A UNITED CAUCASUS: REALITY ROOTED IN THE PAST OR HIGH-FLOWN POLITICAL ILLUSIONS?

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Coming Back to World Politics

The Caucasus was drawn into the sphere of international politics in the 1990s and has remained there ever since. Along with Yugoslavia it owes its international prominence to the acute ethnic and political conflicts and wars on its territory.

Its geographic, ethnic, linguistic, confessional, and cultural diversity has largely determined its history and the relations among its nations. It is not for nothing that the Caucasus is called a "museum of nations:" it is home to over 50 large and small nations and ethnic groups (about 20 million people in all). The smallest number several hundreds, while the largest ethnic groups have several million people.

At all times the region remained a link between Europe and Asia; throughout its history the Caucasus or its regions were either a buffer zone between the rivaling empires or part of them. Rome, Parthia, Byzantium, Arabs, Mongols, Turks, the Iranian, Ottoman, and Russian empires all met or clashed here. Confessional and ethnic diversity is another of the region's prominent features: there are Christians and Muslims (Sunni and Shi'a), as well as peoples belonging to various Indo-European groups, the Iberian-Caucasian, Turkic, and Semitic ethnic and language groups.

The Caucasus is home to the four world religions: Christianity represented mainly by Orthodoxy and Monophysitism and a small number of Catholics and Protestants; Sunni and Shi'a Islam; Judaism practiced by the Georgian and mountain Jews (the latter living mainly high up in the mountains of Azerbaijan and Daghestan), and Buddhism, the religion of the Kalmyks.[1]

Throughout its history the Caucasus has been and remains a bridge connecting the North and the South, and the West and the East, as well as a barrier separating them. The academic community on the whole agrees that the Caucasian peoples gained next to nothing from this geopolitical advantage, and even lost a lot because of it. With the exception of the Soviet period when the Caucasus, as part of the U.S.S.R., lived according to the laws of a "closed" society, it was part of the international communication network. Under Soviet power, however, it was deprived of its role of a North/South and West/East transportation corridor. Today, the region is free to regain this function.

There is no clear geographic definition of the Caucasus. Generally speaking, it is a mountainous country between the Black and the Caspian seas. Described in the demographic and historical terms

[1] Not all authors agree that the Kalmyks belong to the Caucasus. There are 122,000 of them living to the north of Daghestan and to the northwest of the Caspian; their contacts with the Caucasian peoples are intensifying.

of the past two centuries, the region is delimited in the north by the northern slopes of the Caucasian Range and the adjacent valleys that separate the lands inhabited by the small North Caucasian peoples from the northern territories populated by Russians. In the political terms of the late 20th century, the Caucasian boundary coincided with Russia's southern frontiers, that is, with its North Caucasian republics and the Krasnodar and Stavropol territories. In the west, the border territory is populated by Turks on the one side of the border and Georgians and Armenians, on the other. It is much harder to trace the southern demographic boundary since Azeri Turks live on both shores of the River Araks (the southern border of Georgia). Because of the indiscriminating administrative division of the Northern Caucasus inherited from the past, which ignored the titular nations' settlement pattern, it is hard to trace the Caucasus' geographical and political limits.

Some Russian colleagues identify the Caucasus as a much wider territory which includes not only the Transcaucasus and Northern Caucasus, but also the steppe foothills (the Stavropol and Krasnodar territories), as well as the Rostov Region. Others who are guided by ethnic and demographic criteria limit the Caucasus to the territories populated by the autochthonous mountain peoples. They describe the steppe foothills, as well as the Volgograd and Astrakhan regions together with Kalmykia, as the South Russian Region and a transition zone with typically Russian and typically North Caucasian features. Many centuries of migration between the North and the South have made the boundary between the steppe foothills and the Northern Caucasus unidentifiable. In fact, it can be described as provisional. On the other hand, the Northern Caucasus connects the Transcaucasus and the foothills.[2]

There is another, more recent, opinion stemming from the current geopolitical realities which divides the social and economic space of the Caucasus into the Northern, Central, and Southern parts. Traditionally, the region includes only the post-Soviet autonomous political units and the Transcaucasus—Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia. According to the above-mentioned viewpoint, however, the northwest of Iran is regarded as the Southeastern Caucasus and the northeastern areas of Turkey (Kars, Ardahan, Artvin, etc.) form the Southwestern Caucasus. Indeed, during the many centuries before Russia came to the Caucasus these lands belonged to a single socioeconomic and ethnocultural expanse peopled by the Caucasian nations; today the Southwestern Caucasus (part of Turkey) and the Southeastern Caucasus (part of Iran) can be described as the Southern Caucasus.[3]

The Southern Caucasus is populated by 6 million Azeris, 4 million Georgians, and 3.5 million Armenians, as well as by smaller nations, some of which also belong to the autochthonous population. Georgia and Azerbaijan are polyethnic countries, while Armenia, with 95 percent of its population being Armenians, can be described as monoethnic (there are also 2 percent of Russians and less than 2 percent of Yezidi Kurds). In Georgia, the titular nation comprises 70 percent of the total population, in Azerbaijan, over 83 percent.

The Northern Caucasus can be described as an ethnic patchwork.

Samuel Huntington and His Opponents

The post-Cold War dramatic changes called for a novel approach to the new political realities. Scholars and politicians responded with a host of descriptions of the world order of the future rang-

[2] See: K.S. Gadjiev, *Geopolitika Kavkaza,* Mezhdunarodnye otnoshenia Publishers, Moscow, 2001, pp. 44-45.

[3] See: E. Ismailov, E. Polukhov, "The 'Old' and 'New' Players in Caucasian Politics," *Central Asia and the Caucasus,* No. 4 (28), 2004, p. 46.

ing from the era of nation-states to their final disappearance under the impact of all sorts of factors (tribalism, globalism, etc.). Some of them described the future as a unipolar world organized around the West (the United States, in particular). Others predicted that in the near future a non-Western (Confucian) civilization would emerge as another pole hostile to the West. Still others talked about a multipolar world. The so-called cultural come-back was another factor of international relations.

Scholarly writings offer several paradigms equally suited to interpreting international relations in the Caucasus: globalization, the balance of power, the clash of civilizations, etc. The latter, consistently described in Samuel Huntington's well-known book, produced a noticeable impact on the scholarly and political discussions of the Caucasian problems. Huntington has postulated that the emerging world order is determined by the relations among seven or eight large civilizations and that civilizational identities, rather than ideology or economics (as it was asserted in the past), determine the key distinctive features and will, therefore, develop into a source of conflicts. He described civilization as a cultural entity of the highest rank and the broadest level of cultural identity mainly determined by religion. Mr. Huntington insisted that no universal civilization would appear in the foreseeable future even though it was commonly believed in the West that the Western values as a universal phenomenon would serve as the cornerstone of the future world order. In fact, civilizations must coexist to survive: according to Huntington, this coexistence will develop into clashes because the civilizational differences are too great to be ignored. The borderlines between civilizations will become the frontlines of bloody wars.

According to Huntington, the Caucasus is one of such borderlines. These borderlines will inevitably develop into areas of civilizational clashes. He tried to explain the post-Soviet conflicts by the clash of civilizations and the revived identity factor: the Caucasus is one of the regions where Christian Orthodoxy and Islam are in confrontation, while Western ambitions merely aggravate the situation. The Caucasian conflicts (primarily in Karabakh and Chechnia) are direct results of this.[4]

Huntington's conception triggered a fervent discussion: it was criticized because of its overestimated role of the religious factor. The critics pointed out that this factor rarely figured prominently at the initial stages of the conflicts normally triggered by social and economic factors. More likely than not, minorities start fighting for their rights not because they belong to a different confession or a different culture: they merely resent being social and economic outcasts. Politics and culture blend when the situation described above is perceived as a collective rather than individual problem.[5] One can hardly deny that culture plays a prominent role in such conflicts, yet, as I have said above, at the initial stages culture is fairly unimportant: it is moving to the fore as the conflict unfolds.

There is the opinion that identity becomes an effective weapon when there are forces prepared to use it to create myths in order to strengthen their position, add legitimacy to their power, and rally the masses. This is why an impartial analysis should be based on the paradigms of rational choice and the use of force, rather than on the concepts of culture and identity.[6]

S.E. Cornell, one of the most respected experts on Caucasian problems, disagrees with what Samuel Huntington wrote about the Caucasian conflicts as a clash of civilizations. Cornell believes this to be an oversimplified approach that exploits stereotypes. For him, the conflicts are

[4] See: S.P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and Remaking of the World Order*, New York, 1996.

[5] See: D. Senghaas, *The Clash within Civilizations (Coming to terms with cultural conflicts),* Routledge, London, New York, 2002, p. 74.

[6] See: N. MacFarlane, "The Clash of Civilizations: A Critical Perspective," Office of the President, Tbilisi, September 1999.

a combination of nationalism and national interests, rather than religious and civilizational contradictions.[7]

This is true: the Abkhazian and the South Osset conflicts can be hardly explained in Huntington's terms, therefore his opponents often refer to them as another argument against his theory. The same can be said about the Karabakh conflict: Iran helped Christian Armenia in its struggle against Muslim Azerbaijan for a wide range of reasons (increased Turkish influence on Iran's northern borders, the rising wave of nationalism among the Azeri minority in Iran, economic advantages created by trade with blockaded Armenia, expected rapprochement between Baku and Washington, etc.).

Huntington's opponents believe that his "clash of civilizations" model is conceptually vague when applied to the Caucasus; they also insist that it is dangerous, since according to it, all attempts at subregional cooperation (be it the "peaceful Caucasus" or the "Eurasian corridor" projects) are doomed to failure. N. MacFarlane has pointed out that Huntington's theory is readily accepted in the Caucasus for the simple reason that, according to its logic, the Caucasus has become the focus of international attention.[8]

Huntington's opponents are numerous, yet it is difficult to object to his description of the Caucasus as the zone of contact of civilizations and the boundary that divides them. Under the influence of his unfavorable forecasts of the region's future, Caucasian politicians started looking for more positive alternatives. They found them in the "peaceful Caucasus" and the "dialog of cultures and civilizations" projects.

The former does not presuppose an alliance of any sort (contrary to the "common Caucasian home" idea that appeared in the 1990s). It speaks of the need to identify common interests and ensure peaceful coexistence through talks and agreements.

In 1997-1998, politicians initiated several international conferences which discussed the geopolitical problems of the Caucasus and its single cultural space. Much attention was paid to the historical and cultural roots of Caucasian unity. Here I shall limit myself to the most eloquent pronouncement offered by then speaker of the Georgian parliament Zurab Zhvania at a conference at Tbilisi University: "Caucasian unity is not merely a political conception. The Caucasus is a variegated and yet homogenous world, a phenomenon which took many centuries or even millennia to acquire its final shape. There are definite authentic social and cultural institutions in it… This suggests that there is the phenomenon of a single Caucasian civilization created by the Caucasian peoples. They are united by shared values and common mentality, despite the religious and ethnic diversity."[9]

Then Minister of Culture of Georgia V. Asatiani said at the same conference: "We, the Caucasian peoples, form one historical and geopolitical entity. Our psychophysical image, the so-called Caucasian nature, our physical appearance, temperament, and moral ideals make us kindred peoples."[10]

It is fairly easy to explain why politicians offered these opinions and tried to plant them in the minds of people. It should be added that at the same conference scholars pointed out that the different peoples and states on both sides of the Caucasian Range have different systems and that all those who are holding forth about a single Caucasian space or single Caucasian civilization should bear this in mind.[11]

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[7] See: S.E. Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers. A Study of Ethnopolitical Conflicts in the Caucasus,* Curzon Press, Richmond, 2001, pp. 47-51.

[8] See: N. MacFarlane, op. cit.

[9] Z. Zhvania, "Georgia and the New Geopolitical Function of the Caucasus," *Caucasica* (The Journal of Caucasian Studies), Vol. 2, Tbilisi, 1998, p. 7.

[10] V. Asatiani, "Mirny Kavkaz: rol kul'tury v budushchem Kavkaza," *Caucasica*, Vol. 2, p. 37.

[11] See: M. Lordkipanidze, "K voprosu 'Kavkazskogo edinogo doma'," *Caucasica*, Vol. 2, p. 163.

A Lesson in History: How the Chance for Caucasian Unity was Missed

Caucasian history knows of many unsuccessful attempts to achieve unity. One of the most attractive chances was offered by the political and cultural context of the 11th-12th centuries when unity, or what can be called in the latest terms a "single cultural space," seemed just around the corner. This historically short period left its indelible imprint on the later development of the Caucasian peoples.

Georgia, which by that time had become a unified state and had freed itself from all sorts of invaders, began spreading its influence beyond its borders, thus initiating the process of unifying the Caucasus. Georgian chronicler Leonty Mroveli left us a detailed description of an idea which took its final form in the 1070s.[12] According to him, the Georgian rulers obviously wanted to create, to borrow a modern term, a single geopolitical space; the conception spoke about the common roots of the Caucasian peoples to justify Georgia's political course.

It is hard to say which form the "large world-the Caucasus" gradually emerging around Georgia, the core of the future unity, would have taken.[13] We know that the efforts to create a single geopolitical space were accompanied by more or less successful efforts to supply it with ideological and cultural props. The Georgian language was gradually emerging as an important tongue used in churches across the Caucasus. Hagiographic works, chronicles, and epigraphic and architectural monuments testify that in the 11th and 12th centuries, Georgian culture and the Georgian language were used not only by the nobles across the region, but also by ordinary people (Chalcedonian Armenians, the population of Albania and the Northern Caucasus).[14] Assisted by the language and together with it, religion played an important role in uniting the Caucasus. Christianity spread across the Northern Caucasus where bishop's cathedras had been already established; Georgia's political and cultural influence came along with it.[15]

The process turned out to be short-lived: Georgia failed to fully tap two of the most effective types of expansion: economic, by bringing its developed trade capital into the politically subjugated provinces, and cultural, which after it began was cut short in the 13th century.[16] The Mongol invasion weakened Georgia's political might and brought Islam to the Northern Caucasus. Gradually, considerably different political and cultural systems emerged on both slopes of the Caucasian Range. The local peoples were becoming more and more different, even though they preserved many of the cultural features which united them in the past.

Later, the political and ideological conception formulated in the 11th century was regularly revived. The urgent need to decide on a foreign policy orientation suggested the idea of uniting the Caucasus under Irakly II[17] with Georgia (which was much weaker than in the 11th-12th century) as the unification core.

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[12] See: L. Mroveli, "Mepeta tskhovreba" (Lives of the Czars), *Kartlis tskhovreba,* Vol. 1, Tbilisi, 1955, pp. 5-11.

[13] K. Gadjiev calls this "world" "the pan-Caucasian empire," whose vassals were Shirvan and Trebizond (see: K.S. Gadjiev, op. cit., p. 15).

[14] See: D. Muskhelishvili, "K istorii samonaimenovania gruzin," *Matsne,* "History, Ethnography and History of Atrs" series, No. 3, 1992, pp. 17-18.

[15] For more detail, see: N. Berdzenishvili, *Voprosy istorii Gruzii,* Book VIII, Tbilisi, 1975.

[16] See: L. Tukhashvili, *Essays on the History of Georgian Diplomacy,* Book 1, Tbilisi, 1994, pp. 78-79 (in Georgian).

[17] See: L. Tukhashvili, "Relations between the Kartli-Kakheti Kingdom and the Peoples of the Caucasus and the Middle East in the Second Half of the 18th Century," in: *Problems of Georgian History of the Period of Feudalism,* 1972, p. 14 (in Georgian).

Unification from the "Outside:" The Caucasus as Part of the Russian Empire

The Caucasus finally achieved a unity of sorts within the Russian Empire: the newly organized Caucasian vice regency included the administrative units of the Southern and Northern Caucasus, with its administrative center in Tbilisi. Political unification, achieved after a long period of division into the Iranian and Turkish spheres of influence, created favorable conditions for revived traditional contacts (cultural as well as others) among the local peoples, yet the *divide et impera* principle with which the Russian Empire armed itself interfered with the process.

After the February 1917 Revolution, the Russian Provisional Government set up a Special Transcaucasian Committee to rule the Caucasus; in November 1917, the Bolsheviks formed the Transcaucasian Commissariat. In February 1918, the Transcaucasian Sejm was organized; it proved to be short-lived because of contradictions among the representatives and the prospect of state sovereignty. In May 1918, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia proclaimed their independence, therefore there were no reasons to unite the Southern Caucasus into a single political entity.

After establishing Soviet power in the Caucasus, Russia made another attempt to set up united administrative units there: in 1922-1936, there existed the Transcaucasian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic; and in 1921-1924, there was the Gorskaia (Mountainous) Autonomous Republic within the R.S.F.S.R. This attempt, however, did not bring unity to the Caucasus: as soon as the Soviet Union fell apart, centrifugal disintegration forces gained the upper hand.

The "Caucasian Home" Options

The post-Soviet situation of the early 1990s and fervent confrontation with Russia added vigor to the concept of the common Caucasian home even though different peoples had different ideas about it ranging from a Caucasian parliament to an entity of the European Union type. They all ignored the fact that entities of that type rested on shared opinions about the world (religion, in particular), shared values, a single economic system, a single information space, and other factors conspicuously absent in the Caucasus. For these reasons, the common Caucasian home remained a declaration.

An attempt to realize the idea took the shape of the Confederation of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus soon to be transformed into the Confederation of Peoples of the Caucasus, the first congress of which was held on 25-26 August, 1989 in Sukhumi. Its aim was a federal republic; the congress set up an Assembly of Mountain Peoples headed by former Komsomol and Communist Party functionary Musa (Iury) Shanibov, at that time lecturer at the Kabardino-Balkarian University.

The congress was vested with the powers of a "parallel parliament." At the Confederation's third congress held in Sukhumi on 1-2 November, 1991, the Assembly was renamed the Confederation of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus and proclaimed itself the heir to the Republic of Mountain Peoples set up on 11 May, 1918. It described its key tasks as development of sociocultural and political cooperation among the Caucasian peoples; prevention of ethnic and other disagreements and conflicts among them and their peaceful settlement; and setting up a coordinated defense system against external enemies. The leaders believed that the state goals could be achieved when, under the conditions of the Russian Empire's disintegration, each of the South and North Caucasian republics or autonomies achieved independence. This completely ignored the region's history, present-day reality, and the

interests of the Turkic peoples. Meanwhile, the Balkars, Karachais, Kumyks, Nogais, Lezghians, and Darghins were not among the participants in the conferences in Sukhumi, Nalchik, Vladikavkaz, Grozny, and Makhachkala.

Musa Shanibov was elected as the Confederation's president; the Presidential Council included representatives of all North Caucasian peoples, while each of the peoples was expected to send three representatives to the Confederation's parliament. The president pointed out that the Confederation united the peoples of the North Caucasian republics, not their governments; as a result, 16 nationalities and ethnic minorities joined it, with the Karachais, Nogais, Kumyks, and Cossacks participating as observers.

There was no unity among the Confederation members: the Chechens wanted to use the structure in their struggle for independence, while the top figures believed it should serve as an instrument of regional cooperation. Its members differently interpreted the events and conflicts taking place in the Caucasus.[18] In order to attract the Cossacks and other nationalities, the Extraordinary Congress convened in Grozny on 3 October, 1992 renamed the Confederation of Mountain Peoples the Confederation of Caucasian Peoples. Unity in its ranks, however, remained the main headache.

Very soon it amply demonstrated its impotence by acting contrary to its original ideas: it supported Abkhazian separatism, which in fact meant support of Russia's aggression against Georgia, opposed the liberation struggle in Chechnia, etc. This cost it its prestige among the Caucasian peoples, even though the principles it declared remained popular for a while. The leaders were actively seeking international recognition: early in 1994, Shanibov visited Turkey where he met Foreign Ministry and General Staff officials; there was information that representatives of U.S. Congress also wanted to meet the Confederation leaders.[19]

We know from history that at all times Caucasian integration has inevitably acquired anti-Russian features, therefore the Russian Federation did its best to cut short the integration trends: any efforts to ignore them would have placed the ball in the court of the Chechen leaders. After 1992, Moscow used the Confederation against Tbilisi, it even helped it set up a defense system, which, however, did not become a real force and was soon forgotten.

It is interesting to note that Russia's national media described the Confederation as a real structure with a parliament, president, armed forces, and other attributes of a state. The press preferred to pass over in silence the fact that it was not the clearly stated will of the region's peoples, but an attempt by some of the North Caucasian intelligentsia to formulate and implement a certain state project completely divorced from reality. The leaders, and the structure for that matter, had no legal force obtained through elections. Significantly, it was the national, rather than the local North Caucasian press (of Daghestan, in particular) that wrote about the Confederation. The majority knew nothing or next to nothing about it, while those who did have an idea about the Confederation, and its aims and tasks (5 to 10 percent of the region's population) were either negative or enthusiastically positive about it.[20]

As soon as the region became conflict-prone any information about this structure was treated as an absolute priority in Russia's national media; the Confederation's chances increased along with the growth of instability in the Russian Federation and decreased when the situation improved. This is illustrated, in particular, by the rise in the Confederation's popularity after the presidential decree which introduced the state of emergency in Chechnia, as well as during the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict.

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[18] See: "The Unity of the North Caucasian Peoples—Myth and Reality," *Bulletin of the Center of Analysis and Studies of Georgia's Foreign Policy at the Foreign Ministry of Georgia,* Tbilisi, No. 7 (16), 1999, pp. 20-21 (in Georgian).

[19] See: Ibid., p. 23.

[20] See: K.S. Gadjiev, op. cit., p. 81.

We have not yet acquired any reliable information about a treaty or any other decision by the representative or executive bodies of the North Caucasian republics about setting up a Confederation or conducting a referendum with regards to it. These acts alone could have made the structure legitimate—its leaders completely agreed with this and never stopped saying that they wanted to consolidate the mountain peoples to set up, some time in the future (in 10 to 15 or even 20 to 30 years), an independent North Caucasian state consisting of nation-states.[21]

The attempts to make the Confederation an instrument of peaceful settlement of conflicts and contradictions failed. The Confederation even ignited several of the Caucasian conflicts: in the northwest it gathered under its banner the Adighe youth inspired by the "common Adighe ideas" and ready to fight in Abkhazia; it failed to unite the Caucasian peoples. It was torn apart by the contradictions between the leaders of Adighe origin and other Confederation members who mistrusted the leaders. The Karachais, Balkars, Kumyks, and Nogais set up the Assembly of the Turkic Speakers supported by Chechnia and Azerbaijan.

The above shows that for certain reasons the idea of a common Caucasian home failed to take off, yet we must admit there is a certain potential for mutual adaptation of confessions and cultures. Some of the authors point to a special historical experience of the region's peoples in the sphere of cultural and civilizational cooperation. For example, Polish theologian, philosopher and culturologist August Peter Kirsch has written: "In the Caucasus, three key cultures, religions, modes of thinking, and mentalities—ancient Judaism, European Christianity, and Eastern Islam—have offered an example of peaceful coexistence. It is through studying the Iberian-Caucasian contribution to mankind's cultural wealth that we can create an effective antidote to the phobia triggered by 9/11 and to arm mankind with adequate conclusions and knowledge."[22]

The position of contemporary Russian political scientists on the Caucasian unity/disunity issue deserves special treatment. According to prominent geopolitical scholar Alexander Dugin, Georgia needs ethno-cultural, rather than political, differentiation of the region. It should "support latitudinal delimitation and stronger longitudinal integration of the ethnic regions of the Transcaucasus." From this it follows that Abkhazia should be directly connected with Russia, while South and North Ossetia should be united into a single unit, and the rest of Christian Orthodox Georgia should be entrusted with control over the "Caucasian home." In this geopolitical context Chechnia could be administered by Christian Georgia. Besides, "Daghestan and Ingushetia should be attached, to a certain extent, to Georgia. This will create an autonomous North Caucasian zone which, while being economically developed, would completely depend on Russia strategically and be Eurasian-oriented." The author went on to say that a "Caucasian federation" could be created to include the three CIS republics and the RF autonomies.[23]

Some of the Russian geopolitical scholars hold forth about a possible "reintegration" of Georgia and the Russian Federation. One of them, A. Panarin, believes that the Kiev-Baku-Tbilisi axis taking shape can be dangerous, to a certain extent, for Tbilisi. Deprived of Russia's guarantees Georgia will find itself in a much more difficult position in the Transcaucasus. In view of the Islamic radicalization of the regimes distancing themselves from Russia, we can expect that the next generation (in 15 to 20 years) living in the non-Muslim neighboring countries of the Muslim world will have to deal with aggressive regimes.[24]

S. Samuilov is convinced that the Russian Federation should treat its relations with the predominantly Christian Orthodox countries (primarily Serbia and Armenia) as a priority. In the absence of common borders with them, Russia will need transit countries, namely, Georgia and Bulgaria, Chris-

[21] See: K.S. Gadjiev, op. cit., p. 81.
[22] *Khvalindeli dge* (Tomorrow), 2 September, 2003.
[23] A. Dugin, *Osnovy geopolitiki. Geopoliticheskoe budushchee Rossii,* Moscow, 1999, p. 351.
[24] See: A. Panarin, *Revansh istorii: rossiiskaia strategicheskaia initsiativa v XXI veke,* Moscow, 1998, p. 382.

tian Orthodox yet Western-oriented states. For a while they should remain transit countries; later, after Russia has regained its strength and the political elites of these countries have realized that Western prescriptions are useless, Russia might move away from partnership to allied relations with them.

Is the Caucasus a Single Cultural Space?

For centuries the Caucasus has been organically combining integration and disintegration trends, or, rather, has been balancing them. This raises the following questions: Why did the efforts to achieve Caucasian unity fail? Can we regard the cultures of the local peoples (or of some of them) as parts of the same single space?

Scholars differ about the civilizational identity of the Caucasus and its parts. Some of the criteria speak of it as a very specific civilization, sub-civilization, or cultural entity. More politically conscious scholars, mainly those associated with the political community and some of its members, believe that political unity based (or potentially based) on cultural and civilizational unity is also possible.

Peoples or nations belonging to any civilization share ideas, ideals, values, and norms. Together they form a spiritual axis which can be described as a basic paradigm or a philosophical system of any given civilization determining its way of life, self-identity, behavioral stereotypes, and social parameters. Religion was very prominent in most historical civilizations. In this sense the Caucasus can be described, with certain allowances, as a cultural-civilizational space with numerous elements of various development levels, ethnic, cultural, regional, confessional, and other features.

I believe that the term "single cultural space" is the most apt description of Caucasian unity and its past and present. The concept has been discussed in detail in culturological terms; it is believed, in particular, that in the process of natural-unconscious or absolutely rational imitation two or more neighboring cultures borrow certain elements and adjust them to their needs. Common past and similar living and natural conditions may create common features. This is how cultures of the same region acquire common "overtones" and "similar accents."[25] These common features are an illusion and a reality at one and the same time. It is an illusion because no new common culture appears as an independent multi-functional system. It is a reality because common features or elements create a certain aura of unity. They influence the lives of the peoples belonging to different cultures, and make it easier to coexist and to understand each other. This is true not only of cultures belonging to the same civilization or a single cultural space—this is primarily true of cultures existing on the periphery of different civilizations. In fact, their cooperation is closer than with the civilizationally kindred cultures. From this it follows that a single cultural space does not mean a single culture: the two concepts differ in the degree of their homogeneity/heterogeneity. A single culture presupposes homogeneity to a certain extent, while a single cultural space is the sum total of homogenous cultures. This is the context in which the Caucasus as a single cultural space should be discussed; the components of this space belong to different civilizations.

K. Gadjiev believes that we can talk about Caucasian cultural-historical unity as characterized by the existence of a multitude of mutually connected, sometimes opposing, or even conflicting, subcultures. In this way, this unity differs from the Middle Eastern or Central Asian versions. It can be described as fragmentary and conflicting, rather than as united and integral. As distinct from Western

[25] See: "Ibero-Amerika v mirovom tsivilizatsionnom protsesse," *Latinskaia Amerika,* Moscow, No. 7-8, 1999, p. 140; B.I. Koval, S.I. Semenov, "Energiynaia priroda sovremennykh pogranichnykh tsivilizatsiy (Novy podkhod k chelovecheskomu izmereniu vsemirnoy istorii)," *Latinskaia Amerika,* No. 11, 2000, pp. 4-14.

Christian unity based on a common cultural-historical and religious infrastructure, the diversity and splits in the Caucasus are caused by the infrastructure of the Caucasian cultural-historical circle itself. This is what probably makes the conflicting, centrifugal, and disintegration principle more prominent in the region than the consensus and integration principles.[26]

Conclusion

The above suggests that the idea of Caucasian unity has survived throughout many centuries as a very attractive one. We should distinguish between the desire to closely cooperate in any sphere and to create a single political platform or to strive for such unity, on the one hand, and to realize that realities have little or nothing in common with our desires, on the other. Today, and probably tomorrow, the idea of Caucasian unity (or unity of one of its regions) is an ideal the Caucasian nations want to achieve. However, even the most superficial knowledge of the history of the past ten centuries shows there is no unity or harmony of interests.

The Caucasian peoples took shape within the territories of different religions, cultures, and civilizations. This is a "home" in which the inhabitants have already made their choice. Judaism, Christian Orthodoxy, Monophysitism, and Islam are not merely religions chosen by the people or their political course. This is an important culturological factor, a mode of being, mentality, and everything else, which is stronger than faith.[27]

The idea about the Caucasus as a political or cultural entity belongs to the sphere of illusions rather than to historical or contemporary reality. This old and highly attractive dream is periodically revived in the form of an ideological conception and the practical measures for carrying it out.

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[26] See: K.S. Gadjiev, op. cit., p. 41.

[27] See: Z. Kiknadze, "Religion and Caucasian Unity," in: idem, *The Church Yesterday, the Church Tomorrow,* Tbilisi, 2002, p. 129 (in Georgian).