

MIGRATION AND ETHNIC RELATIONS

**ETHNOPOLITICAL CONFLICTS
IN THE NORTHERN CAUCASUS TODAY**

Rashid KHUNAGOV

*D.Sc. (Sociol.), Professor, Chancellor of the Adyghe State University
(Maykop, Republic of Adyghea, Russian Federation)*

Svetlana LYAUSHEVA

*D.Sc. (Philos.), Professor,
Head of the Department of Post-graduate Education and
Academic Theses; Professor at the Department of
Philosophy and Sociology, Adyghe State University
(Maykop, Republic of Adyghea, Russian Federation)*

Asiet SHADZHE

*D.Sc. (Philos.), Professor at the Department of
Philosophy and Sociology, Adyghe State University
(Maykop, Republic of Adyghea, Russian Federation)*

Zuriet ZHADE

*D.Sc. (Political Science), Professor,
Head of the Department of State and Law Theory and Political Science,
Faculty of Jurisprudence, Adyghe State University
(Maykop, Republic of Adyghea, Russian Federation)*

The project has been carried out with the support of grant RNF project No. 15-18-00148 "Ethnosocial Processes and Ethnic Tension in the South of Russia: Improvement of Analytical Instruments and Methods of Regulation."

A B S T R A C T

Political science, history, economics, linguistics, sociology, literary studies, social psychology and social philosophy, ethics and aesthetics, philosophy of language and logic offer their own, and highly specific reconstruction, and formalization of communication between people.

Today, we need common frames of conceptual formalization of an ethnopolitical conflict as a phenomenon; it is a theoretical and cognitive task of Caucasian realities. In the context of the world political process, the region is gradually acquiring the status of the key component of the world's political and social organization; it is gaining consequence as an element of horizontal structuring of society.

Regional conflicts and the ways they can and should be settled have become a permanent element of the agenda of all international organizations, including the OSCE, the U.N., its General Assembly, and the Security Council, and also of the activities of the U.N. Secretary-General, etc. In recent years, the Northern Caucasus has become a zone of vehement ethnic conflicts which, as could be expected, negatively af-

fect its social and political context.¹ Sovereignization of the republics of the South of Russia fragmented the region's social and political space, increased both latent and apparent national and ethnic tension and led to armed clashes. The events of the recent past and those that are unfolding today have done nothing good for the North Caucasian social and political situation and moved to the forefront the security problems of local people and vacationers. For objective reasons, the region is involved in the Abkhazian and South Ossetian problems and the system of trans-regional ethnic and political relationships.² Today, the region is facing a real danger of sliding into an abyss of international terrorism and extremism against the background of tension, created by migration and social upheavals.

¹ See: A. Shadzhe, I. Karabulatova, R. Khunagov, Z. Zhade, "Ethnopolitical Influence in Regulating National Security in Border Territories of the Countries in the Caucasian-Caspian Region," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 17, Issue 3, 2016, pp. 66-75.

² See: S. Lyausheva, R. Khunagov, Z. Zhade, A. Shadzhe, "Ethnic Tensions in the South of Russia in the Opinions of Experts," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 17, Issue 3, 2016, pp. 96-105.

KEYWORDS: *the Northern Caucasus, ethnopolitical conflicts, regional conflictology, ethnic tension.*

Introduction

Conflicts in the Caucasus are rooted in the far from simple relationships between the local peoples and are fanned by a variety of factors: political (struggle for national identity, rehabilitation of the repressed peoples, territorial disputes, etc.), and ethnic factors that escalate the conflicts by slogans and demands, formulated by the conflicting sides. These factors are intertwined, the correlation between them changes from one conflict to another, until it becomes hard or even impossible to separate them.

In the post-Soviet period, the geopolitical processes in the Northern Caucasus have become spontaneous and cyclic; today they are drawn into transborder international relations, in which the

institutionalized presence of foreign actors (the U.S. the EU, Middle Eastern countries and Islamist radical organizations) is strongly felt and is increasing.

Liquidation of the genesis of separatism and terrorism and ensuring territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Russian Federation should be treated as the most urgent tasks; in the long-term perspective the sources of separatism in Chechnia that has been smoldering for a long time now should be finally extinguished to prevent the conflict's internationalization and stem religious radicalism. Time has come to restore law and order in the republic, bordering on the edge of separatism, and improve living standards; the borders should be guarded to exclude transborder traffic of terrorists from the enclaves of the Pankissi Gorge at the border between Eastern Georgia and Chechnia, etc.

In the foreign policy context, which is a logical continuation of Russia's domestic policy, the federal structures of power should insist, despite Turkey's ambitions, on a favorable regime of the Black Sea Straits; they should lobby the routes of the Caspian Pipeline Consortium, the Baku-Grozny-Tuapse oil pipeline, the Blue Stream gas pipeline and other fuel and energy routes within the Russian Federation. The Center should rely on international agreements to consolidate Russia's positions in settling the Karabakh conflict and the conflicts between Georgia, on the one side, and Abkhazia and South Ossetia, on the other; it should use the possibilities, offered by the fairly narrow "corridor of possibilities," to preserve its influence in Transcaucasia; the Transcaucasian Railway should be revived to invigorate Russia's partnership with Armenia, Iran and the Central Asian countries.

We should balance out the interests of the conflicting sides in the Caucasus and abandon the habit of demonstrating force at inappropriate moments. The new international legal status of the Caspian should be legitimized to exclude extra-regional military presence in the region: today it looks like a center of geopolitical opposition or even confrontation.³

Methods and Materials

The sources include the following types of documents:

- (1) legislative acts of the Russian Federation and foreign countries, related to geopolitics and national security;
- (2) documents of political parties (programs, election statements and resolutions), related to the geopolitical problems of the Northern Caucasus;
- (3) materials of the media (newspaper and magazine items, information found in electronic media);
- (4) public statements of political figures (speeches, interviews, articles);
- (5) statistical materials, related to the economic potential of the North Caucasian republics, demography, migration and violent crimes;
- (6) documents of religious political organizations and public figures of the Northern Caucasus;
- (7) reminiscences and other personal documents;
- (8) opinion polls.

³ See: B. Akhmetova, I. Karabulatova, P. Dudin, Zh. Dorzhiev, "Tension around the Problem of the South China Sea as a Factor of Geopolitical Confrontation and Transformation of the Present World Order," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 17, Issue 4, 2016, pp. 49-58.

The theoretical and methodological basis includes the following methods:

- (1) general scientific: logical-heuristic (induction, deduction, analysis, synthesis); descriptive-specific and abstract-definitive; definition and classification;
- (2) social-humanitarian: analysis of documents, method of comparison;
- (3) special scientific: geopolitical analysis, methods of cartography of political phenomena.

The methodology of geopolitical studies of the processes unfolding in the Northern Caucasus was created by E. Pozdniakov, V. Tsymburskiy, A. Dugin and E. Ozhiganov. The present authors side with the neo-Eurasian variant of interpretations of Russia's geopolitics in the region.

The following territories are covered by the term "the Northern Caucasus": the piedmont areas (including the northern slopes of the Greater Caucasus with the exception of its eastern part that belongs to Azerbaijan); the Black Sea coast of the Krasnodar Territory to the south of the Greater Caucasus. We are convinced that a coordinated opinion about the boundaries of the Northern Caucasus is hardly possible. Earlier, it included not only the piedmont areas but also the neighboring territories. As part of Russia, it includes thirteen administrative and national-territorial units: two territories (Stavropol and Krasnodar territories); three regions (Rostov, Astrakhan, Volgograd), eight republics (Adygea, Dagestan, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Kalmykia, Karachaevo-Cherkessia, North Ossetia and Chechnia). The area is a unique ethnocultural, polyconfessional, social and economic phenomenon of special importance for Russia.

Results

The following factors determine the nature of ethno-political conflicts in the Northern Caucasus:

1. *Polyethnoconfessional population*. There are Christians among the local peoples and Muslims of different Islamic persuasions closely intertwined with paganism.⁴ Despite a very long period and very determined efforts to squeeze religion out of everyday life of the Soviet people by limiting or even banning propaganda of the fundamentals of Islam, the religious factor in the Caucasus was revived and strengthened to become a highly important element of ethno-political processes in the traditionally Islamic regions.⁵ Positions of Islam, as an important factor of everyday life, are especially strong in Chechnia, Ingushetia and Dagestan.⁶ Barely discernible under common circumstances, the religious factor invariably crops up, in one way or another, in most of the conflicts in the Northern Caucasus (it is present, for example, in the confrontation between Russia and Chechnia and between Ossetia and Ingushetia).

The conflicts, however, are mostly ethno-political rather than religious:⁷ religious slogans are the favorite instrument of certain political elites that use them to unite their supporters or to camouflage their political aims.

⁴ See: R. Khunagov, A. Shaov, S. Lyausheva, V. Nekhai, "Traditional Adyghe Stereotypes within the Ethnic Tolerance/Intolerance Dichotomy as a Factor of Ethnic Evolution in the Northern Caucasus," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 17, Issue 3, 2016, pp. 105-113.

⁵ See: I. Karabulatova, "Ethnocultural Communication Systems in the Northern Caucasus and the Problem of Radical Islam," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 17, Issue 4, 2016, pp. 71-79.

⁶ See: M. Betilmerzaeva, A. Akhtaev, B. Sadulaev, A. Salgiriev, "Religion and State: Interaction and Sociocultural Transformations (The Chechen Republic Case Study)," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 18, Issue 1, 2017, pp. 124-132.

⁷ See: "Okazyvaetsia, nepravilno verily?" available at [<http://maxpark.com/community/6696/content/5019450>], 6 June, 2017.

2. *Territorial claims.* Frequent changes of administrative territorial borders in the region that ignore the real settlement pattern of the local population, as well as mass deportations of peoples that returned to their native lands after years in exile, deprived the region's administrative division of ethnic logic.⁸ The Soviet Union's disintegration and the revived national aspirations of sovereignty and independence added urgency to the already acute territorial disagreements. What had begun as disagreements over territories claimed by the Ossetians and Ingushes, later developed into an ethnic conflict.
3. *The rigid national-state hierarchy of Soviet times.* The division of peoples into "titular" and "non-titular," with different rights and constitutional statuses, accumulated contradictions in the ethnopolitical sphere.⁹

The very desired national self-identification is clearly seen in what is said about internal federalization in polyethnic republics (Daghestan);¹⁰ possible separation of bi-national republics (Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachaevo-Cherkessia); self-identification outside sovereign states (Chechnia)¹¹ or reunification of the divided peoples (the Lezghians in Daghestan and Azerbaijan).

4. *Negative repercussions of unjustified deportations and repressions.* Starting in the 1860s, the czarist government was consistently moving numerous tribes of Circassians, part of the Chechens, Nogais and other peoples to Turkey. In the nineteenth century, about three million were moved from the Northern and Northwestern Caucasus to Turkey, which radically changed the region's ethnodemographic composition.¹²

In Soviet times, people were moved out of the region and inside it on a much greater scale. During the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945, Chechens, Ingushes, Karachays, and Balkars, falsely accused of treason, were moved to Central Asia, Siberia and the Far East and abandoned without money or shelter. Many of them died; for many years they were deprived of their national culture, their native tongues, etc., while other people were moved to their vacated lands. The region's indigenous population thinks of this time as "darkness."¹³

In the bi-national republics (Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachaevo-Cherkessia), the land (vacated by the repressed peoples) and its use became a source of potential conflicts, when the repressed peoples were allowed to return; in addition, there is a strong desire to divide the bi-national republics into national republics, etc.¹⁴

⁸ See: G.B. Vok, "Strategicheskie interesy SShA na Kavkaze," in: *Istoricheskie svyazi narodov Dagestana i Chechni. Tezisy nauchno-prakticheskoy konferentsii*, Institute of History, Archeology, Ethnography DNTs RAN, Makhachkala, 2005, pp. 95-99.

⁹ See: G. Osipov, I. Karabulatova, G. Shafranov-Kutsev, L. Kononova, B. Akhmetova, E. Loskutova, G. Niyazova, "Ethnic Trauma and Its Echo in Today's Mental Picture of the World among the Peoples of the Post-Soviet States: An Inter-ethnic Conflicting Discourse Unfolding in Russia's Ethnolinguistic Information Space," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 17, Issue 2, 2016, pp. 87-94.

¹⁰ See: Z.A. Makhulova, *Regionalny faktor geopoliticheskikh protsessov v sovremennoy Rossii (na primere Respubliki Dagestan)*, Author's abstract of Ph.D. thesis, Makhachkala, 2006.

¹¹ See: E.V. Sharapova, "Nepriznannye gosudarstva postsovetского prostranstva i problema identichnosti: Abkhazia," in: *Kavkazskiy region: puti stabilizatsii*, Rostov State University Press, Rostov-on-Don, 2004, pp. 237-282.

¹² See: A.Iu. Shadzhe, E.A. Sheodzen, *Severokavkazskoe obshchestvo: opyt sistemnogo analiza*, Adyghea State University Press, Maikop, 2004.

¹³ I.S. Karabulatova, Y.N. Ebzeeva, "Tolerance Problems in the Context of the Repressed Caucasians' Ethno-trauma Transformation as 'LIGHT' AND 'DARKNESS'," *Terra Sebus*, No. 9, 2017, pp. 270-278.

¹⁴ See: Yu. Ebzeeva, N. Dubinina, "Discursive Practices of Contemporary Radical Islam in the Countries of the European Union and Eurasian Customs Union," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 18, Issue 2, 2017, pp. 109-116.

In this way, contradictions in the ethnopolitical sphere were gradually piling up to develop into open conflicts—the results of catastrophic disintegration and the falling apart of the Soviet Union.

5. *Ethnopolitical repercussions of migration.* Migration added tension to the already tense situation in the Caucasus: ethnopolitical relationships became even more strained; the same fully applies to the competition on the labor market.¹⁵

Before the early 1990s, people were leaving Daghestan for other parts of the Soviet Union; recently, the relatively quiet republic has been attracting tens of thousands of people from the “hot spots” on the map of the former Soviet Union: Georgia, Azerbaijan, Chechnia and Tajikistan.¹⁶ Today, greater tension should be expected.

People are very much concerned about the highly tangible tension and the explosive ethnopolitical situation. There is ample reason to perceive it as one of the greatest threats to Russia’s further existence.

Table 1

**Assessment of the Importance of Ethnopolitical Conflicts for the Russian State
(in % of the total number of polled)**

Position	Share of the Polled		
	Agree	Disagree	Undecided
Ethnopolitical conflicts are not very dangerous for Russia	13.5	55.6	12.4
Ethnopolitical conflicts might disintegrate the Russian state	62.6	14.2	14.2

Nearly 63% (or two-thirds of the polled) agreed that ethnopolitical conflicts might cause the disintegration of the Russian state; their opponents comprised the meager 14%. Analysts should pay more attention to this minority: strange as it may seem, its opinion is much more balanced from the analytical point of view. We can surmise that the bigger part of the minority meant to say that national conflicts were not that important: they were used as instruments, when dealing with other, less obvious problems.

The public opinion polls revealed that a bigger part of the local people believes that the ethnopolitical conflicts are stirred up by the local and central political elites for the purposes of their own.¹⁷

On the whole, the current situation in the Northern Caucasus testifies that the conflicts are rooted in objective contradictions, caused by the course of history and the region’s ethnic development, and that they can be settled only if and when these contradictions are resolved.

¹⁵ See: M. Seidina, I. Karabulotova, Z. Polivara, A. Zinchenko, “A Publicist Discourse of the Islamic Organizations of the Central Federal District of Russia and the Issue of Tolerance,” *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 18, Issue 1, 2017, pp. 109-117.

¹⁶ See: I. Karabulotova, “The Islamic Factor and the Political Processes in Tajikistan,” *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 18, Issue 1, 2017, pp. 118-123; M. Troulis, “The Caucasus in the Post-Cold War Era: From the Soviet Republics to a Crucial Buffer Zone,” *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 18, Issue 1, 2017, pp. 14-24; V.Kh. Akaev, G.B. Vok, *Kavkaz v kontekste geopolitiki*, Glazny, 2006.

¹⁷ See: T.A. Ostrovskaya, I.S. Karabulotova, Z.R. Khachmaytova, S.A. Lyaucheva, G.V. Osipov, “The Discourse of the Russian Elite in the ERA ‘Liquid’ Modernity as a Problem of Ethnic, Social and Cultural Security,” *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol. 6, No. 3, S4, 2015, pp. 147-154.

Discussion

In the last ten years, the number of scholars, interested in the specifics and meaningful features of regional conflicts, has increased. The interest, with which the academic community responded to the conflict-prone situations at the regional level, is explained by the fact that the processes and phenomena that caused conflicts in one region reappear in other regions with similar results. An analysis of scholarly publications has revealed the fact that such scholars as V. Chagilov, I. Kalinkina, A. Doeva, A. Glukhova, D. Dolenko and others,¹⁸ are especially interested in analyzing the essential features, specifics and variants of regional conflicts.

An analysis of an interconnection between the state, territory and population (undertaken by Rudolf Kjellén and others), serves as the foundation for the geopolitical approach, as an essential description of many studies of world-systems. Kjellén invariably pointed out that geopolitics is concentrated on the unity of the state, which helps understand its essence; political geography, on the other hand, studies the way objective natural qualities of a territory influence politics.¹⁹ Geopolitics was interpreted as scholarly analysis of spatial interests and actions of the state. Political geography studied the spatial conditions, in which states existed: sizes, respective location, territorial disagreements, etc. In the mid-twentieth century, political science of the West admitted that the non-state political actors (actors outside sovereignties—corporations, elites, parties and leaders, according to James Rosenau), were playing an increasingly greater role. From that time on, territorial politics was no longer the monopoly of states and interstate unions: it became a fairly complicated interaction of varied actors of different levels. Methodologically, the revised meaning of politics removed the barriers that separated geopolitics from political geography, stirred up a lot of interest in sub-national and local geopolitical factors. An interest in the resource potentials of states that make it influential and powerful (in the military sense, among other things), moved geopolitics outside the frame of political geography and strengthened the economic component of its methodological matrix (N. Kondratiev, F. Braudel and I. Wallerstein). The disintegration of the Soviet Union that buried the bipolar world, reoriented geopolitics toward civilizational factors (R. Collins,²⁰ A. Panarin,²¹ N. Rozov, S. Huntington, and V. Tsimburkiy).

Conclusion

Today, in Russia, we should discuss not only economic and political but also sociocultural, confessional and axiological pluralisms. It seems that the following measures may help us smooth down or remove these contradictions:

- (1) We should accept the fact that there is spatial pluralism and different lifestyles; we should overcome our fear of the ghost of separatism when people talk about federalization. From this point of view, we should bear in mind that democracy lies in accepting not only the

¹⁸ See: V.R. Chagilov, "Politicheskie determinanty ethnoregionalnogo konflikta: teoretiko-metodologicheskie aspekty," in: *Regionalnye konflikty v kontekste globalizatsii i stanovleniia kultury mira*, Collection of scholarly articles, Stavropol State University Press, Moscow, Stavropol, 2006; I.V. Kalinkina, A.N. Doeva, *Regionalnaia konfliktologiya*, Yaroslavl, 2009; A.V. Glukhova, "Politicheskie faktory regionalnoy konfliktologii," in: *Sotsialnye konflikty: ekspertiza, prognozirovaniye, tekhnologiya razresheniya*, Issue 19, *Regionalnaia konfliktologiya. Konfliktogennyye faktory i ikh vzaimodeystvie*, Moscow, 2004; D.V. Dolenko, "Regionalnye konflikty v sovremennoy mirovoy politike," *Sotsialno-politicheskie nauki*, No. 1, 2011.

¹⁹ See: J.R. Kjellén, *Der Staat als Lebensform*, Leipzig, 1917.

²⁰ See: R. Collins, *Macrohistory: Essays in Sociology of the Long Run*, Stanford University Press, 1999, 312 pp.

²¹ See: A.S. Panarin, *Politologiya. O mire politiki na Vostoke i na Zapade*, Universitet, Moscow, 2000.

equality of possibilities but also the chosen methods of life, therefore we should accept the right of the territories, regions, republics and peoples to rely on different methods of production and self-realization.

- (2) The use of force for conflict resolution means that Russia's policies and its politicians are short-sighted: they proved unable to learn the most important lessons of the twentieth century, i.e. that war is no longer an efficient political instrument. The aims that could be achieved by force have become much more easily achieved through economic, technological, scientific and other peaceful methods. The events in Chechnia confirmed that war and military power should not be treated lightly.
- (3) The culture of inter-national communication should be created as the "ethics of inter-national communication."

Differentiated geopolitical methods should be used to settle regional conflicts (in Chechnia, Daghestan and between the Ossetians and Ingushes). In Daghestan, it will be useful to rely on the experience of consociational democracy and territorial cantonization.

In Chechnia, a post-conflict settlement of all aspects of life should be achieved, along with the creation of a new civilian identity. The state should interfere in the conflict between the Ossetians and Ingushes to settle it in the shortest amount of time possible. At the same time, the North Caucasian regional conflicts share the logic of "communicating vessels." To settle them, the state should arrive at a geopolitical strategy at the federal level of decision-making.