

ETHNIC RELATIONS

**NUMERICALLY
SMALL NORTH CAUCASIAN PEOPLES
IN THE GLOBALIZED WORLD****Kadirbech DELOKAROV**

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As a highly complicated social and cultural process brimming with contradictions, globalization affects the lives of both large nations and numerically small peoples. Today, the globalization phenomenon reflects first and foremost the scientific and technological development level of human civilization, since information and technology are objective factors that bring the nations of all countries and continents closer in the sphere of economics, politics, finances, etc. For this reason, any nation or people, irrespective of its numerical strength, is involved in the budding global conscience to the extent its scientific and technological advancement allows. I have in mind not only any country's involvement in the worldwide information space, which allows it to promptly receive, process, and translate information, but also its ability to create exclusive information and to be involved in interpreting world processes. Globalization has offered every nation new, and fairly contradictory, possibilities. On the one hand, numerically small peoples have acquired at least a theoretical chance of joining the world network to learn from the achievements of others in various fields and to familiarize themselves with the cultural traditions of other nations. The Internet has offered all numerically small peoples a new vehicle of self-representation: they have an opportunity to present their best achievements in literature, music, fine arts, and other spheres and to bring their cultural ideas and the dynamics of civilizational transformations within the reach of the world community.

The Internet offers another, no less important, opportunity to learn more about expatriates scattered across the world and to establish virtual contacts with at least some of them. This makes it possible to restore a single cultural field, which in the final analysis promotes cultural developments. So far, such opportunities are more theoretical than practical, yet they may develop in the right direction some time in the future.

On the other hand, globalization has created far from simple problems for all peoples and nations, numerically small peoples in particular. It accelerates migration processes throughout the world, causes different nationalities to mix, and blends cultures and tongues—processes that test the viability of all cultures, especially of those, which, for various reasons, cannot protect their identities.

Development is a contradictory process: any nation strives to preserve its most important features and, at the same time, master the achievements of others. This is especially true of nations and peoples closely cooperating in economics, culture, and other spheres. In this way, the identity base becomes broader.

On the whole, closer cooperation encourages mutual penetration of cultures and actualizes the identity issue. The ever-accelerating interpenetration of cultures and traditions suggests that in real history homogeneous national identity is an abstraction rather than reality. Social development is not so much self-reproduction of a nation identical to itself as reproduction of a nation with an ever-developing identity. The factors conducive to this identity are varied and numerous: they range from a dialog of cultures, cooperation aimed at overcoming regional contradictions, conflicts, and wars, and reaching peace accords that bring nations closer together to wider ideas about the nation's identity. The reality of this identity—be it an individual, nation, state, etc.—results from the instinct of self-preservation and the ever-increasing diversity.

An individual or nation with a culture of its own lives and functions in the context of increasingly diverse contacts and dialogs that help to develop identity bases. This is true of the North Caucasian nations as well. Two prominent students of the sociocultural dimensions there, A. Shadje and E. Sheudjen, have written: “The fairly specific sociocultural North Caucasian expanse is a result of historical processes deeply rooted in the time when the Caucasian ethnoses were formed. Each of them has a cultural model of its existence—an idea about the world that conditions man's perception of the world around him.”¹ As part of fluid and changing reality, this world view functions according to its inner laws, yet is open to external factors. This is extremely important for the North Caucasian ethnoses, which are living and creating history in the very specific conditions. For many of them, the years of Soviet power turned out to be difficult ones. Without going into details of this trying period of their history, I would like to say that during the same period they became part of the world culture, and, therefore, of the global world, through the Russian language. Not at all times were they given a chance to develop their own tongues and cultural traditions; not always were they prepared to do this. This caused numerous problems, some of which created tension because of miscalculations by the authorities during the perestroika years and the early stage of the social and economic reforms of the early 1990s.

Today, the situation is still far from simple: the regions are involved in political squabbles at the federal level. The leading political forces of the Russian Federation have not yet reached a consensus; they cannot reach compromises for the sake of Russia's unity and are unwilling to do this. This negatively affects the situation in the regions and endangers the country's future, something what politicians are not always fully aware of. Globalization inevitably leaves its imprint on Russia, a country of abundant natural resources and significant political influence in the region and the world built up during the course of history. The key political structures that seek stronger economic positions in Russia can affect the outcome of the struggle among varied forces along numerous channels ranging from the IMF to immediate support (information, money, etc.) from all sorts of political figures.

¹ A. Shadje, E. Sheudjen, *Severokavkazskoe obshchestvo: opyt systemnogo analiza*, Moscow, Maikop, 2004, p. 165.

The North Caucasian nations have found themselves in a quandary created by the chain of complex social and political transformations of the late 1980s and the first half of the 1990s in the Soviet Union and elsewhere in the world. These changes proved to be a hard test: the local people had to cope with problems at the national, regional, and local levels. Strictly speaking, the way that large nations treat small nations dependent on them shows whether a country's culture is mature enough. After becoming part of a large cultural area (the Russian area in our case), the numerically small North Caucasian peoples, like all other numerically small ethnic groups scattered across the globe, have to share the changing fortunes of the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union and, finally, the Russian Federation. The deep-cutting social and political changes that took place in Russia caused a lot of pain in the Northern Caucasus: amid crises and political storms, the federal authorities tended to ignore the region. In some way, the North Caucasian republics were used as political instruments, which added vehemence to the local religious, ethnic, and political processes.

Today, the country as a whole and the North Caucasian republics in particular have to cope with problems newly created by the fact that Russia has emerged on the global scene and thus attracted the attention of the globalization architects. The problems in Chechnia turned out to be the hardest to resolve. A more or less detailed analysis of them is beyond the scope of my article. Here I shall limit myself to saying that stability in the Northern Caucasus largely depends on stability in Russia as a whole, its advance in the economy and all the other key spheres.

The intelligentsia has at all times served as a link that brought the local cultures together. Aware of many shared features, it helped ethnoses reach mutual understanding and overcome their ethnic limits. It was the intelligentsia that broadened the national culture sphere. At the same time, urban dwellers, the elite of the North Caucasian peoples, left the confines of their traditional culture to function not so much according to its rules as according to the laws of the market and business ethics. For this reason, intellectuals from different republics respond in a similar way, and in line with corporate interests, to the global challenges of the time; they are little concerned with the echo their responses produce among their ethnic groups. This is the entrance price the region has to pay to join the globalized economic expanse. The North Caucasian leaders see globalization not so much as "Americanization" or "Westernization." They perceive it as the highest form of modernization and the triumph of worldwide market rules under local conditions. The language of the market and pursuit of profit are the inevitable companions of modernization all over the world, the Northern Caucasus being no exception.

The results are identical in all republics: more obvious social stratification into the new rich and the destitute, which causes corruption, crime, and builds up social tension. In this respect, the Northern Caucasus differs little from all other regions of the Russian Federation. The social evils, however, are much more pronounced in this part of Russia, since unemployment and unresolved social problems exceed those elsewhere.

The Soviet system brought together the individual and the collective, innovations and traditions in a very strange way. The Soviet educational system and the science and technology based on it made individualism an imperative and stressed the importance of the individual, while the social relations and social institutions that dominated in the cultural sphere insisted on the collective "We." This fairly peculiar "I" and "We" combination is still present in the nation's mentality and the way it interprets the global changes. In fact, it is the contradictory combination of the individual and the collective, innovation and tradition that does not allow the nation to either accept or fully reject the market reforms intimately associated with the ideology of utilitarianism and individualism. While agreeing that "I" as an individual should be respected, the majority, the older generation in particular, cannot accept pragmatic values as moral values of the highest order.

While part of society accepts the market, another part rejects the morality of individualism inherent in market relations. So far, many have not yet discarded the idea of fairness, rather than equal-

ity, as the paradigm of moral preferences. There should be fairness even in inequality. This scale of moral preferences can hardly be called rational, yet it exists and must be reckoned with. It explains why many cultures reject the ideas of “profit” and “gain” as the ultimate goal: they do not correlate well with traditional morality and philosophy.

The above directly or indirectly affects the development dynamics of the North Caucasian peoples. For this reason the numerically small peoples treat globalization as a problem rather than a completely negative or a completely positive factor. Any analysis of the globalization process and the way it affects the fates of numerically small peoples should take account of what is being globalized. Otherwise it will be hard, if this is possible at all, to understand the mutual dependence between globalization and worldwide civilizational dynamics. This analysis should also take account of the way the globalized phenomenon correlates with the values and philosophies of the numerically small peoples of the region and their mentality. Globalization is in fact an attempt to spread neo-liberal ideas and their basic principles—the market, competition, etc.—across the world. This means that anyone wishing to analyze how globalization affects the dynamics of the processes underway in the Northern Caucasus should compare the values of neo-liberalism with the axiological values of the local peoples. Globalization is promoted by American capitalism, which George Soros called “market fundamentalism,” rather than by traditional capitalism. This has given rise to the question: Does contemporary civilization profit from the universal nature of the idea of market fundamentalism? As a universal phenomenon globalization is deprived of national features.

By becoming global, values are inevitably influenced by the cultural traditions within which ideas are adapted to the globalization processes. This creates a contradiction between the urge displayed by TNCs to unify the rules of economic, financial, technological, and other games played in various countries and the nation-states’ desire to protect their interests by resolving all sorts of problems as they see it fit. TNCs prevail in the spheres of information technology and finances and find it much harder to dominate in the economic, political, legal, educational, and cultural spheres. Since the dynamics of creating and disseminating information outstrips man’s ability to grasp information and probe deeper into its most profound meanings and possible effects, the situation becomes far from simple. This is true of contemporary culture as a whole. The trend is fraught with many dangers for the numerically small peoples expected to accept the already broad and broadening information flow as part of their culture, to adapt it to their traditions while preserving their national cultures’ fundamental features.

Fast social, economic, and technological transformations that shift the basic principles on which national identities rest put the identities of the numerically small peoples to a severe test. Globalization intensifies interaction with other, more resilient structures, which give rise to competition and not always adequate conceptions about the meaning of the national, social, and cultural identity.

The fairly complicated social processes underway in the region and external impact make it hard to look for and find new, more general norms. It is equally problematic to go back to national origins, because, first, this involves immense difficulties and, second, because it is interpreted as conservative traditionalism.

For this reason, numerically small nations, in their quest for self-realization, have to navigate between the Scylla of preserving their basic values and the Charybdis of their modernization so as to keep pace with the times and not lose their identity. On the whole, today the identity problem has come to the fore for several reasons. First, the basic values of the nations drawn into intensive globalization are changing. Samuel Huntington is convinced that the crisis of national identity is a common phenomenon of a nationwide nature.² He says that modernization, breakthroughs in economic development, urbanization, and globalization have forced people to re-appraise their identities, to narrow their

² See: S. Huntington, *Kto my? Vyzovy amerikanskoj natsional'noj identichnosti*, Moscow, 2004, p. 36 (S. Huntington, *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 2004).

limits, and to turn them into something much more intimate. National identity has given way to sub-national, group, and religious identities.³

Second, rapid civilizational development and accelerating informatization, which are transforming the world into a global and open entity, have given an edge to the identity problem. The changed roles of space and time and the world that is growing more virtual and dependent on the Internet not only bring peoples closer together, but also pose them difficult questions about their identities. This is quite natural, since more and more often people organize the meanings not around what they do, but around what they are or their own ideas about themselves.⁴

In the case of the former Soviet nations, these problems proved to be especially acute: perestroika launched in the mid-1980s and the radical social and political processes it caused destroyed a great country and put its peoples to a severe test. The authoritarian and mainly closed society, with no historical experience of democratic discussion of fundamental religious, national, and other problems, suddenly found itself absolutely open.

The resultant “draft” caused a shock still felt today. To overcome the negative effects produced by the country’s extreme self-abasement, Russia’s peoples need strategic goals while the country must find its own niche in the globalized world. The “information laundry” destroyed something more than the Soviet symbols—it destroyed a larger part of the fundamental values on which the nation’s self-awareness rested. This led to confusion among people: the radical social and political changes devalued the old identity in the eyes of the majority, but failed to offer a substitute.

This is especially dangerous for the Northern Caucasus with its very specific history, geographic location, and polyethnic and polyconfessional nature. Political squabbles at the federal level, which left the North Caucasian republics to themselves or drew them into a power struggle in the upper echelons, made the situation in one the most difficult and problem-ridden regions of Russia even worse. The separatist forces in the Northern Caucasus, in Chechnia in particular, and abroad seized the chance to build up their influence in the region. The results are well known: the war in Chechnia, the ruined economic potential, the highest unemployment in Russia, and growing nationalist and separatist sentiments. There is another, no less important, side to the process: the people’s growing lack of confidence in the local and regional authorities. This means that most people no longer associate themselves with the state, their confidence in which is being crippled by unfair privatization and corruption.

Extreme stratification has almost destroyed national identity. In the North Caucasian republics, the crisis of individual identity manifested itself as a combined crisis of state, national, and institutional identity. This is the logical outcome expected in any traditional society: once removed from the system of cultural relations that used to provide the individual with his social status, he loses his identity. By the same token, the future of such people as individuals capable of self-expression and self-realization becomes vague. In a traditional society, the individual is firmly tied to his native land and the people around him. He realizes himself through the community, kindred relationships, etc. In other words, the specifics of social existence are formed not so much by the individual “I” as by the collective “We.” To demonstrate their individual characteristics, people need certain social structures, without which they become culturally disoriented and alienated. This explains why people forced to change their ideas about the individual “I” under external pressure, rather than through natural and gradual process, are confronted with numerous difficulties. This process is a contradictory and painful one.

The numerically small nations contribute on a large scale to human culture. I am primarily referring to nations, the numerical strength of which does not allow them to determine civilizational devel-

³ Ibid., p. 37.

⁴ See: M. Castels, “Informatsionnaia epokha,” in: *Ekonomika, obshchestvo i kul'tura*, Moscow, 2000, p. 27. (M. Castels, *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*, Vols. 1-3, Blackwell, Oxford, 1998.)

opment; they are able, however, to affect world developments through their cultural contributions, which add many specific features to worldwide culture. Their role and status attract the close attention of large nations busy competing for influence on a large scale. Throughout their histories the numerically small people have had to reconcile themselves to being objects over which large geostrategic entities fight. They should not only work to preserve their specific and unique nature, but also be aware of the dangers. They can succeed only if they are allowed to develop without losing their uniqueness, culture, language, and traditions.

In fact, smaller nations have certain advantages over large ones. First, they keep away from open or latent rivalry for domination in the world and can concentrate on developing their cultures and resolving their problems. Hendrik Lorentz, Dutch Nobel prize-winner in physics, said at one time that he was happy to belong to a nation too small to blunder grossly.⁵ Victor Hugo was of the same opinion: “The greatness of a people is no more determined by their numbers than the greatness of a man by his height.”

In fact, any assessment is ambivalent and relative; it is methodologically incorrect to compare large and small peoples. Their roles depend on their real contributions to the world’s cultural development.

While analyzing the fates of numerically small nations in the globalization context, we should bear in mind that today the industrially developed and numerically strong nations with advanced science and technology set the globalization rules to promote their own interests. They pay attention to the numerically small nations only as they become objects of transformation or part of global projects. Globalization threatens the future of the numerically small nations in many respects, when they turn out to be a borderland between two or more worlds that have come into contact.

The situation becomes even more complicated when the worlds in contact are burdened with their far from simple past and blunders and still open wounds. The dynamically globalizing world creates less consistent, yet universally imposed rules; traditional moral values and corresponding social institutions lose at least part of their authority. Mobility of ideas and people is increasing; the importance of the state as the foundation of society is decreasing; the state is forced to recognize the growing role of TNCs (IMF, WB, etc.). This limits nation-states when it comes to protecting national interests and, in the final analysis, adds urgency to the national identity issue in the globalization context. Indeed, since everyone is born in one state or another, people come to identify themselves with that state, that nation, and the prevailing cultural values. People live to different extents by the interests of their states, their defeats and victories. The state’s altered role and the fundamental changes of its status cannot but create certain psychological problems for its citizens.

One of the greatest delusions of our day, or perhaps it is a deliberately promoted thesis, ascribes the destruction of the Berlin Wall and the socialist system’s defeat to the West’s superiority not only in economics, science and technology, but also in the cultural sphere. In this context, globalization can be described as “universalization” of the Western cultural values kept together by the ideas of liberal democracy as the final form of human governance.⁶ Francis Fukuyama, who voiced this idea, says that this is leading to the end of history. It seems that globalization is understood as globalization of capitalist relationships based on market fundamentalism, division of powers, and the rule of law. At the same time, the majority of these principles are unrealizable—this is the main problem of the current stage of world history. Indeed, normal democratic governance needs conditions in which society’s material requirements are satisfied, yet we all know that this is increasingly harder to achieve on a global scale. An analysis of the current social and political processes clearly shows that human rights are violated more and more often, and that the state invades private, religious, and other spheres.

⁵ See: H.A. Lorentz, *Starye i novye problemy fiziki*, Moscow, 1970, p. 266.

⁶ See, for example: S. Skirbekk, *Neadekvatnaia kul'tura*, Moscow, 2003.

Obviously, the basic values of liberalism are being distorted as the sphere of globalization widens. Finally, the leading industrialized countries, the principal movers of globalization, are out to overcome the opposition of those who are not ready to embrace the global liberal ideals; in the process they are unceremoniously violating the rights of countries and nations, using force, and unleashing wars. By doing this, they are depriving nations of the right to shape their own future (not to mention violating human rights) and are moving away from the basic liberal principles. The world is obviously entering a new development stage that no longer fits the traditional theoretical constructs. We are watching how a new world is being molded with the help of ad hoc rules.

The concepts of democracy, human rights, open society, etc. that are used to create the new, global world belong to the old categorical system. Obviously, radically changing reality (social, political, and economic relations included) requires new basic concepts and values. The process is not over, which means that the new basic values must receive their finishing touch. We shall have to wait and see what this global world will look like and according to what rules it will function.

The future of the numerically small peoples will depend on the nations themselves, the historical memory of which should be mobilized to oppose the globalization flow, on the one hand, and on a new configuration of the global world, on the other. No matter how things develop, the smaller nations will be always pestered by the question of what conditions are conducive to their survival in the contemporary world?

It seems that a multipolar world in which the forces of all the leading countries are well balanced, which guides itself by international law, and which takes the rights of all nations into account is best suited to the interests of all nations, the numerically small nations included.