Irredentism, Separatism and Identity-based Conflicts

CAUCASUS International

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Caucasus International is a Baku-based academic journal that discusses policymaking in and on the Caucasus as well as the region's role in the global context. Each issue of the journal will focus on a global or regional theme and includes perspectives from authors from different countries and backgrounds. The journal focuses largely on the Caucasus neighborhood, but does so with a global outlook. Caucasus International is published by the Center of Analysis of International Relations in Baku.

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Caucasus International

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Editor's Note

The current issue of the *Caucasus International* (CI) journal entitled "*Irredentism, Separatism and Identity-based Conflicts*" is dedicated to the dynamics of the protracted, frozen and boiling territorial and identity-based conflicts and the repercussions of the aggressive separatism in Eurasia, precisely in the former Soviet area.

The current authors of the CI Journal analyzed the political narratives, identity and memory policies of the states, the national identity and the identity construction of the ethnic minorities, the geopolitical aspects of the conflicts, a threat of territorial expansions and factor of irredentism in the foreign policy, the illegal economic activities in the gray zones (occupied territories) and the process of negotiations for the settlement of the unresolved conflicts. While analyzing these topics, the authors also reflected their views on the challenges of these factors for the domestic and foreign policies of the states and as well as for the stability of the regions where these conflicts anchored in.

The issue starts with **Ilgar Gurbanov's** commentary of "*A Year of Missed Opportunities for Resolution of the Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*" discussed Armenia's over-reliance on the status-quo, which creates systemic problems for the achievement of a breakthrough in the negotiation process between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and demonstrates that the process is hampered by their attempts to sustain the occupation through provocative steps. Gurbanov thinks, from Azerbaijan's perspective, creating an atmosphere of peace and trust-building requires motivating steps such as the withdrawal of Armenian forces from Azerbaijan's occupied territories.

The issue continues with **Orkhan Baghirov's** article of "*Illegal Economic Activities in the Armenian-occupied Territories of Azerbaijan*" by using different economic indicators, examined how the natural resources in the mining and agricultural sectors in the occupied territories have become the main source for Armenia to maintain its economic and political influence over Azerbaijan's occupied territories and to continue the occupation. Baghirov thinks that by actively supporting

illegal activities in the occupied territories, the Armenian government has freed itself from the financial burden that it would have to bear if the occupied territories did not have significant natural resources.

Gvantsa Gasviani's article of "*The Role of the Soviet Past in Contemporary Georgia*" analyzed how the interaction of global and local actors shapes the narrative about the Soviet past in contemporary Georgia by looking into the public and academic debates in Georgia. Her results of the study show that governments play a leading role in these processes.

Hanna Shelest's article of "*The "Frozen Conflict Perspective" in Eastern Ukraine and its Influence on Identity Construction*" argues that the frozen status of the conflict, in the event of the satisfaction of certain social needs, will lead to the deeper separation of the territories, while a special status within a unitary state will lead to the crystallization of their identity, transforming it from a local-cum-regional one to one with expressed features of a political national identity.

Eugene Chausovsky's commentary of "*The Conflict in Ukraine - The Geopolitics of Separatism and Divergent Identities*" then explores the various positions of the main actors involved in the conflict, including Ukraine, Russia, the separatist forces in Donbas, and the West. Chausovsky examined the nature of the causes of the conflict in Ukraine, particularly in relation to the country's geographic and geopolitical position and the tendencies toward separatism that this position breeds.

Rusif Huseynov's article of "*Construction of sub-national identity vis-à-vis parent state: Gagauz case in Moldova*", on the basis of his field trip to Gagauzia, presents how Gagauz self-identity is constructed and how it is contradistinguished from that of Moldova by examining the case partly through an analysis of the Gagauz elite's narrative. Huseynov's study takes a top-down approach in considering identity construction.

Nina Miholjcic's article examined a specific case of irredentism and territorial enlargement factors in the foreign

policy making context, as well as the roots of territorial expansionism in the foreign policy of the country chosen.

The current issue also includes **Polad Muradli's** comprehensive review of "*Contested Territories and International Law: A Comparative Study of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict and the Aland Islands*" (authored by Kamal Makili-Aliyev); "*Europe in the Caucasus, Caucasus in Europe: Perspectives on the Construction of a Region*" (edited by Andrey Makarychev & Thomas Kruessman); and "*South Caucasus in Motion - World Bank Report*".

The first reviewed book explores the possibility of the resolution of the Azerbaijan–Armenia conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh through the implementation of good practices and experiences based on the Aland Islands precedent within the context of comparative international law. The second reviewed book, by moving away from the traditional viewpoint of European studies, considers the countries of the region as objects of Europeanization, and embraces precisely this idea of examining the South Caucasus through links to the major regional powers. The World Bank Report provides a comprehensive assessment of poverty and inequality in the South Caucasus through the lens of mobility.

Finally, on behalf of the CI team, we hope this issue provides food for thought and contributes to and enriches the discussion.

Sincerely,

Farid Shafiyev, *Editor-in-Chief*

A Year of Missed Opportunities for Resolution of the Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict (Commentary)

Ilgar Gurbanov[*]

The change of regime in Armenia had revived Azerbaijan's hopes that the new Armenian government would take a more constructive approach toward the settlement process for the Armenia–Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh) conflict. Albeit the latest talks between Azerbaijan's and Armenia's officials promised humanitarian cooperation, the short-term quiet on the frontline and the peace-building process have deteriorated with Armenia's ceasefire violations and its government's counter-productive discourse. From Azerbaijan's perspective, creating an atmosphere of peace and trust-building requires motivating steps such as the withdrawal of Armenian forces from Azerbaijan's occupied territories. This commentary discusses Armenia's over-reliance on the status-quo, which creates systemic problems for the achievement of a breakthrough in the negotiation process and demonstrates that the process is hampered by their attempts to sustain the occupation through provocative steps.

Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO), where Azerbaijani (25%) and Armenian (75%) populations lived together before the conflict, and seven surrounding districts of Azerbaijan are under occupation by Armenian armed forces. As a result, the entire Azerbaijani population was expelled from NKAO and the seven districts, creating more than 700,000 IDPs. The United Nations Security Council's (UNSC) four resolutions (822, 853, 874, 884) – requiring the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Armenian forces from these territories, condemning the use of force against Azerbaijan, reaffirming Nagorno-Karabakh as an integral part of Azerbaijan, supporting its territorial integrity, sovereignty and the inviolability of its borders, and underlining the inadmissibility of gaining territory by the use of force – have not up to now been fulfilled by Armenia.

* Ilgar Gurbanov is Executive Editor of the Caucasus International Journal.

Post-April 2018

The popular revolution in Armenia in April 2018 that resulted in the overthrow of the previous regime composed of the "Karabakh Clan" brought Nikol Pashinyan (with no roots in the Nagorno-Karabakh region) to power. Azerbaijan's government has been watching this change optimistically in terms of its impact on a possible earlier resolution of the Armenia–Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh) conflict. In 2019, Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev and Armenia's Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and their foreign ministers met each other several times and pledged to prepare their populations for peace.[1] At the CIS summit in Dushanbe in 2018, President Aliyev and Prime Minister Pashinyan reached a verbal agreement on the establishment of direct operative communication links (conducted at low structural levels when necessary) between the two countries in order to prevent the risk of escalation and frontline incidents.[2] After that, the number of ceasefire violations along the Line of Contact (LoC) separating Azerbaijan's armed forces from Armenian forces in the occupied territories and on the Armenia–Azerbaijan state border decreased significantly. The partial deployment of paramilitary forces from both states (Azerbaijan's State Border Service (SBS) and Armenia's police detachment) for the protection of frontier posts on the Azerbaijan–Armenia state border was seen as a reciprocal confidence-building attempt to reduce ceasefire violations along the borderline.[3]

However, the 25-year-old "ceasefire agreement" signed between Armenia and Azerbaijan has failed to transform itself into a sustainable peace, since its key point was not the long-term consolidation of the status-quo through military build-up or

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1   Osce.org (2019), *Press Statement by the Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group*, 16 January, Available at: https://www.osce.org/minsk-group/409220 (Accessed: December 20, 2019).

2   Azertag.az (2018), *Hikmat Hajiyev: St. Petersburg informal meeting of CIS heads of state was held in an efficient and sincere atmosphere*, 7 December, Available at: https://azertag.az/xeber/Hikmet_Haciyev_MDB_dovlet_baschilarinin_qeyri_resmi_Sankt_Peterburq_gorusu_isguzar_ve_semimi_seraitde_kechdi-1222133 (Accessed: December 10, 2019).

3   Gurbanov, I. (2019), "Karabakh Peace Talks Break Down as Azerbaijan and Armenia Operate at Cross-Purposes", *The Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Volume 16 Issue: 29, 4 March, Available at: https://jamestown.org/program/karabakh-peace-talks-break-down-as-azerbaijan-and-armenia-operate-at-cross-purposes/ (Accessed: December 10, 2019).

unconstructive engagement, but setting measures for complete de-occupation.[4] Therefore, 2019 was a year of missed opportunities[5] as no tangible breakthrough was achieved because of the current Armenian government's controversial statements and a position similar to that of the previous government. These tendencies frustrated Azerbaijan and unveiled the Armenian government's real intentions toward the negotiations.

2019 was a year of missed opportunities as no tangible breakthrough was achieved because of the current Armenian government's controversial statements and a position similar to that of the previous government.

Never-ending negotiation process

Azerbaijan has demonstrated its patience for achieving a political settlement. However, Baku cannot accept the process lasting forever,[6] as Armenia makes no concrete commitment to move to substantive negotiations, maintains an unclear policy, sabotaging the resolution,[7] and disregards the fact that de-occupation of Azerbaijan's territories constitutes the negotiations' cornerstone.[8]

Azerbaijan's Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov's speeches at the UN General Assembly session in September and at the OSCE Bratislava meeting in December attested that, despite direct contacts between the two countries' officials and the relatively calm situation at the frontline, no progress has been achieved in the conflict settlement due to the lack of genuine interest of Armenia's leadership, who defend the war outcomes

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4   1news.az (2019), *Khikmet Gadzhiyev: Osnovnoy prichinoy otsutstviya ustoychivogo mira yavlyayetsya prodolzheniye okkupatsionnoy politiki Armenii*, 12 May, Available at: https://1news.az/news/hikmet-gadzhiev-o-tom-pochemu-prekraschenie-ognya-ne-prevratilos-v-prodolzhitel-nyy-mir; Mfa.gov.az (2019); *Statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan on the 25th anniversary of the establishment of cease-fire between Armenia and Azerbaijan* No:134/19, 11 May, Available at: http://www.mfa.gov.az/en/news/909/6158 (Accessed: November 29, 2019).

5   President.az (2019), *Ilham Aliyev received delegation led by Slovak Minister of Foreign and European Affairs*, 28 November, Available at: https://en.president.az/articles/34996 (Accessed: November 29, 2019).

6   Mfa.gov.az (2019), *Speech by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan Mr. Elmar Mammadyarov at the meeting of the CIS Council of Foreign Ministers in a narrow format*, 10 October, Speech No:315/19, Available at: http://mfa.gov.az/en/news/909/6392 (Accessed: November 11, 2019).

7   Interfax.com (2019), *V peregovorakh po Karabakhu yest nekotoryy progress, no on na slovakh - glava MID Azerbaydzhana,* 11 November, Available at: https://interfax.com.ua/news/general/623888.html (Accessed: November 12, 2019).

8   Azertag.az (2019), *MID Azerbaydzhana: Logiku Pashinyana trudno ponyat*, 31 January, Available at: https://azertag.az/ru/xeber/MID_Azerbaidzhana_Logiku_Pashinyana_trudno_ponyat-1240564; *MFA: The party interested in the peaceful settlement of the conflict must demonstrate the political will and determination*, 28 June, Available at: https://azertag.az/xeber/XIN_Munaqisenin_sulh_yolu_ile_hellinde_maraqli_olan_teref_siyasi_irade_ve_qetiyyet_numayis_etdirmelidir-1300287   (Accessed: December 11, 2019).

and the unacceptable status-quo created through the unlawful use of force towards Azerbaijan's territories and derail the peace process by resorting to provocative statements.[9]

Armenia prolongs the negotiations by proposing artificial measures such as "incident investigation mechanisms" on the LoC, "strengthening control over the ceasefire" and "withdrawal of snipers."

Armenia voices different concepts to frustrate the negotiation process. Instead of working on concrete steps (e.g., troop withdrawal – a key element of the resolution), Armenia prolongs the negotiations by proposing artificial measures such as "incident investigation mechanisms" on the LoC, "strengthening control over the ceasefire" and "withdrawal of snipers." Azerbaijan does not endorse such cosmetic measures that consolidate the status-quo and create a safe environment for the Armenian forces in the occupied territories, but prefers to implement such steps in parallel with substantial negotiations, envisaging the troops' complete withdrawal from these territories.[10]

Armenia's political leadership is trying to impose a new concept for conflict resolution by using the expression "the people of Nagorno-Karabakh,"[11] denying the existence of the indigenous Azerbaijani community of this region. None of the international documents adopted as part of the settlement process refers to this region's population as "the people,"[12] because before the conflict the population of the Nagorno-Karabakh region consisted of both Azerbaijani and Armenian communities.[13]

Armenia wanted to change the negotiations' format by involving

9 Mfa.gov.az (2019), *Statement by Elmar Mammadyarov Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan at the General Debate of the 74th session of the United Nations General Assembly* No:304/19, 29 September, Available at: http://mfa.gov.az/en/news/909/6381; *Statement by Elmar Mammadyarov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan 26th Ministerial Council of the OSCE* No:389/19, 5 December, Available at: http://www.mfa.gov.az/en/news/909/6484 (Accessed: December 6, 2019).

10 News.day.az (2019), *Armyanskoye lobbi pytayetsya vtyanut amerikantsev v igru protiv Azerbaydzhana*, 4 July, Available at: https://news.day.az/politics/1134901.html; Azertag.az (2019), *Hikmet Hajiyev: Vienna meeting gives new impetus to negotiations on settlement of Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict*, 30 March, Available at: https://azertag.az/xeber/Hikmet_Haciyev_Vyana_gorusu_Ermenistan_Azerbaycan_munaqisesinin_helli_istiqametinde_danisiqlara_yeni_impuls_verdi-1263373 (Accessed: December 15, 2019).

11 Trend.az (2019), *Leyla Abdullayeva: Ritorika MID Armenii o «podgotovke narodov k miru» yest ne chto inoye, kak litsemeriye*, 5 October, Available at: https://www.trend.az/azerbaijan/politics/3128833.html (Accessed: November 11, 2019).

12 Mfa.gov.az (2019), *Rukovoditel Upravleniya press-sluzhby MID AR otvechayet na vopros SMI*, No:308/19, Available at: http://mfa.gov.az/az/news/909/6385 (Accessed: December 9, 2019).

13 President.az (2019), *Speech by Ilham Aliyev at the plenary session of 16th Annual Meeting of Valdai International Discussion Club*, 3 October, Available at: https://en.president.az/articles/34358 (Accessed: December 16, 2019).

the separatist regime [established in Azerbaijan's occupied territories] in the negotiations as a "direct party." Azerbaijan regarded this as illegitimate according to the OSCE Helsinki Ministerial Council decision (24 March, 1992) establishing Armenia and Azerbaijan as the two principal sides to the conflict, with the Azerbaijani and Armenian communities of the Nagorno-Karabakh region as two interested parties.[14] Therefore, the negotiations are conducted between the sides in direct conflict, and the Nagorno-Karabakh region's two communities might be involved as interested side-parties in the process at the relevant stage, with the consent of the principal sides, helping to define the region's status.[15] By insisting on the participation of the separatist regime in the negotiations with Azerbaijan, Armenia is trying to present itself as an 'indirect party' to avoid responsibility for its direct participation in the occupation of Azerbaijan's territories. Despite Armenia's attempts to put the process in stalemate, all previous meetings have demonstrated that the negotiations' format remains unchanged.[16]

N.Pashinyan's controversial statement "Nagorno-Karabakh is Armenia," made in Khankendi, caused significant damage to the spirit of the negotiations.

N.Pashinyan's controversial statement "Nagorno-Karabakh is Armenia," made in Khankendi,[17] caused significant damage to the spirit of the negotiations. This statement was denounced in President Aliyev's Valdai speech, where he stated: "Karabakh is recognized by the whole world as an integral part of Azerbaijan. Therefore, Karabakh is Azerbaijan!"[18] The demonstration by the Armenian side of such an inadequate

14   Mfa.gov.az (2019), *Statement by Elmar Mammadyarov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan 26th Ministerial Council of the OSCE* No:389/19, 5 December, Available at: http://www.mfa.gov.az/en/news/909/6484 (Accessed: December 6, 2019).

15   Trend.az (2019), *Leyla Abdullayeva: Peregovory po nagorno-karabakhskoy probleme vedutsya mezhdu neposredstvennymi uchastnikami konflikta - Armeniyey i Azerbaydzhanom*, 24 July, Available at: https://www.trend.az/azerbaijan/politics/3095532.html; Azertag.az (2019), *Azerbaijani community in Nagorno-Karabakh issues statement on Lavrov's comments*, 13 November, Available at: https://azertag.az/xeber/Azerbaycanin_Dagliq_Qarabag_bolgesinin_azerbaycanli_icmasi_Sergey_Lavrovun_fikirleri_ile_bagli_beyanat_yayib-1354365 (Accessed: December 10, 2019).

16   Tass.ru (2019), *Aliyev: format peregovorov s Armeniyey ostayetsya bez izmeneniy*, 29 March, Available at: https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/6276104; Trend.az, (2019) *Khikmet Gadzhiyev: Izmeneniye formata peregovorov po uregulirovaniyu karabakhskogo konflikta ne mozhet bit temoy obsuzhdeniya*, 28 February, Available at: https://www.trend.az/azerbaijan/politics/3026401.html (Accessed: December 13, 2019).

17   Azatutyun.am (2019), *"Dovesti naseleniye Armenii do 5 mln chelovek" Pashinyan predstavil strategicheskiye tseli k 2050 godu"*, 5 August, Available at: https://rus.azatutyun.am/a/30093790.html (Accessed: December 10, 2019).

18   President.az (2019), *Sochi hosts plenary session of 16th Annual Meeting of Valdai International Discussion Club*, Events, 3 October, Available at: https://en.president.az/articles/34346 (Accessed: December 6, 2019).

approach and populist rhetoric is perceived by Azerbaijan as crossing a red line and undermining the very essence of the negotiation process.[19]

N.Pashinyan has frequently interpreted the content of "Madrid Principles," which constitute the basis of the current negotiations, as envisaging step-by-step regulation. However, any unilateral change of the content of the negotiations was excluded by the OSCE Minsk Group Co-chairs, as they believe that a lasting

N.Pashinyan has frequently interpreted the content of "Madrid Principles," which constitute the basis of the current negotiations, as envisaging step-by-step regulation.

settlement is possible on the basis of the Helsinki Final Act's (HFA) core principles and the additional elements (Madrid Principles) that present a clear roadmap. These Principles call for the return of the occupied territories (*rayons*) surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijani control; an interim status for Nagorno-Karabakh, providing guarantees for security and self-governance; a corridor linking Armenia to the Nagorno-Karabakh region; future determination of the final legal status of the Nagorno-Karabakh region through a legally binding expression of will; the right of all IDPs and refugees to return to their former residences; and international security guarantees under a peacekeeping operation.[20] If Armenia voices a different formulation contradicting this roadmap, then holding negotiations would appear to be pointless.[21]

Armenia is planning to present any negotiated agreement for nationwide debates to make decisions in a pan-national format through a referendum,[22] which can obviously involve nationalists and radical stakeholders. Through this approach, Armenia

19   Mfa.gov.az (2019), *Press Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan answers the question of the media* No: 224/19, 14 August, Available at: http://mfa.gov.az/en/news/909/6287; *Statement of the MFA of the Republic of Azerbaijan* No: 219/19, 6 August, Available at: http://mfa.gov.az/news/909/6279; *Commentary by the Press Service Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan*, No:221/19, 7 August, Available at: http://mfa.gov.az/news/909/6283 (Accessed: October 10, 2019).

20   Osce.org (2019), *Press Statement by the Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group on the Upcoming Meeting of President Aliyev and Prime Minister Pashinyan*, Moscow/Paris/Washington, 9 March, Available at: https://www.osce.org/minsk-group/413813; Apa.az (2019), *H.Hajiyev: "Model for resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict outside the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, does not exist"*, 27 September, Available at: https://ona.az/en/nagorno-karabakh/hikmet-hajiyev-model-for-resolving-the-nagorno-karabakh-conflict-outside-the-territorial-integrity-of-azerbaijan-does-not-exist-8870 (Accessed: December 13, 2019).

21   YouTube (2019), *Gromkoye intervyu Elmara Mamedyarova CBC. Neozhidannyye otkroveniya kasatelno karabakhskogo konflikta*, 11 December, Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=naN3yEDuMGA (Accessed: December 12, 2019).

22   Panorama.am (2019), *Armenia's Pashinyan rules out conspiracies in Karabakh settlement*, 4 November, Available at: https://www.panorama.am/en/news/2019/11/04/Pashinyan-Artsakh-settlement/2191103 (Accessed: November 16, 2019).

is trying to avoid direct responsibility for the failure of the negotiations and put all the blame on Armenian society.

Armenia's push for the right of self-determination of Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians outside Azerbaijan's jurisdiction[23] is contrary to the OSCE's decisions and the UNSC resolutions. Baku has pledged to ensure the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians' security and recognize their right for the highest level of self-governance within Azerbaijan's international borders.[24] The self-determination principle is not supposed to undermine Azerbaijan's territorial integrity, as according to the HFA it should at all times be in conformity with the territorial integrity of the state. Armenia constantly blames Azerbaijan for "threatening to use force," however, Armenia itself, through the occupation of Azerbaijan's territories, violated one of the HFA's key clauses, urging it to refrain from "the use of force against the territorial integrity."[25]

Baku has pledged to ensure the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians' security and recognize their right for the highest level of self-governance within Azerbaijan's international borders.

Armenia has made claims about the alleged transfer of Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijan in the Soviet period, with reference to a decision of the Caucasian Bureau of the Communist Party's Central Committee (July 5, 1921). The relevant decision did not use the wording "transfer" at all, but it decided to preserve Nagorno-Karabakh as part of Azerbaijan.[26] Starting from the 1980s, Armenia's overt claims to the NKAO shifted to supporting violent actions and aggressive separatism to justify the NKAO's unilateral illegal separation through a so-called "referendum" on December 10, 1991, without the participation of the region's Azerbaijani population and without Azerbaijan's permission. These attempts were contrary to the USSR's Constitution (Article 78 banning a change of the union republic's territory without its consent); the USSR Supreme Soviet's resolution (January 10, 1990, "On the nonconformity with the USSR Constitution of

23   Mfa.am (2019), *Statement by Zohrab Mnatsakanyan, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia at the 26th Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council in Bratislava*, 5 December, Available at: https://www.mfa.am/en/speeches/2019/12/05/fm_remarks_osce_26/9996 (Accessed: December 6, 2019).

24   Mfa.gov.az (2018), *Interview of Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov on the results of 2018*, No:336/18, 25 December, Available at: http://mfa.gov.az/news/909/5985 (Accessed: December 20, 2019).

25   Gurbanov, I. (2019), "Armenia's Approach to Conflict Settlement Leads to Deadlock", *CACI Analyst*, Available at: http://cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13576-armenias-approach-to-conflict-settlement-leads-to-deadlock (Accessed: December 15, 2019).

26   President.az, *Speech by Ilham Aliyev at the plenary session of 16th Annual Meeting of Valdai International Discussion Club, op. cit.*

the acts on Nagorno-Karabakh adopted by Armenian SSR on December 1, 1989 and January 9, 1990," which emphasized the illegality of secession of Nagorno-Karabakh from Azerbaijan SSR); and similar resolutions of the USSR State Council (November 27, 1991) and the USSR Constitutional Oversight Committee. These documents unequivocally recognized the impossibility of changing the existing borders owing to the unlawful actions of Armenian nationalists aimed at unilateral secession of the NKAO from Azerbaijan SSR. According to the USSR's Constitution, Azerbaijan, like all union republics, had the right to secede from the Union, while autonomous entities did not have such a right.[27] After the USSR's dissolution, when Azerbaijan regained its independence and joined the UN (with its USSR-period borders, including the Nagorno-Karabakh region), Nagorno-Karabakh was recognized by the international community as an inalienable part of Azerbaijan. Armenian claims of "uniting Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia" or "granting it independence" are in contrast to the international law's *uti possidetis* principle that endorses Azerbaijan's post-independence borders as set by Soviet laws before independence. The European Court of Human Rights' decision on the "Chiragov and others vs. Armenia" case explicitly proved that the fundamentals of this conflict lie in the occupation of territories by the use of force, and the illegal regime created in Azerbaijan's occupied territories exists thanks to the political, military and financial support of Armenia.[28] The international community recognizes neither the illegal "elections" nor "referendum" held in these territories.[29]

After the USSR's dissolution, when Azerbaijan regained its independence and joined the UN, Nagorno-Karabakh was recognized by the international community as an inalienable part of Azerbaijan.

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27 Haqqin.az (2019), *Ayaz Mutalibov answers Pashinyan: "Azerbaijan had the right to leave the USSR, but Karabakh - not"*, 27 August, Available at: https://haqqin.az/news/156982 (Accessed: December 9, 2019).

28 Mfa.gov.az (2019), *The Head of the Press Service Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan Leyla Abdullayeva responded to a media request* No:375/19, 21 November, Available at: http://mfa.gov.az/en/news/909/6459; *Commentary by the Spokesperson of the Azerbaijani MFA* No:232/19, 28 August, Available at: http://mfa.gov.az/news/909/6295; Azertag.az (2019), *Hikmat Hajiyev: Armenian PM has made a complete upside-down portrayal of political, legal and historical aspects of the Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh conflict from the UN podium*, 27 September, Available at: https://azertag.az/en/xeber/Hikmat_Hajiyev_Armenian_PM_has_made_a_complete_upside_down_portrayal_of_political_legal_and_historical_aspects_of_the_Armenia_Azerbaijan_Nagorno_Karabakh_conflict_from_the_UN_podium-1335376 (Accessed: December 9, 2019).

29 Mfa.gov.az (2019), *Spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan answers the media question*, 23 August, No:229/19, Available at: http://mfa.gov.az/en/news/909/6292 (Accessed: December 10, 2019).

Azerbaijan does not consider any political solution to the conflict beyond the following framework: that a resolution is possible on the basis of the principles of international law respecting Azerbaijan's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and internationally recognized borders, as enshrined in the UNSC resolutions and relevant documents of the OSCE (Helsinki Final Act, Budapest Summit's (1994) and Lisbon Summit's (1996) decisions). The step-by-step solution favored by Azerbaijan envisages, as the initial stage, the immediate, complete and unconditional withdrawal of Armenian armed forces from the Nagorno-Karabakh region and surrounding occupied regions (*rayons*) of Azerbaijan; the return of Azerbaijani IDPs to their homes; and the opening of communications lines in the region. The next step is to determine the status of self-government for the Nagorno-Karabakh region's population within Azerbaijan in interaction/accordance with Azerbaijan's government and constitution with the full participation of the region's population (two communities) to ensure their peaceful coexistence.[30]

The step-by-step solution favored by Azerbaijan envisages, as the initial stage, the immediate, complete and unconditional withdrawal of Armenian armed forces from the Nagorno-Karabakh region and surrounding occupied regions (rayons) of Azerbaijan.

Most of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-chairs' statements send a direct message to Armenia's controversial policy toward the resolution process by emphasizing the importance of confidence-building measures; reducing tension; preparing the populations for peace; refraining from provocative actions, including the use of snipers and engineering works; avoiding escalation and inflammatory rhetoric; and engaging constructively in substantive negotiations without artificial delays or conditions.[31]

Humanitarian cooperation

The recent exchange of journalists between Azerbaijan and Armenia came in the aftermath of the Vienna meeting (March

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30   Apa.az (2019), *Azerbaijan presents position on peaceful settlement of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in Bratislava*, 4 Dekabr, Available at: https://apa.az/az/xarici_siyaset/Azrbaycan-Bratislavada-Dagliq-Qarabag-munaqissinin-sulh-yolu-il-hllin-dair-movqeyini-tqdim-edib-561874 (Accessed: December 4 2019).

31   Osce.org (2018, 2019), *Press Statements by the Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group*, Brussels, 12 July, Available at: https://www.osce.org/minsk-group/387683; New York, 27 September, https://www.osce.org/minsk-group/397700; Milan, 6 December, https://www.osce.org/minsk-group/405479; Paris, 16 January, https://www.osce.org/minsk-group/409220; Vienna, 1 March, https://www.osce.org/minsk-group/412880; Washington, 20 June, https://www.osce.org/minsk-group/423734; New York, 25 September, https://www.osce.org/minsk-group/433121; Bratislava, 5 December, https://www.osce.org/minsk-group/441242 (Accessed: December 13, 2019).

29) of President Aliyev and Prime Minister Pashinyan, at which they agreed to develop confidence-building measures, and the subsequent Moscow meeting (April 15) of Azerbaijani and Armenian foreign ministers, when they endorsed the establishment of bilateral humanitarian contacts through mutual visits of journalists. In the Moscow meeting, the foreign ministers also agreed to take measures to stabilize the situation in the conflict zone during agricultural activities and to allow families to have access to their relatives held in custody.[32] In June, the exchange of two hostages (one from each country) was conducted.[33] Azerbaijan has repeatedly offered to exchange the prisoners of war on the "all for all" principle (which Armenia fiercely opposes), which could create favorable emotional circumstances for both societies in preparation for peace.[34]

In fact, without confidence-building supported by constructive steps, the process is certainly doomed to failure. The Armenian government, while advocating for the people's right to self-determination, completely neglects the rights of Azerbaijani IDPs from the surrounding *rayons* and the Azerbaijani community from the Nagorno-Karabakh region.[35] Armenia's current government, similar to the previous one, prevents contacts between the Nagorno-Karabakh region's Armenian and Azerbaijani communities. The region's Azerbaijani community has repeatedly called on the Armenian community to reconcile peacefully, but their messages have not receives a constructive response.[36]

Azerbaijan has repeatedly offered to exchange the prisoners of war on the "all for all" principle (which Armenia fiercely opposes), which could create favorable emotional circumstances for both societies in preparation for peace.

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32   Osce.org (2019), *Joint Statement by the Foreign Ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan and the Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group*, Vienna, 29 March, Available at: https://www.osce.org/minsk-group/415643; *Joint Statement by the Foreign Ministers of Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Russia, and the Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group*, Moscow, 15 April, Available at: https://www.osce.org/minsk-group/417281 (Accessed: December 13, 2019).

33   Azertag.az (2019), *Information of the State Commission on hostages, prisoners of war and missing persons*, 28 June, Available at: https://azertag.az/xeber/Asir_ve_itkin_dusmus_girov_goturulmus_vetendaslarla_elaqedar_Dovlet_Komissiyasinin_melumati-1300157 (Accessed: December 12, 2019).

34   Gurbanov, "Armenia's Approach to Conflict Settlement...", *op. cit.*

35   Mfa.gov.az (2019), *Commentary of the Press Service Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan*, No:231/19, 27 August, Available at: http://mfa.gov.az/en/news/909/6294 (Accessed: December 9, 2019).

36   Trend.az (2019), *Community leader: "representative" of so-called regime in occupied territories undermines negotiation process*, 13 February, Available at: https://az.trend.az/azerbaijan/karabakh/3019016.html (Accessed: December 20, 2019); Azertag.az (2018), *Tural Ganjaliyev: Azerbaijani community of Nagorno-Karabakh is ready for constructive dialogue with Armenian community*, 26 December, Available at: https://azertag.az/xeber/Tural_Genceliyev_Dagliq_Qarabagin_azerbaycanli_icmasi_ermeni_icmasi_ile_konstruktiv_dialoqun_aparilmasina_hazirdir-1228365 (Accessed: December 20, 2019).

What if the negotiations fail?

The process is occasionally aggravated by the controversial statements of Armenian officials. Armenia's [former] National Security Director Arthur Vanetsian's statement that "none will surrender even an inch of land" was perceived in Baku as evidence of Armenia's direct participation in the annexation of Azerbaijan's territories. The Azerbaijani government, in response to Armenia's Defense Minister David Tonoyan's declaration of "new war – new territories,"[37] did not exclude the liberation of occupied territories through military means under the UN Charter's self-defense provision (Article 51), since the UNSC resolutions remain unfulfilled.[38]

The conflict's effects, in the broader context, do not concern Azerbaijan's occupied territories only, but also Azerbaijan's state borders with Armenia to the north-west and Nakhchivan to the south-east.[39] Although the frontline situation has recently been more stable than in previous years, the fragile trust was, however, damaged by the resumption of occasional sniper shootings from the Armenian side toward soldiers, civilians, and military, medical, and vehicles.[40] Such malicious acts, which are contrary to the advancement of peace, cast doubt on the genuine intention of Armenia's elite to prepare their people for peace.

Since the Dushanbe agreement, Armenian armed forces have continuously been conducting engineering works on the state border and the LoC in order to move their positions forward to hit deep inside Azerbaijan's territories.[41] Azerbaijan's armed forces

37   Gurbanov, I. (2019), "Azerbaijan's Military Exercises Send Defiant Message to Armenia", *The Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Volume: 16 Issue: 99, Available at: https://jamestown.org/program/azerbaijans-military-exercises-send-defiant-message-to-armenia/ (Accessed: December 10, 2019); Gurbanov, "Karabakh Peace Talks Break Down…", *op.cit.*

38   Mfa.gov.az (2019), *Commentary by the Press Service of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan* No:096/19, 30 March, Available at: http://mfa.gov.az/en/news/909/6105 (Accessed: December 10, 2019).

39   Gurbanov, I. (2019), "Aggravated Situation Around Azerbaijan's Nakhchivan Exclave", *The Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Volume: 15 Issue: 85, Available at: https://jamestown.org/program/aggravated-situation-around-azerbaijans-nakhchivan-exclave/ (Accessed: December 5, 2019).

40   Dsx.gov.az (2019), *Information from the State Border Service Press Center*, 27-28 July & 21 September, Available at: http://dsx.gov.az/xeber/856; http://dsx.gov.az/xeber/854; http://dsx.gov.az/xeber/857; http://dsx.gov.az/xeber/881; Mfa.gov.az (2019),*Head of the MFA Press Service Department Leyla Abdullayeva answers the question of the media*, No:307/19, 3 October, Available at: http://mfa.gov.az/en/news/909/6384; *Comment by Leyla Abdullayeva, Spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan*, No:207/19, 18 July, Available at: http://mfa.gov.az/en/news/909/6262 (Accessed: December 10, 2019).

41   Lragir.am (2019), *Armyanskaya armiya vishla v Tavushe na noviye pozitsii*, 19 August, Available

have therefore carried out additional defensive engineering works to improve their positions to respond operationally to Armenia's provocations, prevent their fortificaion engineering works in the occupied territories, and protect the civilian areas from the sniper fire.[42] Armenia, by organizing various provocations along the state border, wants to drag the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) into the conflict. However, most of the CSTO members have close cooperation with Azerbaijan in the military-technical fields and recognize the country's territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders.[43]

Armenia's incoherent rhetoric combined with the never-changing status-quo might lead to another full-scale escalation in the conflict zone.

Armenia's incoherent rhetoric combined with the never-changing status-quo might lead to another full-scale escalation in the conflict zone. Therefore, with skepticism toward the voluntary de-occupation by Armenia through diplomatic negotiations, and in anticipation of its probable front-line offensives, Azerbaijan preserves military vigilance by ensuring constant military readiness for possible large-scale counter-offensive operations. During the first Karabakh war, the then Armenian authorities bogged Azerbaijan down with 'diplomatic negotiations' while the former's troops were extending the area of occupation. Azerbaijan's commitment to a peaceful settlement does not imply negligence of security considerations; the government in Baku perceives military power as playing a special role in conflict resolution. The successful April counter-offensive in the occupied territories (2016) and the Gunnut operation in Nakhchivan (2018) slightly changed the strategic map of the conflict zone in favor of Azerbaijan, liberating some portion of these territories from Armenian control and enabling the country's army to step from unfavorable military positions toward the strategic heights and to control the opposite side's military-strategic objects in the depth.[44] Moreover, Azerbaijan's

at: https://www.lragir.am/ru/2019/08/19/154177/ (Accessed: December 10, 2019).

42   Dsx.gov.az (2019), *Information from the State Border Service Press Center*, 29 June, Available at: http://dsx.gov.az/xeber/843; Mod.gov.az, (2019) *Azerbaijan Defense Minister: "The words of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief "Karabakh is Azerbaijan and an exclamation mark" assign new tasks for the Azerbaijan Army"*, 12 October, Available at: https://mod.gov.az/en/news/azerbaijan-defense-minister-the-words-of-the-supreme-commander-in-chief-karabakh-is-azerbaijan-and-an-exclama-tion-mark-a-28806.html.

43   Mfa.gov.az (2019), *Commentary of the Press Service Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan on the speech of the Prime Minister of Armenia at the meeting of the Collective Security Treaty Organization in Bishkek*, No:381/19, 29 November, Available at: http://mfa.gov.az/az/news/909/6475 (Accessed: November 29, 2019).

44   Gurbanov, I. (2019), "Ice is melting for Nagorno-Karabakh", *Euractiv*, 14 January, Available at:

military exercises mainly simulate counter-offensive operations in the challenging mountainous terrains and complex climate conditions and electronic environment by delivering preventive strikes and taking possession of advantageous frontiers in the occupied territories.[45]

The protraction of the status-quo in the conflict zone and the lack of international enforcement mechanisms to force Armenia into substantive negotiations and to execute the international organizations' resolutions have emboldened the parties to the conflict to invest in a military build-up. Although Armenia is heavily armed and has certain countermeasures against Azerbaijan, the former cannot change the military balance in its favor. Azerbaijan has developed armed forces in all categories of troops armed with advanced weapons in large quantities (unlike the early years of the Karabakh war with Armenia, when Azerbaijan's army was poorly equipped and trained).

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In Lieu of Conclusion

Azerbaijan patiently waited for the completion of domestic political turbulence in Armenia in order to negotiate with a legitimate government while N.Pashinyan prioritized consolidating his power by crushing his domestic opponents, but not ending the conflict. The Pashinyan-led government is now unwilling to change Armenia's traditional stance on the conflict, acknowledging that the "Karabakh" card could not save the previous government and Armenia's options of maneuver are shrinking.[46]

The Armenian political elite's unstable discourse and actions have disrupted Azerbaijan's hopes regarding their possible constructiveness in the post-revolution period. Azerbaijan's

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https://www.euractiv.com/section/azerbaijan/opinion/ice-is-melting-for-nagorno-karabakh/; Gurbanov, I. (2019), "Azerbaijan Raises Military Vigilance in Response to Armenia's Unclear Karabakh Policy", *The Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Volume: 15 Issue: 111, Available at: https://jamestown.org/program/azerbaijan-raises-military-vigilance-in-response-to-armenias-unclear-karabakh-policy/ (Accessed: December 5, 2019); Gurbanov, "Karabakh Peace Talks Break Down…", *op.cit.*

45   Mod.gov.az (2019), *Azerbaijan Army will conduct large-scale exercises*, 13 September, Available at: https://mod.gov.az/en/news/azerbaijan-army-will-conduct-large-scale-exercises-28487.html (Accessed: December 9, 2019); Gurbanov, "Azerbaijan's Military Exercises Send Defiant Message…", *op.cit.*

46   Gurbanov, "Ice is melting for Nagorno-Karabakh", *op.cit.*

perception is that Yerevan, influenced by the current pro-democracy sentiments in Armenia, is trying to distract the international community from criticism toward Armenia for the occupation. The Armenian government's incoherent rhetoric also stems from the exhausting revolutionary sentiments and the deep domestic political crisis as the new leader struggles to consolidate his legitimacy vis-à-vis the previous regime's members.[47] The Armenian government's tailored declarations target specific internal audiences without having a clear communication strategy for conflict resolution, but they understand that this externally prejudices the negotiations.[48]

The words and the deeds of Armenia are in fundamental contradiction to the peaceful settlement process, spoil the climate of trust, mislead the international community and its own people through populist arguments, and prolong the status-quo.

The Armenian officials' provocative statements unveil incoherence between the country's domestic establishment and foreign policy discourse. They aim to provoke negative reaction from Baku with the purpose of making Azerbaijan disrupt the negotiations first. The words and the deeds of Armenia are in fundamental contradiction to the peaceful settlement process, spoil the trust, mislead the international community and its own people through populist arguments, and prolong the status-quo.

The fragmented peace process and frozen settlement situation is not stable, because the status-quo may explode anytime. Azerbaijan expects results-oriented negotiations and meetings, where the main imperative is the withdrawal of the Armenian forces from Azerbaijan's occupied territories. Through techniques of procrastination, Armenia imitates a negotiation process and creates an illusion of loyalty to the peace process, but it is not possible to do this for a long period as the process will enter a phase of complete deadlock in which they will unlikely be able to generate a new excuse. Armenia's different ideas about the negotiation format are leading them nowhere. Nor can humanitarian measures produce any tangible result if the political process remains stagnant; they cannot substitute for

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47   Report.az (2019), *Farid Shafiyev: Azerbaijan and Armenia enter 'post-negotiation' period on Karabakh*, 25 September, Available at: https://report.az/en/nagorno-karabakh-conflict/farid-shafiyev-azerbaijan-and-armenia-enter-post-negotiation-perio/ (Accessed: December 6, 2019).

48   Trend.az (2019), *Leyla Abdullayeva: O kakoy strategii govorit Pashinyan, kogda yest risk rosta napryazhennosti v lyuboy moment?*, 30 November, Available at: https://www.trend.az/azerbaijan/politics/3156762.html (Accessed: November 30, 2019).

substantive negotiations.

Through its manipulative stance, Armenia gains extra time to continue its illegal economic and military fortification activities in the occupied territories, and to receive more military aid and weaponry from Russia. Armenia's conduct of wide-scale illegal activities behind the ceasefire regime in the occupied territories (settlement to change demographic composition and the infrastructural map, reconstructions, destruction of historical-cultural heritage, illicit trade in natural resources) is a clear violation of the "4th Geneva Convention on the Protection of Civilians in Time of War" (1949)[49] and demonstrates Armenia's genuine plans to consolidate the status-quo based on military occupation, to annex Azerbaijan's occupied territories, and to undermine the negotiated conflict settlement. These illegal activities have been confirmed by the report on "The Illegal Activities in the Territories of Azerbaijan under Armenia's occupation: Evidence from Satellite Imagery" (2018) of the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs.[50]

Through its manipulative stance, Armenia gains extra time to continue its illegal economic and military fortification activities in the occupied territories, and to receive more military aid and weaponry from Russia.

Generally, the new Armenian government's alignment with the non-consensus policy of the previous office fuels mistrusts of the true nature of their plans. Not only the current Armenian government, but also Armenian society sticks to the pattern of the previous government's "Karabakh" policy, disregarding the conflict's severe consequences for them. Armenia's economic development will not succeed with two borders (out of four) closed, those with Azerbaijan and Turkey, leading to economic stagnation, attrition of human and financial resources, high-level emigration, and isolation from regional energy and transportation projects. Early conflict resolution and a sustainable peace would improve the well-being of everyone in this region.

49   Mfa.gov.az (2019), *The Statement of Press Service of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan on the statement of Armenia's National Security Service Director Arthur Vanestyan* No:045/19, 1 March, Available at: http://www.mfa.gov.az/az/news/909/6041; *Joint press release of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan and "Azercosmos"*, Available at: http://mfa.gov.az/folder/file/Azercosmos%20birge%20beyenat.pdf (Accessed: December 10, 2019).

50   Mfa.gov.az (2019), *Press statement of the MFA of the Republic of Azerbaijan* No:216/19, 26 July, Available at: http://mfa.gov.az/news/909/6273 (Accessed: December 10, 2019).

Illegal Economic Activities in the Armenia-occupied Territories of Azerbaijan

Orkhan Baghirov[*]

The occupation of Azerbaijan's Nagorno-Karabakh region and seven surrounding districts by Armenia remains a key problem affecting the economic and political stability of the South Caucasus region. By occupying Nagorno-Karabakh and seven adjacent districts, Armenia has caused significant economic and social damage to Azerbaijan. In doing so, Armenia has also gained a chance illegally to exploit the vast natural resources of the occupied territories and to use them for the provision of economic and social stability in both Armenia and the occupied territories. Special focus has been given to the mining and agricultural sectors, as these are more advantageous for the implementation of the economic development goals of Armenia and the separatist regime created in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan. Using different economic indicators, this article examines how the natural resources in the mining and agricultural sectors in the occupied territories have become the main source for Armenia to maintain its economic and political influence over the occupied territories and to continue the occupation. By actively supporting illegal activities in the occupied territories, the Armenian government has freed itself from the financial burden that it would have to bear if the occupied territories did not have significant natural resources. Moreover, Armenia has not only freed itself from the financial burden of continuing occupation, it has also benefited economically from the exploitation of the resources in the occupied territories by importing more than 90 percent of the agricultural and mineral products from the separatist regime.

Keywords: Azerbaijan, Armenia, occupation, illegal economic activities, Nagorno-Karabakh region

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Introduction

After the collapse of Soviet Union, Armenia began, based on historical claims to the territory of the Nagorno-Karabakh autonomous oblast (NKAO) of Azerbaijan, to conduct armed attacks on the NKAO, primarily on neighboring Azerbaijani-populated regions. It then escalated to full-scale war. As a result of the war, Armenian military forces occupied 20 percent of Azerbaijan's internationally recognized territories, including Nagorno-Karabakh, seven adjacent districts, and some small exclaves encircled by Armenian territory.[1] This armed conflict led to the expulsion of 700,000 Azerbaijani people to different regions of the country and to the deaths of 22,000 to 25,000 people.

War destroyed a significant part of the economic infrastructure in Azerbaijan and created severe economic and social problems. The occupation also prevented Azerbaijan from accessing its large natural resources situated in the occupied territories, and this enabled Armenia to use these resources for its own purposes. Since the end of the war, Armenia and the separatist regime in the occupied territories have continued to exploit rich deposits of mineral resources such as gold, mercury, chromite, lead-zinc, and copper in the occupied territories. Through using these resources illegally, Armenia has become one of the world's leading exporters of precious and rare metals.[2]

According to calculations by the United Nations, the total economic damage that the war brought to Azerbaijan is estimated at around US$53.5 billion.

Moreover, after the occupation, Azerbaijan lost an important part of its agricultural output, as the occupied areas played a significant role in Azerbaijan's agricultural production during the Soviet era. Further damage to the agricultural sector came from the Armenian forces' destruction of irrigation system in the Nagorno-Karabakh region, which affected agricultural activities in the adjacent regions. As a result, 120 hectares of land in five regions of Azerbaijan outside the occupied territories were left without irrigation.[3] According to calculations by the United Nations, the total economic damage that the war brought to Azerbaijan is estimated at around US$53.5

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1   Abilov, S. and Isayev, I., "The Consequences of the Nagorno-Karabakh War for Azerbaijan and the Undeniable Reality of Khojaly Massacre: A View from Azerbaijan," *Polish Political Science Yearbook*, Vol. 45, No.1, December 2016, pp. 291–303.

2   Mustafayeva, A. and Garayev, R., "Legal aspects of reparation for damage caused to Azerbaijan as a result of Armenian aggression," *IRS Heritage*, No .14, 2013, pp. 51–61.

3   Ibid.

billion.[4]

Illegal extraction and export of valuable metals from the occupied territories bring substantial financial resources, which are directed toward the implementation of different projects in these territories. The mining and agriculture sectors have strategic importance for Armenia. Without the mineral and agricultural resources in the occupied territories, Armenia would not be able to finance the separatist regime there. It is important to determine how the illegal activities in the above-mentioned sectors favor Armenia in both economic and political terms. Thereby, using different economic indicators, this article examines how the natural resources in the mining and agriculture sectors in the occupied territories became the main source allowing Armenia to maintain its economic development.

Illegal economic activities in mining and agriculture

The scale of the economic damage of the Karabakh War on Azerbaijan proves that the occupied territories have huge economic potential and resources. By occupying these areas, Armenia gained an opportunity to use these resources illegally in order to develop its poor economy and meet the social and economic needs of the Armenian people. The occupied territories have huge economic potential in different economic spheres, such as mining, agriculture and food processing, construction, banking, telecommunications, tourism, energy, textiles, carpeting, jewelry, etc. In all these areas, Armenia implements illegal economic activities. However, natural resources including the mining and agricultural sectors in the occupied territories have greater strategic importance for Armenia's economic development. The abundance of natural resources in the mining and agricultural spheres has attracted both government and private companies to implement different projects in the occupied territories.

However, natural resources including the mining and agricultural sectors in the occupied territories have greater strategic importance for Armenia's economic development.

Mining industry

Nagorno-Karabakh and the adjacent regions are rich in deposits

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4   United Nations Development Programme, (2001), *Azerbaijan Human Development Report 2000,* March 9. Available at: http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/azerbaijan_2000_en.pdf (Accessed October 25, 2019).

of different mineral resources, such as gold, mercury, chromite, lead-zinc, and copper, and this creates opportunities to develop the mining industry and to obtain huge income from their exports. It is estimated that there are 155 deposits of different types of minerals in the occupied territories, and 15 metallic and 51 non-metallic mines are operating. In non-metallic mines, different construction materials, such as sand and limestone, are produced and mostly used for illegal infrastructure projects in the occupied territories.[5]

One of the biggest mines in the occupied territories is the Gyzylbulag underground copper/gold mine. This mine is situated near the Heyvaly village in the Kalbajar district.[6] Since 2002, Base Metals CJSC, a Vallex Group subsidiary, has exploited the Gyzylbulag mine, producing 20,000 tons of ore concentrates per year.[7] Most of the mining products are exported to Germany and other European countries.[8]

After the full exploitation of the Gyzylbulag mine up to 2016, the Base Metals' operation declined substantially, creating unemployment and financial problems in the occupied regions. In order to prevent economic problems, the company began work on another project, the Kashen copper mine. The Kashen mine is situated in the occupied Aghdara (Martakert) province and contains an estimated 275,000 metric tons of copper and 3,200 tons of molybdenum.[9] Vallex Group began work on the Kashen project before the exploitation of the Gyzylbulag mine and in 2012 acquired a 25-year license.[10] In 2015, Vallex Group inaugurated a new copper and molybdenum ore processing plant near the Kashen mine that will handle products from the Kashen mine. The company has invested US$130 million in the new

5   Mfa.gov.az (2016), *Illegal Economic And Other Activities In The Occupied Territories Of Azerbaijan* (*Report by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan*). Available at: http://mfa.gov.az/files/file/MFA_Report_on_the_occupied_territories_March_2016_1.pdf (Accessed October 21, 2019).

6   Tallin.mfa.gov.az (2016), *Statement by the Press Service of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the anniversary of occupation of the Kalbajar district of Azerbaijan,1993 and April escalation.* Available at: http://tallin.mfa.gov.az/news/4/3133 (Accessed: October 21, 2019).

7   Azatutyun.am (2012), *Armenian Mining Giant To Expand Karabakh Operations*, 20 March. Available at: https://www.azatutyun.am/a/24522183.html (Accessed: October 26, 2019).

8   Mfa.gov.az "*Illegal Economic And Other Activities… ,"op. cit.*

9   Asbarez.com (2016), *New Mining Complex Inaugurated in Karabakh*, 5 January, Available at: http://asbarez.com/143995/new-mining-complex-inaugurated-in-karabakh/(Accessed: October 28, 2019).

10   Ibid.

facilities.[11] It is expected that new plant will be able to process at least 1.75 million tons of ore annually. Vallex Group received financial support for this project from the Russia-based VTB Bank to a total value of US$36 million.[12]

Moreover, Base Metals received US$100 million in soft loans for the exploitation of the Kashen mine. About US$20 million was spent on infrastructure projects, including building the "Sotk–Haterk–Kashen" high-voltage power line to supply electricity for the works in the mines.[13] Also, part of the water in the Khachin (*Xaçın*) reservoir was provided to the company. Along with these measures, Base Metals also received tax exemptions for six years.[14]

Several other companies in the mining sector are undertaking illegal activities in the occupied regions. Beginning in 2014, the Armenian company Gold Star CJSC has been operating exploratory gold mines near Vejnali village in the occupied Zangilan district. Known as the "Tundurget" mine, its explorations were implemented using mining equipment supplied by the Russia-based Tigom CJSC and Mashzavod Trud OJSC companies. This project is mainly financed by the Swiss-Armenian business person Vartan Sirmakes.[15]

Another rich gold reserve in the occupied territories, called Soyudlu ("Zod"), has been exploited by the Armenian company GPM Gold since 2007. Situated in the occupied Kalbajar district, this reserve has deposits of 155 tons of gold. The company also owns the "Ararat" gold processing plant situated in Armenia that processes all the gold reserves extracted from the Soyudlu mine. In 2018, 3.7 tons of gold was processed in the "Ararat" plant.[16] Taking into account the international average price of gold in 2018 (US$1,268 per ounce), by exporting the reported volume of processed gold, the company's revenues from the "Ararat" plant were about US$165 million. It is estimated that, at the current extraction rate,

11   Ibid.

12   Ibid.

13   Lragir.am (2019), *State Revenues in "Artsakh" to Increase by 5 Billion AMD*, 9 January, Available at: https://www.lragir.am/en/2019/01/09/70563(Accessed: October 27, 2019).

14   Ibid.

15   Ibid.

16   Geopromining.com (2019), *GPM Gold In Zod*, 1 January. Available at: http://www.geopromining.com/points-in-armenia/ (Accessed: October 27, 2019).

the Soyudlu reserve will be fully exploited by 2027.[17]

It is also worth mentioning that GPM Gold is one of the biggest taxpayers in Armenia's mining sector. In 2015, GPM Gold was the fourth biggest taxpayer in the mining sector of Armenia, paying US$1.7 million in tax in the first quarter.[18] GPM Gold carries out almost all (99 percent) of the exportation of gold from Armenia. The owner of the company is Russia-based Geo Pro Mining, which owns several international mining companies, including Sarylakh-Surma and Zvezda.[19]

Along with the main projects in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan discussed above, other different, smaller projects have also been implemented. Mostly financed by Western and Russian companies such as Mining and Metallurgy Institute CJSC, Strathcona Mineral Services Ltd., Flesh Ltd., Mika Cement CJSC, and Gold Star CJSC, these are projects for the extraction of different mining products such as copper, molybdenum, cobalt, nickel, mercury, and other nonferrous and rare metals. In addition, the natural resources of the occupied territories substantially contribute to Armenia's construction sector. There are different stone processing plants producing products such as marble, blocks, tiles, and others. These products are actively used for construction projects in both the occupied territories and Armenia.[20]

All the implemented projects show that economic activities in the mining sector are among the main sources of financing for different social projects in the occupied territories. Taking into account the limited potential of the Armenian economy, which does not have enough capacity financially to ensure the continuing occupation, illegal activities in the mining sector have become vital tools for Armenia to continue exerting influence over the occupied territories in both economic and political contexts. In other words, with its limited resources, Armenia would not be able to withstand the long-standing and resource-devastating war against Azerbaijan without the illegal exploitation of mineral resources in the occupied territories.

17   Ibid.

18   Hetq.am (2015), *Zangezur Copper Molybdenum Combine Largest Mining Taxpayer - $839 Million,* 11 May. Available at: https://hetq.am/en/article/60143(Accessed: October 29, 2019).

19   Geopromining.com (2019), *About GPM*, 1 January. Available at: http://www.geopromining.com/points-in-armenia/ (Accessed: October 27, 2019).

20   Ibid.

Agriculture

Alongside the mining sector, the occupied regions are also subject to illegal activities in the agricultural sphere. The fertile soil and water resources of the occupied regions create lucrative conditions for agricultural production. The total land area of the occupied regions of Azerbaijanis is 1.143 million hectares, more than 50 percent of which is suitable for agricultural activities.[21]

Before the occupation, these territories were one of Azerbaijan's main sources of agricultural production. During the Karabakh war in these areas, 7,000 establishments were closed that together had provided 24 percent of the grain, 41 percent of the liquor, 46 percent of the potatoes, 18 percent of the meat, and 34 percent of the milk produced by Azerbaijan.[22] The occupation led to the loss of one million hectares of agricultural land, including 127,700 hectares of irrigated land, 34,600 hectares of vineyards and orchards, and 70 percent of summer pastures. During the war, more than 200,000 sheep and 60,000 head of cattle were driven out of the occupied territories into Armenia.[23]

In subsequent years, after the Armenian government had implemented the illegal settlement of Armenians from Armenia and different parts of the world, the development of agricultural activities in the occupied territories intensified. Favorable climate and terrain condition for agricultural development attracted different organizations to illegal activities in the occupied territories. The occupied districts that are situated along the Araz River (Zangilan and Jabrayil districts and southern part of Hadrut region) have the most advantageous conditions for agricultural production.[24]

The Tufenkian Foundation is the most active organization promoting the agricultural sector of the occupied territories.

The Tufenkian Foundation is the most active organization promoting the agricultural sector of the occupied territories. The foundation provided financial support for Armenian farmers settled in the occupied territories, financed the establishment of the new village of "Arajamugh" in Hadrut region in 2004, and

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21   NKR National Statistical Service, (2018) *Statistical Yearbook of "NKR" 2018 – Agriculture*, pp. 185–186. Available at: http://stat-nkr.am/files/yearbooks/2011-2017/15_selxoz_183-197.pdf (Accessed: November 19, 2019).

22   Ibid.

23   Ibid.

24   Ibid.

supported agricultural projects. In 2000, with the support of the foundation, five hectares of land were allocated to pomegranate cultivation, and two more hectares were allocated in 2016.[25] In 2013, the foundation established a second pomegranate orchard covering seven hectares of land in the occupied Lachin district and established a trickle irrigation system.[26] The Tufenkian Foundation also actively participates in greenhouse cultivation projects in the occupied territories. In 2013, in partnership with the Armenian Community Council, the foundation implemented green house infrastructure covering 480 m^2 in the occupied Zangilan district for the cultivation of tomatoes.[27] According to the investment profile of the Tufenkian Foundation, in 2013 it also granted US$35.7 thousand for another greenhouse project called "Yeritsvanq Green House."[28]

In order to support agricultural production in the occupied territories, the "Support Fund of Village and Agriculture" was established in 2007. The main financial source of the fund is the loans obtained from "local banks" and the Hayastan All-Armenian Fund. The Fund participates in different illegal economic activities in the occupied territories, such as the establishment of enterprises involved in the producing agricultural equipment and the provision of agricultural services.[29] These enterprises include "Agriculture Number 1 CJSC,""Machine and Tractor Station CJSC," "Martakert's Agricultural Services CJSC," and "Greenhouse Farming CJSC."

Along with the enterprises mentioned, the Fund established MTS (machine and tractor stations) to provide farmers with cheap agricultural equipment and allocated about US$6 million for purchasing necessary equipment.[30] In addition, the "Support Fund of Village and Agriculture" helps farmers to obtain loans at low interest rates. By partially subsidizing interest rate payments

25   Tufenkianfoundation.org (2017),*Social and Economic Development*, 18 November. Available at: https://www.tufenkianfoundation.org/our-work/our-work-in-artsakh/ongoing-projects/economic-development (Accessed: November 15, 2019).

26   Ibid.

27   Ibid.

28   Bigdatabase.com (2017), *Tufenkian Foundation profile*. Available at: http://www.bigdatabase.com/Big-DB/USFoundation-profiles/TUFENKIAN%20FOUNDATION%20INC-133976159.HTML (Accessed: November 15, 2019).

29   Ibid.

30   Secretmag.ru (2015), *Made in Artsakh: Kak biznesmeny podnyali s kolen nepriznannuyu respubliku*, 14 October. Available at: https://secretmag.ru/cases/stories/artsakh-epic.htm(AccessedNovember 18, 2019).

in the agricultural sector, the Fund supports illegal activities in the occupied territories.[31]

The main player in the sector concerned with the production and export of canned vegetables and fruits is the company "Artsakh Fruit CJSC," established in 2007. The company's product line includes canned vegetables, pickles, preserves, jams, and fruit syrups, with an annual production capacity of about one million cans.[32] In 2012, the company had annual sales of about US$1.2 million.[33] The main buyers of the products are Russian, European, and United Arab Emirates companies (90 percent).[34]

Agricultural activities in the occupied territories also have great economic importance in motivating the illegally settled population to stay in these territories. As in the mining sector, the illegal activities in the agriculture sector of the occupied territories support the sustainability of continuing Armenian occupation by providing financial gains from exports. This, in turn, eliminates Armenia's financial and social burden for maintaining control over the occupied territories.

Conclusion

All the illegal economic activities discussed above show that the Armenian government and the separatist regime have substantially benefited from the natural resources of the occupied territories for their economic gain and development. Taking into account that the Armenian economy does not have enough capacity sustainably to finance the continuing occupation, illegal activities in the occupied territories have become vital tools for Armenia to maintain its occupation and control over the occupied territories, in both the economic and political contexts. Special focus has been placed on

...illegal activities in the occupied territories have become vital tools for Armenia to maintain its occupation and control over the occupied territories, in both the economic and political contexts.

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31   Armbusinessbank.am (2013), *Loans issued under Support Fund of Village and Agriculture of "NKR,"* 5 August. Available at: http://www.armbusinessbank.am/uploads/attachments/article/Gyux-vark-LXH-gyugh-Subsid-eng.pdf (Accessed: November 19, 2019).

32   Artsakhfruit.com (2019), *History*, Available at: http://artsakhfruit.com/?page_id=194&lang=en (Accessed: November 19, 2019).

33   Ibid.

34   Arka.am (2012), "*Artsakh" fruit plans to expand output by 40 percent.* Available at: https://arka.am/en/news/business/artsakh_fruit_plans_to_expand_output_by_40_percent/ (Accessed: November 19, 2019).

the mining and agricultural sectors. Considering the importance of these sectors in the economic development and political stability of the occupied territories, the Armenian government has been active in supporting all illegal economic activities in the occupied territories. Its participation in illegal economic activities has helped to diminish the reliance of the separatist regime on the Armenian government. With limited resources, Armenia would not be able to withstand the long-standing and resource-devastating war against Azerbaijan without the illegal exploitation of natural resources in the occupied territories.

The Armenian government has not only actively participated in the formation of different enterprises in the occupied territories but has also imported the greater part of the products from these enterprises. By importing more than 90 percent of such products, Armenia has also used them to meet the domestic market demand of the Armenian population. This shows that the exploitation of natural resources in the occupied territories strongly supports the social and economic development of Armenia itself.

The natural resource advantages of the occupied territories reveal the economic motivation behind Armenia's interest in the occupation of Azerbaijan's territories, which was to obtain economic gain through the exploitation of natural resources. The rich natural resources of the occupied territories have brought plentiful economic advantages to support Armenia's development. By also bringing economic damage to Azerbaijan through the occupation and the exploitation of natural resources in the occupied territories, Armenia is attempting to ensure its continuing economic existence in the region.

The resources of the mining sector in the occupied territories substantially support economic development in Armenia. The companies operating illegally in the occupied territories extract and sell rich reserves of copper, gold, molybdenum, and other resources in international markets, generating substantial financial revenues.

The Role of the Soviet Past in Contemporary Georgia

Gvantsa Gasviani[*]

The ambivalence of the Soviet past is not an issue that has been consigned to history – it remains clearly visible in the contemporary post-Soviet space. The past pursues each new generation, creating a fresh narrative in accordance with politics, culture, time, and understandings of "right" and "healthy." However, the ways in which history is remembered have dramatically changed over the last two decades. National memory and the composite memories of communities are being changed and reformulated under the weight of globalization processes. The purpose of this study is to analyze how the interaction of global and local actors shapes the narrative about the Soviet past in contemporary Georgia. The paper analyzes these processes by looking into the public and academic debates in Georgia. The results of the study show that governments play a leading role in these processes. However, influenced by the phenomenon of globalization, the role of the state is diminishing as new forces enter the stage. Therefore, states are looking for new and creative ways to maintain their control over the memory creation processes.

Keywords: Post-Soviet Space, Georgia, Memory Studies, Globalization

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Introduction

The ambivalent legacy of the Soviet past is not an issue that has been left behind; it is clearly visible in contemporary Georgia. One of the most vivid examples of the Soviet past playing an important role in present-day Georgia can be seen in Georgia's World War II commemoration ceremony. Every year on the ninth of May, two different events take place. One of them is a commemoration ceremony in which people parade while carrying portraits of their ancestors who were killed in World War II. At first glance, the ceremony does not seem to be problematic. However, it has attracted attention because this specific type of commemoration is believed to be supported by Russia and backed by the Kremlin.[1] Therefore, it is not surprising that the younger generation sees this movement as a symbol of loyalty to, and support for, the Russian Federation. These young people hold protests on the same day to remind society about Soviet Russia's first takeover of Georgia in 1921, and modern-day Russia's military presence in Georgia's two breakaway territories, Abkhazia and South Ossetia.[2] The polarization of Georgian society shows that there is no consensus regarding the role of the Soviet past in contemporary Georgia, with each generation believing that it is on the right side of history. However, with every generation the past is changing and a new narrative is being created in accordance with politics, culture, time and understandings of "right" and "healthy." The impact of transnational mobility and transfers of information via satellite TV and the internet have forced national publics to engage with an increasingly globalized public sphere. National memory and the composite memory of communities are being changed and reformulated under the force of globalization processes.

To research how the interaction of the global and local actors plays out in the creation of memory processes regarding the Soviet past in contemporary Georgia, I will analyze the relationship between three sets of actors: the state, civil society, and the church. In interpreting the past, I am also going to examine whether these

The polarization of Georgian society shows that there is no consensus regarding the role of the Soviet past in contemporary Georgia, with each generation believing that it is on the right side of history.

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1   Lomsadze, G. (2019), Georgia's World War II commemoration becomes ideological battlefield, *Eurasianet*. May 9, Available at: https://eurasianet.org/georgias-world-war-ii-commemoration-be-comes-ideological-battlefield, (Accessed: November 15, 2019)

2   *Ibid.*

forces are changing under the impact of globalization processes. Globalization, as a multi-dimensional, multi-level, and historical process, affects every stage of social and political lives. However, it became even more powerful after "Iron curtain" was lifted and global trends and forces entered the post-Soviet space. Since then the power of satellite TV, the Internet, and social media has changed the dynamics of how societies create and recreate their past.[3] It has become more challenging for governments to exert power over memory creation processes. Even though these processes do not completely negate the government's capacity to narrate the past, its power is still diminished as new global and local forces enter the stage. This pattern can be observed in present-day Georgia. At first glance, it seems that the government still seems to plays the leading role; however, it can be argued that, with an increasingly empowered civil society, it is becoming more challenging for the Georgian state to keep a grip on its power over the memory creation processes.

Academic Debates about Soviet Past in Contemporary Georgia

It is common for a newly independent country to try to remove all the traces and elements that act as reminders of the colonizer. This process is designed to help the country reimaging itself as a nation. One of the best examples is Sri Lanka, where "symbolic decolonization" of the public space took place. The leading party in Sri Lanka took full responsibility for reshaping the national memory, which led to the elevation of a single interpretation of history and gave the dominant role to the state narrative. It can be argued that a similar process took place in post-Soviet Georgia in 2003. The "Rose Revolution" brought Mikheil Saakashvili's party to power and that party tried to enforce its vision of history and memory.[4]

Saakashvili's party, the United National Movement (UNM), set as its number one priority reorienting Georgia to Europe and the West. The goal of the party was to associate "Georgianness" with "Europeanness" and democracy.

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3   Eyerman, R. The Past in the Present: Culture and the Transmission of Identity", in *The collective memory reader*, ed. Olick, J. K, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp.304–307.

4   Kabachnik, P., Kirvalidze, A., & Gugushvili, A. Stalin Today: Contending with the Soviet Past in Georgia (Tbilisi: Ilia State University Press, 2016), p.117

"Europeanness" and democracy. UNM's regime mostly focused on two central place-making strategies. The first was positioning itself as a European nation. The second was the creation of the "other," which was done through the victimization of Georgia using the Russo–Georgian war of 2008 and the Soviet occupation of Georgia. The party argued that these processes were a clear and obvious part of memory politics, since the idea of being a European nation was inscribed in the landscape itself. The division of a space between "ours" and theirs" is not something new or unique to Georgia. It is a common process that occurs in newly independent countries that are in search of their own identities.[5]

It can be argued that UNM's strategy to Europeanize and deSovietize/deRussify the Georgian landscape had a controversial and polarizing influence on Georgian society. The government's version of an ideal sense of "Georgianness" was not acceptable to everyone because the older generation had had a sense of belonging to the Soviet Union for so long that it was hard for them to accept the change without feeling left out. The sudden change of narrative left these people feeling nostalgic about the Soviet past. However, it should be underlined that nostalgia is not only a longing for the past, it is also a reaction to contemporary memory politics and attempts to create a new identity.[6]

In its attempts to distance Georgia from the label "Soviet Georgia," the UNM tried to look for alternative interpretations of Georgian history. These processes led to a focus of earlier stages of Georgian history and the declaration of Georgia as a part of the European family. Kabachnik, Kirvalidze, and Gugushvili (2016) point out that similar processes took place in many other countries. They draw parallels with Hungary, which also tried to reconnect with its past to present itself as a European nation.[7]

Alongside the attempts to present Georgia as a democratic European state, the UNM also tried to get rid of symbols related to the Soviet past. It can be argued that the destruction of the Glory Memorial dedicated to World War II became a symbol of the memory wars and heightened the antagonism between the Georgian and Russian political elites. The destruction of the

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5   *Ibid.*

6   *Ibid*, p.117

7   Kabachnik, P., Kirvalidze, A., & Gugushvili, A., *op.cit.,* p.117

memorial also caused controversy among civilians since some of them saw it as an insult to those Georgian families whose members died in World War II.[8]

According to Kabachnik, Kirvalidze, and Gugushvili, one of the most memorable moments in recent Georgian history, when the Soviet past entered the political debate again, was the passing of the Freedom Charter. The first attempt to pass the law, in 2007, failed, but in 2011 it was passed unanimously. The law enables the Ministry of Domestic Affairs to create a commission that makes a list of items that may reflect Soviet or Nazi ideology and decide whether they should be removed. The law also has a lustration component, which involves banning former senior members of the Communist Party and former KGB agents from jobs in the public sector. The authors underline that, even though the law received political support, it also caused debates regarding the ideas behind it. In the authors' analysis, the law was even seen as "forced amnesia" imposed on society.[9]

The controversy over the Soviet past became apparent once more when Saakashvili's government was replaced by Georgian Dream in 2012 and Stalin's monuments and busts started reappearing in Georgia. Kabachnik, Kirvalidze, and Gugushvili analyze several cases where Stalin's monuments were re-erected and point out that it is not clear who is behind this process. After research conducted with local citizens, the authors explain that the public is divided into two groups. One group thinks that the reappearance of Stalin's figure is simply related to people's love for his persona. The other group links this phenomenon to vast political interests.[10]

The authors conclude that "The landscape, through monuments, public works projects, and through the erasure of old, and creation of new toponyms, is a powerful means through which to construct, inscribe, and reproduce elite-sanctioned Georgian national narratives and hegemonic identity scripts."[11] They argue that the Georgian political elite tried to redefine what it means to be Georgian and the redefinition was made through counterposing

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8   *Ibid.*

9   *Ibid.*

10   *Ibid.*

11   *Ibid,* p.57.

Georgian identity to Russian and Soviet identity. The authors show that, after Saakashvili left office and his political party was replaced by Georgian Dream, changes in memory politics occurred. However, the transition was slow and did not change the main course, just toning it down.[12]

In a 2017 article, Salome Dundua, Tamar Karaia, and Zviad Abashidze share similar ideas regarding post-Soviet memory creation processes in post-Soviet Georgia. The authors argue that understanding the memory creation processes in Georgia from 1992 to 2003is a challenging process. During this period Georgia was characterized as a "failed state." As the authors argue, this was a stage in Georgian history when corrupt/criminal and paramilitary groups were constantly fighting for power. Even though by the end of his presidency Eduard Shevardnadze had managed to stabilize the situation, proper steps to take action and analyze Georgian history and identity had not yet been taken. Therefore, Dundua, Karaia, and Abashidze argue that it is almost impossible to identify any policies that were implemented to construct "historical memory."[13]

...that the memory creation strategies became more apparent in 2006, when Saakashvili's government modified its strategy and focused on victimization of the "self."

The authors argue that noticeable changes in memory politics took place in Georgia only after Mikheil Saakashvili took office. They evaluate Saakashvili's attempts to change and redirect Georgian memory politics as a process leading towards nationalism, and point out that one of the most noticeable approaches Saakashvili used was symbolism, which was expressed in the continuous use of commemorative ceremonies. The ceremonies aimed to look topre-Soviet Georgian history and honor the kings and heroes who fought for Georgian independence.[14]

The authors point out that the memory creation strategies became more apparent in 2006, when Saakashvili's government modified its strategy and focused on victimization of the "self." This change was caused by the mass deportations of Georgians from Russia. One of the results of this policy was the creation of the Museum

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12   *Ibid*, p.117.

13   Dundua, S., Karaia, T. & Abashidze, Z., "National narration and Politics of Memory in post-socialist Georgia," *Slovak Journal of Political Sciences*, Vol. 17(2), 2017, pp.222–240.

14   *Ibid.*

of Occupation, established in 2006 to commemorate experiences of repression and resistance. The Russo–Georgian war in 2008 marked the point of final destruction of the relationship between the two countries. Dundua, Karaia, and Abashidze argue that after the war the strategy of victimization became even more visible. The authors point out that the discussions regarding the overcoming of the Soviet past became very apparent in 2008. The government thought that one way to deal with the past was to change the narrative regarding Stalin in his birth town of Gori. Since Gori was bombed during the Russo–Georgian war, the government used this case to turn the city from Stalin's home into the "memory site" of Russian aggression.[15] Another interesting event that took place during Saakashvili's term of government was the creation of a truth commission that aimed to prepare a narrative on the 200 years of Russian occupation of Georgia. The authors argue that this was an example of how the government tried to construct a hegemonic historical narrative. It is important to note that, during the same period, Russian former president Dmitri Medvedev established a historical commission working against the falsification of Soviet history. It is ironic that, according to the Russian commission, Georgia was one of the sources of the fabrication of Soviet history.[16]

It seems fair to assume that memory politics from 2003 to 2012 were heavily influenced by Saakashvili's government. Memory politics became an indispensable part of national security. Dundua, Karaia and Abashidze (2017) analyze the two main tendencies that took place during Saakashvili's presidency and sum them up as follows: "Remembering heroic past for restoration of state-building and consolidation of citizens was a general trend until 2006. After the deterioration of the Georgian Russian relations, the experience of resistance became one of the acceptable tendencies."[17] The authors argue that, even though these processes were not unique to Georgia and took place in most post-Soviet countries, Georgian priorities were different. They further argue that, unlike in Eastern European countries, a proper assessment of the Soviet period did not take place in Georgia. It was limited to the declaration of "Sovietization" as occupation and functioned as a tool in the Georgian government's hands to

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15 *Ibid*, pp.236–237.

16 *Ibid.*

17 *Ibid*, p.238.

legitimize its power and narrate the country's history according to current political needs.[18]

The articles analyzed in this section have identified several actors involved in the Georgian memory creation processes. All the authors agree that Saakashvili's party played a leading role in directing the narrative about Georgia's Soviet past. The main goal of the party was to distance Georgia from the Soviet past and re-establish the country as a proud member of the European family. Most of the above-mentioned scholars argue that these patterns are not unique to Georgia, but are common in other post-Soviet countries. However, they fail to mention that this pattern, in general, is familiar to almost every postcolonial state. This silence can be explained by David Chioni Moore's (2001) argument that some post-Soviet countries consider themselves European, so it is difficult for them to see how this pattern can be similar to, for example, an African country. Another reason is mimicry. As Moore points out, some postcolonial countries seem to mimic their colonizer. However, the division in the Soviet Union between "European" and "Asiatic" identities presents different patterns of mimicry. Some countries, instead of obsessing with the fallen Russia, are trying to replicate the progress of Europe and the United States,as seems to be the case for Georgia.[19]

The main goal of the party was to distance Georgia from the Soviet past and re-establish the country as a proud member of the European family.

Madina Tlostanova (2012) also points out that many post-Soviet countries find it challenging to see themselves as colonies.[20] Tlostanova explains that it is apparently more difficult to overcome the complex of being a colony to the Second-World Empire than the complex of being ex-Third World, because Third-World countries have first-hand access to modernity through their postcolonial genealogy and, unlike the ex-Soviet colonies, do not have any grounds for claiming, or intention to claim, a European origin.[21]

Academic debate regarding the Soviet past in Georgia mainly

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18   *Ibid.*

19   Moore, D. C., "Is the post-in postcolonial the post-in post-Soviet? Toward a global postcolonial critique," Publications of the Modern Language Association of America, 2001, 111–128.

20   Tlostanova, M. "Postsocialist≠ postcolonial? On post-Soviet imaginary and global coloniality," Journal of Postcolonial Writing, Vol. 48(2), 2012, pp.130–142.

21   Tlostanova, M."The South of the Poor North: Caucasus Subjectivity and the Complex of Secondary 'Australism,"The Global South, Vol.5(1), 2011, pp.66–84.

concentrates on internal actors, such as the Georgian government, and point out that the state is playing the leading role in the memory creation processes. The state narrative seems to be dominant. However, it is also important to see how local forces contribute to the memory creation processes.

Public Debate in Georgia

Academic debate regarding the Soviet past in Georgia has revealed that the Georgian state played the leading role in the memory creation processes. The Georgian state not only tried to change the narrative about the Soviet past, but also introduced a new vision of the entirety of Georgian history. It is interesting to see how the Georgian public reacted to the changes and whether it caused polarization of memories between younger and older generations. Katrine Bendtsen Gotfredsen's article, "Void pasts and marginal presents: On nostalgia and obsolete futures in the Republic of Georgia" (2014), answers most of these questions.[22]

At the beginning of her study, Gotfredsen analyzes the celebration of Victory Day in Georgia in 2011. She points out that the ninth of May 1945 was the day of commemoration of the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union celebrated it annually. Even after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the post-Soviet republics continued to celebrate it. However, Gotfredsen argues that this day became controversial in some post-Soviet states, bringing up the example of Georgia. She analyzes the events of the celebration of Victory Day in Gori and points out that the state-sponsored events were detached from the origin of the day. She emphasizes that the events were focused on Georgian culture and did not even mention the Soviet past. "Paradoxically, it seemed that a part of the past was being erased through the very process of commemorating it."[23] However, there was a second celebration in which about twenty people gathered in front of the house where Stalin was born. This small group was demanding the reestablishment of Stalin's monument. Gotfredsen argues that the commemoration

> *...the commemoration of Victory Day illustrates how the past is being reconstructed and even erased from the memory of Georgian society, and how society is reacting to it.*

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22   Gotfredsen, K. B, "Void pasts and marginal presents: On nostalgia and obsolete futures in the Republic of Georgia", Slavic Review, Vol. 73(2). 2014, pp.246–264.

23   Gotfredsen, K. B, *op.cit,* p.246.

of Victory Day illustrates how the past is being reconstructed and even erased from the memory of Georgian society, and how society is reacting to it.[24]

Gotfredsen's research is based on twenty-five life-story interviews which she conducted with people between the ages of fifty and seventy-five. Some of her interviewees were members of the Stalin Society and the local Communist Party, while others were not active members of any similar association. Based on her interviews, she argues that the official attempt to represent the past in order to create a specific version of history for the future produced nostalgia because it failed to connect these new visions with images of the past or contemporary experience.[25]

Gotfredsen presents the same idea as Kabachnik, Kirvalidze, and Gugushvili's (2016) study regarding the role of the newly adopted pro-Western foreign policy of Georgia. One of the main goals of Saakashvili's government was to establish a closer relationship with the European Union and NATO. This strategy aimed to legitimize both the recent and distant past. Gotfredsen argues that linking Georgia to Europe and distancing it from the Soviet past was the main focus of the UNM. Saakashvili's party was trying to connect Georgian economic growth and development to its European roots and the fact that Georgia was finally free from the Soviet terror. Gotfredsen names several practices that Saakashvili's government used to depict the Soviet Union as a colonial occupier. Examples include the establishment of the Museum of Soviet Occupation and a permanent exhibition at the Georgian National Museum in Tbilisi; attempts to change the narrative according to which Stalin and the Soviet era were presented in Stalin's museum in Gori; the removal of Stalin's monument in Kutaisi; the creation of the Liberty Charter; and so on. Gotfredsen argues that these processes put middle-aged and elderly people in an extremely marginalized situation. As she explains, "a significant part of the older population's memories, life experiences, and achievements are located in the context of a Georgia that was part of the Soviet Union, [a] time and space renounced and silenced in government discourse and practice."[26]

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24   *Ibid.*

25   *Ibid.*

26   *Ibid*, p.252

Gotfredsen argues that the nostalgia that elderly people are experiencing in Gori is the result of the government's political rhetoric and its attempts to reject the Soviet past. She points out that this situation left middle-aged and elderly people in a situation described as a "struggle for recognition."[27] The attempts of this group to find a place for themselves have become extremely difficult because the government has marginalized their former social statuses and experiences.

Academic debate regarding the Soviet past in Georgia has also revealed that, even though the government is playing a leading role in memory creation processes, several other organizations in Georgia actively contribute to public debates regarding the Soviet past. The scope of my project will not allow me to research all of them. Therefore, I am going to concentrate on the leading organization that focuses on the reexamination and rehabilitation of the Soviet past – the Soviet Past Research Laboratory (SovLab). As the name of the organization indicates, its main goal is to explore the Soviet past and evaluate its legacy. SovLab also tries to create a safe environment in which to reflect and debate on such a complicated issue. The idea for the creation of SovLab came during the conference "Terror Topography – Rethinking Soviet Georgian History," organized by the International Cooperation of German Public Universities Association (DVV International) and Heinrich Böll Stiftung. The participants took the initiative to start working on the topics of Stalinism, terror, and repression in Georgia. The objective of the organization is to rethink the Soviet past in a way that will increase society's responsibility towards the victims of totalitarian regimes. SovLab is making the role of the individual in history central and trying to incorporate personal memories in society's common memory.

One of the most notable projects of SovLab is "Topography of the red terror."[28] This is an educational project taking place in four Georgian cities. The project aims to locate and map the precise sites connected to Stalinism, terror, and repression. The project offers to take individuals who are interested in Soviet history on a tour around these places. A similar project was started in 2013, in which SovLab tried to locate the mass graves of the victims of

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27   *Ibid*, p.246.

28   SovLab.ge (2018), *Topography of terror*, 1 February, Available at: http://sovlab.ge/en/project/15, (Accessed November 15, 2019)

Soviet terror.

SovLab seems to have a different approach to representing the Soviet past from that of the Georgian state. The organization mainly focuses on the repression of the Stalin era. This part of history is mostly omitted from the state narrative. Despite changes of government, none of them seems willing to bring up the issue of repression. It can be argued that the repression is overshadowed by the victory in World War II. It is hard to praise the person who inspired the victory and see him as a mass murderer at the same time. It seems that the controversy over the portrayal of Stalin is affecting the state narrative. SovLab, as part of Georgian civil society, is playing an important role in the memory creation processes. However, it cannot be seen solely as a Georgian actor. The organization has close ties with German think-tanks. SovLab is a combination of local and global forces, actors that are helping to create a more diverse narrative about the Soviet past.

Role of Georgian Orthodox Church in Current Memory Politics

The Georgian government, particularly during Saakashvili's term of office, has played a vital role in the memory creation processes in post-revolutionary Georgia. However, the government has not been alone in its attempts to appropriate the past. Another powerful agency, the Georgian Orthodox Church, also played an interesting role.

One of the most interesting topics Dundua, Karaia, and Abashidze bring up in their 2017 article "National narration and Politics of Memory in post-socialist Georgia" is the role of the Georgian Orthodox Church in the creation of the Georgian post-Soviet identity. The authors argue that even though in many democratic states the spheres of politics and religion are clearly independent of each other, in some cases religion still plays a vital role in a country's political life. According to the authors, Georgia is one of the latter. They argue that the Georgian public seems to give more weight to the church's views than those of the government. The level of skepticism towards the church is very low, close to zero. Dundua, Karaia, and Abashidze point out that even if the church is criticized, which happens very rarely, the majority of the public will still support it and denounce its critics. "According

to the survey of 2012 by German-based sociological and research institution …'Forsa' 89% of respondent[s] believe in [the] Georgian Orthodox Church, 74% … in [the] Georgian Army and only 30% in the Court system."[29] Therefore, it is crucially important to see what role the Georgian Orthodox Church plays in remembering the Soviet past.

The statistics indicate that the Georgian Orthodox Church has great power over people's hearts and minds. It is interesting to analyze how the leader of the church, Ilia II, remembers and presents the Soviet past to contemporary Georgia. One of his interviews with Russia Today clarifies his attitude towards the leading Soviet figure, J.Stalin. Ilia II argues that Stalin was "an outstanding person" who "understood the worldwide significance of Russia" and underlines that Stalin was both Russian and Georgian. According to Ilia II, Stalin played a positive role in opening churches, seminaries, and clerical schools.[30]

Ilia II's comment regarding Stalin and the Soviet past sparked public debate in Georgia. Some NGOs even responded with their own major concerns. These included the Tolerance and Diversity Institute (TDI) and the Soviet Past Research Laboratory (SovLab). In their responses, these NGOs condemned the patriarch's statement. They underlined that the feeling of admiration for Stalin is disrespectful to the victims of Stalin's repression, antithetical to Christian and democratic values, and does not accurately represent historical facts.[31]

As suggested earlier, the Georgian Orthodox Church plays an important role in the memory creation processes. As statistical analysis shows, Georgians seem to believe in the church more than any other structure. Therefore, it is surprising to see how the younger generation, raised with the idea that the Soviet Union was a solely negative experience, still believes in a structure that portrays Stalin as a positive figure.

Conclusion

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29   Dundua, S, Karaia, T, &Abashidze, Z, *op.cit*, pp.222–240.

30   Kevorkova, N. "Patriarch of Georgia: Our church and people never cut ties with Russia," RT.com 22 July, 2013, Available at: https://www.rt.com/op-ed/patriarch-georgia-russia-ties-438 (Accessed: November 1, 2019)

31   Kabachnik, P., Kirvalidze, A., & Gugushvili, A., *op.cit.*, p.117

In this paper, I have explored how the interaction of global and local forces shapes the narrative about the Soviet past in contemporary Georgia. The analysis of relations between the state, civil society, and academics revealed the different methods and tools that these actors use to interpret the Soviet past. One interesting observation that is not discussed in academic and public debates is the role of scholars, who are actively involved in memory creation processes. Even though academics mostly take the role of observers, they still have the choice of what to observe and how to interpret what they see. In the texts discussed above, the authors reveal the methods and tools governments are using to stay in charge of the memory creation processes. The academics also underline the role of civil society and show that in less democratic countries the role of non-governmental organizations is limited. By describing these situations, scholars create and contribute to the ongoing debate regarding the construction and rehabilitation of the Soviet past. Their role is vital to maintain a healthy level of objectivity in the memory creation processes.

As the study has revealed, the role of history and memory is still a very active and popular topic in Georgia. Ongoing academic research shows that the state still plays a dominant role in the memory creation processes, using history to legitimize its power. However, even though the state is trying to monopolize the memory creation processes, civil society is still actively trying to engage in the reproduction of history and memory.

The role of the Orthodox Church seem to have great influence on the memory creation processes in Georgia. It can be observed that the church seems to use parts of the country's history selectively, appropriating them according to their current agenda.

In conclusion, it worth underlining that even though the state and the Orthodox Church have great power over the memory creation processes in Georgia, under the processes of globalization their role is still diminishing. Civil society is becoming more and more active, and, with the help of international organizations, local forces seem to be more prepared to challenge the state or church-sponsored narratives.

The "Frozen Conflict Perspective" in Eastern Ukraine and its Influence on Identity Construction

Hanna Shelest*

Although socially and politically constructed, the self-identification of the separatist regions in the east of Ukraine and their inhabitants can have a significant influence on the conflict resolution process. Through an analysis of identity construction in Donbas via the self-perceptions of residents of both the controlled and the uncontrolled territories, and their views regarding the introduction of a "special status," the author aims to answer the following question: Willa special status for the separatists' territories facilitate conflict resolution, or is it a fixing agent for a constructed identity for territories that are experiencing political confrontations? The author argues that the frozen status of the conflict, in the event of the satisfaction of certain social needs, will lead to the deeper separation of the territories, while a special status within a unitary state will lead to the crystallization of their identity, transforming it from a local-cum-regional one to one with expressed features of a political national identity.

Keywords: Ukraine, Donbas, Identity construction, special status, "frozen conflict"

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Introduction

Regional identities in Ukraine have different dimensions and exist at different levels. In different historical moments, they have played greater or lesser roles in political and social discourse within the country. Some have ethnic or historical backgrounds, due to the long history of changing borders in Ukraine. Some were constructed under the influence of Soviet demographic and social policies including, among others, mass movement of people. Some are political constructs, highly developed during elections and revolutions (both the Orange Revolution of 2004 and the Revolution of Dignity, 2013–14).

In most cases, except for mono-ethnic villages on the western and southern borders of Ukraine, local self-identity did not have an ethnic background, but was constructed under the influence of socio-economic and political factors. The Revolution of Dignity, followed by the Russian aggression in the east of Ukraine, as well as local elites' manipulations, became the factors that triggered a new wave of self-identification in Donbas. Developing within the last five years, it is still difficult to evaluate how strong and fixed this identity is, or what the factors influencing its crystallization are.

The aim of this article is to analyze whether "frozen conflict" status, which has been actively discussed recently, can be a factor for fixing the local self-identification in Donbas as a political construct. By analyzing the population's different perceptions about themselves and their self-identification, as well as views regarding the future status of Donbas, we look at the elements that accompany the so-called "frozen conflict" state of affairs and how this could promote greater separation rather than conflict resolution in Donbas.

The Problem of Identity Construction in Donbas

Ethnic identity is not a part of the so-called Donbas identity, which has nevertheless become well developed in the political discourse, especially since 2004. The opposition of Donbas to the West, and later the central government, became one of the most significant issues in local election campaigns. The latest census, conducted back in 2001, demonstrated that, even in

Donetsk and Luhansk regions – the conflict areas – the ethnic Russian population did not exceed 39% of the total,[1] which is why the slogan "rights of the Russian-speaking population" was used often as an element of local self-identification. At the same time, this slogan helped to diffuse the borders of the area where such population is leaving, or who they (Russian-speaking) are, as allowing this construct to go beyond the Donetsk and Lugansk regions' administrative borders.

Moreover, as the events of 2013–19 clearly demonstrated, the supporters and the opponents of the central government were drawn from both ethnic groups, Russian and Ukrainian, and this aspect was not among the main determinants of which side to take. In the Ukrainian case, ethnicity and religion come second to political and ideological differences, creating a level of irrationality in this conflict, i.e., pro-democracy (pro-European) sentiments versus pro-Soviet nostalgia (which does not imply agreement with leftist ideas).

The beliefs of the parties in the conflict are political rather than ethnic, and even the language issue, i.e., Russian versus Ukrainian speakers, is a demonstration of a political preference, not a marker of "ethnic belonging."[2]

Nevertheless, securitization of the identity problem during the conflict resolution process, especially with the involvement of foreign actors, demonstrates that it is a factor that can significantly influence final resolution modalities, so it is a necessity to look at the additional elements that can shape this identity, thus affecting the peace process. While identity is usually a factor that tends to look to the past, in the case of Donetsk and Lugansk it is more significantly an element of future constructs.

In Yugoslavia in the 1990s, ethnicity was re-engineered as a dominant social category, and the Dayton accords enshrined this charged version of ethnicity as "the only relevant political identity in society."[3] The same happened in eastern Ukraine in 2013–14, when issues of language, as part of self-identification,

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1   State Statistics Committee of Ukraine, (2001), *Ukrainian Census*, Available at: http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/ (Accessed: November 1, 2019).

2   Shelest, H. "Imposed State-Building", *Southeastern Europe*, Vol. 42, Issue 3, 2018.

3   Ahmagić, E., Denison, B., et al. (2014) "Bosnia is no model for Ukrainian peace", *Balkans in Europe Policy Blog*. Centre for Southeast European Studies, 20 October, Available at: http://www.suedosteuropa.uni-graz.at/biepag/node/106 (Accessed: November 1, 2019).

started to prevail in political and social discourse.

When analyzing the development of identities during times of conflict, it is necessary to understand whether this identity is just a sharpening of local identity, which can be found in any society, where big cities or certain territories can create special forms of self-identification and self-attachment, or if it is political nation-building type of self-identification.

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Geographically, Donbas (which originated from the term Donetsk Coal Basin) covers a territory that is not identical to the current uncontrolled, separate districts of Donetsk and Lugansk regions, or even the administrative regions of Donetsk and Lugansk. It covers territories in both the Russian Federation and Ukraine (Eastern and Western Donbas), but does not cover Mariupol city and surroundings, which have been under occupation for several months and remain among the "at-risk" territories. Despite attempts to impose a narrative that all the East "belongs to Donbas," this part of the Donetsk oblast is referred as Azov region. Interviews conducted by the author in Mariupol in 2016–19 demonstrated that, more and more, the local populace are trying to separate themselves from identification with Donbas, even expressing ideas of an administrative division of the region into two, so as to escape social constructions around Donbas.

In the opinion of researchers at the Centre for East European and International Studies (ZOIS), "The only way in which a one-off survey can speak to the question of personal identity change is to tap into self-reported changes."[4] However, due to the difficult security situation and Russian control over the territories, it is difficult to find fully reliable data. Below we present two surveys conducted by Ukrainian and German think tanks, using different methodologies, which nevertheless allow a closer look at how the self-identification of the separatist regions has been changing over the last five years.

A recent survey conducted by the Democratic Initiatives Foundation (DIF) in March 2019 at the checkpoints between the

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4   Sasse, G. (2017) 'The Donbas – Two Parts, Or Still One? The Experience of War through the Eyes of the Regional Population", *ZOiS Report*, No.2/2017, Available at: https://www.zois-berlin.de/fileadmin/media/Dateien/ZOiS_Reports/ZOiS_Report_2_2017.pdf (Accessed: November 1, 2019).

controlled and uncontrolled territories of Donetsk and Lugansk regions demonstrated the following self-identification of people living in the uncontrolled territories and crossing the line to the controlled territories for their private affairs (Table 1).

Table 1. Self-identification of people living in the uncontrolled territories and crossing the line to the controlled territories, March 2019[5]

	%,
Resident of the region (oblast, city, village), where you live	24
Citizen of Ukraine	**60**
Representative of your nationality, ethnic group	3
Citizen of the Russian Federations/USSR	3
Citizen of 'DNR'/'LNR'	5
Difficult to answer	5

ZOIS conducted its first survey in December 2016,[6] face-to-face in the government-controlled territories of Donetsk and Lugansk regions and by telephone in the uncontrolled territories. The results demonstrated that, as a result of the events of 2013–16, 26.1% of the respondents in the occupied territories said that they felt "more Russian" and only 8.5% felt "more Ukrainian." At the same time, 20.5% of respondents in the controlled territories said that they felt themselves to be "more Ukrainian."

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In 2019, ZOIS repeated its research,[7] demonstrating significant changes in the self-identification of people in the uncontrolled territories. About 29% of respondents said that they felt more Russian than before (an increase of 3%); some 28% felt more strongly that they were both Russian and Ukrainian; and around 11% felt more Ukrainian than before. All this happened due to a significant

5   Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation (2019) Суспільні настрої та оцінка громадянами ситуації на Донбасі - опитування на КПВВ [Public sentiment and citizens' assessment of the situation in the Donbass - a survey at the CPVV], 25 April, Available at: https://dif.org.ua/article/suspilni-nastroi-ta-otsinka-gromadyanami-situatsii-na-donbasi-opituvannya-na-kpvv (Accessed: November 15, 2019).

6   Sasse, 'The Donbas – Two Parts, Or Still One?...', *op.cit.*

7   Sasse, G. and Lackner, A. (2019) "Attitudes and Identities across the Donbas Front Line: What Has Changed From 2016 to 2019?", *ZOiS Report*, No. 3/2019, Available at: https://www.zois-berlin.de/fileadmin/media/Dateien/ZOiS_Reports/ZOiS_Report_3_2019.pdf, p. 8, (Accessed: November 1, 2019).

decrease in those who thought that their identity had not changed – from 45% in 2016 to 32% in 2019.

Regional identities were also more prominent in the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics ("DNR/LNR") than in government-controlled Donbas in 2019: 18% in the "DNR/LNR" described themselves as "people from Donbas" and about 12% as residents of the "DNR/LNR," while in the controlled territories only 12.8% described themselves as a "person from Donbas."[8]

Special Status as a Fixing Agent of the Identity Construct

One of the main demands, discussed from the very beginning of the conflict in the east of Ukraine and also seen by mediators as a way forward in conflict resolution, is the guarantee of a "special status" to the separatist territories.

The Minsk Agreement II, signed in February 2015 by the representatives of the OSCE, Russia, Ukraine and the two separatist territories, became the first document setting out certain norms of the possible special status. "Complex of measures for the implementation of the Minsk agreements" envisaged, in its explanatory notes, eight "rights," some of which concern economic development support and amnesty, but others are important for special status construction: the right to language self-identification; participation of the local authorities in the appointment of heads of the local prosecutors' offices and courts in separate districts of the Donetsk and Lugansk regions; and the creation of militia units through the decisions of the local councils, with the aim of supporting public order in the separate districts of the Donetsk and Lugansk regions.[9] The protocol on the results of the Trilateral Consultations, signed on the same day by the same representatives, determined (Article 3) "to conduct power decentralization, including by means of adopting a Law of Ukraine 'On Temporary Procedures of Local Self-Governance in separate Regions of Donetsk and Lugansk Regions' (Law on a Special Status)."[10]

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8   Sasse, and Lackner, *op. cit.,* p. 8.

9   Osce.org, (2015) *Complex of measures for the implementation of the Minsk agreements*, 12 February 2015. Available at: https://www.osce.org/ru/cio/140221?download=true (Accessed: November 1, 2019).

10   Osce.org, (2015) *Protocol on the results of consultations of the Trilateral Contact Group con-*

There are four main groups of views regarding a special status composition for the uncontrolled territories of Donetsk and Lugansk regions: those stated in the current Law; those expressed by the team of the new President Zelenskyy; those articulated by the Ukrainian pro-Russian politicians; and those coming from the Russian-controlled separatists and Moscow itself.

Initial legislation on the special status of certain districts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions was adopted back in September 2014, when the parliament of Ukraine, at the initiative of the president of Ukraine, adopted the law "On the special procedure of local self-governance in certain districts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions."[11] According to that law, a special status was established for three years, during which Ukrainian legislation could be limited by this legal provision. Among other things, the law guaranteed the use of the Russian language, immunity from prosecution for participation in the events in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, special procedures for the appointment of prosecutors and judges (with the participation of local authorities), a special regime for investment and economic activities, development of trans-border cooperation with neighbouring Russian Federation regions, and the creation of special militia units to keep public order, controlled only by the local authorities. It was expected that this law would be implemented only after elections in the uncontrolled territories taking place according to Ukrainian law, with international observers and media involved. Since then, elections have not been held as the ceasefire has been constantly violated and the sides could not agree on the modalities for holding elections. The latest "Steinmeier formula" sets out only a sequence of activities, not the modalities themselves.

If we consider individual identity as a constructed mechanism to promote group solidarity, then quasi-federalization could

cerning joint steps aimed on implementation of President Poroshenko's Peace Plan and President Putin's initiatives*, 12 February, Available at: https://www.osce.org/ru/home/123258?download=true ,(Accessed: November 1, 2019).

11   Parliament of Ukraine, (2014) Закон України Про особливий порядок місцевого самоврядування *в* окремих районах Донецької та Луганської областей [Law 'On the special procedure of local self-governance in certain districts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions'], 16 September, Available at: http://zakon2.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1680-18 (Accessed: November 12, 2019).

result from a special status being granted to the separate districts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions. This could lead to the crystallization of their identity, transforming it from a local-cum-regional one to one with expressed features of a political national identity. Moreover, such an identity would not be formed on the basis of ethnicity (internal factor), but in opposition to "the other" (external factor), meaning the rest of Ukraine.[12]

In 2014, both "Donetsk PR" and "Lugansk PR" adopted their "constitutions", which de facto are identical documents. For example, the "Constitution of Donetsk People's Republic"[13] states that the "state languages in the Donetsk People's Republic are Russian and Ukrainian" (Art.10), and that "each person has a right to define and state his/her national identity. Nobody can be obliged to define and state his/her national identity" (Art. 19). These are the only two articles that at first sight refer to identification issues, leaving these rather blurred. However, the use of the term "citizens of the DPR" throughout the "constitution" text is a way of fixing belonging to a certain entity.

At the same time, most of the districts' requests concerning special status have been stated regularly both directly and through Russian official representatives. Back in January 2016, the representatives of the separatist republics submitted their proposals for constitutional reform in Ukraine, which went far beyond the Minsk Agreements and decentralization reform. In addition to the requests to have a quota for their members in the parliament of Ukraine, to use Russian as an official language, and to have close economic ties with Russia, they insisted on the right to approve all Ukrainian laws as well as the right to veto foreign policy decisions. They also demanded the right to form their own police, security services, judiciary, prosecution, border guard service, and other agencies without the approval of the authorities in Kyiv.[14] These demands could possibly lead to paralyzing any state activity, rendering the country completely dysfunctional, but also blocking pro-European reforms and Euro-integration as a whole. Adding to

These demands could possibly lead to paralyzing any state activity, rendering the country completely dysfunctional, but also blocking pro-European reforms and Euro-integration as a whole.

12   Shelest, "Imposed State-Building", *op. cit.*

13   People's Council of DNR (2015) *Constitution of Donetsk People Republic*, 14 May (edition of 30.11.2018). Available at: https://dnrsovet.su/konstitutsiya/ (Accessed: November 1, 2019).

14   Censor.net, (2016) '*DPR' offers special view of amendments to Ukrainian Constitution*, 27 January, Available at: http://en.censor.net.ua/n371293 (Accessed: November 1, 2019).

this police and security services beyond the control of the central government, i.e., a de-facto loss of the monopoly on the use of force; this represents a dangerous accumulation of power that would be far from preventing conflict. Also, these demands clearly demonstrate that it is the political background, rather than identity clashes, that is the root of the conflict.

President Zelenskyy's team still has not presented a clear plan and vision for the new law on special status that needs to be adopted by 31 December 2019. Normandy Format meeting on 9 December 2019 in Paris were expected to clarify the situation, but a decision was taken to prolong a previous version of the law, and to consider possible changes in 2020. However, the president has announced a few basic elements in interviews: compromises on humanitarian issues; possible regional status for the Russian language; no confirmation of autonomous status; possible relations between the Russian Federation and separatist regions; and elections with "Steinmeier formula" as an element.[15]

A survey by DIF, reported in April 2019, demonstrated public opinion regarding the possible options for bringing peace to Donbas across three population categories (Ukrainian citizens as a whole; residents of Ukrainian-controlled Donbas; and residents of the uncontrolled territories crossing the contact line to Ukraine). (All respondents could choose up to three options.)

Table 2. Possible decisions to bring peace to Donbas[16]

	Ukraine, May 2018	Donbas, November 2018	Bloc-posts, March 2019
Separation of the territories occupied by 'DNR' and 'LNR' from Ukraine	9.8	6.2	2.8
Granting a special status to 'DNR and 'LNR' within the Ukrainian borders	12.9	24.3	23.1

15 Unian.ua, (2019) У новому законі про особливий статус не йтиметься про автономію Донбасу – Зеленський [The new law on special status does not refer to the autonomy of Donbass - Zelensky], 10 October, Available at: https://www.unian.ua/politics/10715967-u-novomu-zakoni-pro-osobliviy-status-ne-ytimetsya-pro-avtonomiyu-donbasu-zelenskiy.html (Accessed: November 1, 2019).

16 Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation (2019) Суспільні настрої та оцінка громадянами ситуації на Донбасі - опитування на КПВВ [Public sentiment and citizens' assessment of the situation in the Donbass - a survey at the CPVV], 25 April, Available at: https://dif.org.ua/article/suspilni-nastroi-ta-otsinka-gromadyanami-situatsii-na-donbasi-opituvannya-na-kpvv (Accessed: November 15, 2019).

Introduction of a federal structure in Ukraine	8.7	11.1	3.0
Successful rebuilding of normal life in the territories of Donbas, controlled by Ukraine	30.6	47.7	41.9
Conducting legal elections in the territories controlled by 'DNR' and 'LNR'	13.0	-	-
Granting Russian language the status of a state language	6.5	19.1	15.9
Amnesty to all who participated in fighting in Donbas	7.2	9.4	9.4
Preventing Russia from intervening in the conflict in Donbas (reinforcing international sanctions, pressure of the international structures)	32.0	17.8	16.1
Stopping financing of the territories occupied by 'DNR' and 'LNR' (paying pensions, salaries, etc.)	7.1	4.5	6.1
Rejection of the NATO membership perspective, confirming in the constitution of Ukraine a neutral status.	6.6	8.5	6.9
Regaining control over the territories of 'DNR' and 'LNR' by military force	14.2	7.8	-
Other	2.1	4.5	6.0
Difficult to answer	15.8	17.1	19.0

At the same time, when asked whether it is acceptable to make changes to the Constitution to grant the status of a state language to Russian in order to stop a war in Donbas, the responses differed depending on the region of Ukraine, but also showed a general increase. This demonstrates that, while most of the population do not believe that this measure can help conflict resolution, it is more acceptable to them than a special status, which is a sensitive issue, as it is perceived as a Russian plan for Ukrainian federalization, affecting the sovereignty of the state.

Table 3. How do you consider changes into Constitution to grant a status of the state language to the Russian language as a way to solve Donbas conflict (%)?[17]

	West	*Center*	*South*	*East*	*Donbas*

17   Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation (2019) Пошуки шляхів відновлення суверенітету України над окупованим Донбасом: стан громадської думки напередодні президентських виборів [The search for ways to restore Ukraine's sovereignty over the occupied Donbass: state of public opinion ahead of the presidential election], 13 February, Available at: https://dif.org.ua/article/poshuki-shlyakhiv-vidnovlennya-suverenitetu-ukraini-nad-okupovanim-donbasom-

Acceptable	12,9	17,4	49,0	49,2	55,5
Unacceptable	71,5	65,6	29,9	23,8	22,2
Difficult to reply	15,6	17,0	21,2	27,0	22,3

According to the 2016 Survey results by ZOIS, the preferences regarding the future status of the occupied territories diverge significantly. While in Kyiv-controlled Donbas a clear majority (65%) want to be part of Donetsk and Luhansk oblast without a special status, 26% deem a special status within Ukraine necessary, and about 9% see the future of these territories in Russia. The views of the population in the self-declared republics are more diverse than one might have expected: 21% want this area to be part of Ukraine without a special status, and 35% prefer a special status for these territories inside Ukraine. Conversely, 11% want to see the territories as part of Russia without a special status and 33% would prefer a special status inside Russia.[18] The 2019 data demonstrate an increase in those who want to have a special status within Ukraine – up to 30.7% – and a decrease in both variants for being part of Russia.[19]

"Frozen Conflict" as a Fixing Agent for Separation

The current stage of the conflict in the east of Ukraine has already witnessed careful questions from some Ukrainian and international politicians and observers, such as: "Should we return those lands, if their special status would affect Ukrainian state sovereignty?"; "Should we choose to enter the EU but without Donbas?"; and "Maybe it is better to develop the Ukrainian state without separatist territories and hope that one day they return voluntarily?" De facto all these questions are pre-requisites to the scenario of the "frozen conflict" for Donbas, if no adequate solution is found in the next few months.

In contrast, the DIF survey conducted in 2018 demonstrated that only 9.8% of Ukrainian respondents agreed with the option "to separate territories occupied by 'DNR' and 'LNR' from Ukraine." When looking at the answers among those living in the government-controlled territories of Donetsk and Lugansk

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stan-gromadskoi-dumki-naperedodni-prezidentskikh-viboriv (Accessed: November 1, 2019).

18   Sasse, 'The Donbas – Two Parts, Or Still One? ...', *op. cit.,* p. 12.

19   Sasse, and Lackner, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

regions, this number fall to 6.2%.[20] The numbers differ when respondents are asked about "special status" approval. Of the respondents in Ukraine, 12.9% are ready for such a compromise, compared to 24.3% of those living in the east.

A "frozen conflict" does not guarantee reconciliation in the future; rather it increases the chances of separation. A creation of the parallel structures, narratives, and systems influence the artificial construction of identities and realities.

A "frozen conflict" does not guarantee reconciliation in the future; rather it increases the chances of separation. A creation of the parallel structures, narratives, and systems influence the artificial construction of identities and realities. Moreover, when the conflict is frozen it remains articulated as a conflict, so a generation of people on both sides grows up enemy-oriented. Self-identification is mostly constructed as "us being different from them," especially when the others are portrayed not just as different, but as adversaries.

The Transnistrian case is a good example for Ukraine. After years of a "frozen conflict," the parties are used to coexisting. Benefiting from the special status and preferences within Moldova–EU relations, for example, the separatist region has not demonstrated any changes in public or political opinion about reconciliation or a political settlement. Despite the population composition, where Russians, Moldovans, and Ukrainians comprise approximately equal parts, being Transnistrian prevails in political identification and external presentation.

PålKolstø argues that the non-recognized state of the separatist regions is a transitional, abnormal phase of state-building,[21] while Mikhail Minakov opposes him, stating that "the longer NRS [non-recognized states] exist, and the more they proliferate in the post-Soviet region, the less evident their transitional nature becomes. At least from a mid- to long term perspective, these states seem to be evolving into more stable model."[22] So in our case, the frozen status of the conflict will not lead to an increased

20   Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation (2019) Пошуки шляхів відновлення суверенітету України над окупованим Донбасом: стан громадської думки напередодні президентських виборів [The search for ways to restore Ukraine's sovereignty over the occupied Donbass: state of public opinion ahead of the presidential election], 13 February, Available at: https://dif.org.ua/article/poshuki-shlyakhiv-vidnovlennya-suverenitetu-ukraini-nad-okupovanim-donbasom-stan-gromadskoi-dumki-naperedodni-prezidentskikh-viboriv (Accessed: November 1, 2019).

21   Kolstø, P. (2006) "The Sustainability and Future of Unrecognized Quasi-States", *Journal of Peace Research,* 43(6): p. 734

22   Minakov, M. (2019) "On The Extreme Periphery. The Status of Post-Soviet Non-Recognised States in the World-System", *Ideology and Politics*, Issue 1(12), p. 58

probability of conflict resolution, but to the development of a politically constructed identity and a state mimesis.

As far back as 2016, research by ZOIS demonstrated that "self-identification as a Ukrainian citizen marks an important difference between the Kyiv-controlled and the occupied territories. In the DNR/LNR, 54% reported that they felt less like Ukrainian citizens now compared to before 2013."[23] Special status and conflict freezing will further impact this negative tendency.

Belonging to an unrecognized state is also a matter of strong self-identification. The first search for support and approval is directed not toward the patron state or any international institution but to similar non-recognized entities in the post-Soviet space. However, as Minakov observes, "There is a growing network of cooperation between separate ministries, industries and social organizations across the NRS, but mutual recognition between old and new NRS is not in place. For example, while the 'DPR' has recognized Abkhazia's sovereignty, Abkhazia does not recognize the 'DPR'. So, in spite of high levels of cooperation, post-Soviet NRS have their own logic of non-recognition."[24]

Conclusions

Identity construction during times of conflict is one of the most difficult issues to evaluate, as it relies predominantly on the self-identification of those agreeing to participate in different types of surveys. The security situation, and frequently the absence of a desire for answering or the possibility of asking survey questions, limits the scope of research. However, different attempts to study the situation in Donbas demonstrate the shifts happening in the eastern regions of Ukraine, which are symbolized by a crystallization of local self-identification. Despite the acceptance of the "Ukrainian citizen" identification, all research has nevertheless demonstrated a clear "special status" request, which did not exist before the Russian aggression.

Identity construction during times of conflict is one of the most difficult issues to evaluate, as it relies predominantly on the self-identification of those agreeing to participate in different types of surveys.

The frozen status of the conflict with regard to the satisfaction

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23   Sasse, 'The Donbas – Two Parts, Or Still One?...', *op.cit,* p.7

24   Minakov, *op. cit.*, p. 63

of certain social needs (such as pension payments, which currently cannot be made in the uncontrolled territories due to security concerns, so making people travel to government-controlled territories) can lead to a decrease in the numbers of daily crossings at the contact line between the uncontrolled and controlled territories of Ukraine, indirectly leading to the deeper separation of the territories. A stable model of governance that will develop should the security situation improve without a political resolution in place will lead to crystallization of self-identification as belonging to this political unity, with less necessity for interaction with others.

The frozen status of the conflict will not lead to increased opportunities for conflict resolution, but to the development of a politically constructed identity and a state mimesis. The 2016 surveys have already demonstrated the results of an increased feeling of being "less Ukrainian" in the uncontrolled territories of Donbas. The Donbas local self-identity is not based on ethnic differences, but has been constructed in the 20th century due to different historical circumstances and political competition, and therefore with the development of conflict it has every chance of being reshaped according to the conflict logic.

The Conflict in Ukraine - The Geopolitics of Separatism and Divergent Identities (Commentary)

Eugene Chausovsky[*]

This commentary seeks to examine the nature of the causes of the conflict in Ukraine, particularly in relation to the country's geographic and geopolitical position and the tendencies toward separatism that this position breeds. The commentary then explores the various positions of the main actors involved in the conflict, including Ukraine, Russia, the separatist forces in Donbas, and the West. The commentary concludes with a consideration of the outlook for the conflict, which will be shaped by the divergent positions of these actors and geopolitical constraints on both the military and diplomatic levels.

Keywords: Ukraine, Russia, Geopolitics of Separatism, Identity

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Introduction

The conflict in Ukraine has dominated the Eurasian region for more than five years, serving as a major catalyst for the broader standoff between Russia and the West that continues to this day. Over 13,000 people have been killed and nearly 2 million displaced in the conflict, one which has reverberated and sent ripple effects well beyond Ukraine. The conflict in Ukraine has been a key factor in bringing relations between Moscow and the West to their lowest point since the end of the Cold War, and it shows no signs of abating anytime soon.

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At the heart of the conflict lies the issue of separatism, which stems from cultural and political differences over identity in Ukraine and divergent attitudes toward the state and its domestic and foreign policy. These differences and divisions in Ukraine existed well before the start of the conflict in 2014, but numerous factors have served to exacerbate them over the past decade. These include Ukraine's volatile political evolution, a more dynamic geopolitical environment in the region, and the involvement of external powers in the conflict.

The Ukrainian conflict is not the only one stemming from separatism and identity in Eurasia. Indeed, it is part of a larger phenomenon that dates back to the late Soviet period and that has played out in various forms and in numerous theatres – from Eastern Europe, to the Caucasus, to Central Asia. Nevertheless, the conflict in Ukraine is perhaps one of the most illustrative examples of a local separatist conflict having implications on a regional and even global scale (Russia–West standoff), one that offers lessons well beyond its borders.

The origins and drivers of the Ukraine conflict

On the surface, the conflict in Ukraine, which began in the spring of 2014 and continues to this day, had a very specific trigger. That trigger was the EuroMaidan uprising, which started as a series of protests in central Kyiv (Kiev) in November 2013 following the decision of then-president Viktor Yanukovych abruptly to pull out of negotiations with the EU over an association and free trade

agreement in favor of closer ties with Russia. These protests were initially small and mostly made up of pro-EU students and young people, but a heavy-handed security crackdown on the demonstrations caused the protests to swell in size to hundreds of thousands of people across a wide social spectrum and to take on a more broadly anti-government nature.

Over the course of three months, these protests –known as EuroMaidan after Maidan Nezalezhnosti square in which they were concentrated – evolved to incorporate numerous elements opposed to the Yanukovych administration, from traditional opposition groups to regular citizens to radical and ultranationalist groups such as Right Sector. It was the latter element, although relatively small in size, that participated in clashes with security forces at the apex of the protest movement in February 2014. These clashes led to more than 100 deaths and eventually led to the overthrow of the Yanukovych government at the end of the month.

The ousting of Yanukovych produced several ripple effects. One was a strategic shift in Ukraine's foreign policy away from Russia and toward the West, which was cemented by the election of a pro-Western president, Petro Poroshenko, and an accompanying pro-EU majority in parliament. Further effects included two major reactionary moves by Russia: first, the annexation of Crimea and shortly thereafter the support of a pro-Moscow separatist rebellion in Eastern Ukraine. It is this rebellion that led to the current conflict in Eastern Ukraine, which has included the establishment of the so-called "Donetsk People's Republic" (DPR) and "Luhansk People's Republic" (LPR) in Donbas in April 2014 and their ongoing military clashes with Ukraine's security forces.

Thus, the conflict in Ukraine was a direct reaction to the EuroMaidan uprising. However, there is a deeper driver behind the conflict, and that is the geographic position of Ukraine. The country lies on the geopolitical fault line between Russia and Europe, the so-called "European borderlands." Ukraine's location in the wide-open plains of Eastern Europe offers few geographical barriers, making the country a traditional invasion route from Russia into Europe, and vice versa. Historically, this location, along with Ukraine's abundance of agricultural,

mineral, and energy resources, has made the country of strategic interest to Russia and European powers alike.

The historical competition between Russia and Europe has had a significant impact on Ukraine's political and cultural evolution. Due to its incorporation into and contestation among numerous empires from both east and west, from the Russian Empire and Soviet Union to the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Ukraine has been divided and polarized between a Europe-oriented and largely Ukrainian-speaking western and central part of the country, and a Moscow-oriented and largely Russian-speaking east and south.

Following Ukraine's independence from the Soviet Union in 1991 – the first time that the country was fully independent for hundreds of years – these polarizations were clearly reflected in voting patterns, which were broadly split between east and west along this political/cultural cleavage. This produced sharp political swings in the post-Soviet era, including the 2004 Orange Revolution, which brought into power a pro-Western government led by Viktor Yushchenko in 2005, and the victory of the pro-Russian Yanukovych in the 2010 presidential elections.

These polarizations were most acutely felt following the EuroMaidan uprising. With the government shifting its orientation once again toward the West, the most pro-Russian parts of the country became either part of Russia (as with Crimea) or de-facto independent statelets with significant economic and military support from Moscow (as with "DPR" and "LPR"). This has, in essence, cemented and radicalized the long-running divisions between political and cultural affiliations in the country, leading to the political and security situation in which Ukraine currently finds itself.

Current status and positions of the various players

The conflict in Ukraine, which came about as a result of these differences in identity and the separatist tendencies it has spawned, has several important players. These include Ukraine, the separatist regimes of the "DPR" and "LPR," Russia, the US,

and the EU, each of which has its own unique position when it comes to the conflict.

From Ukraine's perspective, the conflict in Donbas is a product of Russian aggression and Moscow's desire to keep Kyiv in Russia's orbit and out of the Western alliance system. To Kyiv, the separatists in Donetsk and Luhansk are merely Russian proxies, and Ukraine's ultimate goal is to integrate these territories back into the Ukrainian state and expel – whether militarily or diplomatically – Russian forces from this region. This goal is currently not achievable from a purely military perspective, so Ukraine is engaging in diplomatic negotiations in the hope that it can secure enough Western support (in the form of economic/security assistance as well as pressure against Russia in the form of sanctions) to be able, eventually, to regain control of the separatist territories of Eastern Ukraine.

From Russia's perspective, the conflict in Donbas is a result of an unconstitutional coup which overthrew a legitimately elected government in Ukraine. According to Moscow, the EuroMaidan uprising led to an illegal (and, crucially, Western-supported) change of government in Ukraine, with the majority of people in Crimea and in the regions of Donetsk and Luhansk not accepting this change of power. Russia thus supported these people's right to self-determination and refusal to be a part of Ukraine under the post-Maidan government (which was made official in Crimea via a referendum to become part of Russia, and has been unofficially supported in the formation of the "DPR" and "LPR"). Russia's ultimate goal is for Ukraine to be within Moscow's sphere of influence – or at the very least neutral – in terms of its foreign policy. Absent that outcome, Moscow is determined to undermine any efforts by the Ukrainians to integrate with the West. Thus, Russia's support for the separatist conflict stems from its desire to disrupt Ukraine's Western alignment and undermine its stability and coherence as a state in its current orientation.

When it comes to the separatists themselves, their goals are largely aligned with those of Moscow. The separatists do not accept the Ukrainian government as legitimate in its current form and thus refuse to be a part of it. In order to be re-incorporated back into the Ukrainian state, the separatists want a say in decision making regarding foreign and defense policy, at least on a local/regional

level. While the separatists do have some level of autonomy within the "DPR" and "LPR" on internal management of these territories, their reliance on Russia for military and financial support ultimately makes their position and actions in terms of negotiations vis-à-vis Ukraine dependent on decision making in Moscow.

From the US perspective, Washington is broadly in lock step with the position of Ukraine, i.e., that the conflict was a product of Russian aggression and the onus is on Moscow to withdraw its troops and its support for the separatists to end the conflict. To this end, the US has ramped up its support for Ukraine in the form of military assistance, including joint training efforts and the supply of lethal weapons like Javelin anti-tank missiles, and Washington has also increased its pressure on Moscow in the form of sanctions. But the US position regarding the Ukrainian conflict is also different from that of Kyiv in the sense that it is part of a broader standoff between Washington and Moscow which spans a gamut of issues, from Syria, to arms control, to Venezuela. The US support for Ukraine can thus be seen to have an immediate and direct interest in aiding Ukraine's Western integration efforts, but there is also a deeper geopolitical element in play in the form of the US containment strategy toward Russia, where Washington seeks to undermine Moscow's influence in sensitive areas along the former Soviet periphery and weaken Russia's position as a global power.

The EU has a broadly similar stance to the US when it comes the Ukraine conflict, in the sense that the bloc supports Kyiv's Western integration efforts and has also passed sanctions against Russia over its involvement in the conflict. However, the EU position is more complex and nuanced given that the bloc represents 28 different member states, some of which have different positions when it comes to both Ukraine and Russia. For example, countries in Central/Eastern Europe, like Poland and Lithuania, largely mirror the position of the US and are some of Ukraine's staunchest pro-Western advocates, while countries such as Germany and France are far more measured in their support of Ukraine and their antagonism to Russia. This discrepancy is due to several factors: Germany and France have less geographic exposure to and greater commercial ties with Russia (particularly Germany), and both Berlin and Paris are less enthusiastic about Ukraine's EU/NATO integration, given

"enlargement fatigue" and internal issues within these blocs. The result is a less aggressive EU sanctions regime against Russia compared to that of the US and a somewhat more balanced line on seeking concessions from both Russia and Ukraine in order to end the conflict in Donbas.

Outlook for the conflict

Given these conflicting positions of the various players, it is perhaps no surprise that diplomatic efforts to end the conflict in Ukraine have proven inconclusive. Despite numerous efforts to negotiate an end to the conflict – most notably within the context of the Minsk protocols, first established in September 2014 and renewed in February 2015 in the form of the Minsk II agreement – the differences in interpretation over the nature and timing of implementation of these agreements between the various actors have until now made these protocols ineffective in resolving the conflict.

For example, according to Ukraine, whose position is backed by the US, Russia must first withdraw all of its troops and weaponry from the conflict zone in order to move forward with the political components of the deal, particularly granting autonomy and "special status" to the regions of Donetsk and Luhansk. According to the "DPR" and "LPR" separatists, whose position is backed by Russia, political recognition must be granted first before any moves are made on the security front (indeed, Russia formally refuses to acknowledge that its forces are even present in Eastern Ukraine).

While the war is not as active or intense as it was in its initial years, with both the Ukrainian side and separatists firmly establishing their areas of territorial control, there are nevertheless constant ceasefire violations along the line of contact and both sides continue to inflict casualties on a regular basis.

The divergence of these positions and the refusal of both sides to compromise meaningfully have thus produced a stalemate in the conflict. While the war is not as active or intense as it was in its initial years, with both the Ukrainian side and separatists firmly establishing their areas of territorial control, there are nevertheless constant ceasefire violations along the line of contact and both sides continue to inflict casualties on a regular basis. The war in Ukraine has thus essentially turned into a "frozen conflict," not unlike other conflicts in the post-Soviet

space, including Nagorno-Karabakh (between Azerbaijan and Armenia), Abkhazia and South Ossetia (between Georgia and Russia), and Transniestria (between Moldova and Russia), all of which had similar roots of clashes in identity and separatism, and show no signs of resolution anytime soon.

This is not to say that the conflict in Ukraine is destined to continue indefinitely in its current form. Indeed, in recent months, some progress has been made in mitigating the conflict, particularly at a tactical level. An important catalyst for such change was the election of Volodymyr Zelensky as president of Ukraine, which changed the political dynamics of the conflict. Zelensky, an outsider who had never previously held political office, campaigned on a platform of rooting out corruption on the home front and ending the conflict with Russia, and he defeated the incumbent, Poroshenko, by a record margin in the elections of May 2019.

Zelensky's victory was followed by a major prisoner exchange between Ukraine and Russia in July 2019, which included the release of more than two dozen Ukrainian sailors captured by Russia in a standoff in the Sea of Azov during Poroshenko's tenure. This exchange was then followed by the pullback of troops and weaponry from three conflict sites –Stanitsa Luganskaya, Zolote, and Petrovske– which had been agreed in the previous year but had not been fully implemented until Zelensky came to office. This successful implementation has in turn unlocked high-level diplomatic negotiations in the format of the Normandy Four (Russia, Ukraine, Germany, France), whose heads of state met for the first time in more than four years on December 9, 2019 to discuss the conflict from a broader political standpoint.

Despite this tactical progress in terms of prisoner exchanges and troop and weaponry pullbacks, there are still significant challenges for such progress to be translated into political concessions, and it remains far from a diplomatic resolution to the conflict. While granting some level of political autonomy for the "DPR" and "LPR" is under consideration by the Ukrainian government (and ultimately would be necessary to establish a political settlement), there is a divergence between what the separatists and their backers in Moscow want and what the public in Ukraine is willing to accept.

Indeed, there have been several protests in Kyiv in recent months warning against what many view as "capitulation" to Russia in the event of any meaningful political concessions to the separatists. Given the dynamic nature of Ukraine's political system, Zelensky has to treat negotiations carefully, or else risk his own political capital and potentially even his position as president – meaning that Zelensky's decision making is significantly constrained by public opinion.

On Russia's part, Moscow may have an interest in engaging in negotiations without having the genuine willingness to offer major concessions in order to achieve a resolution of the conflict. If Russia were to grant international observers access to its border with the separatist territories, as Kyiv and Washington are calling for, this would essentially be sacrificing Moscow's own position in the conflict, something that the Kremlin is not willing to do. Western sanctions may be economically painful to Russia, but Moscow has calculated that the concession of abandoning the separatist territories would come at a higher political and strategic cost. This is why Russia continues to support the separatist territories, and it is also why Moscow has advocated for Ukraine to negotiate with the separatists directly and why Russian officials classify the conflict as a "civil war," rather than a "war of Russian aggression," as per Ukraine and the US.

Given the dynamic nature of Ukraine's political system, Zelensky has to treat negotiations carefully, or else risk his own political capital and potentially even his position as president – meaning that Zelensky's decision making is significantly constrained by public opinion.

Conclusion

The conflict in Ukraine is not unique in its nature. It is a product of separatism and divergent political and cultural identities, features that are shared among numerous frozen conflicts in the post-Soviet space. As with those conflicts, the Ukrainian conflict is exacerbated by the strategic competition for geopolitical influence among external powers, most notably Russia and the US. In this sense, the scale and ripple effects of the Ukrainian conflict have been unique.

Due to the deep roots of the different political and cultural identities within Ukraine, and the divergent interests of the

various parties to the conflict, a comprehensive political solution, appropriately brokered and respected by all the parties, will be extremely difficult to achieve. It is more likely that the Ukrainian conflict will become the latest in a series of long-term "frozen conflicts" that could take several years, if not decades, to resolve. Nevertheless, the conflict in Ukraine has offered, and will continue to offer, instructive lessons about what drives identity-based divisions within a particular political space, and how those divisions can be shaped and manipulated in the sphere of "great power" politics.

At a broader strategic level, the conflict can be expected to continue until the position of one or more of the actors changes in a strategic way – whether that be the military strength of Ukraine's forces, Russia's own strength, or the willingness of the US to intervene more directly. The tactical elements of the conflict are certainly subject to change, but the broader political contours of the conflict will be shaped by the various (and often contradictory) strategic interests of the different sides. These differences, in turn, will be much more difficult to overcome.

Construction of sub-national identity vis-à-vis parent state: Gagauz case in Moldova

Rusif Huseynov[*]

The current state of Gagauzia, an autonomous territory within Moldova since the 1990s, reflects its troubled historical past and geographical location. Gagauz identity is constructed in an environment conditioned by the region's geopolitical position and the traditional rule of larger groups. Other factors, such as ethno-linguistic affiliation, historical narratives, incomplete national consciousness, and poor economic conditions, further influence Gagauz identity, which may be in some ways different from that of the parent state's dominant group. This paper tries to shed light on how Gagauz self-identity is constructed and how it is contradistinguished from that of Moldova by examining the case partly through an analysis of the Gagauz elite's narrative. This construction is controversial and at the same time perplexing, given Moldova's own quest for identity and geopolitical orientation. In some instances, the parent state can be positioned as 'Other' due to the Romanophobia and Russophilia of the Gagauz; in other cases, Moldova can be internalized as part of Gagauz statehood vis-à-vis a pan-Romanian agenda. This paper is part of a larger project that has generated original data derived from the author's field trip to Gagauzia, based on the narratives of the local elite from this small and under-studied region. The study takes a top-down approach in considering identity construction.

Key words: Gagauz, Gagauzia, Moldova, national identity

* Rusif Huseynov is the co-founder and chair of the Topchubashov Center.

Introduction

Gagauzia, or *Gagauz Yeri* in the local language, is a small self-governing region in the south of Moldova. Set up in its current form in 1995 and officially known as the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia, the entity occupies 1,832 km² and is divided into three *dolays* (districts) in four enclaves, with the seat of local government installed in the township of Comrat. Of a regional population of 155,600 (4.6% of the Moldovan total), the Gagauz constitute an absolute majority (82.1%) followed by Bulgarians, Moldovans, Russians, and Ukrainians.

Orthodox Christians by religion and Oghuz Turks by language, the titular ethnic group of the autonomy, the Gagauz, transmigrated to Bessarabia (present-day Moldova and Ukraine) in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Since then the core group has lived under the Russian Empire, the Kingdom of Romania, the Soviet Union, and the Republic of Moldova.

Decades of Russification and Sovietization, the weak development of the Gagauz language, and the multi-ethnic nature of Bessarabia have all contributed to the construction of Gagauz identity.

Decades of Russification and Sovietization, the weak development of the Gagauz language, and the multi-ethnic nature of Bessarabia have all contributed to the construction of Gagauz identity. Underdeveloped during the Soviet era, the Gagauz national consciousness nonetheless underwent an awakening in the late 1980s and claimed a separate ethno-territorial identity.

Unlike other ethno-territorial problems that broke out as violent and bloody conflicts with the collapse of the USSR, the Gagauz movement for self-determination in the early 1990s proceeded relatively peacefully. Proclaimed in August 1990, the Gagauz Republic, the first de facto state[1] in the post-Soviet space, existed as a semi-independent region until it opted for reintegration into Moldova in the mid-1990s following a series of negotiations between the Gagauz and Moldovan authorities.

The region currently suffers from multiple internal problems (fragile state of the Gagauz language and culture; poor infrastructure; unemployment; out-migration; etc.), while its relations with the central government in Chișinău have usually

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[1]   Kosienkowski, M. "The Gagauz Republic: Internal Dynamics of De Facto Statehood," *Journal Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska*, Volume 24, Issue 1, 2017, p.116.

been far from normal. In fact, the relevant competences between the central and autonomous authorities have not been clearly delineated.

The contemporary state of Gagauzia also reflects its troubled history and geographical location. Historically living in a border region fought over and treated as geopolitically important by various empires, the Gagauz are still subject to the geopolitical influence of diverse power sources. They share ethno-linguistic connections with Turkey, while retaining a strong historical affiliation with Russia. As a result of Moldova's westward aspirations and the relevant European Union (EU) policies, Gagauzia has also been subject to European influence.

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Caught in a tangled web of influences and historically ruled by larger groups, Gagauz identity is, therefore, being constructed in a complicated environment: ethno-linguistic affiliation (ethnic kinship with Turks, Russian as a *lingua franca* in the region), historical narratives (allegiance towards Russia; the painful Romanian period; Soviet nostalgia), complex geopolitical position (the crossroads of the EU, Russia and Turkey), incomplete national consciousness and emigration (*gastarbeiters* in Russia and Turkey, and to some extent in the EU) further confuse the situation and may partially explain the complicated conditions that influence Gagauz identity, which is definitely different from that of the parent state's dominant group.

Voiced by a local student to James Kapaló during the latter's ethnographic research in the region, the quote 'The Turks want to turn us into Turks, the Bulgarians into Bulgarians, the Russians into Russians, the Moldovans into Romanians and now the Greeks want to try the same. Why don't they just let us be Gagauz!'[2] illustrates the desperation of the Gagauz in seeking their identity, as well as the efforts of outside forces to influence Gagauz identity.

This research is part of a larger project, the main empirical findings of which are also derived from the author's field trip to Gagauzia and interviews with representatives of the Gagauz

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2   Kapaló, J. *Text, Context and Performance: Gagauz Folk Religion in Discourse and Practice*, Leiden: Brill, 2011, p.82.

elite, and considers the role of top-down influence in the construction of identity. While the main project mainly dealt with the construction of Gagauz identity and the influence of external forces on this process, a couple of questions touched upon the Gagauz–Moldovan relationship. Based on these findings, this paper aims to reveal how Gagauz identity is constructed in relation to the parent state, Moldova, and how this process affects Moldovan statehood and territorial integrity.

This project utilized intensive document and media analysis and participant observation, but these are supplementary to data supplied by the elite interviews. Drawn from a wider spectrum in interviews for the overall project, this paper includes responses by the following personalities: Mikhail Sirkeli, a civil society activist, journalist, and head of a local non-governmental organization; Todur Zanet, a poet, journalist, folklorist, and editor-in-chief of the first Gagauz-language newspaper; Ivan Patraman, actor and director, and the producer of the first Gagauz-language film; Leonid Dobrov, a Soviet dissident, active member of the Gagauz national movement, and ex-mayor of Comrat; Ekaterina Jekova, a journalist, member of the local parliament, and former chair of Gagauz Radio & Television Company.

Gagauz identity and its key elements

As a product of geographical, historical, political, and social factors, including post-Soviet existential challenges, Gagauz identity has been constructed by emulating discourses that have 'instrumentalised and mythologised narratives of ethno-genesis, origins and religious destiny.'[3] The autochthonous component of Gagauz identity is signified through the Gagauz language as well as self-governance and national symbols. The linguistic and cultural expansion of external forces, especially Russian, plays a crucial role in undermining the situation of Gagauz, since the latter is usually overshadowed: never developed as an administrative, academic, or 'higher society' tongue, Gagauz has also gradually been losing its vernacularity. Therefore, the evaluation of the Gagauz language is currently very pessimistic. While discussing the problem, the author heard from his interlocutors such terms

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3   Ibid, p.77-78

as 'underdeveloped,'[4] 'degradation,'[5] 'catastrophic,'[6] 'tragic,' 'disappearance,' and 'historic loss.'[7]

Instead of cultivating the Gagauz language and culture, as was expected at the beginning of the national movement, the situation was aggravated during (and despite) the autonomy, since there exist no kindergartens or schools with Gagauz as the main language of instruction. Rather, it is taught for only a few hours per week, like a foreign language. The position of the Moldovan authorities toward this problem can be called essentially neutral: they neither undermine the Gagauz language, nor promote it. Nevertheless, they are definitely interested in pushing the Moldovan/Romanian language, which is not popular in daily life in Gagauzia.

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Rather, it is the Russian-language kindergartens and schools, a heritage of the Soviet period that are still maintained here. Furthermore, parent–child communication in Russian is growing, based on the assumption that this language will open more career opportunities in the future, both within and outside Gagauzia, and is now displacing Gagauz from families, too. Intensive upbringing in Russian both at home and school raises concerns that future generations may not be able to properly master the Gagauz idiom, further threatening its continued existence and damaging ethnic identity. As a result, UNESCO has registered Gagauz as an endangered language.[8]

The state of the Gagauz tongue has been worsening parallel to and as a result of the dominance of the Russian language, which, through its role as a *lingua franca* as well as a language of administration, education, and religion, has transformed the Gagauz 'from largely illiterate monoglot speakers of a Turkic[c] idiom'[9] into a currently bilingual ethnic group. In fact, Russian can be listed among the main elements of Gagauz identity

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4   Author's interview with Mihail Sirkeli, February 5, 2019

5   Author's interview with Ivan Patraman, February 14, 2019

6   Author's interview with Todur Zanet, February 5, 2019

7   Leonid Dobrov, interview with Author, February 5, 2019

8   UNESCO, (2010), *UNESCO Interactive Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger*, Available at: http://www.unesco.org/languages-atlas/index.php?hl=en&page=atlasmap (Accessed: October 1, 2019)

9   Kapaló, *op.cit.* 2011, p.82.

according to Sirkeli,[10] who argues that defending the right to use the Russian language was one of the founding components of Gagauz autonomy. The importance of Russian has increased in recent decades for several other reasons: it may be seen as a shield against Romanian/Moldovan expansion and, given the lack of employment and massive out-migration, the Russian language enables the Gagauz to work beyond Gagauzia, especially in Russia.

Soviet nostalgia, another noteworthy constituent of Gagauzness, is not a purely psychological and mental construct in our case: within the autonomous state, it is a visible and tangible phenomenon. The main street in the capital still bears the name of Vladimir Lenin, despite occasional calls to rename it. The monument to Lenin still stands firmly in the same street, in front of the government building that houses the offices of both the *Başkan*[11] and the regional assembly, *Halk Topluşu*. Memorials dedicated to the Great Patriotic War and Soviet–Afghan War can be found in many places across Gagauzia. The celebrations of 22 June[12] (the day in 1941 when Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union) and 9 May (Soviet Victory Day over Nazi Germany, 1945) have been solemnly observed in recent years, featuring the Russian-style Immortal Regiment and St. George ribbons.[13]

The collective memory in Gagauzia has evolved a positive image of the Soviet period, which is associated with mass literacy, certainty about tomorrow, stability, and lower prices. The associated nostalgia has become sharper, especially when contrasting the period with post-Soviet instability and today's reality.[14] Furthermore, not only may this phenomenon glorify Soviet achievements, but it also downplays historical tragedies, such as the mass famine of 1946–1947: in other words, the Gagauz collective memory prefers to forget when it comes to the

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10   Author's interview with Mihail Sirkeli, February 5, 2019.

11   *Başkan* (Gagauz: leader, head) is the official title for the governor of the Gagauz autonomy. The *Başkan* is elected in a direct election every four years.

12   Gagauzinfo.md, (2015) Руководство Гагаузии почтило память павших в Великой Отечественной войне солдат [The leadership of Gagauzia honored the memory of soldiers who fell in the Great Patriotic War], 22 June, Available at: http://gagauzinfo.md/index.php?newsid=18916 (Accessed: April 23, 2019).

13   Gagauzinfo.md, (2017) Жители Вулканешт отметили 9 мая Маршем Победы и акцией «Бессмертный полк» [Residents of Vulcanesht celebrated May 9 with the Victory March and the action "Immortal Regiment"], 9 May, Available at: http://gagauzinfo.md/index.php?newsid=32878 (Accessed: April 23, 2019).

14   Author's interview with Ekaterina Jekova, February 10, 2019.

destructive episodes associated with the USSR.

The Orthodox church, one of the pillars of Gagauzness, also links it to the Russian world. While the Gagauz had converted to Orthodoxy long before they fell under Russian influence, their church is presently subject to the Moscow Patriarchate and liturgical sermons in Gagauz churches are conducted in Russian.

The local identity is also tightly associated with the current territorial autonomy. It was not Gagauz identity alone that fostered self-governance; the inverse process has also been happening, with the autonomy forging Gagauzness. The way in which autonomy was achieved is important to mythmaking about Gagauz uniqueness. It is proudly stated that the Gagauz case was the only conflict in the post-Soviet space that was solved peacefully.[15] This accomplishment is further remarkable due to the absence of any intermediaries. This is why ex-*Başkan* Mihail Formuzal once noted that 'Gagauzia's experience in conflict solution is an example for other countries,' referring particularly to other territorial conflicts in the post-Soviet space.[16] Yet there are concerns over the alleged reduction of Gagauzia's competences over the years against the backdrop of the absence of boundaries between central (Chișinău) and regional (Comrat) authorities.[17]

The way in which autonomy was achieved is important to mythmaking about Gagauz uniqueness. It is proudly stated that the Gagauz case was the only conflict in the post-Soviet space that was solved peacefully.

Turkic kinship is an important cornerstone of Gagauz identity: despite controversial theories on the Gagauz ethnogenesis, the community of blood and language contributes to the emergence of identity-building myths among both ordinary people and professional historians. The author's interviewees stated that every Gagauz proudly acknowledges their roots, while museums typically display the possible routes of the ancient Turkic tribes from Central Asia to the Balkans and Bessarabia. This very component has also given a strong impetus to, and helped to legitimize, the Gagauz claim to autonomy, as well as their relations with Turkey and other Turkic states.

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15   Author's interview with Mihail Sirkeli, February 5, 2019.

16   SputnikNews.ru, (2017) Экс-башган: опыт Гагаузии в решении конфликта - пример для стран, [*Ex-Bashgan: Gagauzia's experience in resolving the conflict - an example for countries*], 15 October, Available at: https://az.sputniknews.ru/expert/20171015/412329489/gagauzija-narod-azerbajdzhan-moldova-konflikt.html (Accessed: April 21, 2019).

17   Author's interview with Ekaterina Jekova, February 10, 2019.

Romanophobia should also be examined as part of contemporary Gagauz discourse. The interwar Romanian rule has definitely left traces – mostly negative –in the Gagauz collective memory. However, post-Second World War Soviet propaganda also played an active role in constructing the negative Romanian image. Echoing the popular Soviet discourse, the local narrative still refers to the period between 1918 and 1940 as the 'Romanian occupation' (during which Romanians allegedly planned to assimilate and even annihilate the Gagauz) and contraposes it against 'Soviet liberation.'[18] Having resurfaced in the late 1980s, when unionist euphoria swept Moldova, this antipathy has resurfaced in the present and been reconstructed in light of current realities: the old stereotype of 'the Romanian gendarme' was not only reproduced, but also exaggerated by the Soviet propaganda machine to form the image of Romanians as fascists. That the Gagauz were treated as second-class citizens or beaten by Romanian teachers at schools has been exaggerated as it has entered the Gagauz collective memory, which, as noted earlier, usually ignores infamous pages from Gagauzia's Soviet history.

Gagauz identity has been influenced by its minority status: for centuries, this community was an ethnic and linguistic minority in Bessarabia, a region dominated by Romanian and Slavic-language speakers.

In general, Gagauz identity has been influenced by its minority status: for centuries, this community was an ethnic and linguistic minority in Bessarabia, a region dominated by Romanian and Slavic-language speakers. In the vast Turkic world to which the Gagauz ethnically and linguistically belong, they find themselves as a religious minority among the predominant Muslims.[19] Furthermore, as a double minority, an ethnic minority living within a non-Russian republic, in the former Soviet Union, the Gagauz could not effectively develop their own language, education, and bureaucracy, and therefore 'are slower in the process of downsizing the Soviet imagination.'[20] Therefore, the initial impetus for Gagauz autonomy was to resist the hegemony of the Moldovan identity 'by embracing the Russian language and Soviet heritage on the one hand'[21] and by constructing a Gagauz

18   BalkanInsight.com, (2018) *Gagauz Resist Moldova's Embrace of West.* 3 January, Available at: https://balka-ninsight.com/2018/01/03/gagauz-resist-moldova-s-embrace-of-west-01-01-2018-1/ (Accessed: April 23, 2019).

19   Kapaló, *op.cit.,* 2011,p.5.

20   Demirdirek, H. "Living in The Present: The Gagauz in Moldova", *The Anthropology of East Europe Review*, 178:1, 2000, p.72.

21   Demirdirek, H. "Step Across the Border Transnational Encounters and Nation-Making," *The Anthropology of East Europe Review*, Vol. 24, No. 1, 2006, p.45.

national identity on the other. Moreover, despite a centuries-long subjection, Gagauz identity itself is not discriminatory, as its byzantine nature is associated with tolerance and co-existence with other ethnic groups in this multi-ethnic region.

Gagauz identity versus Moldova

Gagauz identity, and how it is shaped, certainly affects Moldova, the parent state. As a former part of a larger entity, the Soviet Union, Moldova itself is struggling to construct its own identity, hesitating between Moldovan nationalism and Romanian irredentism. Another fluctuation is apparent between Euro- and Russo-centric geopolitical orientations. The country must also cope with internal territorial problems and ethnic minorities: Transnistria has been developing as a *de facto* state for nearly three decades, while Gagauz and ethnic Bulgarians in the south may have uneasy relations with the center. Moreover, at least one third of the entire population consider themselves Russian-speaking.[22]

In this context, it is extremely important for Moldova to understand and take into account Gagauz identity, especially in the aftermath of the 2014 referendum, in which the overwhelming majority in Gagauzia rejected the westward rush and favoured a Russian-led integrationist project instead. As for the third question in the plebiscite, 98.9% of voters supported Gagauzia's right to declare independence should Moldova lose or surrender its own independence.[23] This was a direct reference to Article 1.4 of the 1994 Autonomy Law, which is touched upon later in this paper.

How the parent state appears to the Gagauz is quite controversial: Moldova is certainly constructed as the Other to the Gagauz Self, and the relationship with Moldova is eyed through the prism of several factors. Firstly, the fact that Gagauzia has become part of Moldova is accepted as a result of historical developments, but perceived neutrally, if not negatively.

The Gagauz–Moldovan relationship is heavily shaped by

22   Point.md (2019) Додон с трибуны ООН: Треть населения Молдовы считают себя русскоязычными, [Dodon from the UN tribune: A third of the population of Moldova consider themselves Russian-speaking], 26 September, Available at: https://point.md/ru/novosti/politika/dodon-s-tri-buny-oon-tret-naseleniia-moldovy-schitaiut-sebia-russkoiazychnymi (Accessed: September 26, 2019).

23   RFE/RL.org (2014) *Gagauzia Voters Reject Closer EU Ties For Moldova*, 3 February, Available at: https://www.rferl.org/a/moldova-gagauz-referendum-counting/25251251.html (Accessed: September 27, 2019).

Romanophobia, which has already been portrayed and explained. Hence, any hypothetical Romanian–Moldovan unification, whether it is real or imagined and whether is it on or off the agenda, haunts the Gagauz narrative and behaviour. According to Sirkeli, the pan-Romanian discourse, although artificially bred, is heightening uncertainty and fear in Gagauzia and pushing it more strongly toward Russia.[24] This discourse may intertwine with the image of the EU and associate the West with Romania. Faced with a Romanian/Western advance into the region, Russia and to some extent Turkey may be seen as protectors for the Gagauz.

...Moldovan statehood is not only constructed as the Other, but in some cases even internalized: in this context, Moldovans (both politicians and the population) may be seen as the Romanian Other, while Moldova is treated as a state of the Gagauz.

One thing the author himself found very interesting is that Moldovan statehood is not only constructed as the Other, but in some cases even internalized: in this context, Moldovans (both politicians and the population) may be seen as the Romanian Other, while Moldova is treated as a state of the Gagauz. This argument can be supported by the fact that Moldova`s unification with Romania has been impossible to achieve, partly due to Gagauz resistance (as well as other factors, such as the Transnistrian problem): *'Whenever a wave of unionism breaks out in Moldova, all the Gagauz, regardless of their views, become the patriots of Moldova and struggle against Moldova's joining any entities, '*says Dobrov, most likely exaggerating Gagauzia's contribution to Moldovan independence:

> *Without the Gagauz, Moldova has already been part of Romania. Whether it would be better or worse is another question. We do not know. But there would have not been an independent Moldova. It would have been incorporated 25 years ago. All presidents, both the former ones and the incumbent Dodon, accept that the Gagauz are more statists[25] than the Moldovans themselves.[26]*

In other words, the understanding of 'Self' and 'Other' is quite relative in this region: Moldova is the Other for the Gagauz in general but, if placed alongside Romania, or when the topic of Romanian unification comes up, then Moldova quickly becomes

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24   Author's interview with Mihail Sirkeli, February 5, 2019.

25   The word 'государственники' ('gosudarstvenniki') was used in the original interview.

26   Author's interview with Leonid Dobrov, February 5, 2019.

part of the Self against the Romanian Other. This narrative is reflected in plural nuances, including the Moldovan versus Romanian language controversy, with most of the interviewees, in step with the general trend in Gagauzia, preferring the notion of a 'Moldovan' rather than 'Romanian' language.

It is no surprise that the Gagauz electorate, which may seem small and insignificant, is intensively embraced by Moldova's anti-unionist political figures and parties, most notably by the current president, pro-Russian Igor Dodon, who visits Gagauzia frequently and with great pleasure, enjoying some measure of sympathy there.

Despite this internalization of the Moldovan state, the Gagauz generally adhere to the 1994 Autonomy Law, more precisely Article 1.4, which legally reserves their right for external self-determination and acts as a guarantee against antagonistic Romanian–Moldovan unification. The self-determination paragraph stemmed from the political realities of the mid-1990s, necessary to keep the Gagauz out of Romania if Moldova decided to join its western neighbour, of which the Gagauz historically had a negative collective memory. In the 2010s, the paragraph, having received a new dimension, was also interpreted in terms of Moldova's EU ambitions. This item can be expected to be brought onto the political agenda again in the event of a partial loss of Moldovan sovereignty due to EU membership.

In response to a follow-up question, "what would the Gagauz do, should Moldova turn westward?", Sirkeli explained that they would also proceed in that direction by inertia as the autonomy does not possess the resources to resist. However, external support might change the balance and provide the lacking resources: *"Of course, Gagauzia has no other way out. But things also depend on the support from outside. For example, on how the Russians will counter-act."*[27]

...the Gagauz narrative regarding Moldova is not straightforward; by reflecting historical experience and present realities, the Gagauz may either detach themselves from or attach themselves to Moldova, depending on the Romanian Other context.

It must be understood that the Gagauz narrative regarding Moldova is not straightforward; by reflecting historical experience and present realities, the Gagauz may either detach themselves from or attach themselves to Moldova, depending on

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27   Author's interview with Mihail Sirkeli, February 5, 2019.

the Romanian Other context. Although the Gagauz may have a say in– and occasionally shape –Moldova's domestic and foreign policy, they apparently do not possess the power that would lead to greater influence.

Conclusion

The contemporary Gagauz identity has a dual nature, Russian and Turkic, with the former apparently having a slightly greater weight. Although acknowledging their Turkic roots, the Gagauz have, over recent decades, become a Russophone community. While the sentiments articulated during the elite interviews represent calls and attempts to construct a distinct identity, including preserving the Gagauz language, little has been done in this regard, leading to the decline of the mother tongue. To explain other key elements of Gagauz identity, this paper has generalized the ways in which the Gagauz feel part of the Turkic world, for example through mythologizing their ancient roots, while maintaining a virtual connection to the Russian world through the Russian language, Orthodox Church, and glorification of the Soviet era.

Gagauzia's status as an integral, yet autonomous province of Moldova may present its own unique set of problems. Since the autonomous status was formalized in the mid-1990s, Gagauzia has maintained uneasy relations with Chişinau, especially in the context of the devolution of competencies, foreign policy priorities, and the historical Romanophobia contained in the Gagauz narrative. Sometimes the parent state can be alienated as 'Other' due to the Romanophobia and Russophilia of the Gagauz; in other instances, Moldova can be internalized as part of Gagauz statehood vis-à-vis the pan-Romanian agenda.

At the same time, the region does not possess sufficient political and economic power to be able to shape the policies of the Republic of Moldova. Nor does it have the resources to secede and become an independent state without outside interference. Therefore, from time to time, Gagauz political forces may either play the self-determination card; be the main supporters of Moldovan statehood; or see Russia and Turkey as protectors against possible Moldovan–Romanian unification.

The Role of Irredentism in Russia's Foreign Policy

Nina Miholjcic*

This article examines the role of irredentism in contemporary Russian foreign policy and the future steps of Russian politics regarding territorial expansion and territorial disputes in the Soviet Union's "near abroad." It also examines the historical background of Russian territorial enlargement in order to explore connections between Russia's current irredentist claims and the roots of expansionist Russian foreign policy. The article examines the case of Crimea through the lens of irredentism and discusses the future of Russia's territorial expansion after the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula followed by Western sanctions. It debates whether irredentism acts as an effective tool in Russian foreign policy for the purposes of further Russian territorial expansion, that is, the acquisition of lands that Russia deems to be its own based on historical and ethnic ties.

Keywords: irredentism, Russia, Crimea, territorial claims, Near Abroad

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Introduction

Territory continues to play a significant role in contemporary international politics. It is at the core of many interstate and interethnic clashes where all sides involved claim their own rights over the disputed territorial areas.[1] In the 1990s, with the dissolution of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, post-Cold War Europe experienced a flourishing of irredentist arguments. Many former republics started to make claims toward the sovereign territories of neighbouring states based on "ethnic kinship."[2] It seemed, however, that immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union the newly established states did not pursue such claims with the exception of the violent Azerbaijan–Armenia conflict caused by Armenia's irredentist claim over Azerbaijan's Armenian-populated region of Nagorno-Karabakh.[3]

> *The contemporary concept of irredentism implies "state support for annexing neighbouring territories inhabited by ethnic kin."*

The contemporary concept of irredentism implies "state support for annexing neighbouring territories inhabited by ethnic kin."[4] Saideman further clarifies that the "territorial expansion of a country is considered irredentist only in cases where a country has ethnic and historical claims over [the] territories in question."[5]

Ever since the collapse of the USSR, Russia has been perceived as a serious irredentist threat to its neighbouring countries due to the fact that more than twenty million Russians live in the border areas of the other former Soviet Republics.[6] Interestingly, the Yeltsin administration was not predominantly irredentist despite being nationalist-oriented. Sideman explains this lack of irredentist sentiment in the early years of post-Soviet Russia as owing to the differences in preferences of Yeltsin's key supporters, who were more occupied by economic issues rather than a desire to protect Russians in the near abroad.[7] However, Russia's current foreign

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1   Kim, G. "Irredentism in Disputed Territories and Its Influence on the Border Conflicts and Wars," *The Journal of Territorial and Maritime Studies*, Vol. 3 No. 1, January 2016, pp. 87–101.

2   Saideman, S. "Inconsistent irredentism? Political competition, ethnic ties, and the Foreign policies of Somalia and Serbia," *Security Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 3, December 2017, p. 51.

3   Ambrosio, T. *Irredentism: Ethnic Conflict and International Politics*, Westport, CT: Praeger, 2001,pp.2–3,7.

4   Saideman, *op.cit*. p. 53.

5   Saideman, *op.cit*. p. 53.

6   Saideman, *op.cit.,*p. 51.

7   Saideman, *op.cit.,* p. 90.

policy is significantly focused on territorial acquisitions of areas populated by ethnic Russians. Vladimir Putin's administration has come to be considered as highly irredentist and expansionist, especially after the annexation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula in 2014.

Pain argues that modern Russia has re-embraced the doctrine of "official nationality," which implies "the concept of protecting 'the Russian world' (*Russkii Mir*) on the territories that once comprised the Russian Empire" and consequently assists in creating "the ideological basis for annexing Crimea and all-round support for the Donbas separatists."[8] The doctrine of official nationality was introduced in 1833 with the famous slogan "*Pravoslaviye, Samoderzhaviye, i Narodnost*" ("Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationality") by Count Sergey Uvarov, the emperor's minister of education. This was supposed to act as a principle to counteract corrupting Western ideas.[9] Official nationality became the formal ideology of Nicholas I's imperial cabinet (1825–55), according to which Russian people could follow Russia's "original path" and tradition, which would not be possible according to the leading European philosophical schools of thought and doctrines of that time.[10]

Contemporary Russian politics exercises "official nationality" partly through an irredentist campaign where the protection of ethnic Russians and their lands has become one of the country's foreign policy priorities. Therefore, this paper investigates the role of irredentism in Russia's current foreign policy and its effect on Russian territorial enlargement. The annexation of Crimea has shown that irredentism has been used effectively as a foreign policy means for further Russian territorial expansion. Harding argues that, if Russia continues to pursue a new "Greater Russia" plan, Russian-speaking areas such as south-eastern Ukraine, Transnistria (a breakaway region of the Republic of Moldova), the Russian-populated parts of all three Baltic countries, and the

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8   Pain, E. "The imperial syndrome and its influence on Russian nationalism," in *The New Russian Nationalism: Imperialism, Ethnicity and Authoritarianism 2000–2015*, eds. PålKolstø, HelgeBlakkisrud (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), pp. 72–73.

9   Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Available at:https://www.britannica.com/topic/Orthodoxy-Autocracy-and-Nationality (Accessed:December 4, 2019).

10   Pain, *op.cit.* p. 49.

north of Kazakhstan will become potential hotspots for Russian irredentism.[11] However, taking into account Russia's declining economic situation, such claims might be less realistic in the near future.

History of Russian Territorial Expansion

Even though Russian irredentism relates to the irredentist claims of post-Soviet Russia to parts of the former Soviet Union, the history of Russian territorial acquisition before the USSR could reveal the roots of Russia's expansionist foreign policy and therefore the contemporary emphasis on irredentist claims that include the incorporation of territories populated by kin-nationals. In order to understand why and how territorial expansion, and with it irredentism, has become one of the priorities in Russia's current foreign policy, we have to explore the historical background of Russia's desire to expand and conquer territories that it deems to be its own. The end of the 15th century was marked by the end of Golden Horde rule and the establishment of the centralized Russian state. The new state that arose after almost two and a half centuries of submission to the Mongol Empire became a predominantly Orthodox, highly autocratic, and isolated political entity.[12]

During the Mongol occupation (1237–1480), Russians were exposed to the harsh and chaotic steppe culture, where borders were an unknown concept, plunder and enslavement normal events, and the nomadic lifestyle a desirable way of existence. In such an insecure, savage environment Russians were desperate and torn apart. After the Mongols had left, the fear of being conquered and subjugated again made Russians believe that only territorial expansion and the exercise of the absolute power over their neighbours[13] would secure them from any future invasion. For the next several centuries Russia managed to invade many of its surrounding areas. The pace of conquest was incredibly

11   Harding, L. (2014), "Irredentist appointment," *The Guardian*, 28 March, Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/mar/28/vladimir-putin-crimea-changed-world (Accessed: October 10, 2019).

12   Trenin, D. (2019), "Russia's Changing Identity: In Search of a Role in the 21st Century," *Carnegie Moscow Center*, 18 July, Available at: https://carnegie.ru/commentary/79521 (Accessed: October 15, 2019).

13   Henry Kissinger, *World Order*, New York: Penguin Books, 2014, p. 52.

fast. Kissinger describes this extraordinary expansion as an unstoppable force that was expanding each year, occupying territories that were often larger than some European states.[14] And with each new territory, Russia would do the same thing– impose its absolute power onto the occupied land and people.

The Tsardom of Russia, later the Russian Empire (1721), practiced an expansionist foreign policy from the 16th century until 1917 when it ceased to exist and soon became part of the Soviet Union. By the late 19th century, Russia had managed to expand southward from Siberia and eastward from the Caspian Sea, reaching the borders of Afghanistan, Iran, and India.[15] The Russian Empire's size was impressive; it covered almost one-sixth of the earth's landmass including modern Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Finland, the Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia), Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan), the Baltic Republics (Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia), substantial parts of Poland and Turkey, even expanding into Alaska and California in North America.[16] Territory has played a significant role in Russian politics. Territorial expansion brings resources, wealth, and power, but it is also at the core of the irredentist claims that modern Russia exercises in order to acquire more land.

Territory has played a significant role in Russian politics. Territorial expansion brings resources, wealth, and power, but it is also at the core of the irredentist claims that modern Russia exercises in order to acquire more land.

Annexation of Crimea as Russia's Irredentist Intervention

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, fifteen new states appeared and among them the largest in terms of territory and population was the Russian Federation. Following the dissolution of the USSR, the Kremlin recognized all new independent post-Soviet states with their Soviet-era administrative borders.[17] Even though around 25 million ethnic Russians stayed outside the borders of the new Russia, the Russian Federation did not, at

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14 Ibid., p. 53.

15 MacKenzie, D. "Turkestan's Significance to Russia (1850-1917)," *Russian Review*, Vol. 33, No. 2, April 1974, p. 167.

16 Trepanier, L. (2017), "The Russian Empire (1721-1917)," *Vogelin View*, 27 February, Available at: https://voegelinview.com/russian-empire-1721-1917/ (Accessed: October 10, 2019).

17 Trenin, *op.cit.*

least officially, pursue irredentist politics within the first decade of independence. As Russian President, Boris Yeltsin did not raise irredentist claims during his tenure and managed to maintain good relations with the neighbouring countries, especially in terms of respecting border demarcation within the post-Soviet region. During the Yeltsin regime, Russia mainly remained uninvolved in the internal affairs of its near abroad, and this is particularly evident in the case of Ukraine's territorial sovereignty. On May 31, 1997, Ukraine and the Russian Federation signed the "Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Partnership" that explicitly obliged both sides to respect and acknowledge "each other's territorial integrity and … the inviolability of the borders existing between them."[18] However, throughout the Yeltsin era, Russia–Ukraine relations were not without political setbacks.

Yeltsin's political actions, particularly toward Ukraine, were more practical due to the fact that at that time any irredentist tactic would probably cause bloodshed and violent conflicts similar to those already affecting the former Yugoslav republics. Additionally, Russia was struggling with its own internal problems such as a serious economic crisis and the separatist movement in Chechnya. The Kremlin did not practice an active irredentist policy during the Yeltsin era possibly because economic issues were more pressing and key supporters were more interested in strengthening economic ties with the West and recovering domestic markets than in protecting kin-nationals living outside Russia's borders.[19] Correspondingly, political reasons, such as the need for consolidating power within the territory of Russia and resolving the separatist threat in Chechnya, made any irredentist attempt highly unfeasible.[20] Irredentism smouldered for almost the next two and a half decades, reaching its peak with the annexation of Crimea in 2014.

The annexation of Crimea was a huge blow to the post-Cold war order. Since then, Russian irredentism has become one of the most debated topics in contemporary international political discourse.

The annexation of Crimea was a huge blow to the post-Cold war order. Since then, Russian irredentism has become one of the most debated topics in

18 Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership Between Ukraine and the Russian Federation (1997), Article 2.

19 Saideman, *op.cit.,* p. 90.

20 Khineyko, I. (2007), "Boris Yeltsin and Ukraine," *Ukraine Analysis*, 24 April, Available at: https://ukraineanalysis.wordpress.com/2007/04/24/boris-yeltsin-and-ukraine/ (Accessed: October 4, 2019).

contemporary international political discourse. Indeed, the takeover of the Crimean Peninsula has become one of the main post-Cold War geopolitical challenges for the West.[21] Such a takeover of land in Ukraine was a signal to the West that Moscow was starting to put in motion its new "Greater Russia" plan that implies territorial expansion in the post-Soviet region and future geopolitical challenges in Eurasia. Russia partially justified the seizure of Crimea with the irredentist claim that the peninsula mostly comprises ethnic Russians[22] and thus should be part of the parent state. Russia's act is partially associated with Ukraine's desire to join NATO and the EU, the restriction of the use of the Russian language in the country, and attempts to "nationalize" the Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine.[23] The Kremlin was concerned that the further westernization of Ukraine would bring NATO to Russia's immediate backyard and jeopardize the geostrategic position of the Russian Navy in the Black Sea. Putin's motivation may have been to act as a defender of Russia's security interests against NATO's further expansion in the region, or as an imperialist who wanted to restore Russian prestige in the international arena.[24] Moscow would not be able successfully to conduct the annexation without the irredentist justification that the Crimean Peninsula, populated by an ethnic Russian majority, should be integrated with Russia on the basis of common ethnicity. The annexation of Crimea boosted Vladimir Putin's approval rating at home to 86 percent.[25] In the Crimean case, irredentism proved to be an effective foreign policy tool that successfully justified Russia's territorial expansion and defense of national interests that also include protecting ethnic Russians living outside the country's borders.

According to Pain, contemporary Russian politics follow the doctrine of "official nationality," where the President is responsible for protecting "the Russian World" (*Russkii Mir*), i.e., territories that once encompassed the Russian Empire and

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21   Harding, *op.cit.*

22   Popovici, A. (2018), "Why Russia Wants Crimea," *History*, 30 August, Available at: https://www.history.com/news/crimea-russia-ukraine-annexation (Accessed: October 12, 2019).

23   Trenin, *op.cit.*

24   Treisman, D. (2016),"Why Putin Took Crimea: The Gambler in the Kremlin," *Foreign Affairs*, May/June, Available at: https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/ukraine/2016-04-18/why-russian-president-putin-took-crimea-from-ukraine (Accessed: October 12, 2019).

25   Kolesnikov, A. (2019), "Five Years After Crimea, Russia Has Come Full Circle at Great Cost," *Carnegie Moscow Center*, 5 February, Available at: https://carnegie.ru/2019/02/05/five-years-after-crimea-russia-has-come-full-circle-at-great-cost-pub-78301 (Accessed: October 13, 2019).

protected the Russian-speaking population from the anti-Russian hostilities coming from the West.[26] Irredentism has supported this idea of "official nationality," particularly in the case of Crimea, since it has provided strong reasoning for why the peninsula should be merged with the mainland of Russia. Moscow claimed that the Russians in Crimea were threatened by anti-Russian sentiment and that Russia intervened in order to protect its co-nationals who, by ethnic and historical ties, rightfully belong to the parent nation. Russia's Minister of Defense, Sergei Shoigu, stated that Russian military actions in Crimea were a "necessary response to threats to the lives of civilians in Crimea and to the danger of possible seizure of Russian military infrastructure by extremist organizations."[27] Vladimir Putin, in a speech that followed the referendum in Crimea, noted that the Ukrainian crisis had endangered the rights of Russian-speaking Crimea and that Russia was obligated to respond and protect Crimea's distressed residents.[28] Moreover, Moscow used a historical explanation to justify the incorporation of Crimean territory by evoking the time of the Russian Empire, when the peninsula was part of the Empire's territory. The President of Russia emphasized the importance of historical heritage and connection to Crimea by stating:

> *Everything in Crimea speaks of our shared history and pride. This is the location of ancient Khersones, where Prince Vladimir was baptised. His spiritual feat of adopting Orthodoxy predetermined the overall basis of the culture, civilisation and human values that unite the peoples of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. The graves of Russian soldiers whose bravery brought Crimea into the Russian empire are also in Crimea. This is also Sevastopol – a legendary city with an outstanding history, a fortress that serves as the birthplace of Russia's Black Sea Fleet.[29]*

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26   Pain, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

27   Krasilnikov, S. (2014), "Shoigu: actions of the Russian Ministry of Defense in Crimea were caused by a threat to the life of civilians" ,*TASS Russian News Agency*, 24 April. Available at: https://tass.ru/politika/1097051 (Accessed: December 5, 2019).

28   Kremlin.ru (2014), *Address by President of the Russian Federation*, President of Russia: Events, 18 March, Available at: http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603 (Accessed: December 5, 2019).

29   Ibid.

Crimea fulfils both the historical and the ethnic conditions required for invoking irredentist claims. The peninsula is predominantly populated by ethnic Russians – almost 1.5 million out of the total population of 2.2 million. On the subject of territorial affiliation, Crimea was part of the Russian Empire from 1783 and, as an integrated part of the USSR, it was transferred from the Russian Federative Socialist Republic to the Ukraine Soviet Socialist Republic in 1954.

Potential Cases of Russian Irredentism

The concept of *Novorossiya* (New Russia) that Vladimir Putin introduced during the television show *Direct Line* in April 2014, just a month after the annexation of Crimea, raised new fears of further irredentist claims on Ukraine. In the live television broadcast, President Putin, regarding the rights of ethnic Russians in Ukraine and the notion of *Novorossiya*, stated the following:

The concept of Novorossiya (New Russia) that Vladimir Putin introduced during the television show Direct Line in April 2014, just a month after the annexation of Crimea, raised new fears of further irredentist claims on Ukraine.

> *The essential issue is how to ensure the legitimate rights and interests of ethnic Russians and Russian speakers in the southeast of Ukraine. I would like to remind you that what was called Novorossiya (New Russia) back in the tsarist days – Kharkov, Lugansk, Donetsk, Kherson, Nikolayev and Odessa – were not part of Ukraine back then. These territories were given to Ukraine in the 1920s by the Soviet government. Why? Who knows? They were won by Potyomkin and Catherine the Great in a series of well-known wars. The center of that territory was Novorossiysk, so the region is called Novorossiya. Russia lost these territories for various reasons, but the people remained. Today, they live in Ukraine, and they should be full citizens of their country.[30]*

This statement signified future irredentist claims to the southeast of Ukraine and the need to protect the interests of ethnic Russians living in *Novorossiya*– an area that, according

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30   Kremlin.ru (2014), *Direct Line with Vladimir Putin*, TV Program Direct Line, 17 April, Available at: http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20796 (Accessed: October 17, 2019).

to Putin, belongs to Russia on the basis of historical and ethnic connections. Putin claimed that Ukraine is an artificial country created by Bolsheviks who attached large regions of the historical South of Russia to the Republic of Ukraine.[31] The aim of the Kremlin's *Novorossiya* campaign was to create a suitable environment for another irredentist move with the argument that Ukraine does not have either historical or ethnical bonds to the south-eastern part of its territory and thus has no right to claim the land as its own.

Even though Novorossiya received political support from the Russian side and had the potential to provide historical and security validations for secessionist sentiments in southeast Ukraine, the project failed to gain wider local support.

Even though *Novorossiya* received political support from the Russian side and had the potential to provide historical and security validations for secessionist sentiments in southeast Ukraine, the project failed to gain wider local support. John O'Loughlin, Gerard Toal, and Vladimir Kolosov (2016) conducted an opinion survey in the targeted six oblasts of south-eastern Ukraine (Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovs'k, Odessa, Mykolaiv, Kherson, and Zaporizhia) in December 2014 in order to evaluate local attitudes toward the *Novorossiya* project. The survey showed that the project did not yield wider local sympathies. Between 20 and 25% of the examined population supported the *Novorossiaya* project, but around half of the sample agreed that the concept of Novorossiya was a "historical myth" and merely a creation of "Russian political technologies" rather than a genuine expression of a wish for independence or a belief that could attract extensive support.[32] On the other hand, due to international sanctions imposed on Russia because of its actions in Ukraine and the collapse of global oil prices that have greatly harmed Russia's domestic economy, the *Novorossiya* project has, for the time being, lost its appeal for the Russian authorities.[33] However, the unsettling possibility that *Novorossiya* might be resurrected and could act

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31   Cassidy, J. (2014), "Putin's Crimean History Lesson," *The New Yorker*, 18 March, Available at: https://www.newyorker.com/news/john-cassidy/putins-crimean-history-lesson (Accessed: October 20, 2019).

32   O'Loughlin, J., Toal, G. and Kolosov, V. "The rise and fall of 'Novorossiya': examining support for a separatist geopolitical imaginary in southeast Ukraine," *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 33, No. 2, 2017, p. 124-144.

33   Hirst, T. (2015), "Putin's dream of reuniting the Russian empire is falling apart," *Business Insider*, 26 May, Available at: https://www.businessinsider.com/putin-puts-novorossiya-project-put-on-hold-2015-5 (Accessed: October 30, 2019).

as a symbolic justification for future Russian irredentist claims over south-eastern Ukraine should not be discarded yet.

Russian irredentism has been a threat to other post-Soviet republics besides Ukraine. After the collapse of the USSR, Kazakhstan felt vulnerable, especially in the north of the country where the ethnic Russians were in the majority. In the 1990s, the Kazakhstan government started to relocate Kazakhs from the south to the north of the country and encouraged a repatriation program for ethnic Kazakhs living abroad who wanted to return to the country's north in order to dilute the predominantly Russian ethnic structure there, so preventing potential pro-Russian separatist movements in the North.[34] Kazakhstan and Russia have managed to maintain good bilateral relations ever since becoming independent post-Soviet republics. However, the annexation of Crimea and the obviously aggressive Russian foreign policy toward its near abroad have left many open questions regarding future Russian irredentist targets, especially in the case of the north of Kazakhstan.

Even though Kazakhstan's then president, Nursultan Nazarbayev, accepted Russia's actions in Crimea, probably acting cautiously in order not to alienate the Kremlin, he later became more assertive of Kazakhstan's independence,[35] especially after Putin questioned Kazakhstan's sovereignty by declaring that "the Kazakhs had never had statehood" prior to 1991.[36] The Kazakhstan government has never officially specified that policies concerning the bolstering of the ethnic Kazakh population through the repatriation program, or the introduction of Kazakh as the official state language,[37] or the decision from 2014 to pass a new, harsher law for separatist activities[38] were enacted because of concerns over potential Russian irredentist claims targeting the northern part of Kazakhstan. Nevertheless,

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34   Kim, G. *op.cit.,* p. 95.

35   Ambrosio, T. "The rhetoric of irredentism: The Russian Federation's perception management campaign and the annexation of Crimea," *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, Vol. 27, No. 3, April 2016, p. 483.

36   Michel, C. (2015), "Take Note, Putin: Kazakhstan Celebrates 550 Years of Statehood," *The Diplomat*, 14 September. Available at: https://thediplomat.com/2015/09/take-note-putin-kazakhstan-celebrates-550-years-of-statehood/ (Accessed: October 26, 2019).

37   Diener, A. "Assessing potential Russian irredentism and separatism in Kazakhstan's northern oblasts," *Eurasia Geography and Economics*, Vol. 56, No. 5, October 2015, pp. 10–11.

38   Hirst, T. (2015), "Putin's dream of reuniting the Russian empire is falling apart."

a certain degree of caution is inevitable, especially in the time of a Putin agenda that praises the protection of Russian-speaking populations in the borderlands of neighbouring countries and questions the territorial integrity of "disobedient" post-Soviet republics with substantial ethnic Russian communities.

Russia has been militarily present in Transnistria as a peacekeeper and has financially supported this separatist formation ever since it broke away from Moldova in 1992.

Russia has been militarily present in Transnistria as a peacekeeper and has financially supported this separatist formation ever since it broke away from Moldova in 1992.[39] Transinstria might become another Russian irredentist project on the grounds of being one of the "Russian-speaking territories assigned to non-Russian union republics within the Soviet Union."[40] Moreover, Russia could invoke the same historical argument as in the case of Crimea that Transnistria was once part of the Russian Empire's territory. Even though Transnistria does not share a common border with Russia, it still could become a specific case of irredentism that fulfils both historical and ethnicity criteria but without a direct land connection with the mainland, potentially resulting in another exclave territory in addition to Kaliningrad, which is under Russian authority. Additionally, Russia might raise the ethnicity argument, since a considerable number of ethnic Russians live in Transnistria. Another potential location for Russian irredentism could be the Baltic States due to the significant percentage of Russian-speaking minorities, especially in Latvia (27%) and Estonia (25%).[41] However, Russian irredentism is less likely toward the Baltic countries, especially since this would be an attack on NATO and EU member states that might prove to be a very costly and risky political move.

Concluding remarks

The annexation of Crimea has shown that irredentism plays a

39   Trenin, *op.cit.*

40   Socor, V. (2014), "Putin's Crimea Speech: A Manifesto of Greater-Russia Irredentism," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 25 March. Available at: https://jamestown.org/program/putins-crimea-speech-a-manifesto-of-greater-russia-irredentism/ (Accessed October 27, 2019).

41   Chemla, N. (2019), "Baltic States' Russian Disquiet," *The New Federalist*, 26 March, Available at: https://www.thenewfederalist.eu/baltic-states-russian-disquiet (Accessed: October 30, 2019).

significant part in the contemporary Russian foreign policy. It has proved to be a useful tool in the territorial expansion of the Russian Federation and an effective means for questioning the territorial integrity of post-Soviet countries that have considerable Russian-speaking populations concentrated in their borderlands with Russia. Today, the annexation of territory requires an irredentist justification, which modern Russia practices in order to legitimize past and future territorial expansion on the basis of protecting its co-nationals and the lands inhabited by them. The history of Russia shows that the constant expansion of Russian territory represents the key feature of Russian statehood, a feature that may have been triggered by the long and traumatic submission to Mongol rule.

In the early years of post-Soviet Russia, irredentism was not overtly present in the official political discourse while economic issues and separatist movements within the territory of Russia were the priority and of immense interest to the Russian political elite. However, contemporary Russia has started extensively practicing an irredentist policy, aiming for greater territorial enlargement and the protection of co-nationals in its near abroad. The takeover of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014, as well as irredentist attempts on south-eastern Ukraine, was a wakeup call for the West to acknowledge that Russian irredentism is very much active. The West responded with sanctions and strong disapproval of the annexation of Crimea and started increasingly to scrutinize Russia's politics towards its near abroad, where it may potentially resurrect other irredentist campaigns targeting Russian-speaking communities in Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Transnistria, and the three Baltic states. On several occasions, the Kremlin has questioned Ukraine's and Kazakhstan's territorial integrity and sovereignty while suggesting that the protection of ethnic Russians, as well as their interests and lands in the post-Soviet region, is one of the primary missions of Russia's foreign policy.

Even though irredentist actions could be very costly and risky political moves, they could bring the necessary justification for territorial expansion and, if successful, they might bring more resources and power to the irredentist country. Irredentism aligns with the idea of protecting "the Russian world" (*Russkii*

Mir), which implies the incorporation of territories that were once encompassed the Russian Empire and are inhabited by Russian-speaking communities that are allegedly threatened by the anti-Russian propaganda coming from the West and need defending. However, some scholars and experts on Russian studies consider the idea of *Russkii Mir* as Russia's failed attempt to justify and popularize territorial expansion through the need to defend ethnic Russians and their land in Russia's near abroad. The concept of "official nationality" paved the way for the active irredentist policy that has become an integral part of Russian foreign policy. Irredentist rhetoric brings the necessary justification for the acquisition of territory inhabited by co-nationals and may prove to be an effective political tool for Russia's territorial enlargement strategy.

CAUCASUS UNDER REVIEW - RECENTLY PUBLISHED BOOKS

reviewed by Polad Muradli

CAUCASUS UNDER REVIEW
RECENTLY PUBLISHED BOOKS

Contested Territories and International Law: A Comparative Study of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict and the Aland Islands

By Kamal Makili-Aliyev

Contested Territories and International Law explores the possibility of the resolution of the Azerbaijan–Armenia conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh through the implementation of good practices and experiences based on the Aland Islands precedent within the context of comparative international law. What are the similarities between the conflict situation in the Aland Islands, which was resolved at the beginning of the 20th century, and the protracted armed conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, which has dominated the security agenda of the South Caucasus since the dissolution of the Soviet Union? How do differences in factors such as geographical location, territorial structures, historical contexts, and the political processes surrounding these two cases affect the way in which they have been treated? How did the principle of the right to self-determination evolve through the 20th century, and what suggestions does the Aland Islands case provide on matters of demilitarization, neutralization, and the rights of the minority? The book draws parallels between these two cases, ultimately endorsing the application of certain elements of the Aland Islands precedent to pave the way for a final solution of the Azerbaijan–Armenia conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh.

Dr. Kamal Makili-Aliyev is an Associate Professor at Malmo University and a researcher at the Faculty of Law, Lund University, and at the Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law, Sweden. Having previously worked as a Senior Research Fellow at the Center for Strategic Studies and as the Senior Legal Officer in the Ministry of Defense of Azerbaijan, and having specialized in the fields of international law, security, defense and conflict, Dr. Makili-Aliyev has consistently been studying the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia from the perspective of international law for almost a decade. He has also

served as a Vice-Rector of Lomonosov Moscow State University Baku Branch and as a Senior Legal Advisor at the Constitutional Court of Azerbaijan, and is a Fellow of the National Security Institute in Amherst, MA, USA.

The volume begins by mentioning that, in many recent cases of territorial conflicts, normative considerations and international law were cast aside in favour of political considerations. However, the author states that it is the normative basis, not political considerations, that allows for the peaceful and civil resolution of any conflict. Thus, in his book the author attempts to provide an answer to the question of how to return the narrative of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict into the sphere of international law, as well as to present guidelines for governments concerned with how to approach the conflict from that viewpoint. The book continues by underlining that a similar situation to the one established around the dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh between Azerbaijan and Armenia arose in the early 20th century between Sweden and Finland over the sovereignty of the Aland Islands. It is argued that the Aland Islands case, resolved in 1921, represents an exemplary model for the solution of territorial conflicts while providing an effective framework to uphold the principles of territorial integrity and self-determination, as well as to respect the rights of minorities. The author, therefore, attempts to compare the cases of the Aland Islands and Nagorno-Karabakh from the perspective of international law, aiming to come up with an applicable solution to the latter conflict through best practices that can be acquired from the success of the earlier precedent.

Structured in four parts, the first two chapters of the book separately examine the aforementioned cases from the historical and legal standpoints. Referring to the history of both conflicts, the author emphasizes the actuality of both cases in the early 20th century. However, while the question regarding the Aland Islands found a longstanding resolution following the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, "the Nagorno-Karabakh situation was put into some sort of 'stasis' incorporated into the Soviet Union." Opining on the case in the European Court of Human Rights, along with numerous international legal documents, the author concludes the first chapter by claiming that Armenia has indeed adopted the role of an occupying power rather than

that of a concerned kin-state within the context of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. Thus, the right of the people to self-determination, which is the major argument that Armenia exploits to justify its behaviour, is inapplicable to the conflict in a broader sense and cannot give rise to a subsequent right to secession. That being said, the author warns against disregarding the interests of the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh. Characterized as a minority within the territory of Azerbaijan, the Armenian community of Nagorno-Karabakh, according to the author, "has the right to internal self-determination, basically allowing for autonomous cultural, linguistic and economic development, without jeopardizing the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan." Subsequently, the second chapter presents the case of the Aland Islands as a successful example of the application of the abovementioned idea.

The third chapter presents a comparison of the two cases, and discusses the contrasting attitudes towards issues such as minority rights and protection, self-determination, and the role of third parties in the resolution processes of these conflicts. The final part of the book, in turn, advocates for the application of the Aland Islands precedent in the case of Nagorno-Karabakh, respectively responding to the three main questions derived from the former precedent, i.e., questions concerning: 1) autonomy and self-governance; 2) demilitarization and neutralization; and 3) minority rights in the autonomy. Accordingly, the author provides a specific set of recommendations in the form of principles to be applied for the peaceful resolution of the Azerbaijan–Armenia conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh under international law. All in all, this book can be considered a significant contribution to the field of conflict and international law.

Europe in the Caucasus, Caucasus in Europe: Perspectives on the Construction of a Region

Edited by Andrey Makarychev & Thomas Kruessman

From a purely academic perspective, one may point out the absence of an institutional basis for the South Caucasus as a region, since there is no regional organization that has managed to gather together all three Caucasian countries. Meanwhile, the Caucasus has always been a space mainly constructed by regional powers through different imaginary frameworks. From the EU perspective, "the South Caucasus is the part of post-Soviet area looking for independence from Moscow's spheres of influence," while from the Russian perspective, the region appears to be "a colonized periphery always tending to revolt against the core and thus displaying permanent security challenges." However, even the notion of a unified "space" fails to characterize the region, as all three members of the Caucasian trio define their foreign policy priorities as directly linked to three different regional poles, namely: Georgia to the EU; Armenia to Russia; and Azerbaijan to Turkey. This perspective, in turn, positions the members of the trio as the peripheries of different centers, which makes them highly dependent on and vulnerable to the dynamics of change in the relations between the key power holders. The book *Europe in the Caucasus, Caucasus in Europe*, in fact, moves away from the traditional viewpoint of European studies, which considers the countries of the region as objects of Europeanization, and embraces precisely this idea of examining the South Caucasus through links to the major regional powers.

This volume is edited by Andrey Makarychev, guest professor at the Johan Skytte Institute of Political Science at the University of Tartu, and Thomas Kruessman, Senior Research Associate with the Global Europe Centre of the University of Kent and coordinator of the Erasmus+ CBHR project "Modernisation of master programmes for future judges, prosecutors, investigators with respect to European standard on human rights" with the University of Graz. The book is one result of the project "Developing European Studies in the Caucasus" carried out by the Jean Monnet Network. This network, a consortium of EU-based universities and their partners from Turkey, Russia, and

the South Caucasian countries, has the principal aim of fostering novel approaches toward promoting European Studies in the Caucasus in both the academic and the educational realms.

The title *Europe in the Caucasus, Caucasus in Europe* reflects the purpose of the volume to emphasize reciprocity and inter-subjectivity with regard to the movement of ideas in areas such as rivalries between different integration systems on the southern and eastern fringes of Europe, various dimensions of interaction between the countries of the South Caucasus and the European Union in a situation of ongoing conflict with Russia, and different ways of using European experiences for the sake of domestic reforms in the South Caucasus. The contributions to this volume, in turn, are instrumental in discovering various layers and tiers of local politics, and deploying them in a broader international perspective. The topics range from identities to foreign policies, and from memory politics to religion.

The volume can be divided into three parts. The first mainly deals with an analysis of Georgia, its break-away territories, and the role of major international actors, namely the EU and Russia, in shaping Georgian foreign policy. In this respect, Camilla Callesen's article focuses on the social-psychological dimension of intractable conflicts and the role that relations between external actors' belief systems may play in this context, ultimately recommending the strategic incorporation of the abovementioned dimension into the conflict resolution process. Susane Szkola, in turn, examines emotion as a key element of national identity discourses by studying the region's engagement with the EU and Russia from the viewpoint of "emotional turn" in international relations. She demonstrates how emotive discourses play an explicitly political role by filling certain cognitive gaps in collective identities with vernacular narratives, including populist, mythologized, and conspiratorial storylines.

Adam Lenton, in his article, applies the interpretative approach to explain how important discourses are for constructing local perceptions about independence, autonomy, and statehood in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. David Matsaberidze's paper attempts to deconstruct the public political meta-narratives in order to explore the controversial representation of Russia in Georgian society. Shota Kakabadze, in his article, touching upon

memory politics in Georgia, analyzes the widespread references in Georgian society to Stalin as an Orthodox believer, ultimately providing an insight into the intricacies of the illiberal mindset in the country. Dali Osipashvili, in his turn, compares Georgian and Lithuanian media within the context of information wars, and shows how divergent the political trajectories of these countries that were once part of the Soviet Union are, hereinafter denouncing the use of the label "post-Soviet".

The second part of the book focuses more on the role of institutions and policy practices within the wider Caucasus region. Victoria Hudson, in her contribution, uses the concept of soft power to describe the nature of connections between the Georgian and Ukrainian Orthodox Churches of the Moscow Patriarchy with the Russian Orthodox Church. Vasif Huseynov also uses the idea of soft power for his analysis of Russian and Western approaches to the South Caucasus region, eventually demonstrating the deep gaps between these actors' understanding of soft power as a concept. Giorgi Gigitashvili, in turn, discusses the practicalities of EU policies, with particular attention paid to the efficiency of EU development assistance programs, by sharing his experience of measuring the results of EU-sponsored projects. By basing their research on anthropological and ethnographic data for Svaneti and its inhabitants, Sara Alexander and Michael Long attempt to explain how the concept of identity might be used for practical policies for tourism development. Olga Dorokhina, in her article, refers to various societal initiatives as means for reconciliation and peacemaking across the post-conflict borderlines, emphasizing the importance of cross- and trans-border connectivity in the Georgian context of European experiences.

The last section of the book presents a number of research notes on topics such as the economic, financial, and political role of China in the South Caucasus, the opportunities and limitations of the EU's depoliticized strategy towards Eastern Partnership countries, and the prospects for implementing new web-based technologies in the region. All in all, the articles and research notes collected in this volume are intended to fill certain existing gaps in academic scholarship on the South Caucasus and to offer new insights into regional studies, both from within and from outside.

South Caucasus in Motion

World Bank Report

The new World Bank Report *South Caucasus in Motion* provides a comprehensive assessment of poverty and inequality in the South Caucasus through the lens of mobility. It is based on an analysis of various sources of information, including household budget and perceptions surveys, administrative records on public services, international standardized test results, and even night-time light emission data, which, taken together, comprise a convincing body of evidence on the constraints on social, economic and spatial mobility in the region. The report emphasizes the notable improvements made by all three countries of the region that have allowed poverty to be significantly reduced during the last two decades, and introduces the new challenges that these countries face in their efforts to meet the aspirations of the emerging middle class.

Sustainable economic growth, poverty reduction, and shared prosperity require that the full potential of all geographical and administrative areas, population groups, and economic sectors be realized. Meanwhile, the report argues that Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia have not yet integrated important geographical areas and population segments in full economic participation and social development. Economic gains have not been uniformly and equitably translated into greater welfare and opportunity among all households and individuals. By adopting various lenses on mobility, this book seeks to understand and consider mobility in the South Caucasus as a means to support all individuals in becoming integrated into and fully benefiting from economic development. According to the report, mobility is closely linked to the notion of equality of opportunity, as it helps individuals to reach their fullest potential, regardless of social, cultural, economic, or geographical characteristics.

In this respect, the first chapter of the report focuses on spatial inequalities. It describes an array of channels along which spatial disparities influence mobility, and it assesses variations in poverty, inequality, consumption, economic activity, and employment across geographical and administrative areas. Through in-depth descriptive analyses of various sources of existing data, it

presents evidence on spatial dynamics as a possible constraint to mobility in the South Caucasus. The chapter concludes that large spatial variations in poverty, inequality, and development across the regions and provinces of the South Caucasus negatively affect mobility and shared prosperity. The findings demonstrate a clear division between capital cities, secondary urban centers, and rural or hinterland areas, and emphasize that economic development has been mainly led by capital cities, while economic activity and market potential lag in other urban and rural areas. While poverty tends to persist in both urban and rural settings, the numerous geographical and demographic challenges of the latter lead to spatial disparities and poor connectivity, which reduces the opportunities for agglomeration and contributes to the isolation of large segments of the population. Hence, the three countries underutilize important resources for economic development and maintain unfair access to economic and social opportunities across spatial divides. The report suggests that reducing the negative effects of the spatial disparities over the three dimensions of economic geography – density, distance, and division – will be key to improving shared prosperity in the South Caucasus.

Chapter 2 focuses on the dynamics of social and economic mobility in the region. By economic mobility, the chapter refers to changes in the incomes of individuals and assesses the movements of households in and out of poverty. The chapter identifies and explores the characteristics of households based on poverty and welfare status, including chronically poor households, vulnerable households, and middle-class households. It draws lessons from the characteristics of households that have managed to escape and remain out of poverty and the contrast between these households and those that are chronically poor. The chapter also analyzes social or intergenerational mobility in the South Caucasus by focusing on educational attainment across generations. The results indicate that progress in educational attainment from one generation to the next has not been guaranteed in the South Caucasus. Similar to the case for economic mobility, social mobility in the countries of the South Caucasus shows both upward and downward shifts, indicating constraints on the mobility needed by households to overcome poverty so that the next generations inherit greater welfare.

Chapter 3, in turn, analyzes inequalities of opportunity in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia through an emphasis on access to labor markets. The analysis adapts the human opportunity index (HOI) framework of Barros et al. (2009, 2010) to identify the influence of fair and unfair factors in access to good jobs. Ultimately, the chapter provides evidence that, in fact, unfair factors, such as gender, ethnicity, and parental political affiliation, account for large shares of the inequality of opportunities across the countries, while fair components of inequality, such as education and work experience, are less significant. The chapter also describes more in-depth research on the issue of human capital by exploring inequalities in access to education and basic public services among children aged 16 or younger. The findings show that, despite the high coverage rates of schooling and basic public services in the South Caucasus, learning performance tends to be poor, unequal, and dependent on the socioeconomic circumstances and geographical location of the children. Consequently, inequality of opportunity seems to be a binding constraint on mobility in the South Caucasus. According to the report, the unfair distribution of good jobs and of the basic inputs of human capital accumulation unfairly prevents individuals from taking advantage of opportunities in labour markets.

The final chapter adapts the policy framework from the World Development Report 2009 to identify relevant policy instruments to address the barriers to mobility in each country, including: (a) horizontal policies that promote mobility across the economy and society; (b) hard and soft infrastructure that connects people, geographical and administrative areas, and markets; and (c) interventions that target and provide incentives to specific areas and sectors of the population. The chapter then maps the lessons from the detailed mobility analysis in chapters 1–3 and other research results into relevant, practical policy recommendations to foster mobility in each country of the South Caucasus. The recommendations cover crucial ideas, such as understanding and removing the constraints to the development of lagging districts; leveraging opportunities for agglomeration; linking geographical areas, peoples, and markets; fostering equality in access to better jobs; and making sure that high-quality education and basic services are available to all individuals and areas.

The countries of the South Caucasus have indeed overcome major economic and social obstacles over recent decades. The GDP of Azerbaijan, for instance, grew at an annual rate of 11 percent between 2010 and 2015. This impressive growth was accompanied by poverty reduction through higher social transfers and a dramatic rise in real wages. Large segments of the population moved up the development ladder, often by overcoming poverty and becoming part of an expanding middle class. Ultimately, this report attempts to provide insights about the barriers to the full realization of this phenomenon in the South Caucasus and to suggest ways in which these barriers may be reduced or eliminated.

Notes for Contributors

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