



DEPARTMENT OF BALKAN, SLAVIC AND ORIENTAL STUDIES  
MASTER PROGRAMME IN POLITICS AND ECONOMICS OF CONTEMPORARY  
EASTERN AND SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE

**THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF CONFLICTS AND PEACEFUL  
COEXISTENCE  
IN THE CAUCASUS:  
COMPARING ABKHAZIA, AJARIA, CHECHNYA AND DAGESTAN**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| <b>ABSTRACT</b> .....   | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....   | <b>5</b>  |
| <b>I. THE CAUCASUS</b> .....  | <b>5</b>  |
| 1.1 The Caucasus: identity constructions.....   | 5         |
| 1.2 Case studies: the historical legacy .....   | 8         |
| 1.2.1 Abkhazia.....   | 8         |
| 1.2.2 Ajaria .....  | 9         |
| 1.2.3 Chechnya.....   | 11        |
| 1.2.4 Dagestan .....  | 12        |
| 1.3 Defining the Caucasus as geographical, political and cultural category.....   | 14        |
| 1.4 Identity constructions and otherness: ethnic names, myths and borders.....  | 15        |
| 1.5 Research on the Caucasus: between conflict and security studies .....   | 18        |
| <b>II. FROM ETHNOFEDERALISM TO ETHNONATIONALISM</b> .....   | <b>19</b> |
| <b>III. GEO-POLITICS OF TRANSITION I: POLITICS OF RELIGION, NATIONALISM, AND OTHER SYMBOLIC ANTAGONISMS OVER POWER, CONTROL AND MATERIAL WEALTH</b> |           |
| 1.1 Struggle of elites .....  | 22        |
| 1.2 The role of ethnicity in identity-based conflicts .....   | 26        |
| 1.3 Religious conflicts. Islam: a source of conflict or of stability in the Caucasus?.....  | 28        |
| 1.4 Cultural conflicts.....   | 38        |
| 1.5 Ideological conflicts.....  | 39        |
| 1.6 Perestroika and the collapse of the Soviet Union.....   | 40        |
| 1.7 Globalisation .....   | 41        |
| 1.8 Nationalism and nationalist conflicts .....   | 42        |
| 1.9 Mass trauma as an incentive for conflict.....   | 45        |
| 2.1 Competition for resources as reason for conflict .....  | 46        |
| 2.2 Informal economy .....  | 51        |
| 2.3 Economic hardships .....  | 52        |
| 2.4 Access to weapons: a conflict-facilitator factor .....  | 53        |
| 2.5 Territorial conflicts .....   | 53        |
| <b>IV. GEO-POLITICS OF TRANSITION II: AJARIA AND DAGESTAN. THE WARS THAT DID NOT HAPPEN</b> .....   | <b>54</b> |
| 1.1 Ajaria .....  | 54        |
| 1.2 Dagestan.....   | 56        |
| <b>CONCLUSIONS</b> .....  | <b>57</b> |

**REFERENCES ..... 60**  
**APPENDICES ..... 67**

## **ABSTRACT**

This Master's dissertation will focus on identifying the role of the main factors in generating conflict and peaceful coexistence in North and South Caucasus, with a detailed emphasis placed on the role of both material, political and symbolic factors as sources of conflict or stability in the region. We will pay attention on the major reasons for Dagestan and Ajaria to follow a different path from the neighbouring Chechnya, respectively Abkhazia, in avoiding war. The case studies in focus are Chechnya and Dagestan in the North-East Caucasus, and Ajaria and Abkhazia in the South Caucasus, as opposing models of conflict and peaceful coexistence during and after the transition in the Russian Federation and respectively in Georgia.

**Key words:** *Caucasus; conflicts and peaceful coexistence; Islam; elites struggle; energy resources; ethnofederalism; nationalism and ethnicity*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Soviet ethnofederalism set the basis for ethnic cleavages and, later on, for secessionist movements. At the same time, the shadow economy boom in the last years of the Soviet Union created strong new entrepreneurial elites with a major interest in capturing the state. As a consequence, violent internal conflict and wars erupted in the region between the competing old and new elites. They were often commercial wars with the new ethnic entrepreneurs and entrepreneurs of violence using Islam and nationality as instruments for political mobilisation towards more pragmatic goals.

The dissertation will attempt to identify the role of the main factors in generating conflict or avoiding it in North and South Caucasus, investigating on both material and non-material sources of conflict: ethnic fragmentation, religion, struggle of elites, globalisation, mass trauma, nationalism, as well as energy resources, informal economy and territory. A detailed emphasis will be placed on the role of Islam as politics of religion and of the oil and gas resources as backgrounds for conflict or stability in the region, as well as on the major reasons for Dagestan and Ajaria to follow a different path from the neighbouring Chechnya, respectively Abkhazia, in avoiding war. The case studies in focus are Chechnya and Dagestan in the North-East Caucasus, and Ajaria and Abkhazia in the South Caucasus, as opposing models of conflict and peaceful coexistence in the Russian Federation and respectively in Georgia.

As methodology, the *purpose* of the research is an attempt of explanatory understanding, investigating on the possible multifaced relations between economic, political, and symbolic factors feeding social action, in the framework of a deductive *approach*, testing theory based on literature review. The *strategy* used derives from political anthropology axioms paying attention to an holistic understanding of conflict and peaceful coexistence. We will proceed in a comparative attempt among different case studies of the same geographical, political and cultural area of Caucasus, with regional and local *levels of analysis*.

## **I. THE CAUCASUS**

### **1.1 The Caucasus: identity constructions**

The North and South Caucasus stand for a unique diversity of ethnic groups, languages, historic origins and religious affiliations. While it counts for the greatest density of languages

anywhere on earth (De Wall, 2010), it not only comprises an extreme linguistic, religious and ethnic fragmentation among different groups in the region, but also between the members of the same group. To use Georgia as an example in this sense, one could count for at least three distinct linguistic sub-groups, with Mingrelians and Svans speaking different dialects from Georgian, as well as for the Muslim Ajaris of Georgian origin, different from their ethnic kin of Orthodox confession. Christian Armenians face an even deeper distinction and often historical segregation between adepts of the Romish as opposed to those of the National Church, while the proportion of the Sunnite and Shiite Muslims in Azerbaijan has been shifted according to the balance of power and influence of the Persian and respectively of the Ottoman Empire across history. Dagestan holds the greatest range of ethnic diversity, being populated by more than 100 different ethnic groups, with no titular nation and with none of the main ethnic groups counting for more than 29 percent of the population.

Religion played an essential role in defining and preserving national identities in the region during history and continuing during the post-Soviet era as well. In the South Caucasus, both Georgians and Armenians have placed Christianity at the very core of their national identification, a source of collective identity preserved also with the help of adopting their own alphabets at the end of the fourth century, which allowed for religious texts to be written and transmitted in their own, unique scripts. Islam, on the other hand, was largely adopted by the Azerbaijani Turks under the Persian Shiite influence, allowing them to distinguish themselves from the Sunnite Ottoman Turks with whom they shared the language and the ethnic belonging (De Waal, 2010).

Geography shaped the vast multicultural diversity of the Caucasus, located at the interference of major empires and their influence: Persian, Ottoman, Byzantine, and Tsarist. Yet, as Zürcher (2007: 13) points out, it has also conditioned the underdevelopment of the sociocultural and socioeconomic structures on which statehood is constructed. Due to its high inaccessible mountain area, North Caucasus remained rather isolated and resistant to the external influence of the empires, developing its own code of values, the *adat*, and organisational structures regardless the ethnic, religious or linguistic diversity. The specificity of the North Caucasus model of social organisation persists up to present, with its most relevant example, Chechnya, a society traditionally based on egalitarianism and lack of hierarchies, with the local clans as main actors and owners of power, on equal and deliberative basis. The lack of an hierarchical structure in the Chechen society has often been regarded as one of the main reasons for statehood failure and lack of consensus as a

prerequisite of dialogue with external actors, including Russia (Trenin and Malashenko, 2004).

The role of the clans (*teip*) in the modern Chechen society is challenged by Hughes (2007), who argues that the role of the *teip* as a social basis for politics was lost, as a consequence of the social fragmentation caused by the Russian colonisation, Tsarist and Soviet modernisation, including state policies of industrialisation and secularisation, collectivisation and deportations. Moreover, there is no common understanding of the concept of *teip*, but rather two different types: a *teip* of large-scale imagined territorial and shared-lineage identity, rather symbolic, associated with iconic oral histories of myths of ethnogenesis, and playing no role in state building and politics; and a narrow *teip*, referring to a small-scale social network of extended families related by blood, playing a strong role in political clientelism (Sokirianskaia; *see* Hughes, 2007).

South Caucasus, on the other hand, allowed, due to its geographical settings, a unique and dynamic melange of cultures and influence, as a result of being a transit region for empires, submitted to invasions and migrations.

[The Caucasian culture] ...was common to all the inhabitants of the region. In such a cultural landscape, geographic proximity was more important in defining culture and for relations between the inhabitants than were abstract ideas about ethnicity or ideological conceptions of the “nation” (Zürcher 2007: 15).

As Zürcher (2007) argues, there are close similarities between the cultural landscape in the Caucasus and the Balkans in this matter, with culture binding people rather than nation and ethnicity. Groups use nation and ethnicity more as mythic concepts, embedding myths and symbols preserved and transmitted in order to differentiate themselves from each other, but they lack a so-called modern meaning, in the sense of an institutionalised nation. It was the Soviet Union who first institutionalised the principle of nationality: new states were created along ethnic lines, with the main nationalities being assigned a territory, defined borders, national symbols and elites, military troops, constitutions and, arguably, the right to self-determination from the union. The Soviet model of ethnofederalism supported an artificial creation of new nation-states and encouraged the development of new identities across the new lines. The local elites were empowered, well-established sets of institutions were developed and the manifestation of “national” identity was encouraged through the political and cultural life of the “nations”.

## **1.2 Case studies: the historical legacy**

### ***1.2.1 Abkhazia***

The Abkhaz are a distinct ethnic and linguistic group with a literary language written in the Cyrillic script. According to the 1989 census, 94% of Abkhaz consider Abkhaz to be their primary language, and another 79% consider Russian their second language, with only 3% of Abkhaz claiming a language other than Russian, including Georgian, as their second language (Toft, 2001). The Abkhaz are southern relatives of the Circassians (Adygheans, Cherkess, and Kabardians), connected by a linguistically and culturally transitional group, the Ubykh, thus linguistically and culturally distinct from the Georgians (Colarusso, 1995).

In order to legitimise their autochthonous character in the region, the Abkhazians have recently started to emphasise their descent from the ancient Hattians, the pre-Hittite population of Asia Minor. In this sense, according to the Abkhaz historiography, most of north-eastern Asia Minor was occupied by ancient tribes who were the ancestors of today's Abkhazians, to be pushed later to the highlands by the arrival of the Kartvelians. Moreover, the Abkhazians are attributed with the establishment of the Kingdom of the Abkhazians and the Kartvelians and the leading role played in the 10<sup>th</sup> and the 11<sup>th</sup> centuries (Cheterian, 2008).

Following the Caucasian wars against Tsarist Russia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the mass deportations, and later on as a consequence of the Georgian policies that altered once more the ethnic composition of the region by encouraging an increased migration of Mingrelians to Abkhazia, the Abkhazians became a minority in their own land. According to the 1989 census, 45 percent of the population of Abkhazia were Georgians and only 17 percent Abkhazians (Cheterian, 2008). The demographic balance changed dramatically after the war with Georgia in 1992-1993, Abkhazians gaining a clear majority in the secessionist republic and the Georgians being reduced to 15 percent of the population.

In March 1921, Abkhazia was given the status of an independent Soviet Socialist Republic within the USSR, but was joined with Georgia in a treaty of union later in the year. In 1931, Abkhazia's status was lowered to that of an Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic within Georgia. The Abkhaz leaders demanded Moscow in 1956, 1967 and 1978 to allow Abkhazia's secession from Georgia and its incorporation into Russia (Petersen, 2008).

In the aftermath of the fall of the Soviet Union, Georgia adopted its constitution of 1921, which ignored the autonomous status of Abkhazia. In response, Abkhazia chose not make use of its right to secede, and reinforced its own constitution of 1925 which gave Abkhazia the attributes of a state (Cheterian, 2008) and expressed the wish for a federative

relationship with Georgia (Colarusso, 1995). In December 1990, Vladislav Ardzinba, the leader of the Abkhaz separatists ('president' of Abkhazia until 2005), was elected chairman of the Abkhaz Supreme Soviet, and held separate parliamentary elections for Abkhazia. In March 1991, Abkhazians participated in the Soviet referendum to decide if the USSR as a renewed federation of equal sovereign republics should be preserved, granting Abkhazia equal status to Georgia, a referendum boycotted by the Georgians. In response, Gamsakhurdia, the nationalist president of Georgia, threatened to abolish Abkhaz autonomy (Petersen, 2008), but he backed up when Ardzinba requested Russia's military support. In 1992, the new Georgian president, Eduard Shevardnadze, put an end to the negotiations with the Abkhaz leadership, and full-scale war followed (King, 2001). By 1993, Abkhaz militias, assisted by Russian forces, had pushed back the defeated Georgian troops and a Russian-brokered agreement in May 1994 stated for the deployment of a peacekeeping mission of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Abkhazia achieved de facto independence, while Georgia had to accept Russian troops on its territory and to become a member of the CIS (Toft, 2003).

### ***1.2.2 Ajaria***

Ajaria is located on the Black Sea coast at the border with Turkey, covering an area of about 2,900 square kilometers and having a population of 376,000 people. According to the 2002 census, 93 percent of Ajaria's population is comprised of ethnically Georgians and over half of the population is Muslim. Until the Russian-Turkish War of 1878, Ajaria was part of the Ottoman Empire, and was incorporated into the Russian Empire after the War. In 1922, Ajaria became an Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic and was subordinated to Georgia in 1936 (Ciobanu, 2008).

Ajarians have not been listed as an independent ethnic group in official census since 1926, being officially considered Georgians. The only official census in which they appeared as a defined ethnic category was the one in 1926. Ajarians disappeared from official records, along with other groups: between 1926 and 1939, the number of recorded ethnic groups in the USSR dropped from 192 to 97 (Hoch and Kopeček, 2011). With the Ajarians vanishing from the censuses, there are no official demographic data on them, although it is estimated that in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the number of Ajarians raised to 130,000-160,000 at the end of the Soviet period (Benningsen and Wimbush 1985; *see* Hoch and Kopeček, 2011), with very few Ajarians living outside Ajaria.

Ajaria was incorporated in the Ottoman Empire at the end of the sixteenth century, with the support of the local lords who displayed ambiguous loyalties, sometimes supporting the Georgian kings and other times the Empires that bordered Georgia (Suny, 1994; *see* Pelkmans, 2002).

The conversion of the Ajarians to Islam has been a slow and voluntary process, stretching over several centuries (the widespread conversion to Islam did not take place until the end of the eighteenth century, up to the nineteenth century), and it was stimulated by economic and political factors, such as the possibility to possess land and to pay lower taxes than Christians or to pursue a political careers in the ottoman Empire (Pelkmans, 2002).

The conversion to Islam became more radical in context of the advance of the Russians in the Caucasus and especially their successes in the Russian–Ottoman wars of 1828–1829, with the Muslim *derebeys* (local lords) becoming among the most determined opponents of the Russians during the early wars of the nineteenth century and resulting into violent conflict with their Christian neighbours (Pelkmans, 2002). “The military and the political confrontations with the Russian Empire had the effect that religion became politicized and ethnicized, that is, Islam became a force that motivated inhabitants to continue their struggles against the heathens, the Russians, but - and that should be stressed - also against the Christian Georgians” (Pelkmans, 2002: 9).

During the Tsarist rule, religion was at the centre of the socioeconomic organization in Ajaria (Derlugian, 1995; *see* Pelkmans, 2002), being organised around the mosques and the Islamic schools, *madrassas*, and with strict observance of the *shariah*. The Russian authorities had limited control over the Muslim institutions and the Muslim clergy retained strong relations with Islamic centres in the Ottoman Empire.

In Ajaria, Islam did not prove to be as strong as in the North Caucasus, neither in the Soviet times, nor in the post-Soviet period. It failed to act as a mobilising factor against the Soviet anti-religious policies, as well as against the Georgian measures to impose Christianity in the region, for reason that will be detailed later in this paper when discussing the role of Islam in the conflicts and peaceful coexistence among people living in the Caucasus.

The Communist era eradicated the main factor of Ajarian “otherness” and problematic aspect - namely, political and cultural bonds with Turkey (Hoch and Kopeček, 2011: 8). The reasons can be found in the short-lived and thus superficial Islamisation, occurring only as late as the nineteenth century, despite an Ottoman rule since the sixteenth century, as well as to a successful Soviet policy of assimilation.

### **1.2.3 Chechnya**

Chechnya stretches over 17,300 square kilometres on the Northern slopes of the Caucasus mountains and bordering the Ingushetia to the west, Dagestan to the east and north, the Stavropol Krai and North Ossetia to the northwest and Georgia to the South. According to the 2010 census, it has a population of 1,268,000, out of which 93% are ethnic Chechens. They constitute a concentrated majority, with very low rates of intermarriages with the other groups, be it Russian, Ingush or Avars. The Chechen language belongs to the Nakh branch of the Northeast Caucasian language family, together with Ingush and Bats (Toft, 2003).

The origins of Chechens are still blurred in history. They were first mentioned in a seventh-century Armenian source, under the name *Nakhchamat'ian*. The Russians named them *Okochany*, *Akkintsy* and finally *Chechens*, after the name of a village near Grozny, Chechen-Aul (Tishkov, 1997). The region was first conquered by the Iranian Alars, ancestors of the Ossetians, in the ninth to the twelfth century, who brought Christianity to the Chechen territories. They were followed by the Golden Horde and later by the Turkish and the Persian domination. It was during the Ottoman rule that the Chechens converted to Islam, benefitting from consequent political and economic privileges. In the sixteenth century, the majority of the Chechens were still animists and the conversion to Islam was slow, lasting until the eighteenth century, through the work of the Naqshbandiya Sufi brotherhood (Lemerquier-Quelquejay, 1996).

The Russian Empire occupied the region starting the eighteenth century leading to the 1817-1864 Caucasian wars, a struggle of the North Caucasus people against the Russian domination. Most of the ethnic groups in the region were organised as tribal federations around the local clans, a societal structure that persisted and remained characteristic of Chechen socio-political identity through modern times (Toft, 2003). The most powerful union in the North Caucasus was the one led by the military and spiritual leader Imam Shamil, a historical figure of the North Caucasus struggle against the Tsarist occupation. Following Shamil's defeat in the 1859, Chechnya was completely integrated into the Russian Empire. In 1918 the Chechens were united with other peoples of the North Caucasus in the newly formed Mountain republic (Gorskaia Republika), supporting the Bolsheviks during the civil war, but being submitted to repressive measures from them after the war, including the ban on Islam practices. In 1934, the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) was created, with the Chechens being now officially recognised as a national minority (Toft, 2003). In 1944, Stalin accused the Chechens of collaboration with Nazi Germany and disposed their deportation almost in their entirety to Kazakhstan and Siberia,

where almost one fourth of the Chechens died. Khrushchev allowed their return in 1956, although their lands had been resettled with Russians, Avars, Dargins, Ossetians and Ukrainians.

Chechens displayed an extraordinary rate of preserving their mother tongue, high above the rates of other peoples in the Soviet Union: 97 percent in the rural areas and 99 percent in the urban areas (Toft, 2003). Moreover, they preserved the Islam faith and practices, with very high rates of believers. The Sufi Islam in Chechnya, based on clans and on the traditional societal organisation, rather than on Muslim institutions and mosques banned during Soviet times, helped to preserve the practice of Islam in Chechnya.

On 27 November 1990, the Supreme Soviet of the Chechen-Ingush Republic adopted the declaration on State Sovereignty, omitting, similarly to Tatarstan, the provision to remain within the RSFSR (Hughes, 2007).

#### ***1.2.4 Dagestan***

Dagestan is a federal subject of the Russian Federation, located in the North Caucasus on Russia's southern frontier. It borders Chechnya to the east, the Caspian Sea to the west, Georgia and Azerbaijan to the south, and, to the north, the autonomous republic of Kalmykiya and the Cossack-populated areas of the Stavropol region of the Russian Federation (Yemelianova, 1999). It occupies a territory of 50,300 square kilometres and, according to the 2010 census, it has a population of 2,910,000 inhabitants.

Dagestan is multiethnic and its society is based on a rigidly closed clan structure. Traditionally each clan, or *tukhum*, unites a group of families related to each other by a common mythological male ancestor. The internal life of the clan is regulated by strict patriarchal norms, customary law (*adat*), and *shariat* (Yemelianova, 1999).

It is populated by more than 100 different ethnic groups, each of which has its own culture and speaks a distinctive language incomprehensible to the rest, with none of the groups accounting to more than 30 percent of the total population, making Dagestan a rare case of a country without any ethnic majority. According to the 2010 census, the Avars are the most numerous group (29.4 percent) and the Northeast Caucasians (including Avars, Dargins, Lezgins, Laks and Tabasarans) represent 75 percent of the population of Dagestan. Turkic peoples, Kumyks, Azerbaijanis and Nogais constitute 21 percent and Russians 3.6 percent. Other ethnic groups each account for less than 0.4 percent of the total population.

Dagestan was subjected to a succession of foreign invasions (Yemelianova, 1999). At the end of the first millennium BC it was part of Caucasian Albania and in the third century AD it was conquered by Sassanid Iran. In the seventh and eighth centuries it was invaded by Arabs who brought Islam to Dagestan. The Sunni Islam was established in the sixteenth century, serving as a social and political bond between the numerous small tribes belonging to three main ethnic and linguistic groups (Lemercier-Quelquejay, 1996): the Turkic group (comprising the Kumyks, the Nogais and the Azeris); the Persian-speaking group (comprising the Muslim tats and Jews); and the Ibero-Caucasian group (comprising the Avars, the Dargins, the Laks, the Kaytaks and the Lezgins).

Between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries it comprised a conglomerate of local feudal states, dependent on either Turkey or Iran and the first Cossack strongholds had already been established in northern Dagestan in the sixteenth century. Later on, Russia has increasingly dominated Dagestan since the late eighteenth century and it formally annexed it to the Russian Empire (Yemelianova, 1999), causing a strong local resistance under the flag of Islam.

After the Russian revolution of 1917, a coalition of Dagestanis and Chechens attempted to revive the Islamic state and proclaimed a theocratic North Caucasian Emirate, to be defeated in 1921 by the Bolsheviki. Dagestan became the Dagestan Soviet Socialist Republic of the Russian Federation of the Soviet Union in January 1921.

In 1944, the Chechen-Akkins from the Novolakskii district were deported along with other groups in Central Asia and Siberia, being suspected by Stalin of collaboration with Nazi Germany. Upon their return after 1956, they found their lands occupied by neighbouring peoples, mainly Laks. The territorial and personal disputes aggravated territorial and ethnic tensions between mountain peoples and lowlanders, especially between Avars and Dargins on one side and Kumyks, Cossacks, and Russian peasants on the other side (Yemelianova, 1999). The Soviet national policy from 1920 until the 1960s aimed at consolidating over 30 ethnic groups into several larger nationalities deepened the ethnic tensions. Groups such as the Botlikh, the Andi, the Akhvakhs, the Tsez and about ten other groups were reclassified as Avars between the 1926 and 1939 censuses. The Avars thus formally became the largest ethnic group and they have dominated the political, economic, and military life of Dagestan.

In spite of decades of Soviet atheism Dagestan remained overwhelmingly a Muslim republic, with almost 90 percent of its population adhering to Islam. The repeated attempts of the radical Wahhabis to penetrate the country have been strongly rejected by the Dagestanis and the authorities openly confronted Wahhabism (Yemelianova, 1999).

The collapse of the Soviet Union was not welcomed in Dagestan which tried to hang on to the Soviet political system until 1995, much longer than anywhere else in Russia's autonomies and regions (Yemelianova, 1999). Dagestan avoided the radicalisation of religion and secessionist movements, under the negative impact of the disruptive war in the neighbouring Chechnya and in the context of a lack of natural resources which maintained its close dependency to Moscow, as well as of a highly ethnically fragmented society that prevented any ethnic group to form a majority and to mobilise the masses around it.

### **1.3 Defining the Caucasus as geographical, political and cultural category**

Defining the Caucasus implies several levels of understanding and deconstructing the concept, as geographical, political and cultural category, not to be reduced merely to one, but rather to be seen and approached through the inter-connection of all of them. First, the Caucasus might be described in *geographical* terms, as the territory between the Black, Azov and Caspian Seas, extending from the Kuma-Manych depression in the north to Georgia's and Armenia's borders with Turkey, and Azerbaijan's borders with Iran in the south. The western Caucasus reaches the Elbrus; the central Caucasus lies between the Elbrus and Kazbek mountains; and the eastern Caucasus is located to the east of the Kazbek.

Secondly, the "Caucasus" implies a different distinction between its constituent parts, when analysed from a *geopolitical* point of view. Thus, in the nineteenth century, when Russia consolidated its position in the region and when the Russian system of administration was established, the region was separated into the North Caucasus and the Transcaucasia ("beyond the Caucasus"), an indication of the differences in status between national-territorial entities (Akkieva, 2008). Transcaucasia, on one hand, comprised three union republics (Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia) and five autonomous units: the autonomous republics of Abkhazia, Ajaria and South Ossetia (belonging to Georgia), as well as Nakhichevan autonomous republic and the area of Nagorno-Karabakh (belonging to Azerbaijan). On the other hand, the North Caucasus, belonging to Russia, consisted of the autonomous regions of Dagestan, Checheno-Ingushetia, North Ossetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, the Krasnodar and Stavropol kraia, which included Adygea and Karachayev-Cherkessia autonomous regions, and the Rostov oblast. However, Soviet historians and ethnographers continued to view the Caucasus as a single "historic-ethnographic complex" (Akkieva, 2008: 3).

Thirdly, from a *historical* approach, the distinction between the various notions implied by the Caucasus is hardly a static process and does often not coincide with the geographical view. Thus, when dictated by the political realities, parts of Iran and Turkey were included within the Caucasus by politicians. After the break-up of the Soviet Union and the decline of Russia's influence in the region, the "Transcaucasus" was renamed into the "South Caucasus," becoming part of the Middle East, at the intersection of the geopolitical and geostrategic interests of world and regional powers as well as international organizations (Akkieva, 2008), while the "North Caucasus" was reduced to the seven autonomous republics of Russia (Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, North Ossetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachaevo-Cherkessia and Adygea).

Fourthly, the Caucasus should be understood through the prism of its extraordinary *ethnocultural* diversity, which even led to be named the "Eurasian Balkans" (Bzhezinsky, 1999; *see* Akkieva, 2008), with over 30 million people of Caucasian, Slavic, Iranian and Turkic ethnic origins speaking over 100 different languages. While the North Caucasus is in appearance more homogenous as religious belonging (over 80% of the population in the North Caucasus are Sunni Muslims, while most Dagestanis, Chechens and Ingush adhere to mystical Islam–Sufism), in the South, the majority of Azerbaijan is Shi'a Muslims, whereas the Armenians and Georgians adhere to different variants of Eastern Christianity - the Georgian Orthodox Christian Church and the Apostolic Orthodox Armenian Church (Kemoklidze et al., 2012).

#### **1.4 Identity constructions and otherness: ethnic names, myths and borders**

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the Russian media and the Slav population have started to use the pejorative term of a "person of the Caucasian nationality" or even "Caucasians", when referring to the migrants from the Caucasus. Simultaneously, the Caucasian academic discourse has developed the idea of "Caucasianness" (Kavkazskost'), with respect to a specific Caucasian civilization and a certain Caucasian socio-cultural entity (Abdulatinov, 1995; *see* Akkieva, 2008). The trend assumptions raised strong criticism from authors arguing that on the contrary, the "Caucasus could not be treated as a civilization because it is an area of constant cross-cultural interaction" (Avksentiev, 1998; *see* Akkieva, 2008). Malashenko (2011: 17) sees the negative attitude of the Russian population against the people of the Caucasus as a "perfectly explainable reaction towards those who have found themselves in an alien environment", "a typical expression of the hostile reaction to the

‘other’ – people who differ in behaviour, religion, the degree of internal community bonds that tie them together, physical appearance, and temperament.” (Malashenko, 2011: 17). Moreover, this attitude is further fed by economic reasoning, since the Caucasus migrants prove to be successful in competition with the local native population.

Specifically in the North Caucasus, the Russian authors suggest a three-dimension approach of the region: Russian *civil* dimension, *ethnic* dimension and *religious* (Islamic) dimension, with the civil and the religious one often finding themselves in conflict. Following the dissolution of the USSR, the Caucasus people no longer feel they represent a great power, whereas the identification with a 1.5 billion Muslim community seems more appealing to their self-esteem, helping them to overcome the “younger brother complex that ethnic minority groups invariably felt during the Soviet period” (Malashenko, 2011a: 14). In this context, a new hetero-definition of the North Caucasus takes prevalence: the “internal abroad”, with both sides displaying stronger attitudes in favour of separating the region from Russia: Russians advocating the break-up of the region from the federal budget and the Caucasus peoples claiming a strong, different identity and the need for self-governing. However, the category of “internal abroad” is being regarded as offensive by both sides, as it contains the implication that Russia is unable to control its periphery as well as the discontent of the Caucasus people to be regarded as aliens in their own country (Malashenko, 2011a). The high proportion in the Russian population supporting the idea of breaking the North Caucasus from Russia (up to 60 percent) is not only a sign of the widely spread Caucasophobia and Islamophobia, but also of the fact that “Russia is overcoming the imperial mindset” (Malashenko, 2011b: 13).

In the context of political transformation in the 1990s, the *ethnic name* becomes an “important political symbol that not only defines one’s identity but also instigates social attitudes and actions” (Shnirelman, 2006), in the process of reinterpreting or replacing the ethnic names in the North Caucasus. After the Chechens and Ingush had been united within the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Region (Chechen-Ingush ASSR since 1936) in 1934, the Soviet authorities strived for creating a singular identity for the two peoples, under the new name “Veinakh/Vainakh” and the idea gained popularity in the 1960s-1980s. However, following the fall of the Soviet Union, the Chechens chose the path of political independence, while the Ingush opted for consolidating their republic within the Russian Federation, strongly opposing the idea of a new unification within the Republic of “Vainakhia”. In return, the Chechens sought to replace their ethnic name themselves, when in 1991 Dzokhar Dudaev proclaimed the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, using the old Turkic name for Chechnya,

which originally only referred to the Southern part of the territory, but was eventually extended to mean all Chechen lands.

In the same light of ideas, the Alan name and identity is disputed by many North Caucasus groups, all of them using various cultural symbols to demonstrate their belonging to the Alan identity (Shnirelman, 2006). In this sense, “Alan” personal names are highly popular among the Ossetians in the last few decades. For them, the Alans are the symbol of civilisation, as well as a common descent meant to overcome the internal differences. Also, the Alan identity is used in support of their territorial disputed with the Ingush in the lowlands. For the Ingush and the Chechens, the Alan belonging is used to serve territorial claims: the Ingush’s claims on the the Prigorodnyi District, and the Chechens’ sovereignty over the lowland Naurskii and Shelkovskoi Districts. Due to the fact that in the USSR it was the indigenous status that legitimated political autonomy and the consequential privileges deriving from it, the Karachais and Balkars used the claim to the Alan identity as a reliable proof for their indigenous status and a strong argument against those who call them late-comers to the North Caucasus (Shnirelman, 2006). In this ways, a demonstration of name is “the typically magical act through which the particular group – virtual, ignored, denied, or repressed – makes itself visible and manifests, for other groups and for itself, and attests to its existence as a group that is known and recognized” (Bourdieu, 1992; *see* Shnirelman, 2006). Thus, the decision to preserve or to change an ethnic name may be regarded as a political decision.

The *myth-making* process plays a similar role, with homeland myths tending to be exclusive, excluding rival groups and delegitimizing their claims to the territory in dispute (Smith et al., 1998). As a consequence, a group uses the national myths either to establish hierarchical relationships between itself and the others in order to assert its superiority, or it excludes the outsiders in general. As an example, in South Caucasus, the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict brought to light five main arguments to legitimise the presence of the two groups in the region: who was the first to inhabit the area and to develop iron production, the origins of local statehood, the dispute over the ethnic composition of the Colchis Lowland population, who founded the Abkhazian Kingdom in the 8<sup>th</sup> century AD and how did Christianity come to the region (Smith et al., 1998). For this goal, the Abkhazians have recently started to emphasise their descent from the ancient Hattians, the pre-Hittite population of Asia Minor.

What matters even more is not only how the groups in questions see and define themselves, but how the opposing ones perceive and categorise them. In this sense, according to the Abkhaz historiography, most of north-eastern Asia Minor was occupied by ancient

tribes who were the ancestors of today's Abkhazians, to be pushed later to the highlands by the arrival of the Kartvelians. Moreover, the Abkhazians are attributed with the establishment of the Kingdom of the Abkhazians and the Kartvelians and the leading role played in the 10<sup>th</sup> and the 11<sup>th</sup> centuries. Furthermore, the Abkhaz argue that, contrary to the claim that Abkhazia has always been a part of Georgia, the latter did not exist at all as a single state from the 13<sup>th</sup> century until 1918. Even more, Abkhazia was incorporated into the Tsarist Empire as an independent entity in 1810, nine years after the annexation of Russia, a proof of the autonomy of the Abkhazia from the Georgian state at the time (Cheterian, 2008).

As opposed to the Abkhaz view on themselves, the Georgians consider them to be merely newcomers, Abkhaz-Adyghe migrants who arrived to their territory in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, arriving from the North Caucasus, an event that weakened the foundation of Christianity in the region. The Kingdom of the Abkhazians and the Kartvelians is regarded by the Georgian historiography as a unified Georgian Kingdom, uniting various Georgian tribes.

The Ajarians consider themselves to be Georgians and do not perceive themselves as “other” in relation to the broader Georgian group (Toft, 2003). Yet, the Georgians find it hard to accept that the Muslim Ajarians are Georgians, as long as being Georgian means being a Christian.

### **1.5 Research on the Caucasus: between conflict and security studies**

The Caucasus has been rather scarcely covered in the work of the Western academics, with the studies on contemporary Caucasus focusing rather on the Nagorno-Karabakh, Russo-Chechen and Georgian conflicts in the post-Soviet period. There are several reasons for the lack of literature on the region (Kemoklidze et al., 2012). There is, on one hand, the lack of access to Iranian sources and archives which would provide relevant information with respect to the Persian and Iranian influence of the region. On the other hand, there seems to be little research interest in the role played by a key regional player, Turkey. At the same time, for the Soviet period, it is the Soviet authors who predominate in the studies on the Caucasus, with much of the local history being neither publicly available, nor accessible. The focus in the last decades was mainly on the conflicts in the Caucasus, the region being treated primarily as a security concern. The gas and oil pipeline projects and Europe's increased energetic dependency added a further security dimension to the study of the region, leaving Caucasus rather outside the preoccupation of ethnic conflicts studies (Kemoklidze et al., 2012).

The 1992-1993 Georgian-Abkhazian conflict has been labelled as a “forgotten conflict” (Petersen, 2008: 2), despite the high number of casualties resulting from the ethnic

cleansing. The lack of coverage of the war occurred in the context of the outbreak of other ethnic wars, this time closer to the heart of Europe, in Yugoslavia. Moreover, the conflict might have been regarded as a Georgian internal issue, or an event in the Russian sphere. Or just another conflict in a remote, unknown part of the world, or, in Ronald Suny's words, "from afar the ethnic and civil warfare in Georgia often looks to casual observers like the latest eruption of 'ancient tribal conflicts' or irradicable primordial hatreds" (Suny, 1994; *see* Kemoklidze et al., 2012).

There were three main waves of interpreting the conflicts in the Caucasus, with scholars finding themselves often unprepared or limited in resources when trying to understand and explain the precipitated events at the end of the Cold War. To this, we can add the lack of proper fieldwork on the part of the anthropologists in the region. First, the early studies tended to analyse the conflicts in the Caucasus through the prism of the primordial nationalist paradigm, based on books about the region written in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century and suggesting similarities between past and present conflicts, linking them to the events of 1905 or 1918 and wrongly discarding the importance of the recent factors. A second wave gained popularity after 1993 and emphasises the impact of the great powers, focusing mainly on Russian geopolitical developments and on Russia's intervention in the conflicts in the region, including in those outside its new borders. The third wave included the conflicts in the Caucasus in the wider group of "ethnic conflicts" at the end of the Cold War stretched around the world, in Africa, the Balkans and Central Asia, proposing nationalism as a cause of conflict and dissolution of USSR, instead of placing it as a direct result of the weakening and collapse of the ethnofederal system (Cheterian, 2008).

## **II. FROM ETHNOFEDERALISM TO ETHNONATIONALISM**

Suny (1993) discusses about the "territorialisation of ethnicity": the Soviet empire created territorial nations, where the national sub-units were not 'natural' pre-existing entities (Suny, 1993, *see* Hirsch, 1997). However, Hirsch argues that it was not the Soviet empire the one who created nations, but a combination of new party officials and old regime specialists, as it happened through the work of ethnographers, geographers and linguists during the 1926, 1937 and 1939 censuses. Thus, ethnographers suggested how borders might be adjusted or how people might be consolidated in order to manipulate or eliminate interethnic conflicts. As an example, after the unification of the Chechen and Ingush autonomous republics, in

1937 Chechens and Ingush have been listed as one group, but, in 1939, they were registered as two different nationalities. In Dagestan, people were united on the basis of territorial proximity; the Kumyks, Avars, Dargins etc. were combined into one collective ethno-territorial unit and referred to as the “narodnosti of Dagestan” (Hirsch, 1997).

The Soviet Union’s model of socialism, its logic of organisation along ethnic lines, created the pre-conditions for future nationalist movements in those political units (union republics, autonomous republics and oblasts) endowed with territoriality and borders on national criteria, to emerge and to transform the map of the region. The Soviet ethnofederalism set the basis for ethnic cleavages and, later on, for secessionist movements along ethnic lines.

The Soviet ethnofederalism supported nation and nationhood, but suppressed nationalism. The principle of ethnic representation was combined with the “divide and conquer” principle. The “foreign” autonomous republics and oblasts were constituted as an effective counterweight to any nationalist impulses of the union republics against the centre (Zürcher, 2007). Nationalist projects following the disintegration of the Soviet Union were sometimes driven by outside incentives (legislative void, counter-reactions to neighbouring nationalist movements), other times by pragmatic economic interests, while, in the case of Chechnya and Dagestan, they failed due to strong traditional ways of societal organisation or due to high ethnic fragmentation.

The well-defined borders of the new entities and their endowment with their own elements of sovereignty, a clearly established institutional and legislative framework, as well as the formation and development of national elites set the ground for the dismantling of the Soviet Union and for the replacement of the socialist governance with nationalist movements, along national and ethnic lines. The local population was encouraged to self-determination after decades of institutionalising the nationality and independence seemed highly feasible as the necessary structures and norms for the new state to function were already set in place.

But what contributed to an even higher degree to the disintegration of the ethnofederalism by ethnonationalist movements, was the hierarchical organisation of the Soviet system along ethnic lines. There were four levels of hierarchy leading to the degree of territorial and national autonomy and privileges assigned to different ethnic groups. As a consequence, the “more progressive” Georgians, Armenians and Azerbaijanis received their own *union republics*. The second in rank, the *autonomous republics*, were defined by constitutions as “national states” and not as “sovereign states” like the union republics. In Western Georgia, the autonomous republics of Abkhazia and Ajaria were instituted. In North

Caucasus, Dagestan was the only autonomous republic without a titular nation, due to its high ethnic fragmentation, while Chechens and Ingush were reunited under one common republic, based on their common ethnic belonging. *Autonomous oblasts* came third in the Soviet ethnofederal ranking, with South Ossetia as an example of autonomous oblast inside the Georgian union republic and Nagorno-Karabakh, an Armenian enclave on Azerbaijani territory. Inside the oblasts, *autonomous okrugs* were established for smaller ethnic groups enjoying only cultural autonomy (Zürcher, 2007).

The federal system was characterised by a high degree of duality, with republics being transformed into “proto-states” with self-organisation principles and elites articulating specific interests on one hand, and a highly centralised state, controlling and ensuring mechanisms of suppressing nationalism on the other hand (Linz and Stepan, 1996).

On a more practical level, the option for independence of many of the second and third rank units of the Soviet ethnofederal system was driven by the lack of legal and institutional choice occurred with the fall of the Soviet Union. The law ruling on the right of the union republics to self-determination was amended in 1990, stating the right of the autonomous republics and oblasts to decide, by referendum, either if they choose to secede with the union republic they belong to, or to remain constituent parts of the Soviet Union. Many of these units, fearing the loss of their status and privileges within the new independent states, opted to stay with the Soviet Union. But, with the fall of USSR, the only option they were left with was a de facto independence, as it was the case of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

The institutionalisation of ethnicity represented a complex social engineering, placing the nation at the top of the hierarchy and linking it with modernisation, industrialisation and socialism. The goal was to create viable economies and to contain nationalism and revolt within the Soviet Union. Access to the top of the hierarchy of nations and thus to the privileges it granted, was secured for those ethnic groups considered as authentic indigenous ones. For this scope, folk traditions which otherwise would have failed to survive in the industrial and post-industrial environment were artificially preserved (Shnirelman, 2001; *see* Cheterian, 2008) and new national histories were created to provide the new entities with distinct attributes of a ‘nation’: history, literature, language, alphabet and culture (Cheterian, 2008). Historian, archaeologists and ethnologist played a crucial role in rewriting histories and designing a hierarchy of ethnic groups.

During the Soviet period, Georgia enjoyed the status of a Union Republic and it contained three political-administrative subjects: two Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics (ASSRs) -Abkhazia and Ajaria-, endowed with republican legislatures and executive

branches and one Autonomous Oblast - South Ossetia. The 'All-Union Law on the Demarcation of Powers Between the USSR and Members of the Federation' passed by the USSR Supreme Soviet in April 1990, as part of Gorbachev's reforms, offered incentives both for Georgia, as a Union Republic, to leave the USSR, as well as for its ASSRs, Abkhazia and Ajaria, to seek greater autonomy.

The case of Ajaria is peculiar in the ethnofederal logic of organisation of the Soviet Union. Its autonomy was not so much the result of the planned work of Soviet ethnographers and authorities, but rather the outcome of a compromise between the new Turkish Republic and the USSR in March 1921, granting Ajaria to the Soviet Union with the condition of benefitting from full religious autonomy for the Sunni Muslims (Pelkmans, 2006). The Soviet nationality system did not create any "Ajarian" nationality and except for the Jewish Autonomous Region, Ajaria was the only Soviet autonomy without a titular nationality (Hoch and Kopeček, 2011).

### **III. GEO-POLITICS OF TRANSITION I: POLITICS OF RELIGION, NATIONALISM, AND OTHER SYMBOLIC ANTAGONISMS OVER POWER, CONTROL AND MATERIAL WEALTH**

The conflicts in the Caucasus must be regarded beyond the first attempts in the literature of the late 1980s - early 1990s to treat them as inter-ethnic or inter-religious conflicts, or as simple territorial clashing demands. They must be analysed in the broader context of the ethnofederal organisation of the Soviet Union legacy, of the geopolitical and security implications of the region, as well as of the struggle of the new emerging elites propelled from the Soviet nomenklatura, often leading to the rise of the entrepreneurs of violence under the flag of national or religious discourse during the period of transition.

#### **1.1 Struggle of elites**

The conflicts in the Caucasus should be understood in the context of struggles between competing political entities, as well as of the confrontations within each political unit. The conflicts themselves have become a resource for elites in power, and instruments to legitimise their newly established political institutions and to mould new political identities, without any popular participation in political choices (Cheterian, 2012).

The elites and the institutions in the former federal subjects of the USSR mirror the Soviet legacy of both economic structures and political personnel, replicating the re-division

of control by the elite over political power and resource flows. However, the maintenance of the logic of Soviet territorial units did not always prove to be sustainable, thus leading to armed conflict and the destruction of transit and trade links throughout the region (Glinkina and Rosenberg, 2005). The old elites coming to power after the dissolution of the USSR's dissolution and inherited from the Soviet Union along with the political and military infrastructure behind them had to compete for control over the territorial resources, with the new, local elites, equally interested in seizing power and access to resources. Both of the elites successfully disguised their goals under the ethno-national or confessional discourse in order to mobilise and manipulate the masses, in a process of "ethnification" of power (Hughes, 2007: 35).

Elite-manipulation lies therefore at the intersection of material and non-material explanations of the causes of conflicts, between the material incentives, such as access to resources, and the non-material ones, the leaders' charisma and the ability to evoke history and national identity (Toft, 2003). However, there are several critiques against the theory of elite-manipulation and elites' appeal to nationalism in order to mobilise the masses otherwise passive. Among these, the fact that the theory dismisses the impact of nationalism in itself, independently of its role as an instrument of the elites. Moreover, it explains the power of leaders to mobilise the passive masses to violence, but it fails to explain their capacity to demobilise them in times of violent conflicts (Toft, 2003).

Thus, in Georgia, the nationalist Gamsakhurdia and, to an extent, Saakashvili resemble most the typology of the nationalist leader able to mobilise the masses and to stir them up to conflict: first one, during the war in Abkhazia in 1992-1993 and the second one during the war in South Ossetia in 2008. However, although the Georgian nationalism helped these leaders to come to power and to engage in conflicts under the national integrity flag, the masses later withdrew their support for the charismatic leaders. Shevardnadze, who followed Gamsakhurdia in power, opted for mediation in the conflict with Abkhazia. Ajaria's leader, Abashidze, despite his anti-Georgian discourse did not manage to engage the region into a conflict or to prevent the change in the religious identity of the Ajarians, converting to Christianity in the last decades (Toft, 2003).

The role of the elites and of the charismatic leaders, of what has been called the "clash of personality" argument, such as the one between Yeltsin and Dudaev in the first Chechen war (Hughes, 2007: 56-57), should not be neglected. Nor should be the importance of the intra-elite struggles that shaped the dynamics of the conflicts in the Caucasus. Thus, the Russian invasion of Chechnya in December 1994 is attributed to the need to boost Yeltsin's

authority and popularity, who was under the attack of the nationalist and pro-Communist opposition forces, by provoking a ‘small victorious war’ (Gall and de Wall 1997; *see* Cheterian, 2012). Also, in favour of the nationalist discourse of the elites triggering conflict stands the pressure of the nationalists for Yeltsin to crash the Chechens’ secessionism and to restore Russia’s role as a hegemonic power in the Caucasus and at the Caspian Sea. However, it is now widely accepted that Yeltsin’s decision to start the military campaign against Chechnya was motivated solely by his need to demonstrate and enhance his leadership potential and to solve the security dilemma of the possible spill-over effect of the Chechen insurgency, as a domino effect, on other Russian republics in the Caucasus and on the Volga (Hughes, 2007).

The ethno-territorial conflicts were closely linked to the struggles between the political and the military elites, trying to retain or seize power. In Georgia, the first freely elected president, the nationalist Zviad Gamsakhurdia was removed from power following a coup d’état in January 1992 and replaced by the former leader of Soviet Georgia and the Soviet minister of foreign affairs, Eduard Shevardnadze. The power struggle that followed between the supporters of Gamsakhurdia and Shevardnadze lies at the base of the war in Abkhazia and of the defeat of the Georgian forces (Cheterian, 2012). The Russian invasion of Chechnya in December 1994 is attributed to the need to boost Yeltsin’s authority and popularity, who was under the attack of the nationalist and pro-Communist opposition forces, by provoking a ‘small victorious war’ (Gall and de Wall 1997; *see* Cheterian, 2012). It was often linked to the intra-elite conflicts in Moscow, the “president versus parliament” conflict or to the “clash of personality” argument, between Yeltsin and Dudaev (Hughes, 2007: 56-57). The second Chechen war revealed an intra-elite struggle in Chechnya, between the Wahhabi radicals led by Shamil Basaev and the moderate forces under Aslan Maskhadov, depicting also a tactical cleavage between military actions taken by Maskhadov and terrorist acts favoured by Basaev.

The old elites coming to power in the aftermath of the USSR’s dissolution were inherited from the Soviet Union along with the political and military infrastructure behind them. Thus, Heydar Aliyev, the president of Azerbaijan, was Director of the Azerbaijan KGB, then First Party Secretary of Azerbaijan and finally a Member of the Politburo of the Communist Party and First Deputy Prime Minister of the USSR. As mentioned above, Eduard Shevardnadze, President of Georgia, was the leader of Soviet Georgia and the Soviet minister of foreign affairs. Dzhokhar Dudaev, the leader of the first Chechen war, was a Soviet Air Force colonel (Glinkina and Rosenberg, 2005). However, they had to compete for

control over the territorial resources, with the new, local elites, equally interested in seizing power and access to resources. During the conflict between them, the formal institutions have been replaced by informal ones, based on ethnic-religious clan networks. In the case of Dagestan, the accommodation of the ethnic and clan structures proved to be successful, the numerous groups managing to design a system of division of resources among them. In Chechnya however, the religious and ethnic identities were mobilised against the “other”, the Slav and Christian Russians, although there too the ethno-nationalist coalitions transformed themselves into clan-based interest groups after the war (Glinkina and Rosenberg, 2005).

In Chechnya, the relations between the federal authorities and the local elites are not built through institutions, but based on personal preferences and affinities, one of the best examples being the relations between Ramzan Kadyrov and Vladimir Putin. According to Malashekno (2011:8), the “stable instability” in Chechnya remains fragile, because it essentially depends on just two people.

The role of elites is thus essential in assessing the propensity for conflict or non-conflict in Chechnya and in Dagestan. Unlike other autonomous units in the USSR, Dagestan did not witness a replacement of the old elites, of the nomenklatura, with new ones, but rather their transformation into new, entrepreneurial and financial elites. Old and new elites may be distinguished by the political tactics they employ. In contrast to the old elites, relying on ideological as well as formal-legal mechanisms of control and political repression, the new elites are indifferent to ideological considerations and concerned with material benefits. Political mobilisation in the Republic was based neither upon ideological nor upon partisan divisions, but upon ethnic consolidation, with Dagestan’s multi-ethnic political balance has become the prevailing political factor (Ware and Kisriev, 2001).

In Chechnya, the “new Muslims” joined the political movement and encouraged its corruption, using Islam for private, economic gains. A new rift was created leading to conflict, between the non-religious population and traditionalists on one side, and the so-called radicals trying to seize power in the aftermath of the first Chechen war (Tishkov, 2004).

It can be argued that the territorial separatists of the early 1990s have become the state builders of the early 2000s. “The products of the wars of the Soviet succession are not frozen conflicts but are, rather, relatively successful examples of making states by making war” (King, 2001: 526).

## **1.2 The role of ethnicity in identity-based conflicts**

The ethnic component of the conflicts in Caucasus should not be neglected in the analysis. However, it must be understood in the broader interplay of other factors holding a decisive impact on the outbreak of conflicts in the post-Soviet space. According to Valery Tishkov (1997), the initial conflicts emerging in the framework of the fall of the Soviet Union were rather a reassertion of individual and collective dignity, irrespective of ethnic meaning, which was to be added later, only in the Baltic republics and in exclusively peaceful forms. The ethnic unrest in the USSR manifested itself rather as inter-ethnic riots and communal clashes directed against vulnerable ‘double minorities’ in national republics. In Abkhazia, what might have initially appeared as a Georgian ethnic cleansing campaign against the Abkhazian population proved to be a series of violent acts directed against all non-Georgian groups in Abkhazia: Greeks, Ukrainians, Armenians, Russian and even Mingrelians, performed by troops of untrained and undisciplined men, many of them freed criminals, driven either by Gamsakhurdia’s nationalist discourse, or by the lust for plunder, as it was the case in many of the criminal acts committed in mafia-style operations in Abkhazia (Colarusso, 1995).

The ethnic element, along with the economic one, played an important role on the other side of the war too, when Cossacks and Russians joined their kinsmen against the Georgians and when the Circassians who considered Abkhazians to be their kin and the Chechens who joined the fight from the North against the Georgian troops. South Ossetians defended the Abkhazians as well, in the form of a national brigade (Colarusso, 1995), driven by similar grievances against Tbilisi.

Linz and Stepan (1996) identify three inter-related arguments for the “politicization of ethnicity” having the fall of the Soviet Union at the background. First, the authors draw the attention on the effect the Soviet type of ethnofederalism on the stateness problems it generated. Second, the prevalence of liberalisation over democratisation, as well as the organisation of the first non-single-party competitive elections at republican and not at Union level had severe disintegrative consequences on the centre’s control capacities, opening the way to ethnic nationalism. Third, the authors conclude on Russia’s legacy, as successor state, with respect to stateness and citizenship problems (Linz and Stepan, 1996).

Ethnicity played an important role in the transition in all Caucasus countries, but ethnic fragmentation and ethnic dominance were not the causes of war, confirming the demonstration of Hoeffler (2004) as well as Hegre et al. (2001) that ethnically fractionalized societies are more secure than more homogenous societies, provided that the largest ethnic group is less than 45 percent of the total population. This is explained by the fact that, in

highly fragmented societies, organisers of violence find it more difficult to aggregate different ethnic groups and to mobilise them along common ethnonationalist goals. This is certainly the case of Dagestan holding the greatest range of ethnic diversity and being populated by more than 100 different ethnic groups, with no titular nation and with none of the main ethnic groups counting for more than 29 percent of the population. Though a movement towards independence emerged also in Dagestan, it has never succeeded to articulate a national mobilisation in the name of a national project, due to the existence of almost 100 ethnic groups. Moreover, the former Soviet elites remained in power and co-interested along the new political entrepreneurs in a common project for statehood building. Therefore, a high ethnic fragmentation and a high elite homogeneity preserved the strength of the state and prevented a war in Dagestan. Civic nationalism triumphed over ethnic nationalism.

The problematic of stateness in multi-national states is further complicated by the issue of multiple identities developed by their inhabitants. Many individuals belonged to more states during their lifetime and changed territory with repeated redrawing of borders or forced displacement. Moreover, through the high degree of multiculturalism of the region, the mixed marriages and cross-cultural interactions, many people developed multiple cultural identities being, this way, an impediment and a target for the aggressive ethnic nationalism, seeking uniformisation and, at times, cleansing. This is certainly the case of Ajaria, where Ajarians became to consider themselves Georgians of Muslim confession, after the Soviet authorities abolished the ethnic category of “Ajarians” and reclassified them as “Georgians”, in the 1930s. Ajaria’s success in avoiding war was also enforced from outside, with Turkey, Ajaria’s “patron”, taking a neutral position, whereas Abkhazia and South Ossetia had the support of Russia in their struggle against Georgia (De Waal, 2010). In North Caucasus, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachai-Cherkessia also managed to resist the spill over effect of the violence in Chechnya and avoided war.

The use of the ethno-national discourse in order to secure access to resources by the elites in power in the post-Soviet period, as well as the efforts to artificially keep the idea of nation alive during Soviet times, led to the re-emergence of ethnicity from above in parallel with a similar process from below, in what authors consider to be identity-based conflicts. “It is the politicisation of the various clientilistic links between the political class and the new informal economy that provides the basis for mobilisation based on identity” (Kaldor, 2001: 55). The informal economy is often organised around ethnic networks and criminal activities are many times based on ethnicity.

### **1.3 Religious conflicts. Islam: a source of conflict or of stability in the Caucasus?**

The organised religion has an essential role in providing the necessary channels to spread myths and ethnic symbols. Trenin and Malashenko (2004:80) discuss about the “transformation of the ethnic nationalism into a religious movement” throughout the North Caucasus.

While the role of Islam in reframing the ethnic nationalism in Caucasus cannot be denied, it should not be regarded as cause of conflict in itself, but rather as an ideological instrument for national mobilisation.

Chechnya remains mainly the sole case of Islam radicalisation through war, but even here, the radical Islam has been resisted by the population and the Islam national project failed, as fundamentalist Islam is highly opposed to the Chechen individualistic, non-hierarchic way of life and organisation. Throughout North Caucasus, fundamentalist Islam as a drive for ethnic nationalism was rejected in opposition to the traditionalist Islam adopted by the local population, placing culture and tradition at the core of their spiritual belonging (Trenin and Malashenko, 2004). The social aspects of religion might, in certain cases, prove to be more important for the survival of an ethnic, than the doctrinal or ethnic ones. Unlike the less durable political, economic, territorial and technological factors, the religious traditions can ensure the long term survival of ethnic communities (Smith, 1989).

In the South Caucasus, Islam did not embrace a radical form and in Georgia it became obviously weak during the Soviet period. In Ajaria, Islam did not prove to be as strong as in the North Caucasus, neither in the Soviet times, nor in the post-Soviet period. It failed to act as a mobilising factor against the Soviet anti-religious policies, as well as against the Georgian measures to impose Christianity in the region.

The religious practice in Abkhazia is a melange of polytheistic worship and animism, converging with aspects of Islam and Christianity, with neither Christianity nor Islam being perceived as a threat to the traditional social structure in Abkhazia, and thus both being adopted at a rather superficial level.

#### ***1.3.1 Islam in the North Caucasus: Chechnya and Dagestan***

##### ***A. Islam in the pre-Soviet era***

The rise of the ascetic Islam in the North Caucasus in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, that followed the establishment of the Russian military power in the region, was caused by

two processes: a global one -as part of a widespread Islamic resistance against the expansion of Christian states -, and a local one -as a reaction against the brutal tactics employed by the Russian armed forces (Seely, 2001). Thus, the radical Islam acted as a unifying force bringing together the local ethnic groups and tribes against the Russian empire. Shamil, the leader of the North Caucasus peoples' resistance against Russia and the founder of the first Islamic Chechen / Avars state, used Islam in the same way as, in the twentieth century, Dudaev used both Islam and ethnic nationalism "to provide a body of coherent ideas with which to fire zealots and challenge Russian power" (Seely, 2001: 45). The role of the Sufi brotherhoods, *tariqat*, preaching strict adherence to Koran and religious discipline was essential in the eruption of the radical Islam at the time. Two Sufi brotherhoods competed in the religious arena of the North Caucasus: Naqshbandiya and Qadiriya. Naqshbandiya banished animist practices and converted the semi-pagan people in the mountains to a strict discipline Islam, promoting an ascetic set of religious precepts and being more popular among the wealthy population. Qadiriya preached non-resistance to Russian domination and attracted the poor inhabitants of the mountains, allowing rituals of music and singing previously forbidden (Seely, 2001).

#### *B. The Soviet Islam*

Sufism and the *tariqat* continued their role of resistance during the Soviet rule, escaping their destruction and going underground, through the activity of a network of illegal mosques, illegal religious schools, holy places and shelters for pilgrims, defying the Soviet ban on religious proselytising and religious meetings outside the legal houses of prayers (Bryan, 1996). The main instruments used by the Islamic leaders to preserve and to revive Islam in the North Caucasus included the brotherhoods (*tariqat*), establishing a master-disciple relationship between the adepts (*murshid-murid*); the door-to-door missionary activities (*agitprop*), bringing the influence of Islam closer to the believers and convincing the non-believers; the visits to holy places (*mazars*), usually associated with an historical event or a hero of anti-Russian resistance; the participation in the Sufi rituals (*zikr*), bringing the community together; the spread of the religious Islamic schools (*madrassas*), attracting a large number of young people; the distribution of Muslim Sufi underground (*samizdat*) literature propagating religious guidance on the Islamic faith (Bryan, 1996); the activity of the religious courts (*Shariat*), compensating for the political and legislative vacuum.

The Muslim hierarchy, grouped around four *Muftias* (Spiritual Directorates) proved to be the most obedient religious organisation to the Soviet rule, taking no stand against the anti-

religious and anti-Muslim propaganda. This has not estranged the Soviet Muslims from Islam; on the contrary, they displayed the lowest rates of atheism during the Soviet times: in 1974, for example, 46 percent of the Dagestanis and 63 percent of the Chechens declared themselves as believers, as opposed to only 12 percent of the Russians in the Caucasus (Benningson and Lemerrier-Quelquejay).

It has been discussed in literature about the existence of a ‘Parallel Islam’ in the Caucasus, or what Benningson and Lemerrier-Quelquejay call the “non-mosque trend”: a non-official Islam based on Sufi brotherhoods (*tariqa*, the “path” leading to God), with more numerous adepts than the official Islam; most of the clerics in North Caucasus belonged, during the Soviet rule, to a Sufi order. Although clandestine, the Sufi orders are mass, collective organisations, including mountain peasants, as well as industrial workers and intellectuals. Thus, Sufi orders evolved as “parallel communities” developing a parallel economy and little connected to the Soviet state, society and economy (Bram and Gammer, 2013).

The clandestine Sufi brotherhoods were considered dangerous by the Soviet rule and, following the 1940-41 Chechen-Ingush rebellion, the entire Muslim population of the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Republic was accused of treason and collaboration with the German army and thus deported, in 1944, to Siberia and Kazakhstan. The Republic was liquidated and all the mosques and worship places were destroyed. Although the Republic was restored and the Muslims allowed to return in 1957, until 1978, it was the only Muslim territory in the Soviet Union where mosques were not authorised. These measures increased the clandestine aspect of Islam in the region, with many secret mosques flourishing and fuelling the anti-Soviet resistance (Broxup, 1981).

Especially in the case of Dagestan and Chechnya, Sufism became a major component of the national identity, with Sufi brotherhoods actively involved in resistance and nationalism. The Soviets had to face a more serious problem, ‘the convergence of religion and nationalism’ (Bram and Gammer, 2013: 301). Thus, Dagestan and Chechnya share two main features: the flourishing Sufi Islam who managed to prosper despite the Soviet anti-religious persecution; and the legacy of resistance against the Tsarist, the Soviet and, more recently, the Russian rule, led by Sufi tariqat (Gammer, 2005).

The demography of the Chechen-Ingush Republic changed radically in the 1960s-1980s, due to the return of the deportees, many of them young and a high birth rate among them. In the same period, there was an increased industrialisation and urbanisation of the region, simultaneously with the development of the oil and gas exploitation fields at the

Caspian Sea, with Chechnya processing most of the reserves in its refineries. However, ethnic delimitation in the economy was obvious, with Russians working in the new developing industries, and local being restricted to agricultural labour. Discrimination encouraged the turn of the young Chechens to the parallel economy and criminal activities. Later, in the 1980s, Islam played a limited role in forming the new Chechen identity during the perestroika. Ethnic belonging and the collective memory of resistance, deportation and discrimination played the most important part in defining the Chechen nation, under a new label, renamed as *Ichkeria*, under the rule of Dudayev (Tishkov, 2004).

Both Dagestan and Chechnya practiced a moderate Islam, with the life of the autonomous mountain communities regulated by the local *adat* system of norms, not replaced by the Islamic Shari'a law. In this sense, Sufism came as the best response to the need of these communities to embrace a form of Islam that would not pressure them to give up on their traditional way of life, but would support its egalitarian, collective character.

### *C. The revival of Islam during perestroika. Islamisation, Wahhabism and the Post-Soviet Islam*

The victory of the Afghan Mujahedeens against the Soviet army in the Afghan war (1979-1989) is considered to have contributed to the revival of Islam in the Caucasus and in Central Asia (Benningsen, 1989). Along with this, several other factors encourage the Muslim revival in the region (Broxup, 1983). Demographic changes generated by a high birth rate increased the number of the young Muslim population. At the same time, solidarity with the rest of the Muslim world was enhanced following the re-affirmation of the distinct, Caucasian and Turkic-Iranian identity of the local peoples. The influence of the Afghan war and of the Iranian Revolution largely contributed themselves to the revival of an Islamic identity and conscience.

There was a general trend for growing religiosity all over the post-Soviet states, embracing a radical form in some part of the former Soviet Union. In Chechnya, the radicalization of Islam is generally attributed to the experience of the first war in 1994-1996. Hughes (2007) distinguishes between multiple layers of the rise of the Islamic factor in Chechnya. Thus, the radicalization took place at an endogenous level in the sense that the military conflict led to the instrumentalisation of Islam as a resource for mobilization. At exogenous level, the growing influence of the Al-Qaida in the 1990s must be taken into account, as well as the importance of the help provided to the Chechen fighters by the Arab volunteers or the funds sent from Afghanistan. The "globalisation of Islamic radicalism" was

also enhanced by the new information technologies (video, mobile phone, internet) which facilitated the spread of the war propaganda (Hughes, 2007: 100).

In the post-Soviet period, the Sufi tariqat expanded their influence over the social and political life, with a critical impact on the national front movements and political parties in Dagestan and in Chechnya. “The pan-Islamic character of the Sufi message gives absolute priority to Muslim identity over a narrow national one” (Bryan, 1996: 214), the tariqat offering an attractive alternative to the failed Communist ideology and to the dysfunctional state.

The spiritual and cultural vacuum left by the disintegration of the Soviet Union opened the way for the radical adepts of the Salafi version of Islam (Reynolds, 2005), designated, at the end of the perestroika, by the pejorative term of *Wahhabism*, not necessarily connected to the official religious doctrine of Saudi Arabia. Wahhabism first gained territory in Dagestan, the beacon of Islam in the Caucasus mainly among young, educated people who acquired religious education either in the Middle East or in Dagestan with teachers from the Middle East. They advocated the establishment of a social and political Islamic order, the restoration of the ‘pure’ Islam and rejection of the republican leadership. They soon attracted the animosity of the local population and initially found little appeal in Chechnya, concerned with nationalism and ethnic identity building. But, the war was the major catalyst for the radicalisation of Islam in Chechnya and the entire North Caucasus (Bram and Gammer, 2013). The main reasons for the success of Wahhabism in Chechnya are indisputably related to the war context. First of all, it offered a moral framework during the Russian-Chechen wars and its atrocities and appealed to Chechens’ long tradition of resistance. Secondly, the Salafis had access to a well-organised transnational network, impressive funds and volunteers ready to join the Chechen cause. Finally, it was regarded as a solution to transcend the clan divisions in the Chechen society and create a centralised Chechen state (Reynolds, 2005). The same traditional patterns of social organisation that impeded any external authority to be peacefully implemented in Chechnya prevented also the establishment of a Chechen stable state and governance.

The revival of Islam during the dissolution of the Soviet Union can be understood as a main sign of the shift of geopolitical zones: Because of the vacuum in the central power and control, the gravitation toward the imperial centre is increasingly replaced by gravitation toward the religious centres of the Islamic world (Sivertseva, 1999).

#### *D. The failure of the radical Islam project*

Both in Dagestan and in Chechnya, the radical Islamic project failed, being strongly rejected by the population and dismissed against the traditional Islam, closer to the previous local ways of social and political organisation in North Caucasus, hereditated as 'tradition'. Although used as a mobilising factor during the second Chechen war, Islam was not a cause of conflict. Similarly, its internal divisions, as well as the more peaceful Sufi philosophy contributed, in the end, to the stabilisation of the region, in the absence of a single unifying Islamic force.

In Dagestan, Islam failed to act as a unifying element. First, the Sunni Islam, in its Salafi form (Wahhabism) was strongly rejected in Dagestan and created a division between the traditionalists and the radicals. Secondly, Sufism itself did not manage to unite the population of the country, due to the traditional belonging to various orders on ethnic grounds and to the rivalry between the main Sufi tariqas, Naqshbandiya and Qadiriya (Gammer, 2005).

In Chechnya, Dudaev, Yandarbiev and other nationalist leaders set the basis of a secular, non-Islamic state which was also the drive behind their idea of nation-building. Despite the fact that Dudaev relied heavily on the support of Beslan Gantemirov, the leader of the Islamic Path party, the choice was not a religious one, Gantemirov being a well-known mafia member with generous resources. Moreover, out of 46 political parties on the political arena of Chechnya in the beginning of 1990s, only 3 were self-declared "Islamic" and all of them had been dissolved by 1993, including the Islamic Path (Hughes, 2007).

It is difficult to argue that the conflict in Chechnya was a religious one. It can be rather analysed as a protracted conflict which became radicalised as a consequence of the atrocities experienced by both parties during the first Chechen war and of the cleavage between two different religious and tactical approaches of the Chechen leaders: the radical Basaev and the moderate Maskhadov. The Chechen leaders pursued goals of independence from Russia and of state-building which are not compatible with the Islamisation philosophy: "if a national revolution is concerned with state power, jihad is its antithesis, given its absence of a vision of the state and its concern with the a-national community of believers", causing thus a breach between "territorialists" and "universalists" (Roy, 1989; *see* Hughes, 2007: 94-95). The Islamic Wahhabi reformism aspires to a global *ummah*, the universal community of believers, arriving to an identity conflict with the local clan and ethnic community and leads thus to the weakness of the political Islam project.

The radical Islam was unevenly spread across Chechnya, being more successful in the highland region under Basaev's control and being justified less by sociological and religious factors, as by Basaev's personal connections with the Wahhabis. The apparent conversion of Basaev from a secular nationalist in the 1990s to a supporter of jihad in the mid-1990s marked a critical turning point for the conflict in Chechnya (Hughes, 2007). Yet, it is considered that it was a political move in order to mobilize the masses in a war against Russia. Thus, the radicalisation must be regarded in close connection with the experience of conflict, clientelism, financial support and political development, and less as a social phenomenon. Moreover, the increase in religiosity did not mean the turn to radical Islam and to jihad for most of the population, but a return to the traditional Sufism which thus came into conflict with the Wahhabism, perceived as an alien form of religious organisation for the Chechen society. The initial success of the radical Islam among the population can be explained not only through the impact of the charismatic leaders embracing the nationalist and, later on, the Islamist discourse, but mainly in the framework of the breakdown in state structures and the power vacuum which soon came to be filled-in by *sharia* courts, as one of the only mechanisms for social regulation (Hughes, 2007).

### ***1.3.2 Islam in the South Caucasus: Ajaria and Abkhazia***

In Ajaria, the Islam did not prove to be as strong as in the North Caucasus, neither in the Soviet times, nor in the post-Soviet period. It failed to act as a mobilising factor against the Soviet anti-religious policies, as well as against the Georgian measures to impose Christianity in the region.

The decline of Islam in the Soviet Ajaria has been regarded as a consequence of the stand the local political elites took with respect to the Soviet policies of banning any form of religiosity and of Islam (Anderson, 1994; Derlugian, 1995; *see* Pelkmans, 2006). The political elites of Ajaria were mainly of Georgian origin and Christian religious affiliation, eager to adopt the Soviet anti-Islam policies (Pelkmans, 2006). Therefore, there was no local political resistance to the Soviet measures of closing or destroying all the mosques and the madrassas (Islamic schools) in Ajaria. The local religious leaders took themselves a moderate attitude and mediated between the state representatives and the local Muslim population, by urging their followers to let the interests of the state prevail over those of religion (Pelkmans, 2006).

Pelkmans (2006) identifies further reasons to explain the weak or inexistent resistance of the Ajarians to the anti-Islamic measures, besides the fear of repression. First, once the border has been drawn between the Soviet Union and Turkey, Ajaria lost the connection to its traditional religious and educational centres in Turkey, to which it had access since the Ottoman times. With the establishment of the Soviet Union, the Islamic leadership of Ajaria was placed under the lead of the Muslim Religious Board for the Transcaucasus in Azerbaijan which was predominantly Shi'ite, as opposed to the Sunni Ajarians, now restrained from voicing their interests.

Second, the lack of resistance to the anti-Islam policies may be explained, according to the author, by the nature of the Islamic institutions in the pre-Soviet period. In Ajaria, Islam spread in the Ottoman times and had a public role, whereas in the North Caucasus the conversion was done through the work of the Sufi brotherhoods that were traditionally organised as secret societies, which allowed them to develop an underground, secret activity of resistance during the Soviet repression of Islam. Thus, in Ajaria, Islam was weakened by losing its connections with the public institutions on which it was based, now hostile to Islam. As a consequence, Islam "retreated to the domestic domain and lost a large part of its institutional basis" (Pelkmans, 2006: 107).

The Soviet historiography and, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Georgian nationalists used the work of the ethnographers and of the historians to re-invent Ajaria's history, by insisting on its Georgian and Christian roots and thus removing the Ottoman and the Muslim legacy. Both the Soviet and the Georgian post-Soviet propaganda depicted the conversion to Islam as an act of terror, under the force of massacres and deportations and stressed the alleged economic difficulties during the Ottoman Empire, as opposed to the prosperity under the Georgian rule. Georgia denounced the incompatibility between the Georgian ethnicity and the Muslim religion and "Islam had become the historical enemy of Georgia, an enemy that undermined Georgia's sense of national identity" (Pelkmans, 2006: 109).

The role of the elites proved to be critical in shaping the religious identity of the people in Ajaria. While the Georgian leaders, both the nationalist Gamsakhurdia and the moderate Shevardnadze, envisaged an image of Georgia not to be dissociated from Christianity, Aslan Abashidze, the leader of the Ajarian Autonomous Republic from 1992 to 2004, avoided to express a clear religious affiliation, being perceived by both Muslim and Christian community of Ajaria as one of their own. However, although Abashidze came to power with the support of the Muslim population, he strengthened his authority with the

support of the non-Ajarian and thus non-Muslim groups and in the later he openly supported the Georgian Orthodox Church, by allocating money to the construction of new churches and ensuring media coverage of Christian events and leaders, while engaging no similar support for the Muslim community (Pelkmans, 2006).

The religious trends in Ajaria followed a distinct regional and geographical pattern, with significant difference between the upper and the lower Ajaria. Thus, in lower Ajaria, the proximity to the urban centres, the high rate of intermarriages with the Christian Georgians and the influx of non-Muslim Georgians facilitated the integration of the local population into the Soviet Georgian society and lifestyle, later to be identified with Christianity. The conversion to Christianity in the last decades went on very quickly with almost the majority of the population converting in the first decade after the socialism (Pelkmans, 2006). In contrast, there was no support for the Muslim establishments and the call to prayer from the only mosque still standing in the capital Batumi was stopped by the authorities in the 1990s following the complaints of the residents about the noise.

In upper Ajaria, Islam remained active in the domestic realm and started to be re-activated in the 1980s, although it lacked the financial means, an educated clergy and the political elites to support it. In the mountain villages, the mosques and the madrassas played an active role and the Muslim leaders became the de facto authorities in these communities (Pelkmans, 2006).

Conversion to Christianity in Ajaria in the last decades has been utilised by people as an instrument to access modernity, to escape the backwardness associated to the Muslim and Ottoman legacy. It is rather a return and not the embrace of Christianity, a removal of a past Islamisation. The trend was enhanced by the socio-economic realities who underlined the incompatibility between a professional career and an Islamic lifestyle. Thus, Islam became the religion of the unskilled workers, mountain villagers, isolating the Muslims from the economic, political and intellectual elite of Ajaria and leading to a further marginalisation of Islam (Pelkmans, 2006: 164). It was especially the representatives of the middle and upper class who converted to Christianity, many civil servants, teachers and higher administrative personnel (Pelkmans, 2002), since it was these categories that were mostly affected of the Stalinist purges in the 1930s and the 1950s or had increased interactions with the urban, thus Georgian lifestyle and education. The access to education, to urban life and then the deportations, all weakened the links with the local community, with its local customs and traditions, which were largely Muslim. Furthermore, even after their rehabilitation, the repressed families were still submitted to stigmatisation by their own community (Pelkmans,

2006: 160-161). The perceived betrayal pushed them out of the community of origin and facilitated their integration into the Georgian and Christian one.

The ambiguity in appreciating the distribution of religious belonging in Abkhazia lies not only in the limited census data, but in the ambiguity of religious practice or belief. The Christian majority, as well as the 20-40 percent Muslim population display little specific religious practices. Moreover, the religious practice in Abkhazia is a melange of polytheistic worship and animism, converging with aspects of Islam and Christianity. "Christian ceremonies, Moslem rites and pagan observances are so closely interwoven that at times it seems impossible to separate them" (Benet, 1974; *see* Clogg, 1999). Individual religious difference is respected, the fundamentalism lacks and it is not uncommon to meet both Christians and Muslims in one family (Clogg, 1999). Neither Christianity or Islam has been perceived as a threat to the traditional social structure in Abkhazia, thus both were adopted at a rather superficial level, while the Abkhaz "preserved their pagan customs, adopting from Christianity or Islam only those elements which did not contradict their ancient beliefs" (Garb, 1986; *see* Clogg, 1999). Adopting Christianity or Islam was rather a political process than a matter of religious conversion. Abkhazia adopted Christianity in the sixth century when it became a part of the Byzantine Empire, converted to Islam in the 15<sup>th</sup> - 16<sup>th</sup> century during the Ottoman Empire and switched back to Christianity when the Turkish influence declined and it became a protectorate of Russia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

During the war between Georgia and Abkhazia in 1992-1993, there were attempts of the Georgian nationalist to portray the conflict as an inter-religious one, between the Muslims in Abkhazia and the Christian Georgians, playing on "Western geo-political fears of the spread of Islamic influence in the post-Soviet space" (Clogg, 1999: 214), although, in reality, religion did not play any part in the war. Moreover, the coalition against the Georgians comprised Muslim and Christian Abkhaz, Muslim Abkhaz from Turkey, North Caucasians, Russians, Greeks and Armenians. However, there has been an increase in the religiosity in Abkhazia following the war, as a side effect of the inter-ethnic war with the Georgians and mainly supported by the powerful Abkhaz diaspora in Turkey (descendants of the émigrés in the 1860s and after), which are practicing Muslims and are four times more numerous than their kins in Abkhazia (Clogg, 1999).

#### **1.4 Cultural conflicts**

The conflicts emerging in the post-Soviet space have also been analysed in literature as cultural conflicts, arising from the struggle to resist the suppression of cultural identities and autonomy during the Soviet period, the assimilation and the Russification process, and to reaffirm the national and local identities.

During Stalin era, a politically circumscribed cultural autonomy was recognised, despite the severe repression of traditional religious and social institutions. However, the hierarchical organisation of the ethnofederal system was regulating the types of cultural and political resources to which groups had access, depriving the minorities without ethnofederal units or living outside these units from the cultural rights granted to them in the early Soviet period. In the framework of the Second World War, nationalist movements still developed in Western Ukraine or the North Caucasus.

In the period following Stalin's regime, mass terror was no longer used as an instrument of nation building, although public expressions against the dominant national order continued to be suppressed and secessionist sentiments remained at the margins of the Soviet society (Beissinger, 2002). Due to the growing international success of the Soviet superpower, the Soviet regime exercised a deep cultural on the non-Russian inhabitants and many of them started to identify themselves with the Soviet state. A double identity emerged as possible, reconciling the Soviet and the national one.

During the 1970s-1980s, the discontent started to grow in the non-Russian federal units, mainly generated by issues as cultural and linguistic expression, religious freedom, representation of nationalities within elite posts, discrimination in the workplace, territorial boundaries of federal subunits, linguistic assimilation through the dual language competency policy (Beissinger, 2002).

In the context of the institutional crisis of the Soviet Union in 1989, multiple conflicts erupted throughout the territory of the federation, under the flag of self-determination and affirmation of national identity, following the first major conflict of Nagorno-Karabakh between the Azerbaijanis and Armenians, in 1988: between Georgians and Azerbaijanis in Georgia's Marneuli district, between Georgians and Abkhazians, Kirgiz and Tajiks in the Osh valley, Uzbeks and Meskhetian Turks in the Fergana valley, Kazakhs and Lezgins in Novyi Uzen.

### **1.5 Ideological conflicts**

The conflicts in the Caucasus, before becoming military conflicts, were fought at an ideological level of antagonistic nationalism. The hierarchical organisation of the ethnofederal system encouraged the affirmation of the long and rich cultural identity and heritage of some groups entitled to be considered autochthonous, while at the same time degrading the status of other group to that of new comers. “Differences in approaches to early history were by no means insignificant to the creation of the ideology of confrontation, which played a major role in the Karabakh, Abkhazian and South Ossetian tragedies” (Shnirelman, 2001: 15; *see* Cheterian, 2008). The weakening Soviet ideology during perestroika opened the way for the intelligentsia, who had access to resources and institutions, to develop a rival ideology, the national one. This new ideology challenged the power of the authorities in Moscow and simultaneously came in conflict with the competing visions of neighbouring nations over resources, territories and populations.

The first post-Soviet elites were intellectual elites, coming from humanities: the leader of the Armenian Karabakh Movement and the first president of independent Armenia, Levon Ter-Petrossian, was a philologist and a specialist in medieval manuscripts; Zviad Gamsakhurdia, the first elected president of Georgia, was a professor of literature and a translator of Shakespeare; Abulfaz Elchibey, the first freely elected president of Azerbaijan, was an Arabist; Ardzhinba, the self-proclaimed president of Abkhazia, was a historian of the medieval Caucasus, to mention only few. The intellectual elites’ perception of the nation, their capacity to articulate a vision of the nation, its glorious past and current grievances was able to mobilise the political forces and played a key role in the outbreak of the conflicts in the Caucasus (Cheterian, 2008: 41-42).

Applying the paradigm of nationalism in interpreting the conflicts in the post-Soviet transition reveals the inadequacy in interpreting the term “nationalism” in itself, regarded by the Soviet social science and the Communist propaganda as the anti-thesis of “proletarian internationalism,” while nationalists were fashioned as the “dark forces and internal conspirators” in service of the “imperialist countries,” such as the United States (Ciobanu, 2008: 28). In Russia, nationalism is understood exclusively as ethnic nationalism and has a strongly negative connotation (Tishkov, 1997). This interpretation was reflected in the faulty reaction of the national and Soviet authorities to the first nationalist movements in the late 1980s - early 1990s, with the party preferring to act in traditional and restrictive Soviet manner by espousing the old myth of “internationalism.” “Mikhail Gorbachev and his senior advisers underestimated the explosiveness of the ‘national question’ in spite of the fact that

their policy ignited it” (Ciobanu, 2008: 30). The reforms initiated by Gorbachev created a double vacuum, at ideological and institutional level, both failing to contain nationalism (Gellner, 1992; *see* Hughes, 2007).

### **1.6 Perestroika and the collapse of the Soviet Union**

The conflicts of the Caucasus and the territorial competition they contained emerged in the context of a political and security vacuum generated by the rapid collapse of the Soviet order and they were due rather to the specificity of Soviet political culture which imposed centralised hierarchical order and did not develop horizontal institutional mechanisms, than to ‘ancient hatreds’ between nations (Cheterian, 2012).

It has been argued, for example, that Georgia failed to build a stable and unified state following its independence under the impact of regional institutions, turned into reactive instruments. The national minorities perceived the institutions of the newly independent as instruments of strengthening the Soviet era practices of privileging Georgians at the expense of other ethnic groups, of enforcing ‘a Georgia for Georgians’ (Toft, 2001). Institutional framework was used as an argument by both parties in the Georgian-Abkhazian war in order to legitimise their claims. The Georgians appealed to the institutional structure inherited from the USSR, with Abkhazia being an integrative part of Georgia, while Abkhazia used the argument of the 1925 constitution granting its independence.

The perestroika introduced by the Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev is often connected to opening the door for new secessionist movements in the federal units and subunits. Through proposing the re-federalization of the USSR, Gorbachev supported ambitious leaders within ethnic autonomies in Russia and in other republics, such as Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia, in his attempt to restrain his main opponent, Boris Yeltsin (Ciobanu, 2008). In April 1990, the USSR Congress of People’s Deputies voted on the ‘Law on the Division of Powers between the USSR and the Subjects of the Federation’, through which the union and autonomous republics received equal status, opening this way the door for a secessionist union republic to exercise its constitutional right to sovereignty and secession, while being confronted with similar secessionist demands from an own autonomous republic.

Although an important factor, the nationalism in itself is not sufficient to explain the conflicts in the post-Soviet space in general and in Caucasus in particular; the rise of nationalist movements should be analysed as an effect of the rapid collapse of the Soviet

state. In the Caucasus, the legitimacy, authority and power of the Soviet institutions (the police, the army, the judiciary, the Soviet rouble) collapsed simultaneously (Cheterian, 2008) leaving a political and economic vacuum behind. Moreover, the response of the national and of the Soviet authorities to the initial upheavals, their unpreparedness to negotiate and the decision to challenge the nationalist mobilisation with military force, was the direct cause of the conflicts (Cheterian, 2008).

In addition to the rebellion against Moscow, several other factors impacted on the sources of conflict in the Caucasus in the context of a weakening and collapsing Soviet Union. While in South Caucasus the territorial conflicts were the consequence of border fixing in the Soviet era, in the North Caucasus the range of causes of conflict was enlarged by the mass trauma caused by the 1944 mass deportations and the conflicts arising upon the return of the deportees, deprived of their previous territories now inhabited by other ethnic groups. Furthermore, the disintegration of the Soviet Union brought the emergence of international borders dividing the Caucasus in two, with Russia in the North, and Georgia and Azerbaijan in the South. Peoples like the Ossets and the Lezgins found themselves divided and national movements militating for unity emerged.

The weakening of the authority in Moscow, its failure to secure the Caucasus, triggered the clash between the various national movements in the region, which came to fill in the political vacuum left behind by a central power failing to control the reforms initiated through perestroika which ended up in destabilising the area (Cheterian, 2008).

### **1.7 Globalisation**

Kaldor (2001) places the “new conflicts” at the end of the Cold War in the context of globalisation, arguing that global and regional interconnectedness has not only influenced the genesis of the conflicts but also deeply affects their dynamics. The post-authoritarian societies opened themselves to the global democratic ideas and neoliberal capitalist trends that have deeply affected their evolution in the aftermath of the USSR disintegration. The author identifies two major reasons lying at the base of the violent conflicts in the post-Communist space: the loss of legitimacy of the socialist ideology thus undermining the state’s authority and the dismantling of Cold War apparatus, flooding the 'market' with surplus weapons and redundant soldiers. The impact of the global factors has critically affected and accelerated the conflict dynamics. Thus, the role of transnational networks at societal level covers a wide range of actors and actions, from non-governmental aid

bypassing the state, to the growing political and economic influence of diasporas or to transnational criminal networks. Legitimacy was further eroded by the combination between privatisation and globalisation, which is closely connected to corruption and clientelism. The incapacity of these states to collect taxes and to secure investment increased the dependence on external donors who in turn extended their pressures for drastic economic reforms and liberalisation. As a consequence, the unemployment, the economic inequalities and the growing informal economy eroded the rule of law and favoured the “re-emergence of privatised forms of violence” (Kaldor, 2001: 52), from private security guards protecting economic facilities - especially international companies - to paramilitary groups associated with particular political factions.

In a critique to the impact of globalisation on the “new wars”, Cheterian (2008) argues, however, that the economic and political global actors penetrated the region only at the late stage of the process. The “Deal of the Century”, the oil deal between Azerbaijan and a consortium of Western companies, was signed as late as September 1994, after the cease-fire agreement in the Nagorno-Karabakh war. The multinationals and the international financial institutions are not to be held responsible for the conflicts in the Caucasus, the region differing substantially from that of Yugoslavia, closer and more exposed to the Western influence. The reasons are to be found rather in the sudden collapse of the state structures and the security dilemma it created (Cheterian, 2008).

### **1.8 Nationalism and nationalist conflicts**

The various nationalist mobilisations in the Caucasus (the Armenians’ movement in Southern Georgia, the Lezgins in Azerbaijan, various upheavals in Dagestan) had less mobilising capacity and did not erupt into violent conflicts, as there was a lack of military repression against them. (Cheterian, 2008).

Socialism (in its Soviet ethnofederalist shape), and its fall, generated national mobilisation and nationalism, as opposed to the view that nationalist revival caused the disintegration of the socialist Soviet Union. Nationalism replacing socialism as an ideology occurred only as an opportunity to fill-in a void, or, in Katherine Verdery’s terms, “what the Leninist Extinction confronts us with is a conceptual vacuum” (Verdery, 1996: 38). Moreover, the Communist states’ weakness can also be translated into an ideological weakness, with Marxism-Leninism remaining for most people an alien ideology (Verdery, 1991: 427). Nationalism may be regarded as an auxiliary phenomenon to modernisation. In

the context of industrialisation and urbanisation having destroyed the traditional connections within the society, the national conscience and nationalism take over in a compensatory role (Altermatt, 2000). The political decentralisation, including the transfer of power to regional bodies, emphasises the need to redefine the territoriality as a key element of the post-traditional nation-state. In the post-traditional nation-state, often the national identity does not coincide with the citizenship, situation leading to conflict (Guiberneau, 1999).

As a consequence, the secessionist movements and the wars that followed were caused not by the nationalism of the smaller autonomous units, but they were rather a counter-reaction to the emergence of nationalism in the first rank union republics (Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia and Abkhazia). The exception is Chechnya, driven into conflict by its own failure to articulate new state structures and on the ground of the emergence of new entrepreneurial elites and elites of violence, competing for power and resources.

In this context, several, overlapping types of nationalism converge in the Caucasus. Tishkov (2000: 12) talks about the “peripheral nationalism” when referring to the nationalism expressed by the autonomist and secessionist movements against Moscow, seen as “the centre”. At the same time, a new type of nationalism developed in the framework of ethnic nationalism, namely the religious nationalism, practiced mainly in the North Caucasus, in Chechnya. The organised religion has an essential role in providing the necessary channels to spread myths and ethnic symbols. Trenin and Malashenko discuss about the “transformation of the ethnic nationalism into a religious movement” (2004: 80) throughout the North Caucasus. In South Caucasus, on the other hand, the religious mobilisation was far less stronger, despite the repeated attempts of Chechens to infiltrate and to influence on the conflicts in the neighbouring regions. The Muslim Ajarians maintained a peaceful environment in their autonomous republic, while the Azerbaijanis sought to seek a balance between the radical Sunnite Chechens at the North and the Shiites in Iran, though the last years have recorded an increased appeal of young people for Islam.

In Georgia, the nationalism emerged in the aftermath of the USSR collapse draws its roots in the dissident movement of the intellectuals in the 1970s, among which Zviad Gamsakhurdia, later on the first freely elected president of independent Georgia and leader of the Georgian nationalist movement. The dissidents’ discourse was focused on one hand on fighting the Soviet rule exposing its human rights violations and, on the other hand, on defending the Georgian national symbols, language and culture. As a consequence, the Georgian nationalism, the ‘Georgia for Georgians’ discourse, excluded one third of the country’s population, the minorities not belonging to the titular nation, which saw Moscow as

the only guarantor of the status quo. Thus, while the Georgian elites feared the Russian assimilation, the minority groups feared the Georgian assimilation and fought back in order to preserve their status, identity and territories.

In contrast to the Balkans, where the nomenklatura itself appropriated the nationalist ideology and project (Lukic & Lynch, 1996; *see* Cheterian, 2012) or Central Asia, where the local nomenklatura resisted and retained power, in the Caucasus, the popular movements inspired by a nationalist discourse overthrew the existing order in an attempt to replace it with a new one, very often led by the Soviet-era intelligentsia (Cheterian, 2012). The initial upheavals, although later diverted under the ethno-nationalist flag, were initially directed against the Soviet rule and expressed discontent with various failures of the Soviet administration to respond to the national and local demands. In Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, the first mass demonstrations were dedicated to environmental issues. Later on, the nationalist movements covered the political arena throughout the Caucasus and they were both mass movements and anti-systemic (Evangelista, 2002: 15; *see* Cheterian, 2012). Yet, not all national movements in the Caucasus emerged as anti-systemic. The Ossetian national movement in South Ossetia and the Abkhaz national movement were anti-Georgian and sought protection from Russia (Cheterian, 2012).

The collapse of the USSR deeply transformed the “triangular conflicts” (Moscow - union republic - autonomy) to bilateral ones between two nationalist movements competing over the heritage of the Soviet Union (Cheterian, 2012: 8). The triangular conflict pattern is clear in the case of Georgia. Here, the Georgian National Movement became a real political force starting from 1988 and pressed the Soviet Georgian authorities to adopt a number of measures to consolidate national identity and to oppose the perceived Soviet policies of Russification, including the passing of a language law in November 1988 (Birch 1996: 161; *see* Cheterian, 2012). At the same time, the Georgian national mobilisation affected the national minority groups, especially those that enjoyed their own forms of territorial organisation, such as autonomous republics or autonomous regions. Finally, the Georgian national movement was directed against the Soviet state considering all Soviet institutions illegitimate, including the autonomous entities of Abkhazia, Ajaria and South Ossetia, as well as the Soviet Georgian constitution of 1925 (Cheterian, 2012).

### **1.9 Mass trauma as an incentive for conflict**

The conflicts in the Caucasus have been fuelled by mass traumas in people's historic experiences, which contributed to their mobilisation in defence of their identity and autonomy.

As a consequence of the Caucasian wars against Tsarist Russia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the mass deportations that followed, the Abkhazians became a minority in their own land. The situation repeated itself in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this time under the Georgian rule that altered once more the ethnic composition of the region by encouraging an increased migration of Mingrelians to Abkhazia. Following these measures of the Georgian leadership, according to the 1989 census, 45 percent of the population of Abkhazia were Georgians and only 17 percent Abkhazians (Cheterian, 2008).

The Chechens (along with the Ingush, Kalmyks, Karachai and Balkars) were deported in their entirety by the Stalinist to Central Asia in 1944, under the accusation of collaboration with Nazi Germany. Smaller groups of Ossets, Avars and Cherkess were also sent into exile (Seely, 2001). The mass trauma of deportation remained very vivid in the Chechen collective memory and "Chechens were brought up on ritualised narratives of this tragic event" (Williams, 2000: 106; *see* Cheterian, 2008). After being rehabilitated and allowed to return under Khrushchev regime in 1956 and the Chechen-Ingush republic was restored, the Chechen and the Ingush returnees faced a double drama: stigmatisation from their neighbours who continued to consider them collaborators of Nazi Germany and the loss of the properties and territories inhabited previous to the deportation and now resettled with other ethnic groups, a situation which led to conflicts between the ethnic groups disputing the lands. Several mountain areas were now closed for habitations and the returnees were forced to settle in lowlands *auls* and in Cossack *stanitsy*. The Akkintsy Chechens, originating from Dagestan, found their native villages repopulated with Laks. The Ingush lost most of their lands to the North Ossetians (Tishkov, 1997).

The insecurities of both Abkhazians and Chechens persisted and were again brought to light since no material or moral compensations have been offered for their suffering which gained a major role in the local narratives and, later on, in the nationalist discourse. Thus, the trauma of past repression, massacres and deportations was a primary factor leading to mass mobilisation among ethnic minorities in the Caucasus (Cheterian, 2008: 308). However, this argument is challenged by Russian authors demonstrating the fact that the Chechens and the Ingush received substantial material support upon their return from the Soviet state in the form of financial aid, tax breaks, social support, construction of schools, hospitals and

cultural institutions (Bugai, 1994; *see* Tishkov, 1997). The same authors argue in favour of the intense socio-cultural development, urbanisation and rapid economic development, primarily in oil-extraction and processing, lumber and textile industries, benefitting the returnees in the North Caucasus, during the 1960s – 1980s (Tishkov, 1997). Yet, the statistics display a reduced presence of the Chechens and the Ingush in the urban environment, with only 30.5 percent Chechens and 5.4 percent Ingush, as opposed to the 55.8 percent Slavs (Russians, Ukrainians and Belorussians), according to the 1989 census. Moreover, Chechen-Ingushetia remained the second poorest part of the Soviet Union (Seely, 2001), which exacerbated the local population's discontent with the central power in Moscow and fuelled the conflicts to emerge later in the 1990s.

Ajaris, a group of Georgian ethnic origin and, starting the 19<sup>th</sup> century, of Muslim religion, fell victims to the Stalinist purges in the 1930s and the 1950s. It was especially the middle-class that was affected by the deportations and the arrests. And it is precisely in the case of these families that conversion to Christianity is being observed at present. There are several causes that link the mass trauma of the purges to the conversion in the last decades. The access to education, to urban life and then the deportations, all weakened the links with the local community, with its local customs and traditions, which were largely Muslim. The repressed families were experienced less pressure to comply with local values and norms and were, thus, more likely to be exposed to Georgian and, therefore, Christian lifestyle. Furthermore, even after their rehabilitation, the repressed families were still submitted to stigmatisation by their own community (Pelkmans, 2006: 160-161). The perceived betrayal pushed them out of the community of origin and facilitated their integration into the Georgian and Christian one.

## **2.1 Competition for resources as reason for conflict**

One of the most circulated theories on the economic causes of conflicts and civil wars introduces the “greed or grievance” dichotomy, supporting the idea that a moderate to high resource dependence of a country is correlated with a higher risk of conflict. The access to resources provides the opportunity, as well as the motivation for rebellion. A conflict is more likely to occur when correlated with economic motivations and opportunities (“loot-seeking”) than ethnic, socio-economic or political grievances (justice-seeking”) (Collier, 2000).

The theory has been strongly criticised in literature mainly because of the statistic determination of the causes of conflict and civil war, and of the danger of inferring individual

motivations from statistical correlations (Ballentine and Nitzschke, 2005). It has also been argued that Collier's theory is heavily focused on the rebels, ignoring the role of the state both as an actor and as an institution in causing or prolonging conflict. Moreover, access to resources is not enough to determine the emergence of a conflict; it is rather the unequal distribution of resources and the corruption associated to it, as well as the exclusion of other minority groups and the weakness of the state per se that create favourable conditions for conflicts. Furthermore, economic greed is hardly the sole responsible for civil wars and conflicts eruption; it is the intersection between economic opportunities and ethnic, socio-economic or political grievances that fosters a conflict to occur (Ballentine and Sherman, 2003; *see* Ballentine and Nitzschke, 2005). "Greed" and "grievance", as defined by Collier, are complementary rather than competing explanations, and neither can be considered separately from the state's loss of legitimacy and capacity to manage development (Kaldor, 2001).

A critical difference between the different types of resources generating different types of conflict has also been emphasised by some authors. Thus, the "lootable resources" (such as alluvial gemstones, narcotic crops, timber) are associated to non-separatist insurgencies in Sierra Leone, Colombia or Afghanistan. They are easy to access, exploit and transport by small groups, which may lead to a prolongation of conflict with many groups depending and reaching the resources in order to finance themselves. On the other hand, the "unlootable resources" (such as oil, natural gas and diamonds) tend to be associated with separatist conflicts, on the ground that the exploitation of these resources requires skilled work and new technologies which are usually at the use of national governments and foreign companies, often failing to provide equal access to resources and the revenues they generate to all groups, especially to minority ones. Similarly, the presence of such resources in a territory is associated with good prospects of wealth, encouraging local groups to seek independence and self-governance (Ballentine and Nitzschke, 2005).

The role of natural resources in fuelling war economies has been widely acknowledge in literature and the conflicts thus resulting have been labelled as "resource wars", sometimes defined as a new type of armed conflict (Cilliers 2000; Renner 2002; *see* Ballentine and Nitzschke, 2005). The so resulted "war economies" have been described to "involve the destruction or circumvention of the formal economy and the growth of informal and black markets, effectively blurring the lines between the formal, informal, and criminal sectors and activities"; to "rely on the licit or illicit exploitation of / trade in lucrative natural resources where these assets obtain"; and to "thrive on cross-border trading networks, regional kin and

ethnic groups, arms traffickers and mercenaries, as well as legally operating commercial entities, each of which may have a vested interest in the continuation of conflict and instability “ (Ballentine and Nitzschke, 2005: 2).

### ***2.1.1 Energy resources as a cause of conflict***

Pipeline development, security and conflicts are highly interlinked. Gas and oil pipelines are at the intersection of politics and economics. The domestic affairs and the international relations of the transit countries are more important in the pipeline security, than those of the producer state, as the latter would be motivated to prioritise economic considerations to political ones. The greater the number of countries between the producer and the consumer, the more difficult the project operation becomes (Karagiannis, 2002).

While causal relations between resources and conflict are still to be determined on a case-by-case basis, two major perspectives have been debated. On one hand, the scarcity of resources is considered to be a determinant of conflicts. Lack of access to essential resources, or the uneven distribution of highly demanded resources (oil, gas, water, minerals, timber) can lead to conflict. On the other hand, it is the abundance of resources, rather than their scarcity, that creates conditions for conflict. Oil-rich countries like Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan are cases where states engage in rent-seeking behaviour rather than in democracy building (O’Lear, 2004).

Several arguments have been exposed in literature supporting the idea that energy-exporter states are conflict-prone. Among these: governments become less effective and more corrupt; rebels can attain funds to sustain a conflict either by attacking the infrastructure and hijacking the resources, either by demanding funds to abstain from attacks; secessionist conflicts may occur in oil and gas producing areas, especially if the revenues are high and the region is inhabited by a distinct ethnic or religious group (Shaffer, 2009).

Nowadays, in energy-exporting countries, in addition to the geopolitical competition, various domestic state and non-state actors compete for direct access to energy rents and engage in violent and often secessionist actions. However, the risk of state failure and interruption of supply can also act as an incentive for these actors to cooperate and maintain a minimum form of authority and rule of law. Three main types of arguments can be identified to explain the causal relation between resources and war: the *geopolitical argument* is about rent-seeking among energy-consuming countries, leading to direct or indirect conflicts among the great powers; the *greed argument* is about rent-seeking at local level, between non-state

actors and dealing with civil wars; finally, the *petro-state argument* is about rent-seeking in the producing state, explaining different types of conflict, internal, external and mixed (Kaldor, 2007).

### **2.1.2 The Caucasus: a regional energy security complex**

The main stake in the geopolitics of Caucasus and Central Asia is control over the transportation of oil and gas (Buzan and Wæver, 2003: 422). Following the same theory, the Caucasus is a heterogeneous, rather than a homogeneous security complex, divided among: three independent states (Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan), comprising autonomous entities claiming independence (Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, South Ossetia), seven republics in North Caucasus as part of the Russian Federation, among which Chechnya has undergone two lengthy independence wars. The penetration and influence of the regional powers - Turkey, Russia and Iran - as well as of the global players -USA and EU- shapes the dynamics of the sub-complex (Karagiannis, 2002).

After the fall of the Soviet Union, a new regional power came into light, Turkey, trying to reinforce its influence on the newly emerged Turkic states in the Caucasus and Central Asia and to counterbalance Russia and Iran's pre-eminence over them. Also, Turkey is determined to use its advantageous geographical position in order to become the most important energy hub, transporting oil and gas from Russia and Central Asia to Europe.

Economic and political rivalry between Russia and Turkey are closely interlinked in the Caucasus and in the Balkans. On one hand, Turkey is accusing Russia of tolerating activities of the secessionist Kurdish organisations on Russian soil and for ignoring the Caucasus section of the 1990 Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty which limits the military presence and heavy weaponry in European Russia and the Caucasus, as well as for the return of the Russian troops as 'peace-keepers' in Georgia and Armenia. On the other hand, Russia suspected Turkey of supporting the Chechens in the Russian-Chechen war and of encouraging the activity of the Chechens on Turkish soil (Bolukbasi, 1998).

A campaign against Chechnya seemed opportune for many Russian elites who regarded the North Caucasus republic's claims of independence as a threat to Russian economic interests and strategic hegemony in the Caucasus and at the Caspian Sea. Dudaev was in control on one of Russia's major pipelines, Baku-Novorosiisk, passing over 153 kilometres through the Chech territory and was threatening, at the same time, Russia's gateway to the South Caucasus (Hughes, 2007).

The “energy oligarchs” of Russia, among which the influential Berezovskii, exercised strong pressures on Yeltsin to secure Chechnya who was now moving towards restoring its own oil production and refining by signing influential contracts with American consortiums. The pressures intensified after Azerbaijan signed the “Deal of the Century” in 1994 with a consortium of international companies led by British Petroleum and Chevron, forming the Azerbaijan International Operating Consortium (AIOC) in order to develop three major oil fields at the Caspian Sea. This project clashed with the Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC), led by the Russian giant Lukoil, aspiring to have monopoly on transporting the oil from the Azeri oil fields at the Caspian Sea to Novorosiisk.

There are yet critiques to the importance of the Chechen resources for Moscow. Thus, Monica Duffy Toft (2003) argues that the oil pipelines were not that important for Russia’s decision to start a military campaign in Chechnya, since in the case of Tatarstan, also rich in natural resources, Moscow proved to be flexible in compromising to allow Tatarstan to sell off 50 percent of its oil wealth. Similarly, the author dismisses the theory that the control over resources was the drive behind Georgia’s war with Abkhazia, as the only strategic factor that could have worried Tbilisi was the loss of control over the railway linking Russia with Georgia, an import and export artery. At the same time, there was no war in Ajaria, although it was far more important in terms of resources than Abkhazia, benefitting from the strategic location of the industrial port of Batumi, the Black Sea terminus of the oil pipeline Baku-Batumi, not under Russian control (Toft, 2003).

### ***2.1.3 The Caucasus: energy security, threats and opportunities***

The gas and oil pipelines in the Caucasus and the Caspian region play a dual role, as threats and security risks, while also offering opportunities for cooperation and stabilisation. The pipeline diplomacy is not to be analysed merely as a security issue, but through the prism of the intertwined factors that come into play, such as the role of kinship and ethnicity in articulating the elites’ interests in the competition for resources, or the importance of defining concepts as territory and belonging when discussing the building of alliances.

*The Northern Route*, from Azerbaijan to Russia, via Chechnya, passes through approximately 150 kilometres of conflict zones in Chechnya. Oil has been here the essence of the war economy, fuelling the conflict, both for the Russian military and the Chechen warlords. As a consequence, Russia built a bypass pipeline, through Dagestan, but this was itself under threat when Chechen rebels invaded Dagestan in 1999, in the name of Islam, in an attempt to destroy this new project compromising Chechnya’s pre-eminence on the oil

transport market in the North Caucasus. Furthermore, the US-backed Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline project, meant to bypass Russia and situated only 100 kilometres from Chechnya has been perceived by Russia not only as an economic threat, but also as a hit on its dominant role in the region.

*The Western Route*, from Azerbaijan to Turkey, via Georgia, is highly linked to the frozen conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Although initially planned as ‘peace pipelines’, the projects have a dividing potential in the end, by exacerbating regional insecurities. However, the BTC and BTE pipelines changed the status quo of power relations in the region, offering major opportunities for Azerbaijan and Georgia to gain a plus of independence from Russia and to consolidate their role in the region, through enhanced cooperation inside the security sub-complex, as well as outside of it, through collaborating with regional powers, as Turkey (Li-Chen, 1999). “As a result they became significant regional actors” (Badalyan, 2011:4).

## **2.2 Informal economy**

The economic life does during war, the so-called “war economy”, does not cease to exist, but it adapts and takes on new forms (Ballentine and Nitzschke, 2005), serving different functions for different participants.

In the absence of the formal institutions to regulate the economic life during conflicts, the business relationships are being confined to an already established circle of relatives or members of the same ethnic or confessional group, leading to the development of ‘kinship-clan’ networks (Glinkina and Rosenberg, 2005: 8). Corruption settles in and the organised criminal groups come to fill-in the vacuum when the police and judicial systems fail.

The roots of the shadow economies in the post-Soviet conflict zones of the Caucasus can be traced back to the Communist period, when a parallel economy flourished coming to compensate for the scarcity and the deficiencies of the planned state-controlled economy. Thus, in Georgia for example, the national economy was liberalised after the 1950s and enjoyed an unprecedented level of autonomy, which in turn favoured the parallel or grey economy, widespread corruption and development of mafia-like structures. Together with the flourishing tourism on the Black Sea coasts of Abkhazia and Ajaria, with the production of exotic agricultural products (citrus fruits, tea, tobacco) and with the cultural freedom superior to other republics, the Georgian parallel economy ensured a higher standard of

leaving and access to the black market good, otherwise restricted to the other Soviet citizens (Cheterian, 2008).

### **2.3 Economic hardships**

The material condition of the ethnic groups has been in the focus of some scholars in the attempt to investigate on the causality of conflicts. It has been argued that the conflicts in the Soviet Union were the product of economic backwardness and poverty and that even later, these close links of these economies to the Russian economy represented one of the major obstacles to their real independence (Ciobanu, 2008). Three major strands have been identified in order to explain the impact of the economic hardships on the emergence of conflicts: development and modernisation, relative deprivation and intrinsic worth (Toft, 2003).

Yet, the economic hardships cannot be held responsible alone for the outbreak of conflicts, although it can be argued that in a stagnant or depressed economy, the appeal to violence is enhanced by the existence of a “mass of alienated young men, whose identity and allegiance are clan-based (Glinkina and Rosenberg, 2005: 6). In Chechnya, the first war generated a profound economic crisis, which came only to complete an already difficult economic situation experienced by the republic during Soviet times when it was the second poorest federal entity in USSR. With the gas and oil industry which employed the largest part of the urban population collapsing during the war, Chechnya became the arena of discontent for many young people, angry with the unemployment and poverty they were facing, with the small elites who used their position and the political and military power for personal enrichment (Tishkov, 1997), with the widespread corruption and, more important, fit to fight and trained for warfare during the general military service performed in the Soviet times.

The war in Chechnya has not spread to other equally poor or even poorer parts of the North Caucasus. Armenia and Azerbaijan have managed to maintain the status quo of the cease-fire and do not confront themselves with violent secessions claims from their minority groups, despite high levels of poverty and inequality, foreign intervention, widespread corruption and, in the Azeri case, authoritarian government. Georgia, on the other hand, although more privileged in terms of economic development than its neighbours, continues to experience repeated conflict and the potential for its escalation still exists (Glinkina and Rosenberg, 2005).

## **2.4 Access to weapons: a conflict-facilitator factor**

An important risk-increasing factor for conflicts in the Caucasus was the disruption of central control on military supplies, in the context of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The access to weapons was easy, the prices were low and there was no control on exchanging and selling them anymore. Moreover, due to the practice of the general military service during the communism, an important part of the population was trained into using the weapons. Many of them were transferred by the Russian military themselves to the Chechen nationalists at the beginning of the conflict. “If Yeltsin created Chechen nationalism, the Russian military armed its insurgency” (Hughes, 2007).

The access to weapons and to trained, redundant soldiers has been identified by some of the authors as one of the two major reasons lying at the base of the violent conflicts in the post-Communist space, along with the loss of legitimacy of the socialist ideology (Kaldor, 2001).

Though the role of the access to light and heavy weaponry after the collapse of the Soviet Union should not be neglected a risk-maximizing factor, it cannot be considered a reason in itself. Throughout the entire URSS and former Communist countries, weapon deposits were opened and sometimes looted; however, in only few of these cases conflicts and wars emerged.

## **2.5 Territorial conflicts**

In her theory of ‘indivisible territory and ethnic war’, Toft (2003) explains the likelihood of ethnic wars to occur in connection with territorial demands if two conditions are met. First, an ethnic minority should demand sovereignty over the territory it inhabits. It will seek to rule the territory if it is concentrated in a particular region of the country, especially if that region is a historic homeland. Second, the state must perceive the territory in cause as indivisible from the rest of the state’s territory. For the state, what matters the most is the precedence setting and thus it will refuse to give up on a territory in favour of a minority group for fear that similar demands will be raised by other groups as well. The fear is more present and it can lead to war in the case of multinational states assuming an equality of status among political units. Thus, the hierarchical logic of the Soviet ethnofederal organisations, with only union republics having the right to secession, while this was not granted to autonomous republics as well, prevented the newly independent Russia to confront itself with sixteen requests for secession (Toft, 2003). In addition, the precedence-setting is used to explain why multinational states are reluctant to allow secession even in the case of those units not

endowed with valuable resources or strong economies, for fear this would create incentives for richer entities to raise the same demands later on. In a similar logic, the state's decision to engage violence against a secessionist unit helps to create a precedence of reaction meant to discourage other initiatives in this sense.

It has been argued in literature that among the minorities in the Caucasus, only those benefitting from an autonomous status sought to secede. Thus, although the ethnic Armenians and Azerbaijanis in Georgians had their own demands, they did not develop secessionist movements since they did not have any autonomous structures (Cornell, 1999; *see* Cheterian, 2008). Yet the theory has been criticised by scholars arguing that the autonomous status of an entity is not sufficient to explain the drive for secession. As such, Nakhichevan, as an Autonomous Republic, had a higher autonomous status than Karabakh within the Azerbaijani SSR, yet it did not express separatist claims, nor did it go to conflict. Similarly, it was the Chechen National Congress that sought secession and not the Autonomous Republic of Checheno-Ingushetia itself (Cheterian, 2008).

#### **IV. GEOPOLITICS OF TRANSITION II: AJARIA AND DAGESTAN. THE WARS THAT DID NOT HAPPEN**

##### **1.1 Ajaria**

During the initial conflict with Tbilisi, Ajaria was accused by the Georgian nationalists of separatism, arising from the nature of the Georgian nationalist discourse during Gamsakhurdia's regime, focused on defining Georgian national identity as overlapping the Christian one. Thus, the Muslim Ajarians were seen as "falling outside this conception of national identity and, therefore, a threat to the unity and the legitimacy of the newly independent state" (Toft, 2001: 14). Yet, *Ajaria did not seek independence*. The Ajarians saw themselves as Georgians and Ajaria as an integral part of Georgia, the conflict being focused on the fear that Ajaria might lose its status as an autonomous republic within Georgia. For the Ajarians, the issue at stake was not whether Tbilisi would have control over the republic, but how much control it would exert (Toft, 2003). Moreover, Ajaria openly declared that it shared common Georgian interests and it expressed its concern for the territorial integrity of Georgia, faced with the wars in South Ossetia and in Abkhazia in the early 1990s.

There are several reasons, identified by Ciobanu (2008), why there was no war in Ajaria and why the region followed a different path in the dynamics of conflict, compared to Abkhazia or South Ossetia.

Despite preserving historic and religious ties with Turkey, *the Ajarians identified themselves as Georgians*, sharing the same language and culture with the Georgians. Ajaria's autonomous status, based on religious and not on ethnic identity, created no incentives for secession and self-determination, as no preconditions for nationhood were created through the ethnofederal system in its case. It never questioned Georgia's territorial integrity, nor did it support the secessionist claims of other regions within Georgia. The Soviet nationality system did not create any "Ajarian" nationality and except for the Jewish Autonomous Region, Ajaria was the only Soviet autonomy without a titular nationality. Ajaria did not raise demands for independence, striving only to maintain the autonomy of the region, due to the fact that "Ajarians perceived only a regional identity, rather than an ethnic otherness" (Hoch and Kopeček, 2011: 15) and to the fact that the foreign powers, Russia and Turkey, did not support the transformation of Ajarian identity either. The Ajarians consider themselves to be Georgians and do not perceive themselves as "other" in relation to the broader Georgian group (Toft, 2003). Yet, the Georgians find it hard to accept that the Muslim Ajarians are Georgians, as long as being Georgian means being a Christian. In the mid-1980s, only the Muslim Ajarians were the target of the anti-Islamic rhetoric in Georgia, other groups, such as the Azeris, being spared of the attacks.

Ajaria benefits from a *strategic location* on the Black Sea coast, with the port of Batumi being a major processing terminal for the oil transported on the Baku-Batumi pipeline. Moreover, it hosts a well developed tourism infrastructure and it is rich in mineral resources and subtropical products. This ensured Ajaria's wealth, considerably above the rest of the country, while determining it to avoid the disrupting economic devastation suffered by the regions that went to war, Abkhazia or South Ossetia.

The conflict between Ajaria and Georgia was *mostly a dispute between charismatic leaders* with diverging economic interests and, unlike Abkhazia and South Ossetia, it never had an intelligentsia-led movement for sovereignty and independence (Ciobanu, 2008: 129). Abashidze was peacefully removed by Saakashvili in May 2004, without any violence and, for the first time since Georgia's independence, Tbilisi Central authorities regained control of Ajaria.

Although in the beginning Tbilisi regarded Ajaria with the same fear it had about Abkhazia and South Ossetia and accused it of separatism, later it came to view Ajaria as an administrative region only seeking to secure its autonomy and not as a secessionist region (Toft, 2003). Tbilisi understood that Ajaria is looking to preserve its autonomy and not to increase it, as Abkhazia wanted. Moreover, Georgia was less determined to start a violent

conflict with Batumi than with Sukhumi, since Ajaria's leaders did not display such close connections nor did they ask for Russian support as the ones in Abkhazia did, raising the fears of the newly independent Georgia of losing its recently gained status against Moscow and of facing a Russian military intervention on its territory.

As far as the other ethnic groups in Georgia did not rebel and asked for autonomy or secession, Zürcher (2005) argues that, although more numerous than the Abkhazians, the Armenians and the Azerbaijanis did not seek to break away from Georgia, because the Soviet ethnofederal organization did not equip them with autonomous structures and territories, as well with the identity and symbolism associated to them, as it happened in the case of Abkhazia. The argument has been however criticized by Petersen (2008) to ignore the broader historical picture, taking into account that the Soviet ethno-federal system generally reflected the historic ethnic realities of the region, even before the USSR. Moreover, the Armenians and Azerbaijanis in Georgia are 'spill-over' populations from their neighbouring sovereign homelands and many of them returned to Armenia and Azerbaijan during the wars, whereas the Abkhazians did not have this option of return, their homeland being entirely within Georgia.

## **1.2 Dagestan**

In Dagestan, the collapse of the authoritarian state led to the re-emergence of the traditional values, institutions and social structures, in the form of the ancient Dagestani *djamaat*, a political community along territorial limits. Usually it is a village or a community of villages with an historical connection, led by a council of elders and governed by the *adat* set of norms. It can thus be considered a "proto-consociational" society (Ware and Kisriev, 2001), a political and social structure, generating elites, unlike the tribal structures in Chechnya. The post-Soviet period marked the emergence of *ethnopolities*, characterised by the fact that their entire membership and base of support consist of a single *djamaat*. Although they may include members from other ethnic groups, the leadership and the elites are recruited from the same *djamaat*, leading thus to the development of the stable system of *djamaat*-based elites in Dagestan.

The main reasons why Dagestan did not follow the conflict way as the neighbouring Chechnya can be summarised, without claiming to be exhaustive, to the following set:

*Economic development:* unlike Chechnya, Dagestan does not dispose of significant natural reserves that would encourage the elites to pursue economic and thus political

independence. Moreover, the major pipeline projects transporting gas and oil from the Caspian Sea, through Caucasus to Europe, bypass Dagestan, with the exception of one alternative pipeline developed by Russia during the conflict in Chechnya. Therefore, Dagestan is highly dependent economically on Moscow and deeply affected by the transition crisis.

*Partokratiia:* The old Soviet elites were not replaced in Dagestan and stayed in power, looking for a consociational model of governance between the country's numerous ethnic groups, as described above and resistant to radicalisation of Islam. By contrast, Chechnya was the only ex-Soviet state to completely remove its nomenklatura.

*Ethnic fragmentation:* with none of the main ethnic groups representing more than 30 percent of the total population, national conflicts along ethnic lines proved to be impossible in Dagestan, since none of the groups would be able to form a majority in order to mobilise a large segment of the population and to exercise enough power.

*Chechen-Dagestani rift:* cooperation between Chechnya and Dagestan in a common fight for independence from the Russian Federation seemed highly unlikely due to the traditional rivalry between Dagestanis (mainly Avars) and Chechens. The Chechens accused the Avars to have contributed to their deportation in 1944. On the other side, the Dagestanis blamed the Chechens for irredentist intentions and strongly mobilised against the Chechen invasion in 1999.

*Division of Islam:* Islam failed to act as a unifying element. First, the Sunni Islam, in its Salafi form (Wahhabism) was strongly rejected in Dagestan and created a division between the traditionalists and the radicals. Secondly, Sufism itself did not manage to unite the population of the country, due to the traditional belonging to various orders on ethnic grounds and to the rivalry between the main Sufi tariqas, Naqshebandiya and Qadiriya (Gammer, 2005).

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Nationalist and religious movements following the disintegration of the Soviet Union were sometimes driven by non-related incentives (legislative void, counter-reactions to neighbouring nationalist movements, political and ideological vacuum), other times by pragmatic economic interests. In the case of Chechnya and Dagestan, they failed due to strong traditional ways of societal organisation or because of high ethnic fragmentation. In

Ajaria and Abkhazia, ethnic identity and the myth of descend and origin played an essential role in opting for war or for peace.

Although religion was often critical in defining and preserving national identities in the Caucasus, the conflicts in the region were not religious. Both in Dagestan and in Chechnya, the radical Islamic project failed, being strongly rejected by the population and dismissed against the traditional, ‘popular Islam’, closer to the traditional way of social and political organisation in the North Caucasus. Similarly, its internal divisions contributed, in the end, to the stabilisation of the region, in the absence of a single unifying Islamic force. In the South Caucasus, Islam did not embrace a radical form and in Georgia it became obviously weak during the Soviet period. Islam did not prove to be as strong as in the North Caucasus, neither in the Soviet times, nor in the post-Soviet period. It failed to act as a mobilising factor against the Soviet anti-religious policies, as well as against the Georgian measures to impose Christianity in the region.

The Soviet model of ethnofederalism supported an artificial creation of new nation-states and encouraged the development of new identities across the new lines. The local elites were empowered, well-established sets of institutions were developed and the manifestation of “national” identity was encouraged through the political and cultural life of the “nations”. It can be argued that the territorial separatists of the early 1990s have become the state builders of the early 2000s.

Ethnicity played an important role in the transition in all Caucasus countries, but ethnic fragmentation and ethnic dominance were not the causes of war by themselves. On the contrary, in highly fragmented societies, such as Dagestan, organisers of violence find it more difficult to aggregate different ethnic groups and to mobilise them along common ethnonationalist goals. The initial conflicts emerging in the framework of the fall of the Soviet Union were rather a reassertion of individual and collective dignity, irrespective of ethnic meaning, which was to be added later.

Pipeline development, security and conflicts are highly interlinked. Gas and oil pipelines are at the intersection of politics and economics. While causal relations between resources and conflict are still to be determined on a case-by-case basis, the competition for access to resources, as well as the strive of the local actors for the energy security of the pipelines, along with the involvement of the regional and global powers, constitute both strong incentives for conflict, as well as opportunities for peace and stabilisation.

The conflicts and the peaceful coexistence in the Caucasus must therefore be understood at the intersection of the multitude of factors intervening at the local and regional

level, as well as in a global context. They are to be analysed in the broader historical framework of the ethnofederal organisation of the Soviet Union, of the geopolitical and security implications of the region, as well as of the struggle of the new emerging elites propelled from the Soviet nomenklatura, often leading to the rise of the entrepreneurs of violence under the flag of national or religious discourse. The comparative approach offered by the political anthropology, between the trajectories of various postsocialist countries, can contribute to a better the understanding of the “distinct ways people make sense of their socialist experiences and of the various ideologies and political imaginaries emerging in these regions (e.g. Europeanism, Eurasianism)” (Tulbure, 2009: 4) and can lead to new projects of power and the control over resources. The political anthropologists moved away from the initial model of analysis, from a concern for the political and economic processes, to a micro-level of understanding, filtered through the experiences of the people and the societal transformations (Burawoy and Verdery 1998; Lampland 2000; Hann 2002; Hayden 2002b; Verdery 2002; *see* Tulbure, 2009).

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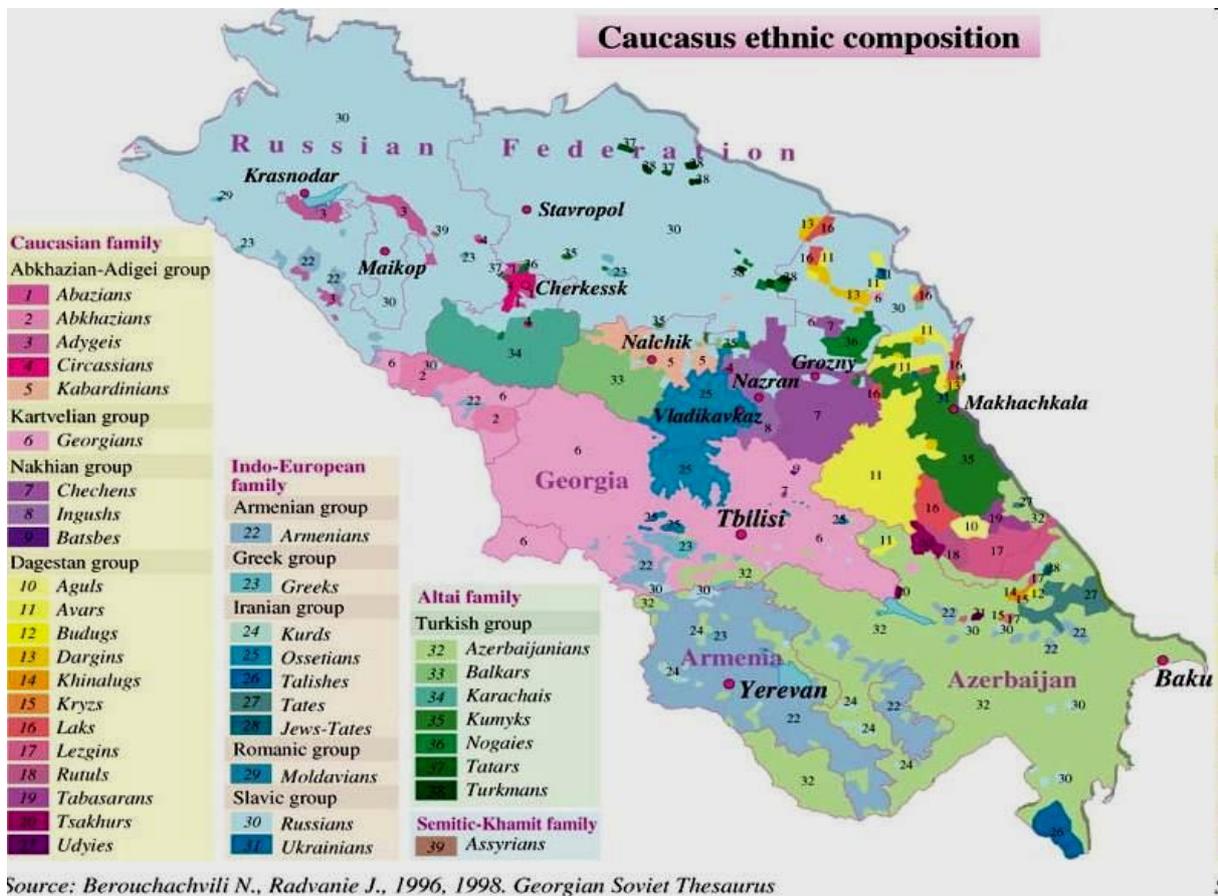
# APPENDICES

## Appendix 1: Ethnic plurality in the Caucasus (1)

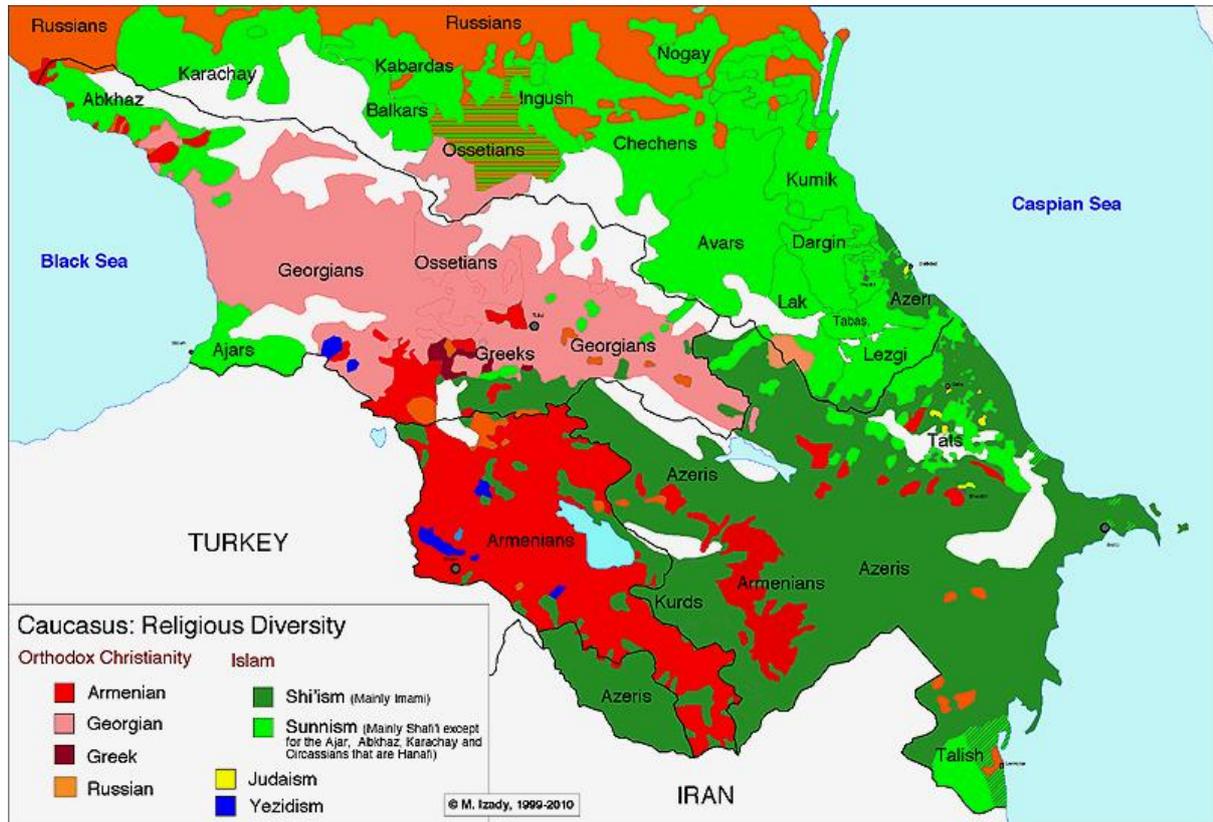


Source: O'Loughlin (2007)

## Appendix 2: Ethnic plurality in the Caucasus (2)



### Appendix 3: Religious diversity in the Caucasus



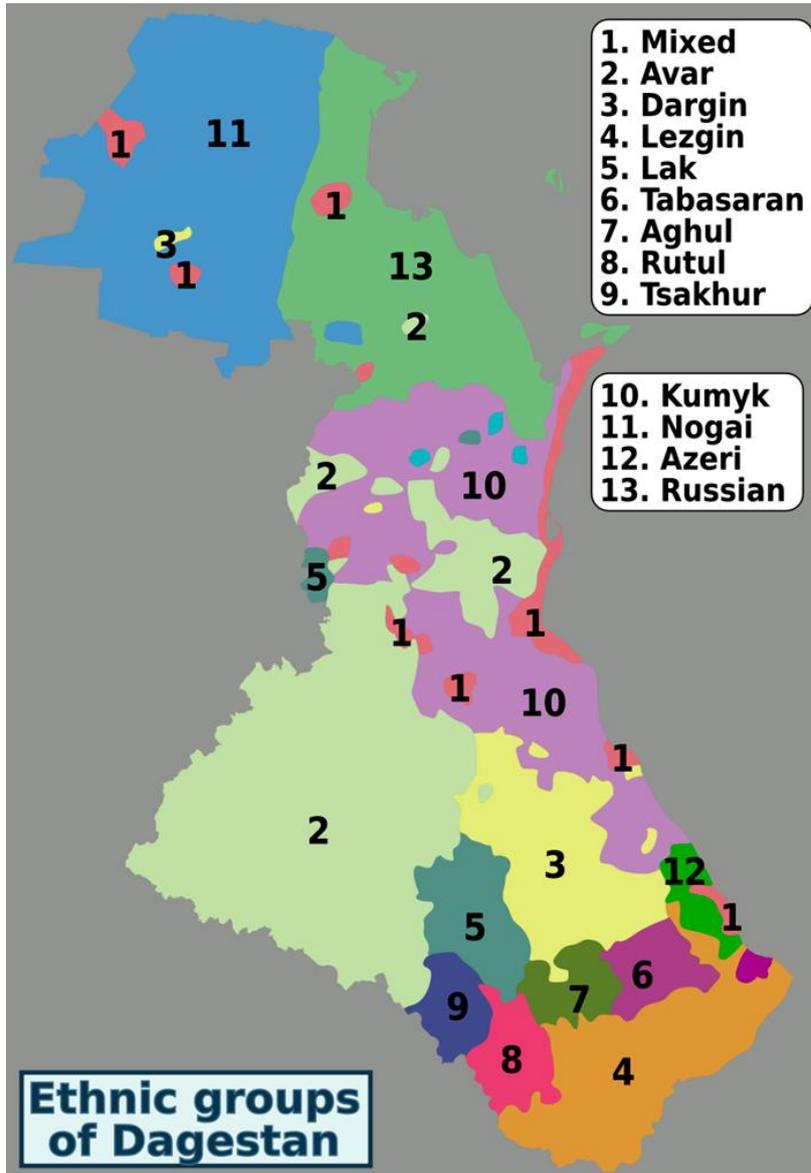
Source: M. Izady (1999-2000)

## Appendix 4: Linguistic diversity in the North-East Caucasus



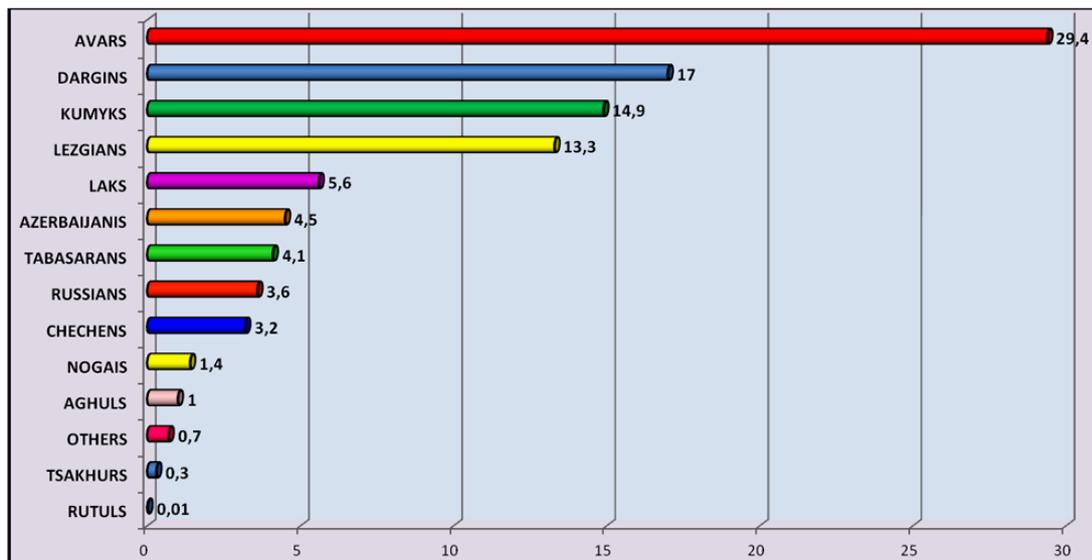
Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northeast\\_Caucasian\\_languages](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northeast_Caucasian_languages)

Appendix 5: Ethnic map of Dagestan



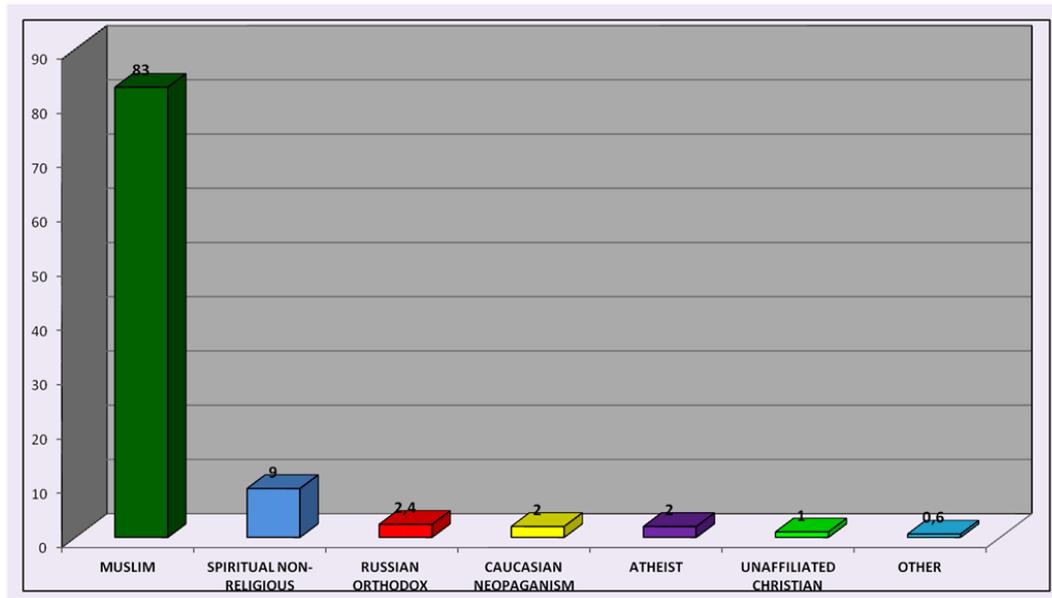
Source: [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Dagestan\\_ethnicities.png](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Dagestan_ethnicities.png)

## Appendix 6: Ethnic plurality in Dagestan



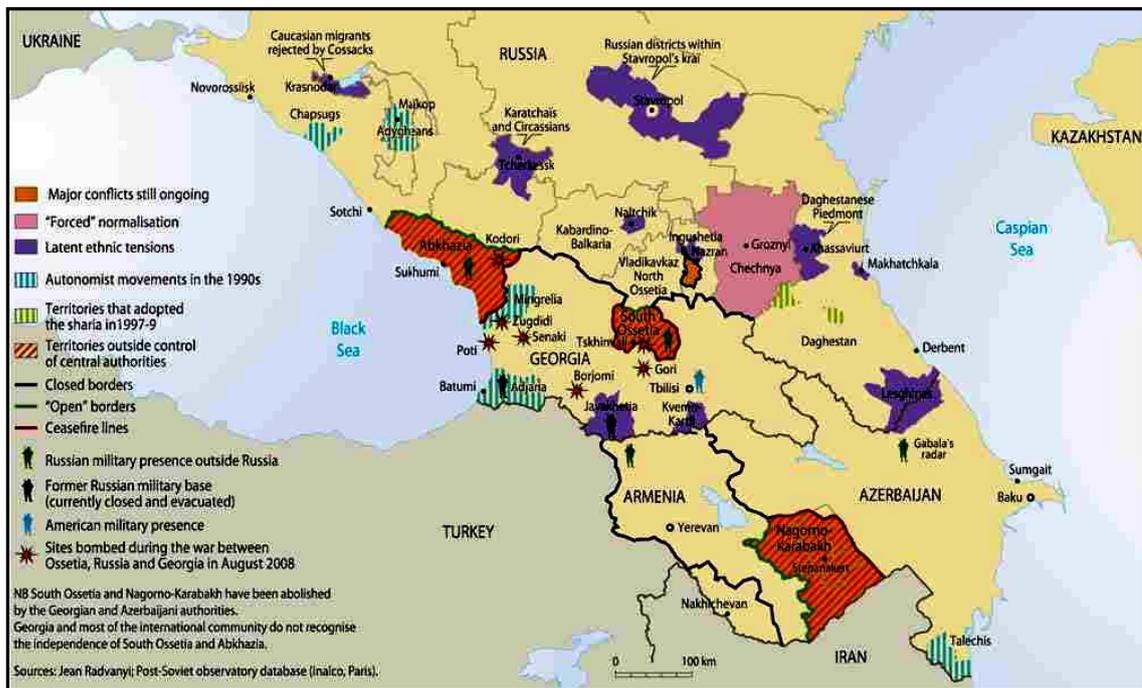
*Author's input based on the 2010 census results*

## Appendix 7: Religious diversity in Dagestan



*Author's input based on the 2010 census results*

## Appendix 8: Map of conflicts in Caucasus



Source: Jean Radvanyi; Post-Soviet observatory database (Inalco, Paris)

## Appendix 9: Economies, Actors, Motives, and Activities During Armed Conflict

Source: Ballentine and Nitzschke, 2005: 8

|  | The Combat Economy   | The Shadow Economy   | The Coping Economy  |
|--|--|--|---|
| <i>Who?<br/>Key Actors</i>                                   | Commanders, “conflict entrepreneurs”, fighters, suppliers of weapons and matériel  | Profiteers, transport sector, businessmen, drug traffickers, “downstream” actors (truck drivers, poppy farmers)  | Poor families and communities   |
| <i>Why?<br/>Motivations and Incentives for War and Peace</i> | To fund the war efforts or achieve military objectives<br>Peace may not be in their interest as it may lead to decreased power, status, and wealth<br>Fighters may have an interest in peace if there are alternative sources of livelihoods available | To make a profit on the margins of a conflict<br>Peace could be in their interest if it encourages long-term investment and licit entrepreneurial activity<br>Peace requires alternatives to the shadow economy; otherwise a criminalised war economy will become a criminalised peace economy | To cope and maintain asset bases through low-risk activities, or to survive through asset erosion<br>Peace could enable families to move beyond subsistence   |
| <i>How?<br/>Key Activities and Commodities</i>               | Taxation of licit and illicit economic activities; money, arms, equipment, and mercenaries from external state and non-state supporters; economic blockages of dissenting areas; asset stripping and looting; aid manipulation                         | Smuggling of high-value commodities; mass extraction of natural resources; Hawalla (currency order and exchange system); aid manipulation  | Employment of diverse livelihood strategies to spread risk; subsistence agriculture; petty trade and small businesses; on-farm and off-farm wage labour; labour migration and remittances; redistribution through family networks; humanitarian and rehabilitation assistance |

(adapted from Goodhand 2004, Table 3.1)

## Appendix 10: PEST analysis of energy security, threats and opportunities in the Caucasus

| POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT  |   | ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT   |  |
|--|---|--|--|
| THREATS  | OPPORTUNITIES   | THREATS  | OPPORTUNITIES  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Frozen conflicts</li> <li>▪ Struggle for dominance between the regional powers: Russia, Turkey, Iran</li> <li>▪ Conflicting interests: USA and EU vs. Russia and Iran</li> <li>▪ Terrorist attacks on the pipelines</li> <li>▪ Rivalries between the states in the region</li> <li>▪ Oil and gas revenues used for military purposes</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ ‘Peace pipelines’</li> <li>▪ Increased cooperation among the states in the region</li> <li>▪ Higher independence from Russia</li> <li>▪ New role within the RSC for Azerbaijan and Georgia</li> <li>▪ New balance of power: the role of Turkey</li> <li>▪ Political stability to secure economic prosperity</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Fluidity of gas and oil prices</li> <li>▪ Presence of monopolies: Gazprom</li> <li>▪ Development of mono-industrial economies</li> <li>▪ Uncertain availability of resources in the Caspian Sea</li> <li>▪ Legal status of the Caspian Sea</li> <li>▪ Incapacity of the consumer states to pay</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Economic prosperity for the states in the region</li> <li>▪ Long-term contracts securing stable political relations</li> <li>▪ Development of infrastructure</li> <li>▪ Employment</li> </ul> |
| SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT   |   | TECHNOLOGICAL ENVIRONMENT  |  |
| THREATS  | OPPORTUNITIES   | THREATS  | OPPORTUNITIES  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Regional differences leading to conflict and competition over resources</li> <li>▪ Division with the society</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Better standards of living</li> <li>▪ Higher incomes</li> <li>▪ Increased job security</li> <li>▪ Peace and stability</li> <li>▪ Increased inter-ethnic cooperation</li> <li>▪ Less incentives for separatism</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Bosphorus: narrow and crowded</li> <li>▪ Critical condition of the pipelines inherited from the USSR</li> <li>▪ Differences in pipelines diameter</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Adjacent infrastructure development (railways)</li> <li>▪ New technologies</li> <li>▪ Search for alternative energy resources</li> </ul>  |

*Author's analysis*