

# The Caucasus Policy of Russia in the Early 21st Century



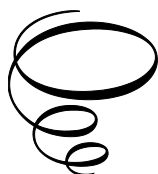
# The Caucasus Policy of Russia in the Early 21<sup>st</sup> Century:

*Internal and External Dynamics*

By

Vefa Kurban

**Cambridge  
Scholars  
Publishing**



The Caucasus Policy of Russia in the Early 21st Century:  
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This book first published 2020

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-5275-5788-X

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-5788-8

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface .....	vii
Introduction .....	1
The Caucasus	
Etymology of the Word Caucasus .....	1
The Ethnic and Religious Structure of the Caucasus .....	1
The Geopolitical Position of the Caucasus .....	2
Russian Rule in the Caucasus .....	3
The Caucasus before the 20th Century.....	3
The Caucasus under Soviet Rule.....	3
The Caucasus after Soviet Rule.....	4
Globalization and the Caucasus .....	6
The Geopolitics of the South Caucasus .....	7
The Geopolitics of the North Caucasus .....	13
References.....	18
Chapter I .....	22
Azerbaijan	
Azerbaijan in the Final Years of the USSR .....	22
Perestroika and Glasnost and the disintegration of the USSR .....	24
The Commonwealth of Independent States .....	30
The Struggle for Independence in Azerbaijan .....	31
Azerbaijan in the Post-Independence Era and Turkey's Policy towards Azerbaijan.....	32
Near Abroad Policy of Russia.....	34
End of the Boris Yeltsin Era .....	39
Elections of March 26, 2000 and Vladimir Putin's Accession to Power and Dostroika .....	41
Azerbaijan-Russia Relations following the Beginning of the Putin Era .....	45
The Status of the Caspian Sea.....	47
The Armenian Factor in Azerbaijan Policy of Russia.....	50
Conclusion .....	54
References.....	55

Chapter II.....	62
Georgia	
The Russian-Georgian War and Turkey-Russia Relations.....	62
The Geopolitical Position of Georgia .....	63
Georgia and the West after Soviet Rule.....	65
The Path to the Russo-Georgian War and the Ethnic and Religious Structure of Georgia and Issues.....	69
Mikheil Saakashvili's Pro-Western Policy .....	76
The Russo-Georgian War and Turkey .....	81
Is the Cold War Making a Comeback? .....	86
The Continuation of the Russia-Georgia Issue: Crimea.....	94
Conclusion .....	98
References.....	103
Chapter III .....	111
Chechnya	
A Hot Conflict Zone in the Post-Soviet Era: The North Caucasus ...	111
The Geopolitical Position of Chechnya .....	112
Chechens and Russians before the Dissolution of the USSR.....	116
Struggle for Independence in the North Caucasus after Perestroika and Glasnost.....	118
Chechens and Russians after the USSR.....	121
I. The Russian-Chechen War .....	124
II. The Russian-Chechen War and Vladimir Putin's Intervention in the Chechen Issue.....	127
Conclusion .....	151
References.....	152

## PREFACE

The present study embraces Russian foreign policy towards the Caucasus, situated on the transition zone between Asia and Europe and located between Central Asia and Asia Minor, which is one of the richest and most multiculturally dynamic regions in the world in terms of the linguistic, religious and ethnic groups it embodies.

Investigated from a historical point of view, Russia hegemonized this area due to the supremacy provided by its security, political power and rich energy resources in the field and since then has struggled to maintain control over the area due to the strategic prominence of the region.

Following the end of the Cold War, countries in the Caucasus and Central Asia proclaimed their independence and have risen to prominence by means of rich intensive oil and gas reserves, water resources, strategic mines and other resources that the entire world requires.

Russia has once again become a global power in the international arena with the accession to power of Vladimir Putin. Since Putin's accession in 2000, Russia has conspicuously boosted its efficiency in international relations. Utilizing all the advantages brought by membership of the United Nations (UN) Security Council, Russia has also obtained a large zone of influence in the same breath thanks to the relations established with different countries of the world.

The current study unveils the relationship between the Russian Federation and the republics in the Caucasus which declared their independence after the dissolution of the USSR. In the first stage, Azerbaijan will be studied along with its oil industry, which could come to the forefront despite the fact that 20% of its land has been invaded,. Subsequently, Russia's policy towards Georgia – which acted as a transit country with regard to the transportation of rich Caucasian and Central Asian oil and natural gas resources to developed Western countries – and Chechnya – which fought against Russia – will be scrutinized.

The book is composed of three chapters plus the introduction which will explore Caucasian geography in terms of its geopolitical significance from a wider perspective. The first chapter will investigate the struggle for independence and post-independence development in Azerbaijan in the last years of the USSR, the status of the Caspian Sea and Russia's policy towards Azerbaijan.

The second chapter will illustrate Georgia's geopolitical position and the advantage this positioning has provided for Georgia, the ethnic challenges encountered in the area, the war between Russia and Georgia and the attitude that the Western world has exhibited towards the war.

The final chapter will scrutinize the two wars between Russia and Chechnya, the accession to power of Vladimir Putin and Russia's policy towards these regions in the sequel.

I would like to thank those who supported me while preparing my work, namely my family, my husband Asif Kurban, my son Tural, my daughter Tunay, my friends, the staff of the archives of the Mirza Fatali Akhundov National Library of Azerbaijan, and the staff of İzmir Ahmet Pırlanta City Archive and Museum.

Furthermore, I would like to thank the editorial board and reviewers of Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

I hope this book will be useful for those who will conduct more extensive studies related to Russian foreign policy.

I hope it will be an illuminating work for readers and researchers, and I wish you pleasant reading.

Vefa KURBAN  
27th April 2020



# INTRODUCTION

## THE CAUCASUS

### Etymology of the Word Caucasus

The region of the Caucasus, which had been described as “As” by the Ancient Greeks, represents the basis of the continent of Asia today. The Caucasus, referred to as “The Mountains of As”, was subsequently called by the Tatarian name of “Jalbus”, that is, *Ice-mane*, by Tatars and “Jildis Thaglar” by Nogays, in which case it signifies the *Mountains of the Stars*. According to this perspective, the word “Kaukas” has derived from a combination of the Persian word “kuh” (that is, mountains in Persian) and the word “kas” which refers to “white” in old Turkish.<sup>1</sup>

The area covering the highlands extending from the Taman Peninsula in the north-western part of the Black Sea to the Absheron Peninsula in the western part of the Caspian Sea is called the Caucasus. The name “Caucasian” or “Caucasus” was first encountered as the “Caucasus mountains” in “Prometheus Bound” by the Greek author Aeschylus who lived between the 6th and 5th centuries BC.<sup>2</sup>

### The Ethnic and Religious Structure of the Caucasus

The Caucasus has been known as one of the richest and most intensively multiculturally-dynamic regions of the world in terms of the linguistic and ethnic diversity that the area embodies. Therefore, it could be

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<sup>1</sup> Ergin Ayan, “Kafkasya: Bir Etno-Kültürel Tarih Çözümlemesi”, ODÜ Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Sosyal Bilimler Araştırmaları Dergisi Issn: 1309-9302 <http://sobiad.odu.edu.tr> Cilt: 1 Sayı: 2 Aralık 2010, s.19-50, s. 21 (Retrieved on: 10.04.2020).

<sup>2</sup> Ruhi Ersoy, “Kafkasya’nın Kültür Jeopolitiği ve Türk Dünyası”, AVRASYA Uluslararası Araştırmalar Dergisi Cilt: 6 Sayı: 15 Sayfa: 798-807 Kasım 2018 Türkiye Araştırma Makalesi, s. 799, <http://avrasyad.com/English/DergiArama.aspx?Turu=True&Kelime=Ruhi%20ERSOY> (Retrieved on: 21.04.2020).

designated as a heterogeneously structured region representing a mosaic of cultures. In such a cosmopolitan area containing innumerable tribes and communities within its identity, a tremendous diversity in terms of linguistic, ethnic and religious traits can be observed.<sup>3</sup> The Caucasus, geographically situated between the continents of Asia and Europe, has always been characterized as a transition point by various nations and societies and therefore the demographic structure of the region has continuously been open to diversity.<sup>4</sup> Approximately fifty tribes, clans and ethnic communities live in the region.<sup>5</sup> It is positioned between Central Asia and Asia Minor and thereby has been characterized as a transition point for those coming from the West and heading to the East or those coming from the East heading to the West. The fact that it has also been described as the “gate of tribes” additionally contributed to the abundance of several waves of migrations and struggles. Moreover, being exposed to various invasions in history for a long time, the Caucasus has also officiated as a field of migration between Asia, Europe and Africa at the same time.<sup>6</sup>

## **The Geopolitical Position of the Caucasus**

The Caucasus is located at the edge of a 5000-kilometer-long water corridor, which is found between Europe, Asia and Africa in geopolitical terms, generated by a range of interconnected landlocked seas such as the Mediterranean Sea, the Aegean Sea and straits and the Sea of Marmara, the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov. At the same time, it reaches East and Central Asia by means of the Caspian Sea. Throughout history, the region has turned

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<sup>3</sup> Muharrem Yıldız, “Dünden Bugüne Kafkasya”, Yitik Hazine Yayınları, 2006, İzmir.

<sup>4</sup> Ergin Ayan, “Kafkasya: Bir Etno-Kültürel Tarih Çözümlemesi”, ODÜ Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Sosyal Bilimler Araştırmaları Dergisi Issn: 1309-9302 <http://sobiad.odu.edu.tr> Cilt: 1 Sayı: 2 Aralık 2010, s. 19-50, s. 22 (Retrieved on: 10.04.2020).

<sup>5</sup> Anıl Çeçen, “Türkiye ve Avrasya”, Doğu Kütüphanesi, İstanbul, 2015, s.104-105.

<sup>6</sup> Nurhan Aydın ve Elif Ergün, “Kafkasya Gazavatı ve Şeyh Şamil”, Kafkas Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi Cilt: 6, Sayı: 12, Kars 2019, ss. 87-114, s. 91, [http://isamveri.org/pdfdrq/D04080/2019\\_12/2019\\_12\\_AYDINN\\_ERGUNE.pdf](http://isamveri.org/pdfdrq/D04080/2019_12/2019_12_AYDINN_ERGUNE.pdf) (Retrieved on: 20.02.2020).

out to be highly prominent for those who intended to secure and maintain their borders by utilizing the Caucasus Mountains as a barricade.<sup>7</sup>

By the side of Turkey, the Caucasus is defined as a strategic geography extending across the Caucasus Mountains between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea. Due to its attractive positioning, the Caucasus has always been a significant plot of ground in history that many states, Russia and Western countries being in first place, have longed to possess and made a great deal of effort to capture.<sup>8</sup>

## **Russian Rule in the Caucasus**

### ***The Caucasus before the 20th Century***

From a historical point of view, the Russians hegemonized this geography due to the supremacy it provided to them in terms of security, political power and rich energy resources and they have been struggling to keep the region in hand since then.<sup>9</sup> The Caucasus, which was to escape Russian control, led developments in favour of the Western world and forced Russia to pursue realistic policies in the area. Russia, which has been among the big players in the international system since the 16<sup>th</sup> century and one of the two superpowers dominating the world after World War II, has reigned over regional and global realpolitik equations for centuries.

### ***The Caucasus under Soviet Rule***

However, towards the end of the 1980s, Soviet power swiftly decelerated and it became clear that the Soviets would not be able to compete with the United States of America (USA) in the conflicts of the Cold War. For this reason, Russia had to gradually leave its position as a superpower between 1989 and 1991 and herewith was renamed as “a losing

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<sup>7</sup> Ruhi Ersoy, “Kafkasya’nın Kültür Jeopolitiği ve Türk Dünyası”, AVRASYA Uluslararası Araştırmalar Dergisi Cilt: 6 Sayı : 15 Sayfa: 798-807 Kasım 2018 Türkiye Araştırma Makalesi, s. 799, <http://avrsyad.com/English/DergiArama.aspx?Turu=True&Kelime=Ruhi%20ERSOY>, (Retrieved on: 21.04.2020).

<sup>8</sup> Ufuk Tavkul, “Kafkasya için Türkiyat Araştırmalarının Önemi”, I. Türkiyat Araştırmaları Sempozyumu Bildirileri.-25-26 Mayıs 2006: 187-202.ss., s. 1, [http://turkoloji.cu.edu.tr/CAGDAS%20TURK%20LEHCELERI/ufuk\\_tavkul\\_kafkasya\\_icin\\_turkoloji\\_onemi.pdf](http://turkoloji.cu.edu.tr/CAGDAS%20TURK%20LEHCELERI/ufuk_tavkul_kafkasya_icin_turkoloji_onemi.pdf), (Retrieved on:10.04.2020).

<sup>9</sup> Savaş Yanar, “Türk-Rus İlişkilerinde Gizli Güç Kafkasya”, IQ Kültür Sanat ve Yayıncılık, 2002, İstanbul, s. 72.

power”. The entire world could obviously witness how Russia shifted from its standing as a superpower and shifted towards a secondary-level positioning together with the disintegration of the Soviet Union.<sup>10</sup> The Russians, who were losing power gradually, had to follow efficient policies in the Caucasus to reverse the status quo.

Along with the end of the Cold War, the Caucasus turned out to be a field where big players struggled to be influential in terms of international politics by virtue of the competition for energy resources to be transmitted to international markets as well as the strategic significance of the area itself emanating from its geographical positioning. The fact that the Caucasus was a gateway to Central Asia also contributed to the growing significance of the field for countries greatly interested in those countries that were newly gaining their interdependence in the Caucasus and Central Asia and the role they would play in international politics. From the perspective of the USA, the most prominent issue at the initial stages was the safe transportation of oil and natural gas resources to the international markets.<sup>11</sup>

### *The Caucasus after Soviet Rule*

Following the end of the Cold War, countries in the Caucasus and Central Asia declared their independence and burst into prominence on the grounds of the region’s intensive oil and gas reserves, rich water resources and strategic mines since the world needed all. Investigated from a geopolitical point of view, the area of land is 4 million square kilometres, yet, it has a population of 61 million people. India, owning a manpower of one billion and China with 1.5 billion, constituted an asymmetrically emerging demographic pressure and these countries began to claim compensation for their gradually increasing energy shortage from this region. Accordingly, political and economic transformations dominated by new dynamics were unavoidably emerging in state policies.<sup>12</sup>

During the existence of the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics), the region was completely under the control of the USSR and therefore closed to the rest of the world. Towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century,

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<sup>10</sup> Mesut Hakkı Çaşın ve Giray Saynur Derman, “Rus Dış Politikasındaki Değişim ve Kremlin Penceresinden Yeni Ufuklar”, SRT Yayınları, Ankara, 2016, s. 151.

<sup>11</sup> Kamer Kasım, “Soğuk Savaş Sonrası Kafkasya”, USAK Yayınları, Ankara, 2009, s. 7.

<sup>12</sup> Mesut Hakkı Çaşın, “Türk Dış Politikası Açısından Kafkasya ve Orta Asya”, Hazar Raporu, Sayı: 2, Kış: 2013, ss. 52-66, s. 54, [https://www.academia.edu/4767553/Hazar\\_Raporu\\_-\\_Issue\\_02\\_-\\_Winter\\_2013](https://www.academia.edu/4767553/Hazar_Raporu_-_Issue_02_-_Winter_2013) (Retrieved on: 12.04.2020).

in the aftermath of the disintegration of the USSR, the Caucasus was once again a centre of attraction for all states around the world. The Caucasus serves as the threshold gate to Central Asia whereas the Caspian Basin is the caravansary (hostel) of the historical silk route and magnificent Eurasia. In this context, cooperation as well as conflicts among passengers and landlords actively present in the field required the opportunities and risks to be analysed as a whole. While the gravity force of rich energy resources, strategic mine reserves and the historical silk route of the field became more and more valuable to the world economy in the sequel to the dissolution of the USSR, the policies of the USA, the European Union, and China caused competition with Russia.<sup>13</sup>

The Caucasus geography can be divided into two parts as the “south” and the “north”. Within the framework of such a division in geographical terms, the North Caucasus refers to the area within the borders of the Russian Federation whereas the South Caucasus signifies Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia. The Southern Caucasus is also called “Transcaucasia” and “Zacaucasus” by the Russians at the same time.<sup>14</sup> In the USSR era, the South Caucasus consisted of three different republics, namely Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia whereas the North Caucasus was a combination of many autonomous governments.<sup>15</sup> Following the dissolution of the USSR, three independent states – Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia; eight autonomous republics: Abkhazia, Ajaria, Chechnya, Dagestan, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, North Ossetia, Nakhchivan; and four autonomous regions: Adygea, Karachaevo-Cherkessia, South Ossetia and Nagorno

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<sup>13</sup> Mesut Hakkı Çaşın, “Türk Dış Politikası Açısından Kafkasya ve Orta Asya”, Hazar Raporu, Sayı: 2, Kış: 2013, ss. 52-66, s. 54-55, [https://www.academia.edu/4767553/Hazar\\_Raporu\\_-\\_Issue\\_02\\_-\\_Winter\\_2013](https://www.academia.edu/4767553/Hazar_Raporu_-_Issue_02_-_Winter_2013) (Retrieved on: 12.04.2020).

<sup>14</sup> Kamer Kasım, “Soğuk Savaş Sonrası Kafkasya”, USAK Yayınları, Ankara, 2009, s. 4

Burçin Canar, “Rusya Federasyonu’nun Azerbaycan ile İlişkileri”, Çankırı Karatekin Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Dergisi B. Canar, Cilt: 2, Sayı: 1, ss. 21-38, Bahar 2012, s. 22, <http://kutuphane.dogus.edu.tr/mvt/pdf.php?pdf=0013746&lng=1> (Retrieved on: 19.04.2020).

<sup>15</sup> Murat Şahin, “Bir Siyasi Güç Olarak Saha ve Kafkas Siyasi Coğrafyasındaki Etkileri”, 3rd International Geography Symposium – GEOMED 2013, Editors: Recep Efe, İbrahim Atalay, İsa Cürebal, Symposium Proceedings, ISBN: 978-605-62253-8-3, 575-581, s. 577 (Retrieved on: 11.04.2020) [http://web.deu.edu.tr/geomed/proceedings/download/055\\_GeoMed\\_2013\\_Proceedings\\_575-581.pdf](http://web.deu.edu.tr/geomed/proceedings/download/055_GeoMed_2013_Proceedings_575-581.pdf).

Karabakh – were found within the whole Caucasus area.<sup>16</sup> Although it is known that the North and South Caucasus share a common history in many aspects, fundamentally three nations have recently been established in the South Caucasus whereas no similar nationalization processes have been observed for centuries in the North Caucasus.<sup>17</sup> This fact emphasizes how Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia from the South Caucasus wing proclaimed their independence in 1991 following the dissolution of the USSR in the Caucasus – one of the richest regions in the world in terms of linguistic, religious and ethnical diversity that it embodies – that went through the Cold War under the domination of the USSR. However, it is quite evident that the struggles for independence were not even close to an end in the region of the northern Caucasus.<sup>18</sup>

## Globalization and the Caucasus

Along with globalization, the need for energy increased all around the world and parallel to this, the Caspian Basin became more valuable than ever due to its rich resources. For this reason, great powers running after the domination of this region became even more eager by looking at this geography.<sup>19</sup> Especially Russia, which once incorporated the region within its borders, wanted to prevent any counter alliance against Russia from having the upper hand in the region by means of energy and handicapping any projects in favour of the West, or, in other words, against Russia.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Giray Saynur Derman, “Kafkasya Bölgesinin Etnik Çatışmalar Açısından İncelenmesi”, *Düşünce Dünyasında Türkiz Siyaset ve Kültür Dergisi*, Yıl:4/Sayı: 22/Temmuz – Ağustos 2013/ISSN 1309–601X, ss. 31-46, s. 34, <https://www.tasav.org/media/k2/attachments/30.pdf> (Retrieved on: 22.04.2020).

<sup>17</sup> Anıl Çeçen, “Türkiye ve Avrasya”, *Doğu Kütüphanesi*, İstanbul, 2015, s. 104.

<sup>18</sup> Telli Korkmaz, “Osmanlı Belgelerinde Kafkasya Göçleri Değerlendirme”, *Studies of the Ottoman Domain*, Cilt: 3, Sayı: 5, Ağustos 2013, Issn: 2147-5210, [www.thestudiesofottomandomain.com](http://www.thestudiesofottomandomain.com), 49-55, s. 49 <https://sistem.nevsehir.edu.tr/bizdosyalar/0d4c19729f64fc4c85bfl09ed8ec0f08/Osmanli%C4%B1%20Belgelerinde%20Kafkasya%20G%C3%B6%C3%A7leri-De%C4%9Ferlendirme.pdf> (Retrieved on: 10.04.2020).

<sup>19</sup> İbrahim Tellioglu, “Kafkasya’da Büyük Güçlerin Nüfuz Mücadelesi ve Türkiye”, ss. 237-245, ss. 237-238, TESAM, <http://tesam.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/T%C3%87BRAHI%C3%87M-TELLI%C3%87OG%C3%86LU.pdf> (Retrieved on: 10.04.2020).

<sup>20</sup> Birol Şal, “Soğuk Savaş Sonrası Dönemde Türkiye’nin Kafkasya’ya Yönelik Dış Politika Açılımları”, *Marmara Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Doktora Tezi*, s. 197 <https://katalog.marmara.edu.tr/eyayin/tez/T0061678.pdf> (Retrieved on: 09. 04.2020).

It is necessary at this point to emphasize that the statement “any counter alliance against Russia” here signifies the necessity for a balance of forces to renew itself in conjunction with the dissolution of the USSR. The mobilization in the region effectuated a polarization including both international and regional forces within the arenas brought along by ethnic conflicts. This polarization manifested itself as the northern-southern axis (Russia, Armenia, and Iran) against the eastern-western axis (Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey). At this point, it would be fair to say that the West supported the Azerbaijan-Georgia-Turkey axis and considered Turkey as an appropriate model for this geography.<sup>21</sup>

For the most part, when Russia’s Caucasus policy is thoroughly scrutinized, it can be observed that while the Russian regime worked to restrain their will of independence and activations of ethnic identities in the North Caucasus, it also provoked ethnicities within the government to wear down and cause a loss of resistance to states which had recently declared their independence. The target is apparent – to be the one and only arbiter in the administration of the region. However, Turkey in particular has established an intensive relationship with the countries in the region in the post-USSR period, and it still amplifies these relations. The severity of the conflicts in the Caucasus – a strategic position between Asia and Europe – contradicted the insufficiency of the existing powers in the region. Emergent problems which started at the meso-level then acquired an international qualification since external powers also got involved in the solution process of the conflicts.<sup>22</sup>

## The Geopolitics of the South Caucasus

According to current circumstances, one of the factors most affecting the geopolitical reality of the earth and adding new dynamics to it is in Eurasia – the geopolitical path that newly-independent countries in the South Caucasus, Central Asia, the Caspian Sea and the Black Sea used to follow. As acknowledged by the entire world, countries that become agents of the international relations system by maintaining their sovereignty in this zone, study and analyse the geopolitical status and efficiency norms,

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<sup>21</sup> Mitat Çelipala ve Cavid Veliyev, “Azerbaycan-Gürcistan-Türkiye Bölgesel İşbirliğinin Başarılı Örneği”, Kadir Has Üniversitesi, Center for International and European Studies, Policy Brief, Mart 2015, 03, ss. 1-25, s. 2, <https://www.khas.edu.tr/cms/cies/dosyalar/files/CIES%20Policy%20Brief%2003.pdf> (Retrieved on: 11.04.2020).

<sup>22</sup> Necati İyikan, “Orta Asya-Güney Kafkasya Siyasi Gelişmeler (1991-2010)”, Hiperlink, İstanbul, 2011 s. 59.

national development and security problems, and the framework and functions of their national interest. Furthermore, they try various mechanisms in order to preserve their internally and externally oriented geopolitical, geo-economic and military-geostrategic interests and perform their strategic duties, such as establishing an international security doctrine and military doctrine, duly in accordance with the requirements of the system. It is obligatory for each and every country to conduct wide-scope geopolitical research continuously in line with regional and global-scale variations as well as to conduct strategic analyses so that these duties can be successfully performed.<sup>23</sup>

In international relations, the notion of “geopolitics” occupies an important position. The status quo on earth leads to change and these changes have an impact on the functioning of the international system and therefore it becomes mandatory for the states to make amendments to their geopolitical codes and passwords. In the last years of the 20<sup>st</sup> century, a giant fell to pieces and the resulting balance paved the way to new initiatives before regions and states in geopolitical terms.<sup>24</sup>

In this section, there will be an analysis of the accelerating geopolitics of the South Caucasus which has turned out to be a focus of interest due to its political, economic and military significance after the dissolution of the USSR.

Located between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, the South Caucasus has great prominence with its geopolitical status especially for territorial and extraterritorial great powers since the south-north and east-west energy and transportation lines intersect here and the area incorporates the energy resources of the Caspian Basin. The South Caucasus holds a strategic positioning in Asia and this characteristic of the region has gained new momentum since the dissolution of the USSR.<sup>25</sup> The importance of the

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<sup>23</sup> Ali Hasanov, “Güney Kafkasya, Hazar-Karadeniz Havzaları ve Azerbaycan’ın Jeopolitiği”, s. 7, <http://www.kitabxana.net/files/books/file/1520433830.pdf> (Retrieved on: 21.04.2020).

<sup>24</sup> Ali Hasanov, “Jeopolitik”, Çeviri: Azad Ağaoğlu, Fuad Şammedov, İstanbul, Babıali Kültür Yayıncılığı, 2012, s. 202, [http://anl.az/el\\_en/book/2016/ha\\_jeo.pdf](http://anl.az/el_en/book/2016/ha_jeo.pdf) (Retrieved on: 21.04.2020).

<sup>25</sup> Hatem Cabbarlı, “Güney Kafkasya’nın Jeopolitiği ve Güvenlik Sorunları: Dağlık Karabağ Örneğinde”, Karadeniz Araştırmaları, Bahar 2017, Sayı: 53, s. 51-69, s. 51, [http://www.karam.org.tr/Makaleler/1813328801\\_04.Hatem%20CABBARLI.pdf](http://www.karam.org.tr/Makaleler/1813328801_04.Hatem%20CABBARLI.pdf) (Retrieved on: 10.04.2020).

Fikret Elma, “Küreselleşme Süresinde Güney Kafkasya Demokrasi, Güvenlik ve İşbirliği Sorunu”, Uluslararası Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi The Journal of International Social Research Volume 2/6 Winter 2009, ss. 195-206, s. 195,



South Caucasus is associated both with its natural resources and its geographical positioning. In other words, the South Caucasus not only binds the two different continents of Europe and Asia but also acts as the convergence point of two different civilizations.<sup>26</sup>

Playing a huge role as the backbone of Europe and Asia, Transcaucasia simultaneously serves as a gate opening onto Central Asia. The state/s that control/s and have/has command of Central Asia will have the opportunity of dominating Central Asia, the Caspian Basin and the Black Sea and inspecting these areas as well. Within this framework, as indicated in Mackinder's "Heartland Theory" and Spykman's "Rimland" Theory, whoever controlled this area would eventually control Asia and controlling Asia would lead to eventual world domination.<sup>27</sup> Transcaucasia therefore acts as a bridge between "north and south" and "east and west" and at the same time is a centre of political manoeuvre. Being a significant commercial transition point since ancient times due to its geographical positioning, Transcaucasia also possesses a strategic position overlooking the Persian Gulf.<sup>28</sup>

The South Caucasus is comprised of three different states, namely Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia, which gained their independence following the disintegration of the USSR. Caucasus was completely under Russian control in 1864. Since then, the Caucasus has become an arena of social, cultural and political tensions between the Caucasian peoples who wanted to preserve their linguistic and cultural identities, and the Russian state apparatus, the aim being to suppress these claims in the last stance.<sup>29</sup>

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[http://www.sosyalarastirmalar.com/cilt2/sayi6pdf/elma\\_fikret.pdf](http://www.sosyalarastirmalar.com/cilt2/sayi6pdf/elma_fikret.pdf) (Retrieved on: 10.04.2020).

<sup>26</sup> Elnur Kazımlı, "Azerbaycan'ın Jeopolitik Konumu ve Karabağ Sorunu", ss. 101-112, s. 101,

[https://tasam.org/Files/Icerik/File/Pages\\_from\\_karadenizkafkaskong\\_pdf\\_9d8f1acf-2ae7-4c72-bea0-33b8b232aacc.pdf](https://tasam.org/Files/Icerik/File/Pages_from_karadenizkafkaskong_pdf_9d8f1acf-2ae7-4c72-bea0-33b8b232aacc.pdf) (Retrieved on: 21.04.2020).

<sup>27</sup> Ahmet Sapmaz, "Rusya'nın Transkafkasya Politikası ve Türkiye'ye Etkileri", Ötüken, s. 28, <https://www.otuken.com.tr/u/otuken/docs/Transkafkasya.pdf> (Retrieved on: 22.04.2020).

<sup>28</sup> Ahmet Sapmaz, "Rusya'nın Transkafkasya Politikası ve Türkiye'ye Etkileri", Ötüken, s. 28-29, <https://www.otuken.com.tr/u/otuken/docs/Transkafkasya.pdf> (Retrieved on: 22.04.2020).

<sup>29</sup> Okan Ancak, "Yeni Avrasyacılık Bağlamında Güney Kafkasya'da Türkiye ve Rusya", Ankara Üniversitesi

SBF Dergisi, Araştırma Makalesi

DOI: 10.33630/ausbf.700806, ss. 1-32, s. 2,

[https://sbfdergi.ankara.edu.tr/dergi/erken\\_gorunum/1522---Okan-Ancak.pdf](https://sbfdergi.ankara.edu.tr/dergi/erken_gorunum/1522---Okan-Ancak.pdf) (Retrieved on: 10.04.2020).

It seems quite natural that the region has become a competition zone with new actors emerging after the Cold War as well as the Russians because as already known, the Caspian Basin, the South Caucasus and Anatolia have always drawn the attention of foreign countries and great actors and been subject to attempts of expansionism since the region holds a geographically significant character.<sup>30</sup>

Historically, the South Caucasus was a competition zone for the Ottoman Empire, Russia and Iran and these states have left their cultural and political traces on the region. Russian domination was established on the South Caucasus at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and preserved its existence until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (December, 1991) except for the years between 1918 and 1920.<sup>31</sup> Subsequent to the disintegration of the USSR, the establishment of three independent states in the region paved the way for new economic, military, political and security conditions in the South Caucasus. The countries in the region encountered various security problems and tried to find a solution through their affiliation to regional and international security organisations and extending cooperation. In this period, Armenia took common actions with Russia especially regarding issues on the economy and security.<sup>32</sup>

Following the Cold War, the South Caucasus emerged on the world's agenda with all its geopolitical advantages, and a new competition for "influence", called "The Big Game", began among territorial and extraterritorial actors, the aim of which was to fill the deficiency of power and effect coming into sight in the South Caucasus. The geopolitical deficiency allowed for a violent competitive environment and it became crystal clear that the fundamental goal of the international struggle – also called the "New Big Game" – in the South Caucasus, which was the symbol of change and transformation, lay in the conflicts of interest regarding the use,

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<sup>30</sup> Ali Hasanov, "Güney Kafkasya, Hazar-Karadeniz Havzaları ve Azerbaycan'ın Jeopolitiği", s. 13, <http://www.kitabxana.net/files/books/file/1520433830.pdf> (Retrieved on: 21.04.2020).

<sup>31</sup> Hatem Cabbarlı, "Güney Kafkasya'nın Jeopolitiği ve Güvenlik Sorunları: Dağlık Karabağ Örneğinde", Karadeniz Araştırmaları, Bahar 2017, Sayı: 53, s. 51-69, s. 53, [http://www.karam.org.tr/Makaleler/1813328801\\_04.Hatem%20CABBARLI.pdf](http://www.karam.org.tr/Makaleler/1813328801_04.Hatem%20CABBARLI.pdf) (Retrieved on: 10.04.2020).

<sup>32</sup> Hatem Cabbarlı, "Güney Kafkasya'nın Jeopolitiği ve Güvenlik Sorunları: Dağlık Karabağ Örneğinde", Karadeniz Araştırmaları, Bahar 2017, Sayı: 53, s. 51-69, s. 54, [http://www.karam.org.tr/Makaleler/1813328801\\_04.Hatem%20CABBARLI.pdf](http://www.karam.org.tr/Makaleler/1813328801_04.Hatem%20CABBARLI.pdf) (Retrieved on: 10.04.2020).

acquisition and shipment of energy resources.<sup>33</sup> The actors of the Big Game were great in number and different as well: The European Union (EU), NATO, Lukoil, BP, the USA, Turkey, Iran and the People's Republic of China... Yet, in the second half of the 1990s, the USA and Russia promulgated the region as their "vital field of interest" and proceeded in their struggle for efficiency as the two principal actors. Alliances between countries in this struggle for sovereignty manifested themselves as the USA versus Russia through groups: "the USA-Turkey-Azerbaijan-Georgia" on the one hand and "Russia-Iran-Armenia" on the other.<sup>34</sup>

As already mentioned, the one who would control the South Caucasus would also be prepotent in wider parts of Eurasia and this fact led global and territorial powers in addition to Russia to concretize their geopolitical, geo-economic and military-geostrategic interests regarding this area.<sup>35</sup>

Consequently, defined as the "Balkans of Eurasia" by Brzezinski, the South Caucasus has become the arena of territorial and global powers since the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>36</sup> However, this is contravened by the interests of the actors in this competition. In the new period, the global superpower USA, Russia (which once lost its global power status yet is trying to regain it), China (which is trying to become a global power) and the EU, and apart from these, Turkey (which is trying to reinforce its

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<sup>33</sup> Uğur Aktürk, "Orta Asya ve Kafkasya Jeopolitiğinde Küresel Egemenlik Mücadelesi", *Elektronik Siyaset Bilimi Araştırmaları Dergisi*, Haziran 2010 Cilt: 1 Sayı: 1, ss. 20-39, s. 20, <http://www.acarindex.com/dosyalar/makale/acarindex-1423878777.pdf> (Retrieved on: 11.04.2020).

<sup>34</sup> Burçin Canar, "Rusya Federasyonu'nun Azerbaycan ile İlişkileri", *Çankırı Karatekin Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Dergisi*, Cilt: 2, Sayı: 1, ss. 21-38, Bahar 2012, s. 22, <http://kutuphane.dogus.edu.tr/mvt/pdf.php?pdf=0013746&lng=1> (Retrieved on: 19. 04.2020).

Uğur Aktürk, "Orta Asya ve Kafkasya Jeopolitiğinde Küresel Egemenlik Mücadelesi", *Elektronik Siyaset Bilimi Araştırmaları Dergisi* Haziran 2010 Cilt: 1 Sayı: 1, ss. 20-39, s. 28, <http://www.acarindex.com/dosyalar/makale/acarindex-1423878777.pdf> (Retrieved on: 11.04.2020).

<sup>35</sup> Ali Hasanov, "Güney Kafkasya, Hazar-Karadeniz Havzaları ve Azerbaycan'ın Jeopolitiği", s. 8, <http://www.kitابخana.net/files/books/file/1520433830.pdf> (Retrieved on: 21.04.2020).

<sup>36</sup> Hatem Cabbarlı, "Güney Kafkasya'nın Jeopolitiği ve Güvenlik Sorunları: Dağlık Karabağ Örneğinde", *Karadeniz Araştırmaları*, Bahar 2017, Sayı: 53, s. 51-69, s. 52-53, [http://www.karam.org.tr/Makaleler/1813328801\\_04.Hatem%20CABBARLI.pdf](http://www.karam.org.tr/Makaleler/1813328801_04.Hatem%20CABBARLI.pdf) (Retrieved on: 10.04.2020).

territorial power status) and Iran were continuously developing strategies to have a voice in the strategic region and achieve their goals in the South Caucasus as in other regions.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, it signified that the geopolitical struggle first began in the Caucasus.<sup>38</sup>

However, Transcaucasia should not have escaped from Russian control since Transcaucasia was the sole point of connection and gateway between Russia and the Middle East; Russia and the Mediterranean; and Russia and Africa.<sup>39</sup> While Russia was maximizing its economic, political and military relations with its last fortress of Armenia to break the resistance of the two remaining countries of Azerbaijan and Georgia; the USA was emulating an existence in the region in military and political terms after ensuring control of the Caspian energy resources; and the EU was competing to take its maximum share from this cake. Meanwhile, Turkey was following a discourse of a “Turkish World extending from the Adriatic to the Great Wall of China”.<sup>40</sup> On the other hand, Iran was working to find its way into Azerbaijan and the Middle East in political, religious and economic terms.<sup>41</sup> The essential factor making Transcaucasia open to foreign powers to such a great extent was the weakness of the states that had just proclaimed their independence. Powerful states chalked up extra points

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<sup>37</sup> Nazim Caferov ve Araz Aslanlı, “ABD ve Güney Kafkasya: Ağustos 2008 Öncesinde ve Sonrasında”, Aksaray Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Dergisi, 8 (4), 1-10, s. 2, [https://www.academia.edu/35968478/ABD\\_ve\\_Guney\\_Kafkasya\\_Agustos\\_2008\\_Oncesinde\\_ve\\_Sonrasında](https://www.academia.edu/35968478/ABD_ve_Guney_Kafkasya_Agustos_2008_Oncesinde_ve_Sonrasında) (Retrieved on: 10.04.2020).

Fikret Elma, “Küreselleşme Süresinde Güney Kafkasya Demokrasi, Güvenlik ve İşbirliği Sorunu”, Uluslararası Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi The Journal of International Social Research, Volume 2/6 Winter 2009, ss. 195-206, s. 196.

<sup>38</sup> Mitat Çelipala ve Cavid Veliyev, “Azerbaycan-Gürcistan-Türkiye Bölgesel İşbirliğinin Başarılı Örneği”, Kadir Has Üniversitesi, Center for International and European Studies, Policy Brief, Mart 2015, 03, ss. 1-25, s. 3, <https://www.khas.edu.tr/cms/cies/dosyalar/files/CIES%20Policy%20Brief%2003.pdf> (Retrieved on: 11.04.2020).

<sup>39</sup> Ahmet Sapmaz, “Rusya’nın Transkafkasya Politikası ve Türkiye’ye Etkileri”, Ötüken, s. 36, <https://www.otuken.com.tr/u/otuken/docs/Transkafkasya.pdf> (Retrieved on: 22.04.2020).

<sup>40</sup> William Hale, “Türk Dış Politikası 1774-2000”, Çeviren: Petek Demir, Mozaik, İstanbul, 2003, s. 308.

<sup>41</sup> Hatem Cabbarlı, “Güney Kafkasya’nın Jeopolitiği ve Güvenlik Sorunları: Dağlık Karabağ Örneğinde”, Karadeniz Araştırmaları, Bahar 2017, Sayı: 53, s. 51-69, s. 57, [http://www.karam.org.tr/Makaleler/1813328801\\_04.Hatem%20CABBARLI.pdf](http://www.karam.org.tr/Makaleler/1813328801_04.Hatem%20CABBARLI.pdf) (Retrieved on: 10.04.2020).

in global politics thanks to the natural resources and the geopolitical and geostrategic positioning. On the contrary, the same advantages did not work for the small-scale, weak states of Transcaucasia, which had no previous tradition of functioning as a state, and they even caused huge problems. Global and territorial powers have always tried to dominate the region in order to maximize their geopolitical, political, economic and strategic interests.<sup>42</sup>

## **The Geopolitics of the North Caucasus**

The North Caucasus is located in the north of the Caucasus Mountains, which start from the Black Sea in the west, end with the Caspian Sea in the east and geographically divide the Caucasus in two. Today, there are seven autonomous republics (Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, North Ossetia-Alania, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachay-Cherkessia and Adygea) and two krais (Krasnodar and Stavropol) affiliated to the Russian Federation in the North Caucasus.

When the North Caucasus is mentioned today, the republics in the North Caucasian Federal District, which is one of the eight federal districts of Russia, are understood. This is because the majority of the people of the North Caucasus live in the republics in question.<sup>43</sup>

The total population of the seven autonomous republics is about 7.5 million. Contrary to popular belief, not every republic has a homogeneous social structure; they contain dozens of different ethnic groups. The Chechens are the people with the largest population in the North Caucasus. Only two of these republics (Chechnya and Ingushetia) have a monoethnic structure; Dagestan, where more than 30 ethnic groups live, is the republic with the most complex population in the region.<sup>44</sup>

The religion of the Chechens has progressed by undergoing change since ancient ages. The Chechens had polytheistic beliefs in prehistoric times.

The Chechen people met with Islam during the Arab-Khazar wars in the early 8th century. After the 10th century, Christianity spread across

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<sup>42</sup> Ahmet Sapmaz, “Rusya’nın Transkafkasya Politikası ve Türkiye’ye Etkileri”, Ötüken, s. 33, <https://www.otuken.com.tr/u/otuken/docs/Transkafkasya.pdf> (Retrieved on: 22.04.2020).

<sup>43</sup> Mokhamed Akhiyadov, Kuzey Kafkasya, Kafkasya’da Din, Siyaset, Etnisite, İnsamer, 2020, s. 1.

<sup>44</sup> Mokhamed Akhiyadov, Kuzey Kafkasya, Kafkasya’da Din, Siyaset, Etnisite, İnsamer, 2020, s. 1.

the region as a result of their rapprochement with Georgia and they led their social and cultural lives according to this Christianity sect.<sup>45</sup>

As already mentioned above, although Christianity spread through Georgia after the 10th century, Islam became the dominant religion thanks to the influence of the Muslims in Dagestan.<sup>46</sup>

The North Caucasus has a geopolitically important position as it is a region where the Muslim and Christian worlds meet and Europe and Asia are separated; hence, the region has always been a place where the interests of the great states are in conflict.

In fact, it took nearly 1000 years for Islam to spread all over the region. Having reached Southern Dagestan in the first step, Islam spread to the west of the region from there. By the 15th century, the east of the North Caucasus had been completely Islamized. However, it took a long time (between the 17th and 19th centuries) for the Muslim peoples living in the region today (especially the peoples in the west of the North Caucasus) to give up their pre-Islamic beliefs. Reaching Dagestan through Arab invitees and conquerors, Islam spread in the eastern regions of the North Caucasus by local inviters, and in the west mostly by the influence of the Ottoman State.<sup>47</sup>

About one-third of the Muslim population in Russia lives in the North Caucasus. Islam is especially common in the eastern part of the region, and more than 90% of the population of the republics there (Dagestan, Chechnya and Ingushetia) is Muslim. In the western part of the North Caucasus, the proportion of Muslims is lower due to both the large Russian population and the presence of Ossetians, an important part of which is Christian.<sup>48</sup>

The Russians showed great interest in the region due to its strategic importance. The Russian military and scientific discovery movements in the region started in the Lower Volga region in the first three-quarters of the 18th century and spread to the North-eastern Caucasus, resulting in natural wealth and human resources being brought to the region under the control of the Russian State. Many soldiers and scientists of European origin, most being German or Dutch, served under the Russians during these expeditions.

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<sup>45</sup> Şamil Basayev, Çeçenlerde Din, [samilbasayev.com/cecenler/cecenlerde-din/](http://samilbasayev.com/cecenler/cecenlerde-din/) (Retrieved on: 23.08.2019).

<sup>46</sup> Muharrem Yıldız, Dünden Bugüne Kafkasya, Yitik Hazine Yayınları, No: 08, İzmir 2006, s. 45.

<sup>47</sup> Mokhamed Akhiyadov, Kuzey Kafkasya, Kafkasya'da Din, Siyaset, Etnisite, İnsamer, 2020, s. 1.

<sup>48</sup> Mokhamed Akhiyadov, Kuzey Kafkasya, Kafkasya'da Din, Siyaset, Etnisite, İnsamer, 2020, s. 1.

The first scientific accounts about the North-eastern Caucasus and the Lower Volga were obtained during the Persian Campaign (1723) in the Peter I period. I. G. Gerber, a German from Brandenburg who participated in this campaign, had served in South Dagestan and Georgia for five years. Gerber was present at the signing of the agreement between the Turks and Russians in Mabur; he presided over the military and commercial expeditions to Bukhara and Khiva in 1731; and he prepared the first map of the Caspian Sea in 1736 observing the territory of the Caspian region very well. In addition, his notes on the Persian campaign in 1723 were published in English by the Scottish doctor and diplomat John Bella in 1763. This was then translated into Russian in 1776 and into French in 1788.<sup>49</sup>

Today, the economies of the North Caucasian republics are dependent on subsidies from Moscow. At least 80% of their budgets consist of central government aid. Despite this aid, the economies of the North Caucasian republics are rather weak. In conjunction with this situation, the North Caucasus is the region with the highest unemployment rate in Russia.

According to official data, the unemployment rate in the region is more than 11% on average. In some republics, this rate reaches 25%. In addition to ethnic diversity and due to such socio-economic problems, the North Caucasus continues to be the most unstable region of Russia. The events that constituted a turning point in terms of the history of this region were those that shaped the period during which they were experienced such as the Migration Period, the spread of Islam in the region, the Tatar-Mongolian domination and the invasion of the region by the Russian Empire, rather than political events unrelated to each other. However, the transformation process of the economic, societal and cultural systems, which are traditional for the North Caucasus, and what they are today were possible mostly due to the influence of the Russian State. The dominance of Russia in the North Caucasus led to major changes in the socioeconomic, political and cultural order that had been maintained in the region for centuries.<sup>50</sup>

Chechnya, a country in the North Caucasus, is located in the southwest of Russia and in the northern part of the Caucasus Mountains. The Terek River is located in the north of the country, Dagestan in the east and the Ossetian regions in the west. Its neighbours are Kumyks and Avars

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<sup>49</sup> Özgür Türker, “Kuzey Kafkasya’daki Rus İşgaline Dair Rusça Kaynaklar Üzerine”, s. 185, <https://dspace.ankara.edu.tr/xmlui/bitstream/handle/20.500.12575/65214/19967.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y> (Retrieved on: 30.04.2020).

<sup>50</sup> Mokhamed Akhiyadov, Kuzey Kafkasya, Kafkasya’da Din, Siyaset, Etnisite, İnsamer, 2020, s. 4-5.

in the east, Kabardians and Ossetians in the west, Kazakhs in the north, and Hawshurs and Tushetians in the south. The Chechens spread to the west and northwest of Dagestan and established settlements at high altitudes. Located in the southern skirt of the Caucasus, Chechnya is located in the northern skirts of the Caucasian Mountains and in the southern part of the Terek Plain.<sup>51</sup>

The 20,000 km<sup>2</sup> surface area of Chechnya is divided into three separate geographical regions: a mountainous region, a central region and a bottom region. The Caucasus constitutes the first region, i.e. the mountainous region. The second region is located in the wide valleys of the Sunja and Terek rivers. The valleys of Chechnya extending from west to east unite in the east, and the mountains of Sunja and Terek extend between them. The summit of these two mountains was measured as 653 meters and the Alkhan-Churt Valley is located between the two mountains. The third and last geographical region consists of the rugged plains of the steppes called Nogai.<sup>52</sup> Chechnya's relations with other countries have always been in accordance with its northern borders. The contacts established through invasion or migration consistently occurred on the northern borders. For this reason, the Sunja and Terek plains had to struggle with foreign occupations.<sup>53</sup>

Differences in the surface features of Chechnya manifest themselves in its climate and vegetation cover. Although its climate varies, the continental climate is usually observed; summers are mild and winters are cold.<sup>54</sup> Chechnya is known as one of the most blessed geographies with fertile soil, famous for its natural beauty and full of natural riches. In this context, a considerable amount of oil is available in the Sunja Valley and in the region between the Sunja and Terek mountains. It is also known that there are deposits of underground gas, mineral water resources and construction materials such as limestone, clay and plaster. This situation caused attacks by Russia and other foreign powers on the region.<sup>55</sup>

According to Vasily Potto, who was a general of the Tsarist Russian army and also the author of the book titled *Caucasian War*, beginning with Ivan IV, almost all Russian tsars tried to rule over the

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<sup>51</sup> Cemal Anadol, *Çağımızın Gerçek Kahramanları Çeçenler*, Kamer Yayınları, No: 78, İstanbul 1996, s. 15.

<sup>52</sup> Ali Özcan, *Kafkasya ve İdil – Ural Bölgesi Coğrafyası*, Çeçenler, İstanbul 2014, s. 1.

<sup>53</sup> Şamil Mansur, *Çeçenler*, Sam Yayınları, İstanbul 1996, s. 18.

<sup>54</sup> Ali Özcan, *Kafkasya ve İdil – Ural Bölgesi Coğrafyası*, Çeçenler, İstanbul 2014, s. 2.

<sup>55</sup> Ali Özcan, *Kafkasya ve İdil – Ural Bölgesi Coğrafyası*, Çeçenler, İstanbul 2014, s. 3.



Caucasus; in fact, "The idea of Caucasian domination became hereditary in Russian history". Nevertheless, the main purpose of Russia's foreign policy for the North Caucasus became to withstand the Ottoman presence in the region by establishing a military and political alliance with Iran, which had already declined, in the late 16th century.<sup>56</sup>

As it is understood, the North Caucasus is a region where alliances were formed between the peoples living in the region, with Russian or global actors, and the steps they took to protect their micro national interests passed into history. The conflicts and alliances of local peoples and global powers have never stopped. However, since the 1770s, Russia has been a sovereign power and a dominant state in this territory. The hills of the Caucasus Mountains, crossed by the southern borders of Russia, have witnessed many rebellions as well as wars or genocides.<sup>57</sup>

Since the Soviet Union was dissolved in 1991, the Russian Federation, which is the biggest country in the world in terms of surface area and has a population of nearly 150 million, has undergone serious changes in its political and economic structure. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, both the West and the East believed that freedom and prosperity and the rules of democracy and the free market economy would arrive in the Eurasian geography. Although a long time has passed, most people in the Russian Federation are still rather pessimist and disappointed about the establishment of a democratic and political system instead of the strict social, political and economic control of the Communist era and the settlement of a market economy.

Since its foundation, the Russian Federation, a young state compared to other states in history established by the Russians, has been involved in two wars against the Chechens who have been struggling for independence. Furthermore, it has faced low-scale conflicts in Dagestan and Ingushetia.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Mokhamed Akhiyadov, *Kuzey Kafkasya, Kafkasya'da Din, Siyaset, Etnisite, İnsamer*, 2020, s. 4-5.

<sup>57</sup> "Kuzey Kafkasya'da yeni anlaşmazlıklar", <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/analiz-haber/kuzey-kafkasyada-yeni-anlasmazliklar/1350832> (Retrieved on: 30.04.2020).

<sup>58</sup> Sezai Özçelik, "Kuzey Kafkasya Çatışmaları: Çeçenistan ve Dağıstan Örnek Olayları", *Kuzey Kafkasya Çatışmaları: Çeçenistan ve Dağıstan Örnek Olayları*", *Yeni Türkiye, Kafkaslar Özel Sayısı-9*, sayı: 79, Temmuz-Aralık 2015, ss. 359-369, <http://www.yeniturkiye.com/display.asp?c=0791> (Retrieved on: 30.04.2020).

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# CHAPTER I

## AZERBAIJAN

### **Azerbaijan in the Final Years of the USSR**

Today, Azerbaijan is the shining star of the Caucasus. However, Azerbaijan's history between the second half of the 1980s and the early 1990s was a period full of struggles for the sake of independence. The factors affecting the fight for national independence were the historical heritage of economic, political and social challenges in the Soviet Union in the second half of the 1980s and implications of these problems in Azerbaijan, Armenia's territorial claims towards Azerbaijan, and the national struggle dating back to 1918 and 1920.<sup>59</sup>

Azerbaijan was divided into two in the first quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The southern part of the Aras River falls within the borders of Iran today. In the northern part is located the independent Azerbaijan Republic. The Azerbaijan Republic, located to the north of the Aras River, has 87,000 km<sup>2</sup> of land and a population of 10 million.<sup>60</sup>

In the second half of the 1980s, socioeconomic problems arose in the USSR and had dramatic implications on communal living. Within the periods of the USSR's economic depression, a decision was accepted prescribing the democratization of the political system and the activities of non-governmental organisations and political parties. This "top to bottom" approach towards the democratization process was one of the factors affecting and catalysing the political fight in Azerbaijan as in any other place in the country. In summary, the economic crisis that the USSR encountered instigated the transition to a market economy. Furthermore, the market economy based on private property was utilised as a way to salvation in a socialist system, the basis of which relies on the rejection of private

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<sup>59</sup> "Bağımsızlıklarının 27.Yılında Türk Cumhuriyetleri", Ankara, 2018, s. 39-41. Editörler: Ayşe Çolpan Yıldız, Murat Yılmaz, Bölüm yazarları, Vefa Kurban, Araz Aslanlı, Geray Musayev, Nazim Caferov.

<sup>60</sup> Mehmet Saray, Atatürk ve Türk Dünyası", T.C. Başbakanlık Atatürk Kültür, Dil Ve Tarih Yüksek Kurumu, Ankara, 1995, s. 76.