

# Editor's Note

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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 Miholjic'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*