

The Experience of Federalization of the South Caucasus states: The Past and the Present

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Various international organizations and the “big” powers often propose to draw on the experience of federalization to help end the conflicts lingering in some post-Soviet countries for over a quarter century now. Several questions arise when considering the option of federalization. Is it a political panacea that can ensure security and protection of rights for ethnic groups (so called minorities)? Or is it a leverage of pressure for the “big” powers, which have national interests all around the world and use it to influence smaller states? What is the relationship between the federal and autonomous (political and cultural) types of territorial governance? Does federalization provide options for the integration or disintegration of state structures?

This list of questions can be complemented by a series of more nuanced ones. Since federalization is no longer a theoretical construct, but has precedents of application, what are the lessons learned based on the available experience? Is an increase in the number of federal states predictable, or, on the contrary, is the collapse of the already existing ones more likely? In the *era of post-Cold War* politics, how independently from outside influence do the states and societies in the post-Soviet space choose their constitutional order? What (if anything) does the idea of federalization mean to the South Caucasus states and the region as a whole? What are the chances that the immediate neighbors in the region – Iran and Turkey – will become federal states in the future? Obviously there are many questions, and this paper will address only a few of them.

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Federalism: to the core of the concept

The authors of this paper do not aim at contributing to the discussion on the history and theory of federalism. However, in order to clearly define the authors' position, a brief discussion of the essence of the political theory and practices of federalization is included. The peculiarities of the Soviet legacy will also be discussed.

During the last years of the 20th century, Vincent Ostrom and Daniel Elazar made a significant contribution to the understanding of this phenomenon within the American federalist school of thought. According to Michael Burgess, "It is, above all, a biblical perspective of federalism. According to this perspective, the concept of covenantal federalism embodies a set of normative principles which bind partners together in a moral contract or agreement of trust. The act of coming together remains a 'political bargain' but it is much more than just this; it is also based upon mutual recognition, tolerance, respect, obligation and responsibility" (Burgess, *Comparative Federalism: Theory and Practice* 2006, 49). Of course in this case – as probably in any attempt to define such a complex phenomenon – an ideal model of relationships is offered where federalization is viewed as a means of establishing the most encompassing mutual trust and conflict-free coexistence possible within a single state or in some form of an inter-state union.

Today there are at least a dozen definitions trying to convey the essence of this socio-political process (Elazar 1987, 5) (Kelemen 2003, 185) (Hueglin and Fenna 2006, 32-33). One of the most successful ones is the definition offered by Ronald Watts: "Federalism refers to the advocacy of multi-tiered government combining elements of shared-rule and regional self-rule. [...] Within the genus of federal political systems, federations represent a particular species in which neither the federal nor the constituent units of government are constitutionally subordinate to the other, i.e. each has sovereign powers derived from the constitution rather than another level government, each is empowered to deal directly with its citizens in the exercise of its legislative, executive and taxing powers and each is directly elected by its citizens" (Watts 1996, 6-7).

Summarizing the definitions presented in literature, federalization implies a decentralization of power, a greater proximity of state institutions and actors to each individual citizen, the formation of equal and horizontal relations, and more freedom in decision-making processes that affect the everyday life of the citizens. It is important to underline that all the definitions imply a democratic form of governance.

Different forms of a political federative order are possible, but it is important to pay attention to “key distinctions between intrastate and interstate federalism” (Burgess, *Federalism and the European Union: The Building of Europe, 1950-2000* 2000, 1). In the case of the South Caucasus, this implies the prospects of federalization within each country, as well as the possibilities of developing such relationships on the regional level – between countries.

The incentives for federalization also vary greatly. Three different experiences (the United States (US), the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), and the European Union (EU)) indicate that federalization, a process largely determined by the level of development of the political system and the economy of the state or states, can be voluntary as well as forced. In the period after the Second World War and during the Cold War era, when two superpowers were competing for hegemony in the world, local or regional trends in federalization were often influenced by external forces which supported or obstructed these tendencies based on their own interests.

Discussions on borrowing the international experience in this sphere remain relevant for many post-Soviet states. Such discussions expose a lot of auxiliary issues determined by the specific socio-political and conflict contexts. It is often said that focus on federalization streams not from global principles or legal norms, but from the influence of external political forces often driving the situation into a deadlock. Due to “frozen” conflicts, which basically means that neither of the sides has enough resources to accomplish the desired outcome, external powers have no other choice than to support the status-quo. Almost three decades of lingering conflicts show that the prospects of conflict resolution may include provisions on possible federalization or autonomies (political, cultural, or territorial), but the shape of the political regimes, as well as the overall mood within the societies are also important. The latter are often not ready for a decentralization of power. However, this should not impede the theoretical study on the potential of federalism in addressing the consequences of conflict.

Federative states and autonomies

Currently there are about three dozen states in the world that consider themselves federations. With very different forms of governance, a number of regions enjoy different and often very high levels of autonomy from the center¹.

¹ For example, there is a very high level of autonomy for a number of regions in Spain, which is a parliamentary monarchy; in the parliamentary-presidential republic of

Such governance approaches are usually driven by a desire to avoid serious conflicts or solve the already existing ones. Often it is also a way to preserve the state itself.

Federative systems and autonomies, similarly to any other form of governance, are not static. This approach should not be regarded as a one-time and final solution to any conflict. Throughout the 20th century, there have been many cases of federalization and de-federalization of states. An example of such a short-lived association of states is the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic proclaimed on April 22 of 1918 and which lived only until May 26, 1918 (Świątochowski 1985, 105-128) (Suny 1994, 185-195).

Obviously in modern states, factors affecting the design of a federative administrative-territorial division or autonomous regions can be very different. Importance lies not only with how these states emerged on the contemporary political world map of the world, but also with their political traditions, economy, the ethnic and religious composition of the population, as well as the geography. The nuances of compliance with or dismissal of factors that contribute to federalization or the formation of autonomies determine whether these formations are *real* or *formal* in nature.

After this general discussion of federalism and autonomies and their possible “pitfalls”, let’s now have a closer look at the first quarter of the 20th century when federalism was implemented in the South Caucasus.

The Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, and the South Caucasus: Beginning of the 20th century

An autocratic king stood at the head of the Russian Empire. A reform of the governance practices and the formation of a new administrative and bureaucratic apparatus that would be a match to the other systems of the second half of the 19th century began after the Great Reforms of 1861. At the same time, the modernization of governance in the Transcaucasian² provinces was facing a number of specific problems. According to Jörg Baberowski, nowhere the

Ukraine, Crimea is an autonomous republic; South Tyrol enjoys a high level of autonomy in the unitary-parliamentary republic of Italy and so on. See more on this: Benedikter, Thomas. *The World’s Modern Autonomy Systems: Concepts and Experiences of Regional Territorial Autonomy*. Bolzano: Institute of Minority Rights, EURAC Research, 2009. (Benedikter 2009).

² In this paper, the denomination “Transcaucasia” is used in reference to the South Caucasus because it narrates a particular period in history.

dilemma of state bureaucracy was so obvious as at the multiethnic peripheries of the empire. The bureaucratization of these regions was synonymous to the marginalization of the indigenous elites who represented the power of the center on the periphery during the pre-reform period. Strange people using a strange language explained and enforced strange laws – this is how bureaucratization of the outskirts was perceived by the local elites and the peasant population (Baberowski 2008, 87).

Among local officials, there were many Christian Georgians and Armenians, while Turkic Muslims were less integrated into the governance and the bureaucratic structures. As everywhere else in the Russian Empire, the territory of Transcaucasia was administratively divided into provinces and districts. The second half of the 19th century and the early 20th century was the period of the establishment of national elites and the promotion of the ideas of autonomy in the region of the Caucasus.

The Special Commission on drafting the “Fundamental Laws of Provisional Government” took up the issues of governance after the February Revolution of 1917. At that point, Poland and Finland were already demanding independence, while the Caucasus elites were merely dreaming about some type of autonomy from the central government. Perhaps, the desire of the Provisional Government to preserve Russia as a unitary state became one of the reasons of its rapid collapse.

Even before the collapse of tsarism, the question about the future political structure was the central question in the programs of all parties. Gradually the urgency of the choice between federation or autonomies (cultural or other) was replaced by the urgency of the choice between national and territorial division of the future subjects of the Russian state entities. The most influential parties proposed divergent solutions. The social-revolutionary party sought to create a federation, while the social-democrats wanted to preserve the centralized state.

In literature, arguments are made that events in the South Caucasus after the collapse of the USSR surprisingly resemble or even repeat the events in the South Caucasus after the collapse of the Russian Empire (Abasov and Khachatryan, *The Karabakh Conflict. Variants of Settlement: Concepts and Reality* 2005, 33) (Dilanyan, Abasov and Javakhishvili 2006, 53-70) (Furman 2001, 9, 496). Of course, history does not repeat itself even if the same subject has to go through the same challenges and risks reminiscent of those it faced in the past. However, the previous experience with its mistakes and achievements has an independent value which can help to adjust the new path.

In the case of the South Caucasus, a direct reliance on past experience is possible since during the 20th century, federalization was implemented twice in the region through the Transcaucasian Federation of 1918 and the Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic (TSFSR) of 1922-1936 (Abasov, *Mezhdunarodnyye otnosheniya Azerbaydzhana i Germanii ot istokov i do nachala XX veka: politicheskiy aspekt*. 2015, 98). After the start of the First World War, the ideas of federalism became more popular. Bihl Wolfdieter says that Georgia sought complete autonomy. It was ready to fight against Russia if the German Reich and Austria-Hungary guaranteed its full independence. On September 27 of 1914, the Georgian committee operating in Berlin under the leadership of Giorgi Machabeli and Mikheil Tsereteli sent an academic article to Vezendok entitled "The Project on the Neutralization of the Caucasus and its Future Political Structure". According to this project, neutral Caucasus state unions were to be established – 'Kingdom of Georgia', 'Armenian-Tatar (Azerbaijani) Canton' and 'Union of Mountainous People' (Wolfdieter 1975, 402).

The Special Transcaucasian Committee (*OZaKom*) and its replacement the Transcaucasian Commissariat, and the Transcaucasian Sejm were created in 1917-1918 as transitional governance bodies toward the Constituent Assembly, which would allow Transcaucasia to become part of a renewed Russia again. Politically there were two options – three autonomies or one united federative structure as part of a single state. As it was expected, being part of the Russian Empire for a century did not allow the ideas of national independence and a sovereign state to develop in the social consciousness of the South Caucasus societies. At the same time, this period was sufficient for Transcaucasia to be viewed as a single space despite the differences among national communities living here.

On February 23 of 1919 in Tiflis, the All-Russian Constituent Assembly deputies established a 133-person executive body – the Transcaucasian Sejm, after the Bolsheviks dissolved the Assembly on January 6 of the same year. On April 22 of 1918 under pressure from Turkey, who refused to negotiate with the structures deprived of sovereignty, the Sejm adopted a resolution on independence of the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic. On April 26 this government proclaimed sovereignty and the independence of Transcaucasia. However, on May 25, the representatives of Georgia made a statement stressing that the attempt to unite the people of the Caucasus around the slogan of "independence" was not successful and disintegration of the Caucasus was evident. On May 26 of 1918, the Transcaucasian Sejm adopted its

last decision: “Due to fundamental divergences on the issue of war and peace among the nations of the Transcaucasian independent republic, and the inability to establish one united authoritative power speaking on behalf of the Caucasus, the Sejm announces the dissolution of Transcaucasia and lays down its powers” (Arkomed 1923, 100) (Bagirova 2007).

Starting from 1918 and in the 1920s, unsuccessful attempts were made to establish a confederation under the auspices of the Triple Entente. The main impediment to these endeavors were territorial disputes that would turn into full conflicts. In April 1920, the Bolsheviks occupied Azerbaijan; they took over Armenia in November 1920 and Georgia in February 1921. This put in motion the process of the Sovietization of the Transcaucasia. According to Terry Martin the support to the national status was the foundation of the Soviet national policy and the establishment of the Soviet Union in 1922-1923 created a territorial national entity and not a federation of autonomous national territories (Martin 2002, 81).

In the early 1920s, a heated debate on the structure and the system for the delegation of authorities accompanied the formation of the Transcaucasian Federation. Moscow sought to control the economy and administrative governance allowing some degree of autonomy in cultural and national aspects. From the very first days of the Sovietization, Moscow set an objective for the new government on unification “within one big communist family”. Initially this was meant to be a unification at the level of a region which would then become part of the Soviet Union which was established in 1922. One of the first government acts was on the unification of the Transcaucasian railroads. In 1921, the “Georgian, Azerbaijani and Armenian Union on Foreign Trade” was established.

In the December of 1921, the Plenum of the Caucasian Bureau of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) and later the first Congress of the Communist organizations of Transcaucasia, held in February 1922, ruled to accelerate the establishment of a common political center of Transcaucasia. The Congress approved the draft Union Treaty of the Soviet Socialist Republics of Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia, as well as the provisions on the Supreme Economic Council. At the same time, despite the pressure from the Center, many Communists continued to oppose the establishment of the federation considering it premature and erroneous (Bagirova 2007).

On March 12 of 1922, at the conference of the Central Executive Committee (CEC), the representatives of the three republics adopted the Union Agreement

on the establishment of the TSFSR declaring that in that the Soviet Socialist Republics of Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia were joining a close military, political, and economic union. The Union Council officially assumed military and fiscal matters, foreign policy and trade, transport and communication, the administration of economic policy, and the fight against counter-revolution. The Union Council organized a united Caucasian People's Commissariats, settled border disputes as well as questions on use of forests, water resources, and pastures in the provinces (Bagirova 2007).

In January 1923, the Transcaucasian CEC (*ZakCIK*) established the People's Commissars of the TSFSR within which the Supreme Economic Council was created. During the first congress, the constitution of the TSFSR was adopted stating that the union of the three republics was voluntarily and each of them remained a sovereign state with its own constitution that was in agreement with the constitution of the TSFSR, and later the USSR. Each republic also retained the right to leave the TSFSR. The TSFSR represented a new form of relations among the Soviet republics. Unlike the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic (RSFSR) built not on the basis of autonomies, the TSFSR was built on contractual relations of three equal and sovereign Soviet republics and it was effectively the first step towards the establishment of the Soviet Union (Bagirova 2007).

The early years of the Transcaucasian Federation coincided with the economic crisis and devastation all across the country. To overcome this, Vladimir Lenin proposed the implementation of the New Economic Policy. On January 10 of 1923, a decree on introducing a single Transcaucasian banknote – the bon, was made. However, in 1924 Transcaucasian CEC and the Council of the People's Commissars published a decree on the introduction of a new hard currency on the territory of the entire Union (Bagirova 2007).

The Caucasian Bureau and the Congress of the Councils of the Republics adopted resolutions on the creation of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic in 1921 and the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast in 1923 as part of Azerbaijan. The Abkhazian Soviet Socialist Republic that existed from 1921 to 1931 later became the Abkhazian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic and together with the Adjarian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (established in 1921) and the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast (established in 1922) constituted part of Georgia. The Transcaucasian Federation existed as part of the Soviet Union until 1936. With the adoption of new Constitution of the USSR, the Transcaucasian Federation was dissolved, leaving behind a rather contradictory experience.

One of the positive aspects of federalization was the strengthening of integrative processes across the full range of political, economic, social, and cultural issues. It somewhat resulted in a unison of the region itself as well as its various territories that were formally part of different state entities. The development of industry and other branches of economy, even though implemented forcibly, resulted in the development of specialized production in the republics uniting them within a single system. Due to the absence of formal borders between the republics, the conflicts – even though lingering in a latent form – were pushed to the periphery of political life. The years spent as part of the Transcaucasian Federation brought people of the region together and contributed to the development of a common Soviet identity.

On the other hand, the sharp disconnect between the legal foundations and the everyday practices of the implementation of federalism brought out its negative aspects. The attempts to level all republics to uniform standards of economic development led to a situation when this policy was implemented in one region at the expense of the others³. The comparison of the share of the South Caucasus republics in the Soviet gross domestic product (GDP) makes it evident that Georgia was always in leading positions. Moreover, the unhealthy competition for resources gave birth to a new Soviet nationalism. And when the Transcaucasian Federation dissolved, nobody on the ground (even formally) stood up to preserve it, which speaks about its imposed nature.

Federalization after the collapse of the USSR

The independence of the South Caucasus states and multiple conflicts revived the ideas of different models of unification, integration, and formation of autonomies even though nobody wanted to give up the recently gained independence. In the early 1990s, the idea of the Caucasian house emerged first was advocated by the people of the North Caucasus in 1992 and later by Eduard Shevardnadze. In March 1996, Georgia and Azerbaijan signed a “Manifesto on Peace, Security, and Cooperation in the Caucasus Region” known as the Tbilisi Declaration. The 1997 Kislovodsk meeting between the presidents of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia, and Russia yielded the Declaration “On peace, economic and cultural cooperation in the Caucasus”. In November 1999, a pact on regional cooperation was discussed at the Istanbul Summit. Nevertheless, all these declarations had little impact at the regional level, except for the

³ This problem exists in various countries today as well and is cause to separatist movements in Canada, Spain, Italy, and other places.

establishment of bilateral and trilateral contacts – Georgia-Azerbaijan, Georgia-Armenia, Azerbaijan-Georgia-Turkey. Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili also expressed a wish to form a confederation between Azerbaijan and Georgia which Baku neglected.

The West regularly proposes programs for regional cooperation. The desire to diminish Russia's role resulted in proposals by the EU and the US to start building structures of regional security in the South Caucasus. At different international forums, the idea of a South Caucasus federative state with the prospects of EU membership is being discussed⁴.

Some Western and local political analysts consider that a union with a respective limitation of the sovereignty of member states, coordination, and a concept for joint security could foster compromise and eventually lead to the peaceful resolution of the conflicts in the region. However, many regional experts are very skeptical about the possibility of such integration arguing that the societies of the South Caucasus are not ready for such integration, and the West is not consistent and active enough in promoting this issue (Dilanyan, Abasov and Javakhishvili 2006). Without a doubt, ongoing military conflicts in the South Caucasus and the authoritarian political regimes are responsible for delaying the integration process. In addition, ethnocratism with a virtual and formal privilege of the "titular nation" – the dominant group – as a form of political domination in the South Caucasus republics and the reluctance of the privileged groups to give up this system is another factor in this process.

⁴ One of the first events with a detailed analysis of this prospect was the international conference "The Caucasus – Region of Frozen Conflicts" organized by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung in Berlin (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung 2002). Within the framework of the conference, nine thematic blocks were presented. The block "Regional Economic Cooperation: Reality and Vision" argued that through such partnership the intensity of conflicts could diminish. The block "Integration of the Caucasus into Supra-Regional Cooperative Structures" analyzed the work of the Organization for Democracy and Economic Development (GUAM), the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) and suggested new models of supra-regional cooperative structures. The block "Europe and the Caucasus: The Pact of Stability?" discussed the models for stabilizing the situation in the Caucasus and expanding Europe's role in the South Caucasus and so on. Similar conferences have been organized regularly in Georgia and abroad and also included in the agenda of almost all the summits of European institutions.

Conflicts and the role of Russia

The views of some Russian political analysts represent the position of the ruling elites who publicly prefer to support the principle of “let people decide themselves how they should live”⁵. The precedent of Kosovo became a turning point in Russia’s engagement with the “near aboard” states. Moscow used this to recognize the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia connecting this decision with “Georgia’s aggression”⁶. At the same time, Moscow stressed that this is not applicable to situations in Transnistria and Nagorno Karabakh. The hybrid war in Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea solidified Russia’s new foreign policy toward the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries that were gravitating towards the US and the EU. Russia introduced the program of the “Eurasian Union” that unlike the EU Association Agreement, it is not only inviting but also compelling new members into this organization⁷.

This led to the resumption of discussions on federalization in Georgia, which at some point culminated in a direct appeal to the Abkhazian authorities to join a confederate state. This proposal was rejected by the Abkhazian authorities (Podrobnosti 2004) (Coppieters, Kovziridze and Leonardy 2003) (Lebanidze 2015). Some Russian experts argue that Azerbaijan “faces several potential ‘South Ossetia’ situations – territories with a compact residence of Lezgins, Avars, the Talysh, and Kurds, and thus also has to consider federalization” (Sukhov 2008).

Some Russian experts believe that Georgia is more inclined toward federalization. The underlying logic is that a change in the relations between Tbilisi and the region of Samtskhe-Javakheti populated by ethnic Armenians

⁵ This opinion has come across in the speeches and statements by Vladimir Putin, Dmitry Medvedev, and other Russian officials. This approach although meant to be democratic speaks strongly in favor of the right of the self-determination of nations and therefore comes with implications.

⁶ Both Russian leaders even labeled Georgia’s actions as genocide. Vladimir Putin is quoted to have said, “In my opinion, these are already elements of genocide against the Ossetian people” (Obroskov 2008).

⁷ Moscow tried to coerce Kiev into joining the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) (Glavnoye 2011). It also repeatedly offered Azerbaijan to join this organization, especially before the confrontation between Turkey and Russia when there were no objections on the side of Turkey. Due to Russia’s pressures, Armenia’s signing of the Association Agreement with the EU was postponed. A rally against Armenia’s accession to the EAEU took place in Yerevan in October 2014 (Martirosyan 2014).

and the region of Kvemo Kartli populated by ethnic Azerbaijanis will result in the empowerment of these regions and will not only prevent them from taking the route of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, but will also attract back these latter breakaway regions. "Federalization of Georgia is the cornerstone of Russia's vision of the 'new security architecture of the South Caucasus'" (Sukhov 2008). However, many Georgian experts believe that federalization will lead to the disintegration of Georgia and a destabilization of the entire region including the North Caucasus (Coppeters, Kovziridze and Leonardy 2003) (Sputnik Georgia 2015) (Memo 2011).

At the same time, the EU repeatedly offers federalism as an alternative to separatism to different states. Back in 2004, the members of European Parliament supported the federalization of Georgia and Azerbaijan. Later other political structures put forward similar proposals to these countries as well as to Ukraine and Moldova.

In the post-Soviet space, federalization along with other political processes still carries the imprint of Soviet practices. Federalization is understood exclusively as territorialization of ethnic groups. This is a product of the politics of memory which emphasizes that in the past only by the granted right of control over a certain territory prevented the expulsion of its population. Such a narrow vision of federalization impedes the development of serious discussions on the perspectives of a decentralization of power.

Federalization proposals at the official level in Georgia are different for Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In his recent interview, the Georgian Minister of Reconciliation and Civic Equality Paata Zakareishvili stated that "Georgia should introduce asymmetric regionalism, in the framework of which Abkhazia should be granted a special status [...]. I always stress that this is the best option for Abkhazia that is almost void of its independence 'thanks' to the treaty signed with Russia that recognized the independence. This treaty, illegal from the viewpoint of international law, effectively razed to the ground all achievements of the Abkhazian society directed at sovereignty. In case of a federative governance in Georgia, where Abkhazia will enjoy a special status, all the values that are critical for the Abkhazians can become part of the system. [...]. A different paaapproach should be applied toward South Ossetia. It is an enclave with a population of about 20 thousand people. With them we need to talk about a different status. Within the approach of regionalism, the idea is that different regions of Georgia will have a different status: While Adjara will have one status, Abkhazia will have another, and Imereti will enjoy yet a third one..." (Simonyan 2015). As a comparison, the Azerbaijani authorities view

federalization very negatively, although the unresolved conflict can make this an urgent issue.

The influence of the US and the EU

The EU and the US repeatedly proposed integration models for the South Caucasus, but all of them eventually failed. One example was a model of economic cooperation that would lead to the resolution of the conflicts later. As part of western innovation programs, the legislative, economic, and social governance systems (financial accounting, banking, information technologies, and other) in all of the three recognized republics have already been brought to a certain standard during the post-Soviet development period. In the political dimension, the tentative initial steps (i.e. creation of a regional inter-parliamentary assembly of the South Caucasus or the joint participation in the EU and Council of Europe (CoE) development programs) have been suspended or completed with varying results. The participation of some of these countries in the GUAM programs or organizations under the auspices of Russia still are only formal and symbolic in nature.

There is a possibility, of course, for the EU to initiate a second round of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) program aimed at the integration of the South Caucasus states. However, the question is whether there is a desire and means to carry out such a program, especially considering Russia's reaction to the advancement of the EU into the post-Soviet space as has been the case with Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia.

It seems that in the short perspective, the US and the EU will leave the South Caucasus under the auspices of Russia that urges the post-Soviet states to join the EAEU. The question of Azerbaijan's membership in this organization halted due to an unexpected cool wind in the Russian-Turkish relations, that until recently demonstrated a steady rapprochement in the political space.

Political reforms in the South Caucasus largely depend also on the foreign policy situation. At the beginning of the previous century, it was Russia and Turkey that decided the fate of the three countries of the region. A direct binding imposition was applied by Russia during the Soviet period, in the case of the Transcaucasian Federation by Turkey that put the unity of the South Caucasus states as a mandatory prerequisite for negotiations. The two models of federalization were carried out under pressure from these two countries.

Today also, the South Caucasus political elites are in no rush to transition to federalism since it will diminish or even eliminate their authoritarian rule. The

diminishing role of the region in international politics could be another obstructing factor. Since federalization bears a large number of risks, the South Caucasus states are likely to soon follow the example of the Russian Federation that is consistently sealing off mechanisms enabling federalization and the formation of autonomies. However, Georgia's and Armenia's planned transition to a parliamentary government may lead to a softening of authoritarianism and ethnocracies, however this process is only at its initial stage. Perhaps, a synergistic effect of internal motivation and external factors is still possible leading to the federalization of the region as a necessary measure. Meanwhile, going beyond the passive expectancy of a possible synergy between internal and external factors, there are other resources and possibilities for integration and federalization to be explored and the following section is dedicated to their consideration.

Prospects for state and non-state federalization of the South Caucasus

The analysis of political history in the South Caucasus demonstrates the failure unification or integration among the countries of the region. However, unresolved conflicts in the region dictate the urgency of a renewed discourse on a shared social-economic and political space in the South Caucasus. This renewed discourse sees integration and perhaps federalization as a possible model of building sustainable peace in the region.

Today, precisely these unresolved conflicts dictate the agenda of the states in the region. They are often used to solve internal policy problems and are manipulated by external actors to promote and strengthen their own interests. Consequently, the recognized states of the region are not self-sufficient or independent politically and economically. The unrecognized or partly recognized entities are limited in their development, unable to implement their full potential, and not self-sufficient either.

The analysis of the past and the current relations between the existing and emerging entities in the South Caucasus, as well as their relationship with the outside world, leave no real prospects for unification or integration. On the contrary, the formation of "global alliances" is underway, and all six entities of the South Caucasus involved in this arrangement (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Nagorno Karabakh, Georgia, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia) are in different, and even opposing political systems.

In the South Caucasus, conflicts were the cornerstone for building states and state entities in the region. Conflicts have determined the course of economy resulting in huge military budgets, formed internal and foreign policies, and determined the alignment of political forces. Political decisions are largely determined by security issues. Ongoing conflicts make security a priority, and joining any political union either provides military security or hopes to resolve conflicts in one's favor. Conflicts are at the core of not only tactical decisions on international cooperation, but also the overall strategy of foreign policy and decisions on joining one or another geopolitical block.

Thus, the desire to create an environment that is the most comfortable and stimulating for development is not the dominant force in decisions that determine the fate of nations and states in the South Caucasus. Rather those decisions are driven by security issues primarily related to the existing conflicts. However, these two sets of priorities are linked to each other; the strategies for development are tied to the security doctrine.

Against this background, in public discourses, the bankruptcy of the state as an institute gains momentum when it becomes evident that the state serves the interests of the authorities and not the people. A state system can be stable and *whole* if all three elements making up the system – “power-law-people” – are even and of equal value (Barantsev, *Assembling Wholness* 2002). Today, most states are binary stems – “people-power”. The law exists only formally since it serves the interests of power. Antagonism is unavoidable in a binary system since one of the elements always dominates, and sooner or later the paradigm loses its relative stability and falls apart. This causes divisions, collapse of empires, revolutions, etc. This scheme characterizes the entire history of humanity: unification, the domination of one element, collapse, war, poverty, and new unification.

The attempts at forced transformation of the state structure or the social system, the attempts to capture the resources of other countries are supposed to be tagged as international aggression and military invasion and should be condemned by the international community. Despite this, this is today often presented as a sort of a “a rescue mission”. This means that the system of international relations also collapses since it is based on oppositions where one element dominates over the other on many occasions, and the balancing element in the form of international law does not have power.

To determine whether in the current “global chaos” the prospect of integration for the South Caucasus can become a lifeline for the people living there,

comprehensive research is needed going beyond theoretic considerations. To begin with, the level of the need for South Caucasus integration should be determined. Is there a public demand for such integration? What can motivate and become a push factor for the emergence of societal intention to integrate with immediate neighbors in the region? Are there any indicators of the inevitability of such a process?

Reasons that drive the unification of developing countries often differ from the reasons that drive developed countries into this process. For the developed countries, integration is a need derived from the availability of productive forces. Integration among developing countries is driven by the willingness to boost economies, maximize the benefits of international cooperation, and strengthen positions on the international arena. All these factors can be at the core of a societal demand for unification. However, there are obstacles that can dominate the needs – conflict, power regimes, the fear of loss of identity or domination by some elements over others.

On the one hand, human beings are social beings which means that they have a natural urge to bond and connect. Moreover, it is exactly in the social setting that a person gains awareness and consciousness of self. The individuality of the self is perceived subconsciously to be safe within ethnic belonging. Moving from this social dimension to the political one, this feeling of safety is secured through the nation state. All other levels of self-awareness in a social system (subethnic, supranational) are perceived as a threat to identity and individuality, since there are no guarantees for the rights or equality of all subjects of those social systems. This perception obstructs the expression of a free will for unification but at the same time, Aleksey Egorov, who does research on questions of integration and law, defines integration as the independent and objective process of interpenetration of the elements of human existence, and the law is a structural formation facilitating integration (Yegorov 2004). Key in this definition are the words “independent” and “objective”, but we will come back to these at the end of the article.

So, we consider that the urge to unification is an organic part of the human nature and is a social need. Today many people attribute their nostalgia for the USSR to the feeling of living in a big country that had a huge influence in the world and the citizens did not feel vulnerable from the point of view of economic and military security. These are the motivations that make up the social intent to integrate into a system that can improve the quality of life of a person and the society, aide its development without destroying ethno-cultural peculiarities.

These needs themselves have the potential of transforming into an intention to integrate into an international or supranational union, but only if there is change in the power relations between the subjects involved. This transformation should be based on the emergence of equality for all subjects involved. The guarantee of equality is a key condition, without which integration will not be possible.

As we consider the possibilities of integration in the political paradigm, even if theoretically and without taking into consideration the interests of the external forces, we see that the internal social needs in the region will not go beyond the existing dilemmas. It is possible to overcome the impediments to ethno-cultural security and form joint environments of activity and existence if all subjects possess the same rights, but the current political paradigm is incapable of securing this. It seems any consideration of integration in the future should end here.

While such equality is unlikely in the current situation, it is possible. The Caucasus has had positive experiences of the civil society finding effective solutions to various issues. These precedents indicate that the effectiveness in achieving the goal was higher when the number of involved actors was bigger. At some point, in the strategy of achieving the goals, ethnicity ceases to be the dominant component, and the desire to solve issues comprehensively and working together dominates.

The trouble is that the search for solutions to integration in the South Caucasus is carried out within the frames of political, historical, and ethnographic disciplines. These exclusively draw from real situations and the search is trapped in a vicious circle. Other methodologies that can aide the search for creative solutions offer departure from the initial data and persistent concepts and ideas, or the transfer of the issue under investigation from one discipline to another. At the beginning of the 20th century, German scientist Hermann Haken who founded Synergetics initiated the interdisciplinary direction of scientific research applying the methods of mathematical analysis in all natural and later also human sciences. How can this help us overcome the vicious circle?

Trying to formulate a common goal, we are inevitably faced with the question of development. We choose forms of existence that are the most comfortable for the harmonious development of a person and all human activity. When a society reaches a certain height, the usual comfort no longer meets the new targets in development; there is a conflict that urges to find a zone of further

comfort. This conflict can also take a destructive path, leading to the demolition of what has already been achieved and throwing the person into the old paradigms. This results in a loss of values, social degradation, the revival of archaic principles of being, etc. What can be done here? After all, if there is something immutable in this world, it is the evolution of all forms and systems of the universe and the human being as a part of it. How can the basic needs for harmonious existence and development be met avoiding violent self-assertion? And how can Synergetics – a discipline that studies the processes of self-organization of developing systems – help us?

According to adherents of Synergetics, fluctuations lead to the complexity of systems and the emergence of new orders within them. Nikita Moiseev, an adherent of Hermann Haken's ideas and a Soviet and Russian scientist in the field of general mechanics and applied mathematics, considers that development implies an increase in diversity, acceleration of processes, and complexification of forms, and the structural patterns in the formation of wholeness should be scrutinized (Moiseyev 1995). The transition from separation, differentiation, and analysis towards unity, integration, and synthesis, or in other words, from analytical to synthetic paradigms is only possible after overcoming binary structures. In the beginning of this section, we looked at one of the models of binary systems – “power-people”, and tried to ground the inevitability of its collapse, unless there is a third element of the system – the law. Yes, within the human psychology dichotomies are the most persistent way of thinking – good-bad, friend-enemy, matter-consciousness, etc. “Fighting this is almost impossible, but a binary thinking turns into evil when it transforms from an instrument of analysis to an instrument of action in the real world” (Sobutskiy 1993). The ideology of antagonism leads the world to suicide. Escape is only possible by transforming the binary system to a triad; that is the introduction of a third element into the system creating a triadic structure in which each element regulates the compatibility of the other two.

One of the models of the evolutionary synthesis of systems is the path leading to wholeness through the triad of *emotio-ratio-intuitio* (Barantsev, On Trinitary Methodology 1998). This formula helps to navigate the semantic space, completing monads and dyads to whole triads. [...] Thus, the dyad “matter-idea” is resolved within the sphere of *emotio* of the person. The previous binary formulation of the main question of philosophy was in-human”, asserts, Rem Barantsev, Professor of mathematical and mechanical sciences (Barantsev, The Ternary Response to the Binary Challenge 2004).

Transferring this approach to the context of the South Caucasus, we get the principle sufficient to form a coherent structure. Synthesis and fusion can occur in an atmosphere of intuitive trust, which is inevitable in a positive, inspiring emotional state; and decisions that are rational and satisfy all subjects can be made when they bring delight to all who is in this atmosphere of trust. This is familiar to many NGO communities, but, alas, NGOs run into the political reality and deadlocks because in the political paradigm of integration – “subject-will(purpose)-law” – securing the last element is not possible today.

Nevertheless, creating a virtual wholeness in the South Caucasus is possible through non-political, or not-politically binding supranational communities united by the purpose to give people joy and enlightenment. One cannot build trust, one needs to generate it. We need to engage in the co-creation of a more attractive reality; only this can generate a new creative emotional level, and then the interaction will lead to the inevitability of uniting. And here it is time to go back to the independence and objectivity of this process. Integration cannot be imposed. Only an evolutionary process can lead to the sustainability of the integration model. What is the role of the person, if evolution will do it itself?! Evolution needs to be promoted; it's time for the person to become a conscious participant in it.

Soviet, Russian, and Ukrainian biochemist Vladimir Vernadsky argued in his “Philosophical Thoughts of a Naturalist” that humanity in the course of its development turns into a new powerful “geological force”, transforming the face of the planet through its thought and work (Vernadskiy 1988). Accordingly, for the sake of its own preservation, it must take responsibility for the development of the biosphere, and it will require a certain social organization and a new, ecological and humanistic ethics.

It seems time has come.

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

CEC Central Executive Committee

CIS Commonwealth of Independent States

CoE Council of Europe

EaP Eastern Partnership

EU European Union

GDP gross domestic product

NGO non-governmental organization

OZaKom Special Transcaucasian Committee

RSFSR Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic

TSFSR Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic, Transcaucasian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic

US United States

USSR Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

ZakCIK Transcaucasian Central Executive Committee