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CAUCASIAN DIASPORAS IN UKRAINE

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Geographically, Ukraine is close to the Caucasus, which made contacts between their populations much easier. People moved across the western fringes of the Eurasian steppes or across the sea that separated the Caucasus and the Crimea. At the turn of the first millennium A.D. Armenians (who were mainly traders) had to migrate along one of the arms of the Great Silk Road from Trabzon to the Crimea and then on to Kamenets-Podol'skiy, Lvov, and Western Europe under pressure from the Seljuk Turks, who spread into Asia Minor. Armenians, in turn, settled in compact groups in the Crimea and Western Ukraine; they were especially active in Eastern Crimea (Feodosia and Stary Krym where dozens of mediaeval Armenian churches can still be seen), the Christian principality of Feodoro (in the foothills of the peninsula's western part), and in central and Western Ukraine. In the 13th-17th centuries, there were over 20 Armenian colonies in Western Ukraine with local self-administration granted by the Polish-Lithuanian state.[1]

Under the influence of their Turkic-speaking neighbors, the Armenians living in the Crimean Khanate started using the so-called Armenian-Kypchak language; in the 18th century the local Armenians embraced Catholicism in Rzeczpospolita and, together with the new faith, the Polish language. Practically no de-

[1] See: Ia.R. Dashkevich, *Istoriko-demograficheskoe izuchenie armianskoy migratsii na Ukraine (XI-XVIII vv.),* Riga, 1977.

scendants of this diaspora can be found in Ukraine today: in 1948 they all emigrated to Poland under the treaty on population exchange between the Polish People's Republic and the Soviet Union (according to the Polish 2002 population poll, only 1,100 descendants of this ethnic group remained in Poland). Long before that, in 1779, on the order of Empress Catherine the Great of Russia, the Crimean Armenians (whose ethnic roots were close to those of the Armenians of Western Ukraine) were moved from the Crimea to the area where Rostov-on-Don is found today.

Under the Ottoman Empire, even Georgians, a small group of Turkic-speaking Christian Orthodox Gurjis, lived in the Crimea. During the Christian exodus from the Crimea provoked by Catherine the Great, they, together with the Crimean Greeks, settled on the Azov shores; there they founded the village of Staroignatievka (now in the Donetsk Region). Their Russified descendants lost their Georgian self-identity and regard themselves as Turkic-speaking Greeks.[2] Larger groups of Georgians came together with the Georgian Czar, Vakhtang VI, who immigrated to Russia from the Ottoman Empire in 1724. His retinue was organized into a Hussar company later enlarged to form a regiment. In 1738 they were granted landed possessions in what is now the Poltava Region; about 1,500 Georgians moved to Ukraine from Moscow. This highly Ukrainianized community produced several outstanding personalities, including Prince Nikolai Tsertelev (1790-1869), the founder of Ukrainian folklore studies, and talented sculptor and film director Ivan Kavaleridze (1887-1989).[3]

During the Golden Horde rule, small groups of Adighe (Circassian) origin came to the right bank of the Dnieper and blended with the Zaporozh'e Cossacks. At that time, the Ukrainians were quite favorably inclined toward the newcomers: several times Circassians (the tribe of the Zhene/Zheneevtsy), together with Cossacks under Prince Dmitri Bayda-Vishnevetskiy (?-1563), the founder of the Zaporozhskaia Sech (Cossack republic), marched on Azov held by the Turks. Moreover, in the 16th-18th centuries it was commonly believed in Ukraine that the Adighe-Piatigortsy (who were Orthodox Christians at that time) had Slavic ancestors.

There were practically no contacts with Azerbaijan at that time: it was dominated by Safavid Iran, far removed from Ukraine, rather than by the Ottoman Empire. It was only during Peter the Great's occupation of the Iranian Caspian provinces in the early 18th century that regular Ukrainian Cossack regiments were stationed in Azerbaijan.[4]

The relations between Ukraine and the Caucasus rapidly developed in the 19th century when, thanks to the efforts of the Black Sea, Kuban, and Terek Cossack regiments, bolstered by Ukrainians, Russia finally managed to conquer the Caucasus. As a result, for almost 200 years Ukraine and the Caucasus remained within one state, first called the Russian Empire and then the Soviet Union.

In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, Russia's newly acquired strength gave rise to a wave of pro-Russian sentiments among the Christian population of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans and the Caucasus. Some of the local peoples even moved to the south of Russia (which is Ukraine today). The place of the Nogai Tartars evicted from the Danube and Azov shores was taken by Christian Orthodox Bulgarians, Gagauzes, and Albanians. The Black Sea coastal states received new waves of Caucasian peoples (Armenians and Pontic Greeks, some of whom spoke Greek and some, Turkic tongues). It was this wave that brought back the ethnic groups earlier resettled by Catherine the Great's decree.

According to the 1897 population census in Russia and the 1900 population census in Austria-Hungary, there were 15,500 Armenians, or 0.1 percent of the total population, in the territory now occupied by Ukraine; half of this number (9,400) lived in the Crimea. Like those who had come before them in the Middle Ages, they were mainly urban dwellers: nearly 2,000 of them lived in Simferopol; 2,400 in Feodosia, Stary Krym, and neighboring villages; 800 people in Karasubazar (now Belogorsk); 400 in

[2] See: M.A. Aradjioni, "Kratkiy otchet ob osushchestvlenii Krymskim otdeleniem Instituta vostokovedenia NAN Ukrainy trekhletney programmy kul'tury potomkov krymskikh khristian-grekov Severnogo Priazov'ia," *Etnografia Kryma XIX-XX vv. i sovremennye etnokul'turnye protsessy. Materialy i issledovania,* Simferopol, 2002, pp. 407-413.

[3] See: *Etnonatsional'ni protsesi v Ukraini: istoria ta suchasnist',* ed. by V. Naulka, Kiev, 2001(in Ukrainian).

[4] See: D. Doroshenko, *Naris istorii Ukraini,* Vol. II. Munich, 1966, pp. 165-166 (in Ukrainian).

Armiansk, and the same number in Sevastopol. Up to 50 percent of the Armenians in Feodosia were foreign (probably Turkish) subjects: this diaspora was obviously a relatively recent one. The Russian subjects among the Armenians belonged to the lower middle class; only in Simferopol, Karasubazar, and Feodosia large groups of them belonged to the privileged social groups of merchants, nobles, and the clergy. This structure in which there were practically no peasants set the Armenian diaspora aside from other foreign colonists of southern Ukraine (Germans, Bulgarians, Greeks, Czechs, Estonians and Swedes), who mainly worked in agriculture.[5]

The earliest information about members of North Caucasian peoples living in Ukraine dates back to the 19th century: for some time imam of Chechnia and Daghestan Avar Shamil, who had been taken prisoner, lived in Kiev; and Kosta Khetagurov, an Osset writer and revolutionary, was exiled to Ochakov. On the whole, not many members of the North Caucasian peoples lived in the Tavrida Gubernia in 1897: 28 men and 1 woman; there were over 100 Georgian peasants in Sevastopol probably serving in the local garrison.

The first Assyrian refugees came from the Southern Caucasus to Ukrainian cities during World War I; the majority soon adopted Orthodox Christianity and worked, as a rule, as street cobblers. It should be said that Ukrainians readily accepted Georgians who were Orthodox Christians and found it hard to tolerate Monophysite Armenians. This cannot be explained solely by confessional differences; the Armenians were an endogamous group engaged in trade, a profitable but little respected occupation.

The ethnic structure of Ukraine remained approximately the same in the first half of the 20th century: according to the population censuses of 1921-1926, a considerable number of Armenians (21,100, or 0.1 percent of the total population) lived in the Ukrainian part of the U.S.S.R., Poland, Rumania, and Czechoslovakia. In 1939 the majority of them (13,000) were still living in the Crimea, where they accounted for 1.1 percent of population. Their share among the village population had somewhat increased, yet the majority remained city dwellers. They did not escape Stalin's repressions: in 1922 their churches were robbed of their valuables; and in the 1930s Armenian churches in Melitopol, Lugansk, and other Ukrainian cities were closed. The last functioning Armenian church in Ukraine (in Odessa) was destroyed during World War II.[6]

The post-war population censuses in Ukraine supply much more information about people of Caucasian origin (see Table 1).[7]

The above shows that in 1959 only representatives of the three largest South Caucasian nations lived in Ukraine, as well as Ossets and members of Daghestanian ethnic groups (3,823 people in all). The number of Armenians continued rising, though their share in the total population was never more than 0.1 percent. It should be added that on 24 June, 1944, they were once more evicted from the Crimea on Stalin's order (in 1779, 8,750 people had been moved away from the peninsula under Catherine's decree). The property of mediaeval Armenian monasteries was removed to Erevan. This time, Crimean Armenians and Greeks spent less time in exile than the deported Crimean Tartars. Immediately after Stalin's death Armenians were allowed to go back, yet only a small part of them used this chance. At least the 1959 population census contained no information about large groups of Armenians either in Crimea or Sevastopol.

As before, the Caucasian diaspora remained an urban phenomenon: in 1959, 90 percent of Armenians, 88 percent of Georgians, and 82 percent of Azerbaijanians lived in cities. The diaspora was still taking shape—it still had no firm roots. This is amply testified by the following figures: men predominated in all ethnic groups (87 percent among Azerbaijanians; 83 percent among ethnic groups from Daghestan; 76 percent among Georgians, and 60 percent among Armenians). In addition, a large share

[5] See: *Pervaia vseobshchaia perepis' naselenia Ros imp., 1897*, Vol. XLI, St. Petersburg, 1904.

[6] See: K. Pivovars'ka, "Virmens'ka apostol's'ka tserkva v Ukraini," *Aragats,* No. 12, 2001; No.1, 2002 (in Ukrainian).

[7] See: *Itogi vsesoiuznoy perepisi naselenia 1959 goda. Ukrainskaia SSR,* Moscow, 1963; *Natsional'niy sklad naselenia Ukraini,* Kiev, 1991, Part 1, pp. 4-12 (in Ukrainian); unpublished materials of the 2002 population census of the State Committee for Statistics of Ukraine.

Table 1

Numerical Strength of People of Caucasian Origin in Ukraine

	1959	1970	1979	1989	2001
Armenians	28,024	33,439	38,646	54,200	99,894
Azerbaijanians	6,680	10,769	17,235	36,961	45,176
Georgians	11,574	14,650	16,301	23,540	34,199
Meskhetian Turks				262	9,180
Ossets	3,325	4,554	5,257	6,345	4,834
Lezghians		1,708	2,354	4,810	4,349
Assyrians		2,765	2,991	2,759	3,143
Chechens		939	1,046	1,844	2,877
Kurds +Yezidi Kurds				238	2,808
Darghins		634	595	1,550	1,610
Avars		893	1,211	2,677	1,496
Abkhazians		476	941	990	1,458
Lakhs		574	662	1,035	1,019
Tabasarans		118	300	932	977
Kumyks				868	718
Udins				109	592
Kabardins		554	673	959	473
Ingushes				466	455
Nogais				331	385
Adighes				688	338
Kalmyks				635	325
Balkars				244	206
Circassians				447	199
Karachais				342	190
Population of Ukraine	41,869,046	47,126,517	49,609,333	51,452,034	48,240,902

of the diaspora members described the languages of their nationalities as their native tongues (69 percent of Azerbaijanians and 63 percent of Georgians). These figures look high in comparison with the figure for the old Armenian diaspora (41 percent). At that time both the former and the latter were

scattered across the regions; the population census offers no information about the diaspora's numerical strength by region.[8]

The data of population censuses of 1979 and 1989 showed that people from the Caucasus continued migrating to Ukraine. This can be said of nearly all the other Soviet regions; there were several factors behind this trend: a desire to speed up the process of unification of the multinational population by blending ethnoses in order to create a new historical community of people—the Soviet people; overpopulation in the Caucasus, and geographic proximity of the Caucasus to Ukraine. It was at that time that fairly large ethnic groups of North Caucasian extraction (mainly men) first appeared in our republic; as a result, the number of mixed marriages increased; traditionally, children in such families were registered by their fathers' nationality, yet they were never vehicles of the corresponding ethnocultural traditions. This and the impossibility of acquiring an education in the native tongue outside the historical homeland in a country where Russian predominated are responsible for the noticeable decline in the number of people of Caucasian extraction who could speak their native tongues. Most of them never tried to master the Ukrainian language and satisfied themselves with Russian, which in the Soviet Union was considered the language of inter-ethnic communication.

I have already written that in the latter half of the 20th century the number of Armenians, Azerbaijanians, and Georgians steadily increased. The diasporas became even larger after the Armenian earthquake of 1989 and the Soviet Union's disintegration. Post-Soviet destabilization (the Armenian-Azerbaijanian conflict over Karabakh, the civil war in Georgia, and the conflicts in Abkhazia and North Ossetia) caused considerable migration shifts in the Southern Caucasus. The resultant ethnic tension and economic collapse, together with traditional pendulum migration from overcrowded agrarian areas to Russia and Ukraine, sent even more people to these two republics. According to the 2001-2002 population censuses, the number of Armenians in Russia doubled compared with the last Soviet census of 1989 to reach 1,130,000; and in Ukraine it almost doubled to reach 100,000 people. Today, there are 621,000 Azerbaijanians living in Russia (a two-fold increase); and in Ukraine, 45,000, or a 20 percent increase. The number of Georgians in Russia grew from 130,000 to 198,000, and in Ukraine, to 34,000 (an increase of 1.5-fold).

Together with the titular nations of the newly formed South Caucasian states, their ethnic minorities were also involved in migration. In the last ten years, the number of Azerbaijanian Udins (600) in Ukraine has grown six-fold (in Russia, four-fold to reach the figure of 4,000), and of South Caucasian Yezidi Kurds (2,800) fourteen-fold. Russia experienced a ten-fold increase: there are 20,000 Kurds and 31,000 Yezidi Kurds living there now. Today, the diasporas are larger than the ethnic groups in the historical homelands. For example, according to the 1999 population census in Azerbaijan, there were 4,000 Udins and 13,000 Kurds living in the republic. We should bear in mind that the number of Abkhazians in Ukraine doubled (1,400); several hundreds of Georgian Greek Urums migrated to the Crimea, while recently the demographically stable group of Assyrians has been rapidly growing.

Another fairly closely-knit group of transit migrants of South Caucasian extraction has appeared. I am referring to the Meskhetian Turks (Akhyska) who, prohibited from returning to Georgia, settled in the Northern Caucasus (95,000), in the Mugan steppe of Azerbaijan (43,000) and in the Kherson Region of Ukraine (9,000).

When the Soviet Union fell apart and Ukraine became independent, most people of North Caucasian extraction (unlike those from the Southern Caucasus) went back to their homeland in the Russian Federation or opted for Moscow and Petersburg. The size of the fairly old groups of Ossets and Avars in Ukraine, as well as of groups of Western Caucasian origin dropped considerably. (A group of Osset sportsmen, two of whom, Z. Zazirov and E. Tadeev, won several free-style wrestling champion titles as Ukrainian citizens, was an exception.)

[8] See: *Itogi vsesoiuznoy perepisi naselenia 1959 goda. Ukrainskaia SSR,* pp. 186-194; *Itogi vsesoiuznoy perepisi naselenia 1979 g.,* Vol. IV (Part 1, Book 2), Moscow, 1989, pp. 3-16; unpublished materials of the 2002 population census of the State Committee for Statistics of Ukraine.

The Chechen community was another exception: during the post-Soviet years it reached 2,800 because of the war. With the help of the right-wing Ukrainian parties, the Chechens set up information centers in Odessa and Lvov, while the Mejlis (parliament) of the Crimean Tartars organized summer camps for Chechen children in the Crimea.

It should be added that not all Caucasian diasporas intend to remain in the republic. This is testified, among other things, by that fact that in the predominantly Ukrainian-speaking Central and Western Ukraine, the percentage of children of Caucasian origin in the schools that teach in Russian is higher than could be expected—their families are potentially ready to move to Russia.

Table 2

Linguistic Preferences of Ethnic Groups in Ukraine

Nationality	The share (%) of those who believed their native tongue to be								
	Language of their nationality			Ukrainian			Russian		
	1959	1979	2001	1959	1979	2001	1959	1979	2001
Ukrainians	93.5	89.0	85.2	—	—	—	6.4	10.9	14.8
Russians	98.1	98.6	95.9	1.8	1.3	3.9	—	—	—
Armenians	41.5	38.0	50.4	2.3	2.6	5.8	55.7	59.0	43.2
Azerbaijanians	69.1	60.1	53.0	3.3	3.7	7.1	27.2	36.0	37.6
Georgians	62.1	48.2	36.7	3.1	4.0	8.2	33.5	47.6	54.4

The above shows that only half of the members of the Caucasian diasporas consider the languages of their nationalities their native tongues (this is also typical of other ethnic groups: from 25 percent among the Ossets and Assyrians to 56 percent among the Kurds; the Meskhetian Turks with 89 percent are the only exception). In the last ten years the percentage of those who regarded Armenian as their native tongue greatly increased among the Armenians because of an immense upsurge (an increase of 100 percent) in emigrants from Armenia.

Over 40 percent of the Caucasian migrants have accepted Russian as their native tongue, because they mostly live in the Russian-speaking cities of Eastern and Southern Ukraine. In 2001 there were Armenian communities with a population of over 10,000 each in the Donetsk, Kharkov, and Dnepropetrovsk regions and the Crimea, and communities with over 5,000 people in the Zaporozh'e, Lugansk, and Odessa regions. Azerbaijanian communities with over 5,000 people each were found in the Donetsk, Dnepropetrovsk and Kharkov regions; there are over 7,000 Georgians living in the Donetsk Region; and the Kharkov and Zaporozh'e regions each have 4,000-strong Georgian communities. A similar distribution pattern among the economically developed industrialized territories is typical of the small Caucasian groups as well. Fifty percent of Lezghians live in the Donetsk and Kharkov regions; 50 percent of Abkhazians in the Odessa and Donetsk regions; over 50 percent of Darghins in the Dnepropetrovsk Region; over 30 percent of Assyrians in the Donetsk Region, and 20 percent of Kurds in the Lugansk Region.

These peoples obviously prefer to live in compact groups: new migrants join the already existing communities in the justified hope of getting support from relatives and compatriots when looking for employment and adjusting to the new, preferably Russian-speaking ethnocultural environment. At the same time, a considerable number of mixed marriages assimilate their children into the Ukrainian cultural milieu as well. In the last twenty years the number of Armenians, Azerbaijanians, and Georgians who

regarded Ukrainian as their native tongue doubled. This group is not yet large, but it has already produced several outstanding personalities: People's Artist of Ukraine A. Khostikoev, whose father is an Osset, and an opposition journalist G. Gongadze, the son of a Ukrainian mother and Georgian father, who died a tragic death. The so far low percentage of Ukrainian-speaking people of Caucasian origin is explained by the fact that in the Ukrainian-speaking central and western areas, the population of Caucasian origin is not large.

The ethnocultural situation changed dramatically during perestroika, which gave rise to a wave of ethnic awareness and enthusiasm among the majority of the Soviet nations. In 1991, the Kiev Armenian Society was set up in Ukraine; under a decree of the Catholicos of All Armenians Vazgen I, the Ukrainian eparchy of the Armenian Apostolic Church was restored; it was headed by Archbishop Nathan Oganesian until his transfer to the U.K. in 2001. Today, it is functioning under Grigoris Buniatian. During the post-Soviet period, the eparchy recovered its mediaeval churches of St. Sarkis (with the tombs of the family of famous painter Ivan Aivazovskiy) and of St. Archangels in Feodosia; the old Surb-Khach monastery in Stary Krym, as well as the Church of the St. Virgin Ripsime (1905-1917) in Yalta. The rededication service of the restored Cathedral of the Assumption of the Mother of God (1363) in Lvov in May 2003 was attended by Catholicos of All Armenians Garegin II, speaker of the Armenian parliament A. Khachatrian, and Charles Aznavour, French singer of Armenian extraction. This crowd of dignitaries emphasized the long history of the Armenian presence in Ukraine and the importance of the 100,000-strong diaspora for Armenia. It is active and rich, which has been confirmed by the new Armenian churches built in Odessa, Makeevka, and Kharkov, as well as by chapels in Kiev and Simferopol.

Since 1994 the Armenian and Ukrainian versions of *Aragats* monthly have been published with the financial support of the Ukrainian state. This stability amid the prolonged economic crisis is exceptional, especially compared with the mainly irregular publications of other ethnic minorities in Ukraine. There are branches of the Union of the Armenians of Ukraine in nearly every regional center; there are Sunday schools based on state educational establishments, and folklore ensembles. All national holidays are regularly cerebrated.

The Armenian diaspora in Ukraine demonstrates the same high business activity and has the same influential Armenian lobby in the power structures as other places in the world with large Armenian diasporas. Early in the 1990s, the Party of Economic Revival of the Peninsula, a political organization of local Armenian businessmen, was fairly active in the Crimea. After its defeat at the parliamentary elections in Ukraine, its founders, headed by A. Danilian, emigrated to Karabakh when the political situation in the Crimea had stabilized. In Karabakh they blended into the elite of this unrecognized state. Unanian, who was behind the shooting incident in the Armenian parliament, is also from the Crimea. All of this testifies to the fact that the Ukrainian Armenians are very much involved in what is going on in their historical homeland.

In 2002 four Armenians were elected deputies to the Supreme Rada of Ukraine, a sort of a record among the ethnic minorities. After the elections Roman Balaian, prominent film director from Kiev, ceded his post as President of the Union of the Armenians of Ukraine to people's deputy Nver Mkhitarian, owner of a large construction company Pozdniakizhilbud, which operates in Kiev. The Armenian lobby in Ukraine is following in the footsteps of the Armenian lobbies in Russia and America, though with less spectacular results: so far, relations with Armenia are much less developed than relations with Georgia and Azerbaijan within GUUAM and TRACECA, as well as a number of bilateral agreements in various, including military, spheres.

At the same time, other Caucasian diasporas are much less active; they have established their cultural societies, yet only Georgians and Azerbaijanians opened Sunday schools and are represented in the state structures along with Armenians. The periodicals published by those diasporas appear irregularly and have limited circulation; the communities meet mainly on large state and religious holidays. The Christian Orthodox Georgians, Ossets, and Assyrians have no religious structures of their own in Ukraine and attend local Orthodox churches. The monument to the Georgian soldiers killed in World War II in Kerch, paid for by a local businessman and consecrated by a Georgian clergyman, is the only exception. The Muslims of Caucasian origin living in Ukraine are less active in the religious sphere than the Tartar

and Arab diasporas, the only exception being the Kiev Islamic Cultural Center headed by a Lezghian who maintains active contacts with the local Azerbaijanian community.

All Caucasian ethnic communities are working hard to create a positive image of their nations in the eyes of Ukrainians; they emphasize that mutual cultural contacts go way back; they are doing a lot to translate the best literary works of their national writers into Ukrainian and are striving to establish friendly ethnic relations.

I should say that compared to Russia, the local people in Ukraine are much more tolerant toward Caucasian migrants, there are no racist organizations in our republic. In everyday life, however, there is a certain amount of alienation: it is commonly believed that the Caucasian migrants are all hucksters; people do not like their provocative behavior; the press associates them with organized crime, and people prefer to keep away from them. This widens the gap between these communities and the local people.

On the other hand, the larger part of the Ukrainian elite supports the Caucasian nations seeking greater independence from Russia. This is explained by the traditional support of weak and oppressed nations.

Integration processes are developing in our republic in a favorable atmosphere, which leads us to assume that the Ukrainians will continue living peacefully side by side with the Caucasian communities and will preserve their traditional tolerance for ethnic minorities.