some extent, the problem lies in the divergence between formal and traditional or religious law and the latter often carries more impact since it is entrenched in everyday practices and discourses.

Women and peace initiatives

It is hard to overstate the role of women in the peace processes. In the South Caucasus, regional collaboration initiatives among women is an important resource for conflict transformation. In the 1990s, women’s initiatives made a significant contribution to the exchange of the prisoners of war, regional dialogues, dissemination of alternative and positive information, and the analysis of the politics of memory. The main resource here are still women’s NGOs, and despite the stagnation in peacebuilding in the South Caucasus, women still play a significant role in conflict transformation in the South Caucasus.

In Georgian, women’s peacebuilding NGOs have been operating for already more than twenty years. Women’s networks have connected Sukhum/i, Tskhinval/i, and Tbilisi. Quite often, these NGOs were created by women from among the forcibly displaced persons. The leader of the NGO “Consent”, Julia Kharashvili says, “When the intervention began in 2008, all communication channels were blocked and we were unable to tell the world what is going on

in Georgia. This is when many respected human rights organizations in Russia, such as “Memorial”, were calling for the protection of the civilian population and were presenting an independent assessment of the situation. We disseminated that information, so that people here would not think that all Russians were our enemies”. (Badasyan, *Kak by ne bylo slozhno, my budem prodolzhat' stroit' mir* 2014)

Julia Kharashvili shared about the alliance of Georgian and Russian women-peacebuilders, a joint initiative of two women – Valentina Cherevatenko and Alla Gamakharia. The aim of the alliance was the dissemination of positive information about both societies involved in the conflict. One of the results of the peacebuilding activities of the alliance was the visit to Georgia of the correspondent of “Novaya Gazeta” Victoria Ivleva, who later wrote several articles. Another initiative was Elvira Goryukhina’s book on the forcibly displaced people from the Kodori gorge.

Julia Kharashvili also spoke about the collaboration between Tbilisi NGOs with their Tskhinval/i and Sukhum/i counterparts that has been ongoing since 1995. Initially within the framework of the program “Peace Camp”, the collaboration then transformed into the “Dialogues of Young Volunteers for Peace”. These types of youth dialogues have brought together young people from conflicting societies to get to know each other and discuss painful issues. People who have undergone forcible relocation are those who express the biggest willingness to participate in such projects. “We were discussing conflict settlement models, because we have always had a hope to return home. But after 2008, everything changed dramatically. It is not possible now to talk about a quick return to the former places of residence. It is one thing when the borders are monitored by peacekeepers, and yet another if there are border guards there”, says Julia Kharashvili. (Badasyan, *Kak by ne bylo slozhno, my budem prodolzhat' stroit' mir* 2014)

Another noteworthy project has been the “Strengthening Women’s Capacity for Peacebuilding in the South Caucasus Region” that lasted for three and a half years. The project devised models of legal solutions to local problems and the inclusion of women in economic activities. Julia Kharashvili noted that in the 1990s, the comprehensive field studies revealed that the maintenance of the connection between people was the priority for the forcibly displaced people. At that time, peacebuilding literally meant a dialogue between people. In contrast, now it is a more organized and professional process. (Badasyan, *Kak by ne bylo slozhno, my budem prodolzhat' stroit' mir* 2014)

The Tbilisi-based NGO “Society to Promote Harmonious Human Development” led by Tsovinar Nazarova took part in the implementation of a project from May 2014 to February 2015 carried out with the support of the Confidence Building and Early Response Mechanism (COBERM), a joint initiative of the European Commission and the United Nations Development Program. The initial idea of the project came from partners in Tskhinval/i. The goal of the project was the restoration of trust between the conflicting parties, through assistance in the restoration of the personal documents of people who had to flee their homes because of the conflict. During the project, people could call the hotline numbers and describe the circumstances under which their documents were lost and the restoration process would follow. (Badasyan, *Sovmestnyy proyekt gruzinskoy i osetinskoy NPO pomogayet vosstanovit' uteryannyye v khode konflikta dokumenty* 2014)

Established by women from among the forcibly displaced people, the Kutaisi-based women’s cultural-humanitarian fund “Sukhumi” has been working in the west of Georgia since 1997. The fund has branches in six other cities and the priority areas of the fund are peacebuilding, work with victims of violence, measures to strengthen women’s impact on decision making with the main beneficiaries are the forcibly displaced women from Abkhazia. The main goals of the fund are reducing aggression, restoration of trust, and the transformation of the enemy images in the two post-conflict societies. The fund has a partner in Abkhazia – the “Association of Women of Abkhazia” and since the very start of the collaboration the partners have established an agreement that in their joint work they will not touch upon political issues. (Badasyan, *Interv'yu s predsedatelem fonda "Sukhumi"* 2015)

In Armenia and Azerbaijan, the Global Fund for Women has been working with women’s organizations providing a stable source of funding since mid-1990s. In 2011, the NGO “Democracy Today” was the driving force for the establishment of the regional initiative “Women of the South Caucasus for Peace” bringing together 13 women’s peacebuilding groups from Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia.

Due to the resumption of violence in the region of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict that can no longer be considered frozen, women’s peace initiatives gain increased relevance for the Armenian and Azerbaijani societies. Soldiers and civilians fell victims of the April 2016 military clashes that have been coined as the four-day war. As a result of the tensions and military clashes across the line of contact there is an increase in hatred and hate speech in the societies.

On the ground women’s groups call for peace negotiations to settle the conflict permanently (Global Fund for Women 2014). The call acknowledges that this conflict has been presenting an immediate threat to women including gender-based violence and causing large portions of women refugees and internally displaced people in the region. The conflict has limited women’s access to critical services including health care and education. The recent escalation has rolled back years of work by women leaders to drive peace and collaboration across the conflict divide. (Global Fund for Women 2014) Through social media, the Armenian branch of the women’s world-wide peace network “Women in Black” published a call to act together against the escalation of military violence (Women in Black 2016).

All these initiatives concern peacebuilding after the active military phase of the conflicts in the South Caucasus. The issue of sexual violence during armed conflict remains a separate issue that has been persistently hushed up by all parties of the conflicts in the region of the South Caucasus. Only a small number of women’s organizations, in particular in Armenia and Azerbaijan, continue working with the victims of sexual violence during war providing consultations, psychological and legal support. These organizations also try to introduce amendments to the laws to ensure victims’ access to justice.

Empowerment – Karabakh-style: Different social realities

Security problems frame the rhetoric of gender in Nagorno Karabakh, popularizing the image of “our traditional” woman. During the 2007 presidential elections, the phrase “We don’t need glamor, we need a dad” standing for “a need for care and patronage” became a catch phrase, signifying the need of a strong figure suitable for a situation where the military and other power structures are at the peak of demand. The quota of 20 percent is the same for the political field of Nagorno Karabakh; however, there is a slightly higher political participation – 5 out of 33 members of the National Assembly and 2 out of the 11 ministers are women.

The story of women’s empowerment in Nagorno Karabakh is different from the other ones in the region. Immediately after the war and in the early 2000s, there were about 6 women with ministerial portfolios. Analyst Masis Mailyan reflects that all these women have been typical “self-made women” that have held high positions due to their professional skills and hard work (Mailyan 2015). However, this has not affected their support for the idea of gender equality.

They regard themselves as professionals of their work deliberately distancing themselves from feminist values due to the low popularity of the latter. In an interview, Assistant to the President for Cultural Affairs, a participant of the Nagorno Karabakh war, and former actress Zhanna Galstyan captured her anti-feminist approach toward women’s solidarity in a short, but capacious phrase, “Why divide the nation into men and women?” (Galstyan 2004). However, the political arena in Nagorno Karabakh seems more prepared to accept women’s leadership, than the one in Armenia or Azerbaijan. In Stepanakert⁷⁵ the prospects of a female president or defense minister are often discussed.

Lara Aharonyan from the Women’s Resource Center says, “In Armenia, it looks more like a boy’s club. In Karabakh, a woman has more chances to ascend to presidency because the structure of power and hierarchy are fundamentally different. Most of the political leaders have fought together in the war. Of course, women were pushed out of the political system after the war but the structure of power is different there. I have observed how the ex-member of the National Assembly Arevik Petrosyan was conversing with President of National Assembly Ashot Ghulyan absolutely on equal terms. Perhaps this is because the war was fought both by men and women for both men and women. The horizontal and vertical axes of struggle work simultaneously here and the horizontal one is very important here”. (Aharonyan, Unpublished interview “Women in Politics” 2016)

The civil society organizations specializing in gender issues is also quite strong in Nagorno Karabakh. The Women’s Resource Center with branches in the Republic of Armenia also has its own office in Nagorno Karabakh under the directorship of Gayane Hambardzumyan. The Center has a space where women can come with their children in the cases of abuse and physical violence in the family. In addition, every Sunday and on holidays, women come to the Center to socialize around a cup of tea, read gender related literature, and discuss political news.

These dynamics in Nagorno Karabakh leads to the question of whether there is a link between a more active participation of women in the political life with their active participation in the war. Did engagement in the military activities transform into a political status as a tangible result of social recognition of the women’s contribution? If this is so, then this case of women’s active

⁷⁵ The city is called Khankendi in Azerbaijan.

involvement as subjects in political action is a historical aberration, rather than the “normal” scenario of post-war development and (re)distribution of power.

Women become active during any war, but immediately after the end of the war, they are usually “pushed back into their place”. Currently there is not enough evidence to conclude that the case of Nagorno Karabakh is exceptional in this respect. It is premature to draw any conclusions, and there is a need for a serious study and analysis of the gender situation in and around Nagorno Karabakh. It is also possible that the answer lies on the surface: a high rate of male mortality during the war contributed to the involvement of women in the political sphere due to the lack of “better” candidates. Now that a new generation of men has emerged, the situation could change again. However, it is not happening yet. In any case, the base of a more adequate political participation of women has been the total militarization of the society caused by the security dilemma. This in itself is a slippery foundation and brings many challenges that have been the focus of numerous studies on gender equality and war in the Israeli and Yugoslav contexts.

Feminist theories have varying views on the issue of women and war. Some feminists see a potential for empowerment in the image of a woman-warrior. Among these, some see militarization as necessary for the emancipation from the patriarchal model of societal relations, others see the image of a woman warrior as a strong base for equality between men and women. These perspectives consider the militarization of women a path towards the gradual transformation of militaristic societies into a-hierarchical and more democratic ones. A different feminist perspective warns against the image of a woman-warrior and the “warrior mystique”, that is the mystification of the image of a warrior and war that promotes masculinist values rather than gender-balanced societies. From this critical perspective the fascination with the image of the woman-warrior is explained by women’s emancipation and the vision of the “warrior mystique” as a softening of the image of the military as a destructive force and towards seeing it as a democratic institute (D’Amico 1996, 379). It is argued by this wing of feminists that on the contrary the aim should be to deconstruct the “warrior mystique’ and instead build a positive concept of citizenship and equality” (D’Amico 1996, 384) (N. R. Shahnazaryan, *Gender i voyna* 2013). The methodological dilemmas of this sort have been considered also in the context of Nagorno Karabakh (Goroshko 2013).

Conclusion

The analysis of the gender dynamics in the societies of the South Caucasus reveals that while women are formally granted access to power, this access takes place under the control of men. “Auxiliary” is a key descriptive word here. This issue should not be viewed only with the lens of competition between men and women. It is obvious that women are “beginners” in politics, and they certainly need systematic training and social resources that would allow to overcome the structural impediments towards political experience. Political activity surely requires special skills and professionalism; however, the current male-dominated political arena does not stand out by these characteristics. A prolonged closed political arena that has hindered the acquisition and practice of these skills among women serves as an excuse for further exclusion. And now, even when a woman is allowed into politics (whether for visibility or for real participation), she often performs the traditional roles that “cling” to her. So a woman’s political participation is often manifested in her work on cultural issues as an important link in passing down traditional and national values, health care to perform the prescribed gender role of an actor providing care for the sick in the family and in the country, and in education fulfilling the role of teacher of her own and all the other children.

This transfer of private roles into the public sphere consistently receives public approval. Since this transfer does not challenge the stereotypical perception of “purely women’s roles”, the inertia of thinking in old frames is not disrupted. When it comes to leading the country, a cognitive dissonance arises: “it is not a woman’s virtue; historically it worked out this way; and there is no need to break the order”. An exception is Georgia’s political structure, where women received the very “male” ministerial portfolios. Despite affirmative action by the state in all the countries, the situation is the worst at the level of the representation of women in local governments. The authors of this paper, therefore, conclude that the inertia and resistance of customary law (*adat*) to formal law remains very significant. The main conclusions can be summarized as follows:

- Soviet-style state feminism and the indoctrination of communist ideas with the purposeful aim to bend the traditionalist way of life have led to conflicting results: on the one hand, the Soviet state strongly invited women to the labor, public, and political spheres and on the other, it failed to meet the household needs of women or alleviate their burden.

- Despite certain drawbacks, gender quotas are an important strategy necessary for the formation of a balanced pattern of political representation.
- Even when special laws and mechanisms aimed at protecting victims of domestic violence have been adopted, often the victims themselves are not aware of these mechanisms and, as a result, do not use them. Therefore, the creation of a full legal framework with mechanisms for the implementation of these laws remains crucial.
- The analysis of the situations in the civil societies and in particular in women’s organizations in the South Caucasus, it can be concluded that in the post-Soviet period, when women were pushed out of the public and political spheres despite their active participation in the national movements, they had to take the available and residual niche in the NGOs. Thus, the current state of the civil societies, among other things, reflects the specificity of the gender competition for a place in the political arena.

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Acronyms and Initialisms

ARF Armenian Revolutionary Federation
ASEAN Association of the Southeast Asian Nations
BOTAŞ Petroleum Pipeline Corporation
BP British Petroleum
BRICS Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa
BSEC Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation
BTC Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (oil pipeline)
BTE Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (natural gas pipeline also known as the South Caucasus Pipeline)
CCIIR Centre for Civil Integration and Inter-Ethnic Relations
CEC Central Executive Committee
CIS Commonwealth of Independent States
CMEA Council for Mutual Economic Assistance
COBERM Confidence Building and Early Response Mechanism
CoE Council of Europe
CSTO Collective Security Treaty Organization
DCFTA Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement
de facto NKR *de facto* Nagorno Karabakh Republic
EAEC Eurasian Economic Community (also as EurAsEC)
EAEU Eurasian Economic Union
EaP Eastern Partnership
ECSC European Coal and Steel Community
ENP European Neighborhood Policy
EPNK European Partnership for the Peaceful Settlement of the Conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh
ERC Education Resource Centers
EU European Union
FCNM Framework Convention of Protection of National Minorities
GDP Gross domestic product
GIPA Georgian Institute of Public Affairs
GUAM Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova; Organization for Democracy and Economic Development
INGO international non-governmental organization
ISSICEU Intra- and Inter-Societal Sources of Instability in the Caucasus and EU
IWPR Institute for War and Peace Reporting
MoES of Georgia Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia
NATO North Atlantic Treaty Organization

Acronyms and Initialisms

NKAO Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast
NSGP North-South Gas Pipeline
OIC Organization of Islamic Cooperation
OSCE Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
OSI Open Society Institute
PACE Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe
RSFSR Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, Russian Socialist
Federative Soviet Republic
SES Single Economic Space
SOCAR State Oil Company of Azerbaijan Republic
TANAP Trans-Anatolian Pipeline (natural gas pipeline)
TAP Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (natural gas pipeline)
TEPAV Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey
TPDC National Center for Teacher Professional Development Center
TRACECA Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia
TRNC Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus
TSFSR Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic, Transcaucasian
Soviet Federative Socialist Republic
UK United Kingdom
UMBA Union of Manufacturers' and Businessmen of Armenia
UN United Nations
US United States
USSR Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WTO World Trade Organization

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