

THE CAUCASUS THROUGH THE EURASIAN PRISM

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The Region's Geopolitical Specifics

Historians are convinced that the Caucasus has always been an object of close attention of the European states and Oriental Eurasian empires. Throughout the last twenty centuries, the Roman Empire, Persia, Byzantium, and the Ottoman Empire tried to establish their control over the region. Tamerlane, Genghis Khan, Shah Abbas, and Mamai invaded the Caucasus at different times.¹

The founders of a virtual ethnographic museum pointed out: “The Caucasus is a small part of Eurasia, therefore we cannot but marvel at the variety it displays. Its natural conditions range from subtropical to polar; there are large cities and mountain villages comprising a single house-fortress. Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and numerous other very specific beliefs have been living together there.”²

According to Russian political scientist Alexander Dugin, the Caucasus has been a sphere of strategic rivalry between Russia and the West (the British Empire in the past and the United States today) for three centuries now. Russia was seeking an outlet to the warm seas and the south in order to establish itself in India and the Indian Ocean; Britain, in turn, has been doing its best to stem Russia's southward thrust. The Caucasian wars, Crimean War, and all Russian-Turkish and Russian-Persian wars were caused by these opposing geopolitical movements. At all times, Britain stood opposed to Russia.³

Anatoly Gromyko says the same: “In the last few years the region where, according to Kipling, the Great Game unfolded in the 19th century has undergone amazing changes. In the 19th century, Russia

¹ See: Documents of the Internet forum “Chechenskiy krizis i ‘osobennosti natsional’noy politiki’ na Kavkaze” [<http://www.agentura.ru/Forum/archive2001/3767.html>].

² *Etnograficheskie etiuudy. Narody Kavkaza* [http://www.ethnomuseum.ru/parad/Ethnographic_Etudes/Caucasus/Caucasus_peoples/index.htm].

³ See: A.G. Dugin, *Osnovy geopolitiki*, Arktogeia-tsentr, Moscow, 2000, p. 803 [<http://www.arctogaia.com/public/osnovy-geo/vocabul.htm>].

and Britain were contending for influence in Central Asia. Later, the Caucasus and Central Asia became part of the zone of vital interests, first, of czarist and, later, of Soviet Russia. Britain concentrated on the Middle East and India. The balance looked immutable until the end of the second millennium, which brought surprises. The Great Game was resumed on a planetary scale. New countries appeared on the political map; these developments made the Caspian Basin the key strategic prize and a future source of energy resources. All of a sudden the Central Caucasus (Transcaucasus) and Central Asia, which for a long time existed on the periphery of the world community's attention, developed into a 'multi-layered pie' of local, regional, and global interests. Today, they are viewed as vast 'strait-territories' with dual civilizational orientations where Christianity and Islam, the West and the East, Europe and Asia, Eurasianism and Atlanticism rub shoulders. The region has any number of active neighbors confronted with vitally important issues. In the north, Russia is trying to extract itself from the vicious circle of economic and political upheavals; in the west, Turkey is balancing between a secular regime sitting on bayonets and moderate Islamism; in the east, China is gaining power; and in the south, there is Iran, which overshadows the Persian Gulf...⁷⁴

If we take into account that "the great confrontation between the West and the East rooted for many centuries in fundamental geopolitical law—the tellurocracy-thalassocracy dualism—was manifested as military and political rivalry between two cultural and historical civilizations: democracy and ideocracy,"⁷⁵ we can say that the Caucasian-Caspian region has been, and remains, an epicenter of such "civilizational upheavals." Parvin Darabadi goes on to say that the region, "together with the Arctic Ocean and the Aral Sea basins, forms the Pivotal Area, otherwise called the Heartland, that is, intracontinental Eurasian territories around which geohistorical development is revolving. Historically, its dynamics were closely related to the fact that the Caspian area has been serving for 2,000 years as a meeting place of three super-ethnoses: the Turkic, Slavic, and Aryan-Iranian. In a broader civilizational context, we can say that since the 7th century it was the Christian, Muslim, and partly Buddhist worlds that have been in contact there."⁷⁶

Its geographic location doomed this "borderland" territory to permanent conflicts of a narrow regional and broader nature, which involved extra-regional forces. There is the opinion that at all times the political landscape and local mentality were affected by a tangle of intricate problems. Too often they caused bitter disagreements, bloodshed and wars between the local nations and states. At different times in the past the region was either a buffer zone, which cushioned imperial rivalry, or was part of one or another empire. By a whim of history, the region is populated by ethnoses that belong to different cultural and civilizational, and often hostile, traditions.

Despite its conflict-prone nature, the Caucasus should be regarded as an integral cultural and historical zone populated by nations with common histories, mentalities, and way of life. In the context of the region's "permanent conflict," an idea expressed by Georg Simmel deserves special attention: "Antagonism is much stronger among kindred communities than among alien ones. Mutual hatred of small neighboring states with inevitably similar or even identical ideas of the world, local ties, and interests is often more passionate and irreconcilable than among large nations separated by vast expanses and absolutely alien to each other."⁷⁷

The region's highly varied ethnic and linguistic context is another specific regional trait. In Soviet times this relatively small area of about 440,000 sq km,⁸ sparsely populated by no more than 30 million,⁹ was (and is) home for over 50 peoples using languages of 3 linguistic families.¹⁰ The Georgian, the mountain

⁴ A.A. Gromyko, "Novaia Velikaia igra: Kaspiy stal sredotochiem geopoliticheskikh interesov gosudarstv regionov," *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 20 August, 1998.

⁵ P. Darabadi, "The Caspian Region in Contemporary Geopolitics," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 3 (21), 2003, p. 66.

⁶ Ibidem.

⁷ G. Simmel, *Izbrannoe*, Vol. 2, "Sozertsanie zhizni," Moscow, 1996, p. 505.

⁸ See: *Bol'shaia sovetskaia entsiklopedia*, Vol. 11, Sovetskaia entsiklopedia Publishers, Moscow, 1973, p. 113.

⁹ See: K.S. Gadjiiev, *Geopolitika Kavkaza*, Mezhdunarodnye otnoshenia Publishers, Moscow, 2003, p. 40.

¹⁰ See: *Bol'shaia sovetskaia entsiklopedia*, Vol. 11, p. 116.

peoples of Daghestan, the peoples of the Vainakh and Adighe groups, and some others speak Japhetic, or Caucasian-Iberian languages. The Azeris, Kumyks, Nogais, Karachais, Balkars, and others use languages belonging to the Turkic group of the Altai language family, while Armenians, Ossets, Tats, Talyshes, Mountain Jews, and Kurds speak Indo-European languages.

Any classification being inevitably relative, the region's division suggests two approaches. According to one of them, Russian (Soviet) science divided the Caucasus conquered by the Russian Empire into two parts—the Northern Caucasus and the Transcaucasus, “divided along the Main, or Watershed, Range of the Greater Caucasus.”¹¹ Whereby the whole western extremity of the Greater Caucasus belongs to the Northern Caucasus. From the “viewpoint of physical geography these units cannot be regarded as territorial units.”¹² It was E. Ismailov and Z. Kengerli who offered a different approach, since the Russian (Soviet) pattern no longer applied, “first, because it lost its geopolitical context—Russia's monopoly domination in the Caucasus. Second, this approach relied on the region's incorrectly reflected historical socioeconomic, sociocultural, and ethnic characteristics.”¹³

Being convinced that the Russian approach narrowed down, for no justified reason, the limits of the Caucasian region, Ismailov and Kengerli widened it to cover the northeastern regions of Turkey (Kars, Ardagan, Artvin, Igdyr, etc.) and the northwestern areas of Iran (Eastern and Western Azerbaijan, etc.). They have arrived at the following scheme: the Central Caucasus (Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia); the Northern Caucasus (autonomous republics within the Russian Federation); the Southern Caucasus, divided in turn into the Southwestern Caucasus (the *ilis* of Turkey bordering on Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia), and the Southeastern Caucasus (the northwestern *ostans* of Iran). The authors explain this division by the fact that “for many centuries, before Russia conquered the Caucasus, these regions (the *ilis* and *ostans*.—*Ed.*) were found in the same socioeconomic and ethnocultural area.”¹⁴

Described in the terms of Saul Bernard Cohen, the Caucasus is a shatterbelt of Eurasia of sorts. According to Dugin, this is a zone of “indefiniteness and highly varied orientations, which may be attracted to both the tellurocratic continent and to the thalassocratic sea.”¹⁵ Control over it spells strategic preeminence for any of the global entities of geopolitics.

Strictly speaking, this geopolitical property is responsible for the fact that “from time immemorial the Caucasus has been regarded as one of the key geostrategic regions separating Eastern Europe from the Asian steppes and Christianity from Islam. It served as the barrier between the Byzantine, Ottoman, Persian, and Russian empires and was an arena on which empires clashed and national conflicts flared up. At the same time, the Caucasus, situated at the place where Europe and Asia come together, serves as a handy toehold for those wishing to push further to the Middle East, as well as the Caspian and Black sea basins and the Mediterranean. It connects all these regions.”¹⁶ The area in the southwestern corner of Eurasia, seen as a “very specific region, the meeting place of all the leading world religions, Christianity and Islam in the first place, of the West and the East, Europe and Asia, the North and the South”¹⁷ brings various worlds together, thus betraying its limological nature.

Today, the Caucasus directly borders on the Russian Federation and Ukraine; the Black Sea serves as its border with Bulgaria and Rumania; the Caspian connects it with Central Asia. It borders on Iran and Turkey and through them on the Arab countries. It has access to the Caspian, Black and Azov seas and boasts a ramified transport and communication network.

Among others, the following factors were responsible for bringing the region to the fore at the turn of the 21st century:

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

¹² *Ibidem.*

¹³ E. Ismailov, Z. Kengerli, “O kategorii Kavkaz,” *Doklady Natsional'noy Akademii Nauk Azerbajjana*, No. 5-6, 2002, Elm Publishers, Baku, pp. 292-293.

¹⁴ E. Ismailov, Z. Kengerli, *op. cit.*, p. 293.

¹⁵ A.G. Dugin, *op. cit.*

¹⁶ K.S. Gadjeiev, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

- (1) *The altered global geopolitical configuration.* The Soviet Union's collapse opened the region to "all interested parties." Along with Russia (the U.S.S.R.'s "axis republic") America (in the first place), Turkey, Iran, and Western Europe have already shown their desire to control the region to varying degrees. This is mainly true of the Central Caucasus, since the Northern Caucasus is part of the Russian Federation.
- (2) *Natural resources.* I have already mentioned that in Soviet times the region never betrayed its "conflict-prone nature." As soon as the Soviet Union disappeared from the political map, it betrayed itself in the rivalry of different countries and political forces. This happened because some of the geopolitical entities regard the region as a source of various natural resources and energy fuels.¹⁸ S.E. Cornell is convinced that it is local natural resources which are riveting the attention of the key political and business circles to the Caucasian-Caspian region.¹⁹

The region comes second after Saudi Arabia in terms of its hydrocarbon resources. The explored reserves of the Caspian Basin amount to 30 billion barrels of oil and 7 trillion c m of gas. At the current world daily consumption of oil (70 million barrels) and annual consumption of gas (2.2 trillion c m), the region could keep the world supplied with oil for 14 months and with gas for 3 years. The Caspian Basin comes second after the Persian Gulf, yet is richer than the Northern Sea. The figures for the forecasted reserves are even more impressive: according to conservative estimates, there are 100 billion barrels of oil and 10 trillion c m of gas in the area.²⁰ This adds strategic importance to the ability to control the Caucasian-Caspian region. There is a widely shared opinion that today the key role in international relations belongs to states or groups of states that directly control large centers of extraction and production of the strategically important energy resources and the regions across which these resources are transited. These states and groups of states are expected to protect the corresponding infrastructures in order to make transportation absolutely safe. This presupposes that the energy-producing regions should create favorable political conditions in the form of puppet regimes; rivals should be removed, while the territories should be completely controlled.

As a link between the East and the West, the Caucasus is a Eurasian region which will become one of the key entities of world economic relations in the 21st century.²¹ Parvin Darabadi has the following to say in this respect: "Its huge fuel resources have become important geostrategic and geo-economic factors largely shaping world politics and world economy. This became especially clear after the 9/11 events, when powerful tectonic forces were stirred to action. They can radically change the entire geopolitical landscape of Eurasia. In the new century, the geopolitical position of any country will be determined by the level to which it can control fuel and energy resources and means of their transportation."²² The region is also "rich in iron, copper, and chromium ores, Glauber's salt, chlorides, phosphorites, asbestos, etc., as well as biore-sources."²³ We should also bear in mind that "90 percent of black caviar consumed by the world comes from the Caspian."²⁴

- (3) *Geographic location.* The Caucasus' geographic location as a "link" means it is a target of keen interest of all the global geopolitical entities—be they states, military-political blocs, or all manner of confessional-ethnic groups. The limological nature of the region on the southern borders of politically and economically weakened Russia resurfaced as soon as the Soviet Union ceased to

¹⁸ It should be said that since under Soviet power the region's natural riches belonged to the state, no international conflicts over them were possible.

¹⁹ See: S.E. Cornell, "Geopolitics and Strategic Alignments in the Caucasus and Central Asia," *Perceptions. Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. IV, No. 2, June-August 1999.

²⁰ See: A.A. Gromyko, op. cit.

²¹ See: Documents of the Internet forum "Chechensky krizis i 'osobennosti natsional'noy politiki' na Kavkaze".

²² P. Darabadi, op. cit.

²³ K.S. Gadjev, op. cit., p. 44.

²⁴ A.A. Gromyko, op. cit.

exist. This created the opportunity of penetrating the region to further undermine Moscow's influence there and squeeze it out altogether. In the context of Alfred T. Mahan's conceptions, control over the Caucasian-Caspian region is strategically important in terms of implementing the Anaconda Plan.²⁵ This means that the United States is going to penetrate the "shatterbelt" and push Russia out of it.

- (4) *A transit zone.* The region should be regarded as an important crossing for all kinds of transnational transportation systems along the South-North and East-West line. Even the above factors (which do not exhaust the list of all other factors) make it possible to say that for a long time to come the region "will seriously affect both the world economy and interstate relations"²⁶ (until the present unipolar world is replaced with a new world order more acceptable to the most geopolitical entities).

V. Kotilko believes that today the situation in the Caucasus is determined by the following factors: "Specific natural conditions and the still underdeveloped mining of natural resources; the mostly untapped food and recreation, as well as great agricultural potential; the environmental problems; the high risk of ethnic and religious flare-ups; the prolonged impact of regional armed conflicts; the unregulated border conflicts caused by the Soviet Union's disintegration; the consistent efforts of the West and the United States to create and maintain a pro-Western orientation in the Caucasus and Central Asia."²⁷

Gadjiev suggests that the Caucasus should be regarded as a single whole, and that the state, administrative, and ethnic borders inside it should be ignored. He supports his point by saying that there is "a community of close economic, cultural, political, and other ties rooted in the past; common historical destinies, similar standards and behavior stereotypes and specifics of local mentality."²⁸ To better understand regional specifics we should always bear in mind that the region is torn apart by numerous contradictions caused by its natural and geographic conditions, its natural resources, economic activities, transportation infrastructure, and geopolitical specifics.

The Eurasian Idea of the Caucasus

Eurasianism, which preaches the "flourishing complexity" of cultures and nations and criticizes "all sorts of centrism"²⁹ (either civilizational or strictly national), has acquired special importance in the present context. Indeed, according to Prince Nikolai Trubetskoy, "the national question becomes even more complicated because individual nationalities are hostile to each other."³⁰ These words written back in the 1920s are still pertinent today.

When saying that any forms of extremism are especially dangerous in the Caucasus and pointing to the "integrational" nature of Eurasian ideology, Stanislav Derev, presidential candidate at the 2001 elections in Karachaevo-Cherkessia, insisted that "peace in the multinational region should be preserved not only because a bad peace is better than a good dispute, but also because it is the only condition leading to creative interaction among fraternal peoples."³¹

²⁵ It was American General McClellan who first implemented this plan during the American Civil War of 1861-1865. As a result, the enemy territories found themselves strictly blockaded along the seaboard, and the enemy was gradually worn out strategically (see: A.G. Dugin, *Osnovy geopolitiki*, Parts 1 and 2 [<http://www.kprf.ru/library/3651.shtml?print>]).

²⁶ V. Kotilko, "Rossia i Kaspii: geopoliticheskie interesy" [http://www.nasled.ru/prensa/obozrev/N07_00/07_09.HTM].

²⁷ Ibidem.

²⁸ K.S. Gadjiev, op. cit., p. 46.

²⁹ A certain amount of "ideological centrism," in which ideology prevails over economic, ethnic, and other factors, is probably an exception.

³⁰ N.S. Trubetskoy, "O narodakh Kavkaza," in: *Nasledie Chingizkhana*, Agraf Publishers, Moscow, 2000, p. 474.

³¹ I. Maksakov, "Evraziystvo na iuge Rossii: ubezhdenia i somnena. Severokavkazskie lidery o novom techenii v rossiiskoy politike," *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 8 June, 2001.

The classics of Eurasianism, an ideological trend which emerged at the dawn of the 20th century, did not pay particular attention to the Caucasus for the simple reason that it had not yet developed into an independent geopolitical entity and remained a group of frontier territories and a bone of contention for the Eurasian (Persian, Ottoman, and Russian empires) and Western powers. Still, some of their works do contain references to the Caucasus' strategic importance and look at its geography. Pyotr Savitsky described this territory as a "zone that encircles the middle world" (Eurasia) with mountains.³² The classics of Eurasianism viewed the Caucasus as a latitudinal mountain range that confined three "axial" Eurasian plains in the south along with the Crimean Mountains, the Kopetdag, Parapamiz, Hindu-Kush, and main Tien-Shan ranges, and the northern Tibet ranges, In-Shan, in the area of the Great Wall of China."³³

This shows that the classics of Eurasianism regarded the Caucasus as the borderline zone of the Middle World, or the shatterbelt of Eurasia (to borrow the term from S.B. Cohen).

The Central Caucasian Ethnic Groups as Seen by Trubetskoy

Georgians

When talking about the Georgians, the author says that during the February Revolution of 1917 they gained the right to autonomy (at least), which could not be taken away from them. At the same time, said Trubetskoy, this might give rise to Georgian separatism, therefore, he added, every Russian government should oppose it: "If Russia wants to preserve the oil of Baku (deprived of it Russia would hardly be able to keep not only the Transcaucasus, but also the Northern Caucasus under its control), it should prevent Georgia's independence."³⁴ He was convinced that in the context of historical experience it would be impossible to totally ignore Georgia's independence. At the same time, in view of Eurasian interests, it would be impossible to grant it complete independence. For this reason, the classic suggested that the middle road should be chosen; it was very important, he said, to prevent Russophobic sentiments among the Georgians. When criticizing Eurocentrism, Nikolai Trubetskoy pointed out that Georgian nationalism assumes dangerous forms under the influence of Europeanism. From this it followed, according to Trubetskoy, that the Georgian question could be correctly resolved in the context of genuine Georgian nationalism³⁵ as a special form of Eurasian ideology.

Azerbaijanians

Their numerical strength made the Azerbaijanians the most important element of the Central Caucasus. Trubetskoy pointed out that they were more consistent than their Caucasian neighbors in their Russophobia because of their specific ethnic and linguistic features and their ethnogenesis.³⁶

³² P.N. Savitsky, *Geograficheskie i geopoliticheskie osnovy Evraziystva. Kontinent Evrazia*, Agraf Publishers, Moscow, 1997, pp. 298-299.

³³ *Ibidem*.

³⁴ N.S. Trubetskoy, *op. cit.*, pp. 472-473.

³⁵ On the Eurasian opinion about true and false nationalism see: N.S. Trubetskoy, "Ob istinnom i lozhnom natsionalizme," in: *Nasledie Chingizkhana*, pp. 103-117.

³⁶ It should be pointed out here that on the eve of the Soviet Union's collapse, the Azerbaijanians were one of the few Soviet ethnic groups that remained loyal to Moscow. Trubetskoy's opinion expressed early in the 20th century and Lev Gumilev's theory of ethnogenesis suggest that since the beginning of the 20th century the Azerbaijanians, as an ethnolinguistic group, have changed considerably.

In Azerbaijan, Russophobia is accompanied by Turkophilia fed by pan-Islamist and pan-Turanist ideas. Because of their economic potential (oil, silk, and cotton) and because it was highly important to integrate them into united Eurasia, wrote Trubetskoy, it was also very important to prevent their separation from Russia. Under pressure from objective reality, he had to admit that the Azeris should be granted a certain amount of independence within the Eurasian integration processes. Being aware that a dialog was desirable and necessary, Prince Trubetskoy pointed out that a “national Azerbaijanian form of Eurasianism” was of prime importance. He saw Shi‘ism as an alternative to pan-Turkism and pan-Islamism.

Armenians

Trubetskoy said that in view of the well-known circumstances (the common border with Turkey and Azerbaijan, both being Muslim states, and the far from simple relations with Georgia to mention a few), the Armenians have always sided with Russia (irrespective of the nature of the Russian government) and would continue to do this in future. This made Armenian separatism next to impossible. He added that placing stakes on the Armenians held no promise: despite their economic might and their total control over the Transcaucasian economy, they were basically a parasitic nation with a slavish mentality. They were not liked by their neighbors, and even hated throughout the Caucasus. Those who placed their stakes on them would attract similar dislike and hatred.³⁷

His opinion is practically identical to what writer Vassili Velichko, “an expert in Caucasian affairs,” had to say: “From time immemorial, there has been a bad opinion about the Armenians. It was obviously justified, since otherwise this opinion would not have appeared among different nations at different times.”³⁸ To support his thesis that “placing stakes on the Armenians held no promise,” Trubetskoy referred to the Russian pre-revolutionary policies which, he insisted, “left Russians alone with the Armenians, all the other Transcaucasian nationalities being against them.”³⁹ He offered his opinion that to a certain extent the Armenian question was an international issue, therefore the Russian government should coordinate its relations with the Armenians in the Caucasus with Russia’s relations with Turkey.

* * *

The present geopolitical meandering in the Central Caucasus is amazingly similar to what Prince Trubetskoy had to say: the three national problems of the Transcaucasus (Georgian, Azerbaijanian, and Armenian) are indeed intertwined with foreign policies.

In summing up, Trubetskoy said that being aware that Georgian independence would make it possible to turn it into a satellite of the West in the Eurasian “shatterbelt,” the Western powers were doomed to “intrigues in Georgia.” The “inevitability” of this forced Trubetskoy to point out that a pro-Western orientation among the Armenians was undesirable, as well as additional prerequisites of Western expansion in the Central Caucasus. At the same time, said he, placing stakes on the Armenians alone “would create a Turkophilic orientation among the Azeris and Russophobic sentiments among the Georgians.”⁴⁰

The “first Eurasian” countered the imperial “divide and rule” conception by saying that it did not apply in situations in which state power wished to create an organism designed to work together. It was

³⁷ See: N.S. Trubetskoy, “O narodakh Kavkaza,” p. 472.

³⁸ V.L. Velichko, *Kavkaz. Russkoe delo i mezhduplemennye voprosy*, Elm Publishers, Baku, 1990, p. 64.

³⁹ N.S. Trubetskoy, “O narodakh Kavkaza,” p. 472.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 474.

for this reason, said he, that disagreements and potential conflicts between Caucasian nationalities should be played down. To prevent their separation, all the psychological factors behind separatist sentiments should be taken into account. His forecast about the effects of disintegration within the Eurasian continent was amazingly exact. He wrote that the ordinary people were not nurturing “separatist sentiments” and believed that it was the local intellectuals who supported separatism. He pointed out, at the same time, that these people were mainly driven by the principle: “better first in the village than last in a city.” He spared no sarcasm when speaking about this sort of separatism: “The minister of a newly declared republic does what the bureaucrat of the old gubernia was doing before him,”⁴¹ yet “it is much nicer to be called a minister.”

The Caucasus as Seen by the Neo-Eurasians

For the objective reasons described above neo-Eurasianism pays much more attention to the place and geopolitical role of the entire region, and the Central Caucasus in particular. The territory has left the sphere of Russia’s direct control (which it exercised within the Soviet Union when all other geopolitical entities refrained from “claiming the right of control” over the region).

Collapse of the bipolar world opened another stage in the re-division of the world on a global scale. According to Ken Jowitt, the world has re-entered the Genesis Age and is moving away from its centralized and rigidly organized state, when it was hysterically intent on keeping its frontiers closed, toward a new one, which can be described as vague and universally confusing.⁴² The re-division of the world affected the Caucasus. This created the need for a new geopolitical strategy toward the region in order to oppose the Western, or to be more exact, American one.

The geopolitical design of neo-Eurasianism is found in Alexander Dugin’s so-called “syncretic” conception of neo-Eurasianism as the most “geopolitically oriented” among all other contemporary interpretations of the term. Other neo-Eurasian trends are mostly engaged in developing and broadening the civilizational, cultural, and historical aspects of the classical doctrine.⁴³

When writing about Dugin’s fundamental work *Osnovy geopolitiki* (The Fundamentals of Geopolitics), in which the author presented, among others, his own “neo-Eurasian” geopolitical strategy in the Caucasus, A. Tsygankov describes it as “the response of the most radical- and conservative-minded part of Russian society to the problems of Russia in Eurasia.”⁴⁴ In his definitive work Dugin, who is the leader of the most politically active trend of neo-Eurasianism, has pointed out that any contemporary Eurasian strategy in the Caucasus should take into account the general geopolitical context there.

He believes that the two types of separatism existing in the Caucasus today are specific features of the present-day geopolitical situation. One of them is national-separatism, which is rooted in autochthonous considerations and oriented toward a non-Western, or “traditional,” development course⁴⁵ and hostile to any forms of “universalism.” As a rule, the author goes on to write, it is supported by Islamic fundamentalists (either Sufi or Shi’a) who obviously sympathize with Iran. The second type is Caucasian Muslim separatism oriented toward the West, Saudi Arabia, and official

⁴¹ See: Ibidem.

⁴² See: *Zeitschrift für Sociologie*, June 1994, p. 183.

⁴³ For more detail, see my work “K voprosu o spetsifike neoevraziystva,” in: *Tezisy nauchnoy konferentsii dlia dissertantov i aspirantov, organizovannoy v Akademii gosudarstvennogo upravleniya pri Prezidente Azerbajjanskoy Respubliki*, Chashyo’lu Publishers, Baku, 2004.

⁴⁴ A.P. Tsygankov, “Mastering Space in Eurasia: Russian Geopolitical Thinking after the Soviet Break-Up (review essay),” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 1, 2003 [http://bss.sfsu.edu/tsygankov/Research/RusEurasPap.htm].

⁴⁵ See: A.G. Dugin, op. cit., p. 809.

Turkey; its moralist Sunni “Wahhabism” could coexist with the liberal-democratic and openly Atlanticist preferences.

Today, according to Dugin, we are witnessing the active removal of the old model of influence and control, which creates the need for a new one. Along with the traditional methodology of encouraging pro-Russian sentiments among the elites and playing on domestic contradictions, the new model should take into account the new situation created by the two types of separatism. In the long term, the “tellurian civilization” may profit from the first type. The second cannot be used either in the short or the long term. Since the contradictions between Eurasianism and Atlanticism cannot be removed, Dugin offers a “flexible strategy,” which will in the future make use of the pro-Iranian “fundamentalists” (who are today opposed to Russia as the axis of unified Eurasia, according to Dugin).

The founder of the syncretic conception of neo-Eurasianism believes that the three independent Caucasian republics are important elements of the region’s geopolitical picture.⁴⁶ Their concise geopolitical descriptions make interesting reading especially when compared with what Trubetskoy had to say in his time. “Christian Armenia, having started with the pro-Atlantic policy of ‘independence from Moscow’ and having reproduced the history of the early 20th century when Armenians turned to the ‘white’ Atlanticist Entente instead of Bolshevik Moscow, rapidly realized its geopolitical vulnerability: Islamic neighbors, no access to the sea, and no efficient and safe transportation routes. It took an obviously pro-Moscow strategic position. It is actively developing its ties with Iran very much in line with the general anti-Atlanticist conception of the Moscow-Tehran axis.”⁴⁷

Dugin recognizes that the West is strengthening its position in Georgia, yet he is convinced that over time “the religious-topographic reflection” in Georgia will come to the fore to create recognition of the “need of an alliance with Eurasia.”

Azerbaijan presents a more difficult problem. When anti-Moscow passions were raging in Georgia and Armenia, it remained more “pro-Soviet” and more “pro-Moscow” than its neighbors. Today, it is mainly U.S.-oriented. Wahhabism is poorly developed there because the local population is Shi’a Muslim; an Atlantic orientation is maintained through Ankara’s political and economic presence and thanks to a certain amount of ethnic kinship with Turkey. Relations with Iran are strained because of the Southern Azerbaijan issue. The local press regularly raises the question of the rights of Azerbaijanians in Iran.

C o n c l u s i o n

The Soviet Union’s collapse launched the next stage in the division of the world, in which the Caucasus was also involved. For historical reasons it became a geopolitical “stumbling block” once more. Today, there is no stabilization in sight; at least it will not come before the Central Caucasian countries finally choose their geopolitical orientation or, rather, not before it is chosen for them by the main global and regional geopolitical players and before Russia establishes law and order in the Northern Caucasus. And it can only do this by curtailing everything the destabilizing groups (encouraged by certain circles abroad and inside Russia) are doing with the help of domestic and foreign centers of power.

⁴⁶ See: *Ibid.*, p. 807.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 808.