

SOUTH CAUCASIAN IDENTITY – A POLITICAL MYTH

Preface

Three countries existing in South Caucasus – Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan are located in one geographic region and due to the same regional perspective, they have always been considered as one geopolitical space, as political establishment of Russia, and European politicians, who have discussed these countries in one context, within the European neighborhood policy, due to their close location (europa.eu, 2009). However, arguably, the unity of South Caucasian countries and the identity of their political views is only a myth and they have more in contrary, than in common.

Within this research paper, I will try to highlight all the distinguishing factors and discuss their basis, which give me grounds to analyze the political aspirations of these countries separately despite their geographical propinquity. It is a fact that on 23rd of July 2014, Georgia has signed the European Union Association Agreement (eeas.europa.eu, 2014), and Armenia made a deal with the Russian Federation on 7th of October 2014 regarding the subscription to the Eurasian Union (Reuters, 2014). Meanwhile Azerbaijan is trying to play an independent game from both Russia and the European Union and connects its future to the present-day Dubai, being encouraged with their resources of oil (Illis, 2012).

Deriving from this reality, the subject and a major question of the research is - why these three republics have controversial and backward foreign politics, despite their close geographical location? My response to this question is that South Caucasian identity and in this particular case, political identity is just a myth and first of all this was within the interests of Russia. Despite some cultural similarities and Caucasian backwardness comparing to Russian elite during the Soviet Union, they still have more in contrary, than in common. However, in this paper I will discuss the political differences and their grounds, to explain what exactly caused separation of their political ways, while being territorially located in a small region.

Theory, that I shall use to prove my hypothesis regarding non-identity of South Caucasian countries belongs to one of the famous sociologist – Maurice Halbwachs, according to which there exists a collective memory that is formatted from historical facts, which are publicly known and determines rules of conduct of society. As a result, politicians that reflect interests of their society are limited in their own decisions. According to the theory of collective memory, social consciousness is formed by historical tales, narratives, texts, chronics, school books and creates such stereotypical perceptions, that are mostly more stable, than the reality. Such collective memory lasts for years and even centuries. By this way, the idea formed within the society is transferred from generation to generation and politicians that are trying to follow interests of their society, first of all have to take into account the social opinion, or become the guardians of this opinion (Halbwachs, 1992). Since 1991, exactly certain historical events made all independent governments of Georgia positively minded regarding the European Integration. On the contrary, Political elite of Armenia became adherent to cooperate with Russia, while Azerbaijan, where the state system depended on one family was trying to be equal partner and distant from both Russians and Europeans.

I am going to use various research methods to prove my theory. On basis of comparative analysis, we will study significant and decisive historical facts that for a long time have been changing future of these countries and kept creating a united chain through their ways to development. However, I will rely on the history of these countries, as how it is taught and what information they are getting from their historian books. My aim is not examining the veracity of Azerbaijan or Armenian or even Georgian history. Furthermore, according to the analysis of this theory, I claimed that sometimes distorted history is stronger, than the real one. That is really sociological phenomena and explains the social behavior. Moreover, I will search for articles, that will explain political ways of South Caucasian states and strengthen my argument on why these states are developing in controversial directions.

The First Steps of Genesis of Countries

Georgia

Back there, when the first historically confirmed state unit was established on the current site of Georgia, called “Kartli” (known as “Iberia”), only a few of the civilizations and states existed on the global map (P.N. Stearns, M. Adams, S.B. Schwartz, M.J. Gilbert, 2006). It was the first millennium before Christ, IV century, when the first king of Kartli king Parnavaz announced creation of a new independent country and principality of Egrisi (known as “Colchis” or “Lazika”) located on the western part of Georgia, has pledged obedience. At this territory royal title of Hellenistic culture and Greek City States (known as Polis) has already been present for centuries (Gamkrelidze, 2012). Exactly this part was directly connected to Greek culture both in economic and political terms. Ethnic Union of Kartli and Egrisi stipulated spreading of Greek civilization easily both in western and eastern part of Georgia (Gamkrelidze, 2012). This reflected on the state system, formation of the army and tax systems. Georgian countries of that time were in direct connection to that western civilization, where ideas about Christianity or democracy were way too early. In contrary to Georgians, Persian civilization and southern also known as Mesopotamian civilization became a source of creating Azerbaijanians and Armenians of that time.¹

Armenia

Mesopotamia located south from Caucasus, which is nowadays the territory of Iraq, is considered as a very first civilization of the world. Sumerian city-states were formed exactly on this territory having state cultural inheritors as Assyria and Urartu (P.N. Stearns, M. Adams, S.B. Schwartz, M.J. Gilbert,, 2006). People survived from the ruins of the latter formed the first Armenian State and laid the foundation for establishing Armenian nation in South Caucasus along with the Haya tribes in VI century BC (Vardaryan, 2003).

Although the first Armenian State has soon lost its independence and at first turned under the subordination of Persia and then Macedonia (V-III c), in II century BC it achieved not only the independence, but significant political growth.

Right exactly on the initial stage of state establishment, such political growth became the major motivator for Armenian people not to become a part of Empires of Eastern or Western civilizations for centuries. Neither was it the successor of Greek civilization and used to come in contrary to Persian civilization. Armenia has always wanted to play such an independent ambitious politics, that had nothing in common with Georgian or Azerbaijanian state development.

Azerbaijan

In contrast to Georgian and Armenian countries, in the 4th century BC Atropatene was born from the Persian civilization on the south-western Caspian shore, from which derives the name “Azerbaijan” (Forsyth, 2013) and which has united with South Caucasian people _ Albanians (Forsyth, 2013). Descendants of the latter are only several tens of thousands on the territories of present-day Azerbaijan, Georgia and Dagestan (Neshumashvili, 2002). They still speak Albanian dialect and prior to the 17th century all the other people used to speak language called “Old Azar” apparently considered as one of the dialects of Iranian language (Bartold, 1935).

Albanians living in South-Eastern Caucasus were periodically subjects of interests for Persia, Macedonia, Rome and Armenia. They have had especially difficulties in creating united independent Caucasian country and finally, in 8th century AD after reunion with Atropatene, same Iranian Azerbaijan, a new Azerbaijanian country was born (Bartold, 1935).

As we can see, even though the fact that all three countries were born in South Caucasus, they are originated from completely different civilizations. Right exactly such history influenced their further independent development from each other.

¹ See subchapters

Ethnic and Religious Identity

Origination of these three South Caucasian countries from different civilizations is not the only reason for their different political way of development. Despite the fact that the present-day states are the civil unions and migration of people over many centuries along with the economic and cultural relations provided assimilation between various ethnic groups, the ethnic origin and national identity still remained as a major factor over the centuries. The latest could have been especially distinguishing if it would be accompanied by the religious factor, that was a strong political ideology of those countries and had identified itself within the geopolitics. Exactly these two factors had its ample role in South Caucasus for all three countries to become reason of independent political decisions.

Present-day Georgians belong to Ibero-Caucasian ethnic group. Armenians belong to Indo-European family and Azerbaijanians to Turkish ethnic group (Forsyth, 2013). Therefore, all three states speak completely different languages and have completely different alphabets, despite the similarities between the old Armenian and Georgian alphabets.² Meanwhile, discussion on ethnic genuine is not politically correct considering current democratic values, this is still a great factor for people living in such small region to sharply identify themselves from each other, which subsequently reflects in their political decisions.

Religious factor in secular states should not be the ground for making political decisions, however, it is a fact that for centuries it had a great importance for identity of South Caucasian countries, especially for Georgia and Armenia.

Although the leaders of Albania announced Christianity as their official religion in 4th century, it still hasn't taken hold of the territory of present-day Azerbaijan. Zoroastrianism, the fire-worship was the most spread religion here that was the official religion of Persia before accepting Islam (D. Tinikashvili, Z. Jashi, 2012). Once, after 8th century AD, South Caucasus had been conquered by Arabs, Islam was widely spread on the territory of Azerbaijan and for the following centuries these territories were never the subject of other religions (Forsyth, 2013).

Nevertheless, the attempts of Arabs, Persians and Turk-Ottoman Empires to spread Islam in Georgia and Armenia, Christianity within these two countries remained to be the part of their political identity. However, both republics chose different ways even on this stage of history.

After annulation of Armenia's statehood in the 5th century, the national government retained at the hands of Armenian Church, in addition, Armenian autocephaly due to their theological views strived against the world church council and continued running independently. Current Armenian-Gregorian church is the only one in the world and has been part of national identity of Armenians over centuries (D. Tinikashvili, Z. Jashi, 2012).

Georgia made its first decision in the 3rd century, neither to be the part of Asian culture, nor to play an independent political game. Originally, Persian King Mirian has ultimately connected the fate of Georgia to European Byzantine culture, by announcing Christianity as an official religion (Lortkipanidze, 1983). The validation of this choice was made in the 11th century, when the world church council was divided and Georgian autocephalous church became a part of Eastern Europe as an orthodox state (D. Tinikashvili, Z. Jashi, 2012).

As we can see the origin of the three neighboring states is coming from three different civilizations, different ethnic and linguistic groups and all of them have made different religious choices. Despite the fact that all of them have shared the same effort of struggling for survival and independence, all three kept making different foreign and internal political decision during such important stages of historical development.

Crucial Moments of Medieval

Once three states were established in South Caucasus and all of them have chosen their own different way for development, exactly after the emergence of the three independent states of South Caucasus each following its unique and distinctive development path, the influential political decisions of theirs made the Middle Ages determined their political fortune for next centuries. First of all, it was a religious self-identification. However, beyond that, there were very significant political events, the effect of which lasted for centuries:

² Despite of differences in structures and contents of alphabets, it should be underlined that there are similarities in Georgian and Armenian alphabet shapes and fifteen of them are like each other. Compare: <http://www.omniglot.com/writing/georgian.htm> and <http://www.omniglot.com/writing/armenian.htm>

Armenia

Prior to medieval, in IV century when Armenia was divided by the Eastern Roman Empire known as Byzantium and Persia, Greeks annulated kingdom in Western Armenia (Khorenatsi, 1984). This step has further alienated the people of Armenia from Greek culture, because it wasn't turning of Armenia into vassal or tributary country, it was destruction of Armenian statehood. This fact could have caused only resistance in Armenian people to the threat coming from the West.

To reinstate its independence Armenia rebelled several times as against Greeks, as against Persians and Arabs. Despite the constant failure, they managed to reinstate their kingdom in IX century led by Bagratuni dynasty, however two centuries later as a result of Byzantium aggression, statehood of Armenia was abolished again (Forsyth, 2013). It was crucial historical event for the Armenian people, as the royal house in Armenia have never reinstated since (see chapter 6).

Armenians that have lost their independence often fought for restoration of their kingdom, however, in the Middle Ages, being under the constant oppression, most of the population began to emigrate and created settlements as in their neighbor countries as in the Western Europe and on the territories of modern Russia. Initially emigration of Armenians carried forced resettlement character done by Byzantium on its internal territories but then Armenians gradually began to acknowledge neighboring or distant trading cities and established influential diasporas (Mikaelian, 1952). Exactly these historical events in the Middle Ages ensured that Armenia, in contrast to Georgia and Azerbaijan, nowadays still has powerful Diaspora in many parts of the world.

Georgia

Radically different events from Armenia took place on the territory of Georgia. Kingdom of Colchis that was completely part of Byzantium and Romanian culture has never become controversial factor for Iberia to announce Christianity as a State religion, or to connect its future to Rome or Byzantium and distant itself from Persia even more.

Besides, unlike Armenia, after formation of united Georgia (X century) and after remaining in orthodox space, Georgia has reached epoch of political triumph. In XI-XII centuries, its territory completely covered whole South Caucasus and was establishing control over North Caucasus (Metreveli, 1995). Exactly at this period, Georgia became a main partner of European Christian states. The European and Byzantium culture became an inseparable part of Georgia and despite the domination of Mongols during two centuries, Georgia retained its royal dynasty and in XIV once again retrieved leading position in the region (Metreveli, 1995).

In XV century, when Constantinople collapsed, Georgia was left between two Islamic empires and lost its military-political connection with Byzantium and consequently with other Christian countries as well (Forsyth, 2013). However, the triumphal period of Georgia in Medieval turned out to be so influential that it still retained the continuity of the royal dynasty, which meant keeping the state system and constant aspiring to "west", to Christian Europe at that time. Despite that, Georgia was divided in several parts, this state system and royal house kept Georgians to fight for their self-determination from Turkish and Iranian Emperies until XIX century – when the Russian Empire emerged in Caucasus (see chapter 6).

Azerbaijan

Medieval history of Azerbaijan went unlike from Armenia and Georgia. Despite that all three countries experienced attacks from Arabs, Persians, Seljuks and Mongols, as we have already mentioned, Islam religion has spread only in Azerbaijan and despite of reign of different dynasties in IX-XVI centuries Azerbaijan was mostly ruled by Persian dynasty of Shirvanshahs of Arabic origin (Forsyth, 2013). Unlike Georgia and Armenia, internal Islamic and ethnic confrontations took place in Azerbaijan. For instance, Shirvanshahs were Sunni Islamists, but Safavid dynasty who replaced Shirvanshahs – were Shia Islamists (Bartold, 1935). Therefore, since XVI century they have even more related themselves to Shia Iran and continue to be adherents of this Islamic denomination till present.

Ethno-linguistic formation of Azerbaijanians went by a different way from its religion. As a result of Turk-Seljuk's march in the 11th century, who migrated from Middle Asia, occupied Persia and all Asia Minor. They created such Turkish Empire that has laid the groundwork for the Ottoman Empire and then for the Republic of Turkey (Forsyth, 2013). Their influence was so big over Azerbaijanian populations that the language "Old Azar" (Iranian dialect) time

by time was replaced by Turkish language and formed new ethno-linguistic Azerbaijanians (Bartold, 1935).

As a result, crashes of Medieval Empires, ethnic and religious symbioses, ensured formation of different and unique Azerbaijan. Linguistically they belong to Turkish linguistic group and religiously share Shia Islam - unlike Sunni Turks and like Iranians.

Appearance of Russia and its role on South Caucasian states

The Russian Empire

Before we start discussion about emergence of Russia, we should make general overview of the geopolitical environment in the region at that time. In XVIII century major part of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia was occupied by Iran. Kingdoms of Georgia maintains self-governance, however they are amenable to Iran. The Ottoman Empire claims for this region as well and holds eastern parts of Armenia and Georgia. In this situation, due to internal confrontations, Iran gets weaker and eventually collapses. Consequently, eight independent Khanates were created on the territory of Azerbaijan. Khanate of Erevan, which included the major part of present-day Armenia, separates from other Khanates. Georgian Kingdoms were also separating from vassalage of Iran, which provides pre-condition for its reunion as united kingdom (Kingdoms of Kartli and Kakheti (Iberia) reunited and negotiations were running for reuniting with Imereti Kingdom (Colchis), where grandson of King of the eastern part of Georgia was ascended on the throne and which governed several autonomic principalities).

Within this century, Russia reached the peak of its military campaign and claims for Caucasus. Despite the constant rebellions Russia held an absolute control upon North Caucasus and occupies western coasts of Caspian Sea from Derbend.

In the first half of XIX century, as a result of two wars and two armistices, the Russian Empire won over Iran and the whole South Caucasus with all its three republics was transferred to Russia's possession (Vachnadze, 2003).

Territorial and religious issues

After annexation of South Caucasus, Russia has started governing by its own rules. Russia abolished all Khanates, Georgian Kingdoms and principalities and created new political map that later has become the reason for disputes and armed conflicts among these three countries. Out of eight Khanates in the territory of Azerbaijan, Russia created two provinces: Baku and Elisabethpol, also known as Ganja province. Nakhichevan Khanate was united with Khanate of Armenia and turned into Erevan province. As for territory of Georgia, just as Azerbaijan, it has been divided in two governing objects, provinces of Tbilisi and Kutaisi (Vachnadze, 2003).

Armenia

Such territorial arrangement caused different attitudes in South Caucasus, especially in Armenia and Georgia. Turning of Erevan Khanate into "province" could not have been a negative fact for Armenians, as it has not changed anything in particular. Contrary, accession of Nakhichevan to Erevan and sensation of having other lands populated by Armenian people as the part of Erevan, created a positive perception among Armenian population. Moreover, the Russian Empire annexed part of the territory of Ottomans and created province of Kars, which was also mostly populated by Armenian people (Vachnadze, 2003). Also, Armenia gained a chance of amalgamation of Nagorno-Karabakh and exemption of the territories of present-day Turkey from Ottomans. As we are aware, the Kingdom of Armenia has not existed since XI century and such steps made by the Russian Empire could only be accepted as the best political option at that time. Territories populated by Armenians were being released from Islamic governance. However, this created future military mines against Azerbaijan and Turkey.

Armenian Church found itself in comfortable conditions as well. Its parish was no longer threatened by physical destruction or forcibly spreading of Islam. Armenian Church was neither subject of Pope of Rome nor was a member of Orthodox world. Therefore, Russian Orthodox Church did not express big interest towards them. This was just another reason for Armenians to positively acknowledge the presence of the Russian Empire.

Georgia

It is a fact, that the emergence of Russia should have had positive expectations in Georgia, as it was in Armenia since after several centuries of Islamic siege, for the first time appeared Christian country, which was developing along with European countries. This was something that has appeared to be pipe dream of Georgia for centuries.

However, the opposite happened. The Royal house (Forsyth, 2013) and Autocephaly of Church in Georgia were annulated (Guruli, 2010).

These steps lead to an unprecedented reaction that has never happened since the day of establishment of Georgian Kingdoms. Annulation of the royal throne was equal to abolishment of the state system. As we have seen before, in spite of the different state governance over Georgia, royal dynasty has always maintained the throne, which has always kept a sense of independence.

Besides, despite the fact that Russian Empire was officially Orthodox Christian and should have brought some kind of relief for Georgian Church, happened the opposite. Russia abolished autocephaly of Georgia and completely subordinated to the Russian Church.

Such extreme steps and disappointment of expectations caused multiple local strikes in Georgia and supported creation of a new enemy image (Metreveli, 1995).

Azerbaijan

Despite the fact that Azerbaijanian people were followers of Islam and the Russian Empire was a Christian, no radical political steps were made against the religion in Azerbaijan in XIX century. Just as other annexed Islamic people on the territory of the Russian Empire, they did not suffer from any forced acknowledging of Christianity. Several sectarian populations were being migrated to the territory of Azerbaijan, however not massively but it didn't have such massive character to create an exceptional resistance among Azeri population. As the Prof. Sardion Zedelashvili states in his interview with us - "Religious Courts were maintained in Azerbaijan, which was an important factor for turning elite of this country to their supporters. Also, the Russian Empire considered factors of Iran and Turkey, as it did not want to give these countries one more additional religious reason for confrontation" (Zedelashvili, 2015).

Neither territorial arrangement caused big resistance in Azerbaijan. Changing Khanates to two "provinces" did not make any sufficient changes for population. On the contrary, the physical destruction from Iranian and Ottoman people ceased and a chance for peaceful development emerged. Unlike Georgians, the resistance impulse was being accumulated not against Russians, but against Armenians who kept transferring previously perceived lands of Islamic Khanates to Armenian space.

Peace building and rise of nationalism

Annexation of South Caucasus by the Russian Empire has received positive and negative results, that have differently reflected on people of this region.

First of all, more or less stable period has come and all three countries have been released from destructing attacks of Iranians and Ottomans, which has especially threatened Armenians and Georgians as radically different people from them. This has caused cultural and economic progress in all three countries (Forsyth, 2013). (Unlike North-Caucasus, where as the result of the military campaigns of the Russian Empire, Jigets and Ubykhs have been physically destructed and hundreds of thousands Abkhazians have been relocated to the Ottoman Empire) (Khorava, 2014).

The second positive event that took place in Caucasus was discovery of Oil in Caspian Sea, which has brought significant regional importance to Baku (Mikadze, 2002). Economic rise has started as well as growth and development of population of Baku. However, "rapid economic growth of Azerbaijan was placed under the influence of Russian political establishment, Azerbaijanian elite was involved in Oil-producing process and thus acquired additional favor to the Empire" – states the Prof. Sardion Zedelashvili (Zedelashvili, 2015).

Last but not least, desire was of the Russian Empire, whatever entered into South Caucasus through the Russian Empire from Europe, was Western enlightenment and new political ideologies. As the result, new elites have been created in all three countries who had received education in Russia and the West. The new bourgeois classes actively propagated such nationalist ideas, which have laid the foundations for the creation of new states in Europe. Unlike the Middle Ages, when the independence of the country was associated with royal dynasty, stayed in past. Source and guarantor of the independence of the state has become a nation that lived in a certain area.

In parallel to nationalistic ideas, socialistic ideas have been spread in South Caucasus and labor protestant classes and trade unions have been set up (Vachnadze, 2003). Such new South Caucasian elites prepared the ground and led all three South Caucasian countries to independence in 1918 that lasted almost only three years (Forsyth, 2013).

New European style independent countries have cooperated with each other, to continue independent existence. However, during the very first independent years, armed conflicts have taken place among each other,³ causing deep stamp on the relationship of these countries and bringing the existing problems up to this date.

Internal territorial disputes in South Caucasus

Because all three countries comparing to great empires have held relatively small area and all three of them have been annexed, oppressed, assimilated and pursued by empires, state's territory borders of these states have been constantly changing. Among these countries, there have been a lot of such territories that sometimes have been controlled by one or another country. Besides, compact settlements appeared on the territories of neighbor countries due to oppression of emperies or due to trade relations or sometimes these areas were transferred to the neighboring state borders. Therefore, it was unrealistic to determine with the mathematical accuracy exactly how much of the territory belonged to the country, not only in the South Caucasus, but also in any spot of the World. Such territorial ambitions led to ethnic, neighbor conflicts or even World Wars.

Ambitions of Armenia in terms of territories were big. As Erevan province boundaries expanded being within the Russian borders, Kars province have emerged and as we mentioned above, Armenians have got a chance to gain even more territories within the borders of the Russian Empire.

Armenia had seen its territorial ambitions basically by location of its people. Georgia had seen its own territories, as it was before appearance of the Russian Empire and the Turkish Empire. It claimed Tao-Klarjeti (modern north-east Turkey), as it was birthplace of Georgian kingdom dynasty and cultural prosperity (V. Guruli, L. Jikia, 2013). As for Azerbaijan, it claimed the Azeri-populated territories, as well as the borders existing at the period of the rule of Khanate before appearing of the Russian Empire.

Territorial disputes in 1918-1921 years have led all three countries to armed conflicts, changed their borders and laid a ground to disputes that have lasted for centuries between these countries.

The first conflict has happened between Armenia and Georgia. Disputed territory has been a region of South Georgia, which was a bilingual settlement. Despite the fact that Armenian army backed down, the controversial region was finally divided in two parts (Vashakmadze, 2002).

The second conflict, which has lasted longer, has happened between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The main subject of the conflict was Nakhichevan, which has been transferred to Azerbaijan after negotiations made by Turkey and the Soviet Union (Pipinashvili, 2009).

One more and the bloodiest conflict has happened between Armenia and the Ottoman Empire. After the western coalition dismantled the Ottoman Empire and territories of the present-day Turkey has been given to Greece and the eastern parts to Armenia, as the result of the First World War (1914-1918), the latter has been given a chance to enlarge the borders of Armenia gaining Kars along with Georgian city of Batumi and finally for the first time in the history, they could have received a path to Black Sea. Ultimately, Ottomans have not accepted dissolution of its own territories and on the basis of strong nationalistic and military campaign they have retrieved lands given to Greece and the ones promised to Armenia and according to armistice agreement Kars has remained within the territory of Turks (Pipinashvili, 2009).

³ See the following sub-chapters.

Failure of Armenian's aspiration to enlarge the territories was preceded by events in 1915-1918 years that are known as "Armenian Genocide" (G. Yagutov, R. Badalin, A. Mirzoyan, E. Saakyan, A. Ohonyan, 2011).⁴ Such tragic event has affected the Armenian-Turkish relations. Even today these two republics do not have any kind of relations, unlike Georgia that used to consider Turkish-Ottoman Empire as a historical enemy, but since 90's aspiration of both countries towards the democracy became the ground for tight partnership.

The Soviet Union

Management of territories, the Soviet governance and creation of "South Caucasian Identity"

At first, in 1920-21 years the Bolshevik government of Russia acknowledged the independence of South Caucasian Republics and then managed to occupy Baku, Erevan and finally Tbilisi. Despite the fact, that as the result of the elections held in those countries, where Bolsheviks received only 1% of the voters, the above did not turn into disturbing factor for Bolsheviks to establish the Bolshevik regime in South Caucasus at the expense of military execution of hundreds of people (Metreveli, 1995).

Right at this period, the attempt to create "South Caucasian Identity" was born and occupied territories were united into one federation, which was called "Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic". These three countries remained under such status of regional republic in the Soviet Union until 1936 (Vachnadze, 2005). Within this period the Soviet Union managed to run strict politics, to establish its own rules and to dump future ethno-conflicting mines.

First of all, the Soviet Union has distributed territories of occupied republics (Guruli, 2013). It has created "Autonomic republic of Abkhazia" in Georgia, which has included multi-ethnic region (itself Abkhazia) and the part of Samegrelo and Svaneti regions (areas of Gali and Kodori Valley), that have been populated only by ethnic Georgians. Also it has created "Autonomous Oblast of South Ossetia" and despite the fact that during twenty centuries history of Georgia, Ossetia has been bordering only in North Caucasus and only small amount of people of their ethnical representatives lived in Tskhinvali town, not only this city has been included in "Autonomous Oblast of South Ossetia" but most part of Kartli region populated only by Georgians. And this happened in such way that the boundaries have not been demarcated by even any natural borders (Pipinashvili, 2009).

The Soviet Russia has forwarded bilingual Nakhichevan to Azerbaijan, while having no land borders with it. In addition, bilingual "Nagorno Karabakh Autonomous Oblast" has been created on the territory of Azerbaijan (Pipinashvili, 2009). Currently, due to the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, only Azerbaijanians live in Nakhichevan and only Armenians live in – Karabakh (Pipinashvili, 2009). Moreover, Azerbaijan has been given southern lands of Georgia populated by Azerbaijanians and eastern part of Georgia populated by Georgians (Mirianashvili, 2012). Nevertheless, this has been a clear pre-condition for the conflict, fortunately no attempts of armed conflicts have been made, which has been the result of tight partnership between present-day Georgia and Azerbaijan.

Within the frames of "Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic" hundreds of people have been militarily executed and relocated in all three countries. Intelligence of these countries having national and social-democratic ideas had been almost fully abolished (Vachnadze, 2005). Moreover, the number of Caucasians who had gone to the Second World War has been halved and ultimately, the Soviet Russia has got completely new population fulfilled with only communistic ideas (Guruli, 2013).

Once the tyrant epoch of Stalin has ended in 1953, the southern Caucasian federation was already abolished. However, the Soviet policy did not change. They continued building the totalitarian empire and reached the development of economics only in 1970-80 years (Forsyth, 2013). In this period was continued central policy of Moscow to create the South Caucasian identity. They had been running mechanically similar architectural projects, the same economical tasks, the same political directives and management style. However, all three republics kept the mem-

⁴ It should be mentioned that Turkey still does not admit the fact of genocide, and considers it to be the reality of the Ottoman War, when the current international legal principles were not effective.

ory of historical development of their own people and already on the background of Gorbachov's Restructuring period, national movements has been emerged in all three countries (Forsyth, 2013).

As it became clear from the above mentioned examples of the history, sole image of historical enemy of Georgia has always been occupant Russia. Unlike Armenia, where there have been more reasons to remain loyal towards Russia and creation of image of the enemy has been directed to Azerbaijan, the country that has been associated to Muslim oppressions towards Armenians and the country that was with equal capacity comparing to other Muslim conquering empires. As a result, for Armenians revenge against the Muslim World was to fight against Azerbaijanians (Pertaia, 2007). Just as in Georgia, neither national movement of Azerbaijan has had positive attitude towards Russian policy, which has been accompanied by national hatred toward Armenia.

After collapsing of the Soviet Union in 1991 and emergence of fifteen independent republics, unlike three Baltic States, where the national movement was more oriented on developing of future economic programs, South Caucasus was more promoted to ethnic-nationalist ideas. Despite that comparison of these two regions is a subject of another research, it is a fact that Baltic republics have managed to survive without ethnical controversies and in South Caucasus devastated wars have happened.

For Georgia the war against Russia has reflected in armed conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia/Tskhinvali region where it has been defeated. As for Armenia and Azerbaijan the war has resulted in a conflict in Nagorno Karabakh where the Armenian part has won.

Nevertheless that Russia has actively participated in all these wars and actually decided the fortune of each conflict, the wars of South Caucasus are still considered to be unsolved. Therefore, Armenia and Azerbaijan have deteriorated all links with each other. In response Turkey also has voided the contact with Armenia and Georgia with Russia (Pertaia, 2007).

Within such politically tensed, ethnically opposed and on the territories of differently developed republics, at the end of 90's the European Union appears into South Caucasus as a new geopolitical player.

The European neighborhood policy and heterogeneity of South Caucasus

After the Second World War was finished, new political and international orders were established in the world, aiming to set peace within the world and avoid such tragedy as it has happened during the World War II and its causing reasons. Ultimately, the United Nations, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the European Economic Community have been created and the formation of democratic, transparent and human oriented republics formation has begun. In 1949 the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has been adopted, however implementation of these rules have been quite a big challenge even for initiator European and American republics itself. Full political and social equality between citizens has been implemented gradually and sometimes by bloody controversies as well, regardless of race, nationality, culture, religion or gender. Establishing of transparent democracy has been followed by decolonization and setting of the above values in more and more states by different institutions. The states being constantly at war and enemies to each other have turned into the examples of peace (Rodoneli, 1996).

Through the European institutes, democratic values have been gradually spread over from west to east Europe. After the Socialist Camp has been dismissed, step by step it has been spread in East Europe and in the Post-Soviet countries. The European Union announced the Neighborhood Policy, which included Belorussia, Ukraine, Moldova and three South Caucasian countries (European Commission, 2009).

Joining of South Caucasian countries into the Council of Europe and implementation of the partnership programs of the European Union in 90's was acknowledged by Russia as involvement of European civilization into South Caucasus by Russia. Unfortunately, Russia does not consider the European Union and its values as universal. Russia sees the above from the perspective of its own imperialistic view, as a new imperial enemy, which lead to responsive reactions. The Eurasian Union has been created by Russia and promotion of anti-western ideas based on pseudo cultural and religion motives has begun. After that, Russia has organized military conflicts and occupied other new territories (Asmus, 2010). Consequently, republics of South Caucasus made their decisions guiding by the past historical experience and not by benefit of new democratic values.

Georgia has aggressively followed the way of the European Union and NATO, as a reflection to the attempt of returning into European space and salvation from the Russian Empire (V. Shubitidze, N. Tsereteli, 2013). Armenia

has joined the Eurasian Union and has become even more depended on the Russian Federation in terms of economic, military and political views. As for Azerbaijan, it has kept more careful attitude toward Russia and the European Union as well. It still does not have clear position regarding to any of the poles and tries to run independent policy on bases of the natural resources owned, which is more characteristic for Asian oil production states.

Ultimately, leaders of the European Union have analyzed choices of countries of South Caucasus and have changed their regional policy. In 2014, the European Commission published a document, where they admitted failure of the regional approach of the European Union (FRIDE, 2014) and set a main goal to deal with countries individually (Lehne, 2014). This reflected in consideration of Georgia within a new regional frame, when Georgia became an associated member of EU along with Ukraine and Moldova in 2014.

Conclusion

Subject of the foregoing research paper was a question to analyze why these three countries of South Caucasus, closely located, have completely contrasted and contradictory foreign policy.

My answer was as follows, South Caucasus political identity is only a myth. These republics nowadays make political decisions not pursuant to mandatory contemporary democratic principles, but according to the historical facts that are reflected in the memories of their people.

Once I have made a thorough study and analysis of the history of the southern Caucasian countries, I have reflected in this research the most significant historical decisions, that kept changing destiny of these people and kept creating development way totally different from each other. I tried to stay focused on the collective memory, that these three nations possess as a result of books given at schools, narratives, historical myths and legends. I do not claim that “objective” history of each nation since their birth precisely accumulated in peoples mind. Even more, maybe most of the people do not remember their “history” by heart, but their political and social behavior is quite influenced and prejudiced due to the compulsory (and questionable) schooling they get during their early ages. Furthermore, politicians and especially religious leaders permanently feed their people by this “historian facts”. That is why, despite the fact that mostly the enemy of these countries in one certain period of time has been the same empires, each three of them had different reaction in response.

Therefore, I am convinced that the theory of collective memory, which stipulates the rules of conduct of society deriving from the historical facts, is justified and steadfast with respect to these three countries. During the research, I have made the comparative analysis of the historical facts, which even the current political decision-makers are bound by various civil and political decisions. They fully reflect the historical ways and requirements of their people.

Collective memory cannot be unambiguously considered in a positive context, it may become the basis for insularity and conflicts. However, this phenomenon is resolvable for avoiding the negative consequences. The examples are those European countries, which have constantly been in armed conflicts with each others and have had more differences with each other than South Caucasian countries had.

After elimination of the outer obstructive facts, which is mainly the present militaristic and imperialistic policy of the Russian Federation, the countries will easily lead themselves to the decision that it does not essentially matter, which civilization the one comes from or which ethnic-language group does one belong to and what decision have their motherland made in the Middle Ages, but their major value is a human being and the biggest challenge is to achieve economical welfare and keep peace.

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