

The Caucasus Geostrata and New Geopolitical Identity of the South Caucasus

Bakur Kiguradze^{*}, Vakhtang Maisaia^{}, Aliko Guchua[§]**

^{*} *International Institute for Globalization Studies, Tbilisi, Georgia*

^{**} *Caucasus International University, Tbilisi, Georgia; Jozef Goluhowski Applied Science University in Ostrowiec Swietokrzyski, Republic of Poland*

[§] *Caucasus International University, Tbilisi, Georgia*

(Presented by Academy Member Vladimer Papava)

Abstract. This work discusses the main content of the geopolitical development and peace initiatives of the South Caucasus, as well as the key factors hindering the regional stability. The current processes in the Caucasus are influenced by numerous factors, the most important of which are the interests and strategic policies of global actors. The study aims to analyze the region's security policy and to present the concept of the Caucasus Geostrata as a new form of geopolitical identification. The geopolitical vision of the novel concept Caucasus Geostrata as a peacekeeping strategy for the South Caucasus region is what makes this study innovative. We employed historical-descriptive, substantive, and political science methods to assess the geostrategic environment of the South Caucasus and the challenges associated with implementing the Caucasus Geostrata. The paper draws on comprehensive security regional theory, securitization theory, and cooperative security theory, and includes a comparative analysis of selected peace initiatives. The main threats and risks facing the Caucasus region are examined within a regional modality framework. The findings present a new approach to the geopolitics of identifying regional security in the South Caucasus, and the Caucasus geostrata as an important vision for peace and stability. © 2025 Bull. Natl. Acad. Sci. Georg.

Keywords: geopolitics, South Caucasus, peace initiatives, Caucasus Geostrata

Introduction

Based on natural geographical identification of the mountain system located between three seas – the Caspian Basin, the Black Sea and the Azov Sea- the core of the Caucasus region encompasses the southern part of European Russia and three South Caucasus states: Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia. The Caucasus covers an area of about 440.000 km²

with population of approximately 30.6 million (Caucasus Environment Outlook, 2002). This region has a distinct geographic structure and a unique geopolitical identity, which is increasingly important in the context of the emerging “New Cold War”. Some researchers suggest that the geopolitical configuration of the Caucasus may be described as a regional organizing model, which can be described as follows (Ismailov, 2002):

- 1) **The Central Caucasus** – comprises three countries: Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia;
- 2) **The Northern Caucasus** – includes autonomous republics of the Russian Federation;
- 3) **The Southern Caucasus** – includes the regions of Turkey close to Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia (Southwestern Caucasus) and the part of Iran (Southeastern Caucasus).

Discussion

In an era of major geopolitical and geoeconomic changes, the South Caucasus is becoming the epicenter of the interests of global powers. Within the context of new international order, it is important for the geopolitics of the Caucasus to be oriented towards maintaining stability and peaceful coexistence. It is precisely against the backdrop of geopolitical processes in the world and the region that the awareness of the Caucasus Geostrata and its use as a political mechanism becomes important. New geopolitical concept of the Georgian School of Geopolitics – the Caucasus Geostrata is a rational instrument to transform confrontation model of regional security in aegis of the whole Caucasus area into a peaceful “island” of coexistence. A rather important role is assigned to the nations of the Central Caucasus with involvement of regional actors, whose political decisions depend on what kind of political processes will develop in the Caucasus. Furthermore, new political implications of the Caucasus have given rise to modern integration incentives and modalities, even though it has been suggested that the region has been shielded by deep political and military conflicts that hinder regional overall security (such as the de facto hostilities between Armenia and Azerbaijan and the de jure tensions between Georgia and Russia), which support a trend towards regional stability and resilience. The following categories are to be used to classify the incentives:

- Incentive on *the Caucasian Home* proposed by the first President of Georgia Zviad Gamsa-

khurdia describing entity and new integration links between the independent states of the South Caucasus and eight political entities of the Northern Caucasus within the Russian Federation;

- Incentive for full integration of only three sovereign nations of the Caucasus – Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia;
- Incentive based on the “3+1” formula, integrating the nations of the South Caucasus and plus Russia;
- Local national incentives introduced by Armenia and Azerbaijan in 2001 under the (3+3+2) and (3+3+2) with involvement of Russia, Turkey and Iran as well as global actors (Ismailov & Papava, 2006);
- Modern regional security modality implies “3+3” with involvement local actors and three regional hegemons.

Political approaches toward the Caucasus region in aegis of geopolitical identification from academic point:

Eurasian Identification of the Caucasus – South/North Caucasus and Transcaucasia;

Western (Atlantist) Identification of the Caucasus – Caucasus-Caspian and Central Caucasus.

Even though the integration clause has a long history, it is crucial to consider the bipolar dynamics of the New Cold War applications influencing regional security, especially in light of the 1917–1922 “Natural Independence” period prior to the region's “Sovietization”. It is well-known fact that namely USA and Russia fierce competition over the regional influence is determined by military, political, economic, informational, psychological, and even linguistic factors. This security dilemma between great powers is associated with so-called Securitization theory of the Copenhagen school” and reflected new realm known as “geopolitical neo-linguistics”. Indeed, from the perspective of bipolarity between the USA and Russia policy-makers, the Caucasus has become main attractive nucleus for “linguistic geopolitics” The term

“Zakavkazje” (meaning “the area beyond the Caucasus Mountain Range”) is the Russian word translated as “Transcaucasus” or “Transcaucasia” in Western languages. While the term “Transcaucasia” historically had strong recognition in international politics, it was replaced by “South Caucasus” (Russian: “Yuzhnyi Kavkaz,” (Gamkrelidze, 1998). This indicates that the terms “Transcaucasus” and “South Caucasus” have become consistently affiliated with the Russian geopolitics and correspond the principles of the Eurasian geopolitical school. These terms are still used in official Russian Federation strategic documents, such as the 2016 adoption of the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation (approved by President V.V. Putin on November 30, 2016, paragraph 59). However, the Caucasus region anyway is being reviewed by the global actors of the contemporary international order from the perspective of “imperial geopolitics” that determines new provisions of the regional security system at present (Papava, 2010).

From another position, there is the alternative method of identifying the geopolitical modality of the Caucasus region from the American or „Atlantistic” perspective. To further US national interests in the region, a unique institution was established to embrace the new geopolitical identity of the “Caucasus-Caspian Region.” The initial term, denoting exactly this area, was introduced by the Caucasus-Caspian Commission, which stated that “The Caucasus Caspian space is not a precisely defined region, either geographically or politically”. The inner core, outer ring, and global circle are the three concentric circles that the Caucasus-Caspian Commission has chosen to examine in the preparation of this study (A future vision for the Caucasus-Caspian region and its European dimension”, 2007) which describes the region's strategic relevance to global politics. Additionally, the term “Central Caucasus” was coined; as a result, linguistically speaking, the idea of “the Central Caucasus” is similar concept that of “Central Asia” and

“Central Eurasia” being in contradiction with “the Southern Caucasus” (Ismailov & Papava, 2018). Therefore, it is accurate to say that the political conflict linked with the regional context today can be viewed the conflict between Atlantism and Eurasianism.

Having considered the high stakes in the geopolitical disposition of the region is possible to consider the geo-economic perspectives on the world economy and world trade. The two main axes of transport connection in the Caucasus region are east-west and north-south. Naturally, the connection between the north and south is quite challenging, which makes it a security dilemma for Russia's effort to exert influence as well as to increase its geopolitical presence in the region. The current regional security is somewhat better when it comes to the South Caucasus (de facto, the area on the southern side of the Greater Caucasus mountains) ties with Anatolia, the Middle East, or Iran. After all, the Caucasus holds a prominent place in the international community in terms of geography, history, ethnicity, and geostrategic importance. Because of their history, relationships, and initiatives with the states in the region, the major powers of the twenty-first century continue to monitor the area. Besides its natural resources, its location made it a geostrategic site for global influence. It will be connected soon to:

- Central Asia via Caspian Sea,
- Middle East with border of Iran,
- Europe via Black Sea, Azov Sea, Aegean Sea and Marmara Sea.
- Africa via water corridor reaching to Mediterranean (Maisaia, 2020).

Given its geographical location, strategic significance, and global history, the Caucasus area is a wealthy one. Notably, the impact and geo-economic relevance of the region have been reviving since the post conflict situation development in Nagorno-Karabakh. In particular, the precarious peace in the area that was once a conflict serves as a fresh impetus for the construction of trans-

communicational corridor systems. Among these systems are the following:

“West-East” – the EU-the South Caucasus-the Central Asia-China transit corridor;

“North-South” – Eurasia (Russia) –the South Caucasus-the MENA transit Corridor;

“West-South” – the EU-Black Sea Basin-the South Caucasus-the MENA transit corridor;

“East-East” – Azerbaijan-Georgia-Turkey (Baku-Tbilisi-Kars) railway transit corridor;

“South-West” – India-Iran-the South Caucasus – the Black Sea Basin-the EU transit corridor;

“South-South” – Azerbaijan-Armenia-Turkey transit corridor (“Zangezur” corridor) (Maisaia, 2023).

Results

The above-mentioned Geo-economic trans-communication transit zonal corridors are to be promoted further on and geopolitical stability is a key promoter of the mega- projects. Therefore, in order to really perform the projects are needed to set up an institutional instrumental provision is needed, like the creation of so-called “The Caucasus Transport Union” where the local actors are to be engaged and involved. With consideration the opportunity, local regional society could be promoted in the aegis of the so-called “European four principles” pattern and could be based on the so-called “Four Society”. Community and Expert Regional Community. The potential for Georgia to become an economic centre and the fact that the nation has become an intercommunication transit hub. Together with Azerbaijan, Georgia contributes a new impetus for promoting economic growth at the regional level (Allahverdiev, 2013).

The new geopolitical position of the Caucasus is determined by the geo-civilized situation on the threshold of the borders, and by the determination of the political systems that are developing in this century. The transference of the civilization into the political vectors gives the region completely different functions to the region and demands the nece-

ssity of getting to the center of the invariant problems. Thus, the goal of the Caucasus Geostrata is to change the confrontation area, considering the rivalry of the geo-political projects (neo-Mondialism, neo-Atlantism, neo-Eurasianism, and Islamic Integristism) into the zone of stability and peace. It became a problem to convert confrontation relations into peaceful relations at the regional security level. The case of the Caucasus region is a clear confirmation of it. Hence, these relations could be transformed into a peaceful land of resilience, and the Caucasus region could be an example of the transformation. The one is prescribed by a geopolitical strategy of the Caucasus Geostrata, a unique and spatial space where, with the assistance of special political and economic mechanisms, confrontational relations are transforming into a modality of peaceful coexistence (Kiguradze & Maisaia, 2024). One of the key mechanisms in the case of the Caucasus region is the establishment of the Caucasus Public Chamber to coordinate the activities of the Caucasian local NGOs, mass media, and representatives of the regional scholarly and civil society communities. This institution would foster cooperation modalities among these actors, help prevent any kind of confrontation, and promote dialogue and cooperation, thereby achieving peaceful coexistence under the aegis of a concept, which is not a myth but a reality.

Conclusion

The Caucasus region, taking into account its geopolitical location, maintains a strategic importance in international politics. It must be said that achieving peace and maintaining stability in the mentioned region is important for its development. Building peace in the Caucasus region requires a sustainable and coherent policy, which should be based on a critical assessment of the existing experience and history, explaining why the said process could not be implemented until now. What are the main factors that prevented and influenced the achievement and maintenance of stability in the Caucasus region? It is important to reach a political consensus

on the problems in the region in order to implement the peace policy. It is most important to develop new approaches and strategies to achieve stability in the Central Caucasus area. The modality of peaceful coexistence should be taken to protect and ensure the common interests, so that the political interests of either side are not undermined, which may subsequently lead to a new conflict or disagreement. Accordingly, taking into account the current geopolitical and geoeconomic processes and current trends in the world, it is necessary for the actors of this region to implement a consistent and

pragmatic policy, which will allow them to survive the process of establishing a new world order and, despite many challenges, to achieve stability through cooperation. The Caucasus Geostrata is a concrete strategy to achieve peace and stability in the aegis of the region. Creation of the conditions of the agreement and peaceful coexistence in the Caucasus will create the phenomenon of world peace. The main part of this futurological and geopolitical scenario is the foundation of the hypothetical model and the attempt to realize the perspectives.

პოლიტიკური მეცნიერება

კავკასიის გეოსტრატა და სამხრეთ კავკასიის რეგიონის ახალი გეოპოლიტიკური იდენტიფიკაცია

ბ. კილურაძე*, ვ. მაისაია**, ა. გუჩუა§

* გლობალიზაციის კვლევების საერთაშორისო ინსტიტუტი, თბილისი, საქართველო

** კავკასიის საერთაშორისო უნივერსიტეტი, თბილისი, საქართველო; იოზეფ გოლუხოვსკის სახ. გამოყენებითი მეცნიერების უნივერსიტეტი, პოლონეთის რესპუბლიკა.

§ კავკასიის საერთაშორისო უნივერსიტეტი, თბილისი, საქართველო

(წარმოდგენილია აკადემიის წევრის ვ. პაპავას მიერ)

სტატიაში განხილულია კავკასიის გეოპოლიტიკის განვითარებისა და სამშვიდობო ინიციატივების ძირითადი შინაარსი და მიზნები, ასევე, ის ძირითადი ფაქტორები რომლებიც ხელს უშლის ამ რეგიონში სტაბილურობას. კავკასიის რეგიონში მიმდინარე პროცესებზე მრავალი ფაქტორი ახდენს გავლენას, რომელთაგან ყველაზე მნიშვნელოვანია გლობალური მოთამაშეების ინტერესები და მათი პოლიტიკა. ნაშრომის მიზანია სამხრეთ კავკასიის რეგიონის უსაფრთხოების პოლიტიკის ანალიზი და კავკასიის გეოსტრატას წარმოჩენა, როგორც სამხრეთ კავკასიის რეგიონის ახალი გეოპოლიტიკური იდენტიფიკაციისა. კვლევის პროცესში გამოყენებულია ქართველ და უცხოელ მკვლევართა ნაშრომები, რომელიც ეხება სამხრეთ კავკასიის რეგიონის გეოპოლიტიკას და რეგიონული უსაფრთხოების პოლიტიკის საკითხებს. ინოვაცია

მდგომარეობს ახალი ტერმინის „კავკასიური გეოსტრატას“ გეოპოლიტიკური ხედვის, როგორც სამხრეთ კავკასიის რეგიონის სამშვიდობო პოლიტიკის წარმოჩენაში. ნაშრომი ეფუძნება ისტორიულ-აღწერილობით, კონტენტ და პოლიტიკური კვლევის ანალიზის მეთოდებს, რომელთა გამოყენებითაც შეფასებულია და გაანალიზებულია სამხრეთ კავკასიის გეოსტრატეგიული გარემო და კავკასიის გეოსტრატას რეალიზაციის სირთულეები. ნაშრომში გამოყენებულია რეგიონული უსაფრთხოების კომპლექსური თეორია, სეკიურტიზაციისა და თანამშრომლობითი უსაფრთხოების თეორიები, შედარებულია გარკვეული სამშვიდობო ინიციატივები. რეგიონალური მოდალობის ფორმატში გაანალიზებულია ის ძირითადი საფრთხეები და რისკები რომელსაც აწყდება კავკასიის რეგიონი. კვლევის შედეგები წარმოაჩენს სამხრეთ კავკასიის რეგიონული უსაფრთხოების იდენტიფიკაციის გეოპოლიტიკის ახალ მიდგომას კავკასიის გეოსტრატას, როგორც მშვიდობის და სტაბილურობის მნიშვნელოვან ხედვას.

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