

ADAPTATION OF SOUTH CAUCASIAN IMMIGRANTS IN MODERN-DAY SWITZERLAND

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ABSTRACT

The article examines the main aspects of the adjustment of political and work immigrants from the South Caucasus (Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan) who settled in Switzerland in the 1990s and 2000s. Field ethnographic materials were collected in 2018-2019. In the course of the study, the peculiarities of the perception of the culture, lifestyle, and the value system of the Swiss were analyzed. Separately, the author examined the types of immigrants' employment in the new country. The article's main focus is the age factor in the adjustment and integration processes.

The study also addresses the problems of the preservation of Caucasian cultures and languages under the conditions of immigration and the formation of communication environments for South Caucasians in Switzerland. The author concludes that the South Caucasian immigrants are united by professional and social criteria rather than ethnic kinship. The adults adapt to the new conditions, and the youth integrates and acquires a Swiss identity. Elements of Caucasian cultures, languages and environment are gradually being lost in Switzerland.

KEYWORDS: *adaptation, Georgians, Armenians, Azerbaijanis, immigration, Switzerland, culture, language, traditions, Christianity.*

Introduction

Switzerland is a country with a rapidly developing economy, whose financial security attracts people from all over the world. The number of people wishing to emigrate to the country exceeds its capacity. Also, Switzerland was the first European country to link the level of immigration with the need to preserve the Swiss identity, i.e. immigration should not increase to a level where foreign

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cultures begin to “engulf” the Swiss culture. In this article, we plan to analyze the main trends in the adjustment of South Caucasians (Georgians, Armenians, and Azerbaijanis) to the Swiss culture, lifestyle, etc. The article was based on two types of sources: published (newspaper) material and field ethnographic materials collected by the author in 2018-2019. We conducted in-depth polls among 45 South Caucasians: Azerbaijanis, Armenians, and Georgians. (age: 10 to 60, approximately equal numbers of men and women). All respondents arrived in the country 10-20 years ago or more. They have official papers that allow them to reside in Switzerland, and have a job and a steady income. In addition to surveys of immigrants, we interviewed five workers of Swiss social and educational structures that are associated with immigrants, specifically, employees of the Office for Professional Employment of Refugees (Neuchâtel canton) and school teachers.

The Caucasian immigrant community is not the largest in Switzerland. There was a large wave of Albanian (Muslim) immigrants from Kosovo in Switzerland at one time, as well as Italians, Spaniards and Eastern Europeans (Czechs, Hungarians).¹ In general, Switzerland takes the socio-economic and cultural adaptation of immigrants very seriously. Nevertheless, the South Caucasian immigration remained outside the subject of their study.²

In Switzerland, all immigrants are divided into the political and economic categories. Political immigrants constitute merely 1%, the rest are work migrants.³ Caucasian work migrants (like most Russian migrants) generally come to Switzerland through a system of educational grants for higher education or post-graduate degrees (i.e., obtaining a Ph.D. degree). Many have left the South Caucasian countries or Russia in the 1990s (however, there are also those who left in the 2000s). While receiving an education in Switzerland, many of the students attempt to stay and find a job.⁴ Similarly to the United States, Switzerland actively attracts “brains” to various spheres of its economy. As a rule, work immigrants in Switzerland are young people with excellent academic abilities (including language-learning abilities). In addition, there are rich businessmen immigrants, as well as those who work for the U.N. and other large international organizations based in Geneva. Work immigrants live where they can find employment. They move easily, and often from one canton to another.⁵

In addition to political and work immigrants, Switzerland has a group of *medical immigrants* from the Southern Caucasus who enter the country through the Red Cross (many of them are Georgian or Armenian).⁶ Finally, there is *family immigration*, when Caucasian women marry Swiss men.⁷ For example, in Basel alone, there are about 20 Azerbaijani women who married German Swiss men, whom they met on the Internet.⁸

There are approximately 1,000 Azerbaijanis living in Switzerland.⁹ According to the Georgian Ambassador to Switzerland, there are about 1,000 Georgians in the country.¹⁰ The number of Armenians is greater. Taking into account the “Western” Armenians, i.e. those who did not come from Armenia, but are the descendants of those who came to the country as a result of the Armenian genocide in 1915, there are approximately 5-7 thousand Armenians, of whom about 3 thousand are from Armenia (“Eastern” Armenians).¹¹

¹ Field materials collected by the author. Switzerland (hereafter — FMA), 2018.

² Ibidem.

³ Ibidem.

⁴ Ibidem.

⁵ Ibidem.

⁶ FMA, 2019.

⁷ FMA, 2018.

⁸ FMA, 2019.

⁹ See: N. Kapone, “So Shveytsariy u nas sushchestvuet dialog na vysokom urovne,” available at [https://www.swissinfo.ch/rus].

¹⁰ See: N. Kapone, “Gruzia blagodarna Shveytsarii za podderzhku,” 7 August, 2018, available at [ww.swissinfo.ch/rus].

¹¹ FMA, 2019.

Peculiarities of Perception of the Swiss Culture, Lifestyle, Value System by South Caucasian Immigrants

In general, the attitude of the South Caucasians towards Switzerland, its culture and the way of life of its inhabitants is contradictory. On the one hand, Switzerland is an international country, with many immigrants who work in international companies, and on the other hand, the country has numerous intrinsic identities, i.e., Swiss, regional, cantonal, and ethnic identities. This distinguishes Switzerland from other countries, such as Germany, which is a mono-ethnic country.¹² The mosaic of identities in Switzerland is clearly pronounced.

There are certain traits of the Swiss lifestyle, culture and traditions that arouse rejection or which were difficult to get used to, according to our informants.¹³

In Switzerland, life begins early, at 6 am, and in the Southern Caucasus—at 10-12 am. The Swiss are very reserved people. In the Caucasus, neighbors living in the same house or in the same block of private houses always communicate with each other. In Switzerland, however, the neighbors only say hello to each other. An Armenian couple from Erevan, who have lived in Switzerland for over 20 years, built excellent careers in this country, and had two children, speak of Swiss reserved nature:

“The Swiss are very reserved towards everyone, including their own people. Our Swiss colleagues did not invite us to their home or come to visit us. At first, we thought that we were the problem, but then we realized that it was just the way they were. We certainly feel the mental discomfort because of this trait.” Here is an example. When their daughter had to be taken to a hospital, her mother spent all her time with her child, even though she had a job, and next to her lay a Swiss girl whose mother, who did not work, came to visit her very rarely. “According to Caucasian traditions, one should often visit the sick.”¹⁴

Azerbaijani woman A., who has lived with her German Swiss husband in Basel for over 20 years, could not get used to her husband’s closed and uncommunicative nature. As soon as their children grow up, she is planning to return to the Caucasus.¹⁵

In Switzerland, it’s not customary to call people on weekends. An Armenian woman reports:

“My husband (a Swiss) has a brother, but we can’t even call him on a day off. A meeting with him has to be arranged a week in advance. Communication is different in Switzerland—their conversations are superficial and they have more acquaintances than friends. It seems that they simply do not feel the need for deeper relationships between people. From my point of view, my husband has no friends, and many acquaintances. Everyone knows him, and when we go somewhere together, people often stop him, say hello and speak a little. They always maintain a distance, even in interaction. You can’t make noise on the weekends and on weeknights after 8 pm.”¹⁶

The daily life of the Swiss is planned and organized in advance. In the Caucasus, many events and meetings take place “impromptu.” The Swiss society is more manageable than the Caucasian one. People are used to living according to a plan. In the Caucasus, you can come to visit (especially your relatives) without any arrangements at all.¹⁷ If something out of the ordinary happens in the life of a

¹² FMA, 2018.

¹³ Ibidem.

¹⁴ Ibidem.

¹⁵ FMA, 2019.

¹⁶ FMA, 2018.

¹⁷ Ibidem.

Swiss person, they are lost. Because of the measured life, the Swiss lack resourcefulness. Here are some examples that an Armenian woman married to an Italian Swiss man described to us: “Our suitcase handle broke. My husband decided to throw out the suitcase. I took it and fixed the suitcase myself. We still use it. Another example. There were two kinds of pasta left, one kind needed to be cooked for 8 minutes, and the other—11 minutes. They couldn’t figure out how to cook the two kinds of pasta together. You can start boiling one kind of pasta, and three minutes later, throw in the second kind, then boil everything for 8 minutes. They just can’t do that.”¹⁸

The “properness” of the Swiss. The Swiss love to obey the rules, whether it be traffic rules (pedestrians do not walk on a red light) or other established rules of life. They can “snitch” to the authorities if others do not comply. Here is an example, reported to us by F, a Udi by nationality: “I left the car for 20 minutes on the yellow line (yellow parking is for local residents only). A local resident saw this and immediately reported me to the police, writing a complaint against me. I had to pay a 120-franc fine and 50 francs for the investigation of the case.”¹⁹

The Swiss are very composed and modest in appearance. In the Caucasus, people love brightness, noise, exuberance.²⁰ In Switzerland, the institution of friendship is not valuable. There are only acquaintances. In schools, the class makeup is constantly changing. As soon as the children become friends, they are immediately transferred to other classes, so that there are no close contacts between them. The Swiss society lacks the institution of mutual assistance and respect for elders, which are traditionally a given in the Caucasus.²¹

Certain features of the Swiss way of life, culture and traditions arouse the respect of the South Caucasians in the opinion of our informants. The Swiss work a lot, which is the foundation of the country’s stable economy. All the country’s residents live well. Everyone who is willing to work can find employment and earn money. In the Caucasus, “everything is uncertain.” Caucasians like the punctuality of the Swiss, the precise work of their transportation system, the opportunity to live and work in a country “without bribes,” the chance to achieve great success in their careers and society thanks to their work ethics and abilities. There is a “cultural urbanization” in Switzerland. The authorities do not do anything that is not accepted by the country’s population. The referendum psychology is impressive. In Switzerland, public opinion is always taken into account. Real, rather than formal, local self-government in Switzerland is significantly different from life in the Caucasus. The law prevails in Switzerland. Everything is fair and understandable. Switzerland is not centralized, and every city is self-sufficient. The country is home to many wealthy people who have no need to stand out, so all residents, including immigrants, feel comfortable. Most of the Swiss, according to our informants, are decent and honest people.²²

Our informants also noted similarities that they share with the Swiss: love of freedom, efficiency and the desire to work hard, as well as a mosaic identity. History of Switzerland abounds with a rebellious spirit, which is also characteristic of Caucasian history. There are similarities between the nature of the Caucasus and Switzerland. People in both regions are engaged in winemaking.²³

Some South Caucasians feel closer to the French Swiss, others to the German Swiss. F., a Udi by nationality, prefers to live among the German Swiss: he feels more similar to them. He believes that “the French who live in the French-speaking part of Switzerland are the same as in France, but the German Swiss are different from the Germans in Germany.” German Swiss are conservative,

¹⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁹ Ibidem.

²⁰ Ibidem.

²¹ FMA, 2019.

²² FMA, 2018.

²³ Ibidem.

family values are important to them, they are reserved, they clearly express their identity. In addition, F. believes that despite their reserved nature, they are capable of selfless help.²⁴

The majority of the Caucasian immigrants reside in Switzerland with their families. Some of the couples arrived in Switzerland together. Some women married Europeans (Czechs, Germans, etc.) and came to the country with them or, as we indicated above, married Swiss men.²⁵ Sometimes Caucasians manage to find spouses among fellow compatriots in the immigrant community.

Characteristics of Immigrant Employment

Work immigrants often arrive with the knowledge of one foreign language—English (most often), French or German, and then actively learn the second, and sometimes the third language. Immigrants may obtain an education in a French canton, and find employment in a German canton. This is the norm for Switzerland. Sometimes an immigrant works at an international company, where the main language is English, and lives in a French canton. In this case, he begins to learn French. As a rule, family, political and medical migrants come to Switzerland without knowledge of foreign languages. But they begin to actively learn the language of the canton in which they live. This takes approximately two years.²⁶

Work migrants from the South Caucasus often come to Switzerland with a higher education and continue to study in Switzerland. They often build good careers in the new country and hold steady positions in banks, international organizations and firms, in public and private schools, and universities. Family or political immigrants are usually employed in working professions (maids in hotels, employees in school administrations, security guards, tailors, beauticians, etc.).²⁷ Sometimes the Caucasians' careers are connected with their former homeland, for instance, a Georgian who came to Switzerland at the age of 10 grew up and established a company that exports European automobile tires to Georgia.²⁸ Certain people experience difficulties, for instance, V., a Georgian, worked as a journalist at home.²⁹ Having received the status of a political immigrant in Switzerland, he could not apply for a similarly interesting job without a knowledge of foreign languages, and refused to work as a factory laborer.

Migration Policy and Swiss Identity

On the one hand, the Swiss are interested in foreign culture, ask questions, respect it and ask its bearers to tell them about it. This creates a positive impression for the immigrant. According to our informants, foreign cultures are not pushed into the background in Switzerland, and each nationality is given a place for its culture to exist in the country. Once a year, cantonal authorities hold national

²⁴ Ibidem.

²⁵ Ibidem.

²⁶ Ibidem.

²⁷ Ibidem.

²⁸ Ibidem.

²⁹ Ibidem.

fairs, where different peoples living in a given canton can set up a shop to present national food, demonstrate dances and music, and tell the fair visitors about their cultural specifics. Local authorities pay 200 francs to those who set up such a shop.³⁰

There are elements of cultural tolerance in Swiss schools as well. For instance, the mother of an Armenian boy recalled that when he first came to school, he was called to the blackboard and asked to read something in Armenian during the lesson, so that other children would listen to his language, then they asked him to write the names of other children in Armenian. The child told his mother about it at home, and she remembered this episode. In her opinion, this testifies to the “openness of the Swiss society to other cultures.”³¹

On the other hand, the entire Swiss society and school is aimed at ensuring that an immigrant not only adapts to the living conditions in the new country, but also integrates as much as possible. When an immigrant eventually receives the documents to obtain Swiss citizenship, specific details of his integration play an important role, for example, the participation of a person wishing to become a Swiss citizen in a volunteer movement.³² School occupies a special place in migration policy. It is through the school that the Swiss authorities actively integrate immigrant children into Swiss society.

Age, Adaptation and Integration

Despite the difficulties of adaptation, South Caucasians gradually begin to lead a Swiss lifestyle: skiing in winter and spending the summers hiking in the Alps, cycling, swimming in lakes, traveling around Europe, having lunch and dinner strictly by the clock, participating in volunteer movements, becoming more tolerant of other people and cultures, etc.³³

Special seminars are held for kindergarten teachers and school teachers working in extended-day groups to teach them how to integrate immigrant children. Special “interclasses” are being created in schools, where they work with children of immigrants according to special programs.³⁴ Caucasian immigrants with children have informed us of these facts. V., a Georgian, has a son who came to Neuchâtel at the age of 8, without no knowledge of French, and went to a local school. Sometime later, after his son started attending school, V. met with the teachers and asked how he could help his son to adapt to life in the new country. His teachers answered: “Please don’t interfere. We will do everything ourselves.” Gradually, the boy learned the language, and was completely immersed in the Swiss environment. He had friends of different nationalities in his class: Serb, Spanish, Swiss. For children, the nationality of their friends is no longer important, while common interests are significant. Swiss schools really do everything to ensure that the children of all immigrants adapt to Swiss life. In schools where the Swiss anthem is not even taught, children are taught the norms of behavior in Swiss society (how to cross the street, how to collect garbage, etc.). And the teachers do not say: “these are Swiss rules,” rather, they say: “This is how we do it here.”³⁵ Child psychologists in Switzerland do not advise parents of such children to focus their attention on their national roots, i.e., culture and language. For instance, N., a 10-year old boy born in Lausanne in a Georgian family considers himself Swiss. The boy was offered to attend Georgian language courses. The parents consulted with a psychologist regarding whether to send their child to these courses, and they were ad-

³⁰ FMA, 2019.

³¹ FMA, 2018.

³² Ibidem.

³³ Ibidem.

³⁴ Ibidem.

³⁵ Ibidem.

vised against introducing the boy to the Georgian culture if they plan to continue living in Switzerland.³⁶

In our opinion, the following fact is an important indicator of the integration of South Caucasian children in Switzerland. As a rule, there are several children in an immigrant family, and they tend to speak the titular language of the canton where the family lives among themselves. This fact testifies to the success of children's integration into Swiss society.³⁷ In Switzerland, the children of immigrants from practically all over the world are gradually integrating into the local society and becoming Swiss, since the school does not merely teach, it also shapes a person. Moreover, immigrant parents often find it difficult to adapt, while children adapt and even integrate.³⁸

V., a Georgian, stated that although he has a good relationship with his son, when discussing the boy's future education and work, he is not the one who has clout with him, but the fathers of his Swiss friends, who are better integrated into Swiss life.³⁹ The children acquire a Swiss identity. A 20-year-old Georgian, who has lived in Neuchâtel since the age of 2, considers himself Swiss, while certainly aware of Georgia and his Georgian roots. He stated the following: "I like Georgia, I feel that it's my native culture, but the mentality is already alien to me. My impression of Georgia is that I could not live there. I feel that Georgian and Swiss mentalities are very different. I love Switzerland very much and I love Neuchâtel very much. I feel Swiss."⁴⁰

Our conversations with the parents of South Caucasian children who are successfully integrating into Swiss society, indicate that parents are aware that Switzerland is becoming a homeland for their children. The younger generation of South Caucasian immigrants, in fact, are losing the Armenian, Azerbaijani, Georgian and Caucasian culture. Integration is even easier for children if one of the parents is non-Caucasian.⁴¹ In multinational families, there are two languages in everyday use, i.e., Armenian and German, with English also often being used.

Problem of Caucasian Cultures and Languages

In the context of all of the above, the problem of preserving their Caucasian roots, i.e., languages, traditions and cultures becomes an important and acute problem for children of South Caucasian immigrants integrated into Swiss society. In the course of our surveys, only one family has fully preserved the Armenian language in everyday life (both parents are Armenian). This was achieved by the enormous efforts of the parents, who constantly orient their children towards Armenia, the Armenian culture and language, i.e. they are involved in introducing Armenian culture, language and norms of behavior into their lives.⁴² As a result, their 9 and 11-year old children, felt great when visiting Armenia in 2019 (the family visits often and even thinks of returning to their homeland to help develop its economy⁴³). According to the parents, the Armenian language spoken by their children does not differ from the Armenian language spoken by children in Armenia. But kids do have issues with reading and writing.

³⁶ FMA, 2019.

³⁷ FMA, 2018.

³⁸ FMA, 2018, 2019.

³⁹ FMA, 2018.

⁴⁰ Ibidem.

⁴¹ Ibidem.

⁴² Ibidem.

⁴³ In 2020, the couple did return to Armenia and began to work as economic advisors to the government.

The children's mother stated: "When my son was 3.5 years old, and I came to the kindergarten to get him, he asked me, "Mom, why do you speak Armenian, and not German like everyone else? Let's speak German, like everyone else." I explained to him who we are and what our language is. And then I taught my children a lot—they learned all the Armenian words that were required in all school subjects. Thus, they have a complete vocabulary to speak Armenian and can express their thoughts in this language. But even in this case, our children are somewhat removed from the Armenian culture, for instance, they cannot read Armenian literature."⁴⁴

As indicated above, Caucasian immigrant parents speak their native language at home (if both spouses are Caucasian), but their children, as a rule, quickly switch to interacting between themselves and with their parents in French and German. Therefore, the parents gladly invite their own parents to Switzerland at the earliest opportunity, so that they speak with their grandchildren in their native language. In a family where only one parent is Caucasian, native languages are present in communication, but children can only understand and speak a little. Thus, in a family where the mother is Armenian and the father is Czech, the older boy (6,5 years old) understands and speaks Armenian, while the younger children (5 and 4 years old) only understand the Armenian language. At home, the mother speaks Armenian with the children. The children speak French among themselves (the family lives in a French-speaking canton). They also use French to communicate with their father.⁴⁵

In Switzerland, the state authorities are sometimes willing to pay for the courses in languages of the immigrants. For example, the Basel Department of Education offered to pay for such courses (there were about 40 languages offered).⁴⁶ However, this Basel initiative is an exception rather than the rule. Usually, courses in South Caucasian languages are offered through individual initiative.

Armenian language classes. In 2015, upon the initiative of a young Armenian woman R., who is married to a German Swiss man and has children, Armenian language lessons were organized for Armenian children in Lausanne. Here's what she told us: "I wrote about it on Facebook, and people expressed an interest. The group consisted of 12-13 children, 4-6 years old. Two boys have just arrived from Russia and spoke Russian, but did not speak Armenian at all, and the rest of the students were from Armenia. My children spoke the language well, and my son even knows how to write and read a little. But many of the children knew a lot less. I first found a room at a club near my house (I had to pay for it), then I found an even cheaper one—for 10 francs per lesson (that is, the children paid 1 franc for the room rental). One-hour lessons were held on Sundays. Then the idea arose for another woman to conduct creative arts lessons with the children, make some crafts and communicate in Armenian. The lessons were free. I held out for almost 1.5 years, then I realized that there was no time. It became hard for me. Then I started looking for a replacement, but I couldn't find one."⁴⁷

When R. realized that she herself would no longer be able to continue the Armenian language classes for children in Lausanne, she turned to the Armenian cultural center, which is located at the Armenian church in Geneva. It also offers Armenian language lessons. The church and the center belong to the so-called Western Armenians and it is attended mainly by Swiss-born people. The Armenian language of Western Armenians is somewhat different from that of Eastern Armenians.⁴⁸ R. suggested that the Geneva center create a branch in Lausanne based on the classes she had organized, which would allow to pay the Armenian language teacher. But the management of the center did not support R., which, in the opinion of our informant, is due to the fact that her classes teach the

⁴⁴ FMA, 2018.

⁴⁵ Ibidem.

⁴⁶ FMA, 2019.

⁴⁷ FMA, 2018.

⁴⁸ Ibidem.

Eastern Armenian language variety.⁴⁹ In Zurich, a Western Armenian, having married an Eastern Armenian, also organized Armenian language classes for adults.⁵⁰

Georgian language classes. For Georgian children who grew up in Switzerland, learning the Georgian language is a must, as the language is gradually disappearing from families. N., a 20-year-old Georgian who arrived with his parents as a baby, began to study Georgian at home with his parents. He can speak his native language, but he cannot write or read. His older brother, who came to the country at the age of 10, knows Georgian well. Their younger sister has a much weaker knowledge of Georgian than the middle brother. The elder brother often visits Georgia (he has a business there), and has an opportunity to improve his Georgian language skills. At home, the children speak French to each other, and Georgian to their parents.⁵¹ Another Georgian boy, 16, who came to Neuchâtel at the age of 8, knows everyday Georgian and speaks Georgian with his parents at home (he has no brothers or sisters).⁵²

In 2016, thanks to a private initiative, Georgian language classes for children were organized in Lausanne. P., a Georgian woman, came to Lausanne with her daughter for medical treatment. The girl missed a sense of Georgian community in Lausanne. There are about 20 Georgian families living in Lausanne. Most of them came to Switzerland for treatment. P. found Georgians who wanted to teach their children the Georgian language in a Greek Orthodox school.⁵³ P. found a room for 50 francs a year. The classes were free and took place weekly, on Sundays. A total of 10-12 children attended the courses. The children were divided into groups by their knowledge of the Georgian language, rather than by age.⁵⁴

Most of the Georgian children had some knowledge of the Georgian language. But there were two boys who were born in Lausanne and barely knew the language, except for a few words in Georgian. Moreover, they and their parents did not seek to learn the Georgian language. This has already been mentioned.⁵⁵ The center conducts national dance training. The teacher is a young Georgian who came to Lausanne with three children to treat one of the children for autism.⁵⁶ In addition to teaching the Georgian language, the center conducts celebrations, such as New Year's and birthday parties. The last holiday was Orthodox Easter. The Ambassador of Georgia to Switzerland and a Georgian priest from the Russian Orthodox Church in Geneva attended the Easter holiday. The center hosts exhibitions. Children paint pictures of Georgia, conduct sports activities, walks in the forest and mountains. The center has an excellent selection of books in Georgian published in Georgia.⁵⁷ Swiss and Russian people also come to the celebrations. Georgian language classes are also offered at the University of Zurich.

Azerbaijani language classes. Azerbaijani woman A., married to a German Swiss man, tried to organize an Azerbaijani language class in Basel in 2010, but was unsuccessful. At first, there were few children, but many subsequently joined. Funds were required to rent premises and pay the teacher, since nobody wanted to teach for free.⁵⁸ Recently, a decision was made to organize Azerbaijani language classes on the basis of the Karabakh school at the Azerbaijani Embassy in Bern.⁵⁹ Azerbaijani

⁴⁹ Ibidem.

⁵⁰ Ibidem.

⁵¹ Ibidem.

⁵² Ibidem.

⁵³ FMA, 2019.

⁵⁴ Ibidem.

⁵⁵ Ibidem.

⁵⁶ Ibidem.

⁵⁷ Ibidem.

⁵⁸ Ibidem.

⁵⁹ See: N. Kapone, "So Shveysariye u nas sushchestvuet dialog na vysokom urovne."

jani language, history, national dances and piano will be taught at the school. The Swiss and people of any other nationality can attend the school.⁶⁰

Russian language study options. The use of the Russian language by Caucasian immigrants in Switzerland has its own specifics: adult Caucasians who come to work and study in Switzerland usually know Russian well and use it (in the Russian environment, which they willingly interact with), however, their children, who were small when they arrived in Switzerland, or were born in Switzerland, need to study so many languages that they do not have the time to study Russian. As a rule, South Caucasian children in Switzerland do not know Russian. There are exceptions, i.e., a 20-year-old Georgian who has been studying Russian as a foreign language at the University of Neuchâtel. For many immigrants from Russia, maintaining the use of the Russian language in the younger generation is a serious problem.

Caucasian families in Switzerland generally remain committed to traditional food. At home they prepare their own meals. As we described above, during Basel events, many Caucasians set up their own shops with national food, i.e., Azerbaijanis make pilaf, khash and dolma.⁶¹ Georgians set up a shop with Georgian food (khachapuri) in Yverdon (Neuchâtel canton).⁶²

Interaction Environments of South Caucasians

Swiss Environment

In general, Caucasian immigrants have Swiss acquaintances, most of them colleagues. Caucasian immigrants communicate very little with their neighbors. They can help if needed, but it is not customary in Switzerland.⁶³ For example, an Armenian woman living in the village of L. needed help from the neighbors, namely, to stay with her two children while she went to the hospital with another child. The neighbors responded.⁶⁴ The wife of a Georgian political immigrant, a teacher of the Georgian language, a sociable person by nature, met her Swiss neighbors through her son and began to actively communicate with them.⁶⁵ An Armenian family living in Zurich notes that they have many Swiss acquaintances, but few friends among them. They had one real Swiss friend who, as they were adapting to Swiss society and trying to build their careers, helped the Armenian couple a lot with advice. In their opinion, he is more the exception than the rule. It is curious that his wife is Russian, thus, he may have become more open than a typical German Swiss person due to the influence of his wife.⁶⁶ Once a Swiss friend of the son of a Georgian immigrant decided to spend the night at the residence of a Georgian family. The friend's father came to the Georgian family house to check the conditions where his son would spend the night, and only then allowed him to stay.⁶⁷

There is the Society of Friends of Georgia—Vereinigung der Freunde Georgiens in Zurich, founded on 13 January, 1988. It comprises the people interested in the Georgian language and culture, those who attend Georgian language classes at the University of Zurich; members of the Swiss

⁶⁰ [<https://www.trend.az/azerbaijan/politics/2961612.html>].

⁶¹ FMA, 2019.

⁶² Ibidem.

⁶³ FMA, 2018.

⁶⁴ Ibidem.

⁶⁵ Ibidem.

⁶⁶ Ibidem.

⁶⁷ Ibidem.

Reformed churches, who maintained relations with the Georgian Orthodox Church, which sought connections with Central Europe; members of the anthroposophic movement who sought to encounter the ancient culture and intellectual history of the Caucasus; and, finally, Georgians living in Switzerland.⁶⁸ Note that our Georgian informants from places other than Zurich have not told us about this society and did not participate in its events.

Caucasian Environment

Georgian environment. When describing the Caucasian environment in Switzerland, the following tendency can be noted: the better the South Caucasians have adapted and the more successful their careers in the new country, the less they are drawn to their fellow countrymen. Here is the story of a Georgian from Neuchâtel: “When I first arrived in Switzerland, I began to actively communicate with Georgians who lived in the country. Basically, these were Georgians from big cities—Bern, Basel, Zurich, Geneva. I went to see them, and they came to visit me. But over the years, contacts with Georgians gradually began to weaken.”⁶⁹

This Georgian family began to expand their connections to new social circles. Moreover, our field materials show that there is another Georgian family living in the same city. These families do not communicate, and they do not even know about each other’s existence.

Sometimes Georgians are reluctant to communicate with other Georgians, since many “criminally” oriented Georgians came to Switzerland during Saakashvili’s rule. In the 2010s, Swiss police arrested about 150 Georgians who were involved in theft or addicted to drugs.⁷⁰ Therefore, although there is a sufficient number of Georgians in Switzerland, there is no Georgian environment as such in the country. For 9 years of his stay in the country, our Georgian informant has never been to a Georgian wedding.⁷¹ If immigrants have their documents in order, they gladly visit Georgia and acquaint their children with it. As a rule, this happens once a year, on vacation.⁷² Georgians from the Caucasus also come to visit friends or relatives. At home, they live according to Georgian traditions: have Georgian dance parties at home (young people, especially girls, can dance), prepare Georgian dishes (along with Swiss ones)—khachapuri, satsivi, badrijani.⁷³ Georgian families in Switzerland celebrate Orthodox Christian Christmas and New Year. During family holidays, Georgian music and songs are played. Georgian youth willingly attend these holidays, but are, in fact, fans of Swiss youth bands.⁷⁴

The acquaintance of Georgians with each other, in the absence of a single Georgian center, takes place at the Orthodox Church. As already pointed out above, having decided to organize Georgian language courses for children, Georgian woman P. found Georgians in Orthodox churches: the Greek church in Lausanne and the Russian church in Vevey.⁷⁵ If an immigrant’s residence papers are not in order, they do not want to attract any extra attention and lead a quiet life.⁷⁶

There is no Georgian Orthodox Church in Switzerland, but there is a Georgian priest who serves in the Russian Orthodox Church in Geneva.⁷⁷ Therefore, if they so desire, Georgians visit Russian or

⁶⁸ [<https://www.freunde-georgiens.ch/ueber-uns.html>].

⁶⁹ FMA, 2018.

⁷⁰ Ibidem.

⁷¹ Ibidem.

⁷² Ibidem.

⁷³ Ibidem.

⁷⁴ Ibidem.

⁷⁵ FMA, 2019.

⁷⁶ Ibidem.

⁷⁷ Ibidem.

Greek Orthodox churches. There is an icon of Matrona (a canonized saint of the Russian Orthodox Church) at the home of one Georgian family. The elderly parents of a young Georgian, our informant, have been to the Russian Orthodox Church 2-3 times over the past 10 years⁷⁸ Lausanne Georgians attend the Russian church in Vevey.⁷⁹ Georgian youth who grew up in Switzerland look upon Swiss Catholic and Protestant churches with great approval. If the family is Caucasian-Swiss, then the child is more likely to be christened in a Catholic or Protestant Church than in the Orthodox church (based on the husband's religious affiliation).⁸⁰ But many Swiss people are not religious at all.

Armenian environment. Among the South Caucasians, the Armenian immigrants who came both from Armenia (i.e., Eastern Armenians) and from Turkey (Western Armenians) are the most organized in Switzerland. Three factors contribute to this.

- First of all, it is the Armenian Church of St. Hagop in Geneva,⁸¹ which holds services not only in Geneva, but also conducts outreach masses at Catholic churches throughout Switzerland, for instance, in the small village of Cornaux in the Neuchâtel canton, such a mass is held every last Sunday of the month.⁸² There is an Armenian church in the German part of Switzerland.⁸³ The Armenian diaspora from different countries comes to Armenian services, while Eastern Armenian immigrants rarely attend.⁸⁴ One of our informants, an Eastern Armenian, only once attended an Armenian service in Cornaux at the invitation of her neighbor, a Western Armenian. Her husband is Czech (Catholic) and the children are brought up outside of religion. However, the woman plans to baptize her children in an Armenian church while visiting Erevan. The husband is not against a baptism in the Armenian church. He believes that the Catholic and Armenian churches are both Christian.⁸⁵
- Secondly, it is the establishment of a number of Armenian organizations, clubs, centers, etc. (i.e., the Union of Armenians in Switzerland, the Armenian club in Zurich⁸⁶), where concerts are held with the participation of Armenian artists (even the most famous Armenian in the world Charles Aznavour was a frequent guest of the Swiss Armenians), Armenian culinary evenings and Armenian language classes are organized, etc.
- And finally, it is the fact that Armenians are the most numerous among the South Caucasian immigrants in Switzerland.

It would seem that there is an Armenian environment in Switzerland, but our informants—Eastern Armenians who emigrated from Armenia in the last 20 years, report otherwise. The reasons for that are that the Armenian church and center were created by Western Armenians, who had arrived much earlier, and are mostly attended by them. Eastern Armenians rarely come to the center or the church. Western and Eastern Armenians have their own linguistic characteristics, differences in traditions and customs, as well as social differences (Western Armenians are typically wealthier). Therefore, the Eastern Armenian immigrants do not feel comfortable in the Western Armenian milieu and do not gravitate towards it. Many Eastern Armenians reported that it was difficult for them to communicate with Western Armenians.⁸⁷ Eastern Armenians are oriented towards Armenia: they listen to Armenian radio and watch Armenian TV. There is no unity between Western and Eastern Armenians in Switzer-

⁷⁸ FMA, 2018.

⁷⁹ FMA, 2019.

⁸⁰ Ibidem.

⁸¹ [<http://www.centre-armenien-geneve.ch/eglise-apostolique-armenienne-saint-hagop-geneve.aspx>].

⁸² FMA, 2019.

⁸³ [<http://www.armenische-kirche.ch/>].

⁸⁴ FMA, 2018.

⁸⁵ Ibidem.

⁸⁶ [<http://www.hayastan.ch/> <http://uasdirect.com/>].

⁸⁷ FMA, 2018.

land. But there are also exceptions. R., an Eastern Armenian, a 35-year-old female private school teacher, met another teacher there, a Western Armenian, who, as R. noted, “made her feel like family.”⁸⁸

Eastern Armenians often meet with other Eastern Armenians in Switzerland (there are many of them in Bern, Zurich, Lausanne), but they rarely manage to establish long-term relations. Most often, their social circle comprises relatives (i.e., sisters, one of whom lives in Zurich, and the other not far from the Biel, meet once every two months).⁸⁹ A family of four living in Zurich willingly interacts with the Armenians from Zurich and holds joint cultural events.⁹⁰ Armenian children also interact with other Armenian children.⁹¹ Eastern Armenians have real Armenian friends in Switzerland. Our female Armenian informants cook Armenian dishes, most often pancakes, pies, khachapuri, sometimes dolma and ghapama.⁹²

An Armenian woman, whose husband is Czech, reports: “I do many things as if I still lived in Armenia: women here do little housework, do not cook or do laundry. I do everything at home, I cook, I even made the shish kebab myself (although in Armenia men are the ones who make it). At first, when I started to cook Armenian dishes here, I did not have enough spices, then I managed to adapt. I cook Armenian dishes, and my husband likes them. But I also began to consume more natural food, without spices. A lot of spices are used in Armenia, but here people prefer the natural taste of food.”⁹³

Armenians all over the world have relatives in Armenia who live abroad (3 million people live in Armenia, and there is a total of 10 million Armenians in the world). For Armenians, the preservation of their national roots is of great importance, and they feel and realize that the absence of the Armenian environment in Switzerland is gradually weakening them, they lose their national roots. They see frequent trips to Armenia as a way to resolve this problem.⁹⁴

Azerbaijani environment. Azerbaijanis live in Zurich, Bern, Geneva (work at the U.N.). An Azerbaijani woman A. tried to organize an Azerbaijani center in Basel. She reports on what came of it: “I created the Friends of Azerbaijan center, but it did not work out, since the Azerbaijani immigrant community comprises different types of immigrants: rich work immigrants, businessmen, family (wives of Swiss men), and political immigrants (the poorest). It is difficult to integrate all of them. Work immigrants from Azerbaijan have different political views of Russia and Azerbaijan. There are those who do not want to communicate with their own people at all, since they are afraid of gossip. In order to keep the center functioning, I communicate with Azerbaijanis, with whom I would personally never communicate otherwise. Ethnic affinity is not always important in immigration. It is completely impossible to make friends with many Azerbaijanis. Azerbaijani immigrants have very different views of life.”⁹⁵

A. has been in charge of the center for 10 years, and she would like to pass it on to young people, but she cannot find anyone willing to take over. Azerbaijanis who are now arriving or who have grown up in Switzerland do not want to be engaged in public affairs at all. Recently, the Azerbaijani Cultural Center was registered at the Embassy of Azerbaijan in Bern. Embassy employees actively support Azerbaijani cultural centers.⁹⁶

Basel is home to about 20 Azerbaijani women who married Swiss men. They make up a kind of society, meet and cook jointly.⁹⁷ Azerbaijani woman A., married to a German Swiss man, says: “I

⁸⁸ Ibidem.

⁸⁹ Ibidem.

⁹⁰ Ibidem.

⁹¹ Ibidem.

⁹² Ibidem.

⁹³ Ibidem.

⁹⁴ Ibidem.

⁹⁵ FMA, 2019.

⁹⁶ See: N. Kapone, “So Shveysariyey u nas sushchestvuet dialog na vysokom urovne.”

⁹⁷ FMA, 2019.

organize ‘Azerbaijani’ dinners at home twice a year—in winter and summer. I invite 15-20 Azerbaijani women (not political refugees—my husband does not accept them at all). We cook Azerbaijani dishes: khash (jellied meat) from cow feet—more often in winter, and pilaf and dolma in summer. We bring grape leaves and baklava from Azerbaijan. I make pilaf with dry meat. Azerbaijani children interact with each other at these meetings.”

Other Environments

The Russian community in Switzerland is certainly more numerous than the Caucasian one. Russians engage Caucasians in their community. All the Caucasians of the older and middle generation (including 30-year-olds) who left the Caucasus, have learned Russian in their past, so in Switzerland they willingly communicate with Russian immigrants.⁹⁸ Armenian woman A. is friends with a Russian from Krasnodar. A. believes that it is easier to communicate with Russians, one feels a common cultural past and space.⁹⁹ Besides Armenians, an Armenian couple that lives in Zurich, interacts with Russians and people from Eastern Europe.¹⁰⁰ Caucasian youth in Switzerland often does not know Russian at all.¹⁰¹ Sometimes Caucasians prefer to interact with immigrants from the East, for example, Georgian V. interacts with Kurds from Turkish Kurdistan, whom he considers the most friendly and sociable among the entire population.¹⁰² Azerbaijanis communicate with Brazilian immigrants.¹⁰³ Many successful Caucasian immigrants work for international firms. They have many friends—their colleagues from other countries. Therefore, there is also an international environment in Switzerland.¹⁰⁴

Conclusion

It seems to us that Switzerland, in fact, has become the first country to abandon the idea of cultural tolerance so widespread in Europe in the post-war period and today. The authorities themselves call their policy quite clearly and definitely “the zero-tolerance policy.”¹⁰⁵ South Caucasian immigrants are united by professional and social factors rather than ethnic kinship. Their adaptation to Swiss life is quite successful, despite the dislike for the Swiss. Moreover, their children integrate into the new society and become Swiss. The preservation of their national roots poses a problem for Caucasian immigrants, since elements of the Caucasian cultures, languages and communities in Switzerland are gradually being lost.

⁹⁸ FMA, 2018.

⁹⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁰⁰ Ibidem.

¹⁰¹ Ibidem.

¹⁰² Ibidem.

¹⁰³ FMA, 2019.

¹⁰⁴ FMA, 2018.

¹⁰⁵ T. Girko, “Prokuratura Konfederatsii zainteresovalas Tsentralnym islamskim sovetom,” *Nasha gazeta*, 28 November, 2016.