

Demology

Interests of Foreign Countries in the Regions of Georgia Populated by Ethnic Minorities and their Impact on Demographic Situation and Stability in the South Caucasus

Petre Gelashvili

LEPL Scientific Technical Center (STC) "Delta", Tbilisi, Georgia

(Presented by Academy Member Vazha Lortkipanidze)

Considering new geopolitical realities in the South Caucasus to examine association between interest of foreign countries in the regions of Georgia populated by ethnic minorities and existing demographic situation is a key component to realize threats to national security and regional stability. It affects existing geopolitical condition and international affairs of neighboring, as well as partner countries. Structural functionalism and systemic approach were used. The obtained data were analyzed using critical, situational and comparative analysis methods. Research paper is also based on theories and fundamental researches focused on research topic. Within the framework of the research legal acts were reviewed. Information was requested from different ministries and sub-departmental agencies which worked in the field of research topic. In-depth individual interviews were conducted with people who were involved in decision making process. Those respondents were representatives from the organizations that worked in ethnic, religious, law enforcement, military, and national security fields. Representatives from non-governmental organizations (Tbilisi and regions) were also interviewed. As a result, research assessed interests of foreign countries in the regions of Georgia populated by ethnic minorities (as zones with challenges in term of demography and potential sources of ethnic conflicts) and their impact on existing geopolitical, geo-economical, demographic situation. Threats to national security and regional stability were identified. © 2022 *Bull. Georg. Natl. Acad. Sci.*

State interests, ethnic minorities, demographic situation, geopolitics, South Caucasus

The geopolitical position and demographic situation of a country is one of the most important objective circumstances conditioning the status of an independent national state within the international community. The fact that the South Caucasus region has always been the forefront of

big geopolitical games and that the geopolitical considerations were exactly the altar of which the first democratic republics were sacrificed should also be taken into consideration. In this respect, a special attention deserve the regions of Georgia populated by ethnic minorities (as zones with

challenges in term of demography and potential sources of ethnic conflicts), which include the state border regions and are distinguished by a small number of the Georgian population. The dominating ethnic minorities create, the so-called, “ethnic micro-territories” that live on the territories of Georgia bordering the native land of the given ethnic group. Fomenting conflict in these areas will lead to geopolitical destabilization in the South Caucasus and drawing of almost all neighbor countries into the conflict.

Georgia has long been known as the most important transport and energy corridor connecting Asia with Europe and *vice versa*, including its areas populated by ethnic minorities. Therefore, Georgia is the place where the economic, geopolitical and military concerns of many states interweave. These states could be united into 3 main groups:

1. Russia, its strategic or situative allies – Armenia, Iran, and the states oriented thereon;
2. Turkey, its strategic ally Azerbaijan;
3. The USA, EU, and West-oriented countries.

It should be mentioned here that several years ago the Turkish foreign policy agenda shifted temporarily from the West toward Russia. In spite of this, the historical experience, the principal disagreement and divergence of the interests of Turkey and Azerbaijan with Iran and Armenia the principal partners of Russia in the region, also the NATO membership of Turkey and many other factors made the long-term perspectives of thaw in Russia-Turkish relations rather doubtful, and it was expected, very soon they found themselves again in the opposing strategic axes, which could not but reflect on the development of conflicting process in the region. Changes followed by recent conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh revealed how fragile and inconsistency is the balance of power in the South Caucasus and Middle East. As for the Turkish initiative about the “Caucasian platform”, which seems to be quite interesting configuration of regional cooperation, but actually might be the attempt to get back and legitimate military presence

in the “Caucasus region” that was strong Turkish will during the centuries.

Georgia is located on the intersection of the geopolitical aspirations of these groups; therefore, the existing situation and the ongoing processes should also be considered in this context.

The separate mention should be made of China relatively new actor of international relations having appeared in the region with its ambitions in connection with the new Silk Road and economic zone.

It is noteworthy that versus the new Silk Road and free economic zone Russia attempts to strengthen effective control over the post-Soviet space by means of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). Unlike the Chinese project, the EEU is built more on the ideological and political principles rather than on the economic expediency [1].

The Putin-led Russian authorities are trying to imitate the Soviet Union’s politics. Around the political and military organizations (EU, NATO, OSCE, etc.) they create alternative associations (EAEU, CSTO, and BRICs). If the EAEU and CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organization) are comparatively weak version of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact, the BRICs seems to be more interesting and stronger association, whose members, according to political analysts, are striving for setting up a peculiar political club, and, thus, to transform their growing “economic power” into “great geopolitical influence” [2, 4].

For concretizing the aspirations of foreign states in Georgia, including in the regions populated by ethnic minorities (as zones with challenges in term of demography and potential sources of ethnic conflicts), the interests/policies of the said states could be considered as follows:

At present stage, Russia appears to be historical and partially ideological successor of the former Soviet Union (FSU), which by the larger part of the world community is regarded as an authoritarian postmodern empire and force threatening democratic stability. This consideration has been

also consolidated by the neighbor policy carried out by Russia herself, beginning from the formal dissolution of the Soviet Union up to this day (particularly, after Vladimir Putin coming to power), The aggressive steps taken by Russia in the post-Soviet space (especially following the wave of color revolutions backed by the West) are mostly directed at young democracies; although, attempts of intervention into the socio-political life of developed countries were also observed lately, of which the most notorious was the alleged Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential election. [5].

Russia uses all resources to strengthen its positions and widen its influence in the world, including both, traditional and modern technologies, carries out ideological, cultural-religion and economic expansion. According to Molly K. McKew, an expert on information warfare, a large number of experts consider that the most useful articulation of Russia's modern strategy, a vision of total warfare that places politics and war within the same spectrum of activities philosophically, but also logistically is the article by General Valery Gerasimov "The Value of Science is in the Foresight" [6, 7]. The said article is also referred to as the Gerasimov Doctrine [6]. Definite symbiosis of official agencies, the private sector, groups of doubtful or evidently criminal reputation and religious circles, which serve the common purpose and act in coordination that also comes into compliance with the Gerasimov doctrine is characteristic of the Russian policy.

In the abovementioned context, the following interests of Russia towards the regions of Georgia populated by ethnic minorities (as zones with challenges in term of demography and potential sources of ethnic conflicts) are outlined:

- Leverage over Georgia;
- Supporting Armenia as Russia's strategic partner in its aspirations that do not contradict the Russian interests. While cooperate with Armenia, Russia strictly protects those above

mentioned principles and it was obvious during the second Nagorno-Karabakh war. During the war Russia did not regulate situation until maximum geopolitical benefits were suggested, even if the obtained benefits might affect the most loyal ally, Armenia interests.

- Control over the Turkey-Azerbaijan, the North Caucasus-Turkey, the China-Central Asia-East Europe, Iran-the Black Sea region transport and energy corridor going through Georgia. All this has specific manifestations:
 - Russia backed the running of the Georgia-Turkey main railway line via Gyumri, for which it would impose a military control over functioning of the line by means of military base deployed there;
 - Russia seeks to control oil and gas pipelines in operation and to be built on the territory of Georgia;
 - Russia in every way supported Armenia's aspiration to have an alternative transport corridor from Iran; this would decrease dependence of Armenia on Georgia, which consists of significant obstacle to bolder measures to be taken by the Armenian population of Javakheti, to the placing of different demands on the Georgian authorities, of which claiming of political autonomy being the most important;
 - The issues of political autonomy of Javakheti, Russia links with its policy in respect of Ajara region as well;
 - Leverage over Georgia in regard to Abkhazia and South Ossetia is thought in the political circles of Russia to be also applied in respect of Javakheti and Ajara [8].
 - Russia has always been concerned with the establishment by the post-Soviet countries independent from it associations and/or unions. In some Russian circles it is believed that an association of Central Asia and the South Caucasus states on the anti-Russian basis is taking place with the western capital. In this

- connection, Russian sees threat of creating an anti-Russian military bloc by the relatively oriented states consolidated around new communication and energy arteries [8].
- In this respect, during long periods of time the so-called “anti-Russian axis” Tashkent-Tbilisi-Kiev would come to existence. Actualization of the axis’ “weaknesses” was targeted at the “blocking” of the above line. The Javakheti was also thought out in this context by the concept authors. A separate mention deserves the circumstance that one co-author the political scientist A. Migranyan is an ethnic Armenian. It should also be mentioned here the strengthening of the armed forces of Armenia on the part of Russia [8].
 - The destabilization in the South Caucasus is to frighten investors and stop the incoming of large financial flows, which will cripple independence of the South Caucasus countries. Iran seems to be also Russia’s allies in this matter.
 - Russia sees Georgia’s future in the federative framework;
 - In pursuing its Caucasian policy, Russia attaches much importance, to the so-called, “Ossetia’s wedge” in the division of the Caucasus into the Vainakh-Daghestan part on the one hand and the Adygean part on the other.
 - In the interests of Russia is also the existence of a land communication with its strategic ally Armenia, which can be implemented only via Georgia (Voronezh-Volgodonsk-Mozdok-Caucasus mountain road).
- Armenia tried to fulfill own interests in Javakheti in tune with Russia’s policies in the South Caucasus. Lately, the Armenian authorities have manifested a new approach to the destabilization in Javakheti, which can be regarded as a result of the activation of influential players (not only inner ones).
- Armenia’s interests in Javakheti can be expressed as follows:
- Armenia should control the Azerbaijan-Turkey communicant corridor in alliance with Russia;
 - The ethnic composition of Javakheti population remains a means of influencing Georgia and should be kept as such. The locals should be provided with the widest possibilities of manifesting national and cultural feelings. Borders should become transparent;
 - Getting of an outlet to the Black Sea, also implying the handling via Armenia of cargo coming from Iran, is of additional geopolitical significance for Armenia. In this respect, the so-called “Iranian Azerbaijan” with the respective ethnic composition of its population located along the way leading to Iran should be taken into account. The ethno-territorial characters of Javakheti could serve as a factor balancing the above. Also of importance is that one railway section going from Georgia to Armenia (Tbilisi-Marneuli-Alaverdi) crosses an area inhabited by Azeris. The opening of the Gyumri-Akhalkalaki railway section could handle this problem for Armenia. At the same time, Armenia should be concerned because of Georgia-Azerbaijan alliance, which will be more pronounced in the case of Armenia’s territorial claims in relation to Georgia.
 - Armenia actively seeks the ways for legitimizing the Artsakh or Nagorno-Karabakh Republic and any autonomies and free economic zones would be of uninterest thereto. After second war, the failure of Karabakh made more actual Armenian aspirations in this field. The interests of Turkey and Azerbaijan towards the regions of Georgia populated by ethnic minorities (as zones with challenges in term of demography and potential sources of ethnic conflicts) in the general context is associated with the relations with Georgia and Armenia, also with the safe operation of transport and power main lines and the gaining of maximum independence from the Russian armed forces in the South Caucasus. Transport communication with the countries of

Central Asia (and not only Central Asia) region, being carried out through Georgia and Azerbaijan, is also of a vital importance for Turkey. In this respect, the absence of diplomatic relations excludes the activation of customs checkpoints on the Armenia-Turkey and Armenia-Azerbaijan state border, while a small distance between the Ninotsminda (Georgia-Armenia border) and Kartsakhi (Georgia-Turkey border) checkpoints in Javakheti, as well as the ethnic origin of local population practically ensure a direct communication contact between Turkey and Armenia.

Turkey strives to connect with its strategic partner Azerbaijan and other regions via Georgia, although without any dependence in such a communication on the Russia's armed forces and/or Armenia.

On November 10, 2020 Peace Treaty was signed by Russia, Azerbaijan and Armenia and it was decided to make Nakhichevan and Azerbaijan transport corridor functional. This transport corridor aims to make possible cargo turnover on Turkey-China rout without Georgian involvement. In this direction, it is worth considering that this way is under control of Russian military and despite its purely commercial terms of attractiveness, according diversification principles, it is less expected that alternative transport communications in Georgia will be fully replaced.

Turkey is also concerned with the problem of Kurdistan's support on the part of Armenia – the frequent reason of its deliverance.

Iran's major interest towards the regions of Georgia populated by ethnic minorities (as zones with challenges in term of demography and potential sources of ethnic conflicts) is conditioned by the existence of main pipelines going through Armenia and Georgia, as well as by military partnership with Russia.

The cooperation with Russia is acceptable to Iran for countering the expansion of Turkish influence in the region, whereas thanks to the

“Iranian Azerbaijan” problem, Iran is much closer to Armenia than to monotheistic Shiite Azerbaijan.

The main pipeline going through Armenia and Georgia will enable Iran, by passing through its territory the cargos coming from China and Central Asia, to create an alternative transport corridor, which will bypass Azerbaijan and Turkey and strengthen Iran's influence both in Central Asia and the South Caucasus.

The main interests of the USA, EU and the west-oriented countries in the regions of Georgia populated by ethnic minorities (as zones with challenges in term of demography and potential sources of ethnic conflicts) are also associated with the creation and safe operation of new transport and energy corridors free from Russia's control. However, the USA, noted from the western partners for greater activity, purposefulness and consistency in the region, could be also motivated by the political and military interest, because, according to some, researchers, for Washington the geopolitical interest in the South Caucasus are more prioritized than the economic ones. This consideration is substantiated by the well-known American political scientist Zbigniew Brzezinski, according to whom America was also interested in political hegemony rather than only in the energy carriers in the region [9]. Concerns over a possible military and economic expulsion of Russia from the post-Soviet space and specifically from the Caucasus, appealed to most Russian experts, including A. Dugin [10]. The mentionable is a certain difference in the perceptions of Georgian political establishment and western partners concerning the fundamental strategic significance of the South Caucasus region for the North Atlantic security, which is particularly mentioned by Neil MacFarlane in analyzing the national security concept of Georgia. According to MacFarlane, the views of the Georgian on the strategic significance of the Caucasus for energy security, as well as the partners' armed forces in terms of logistical support in the Near East and the possibility of potential use

of the region for the platform of activities carried out against Iran, if required and the relevant expectations could be exaggerated and differing from that, which the western countries and their institutions are willing to provide for Georgia [11].

The former Soviet bloc member countries, particularly Ukraine, Poland and the Baltic States have particularly clear views concerning the development of Georgia's integration with NATO than it can be considered by other representatives of the EU and the post-Soviet space. These views exactly have conditioned the Eastern Partnership (EaP) initiative.

It should be said, that Russia lacks clearly defined long-term approach to the regions of Georgia populated by ethnic minorities (as zones with challenges in the term of demography and potential sources of ethnic conflicts). Theoretical options of such approaches are frequently cited by

different forces; however, their practical realization makes it possible to say that Russia's policy is still inconsistent, and where it has any sign of consistency, it is always anti-Georgian.

Unless the formal authorities of Armenia once and for all take strong negative attitude towards the political autonomy of Javakheti, the definite forces will be enabled to make a new spot of destabilization in Georgia, which will hold far-reaching negative consequences for the region as a whole, including Armenia.

Analysis of interests of different states in the regions populated by ethnic minorities makes it possible to presume that the balancing of forces in the region is maximized, which will, in turn, play a great role in the making it right between the neighbour countries in ensuring the geopolitical stability and in the prevention of new hotbeds of ethnic conflicts.

დემოლოგია

საზღვარგარეთის ქვეყნების ინტერესები საქართველოს ეთნიკური უმცირესობებით დასახლებულ რეგიონებში და მათი გავლენა დემოგრაფიულ მდგომარეობასა და სტაბილურობაზე სამხრეთ კავკასიაში

პ. გელაშვილი

სსიპ სამხედრო სამეცნიერო ტექნიკური ცენტრი (სსტც) „დელტა“, თბილისი, საქართველო

(წარმოდგენილია აკადემიის წევრის ვ. ლორთქიფანიძის მიერ)

სამხრეთ კავკასიაში არსებული ახალი გეოპოლიტიკური რეაქციების გათვალისწინებით, საქართველოს ეთნიკური უმცირესობებით დასახლებულ რეგიონებში უცხო ქვეყნების ინტერესებისა და არსებული დემოგრაფიული მდგომარეობის ურთიერთდამოკიდებულების შესწავლა მნიშვნელოვანია ეროვნული უშიშროებისა და რეგიონული სტაბილურობის მიმართულებით არსებული საფრთხეების გააზრებისას. გარდა ამისა, ეს გავლენას ახდენს არსებულ გეოპოლიტიკურ მდგომარეობაზე, რაც თავისთავად აისახება ურთიერთობებზე ახლო და, არა მხოლოდ ახლო, სამეზობლო სივრცის სახელმწიფოებთან. ნაშრომის შესაქმნელად გამოყენებულია მეცნიერებაში უკვე არსებული და დამკვიდრებული კვლევის ისეთი მეთოდები როგორცაა სისტემურობისა და სტრუქტურულ-ფუნქციური მეთოდები, კრიტიკული, სიტუაციური და შედარებითი ანალიზი. კვლევა ასევე ეყრდნობა საკვლევი თემის ირგვლივ ჩამოყალიბებულ თეორიებსა და ფუნდამენტური კვლევის შედეგებს. კვლევის პროცესში ასევე მიმოხილული იქნა სამართლებრივი აქტები, ინფორმაცია გამოთხოვილია სხვადასხვა დარგობრივი სამინისტროებიდან და საქვეუწყებო დაწესებულებებიდან. გარდა ამისა, ჩატარებულია ჩადრმავებული ინდივიდუალური ინტერვიუები იმ პირებთან, რომლებიც ჩართულები არიან ეთნიკურ, რელიგიურ, სამართალდამცავ, სამხედრო და სახელმწიფო უშიშროების საკითხებზე პოლიტიკის წარმოებაში და არასამთავრობო სექტორის იმ ორგანიზაციების წარმომადგენლებთან, რომლებიც თბილისსა და რეგიონებში მუშაობენ ზემოთ ხსენებული მიმართულებით. შესწავლილ იქნა უცხო ქვეყნების ინტერესები საქართველოს ეთნიკური უმცირესობებით დასახლებულ რეგიონებში და მათი გავლენა არსებულ გეოპოლიტიკურ, გეოეკონომიკურ, დემოგრაფიულ ვითარებაზე. გამოვლინდა საფრთხეები ეროვნული უშიშროებისა და რეგიონული სტაბილურობის მიმართულებით.

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