



THE EFFECT OF ETHNIC NATIONALISM IN THE CAUCASUS ON THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM AFTER THE COLD WAR

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Abstract: This study entitled as “the effect of ethnic nationalism in the Caucasus on the international system after the Cold War” tries to explain conflicts that took place in the Caucasus after the collapse of USSR. During this period, the Caucasus turned into a war zone and a number of long-lasting conflicts even which still continue today occurred between various ethnic groups,. The most important reason of these conflicts is that ethnic nationalism, as an ideology, substituted the communism of the USSR period. At the same time, the strategic location and natural resources of the Caucasus geography cause this competition over the region by using ethnic nationalism. The purpose of owning the Caspian resources and the policy of dominating over the Caucasus are also the reasons of these conflicts. In this sense, the conflicts faced by the society are the means of competition for domination. The USA and Russia are the biggest powers in the Caucasus and Russia can have a say in the region by manipulating these ethnic conflicts.

Key Words: Caucasus, Ethnic Nationalism, Russia, USA

INTRODUCTION

The Caucasus is a geography in which it has always been possible to witness multilingualism, different religions, different nationalities and bloody conflicts between powers in the competition for hegemony. Although these conflicts have mainly ethnic origins, the ultimate aim of regional and global powers is to possess hegemony over the Caucasus. In the 21st century, economy of the Caucasus depends on its natural resources and hydrocarbon energy. It is a globally important area of interest and competition and therefore

known as “New Big Game”. Within this perspective, any international problem in the area should be regarded in a geopolitical frame. Oil and natural gas resources in the region as well as its geopolitical and geostrategic location are the reasons of many regional and international problems.

The population policy applied by the Tsardom of Russia and the USSR, practices and institutions left by Soviet regime and the fact that the ideological gap after the Soviets was filled with nationalism lie at the bottom of ethnic nationalism

and conflicts that have appeared in the region after the Cold War. However, it is actually personal interests of global powers who want to dominate the region that lie behind these conflicts. These conflicts have also changed the international system. After the Cold War, the system which had been monopolar became multipolar as a result of the ethnic conflicts and power struggles in the Caucasus.

In this study, we tried to explain the effects of ethnic nationalism in the Caucasus on the international systems. Within this scope, we first analysed the geography of the Caucasus and then continued with regional conflicts. The conflicts were explained in a classification such as “the North Caucasus” and “the South Caucasus” and finally the politics and approaches of Russia and the USA were discussed by looking at the international system dimension of nationalist movements in the Caucasus.

THE CAUCASUS REGION

The word “Caucasus” derived from the Persian word “kafkah” meaning “the mount of Kaf”. The Greek usage of the word “Caucasus” to describe the region is “Kaukasos” which is originally Latin. This term derived from the Persian word “Kraukasis” meaning “sparkling with its ice-covered surface”. The Turkish word “Kafkas” and Russian “Kavkaz” also derive from the same root (Çelikpala, 2006:39).

The Caucasus is situated between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea. In the north, there are Don and Kuma regions known also as the “Caucasian front” where the Caucasus Mountains end. In the south, there are the Aras River valley and the

Kars plateau. Arab travellers call the Caucasus as “Cebel-i Elsiné” that means “Mount of Language”. The region is divided into two parts by the Caucasus Mountains: south and north (Yalçınkaya, 2006:9). The Kuan valley, the Stavropol plateau and the Terek valley are on the north of the mountains. This part is under the Russian authority and is called as “North Caucasus” or “Caucasian front”. On the south of the mountains, there are Small Caucasus Ridge, Rioni and Kura valleys. Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan are also in this part of the mountains. It is called as “South Caucasus” or “Transcaucasia”. Politically, whole of the Caucasus are regarded in the continental Europe (Yıldırım, 2007: 7).

Throughout the history, power struggles have always existed in the Caucasus and various communities have invaded the region. As a result of the Caspian attacks, Arabs had to withdraw from the Caucasus where they first came in 625. While the Caspian Empire reigned in 7th century, the Caucasus was under the reign of Abkhazian Kingdom in the 8th century. Starting from the 10th century, Kipchaks in the north and Oghuz Turkmen tribes in the south started to appear. In the 13th century, the Caucasus was invaded by Mongolians and later on Timur ruled over the region. Finally in the 16th century, the Caucasus was tied to the Ottoman Empire. Because of the wars between Persian, Ottoman and Russian Empires, the owner of the Caucasus changed in the following years and in the 19th century the region was invaded by Russians. Sheik Shamil became the symbol of resistance against Russian invasion. There were many atrocities of Russian Empire in the Caucasus and many people immigrated to Anatolia to escape from this situation.



After the Cold War, the USSR fell apart and the South Caucasus gained its freedom. However, the North Caucasus still remains in Russian borders (Yıldırım,2007: 7).

The autonomous regions in the North Caucasus are the Republic of Adygea, the Republic of Karachay-Cherkessia, the Republic of Kabardino-Balkaria, the Republic of North Ossetia, the Chechen Republic, the Republic of Ingush and the Daghistan Republic. The independent states in the South Caucasus are Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia. The autonomous regions of the south are the South Ossetia, Abkhazia, the Republic of Adjara, the Javakheti region, Nakhchivan and Nagorno- Karabakh (Yıldırım,2007:8-9).

The Caucasus is one of the richest regions in the world in terms of ethnicity, religion and language. Over one hundred languages and dialects are spoken in the Caucasus where more than fifty ethnicities live together. The native inhabitants of the North Caucasus are Vaynahs (Chechen, Ingush), some of Daghistan communities (Avar, Lezg, Dargin,Lak), Abkhazians and Circassians (Kabardin, Adygea, Circassian). Apart from them, there are many Turkish groups accepted as native in the area. They are Karachay, Balkar Turks, Kumyks and Noghai. Ossets and Tats who are known as Persians also live in the region (Çelikpala, 2006, 41). There are also many Slavic people (Russian and Ukrainian) in the area. On the other hand, in the South Caucasus there are Georgians (Svan, Megrel, Laz and Bat), Ajaris, Azerbaijani Turks, Armenians, Taleshis, Kurds, Jews, Ossets, Tats, Abkhazians, Avars, Lezgian, Ingushs and Assyrians (Yıldırım, 2007:17-19).

The languages spoken in the Caucasus are divided into three groups: Caucasian languages, Indo-European languages and languages that belong to Turkish language group. The Caucasian language group forms 35%, Ural-Altai language group which include Turkish speakers forms 35% and the people who speak Indo-European languages form 28%. (Yalçinkaya, 2006: 12). The Caucasian languages are Adyghe, Kabardin, Abkhazian, Abkhasian, Ubih language, Georgian, Laz language, Chechen, Ingush, Avar language, Lezgian language and others. The Ural-Altai languages are Azerbaijani, Karachai language, Balkarian, Kumyks language, Noghai language and others. Finally, the Indo-European languages are Armenian, Russian, Ukrainian, Ossetic language, Tati language, Taleshi language and other.

In terms of faith, there is a variety of religions in the Caucasus. But the most common religion is Islam followed by Orthodox Christianity. Islam started to expand in the Caucasus after the 8th century. Today, the 80% of the Azerbaijani population together with communities living in Azerbaijan such as Dargin and Lezgi, Tat and Taleshi are Shiite. Other Caucasus communities (Avar, Dargin, Kumyks, Laks, Tabasarans, Rutuls, Aguls, Kaytaks and other Daghistan people) are Shafii and Hanafi (Noghai, Kabardin, Chechen, Ingush, Karachai, Abazin, Muslim Abkhazians, Adygea, Balkar Turks, Circassians, Ajaris and Muslim Ossets) which are both Sunni branches of Islam (Çelikpala, 2006: 42). Russians, Armenians, Georgians, Ossets and Abkhazians are Christian communities.

It is known that 55.9% of the residents is Muslim, 43.6% is Christian and 0.4% is Jewish. As the

most dominant community, the Turkish people comprise 36.6% of language group, 65.5% of religion group and 56.6% of the geography. It is also important to mention that these people have become Turkish because of their Muslim affiliations, they have relations with Turkish people and have strong pressure group in Turkey(Yalçınkaya, 2006: 13).

As for the geopolitical and geostrategic importance of the Caucasus, the region is situated in the middle of Europe-Asia-Africa connections. It also lies at the eastern part of a water corridor created by the Mediterranean, Aegean Sea and the Bosphorus on the one hand; the Marmara, Black Sea and the Sea of Azov on the other. It also has connections with the Caspian Sea in the east. Shortly, the Caucasus is a region which is situated in the connections of roads coming from north-south and east-west (Yıldırım, 2007, 27).

The Caucasus region is like an entrance gate of the Middle East. It is also like a passage leading to Western markets for the Middle East. Because of its rich oil and natural gas sources, various big powers are competing with each other in the region (Kantarıcı, 2006(a): 59-60). On the other hand, the Caucasian mountains are very rich in terms of its mineral deposit reserves such as coal, iron, lead, zinc, copper, molybdenum and manganese(Yıldız, 2006: 25).

Lying between the Middle East and the West, it is possible to say that the Caucasus is the most important place in the world in terms of its geopolitical and geostrategic location as well as its rich ground and underground resources. Moreover, it has become an important competition area due

to the energy transmission lines which have been completed recently.

ETHNIC CONFLICTS IN THE CAUCASUS AFTER THE COLD WAR

An ethnic conflict within the borders of a country is regarded as a large-scale opposition of one or more ethnic groups against other groups or against central administration in which other groups are in dominant position. Here, the term “ethnic group” refers to the societies which involve people organizing and coming together for their common descent, common historical background or common language and culture. Although the blood relation is an important element for ethnic consciousness and identity, it is not mandatory. Ethnic identity is about emotions and psychological relations. And this relation can be defined as subjective when the people are regarded(Yılmaz, 2006: 18).

The Caucasus has suffered from a geopolitical trauma after the collapse of the USSR which was one of the two biggest powers in the world. The area has turned into a war zone. As a result, a geopolitical gap occurred in the Caucasus region and many global and regional actors started to compete with each other for the purpose of filling this gap. As Brezezinski says, the Caucasus is “the Balkans of Eurasia” (Brezezinski, 1998: 112-113).

This ethnic diversity has resulted in an important cultural and social variety but this situation has also paved the way for the intervention of powers coming from outside of the Caucasus. The Caucasian societies were compelled to immigrate and minorities were placed among them. They



wanted these minorities to govern the majority and this kind of situations raised the level of hostility in the region. The population of ethnic groups, their distribution and importance have changed in years but the only element that has remained the same is the ethnic richness (Demir, 2003: 70).

With the intervention of Stalin, the demographic structure which had rather been sensitive became much more complicated. It also constituted the base of today's conflicts. In accordance with Stalin's settlement policy, the people living in the North and South Caucasus were never allowed to settle in their own regions and the unity was fragmented by sending some of the people to different locations in Soviet Russia and placing others in their regions. Conflicts and frictions occurred between new and old owners of these lands due to the problems stemming from these policies (Kantarcı, 2006(a): 35).

Another reason of ethnic conflicts faced in the Caucasus is the USSR heritage in institution, idea, faith and opinion system. Especially the countries that won their independence in the South Caucasus have passed through a very difficult period. It was for the first time in history to adopt democracy and market economy by leaving the totalitarian regime and socialist economy. The notions of state, nation, identity, ideology, politics and economy had to be rebuilt in these countries (Elma, 2009: 198-199). There have been many problems in this rebuilding process and ethnic nationalism has increased.

Ethnic Conflicts in the North Caucasus

After the collapse of the USSR, people have faced a number of conflicts stemming from ethnic nati-

onalism in the North Caucasus which is situated within the borders of Russia today. These conflicts can be divided as Russian-Chechen war, Osset-Ingush conflict in the North Ossetia and others (conflicts between Karachai-Circassian and in Daghistan). Especially the Russian-Chechen war attained the interest of international community and witnessed the power struggles.

Russian-Chechen War

The tension between Russians and Chechens started in 27 October 1991 when Chechens declared their independence from Russia and the foundation of independent Chechen Republic after the President of the Executive Board of All-National Congress of the Chechen People Dzhokhar Dudayev was elected as the President. At the end of 1993, Russia finalized its policy against Chechnya that was threatening its own existence and interests in the Caucasus. Russia who had been supporting both economic embargo and opponents till that time started to use more rigid policies (Tavkul, 2002: 93-94).

On 26 November 1994, 50 Russian tanks cooperating with Chechen opponents attacked Grozni and the First Chechen- Russian war began. Dzhokhar Dudayev successfully defended the country and destroyed half of the Russian tanks. The fact that the unity of opponents was destroyed and 26 Russian soldiers were captured shocked everybody in Russia. In return, Russia bombed Chechnya with aircrafts and rockets. Dzhokhar Dudayev died in one of these attacks and peace settlement was signed between Chechens and Russians on 30 August 1996 (Tavkul, 2002: 96-102).

After Dudayev, another election for presidency was held and Aslan Mashadov won the election. With this new president, Chechnya started to fall into a civil war. Mashadov had to face Shamil Basayev as the guerrilla leader. At the same time Movladi Udugov who supported the Islamist view and Dudayev's assistant Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev started to fight for power. As a result, the silence of Chechnya was destroyed. Basayev accused Mashadov of being pro-Russian. Udugov supported Wahabis contrary to Mashadov who was worried about the rise of Wahabism in Chechnya and the problems between wahabis and other Muslim Chechens. Finally various different powers occurred in Chechnya (Tavkul, 2002: 103-107). After a Russian general was kidnapped and a building in which Russian officers were living was bombed by Chechens, the Second Chechen-Russian war began. It was much more violent than the first one. Because the Russians took lessons from the first war, they commenced the war with the support of special units and air forces.

On 23 September 1999, the war officially began with the bombing of the capital of Chechnya, Grozni. Starting from the first day, civil Chechens began to leave their country. More than 60 thousand of Chechens gathered on Chechen-Ingush border. Aslan Mashadov was both inviting the International Peace Keeping Forces to the region and seeking for ways of negotiation. Although Russia wanted Basayev and guerrilla Hattab to be turned over, Mashadov resisted. On 30 September 1999, Russian troops started to invade Chechnya overland. On the 12th of November, after they invaded the second biggest city of Chechnya, Gudermes, Russians captured Grozni. The number of refugees escaping from Chechnya

reached 200 thousand. Russians adopted very rigid policies in this war. At the same time, the fact that Russians manipulated some pro-Russian Chechens and put the blame on them showed that it was actually Russians who wanted the outbreak of the war and became the winner. On 31 December 1999 the President of Russia Boris Yeltsin surprisingly decided to leave his post to Vladimir Putin. Presidential elections were held three months later and Putin won the election. After that the Russian Federation started to adopt more rigid policies. (Tavkul, 2002: 113-121).

The reason why the Chechens challenged Russia to such an extent and waged an independence war is the religious emphasis of Chechen nationalism. The power of radical Islam has increased after the Cold War particularly in the North Caucasus. Moreover, the role of Islam and especially the Naqshbandi Tariqa led by Sheik Shamil during the liberation movements in the past was really important. The Qadiri Tariqa and Wahabism with foreign support were very common in Chechnya. Iran, on the other hand, supported and helped Chechnya for the purpose of increasing its power in the Caucasus. However, changes in the international system and the cooperation between Moscow-Yerevan-Tehran in the following years caused this help to cease. Especially the nuclear facilities developed by Iran and the changes in the international system obliged Iran to be on Russia's side (Malek, 2008: 34).

The aim of the Chechen opposition in the North Caucasus originated in Saudi Arabia and supported by Wahabis is not only to establish a state ruled according to the sharia, but also to decrease the power of Russian Federation in the region and



to solve the problems of sharing oil and natural gas reserves. It is well known that if the conflicts continue, the transmission of oil through the Baku- Novorossiysk pipeline will halt, the oil price will go up and the oil producing Arab countries, Saudi Arabia in particular, will get the best of the situation (Kantarcı, 2006(b): 66).

The 9/11 attacks just after Putin came to power enabled Russia to solve the Chechen problem. During an interview in 2002, Putin told that the Chechens in the North Caucasus desired to establish the Caliphate and Russia was facing the “Islamic Terrorism” referring to the conjuncture (Malek, 2008: 33). This discourse and the outlook of international system on “Islamic Terrorism” paved the way for Russia and the balances changed in the Chechen war in 2000s in favour of Russia.

The tension de-escalated to some extent after Aslan Mashadov was assassinated, Shamil Basayev died as a result of Russian attacks and Abdulhalim Sadulaev was killed in 2006, and therefore Russia brought Ramazan Kadirov to the power of Chechnya. Yet, Chechnya is still the most problematic part of the North Caucasus (Tavkul, 2002: 85-91).

The North Ossetia Problem and Ossetian-Ingushetian Ethnic Conflict

North Ossetia is one of the Caucasus Republics which is situated on the North Caucasus’ door opening to South Ossetia and has an important strategic location. The most important problem in North Ossetia resulting from ethnic nationalisms is Ossetian- Ingushetian conflict. The main reason of this conflict seems to be historical but

it happened after the dissolution of the USSR as a result of Russian policies.

Ingushetians used to live on the right side (of the right side of Terek River which is called Prigorodni Rayon) Vladikavkaz, which is the current capital city of North Ossetia. However they were accused of collaborating with Nazis in the Second World War and exiled to Central Asia together with Chechenians and Karachays. Ingushetians have tried to take Prigorodni region since 1957 which is the date they came back. Ossetians have aimed to give the region to the immigrants having come from South Ossetia and thus turn the region into Ossetian region. The first conflict between Ingushetians and Ossetians emerged in 1981. However the bloodiest battles happened after the end of Cold War. Ingushetians demanded from others to give the region to them. In the conflicts between Ossetians and Ingushetians in the autumn of 1992, 2,000 people died and 76,000 people escaped from Ossetia. While around three thousand Russian soldiers combatted on the Ossetian side in the Ingushe-Ossetian battle, Muslims took side with Ingushetians. Although the severity of the battles passed off, they lasted until 1997. The Government of Russia gathered the presidents of the sides together in order to stop the battles but the ongoing nationalistic attitude of the both sides hindered an agreement. At the present time the problem seems to have subsided. The most important factor in that situation is Russia. Ossetians did not make war with Russia, opened their territories in Chechen War and always adopted pro-Russian policies. All these factors had an effect on Russians taking side with Ossetians.

The Ethnic Conflicts in South Caucasus

The peace environment which was established gradually in the South Caucasus on the period of the USSR gave its place to violent political, ethnic and military conflicts. The Soviet Regimes, trying to keep ethnic groups under the roof of empire used communist power and economic and political tools belonging to the Russian Empire. According to the Soviet Republics, the policy was implemented successfully in order to exercise supervisory control onto the peoples. However with the sudden collapse of Soviets, this policy caused ethnic conflicts which were really difficult to solve in Eurasia geography (Yılmaz, 2010: 23).

After the dissolution of the USSR; Georgians, Armenians and Azeri Turks gained their independence but a good number of ethnic groups continued to live under Russian authority. However they caused ethnic conflicts since they were attracted by nationalist revival of the era. In contrast to the ethnic conflicts in the North Caucasus, the ethnic conflicts in the South Caucasus have not been solved yet.

Another important factor in the emergence of ethnic conflicts in South Ossetia results from its location. The South Caucasus is located between Caspian Sea and Black Sea, surrounded by Iran, Turkey and Russia and located over Caspian resources and has routes transporting them to the Western markets. Its security should be provided in accordance with the economic interests of West. On this point EU, NATO and the USA work for stability in the region (German,2008: 64), but the actors of international system and debate over the region do not make it possible.

The Georgia-Ossetia and Georgia- Abkhaz conflicts in the borders of Georgia and the Nagorno-Karabakh problem which is a result of Armenian occupation of Azerbaijani territory are the conflicts that maintain their importance and still continue.

Problem of Abkhazia and the South Ossetia

Georgia is the most problematic country in terms of ethnic conflicts in the South Caucasus. The country was at a certain level of welfare during the USSR period. But after 1991, it lost economic privileges of being in a political unity. Georgia does not have resources such as oil and natural gas that may attract foreign investment and bring economic income to the country. That is why the political reflections of the economic problems in the country were much more intense than the other countries. In such an environment, the first conflicts between Georgians, South Ossetians and Abkhazians occurred at the end of 1990 in the post-Soviet period. The economic problems and social and political turmoil in Georgia after 1991 were also felt in other regions of the country which are geographically farther and ethnically mixed. In the region where ethnic problems occurred, the existence of economic problems and the belief that the policies of the central administration in Tbilisi were not enough caused these nationalist and separatist sentiments to increase in 1990s. The expectations that the solutions would come from local politicians, who were always claiming the best, worsened the situation (Öztürk, 2009: 6).

On the other hand, the Georgian identity and the structuring of nation-state after the independency in Georgia also caused dissatisfaction among other ethnic groups. On 26 May 1991, elections



were held in Georgia, in which Abkhazians and Ossetians did not participate, Gamsahurdiya was elected as President. He started to adopt policies based on Georgian nationalism and followed the idea of “Georgia for Georgians”. In order to protect the rights of Georgians, his aim was to affect the policies in Abkhazia and in South Ossetia where Georgians were also living. These policies were based on converting people into Georgian and Christian identity, therefore they were strongly rejected by the authorities of Abkhazia and the South Ossetia (Kalkan, 2010: 94).

Finally, it was Russia that caused the conflicts to occur and the ethnic nationalism to become so powerful in Georgia. Georgia is a Caucasian country with whom Russia has had the tensest relations. According to Eduard Shevardnadze, the President of Georgia in 2000, the reasons of this problematic relation between two countries are Moscow’s support for the separatist regions and its double standard policies in terms of the territorial integrity of old Soviet Republics (Kamalaov, 2008: 103).

In order to understand the problems of the South Ossetia and Abkhazia, it is necessary to look at the occurrence and the historical development of these problems. Not only the Georgian-Ossetian relations but also the Georgian-Abkhazian relations and some other issues in Georgia after the Cold War caused some ethnic conflicts among these communities.

The Georgian-Abkhazian war which started at the end of the Cold War and became violent a few years ago may actually be seen as national independence movements of both countries. Georgia started this war to escape from the

constant Russian threat although it has won its independence and to secure its borders. On the other hand, Abkhazians started this war to obtain their independence like all other South Caucasus communities. In short, the behaviours of both groups are parallel to each other (Petersen, 2008: 198).

Abkhazians are one of the native communities of the Caucasus who has the tradition of a deep-rooted state going back to the 12th century. Abkhazians are Sunni Muslims and they speak Abkhazian which is one of the Caucasian languages. Abkhazian Autonomous Republic is situated within the borders of Georgia and it is geographically a part of the North Caucasus. The main reason that lies behind the conflicts with Abkhazia is their desire to be an independent state (Kantarcı, 2006(b): 53).

Abkhazia was exposed to various assimilation policies both in the Tsardom and the USSR period. They were regarded as minorities in their own country. As well as their attempts to be an independent republic in 1970s, their desire for independence strengthened in the Gorbachev administration. On 23 July 1988, they consulted to the USSR and demanded to be given the status of “Soviet Republic”. After the collapse of the USSR, the Abkhazian Parliament declared independence in the session on 23 July 1992. In reply, the Georgian army entered the capital of Abkhazia, Sukhumi, in the same year and started the armed battle. After these conflicts, the North Caucasian Autonomous Republics demanded Russia to interfere in favour of Abkhazians. Although the ceasefire agreement was signed on 20 May 1993, the conflicts reoccurred in July 1993 and

the Abkhazians crossed the natural borders and occupied a part of Georgia. As a result of these battles, a great deal of Georgians (250 thousand people), who were the majority in terms of population, had to escape from Abkhazia and people who have Abkhazian origins were settled in their place (Kantarcı, 2006(b): 54).

Manipulating the ethnic conflicts in the Caucasus on behalf of itself and turning them into pressure agent, Russia benefitted from this conflict. In Georgia, defeated by Abkhazia, rebellions took place in 1933, the country come within an ace of dismemberment. Gamsakhurdia quitted and he was succeeded by Eduard Ševardnadze who Russia favored more and the Georgia government, doing its best not to accede to Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), acceded to it even if reluctantly. Beside its CIS membership, Georgia also signed the agreement which provided that the Russian military bases could stay there for another 25 years (Kamalov, 2008: 104).

The Abkhazia problem also continued after this process. While Abkhazians demanded total independence, Georgians resisted on the grounds that the unitary structure would be destroyed. Another problem is the Georgian immigrants. Abkhazians does not want the Georgians immigrants to come back on the grounds that Abkhazians will fall into status of minority. According to the UNICORD estimates; the population of Abkhazia is 230,000; 90,000 of which is Abkhazian and the remaining 40,000 is Georgian and the remaining part is Russian, Armenian and Greek. Abkhazians took side with Russians and Georgians in the 2008 Russian – Ossetia and Georgia war. The Government of the Autonomous Republic

of Abkhazia already behaves as a de facto free state and Georgia- Abkhazia conflict remains (Kantarcı, 2006(b): 55-56).

Ossetian people are an ethnic group who live in the Caucasus, speak the Ossetic- a member of Persian of Indo-European languages- and add up to 700.000. Located within the borders of Georgia, South Ossetia has an area of 3900 square kilometers and the number of Ossetians living here, adds up to only five per cent of the total number of Ossetians in the Caucasus. South Ossetia is located on the shoulders of the Caucasus Mountains and its east, west and south is surrounded by Georgia. Its north border is connected to Russia by a tunnel and naturally this is connected by North Ossetia (Öztürk, 2009: 4-5).

Before the collapse of the USSR, the South Ossetian Popular Front announced the South Ossetia as a separate and sovereign republic, Democratic Republic of South Ossetia, within the USSR in 20th September of 1990. In the same year, boycotting the elections in Georgia, Ossetians carried out their independent elections. However, nationalist Gamsakhurdia administration terminated the autonomous status of the South Ossetia by discrediting the elections in Ossetia. The 1991 year passed with the conflicts between two parties. The 1992 year also passed generally with close combats and towards to the end of the year after the appropriate parties accepted the truce, a peace force made up of Russians, Georgians and Ossetians, was placed in the area under the custody of Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (Öztürk, 2009: 7).

At the first stage the South Ossetians demanded independence from the Georgian administration.



Later uniting with North Ossetia, they demanded to establish the Great Ossetia Republic and enable it to connect to Russia. Russia got more involved in the area thanks to the extreme western- oriented and nationalistic policies of Saakashvili governance that came into power by the 2003 Rose Revolution. This situation has led to conflicts since 2004 in the area where the silence had prevailed since 1992 and later to the outbreak of Russia- Georgia war.

The Russian Assembly Duma took a decision firstly in July of 2004 and later in August of 2005 to support the liberation movements in the South Ossetia and Abkhazia. With this policy, Russia tried to expand its efficiency and increase the radius of action in Caucasus. Two factors caused this decision to be taken. First of them is extreme western- oriented policies of Saakashvili administration and its clearer and harsher attitude towards Russian benefits. Second of them was that Russia could give an answer to the developments in the Balkans and Eastern Europe which it could not dominate any more over Caucasus. Especially the independence of Kosovo and its support from Europe and the USA caused Russia to take precautions (Öztürk, 2009: 8).

At the end of the war which began in 7th August of 2008 with the Georgian troops' attacks to South Ossetia and involvement of Russia due to the attacks to Russian Peace Force soldiers, Georgia was completely defeated. Previously the Ossetians' attack to a helicopter carrying the Georgian Defense Minister in 3th September of 2006 and the Russian jet planes' launch to a Georgian village were the indications of the beginning of the war. The tension caused by those events led

Georgia to attack to South Ossetia. However, the Russia side stated that it got involved into the Georgia attack in order to protect the Russian citizens in the area and the attack that targeted the Russian Peace Force soldiers did also cause them to take part in the war. In addition to South Ossetia and Russia, Abkhazians took place in the battles between the dates of 7th and 16th August of 2008. As a result of Russia's bombardment in the important cities of Georgia with its land, naval and air forces, the Georgian troops moved aside from Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Russia also occupied certain parts of Georgia territories. Later although Russia disengaged its soldiers from Georgia within the frame of the Sarkozy Plan, its military existence remains in South Ossetia and Abkhazia which it accepted as separate independent states in 26th August of 2008 (Öztürk, 2009: 8-9). The balances in the region changed due to the South Ossetia and Abkhazia wars. The balance that will be the result of those wars will be shaped by the identities and interests of the agents and thus it will be understood whether the future of the South Caucasus is pregnant with wars or not (Ditych, 2008: 123).

The Nagorno-Karabakh Problem

Like other ethnic conflicts in the Caucasus, the Nagorno-Karabakh Problem resulted from historical reasons. Exchange of population and power still exists as has often happened. In the year of 1823 when Russians were not in the Caucasus, the 92 per cent of Karabakh population was Azeri Turks whereas 9 per cent of it was Armenian. When Russia achieved dominance in the Caucasus, 65 percent of Karabakh population was made up of Azeri Turks and 35 percent of it was Armenian

in 1832. Russians started to make the region populated with more Armenian people with the aim of constructing of a buffer zone which was made up of Christians in their south. In 1871 population rates were like this: 24 per cent Armenians, 76 percent Azeris. In 1897 population rates were like this: 39.5 per cent Armenians, 59.5 percent Azeris. In 1897 the population rates were like this: 70 per cent Armenians, 30 per cent Azeris. In 1979 the rate of Armenian population was 75, 9 per cent and the rate of Azeri population was 23 per cent and before the collapse of the USSR in 1989 the rate of Armenian population was 76.9 per cent, the rate of Azeri population was 21.5 per cent (Baguirov,2008: 13-14). As it is clear from the numbers, Russians' making Karabakh a region which was populated much more with Armenian people caused ethno-nationalism to increase in the region.

The underlying reason of the Karabakh problem is Russians' attempts to make the region much more populated by Armenians and the wish of Azerbaijan to protect its territorial integrity against the wish of Armenians who were majority. Especially Armenian occupation of the region within the frame of the idea of "Great Armenia" and slaughtering Azeri Turks in Karabakh made the situation worse.

In 1987 a petition demanding Nakhchivan's connection to Socialist Armenia and which was signed by 75.000 people, a group of Armenian activists, was presented to Soviets. The conflicts began in February of 1988 when Karabakh Region's Council demanded from Azerbaijan and Armenian Supreme Council that Karabakh region should be handed over to Armenia. The

Soviet Union Supreme Council declined the change of borders and decided to found a special administration in Karabakh. With this decision it was officially registered that Karabakh would stay within the borders of Azerbaijan. With the proclamation of the Karabakh Republic, Karabakh local government declared that it seceded from Azerbaijan. Under these circumstances Azerbaijani government abolished the autonomous status of Karabakh in 1991. In the face of such a situation Armenian people revolted and the Azerbaijani army went into Karabakh. In return, Armenia attacked Azeris in Armenia and thousands of Azeris left the country. In reaction to this situation, Azeri nationalists attacked Armenians in Sumgait. Because of the violence among ethnic groups there were considerable numbers of mutual moves between the years of 1989 and 1991. Later, Armenian troops (more precisely, reinforced with Russian troops) occupied Karabakh region. By occupying certain parts of Azerbaijan territories in order to use as a trump card later, they even put out of the sight the possible border that might appear between Azerbaijan and Turkey. Being supported by Russian and Armenian diasporas in other countries indicate the determination of Armenian nationalism in the occupation of Karabakh (Gürses, 1996: 158-160).

Khojaly Genocide following the Karabakh occupation appalled the political situation in Azerbaijan. More than 1000 Azeris were slaughtered in Khojaly in March of 1992. Khojaly incident resulted in a government reshuffle in Azerbaijan; Ayaz Mutallibov resigned and fled to Moscow. Azerbaijan Popular Front leader Abulfaz Elchibey came into power and his first job was to take Azerbaijan from CIS (Gürbüz, 2008: 120).



Turkey did not remain unresponsive to the occupation of Azerbaijan territories and to killing of its cognates. All the diplomatic relations with Armenia were stopped and the Armenian border was closed. This situation is even an important problem of Turkey-UN relations and also Turkey-USA relations. However, since the beginning of the problem, all Turkish governments have stated that the occupation should be removed in order to open Armenian border. In addition to Turkey, this problem has been subject of discussion in international community. To resolve this problem a 11-membered Minsk Group was formed by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. However, both Russia's and the USA's support of Armenian policies makes the solution of the problem difficult.

Since there were no concrete steps in solution in the 2000s, in the Heydar Aliyev military ceremony, Azerbaijan Defense Minister Safar Abiyev's statement as "Azerbaijani army is ready to save the territories under occupation" proved that the tension was still high in the region

With its decision on 14th May of 2008, the UN General Assembly stressed the hegemony and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. Within the decision accepted by 39 affirmative votes against 7 dissentive votes, certain issues such as the support of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity, sending away the Armenians unconditionally from Azerbaijan's territories they occupied, the returns of Azerbaijani people who were in the status of refugees to their country were included

While Western countries' and foundations' attempts on the Nagorno-Karabakh problem remained, with the effort of Russia wishing to

maintain its efficiency in the region, Azerbaijan and Armenia signed the Moscow Declaration. In this declaration certain issues such as parties' measuring up Madrid Criteria and establishing peace as soon as possible were debated (Kalkan, 2010: 84-85). However, in the current situation peace has not been reached and especially the Armenian side's harassments have continued. Nagorno-Karabakh, where the great majority of population was Muslim Azeri Turks until 20th century, faces Armenian separatism and irredentism (Baguirov, 2008: 23-24). The resolution of this problem seems very challenging.

THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM DIMENSION OF THE ETHNIC CONFLICTS IN CAUCASUS

Following the end of the Cold War after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the dissolution of the Eastern Bloc and the USSR in 1991, the international system entered in the process of reorganization which still continues today. In this process during which the bipolar international system disappeared, sources of instability appeared. On the one hand as the economic cliff between the rich and poor countries has grown wider, the East-West antagonism has given its place to North-South antagonism(Sander, 2002(a): 585). On the other hand regional conflicts have caused tensions in various regions. The Caucasus is on the top of the list of such conflicts. In fact the regional conflicts having resulted from filling the ideological vacuum that occurred in the dissolution process of the USSR with the aggressive nationalism reveals the hegemony race over Nagorno- Karabakh, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Chechnya and Caucasus(Sander, 2001(b): 608)

Regarding to hegemony effort in Eurasia from the end of the World War II until today, in two different periods such as the period of the Cold War years and the period following the Cold War, the USSR (Russia) and the USA should be mentioned as important powers that are rivals at global levels and conflicting powers. After the Cold War period, the rivalry and hegemony fight between the two powers has taken place in both political and military initiatives depending on economic, political and military properties (Öztürk, 2009:12). At this juncture, the Caucasus politics of these two countries (Russia and the USA) and their views of the ethnic conflicts in the Caucasus will be examined.

USA and Caucasus

After the collapse of the USSR and the Eastern Bloc, the USA took an action to fill the gaps that appeared in Eastern Europe, the Balkans, Middle East, the Caucasus (South Caucasus) and Central Asia. Within this scope, especially Middle East and Caspian Basin which owned the great majority of the world's oil had importance for USA (Canar, 2006: 44-45).

Wolfowitz, indicated the importance of the region from the point of the International System by saying "as long as its natural resources are controlled, the hegemony of any enemy capable of producing a global power should have been blocked". Therefore, Kalpgah (the heart of Eurasia) surrounded by the regional forces - Iran, Turkey and Russia - is quite important for the USA to maintain its hegemony over the world from the point of not only transporting the energy resources in Casper Region to international markets but also the strategic location due to the its closeness to

the Central Asia and Middle East. Not desiring any global or regional rivals after the Cold War, the USA is against the hegemony of Russia and Iran in the Caucasus.

The Caucasus was initially not focus of interest because it was an unknown geography and there were violent conflicts. However, after its strategic importance was noticed, the interest of the USA increased. After the Gulf War in 1990, President of the USA George Bush stated that in the Caucasus, they would support the developments of "democracy, free market economy and human rights" concepts which are the corner stones of the "new world order". The USA much more activated its Caucasus policy at the time when Russia was defeated in the Chechen War. Considering that Russia could not protect its own territories, the USA marked its Caucasus policy after 1996 and declared the region "zone of vital interest".

The USA desired that especially South Caucasus states would accept democracy and free market policy. The most important tool used by the USA for the purpose of achieving its goals in the region was assistance programs. By giving economic support to Caucasus States which become independent with the "Freedom Support Act", the USA also provided certain foundations (such as the World Bank, USAID Credit Guarantees, USDA sale donations) to support the region. The assistance programs of the USA in the region can be listed under the titles of democracy, economic reform, security, law reform and humanitarian aid. In addition to this, the democracy policy of the USA which considers enhancing the efficiency in the region with certain foundations and organiza-



tions is mainly enabling the pro-USA people to come into power. For example, Saakashvili who came into power in 2003 with support of Soros foundations and thanks to the Velvet Revolution (Rose Revolution) is noticeable for his pro-USA policies(Canar, 2006: 47-51).

Another side of the foreign strategy of the USA for this region is to establish cultural hegemony in the region. The cultural hegemony has been established on three stands. First of them is language. The use of English is aimed to be extended. Second of them is that USA supports “moderate Islam” in the region. What is meant by moderate Islam is that being moderate in the moderation of the positioning in the international power centers. Third of them is democratization(Kantarci, 2006(b): 86). Establishing cultural hegemony enables the USA much more to step into the region and thus to constitute policies in the region.

By declaring the region “zone of vital interest” on the matters of the Nagorno Karabakh problem and territorial integrity of Georgia, the USA took an active role in the solution of these problems. Former Adviser of the Foreign Affairs Minister of the USA Strobe Talbott expressed that he did not want instability and conflict in the South Caucasus and Central Asia which were sitting over the 200 billion barrel oil. Therefore, the regional conflicts threatening the reach of Western companies to oil and gas reserves which were vital had to be solved in accordance with the interests of the West. Meanwhile the USA desires to put an end to Russian strength in the region by solving these conflicts which enable its activity in the South Caucasus to remain. For this reason, as Talbott stated “the primary duty

of the USA” is to put an end to the conflicts in the region(Canar, 2006: 56-57).

There is no doubt that the most important matter of the USA’s Caucasus policies is the pipelines which transporting the Caspian energy resources to the Western markets. Currently there are two routes: Baku–Novorossiysk and Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan (BTC). The underlying reason of the pipeline struggle in which the other states in the region besides RF and Turkey, actors outside the region, national and multinational companies took place is to establish economic and strategic efficiency in the region. Therefore, the main point for the states is not to transport these resources to the Western markets by the nearest road but to transfer through the most appropriate states. The aim of the USA is to put an end to Russian efficiency in the region. Therefore, it supports the BTC pipeline. The fact that Azerbaijan does not want Armenia and that the USA does not want Iran has increased the importance of Turkey and Georgia in the region. For this reason, the USA desires stability in the region but Russia causes instabilities by using ethnic controversies(Canar,2006: 40). It is Georgia which is most affected by this situation. In Georgia through which the BTC pipeline passes, the wars resulting from ethnic nationalism threatens the security of the pipeline and this is against the interests of the USA.

Russia and the Caucasus

Having participated in the international system as the successor of the USSR after the collapse of it, RF firstly aimed to establish a democratic regime and to accommodate with free market economy inside and become integrated with the West outside. However, RF again fixed its eye

on former Soviet republics in accordance with Eurasianism movement. The spokesman of this movement was Sergei Stankevich, the foreign political advisor of Yeltsin. Russians depicted this as “near-abroad strategy”. They tried to establish hegemony over the former Soviet republics through the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

RF entered into competition firstly with the regional forces, Turkey and Iran. RF considered that Iran with Pan-Islamic policies and Turkey with Pan-Turkish policies aim to establish hegemony in the region. RF later tried to send away Turkey from the Caucasus by collaborating with Iran and by adopting anti-Turkish policies. Russia has become the most important power determining the quality of international system in the Caucasus which has been turned into a battlefield of ethnic conflicts, in the North Caucasus in its own borders and in its bordering region South Caucasus.

The North Caucasus is the main land which is the entrance door of the Caucasus and which has strategic importance that can provide control over the region. It is a necessity to have the North Caucasus in order to control the South Caucasus. Therefore Russia tries to keep the North Caucasus in its hands. Again for this reason, Russia rejected the independence demands in the North Caucasus and waged an intense war against Chechnya(Kantarci, 2006(a): 62).

There are certain reasons that make the geostrategic importance of the North Caucasus clear for Russia. The reasons are as follows: Russia has the shortest route to reach the hot seas, It has formed its natural boundaries, reassured its defense against the threats that may come from the south, Russia has remote control over East

Mediterranean Sea and Persian Gulf, Russia is a region that can be used as supplementary attack heading in an operation over the Balkans and thus Russia is a region that enables to manipulate the major threat forces(Yıldırım, 2007 29).

Apart from these, what makes the North Caucasus important for Russia is that the pipelines enabling oil resources and the Caspian oil and gas to reach to the Western market. The reason for the outbreak of war and exploitation of Chechens by Wahhabis also results from this fact. Chechen and Ingush Republics have 60 million tons of oil reserve. At the same time, the main reason for the Chechen War is the Baku–Novorossiysk pipeline which transports Caspian sources to Western market. Global powers try to alienate Russia from the system by questioning the security of this pipeline and at the same time they use Chechens against Russia by forming nationalistic movements among Chechens on the religion axis(Tavkul,2002:122-123). Similarly other states try to deactivate Russia by BTC pipeline in the South Caucasus. On the one hand Russia tries to destabilize Georgia by means of ethnic conflicts; on the other hand it tries to increase its Russia that is being tried to deactivate in the South Caucasus by the BTC tries, on the one hand, to destabilize the key country of the pipeline, Georgia, by means of ethnic conflicts; and on the other hand to control the Caspian sources with the help of the agreement which it signed with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan in May of 2007(German, 2008: 72).

NATO’s decision in 1999 - its 50th anniversary – in terms of enlargement and intervention to the region which had been out of its traditional area



of responsibility also had an effect on Russia's policy change for the Caucasus. Russia perceived this decision as a threat. With the Security Doctrine accepted in 2000, Russia declared itself as a global power and opted for a multipolar world (Yılmaz, 2006: 25).

Together with Putin, RF follows a multidimensional policy in accordance with multipolar world. With this manner it approaches to the South Caucasus which it defines as "near-abroad zone". In contrast to increasing the USA efficiency in the South Caucasus, RF gives importance to collaboration with the states in the region, in other words, it tries to balance the USA hegemony with the aid of the collaboration with various states.

In order to regain its power in the region, RF, on the one hand, tries to protect its claims in the former Soviet territories by the help of "near-abroad zone" policy, and uses ethnic conflicts as a tool to resettle into the region on the other hand. Georgia and Azerbaijan strives to become integrated with West and Russia considers that attitude as disloyalty. Russia succeeded to punish those two states by supporting the separatist powers in Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh and South Ossetia. Establishing its control over the South Caucasus, Georgia and Armenia; Moscow is able to put pressure on Tbilisi by means of manipulating ethnic conflicts with a great skill especially in Adjara in Georgia, South Ossetia and Abkhazia and remain its military superiority in the region. Similarly Moscow achieves to remain its military existence in Armenia thanks to the Nagorno-Karabakh problem and for the reason to protect border security against Turkey. It can be noticed

that Moscow has reestablished its hegemony over the Caucasus (Kantarıcı, 2006(b): 72).

The USA's unquestioning support for the anti-Russia movements in Georgia (energy corridors, economic integration, conflict psychology and solution of separationist problem and other regional problems) and the USA's initiatives for various areas in the region threatened the Russia's regional interests. Especially "the Rose Revolution" in Georgia and following anti-Russia policies impelled Russia to more rigid policies. Russia could not prevent the independence of Kosovo and deployment of the USA rockets in Czech Republic and Poland. However Russia prepared determinedly for revenge through Georgia. By manipulating ethnic nationalism in Georgia with a great skill, Russia provoked Ossetians and Abkhazians in the 2008 war. Russia later alleged Georgia's attacks against Ossetians and Abkhazians as a pretext and defeated Georgia and therefore revenged the West. Besides Georgia considered that its security would be guaranteed by western institutions through means of NATO's enlargement. Russia entered into this war in order to prove that this guarantee would never be realized and to teach a painful lesson and Georgia was fallen apart (Muzalevsky, 2009: 125).

THE CONCLUSION

Thanks to its nearness to the Central Asia and the Middle East, its location between the Caspian basin and the Black Sea and its convenient strategic and economic location, the Caucasus has attracted all the agents of international system. A similar battle to the one that British, Russian and Ottoman Empire made for the hegemony of

the Caucasus took place with the participation of more agents after the dissolution of USSR.

The USA, trying to remain its hegemony over the Caucasus in the international system, and Russia, advocating multipolarism against the USA hegemony, are up against each other. The USA is allied with Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey in the region. In contrast Russia is allied with Armenia and Iran.

After the dissolution of the USSR, old hostilities reappeared and the Caucasus people were in search of independence. This search of independence resulted in conflicts (Chechnya, South Ossetia, Abkhazia and Nagorno- Karabakh) that reached to the war level due to the increase of ethnic nationalism. At the end of those conflicts, tens of thousands people died, were injured and fell onto the refugee status. Billions of dollars' worth material damage resulted.

The South Caucasus sub-system appeared with the participation of the former Soviet republics Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia that entered into the process of reorganization after the Cold War and won their independence in the international system. The ethnic conflicts which appeared when the gap having emerged after the dissolution of Soviets was replaced with nationalism and which were not solved yet left their mark on the region and became a tool used by regional and global powers that were on the race of hegemony in the region. Those ethnic conflicts are tools on behalf of hegemony over region and possession of Caspian sources. The states in the Caucasus and the states wishing hegemony in Caucasus should take all these facts into consideration.

Benefitting from ethnic nationalisms in the Caucasus is one of the ways applied by regional and global powers competing with one another. For example in Georgia which approached to the West Block, by using Ossetians and Abkhazians, Russia both made this country's access to CIS possible and dissolved Georgia which behaved against its interest as in the case of the 2008 war. In fact the purpose of Russia was not to help the ethnic groups to win independence. Since a lot of ethnic groups live in its own country and these groups can be provoked by the West as in the case of the Chechen war. The purpose of Russia is to put those countries under political pressure by making use of ethnic conflicts, providing that they don't act against its interests and to prevent them from being the USA' satellite. However the USA tries to settle to the region, therefore the USA aims to establish governments close to itself and provide financial support.

As a result the ethnic nationalisms in Caucasus influence deeply the structure of international system. Making use of the ethnic controversies, Russia tries to prevent the USA's settling to the region and becomes successful at this. Russia is on the status of most powerful actor in the region. The underlying reasons for this situation are as follows: Russia knows the region, it used to be there before and it knows the reasons of the occurrence of the ethnic conflicts (therefore manipulates the region easily with population exchanges). Even though the USA and NATO desire to enter into region and solve the ethnic conflicts, they aren't successful at this. The survival of Russia depends on the condition that it holds the Caucasus in its hands. As a matter of fact that's why Russia did not want Chechnya's and



Dagestan's independence in the North Caucasus. The South Caucasus is also as important as the North Caucasus. Russia could relinquish from Central and Eastern Europe and did so but it is not possible to relinquish from the Caucasus. The hegemony in the Caucasus is the only condition for Russia besides other agents to survive with its geopolitical position and energy sources.

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SOĞUK SAVAŞ SONRASI KAFKASYA'DA ETNİK MİLLİYETÇİLİĞİN ULUSLARARASI SİSTEME ETKİSİ

Özet: Kafkasya, geçmişten günümüze çok dilli, dinli, milletli yapısı ve hegemonya yarışındaki güçlerin ve grupların kanlı mücadelelerine tanık olunan bir coğrafyadır. Bu mücadeleler genellikle etnik çatışmalar şeklinde geçmesine rağmen, asıl hedef küresel ve bölgesel güçlerin Kafkasya üzerinde sağlayacakları egemenliktir. Kafkasya, 21.yüzyılı yaşadığımız bu günlerde, barındırdığı doğal kaynaklar ile hidrokarbon enerjisine dayalı dünya ekonomisi için, “Yeni Büyük Oyun” olarak da ifade edilen, bölgesel ve küresel düzeyde önemli bir ilgi ve rekabet alanıdır. Bu sebeple bölgede vuku bulan hemen her uluslararası sorunun, yerel ve görünür özelliklerin ötesinde bölgesel ve küresel ölçekte, jeopolitik bir çerçevede değerlendirilmesi gerekir. Bölgenin sahip olduğu petrol ve doğalgaz kaynakları ile jeopolitik ve jeostratejik konumu birçok bölgesel ve uluslararası sorunun doğmasında etkindir. Bölgede Soğuk Savaş sonrası ortaya çıkan etnik milliyetçilikler ve bunların neden olduğu çatışmaların temelinde, Çarlık Rusya’sı ve SSCB’nin bölgede uygulamış oldukları nüfus politikaları, Sovyetler sonrası ortaya çıkan ideolojik boşluğu milliyetçiliğin doldurması ve Sovyet rejiminin bırakmış olduğu alışkanlıklar ve kurumlar etkili olmuştur. Ancak bu çatışmaların arka planında bölgede hâkimiyet kurmak isteyen küresel güçlerin çıkar hesapları bulunmaktadır. Bu çatışmalar uluslararası sistemin niteliğini de değiştirmiş, Soğuk Savaş sonrası tek kutuplu hale gelen sistem, Kafkasya’da yaşanan etnik çatışmalar ve güç mücadelelerinin sonunda çok kutuplu bir yapı halini almıştır. Çalışmada, Kafkasya’da yaşanan etnik milliyetçiliklerin uluslararası sisteme etkisi ortaya konulmaya çalışılmıştır. Bu bağlamda öncelikle Kafkasya coğrafyası ele alınmış ve bölgedeki çatışmalar, “Kuzey Kafkasya” ve “Güney Kafkasya” şeklinde bir ayrıma tabi tutularak analiz edilmiştir. Son olarak çalışmada, Kafkasya’daki milliyetçi hareketlerin uluslararası sistem boyutu ele alınarak, Rusya ve ABD’nin Kafkasya politikaları ve buradaki çatışmalara yaklaşımı incelenmiştir. Çalışmada öncelikle, bölgedeki çatışmaların ve kavgaların nedenini anlayabilmek için Kafkasya bölgesi tanımlanmıştır. Kafkasya sıradağlarının ikiye böldüğü Kafkasya, Büyük Kafkas Dağlarının kuzeyinde bulunan Kuban çöküntüsü, Stavropol platosu ve Terek çöküntülerinin oluşturduğu ve Rusya Federasyonunun egemenliğinde bulunan “Kuzey Kafkasya” ve ya “Kafkasönu”, güneyinde Küçük Kafkas Dağları, Rioni ve Kura çöküntülerinin oluşturduğu Ermenistan, Gürcistan ve Azerbaycan’ın yer aldığı “Güney Kafkasya”dan oluşmaktadır. Güney Kafkasya için günümüzde “Transkafkasya” deyimini sıklıkla kullanılmaktadır. Siyasi açıdan Kafkasya’nın tamamı Avrupa kıtası içinde değerlendirilmektedir. Günümüzde Kuzey Kafkasya’da yer alan özerk bölgeler şunlardır: Adige Cumhuriyeti, Karaçay-Çekes Cumhuriyeti, Kabardin-Balkar Cumhuriyeti, Kuzey Osetya Cumhuriyeti, Çeçen Cumhuriyeti, İnguş Cumhuriyeti ve Dağıstan Cumhuriyeti. Güney Kafkasya’da yer alan bağımsız devletler ise, Azerbaycan, Gürcistan ve Ermenistan’dır. Özerk bölgeler ise; Güney Osetya, Abhazy, Acara Cumhuriyeti, Cevahati Bölgesi, Nahçıvan ve Dağlık Karabağ’dır. Kafkasya etnik, dini ve dil bakımından dünyanın en zengin bölgelerinden biridir. Elliden fazla etnisitenin yaşadığı Kafkasya’da yüzü aşkın dil ve lehçe konuşulmaktadır. Dini inanç bakımından da çeşitlilik gösteren Kafkasya’da en yaygın din İslam’dır. İslamiyet’ten sonra Ortodoks Hıristiyanlık gelmektedir. Kafkasya bölgesi, Orta Asya’nın giriş kapısı, Orta Asya bakımından Batı pazarlarına açılan bir geçit olması ve Orta Asya ile bir bütün olarak ele alındığında zengin petrol ve doğalgaz rezervlerine sahip olması bakımından büyük güçlerin mücadelelerine tanık olunmaktadır. Zengin yer altı ve yer üstü kaynakları ile Orta Asya ve Batı arasında yer alan Kafkasya hem jeopolitik hem de jeostratejik açıdan dünyanın en önemli bölgesidir diyebiliriz. Bunun yanında son dönemlerde tamamlanan enerji nakil hatları sebebiyle bölge büyük bir rekabet alanına

dönmüştür. Çalışmada, Kafkasya bölgesinde yaşanmış olan büyük etnik çatışmalara yer verilmiştir. Bu çatışmalar, Çeçenistan-Rusya Federasyonu, Gürcistan-Güney Osetya, Gürcistan-Abhazya ve Karabağ üzerinde yaşanan Azerbaycan-Ermenistan savaşlarıdır. Bu savaşların temelinde, tarihsel bağlamda bölgenin yönetiminde hem Çarlık dönemi hem de SSCB döneminde söz sahibi olan Rusların, bölgeyi daha rahat yönetebilmek için uygulamış olduğu nüfus politikaları etkili olduğu görülmektedir. Etnisiteler arasında huzursuzluk çıkararak bölgeyi daha rahat yöneten Ruslar, Rusya Federasyonunun kurulmasından sonra bölge üzerindeki hâkimiyetini devam ettirebilmek için yine bu ihtilaflardan yararlanmaya çalışmışlardır. Bu çatışmalar günümüzde stabil durumda olsalar bile hala çözüme kavuşturulamamışlar ve her an alevlenme tehlikesi bulunmaktadır. Ayrıca çalışmanın geniş bölümünde, bölge üzerinde hegemonya çatışması veren iki devletin (ABD ve RF) Kafkasya üzerindeki politikalarına yer verilmiştir. Özellikle Güney Kafkasya devletlerinin demokrasiye ve serbest piyasa ekonomisine geçmesini arzulayan ABD'nin bölgeye yönelik hedeflerinin gerçekleştirilmesinde kullandığı en önemli araç yardım programları olduğu ortaya çıkmaktadır. ABD'nin bölgeye yardım programları, demokrasi, ekonomik reform, güvenlik ve hukuk reformu ve insani yardım başlıkları altında toplanabilir. Bunun yanında çeşitli vakıf ve kuruluşlarla bölgede etkinliğini arttırmaya çalışan ABD'nin demokrasi söylemi, daha çok ABD yanlısı kişilerin iktidara gelmesini sağlamaktadır. ABD'nin Kafkasya politikaları içindeki en önemli konu şüphesiz Hazar enerji kaynaklarını Batı pazarlarına ulaştırın boru hatlarıdır. ABD'nin hedefi bölgedeki Rus egemenliğini kırmaktır. Bölgedeki eski nüfuzunu kazanmaya çalışan RF, bir taraftan "yakın çevre" politikası ile eski Sovyet toprakları üzerindeki iddialarını korumaya çalışırken, diğer taraftan bölgedeki etnik çatışmaları, bölgeye yeniden yerleşmekte bir araç olarak kullanmaktadır. Rusya, Batıyla bütünleşme çabası içinde olan ve kendine göre Gürcistan ve Azerbaycan'ın bu sadakatsizliğini, Abhazya, Dağlık Karabağ ve Güney Osetya'daki ayrılıkçı güçlere destek vererek, cezalandırmayı çalışmaktadır. Güney Kafkasya'da, Gürcistan ve Ermenistan üzerindeki egemenliğini kuran Moskova, bilhassa Gürcistan'da Acaristan, Güney Osetya ve Abhazya etnik çatışmalarını ustaca kullanmak suretiyle, Tiflis'e baskı yapabilmekte ve bölgedeki askeri varlığını sürdürebilmektedir. Aynı şekilde, Dağlık Karabağ sorunu nedeniyle ve Türkiye'ye karşı sınır güvenliğini korumak gerekçesiyle, Ermenistan'daki askeri mevcudiyetini sürdürmeyi başaran Moskova'nın, Kafkasya'daki hâkimiyetini yeniden kurduğu görülmektedir. Kafkasya'da etkili olan bölge ülkelerinin bölgeye yönelik politikalarının analiz edildiği bu çalışma, Kafkasya'daki etnik milliyetçiliklerin uluslararası sistemin yapısını derinden etkilediği sonucunu ortaya koymaktadır. Rusya etnik ihtilafları kullanarak bölgeye ABD'nin yerleşmesini engellemeye çalışmakta, bunda da başarılı olmaktadır. Rusya, Kafkasya'daki en güçlü aktör konumundadır. Bunda bu bölgeye tanınması, eski bakiyesi olması ve etnik çatışmaların ortaya çıkış nedenini (nüfus değişimleri böylece bölgeyi rahat idare edebilmesi) bilmesi yatmaktadır. Her ne kadar ABD ve NATO bölgeye girmek ve etnik çatışmaları çözmek istese de bunda başarılı olamamaktadır. Rusya'nın ayakta kalabilmesi, Kafkasya'yı elinde tutmasına bağlıdır. Nitekim Kuzey Kafkasya'daki Çeçenistan ve Dağıstan'ın bağımsızlığını bu yüzden istememişti. Güney Kafkasya'da aynı şekilde öneme haizdir. Rusya, Orta ve Doğu Avrupa'dan vazgeçebilirdi ve vazgeçti ama Kafkasya'dan vazgeçmesi mümkün değildir. Kafkasya'da sağlanacak egemenlik, bütün aktörlerden ziyade Rusya için jeopolitik ve jeostratejik konumu ve enerji kaynakları ile hayatta kalabilmesinin tek koşuludur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kafkaslar, Etnik Milliyetçilik, Rusya, ABD