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46

THREATS TO ETHNOPOLITICAL SECURITY IN THE CENTRAL CAUCASUS

AMENAZAS A LA SEGURIDAD ETNOLÓGICA EN EL CÁUCASO CENTRAL

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ABSTRACT

Ethno-political conflicts are currently one of the focuses of attention in political science because they have a great influence on the security and stability of the regions. Historically, the Caucasus has presented this type of conflicts because the region is a point of convergence of several ancestral cultures, so disputes over territories have been frequent. However, being a wide and rich region, it should not fall into geographic reductionism, so the peculiarities of each subregion should be taken into consideration for a comprehensive understanding of the conflicts. The objective of this work is to analyze the threats to ethno-political security focused on the particularities of the Central Caucasus. For this, the work traces the evolution of ideas about the ethno-political dimension both in political science and in practical politics. These ideas have evolved from the view that the ethnic question has been completely mixed with the social sector of the security system to the scientifically based acceptance of the ethnic dimension of security. Consequently, the recognition that the ethno-political aspect of the security issue needs a theoretical and methodological basis, as well as the political-legal institutionalization justifies the analysis of this important issue.

Keywords:

Ethno-political, security, Central Caucasus.

RESUMEN

Los conflictos etnopolíticos constituyen en la actualidad uno de los focos de atención en las ciencias políticas debido a que estos tienen gran influencia en la seguridad y estabilidad de las regiones. Históricamente el Cáucaso ha presentado este tipo de conflictos debido a que la región es punto de convergencia de varias culturas ancestrales por lo que las disputas por territorios han sido frecuentes. Sin embargo, al ser una región tan amplia y rica no se debe caer en un reduccionismo geográfico, por lo que las peculiaridades de cada subregión deben ser tomadas en consideración para un entendimiento integral de los conflictos. El objetivo de este trabajo es analizar las amenazas a la seguridad etnopolítica enfocado a las particularidades del Cáucaso Central. Para ello, en el trabajo se traza la evolución de las ideas sobre la dimensión etnopolítica tanto en la ciencia política como en la política práctica. Estas ideas se han desarrollado desde la visión de que la cuestión étnica se ha mezclado completamente con el sector social del sistema de seguridad a la aceptación científicamente fundamentada de la dimensión étnica de la seguridad. Por consiguiente, el reconocimiento de que el aspecto etnopolítico de la cuestión de la seguridad necesita una base teórica y metodológica, así como la institucionalización político-jurídica justifica el análisis de este tema tan importante.

Palabras clave:

Seguridad, etnopolítica, Cáucaso Central.

INTRODUCTION

Today, the aggravation of cultural conflicts necessitates an integration policy that excludes assimilation and isolationist strategies, reduces ethnic and religious violence, and ensures a high level of civil solidarity. The dramatic events of recent years have demonstrated that destructive cultural conflicts go beyond domestic and regional ones (Popov, 2020). For this reason, in recent years, there has been a rise in the interest of domestic and foreign scientists in studying political elites and understanding the nature of information and sociocultural threats at the global and regional levels. The number of dissertations, monographs, articles on the problems of political provision of information security at the state and subnational levels in the context of the activities of regional actors is increasing (Salgiriev, et al., 2020).

Among the different regions in the world which can present these issues Caucasus is of special relevance because it is a key zone according to the latest structuralization of the Eurasian geopolitical expanse offered by ISSC of Azerbaijan for the Caucasus and Central Eurasia as a whole (Ismailov & Papava, 2006). However, as Caucasus is a vast region not all the problems are manifested equal and in the same intensity in all its parts. For this reason, it is important to go deeper and take into account the particular sub-regions. In spite of different geopolitical structuralization of the Caucasus suggested in the past the most comprehensive, in the opinion of this author, is provided by Coppieters (1996). Then, Caucasus may be seen composed of the following geo-political sub-regions: (1) The Central Caucasus, including the three independent states (Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia); (2) The Northern Caucasus, consisting of the border autonomous state formations of the Russian Federation; and (3) The Southern Caucasus, including the *ils* of Turkey bordering on Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia (South-Western Caucasus) and Iran's northwestern *ostans* (South-Eastern Caucasus).

In the academic literature there are a lot of research about Northern Caucasus (Khunagov, et al., 2017; Kosov, et al., 2017; Salgiriev, et al., 2017; Popov, 2018, 2020; Salgiriev et al., 2020; Avksent'Ev & Yu, 2020;) and the South Caucasus has also been approached (Ordukhanyan, 2020). On the other hand, although previous investigations have been carried out comparatively Central Caucasus hasn't had the same level of attention. With this precedent the goal of this research is to make a brief analysis of the threats to ethnopolitical security in the Central Caucasus.

DEVELOPMENT

The symbiosis of the multitude of self-sufficient cultural worlds makes the Central Caucasus absolutely unique as the crossroads of diverse cultures and languages, civilizational influences and borrowings. The Central Caucasus is a geographic and a geopolitical phenomenon as well as a cultural-civilizational entity. It is commonly seen as the strategic line that separates Europe from Asia; it is the meeting place of Eastern and Western local civilizations. It has accumulated the diverse and contradictory experience of ethnic relations: cooperation and strife, conflicts and good-neighborly coexistence (Goble, 1997; Rondeli, 1998).

However, the deep-cutting changes of the early 1990s that affected the social and economic foundations bred new mass sentiments: in the post-Soviet reality, the traditions of ethnic good-neighborly relations, national and religious tolerance, and conflict prevention proved dead. The region's contradictions and conflicts are rooted in the ethnocratic egotism of the local politicians who, after grabbing political, ideological, and information resources, acted (under pressure of circumstances) on a grand scale while remaining mercenary-minded individuals. For example, the Armenian, Abkhazian, and South Ossetian leaders, who never stopped to ponder on the effects of their claims to the territory and culture of their neighbors. This brought nothing but bloodshed to the Central Caucasus; occupation of the adjacent territories, and changed political and geographic boundaries. The international conference "Conflict Transformation in South Caucasus" held in Tbilisi in 2001 cites the number of victims within this region alone as 1.5 million; this could not but lead to rather serious socioeconomic consequences (Coppieters, 2001).

According to Coppieters (2001), the fact that ethnic relations were moved into the sphere of politics and security was one of the key factors behind the flare-ups of conflicts in the Caucasus in the post-Soviet period. He has also pointed out that the obvious intention to raise the ethnic issues related to domestic and regional policy to the level of security issues made ethnic compromises in the Central Caucasus almost impossible.

The public remains convinced that the region's conflicts are the product of the region's past. This means that the entire diversity of the social processes of the 20th century is reduced to ethnic relations. In other words, ethnic reductionism triumphs. There is the tendency to squeeze the contradictions of the past into the present-day context of geopolitical and ethnopolitical realities. The conflicts of the past are revived in the so-called historical memory,

which tends to ignore the long periods of cooperation. This is how ethnocentric policy is formed.

Regional security in the Central Caucasus is a post-Soviet conception, a political catch phrase of the globalization era associated, no matter how strange this may seem, with the disintegration of the imperial expanse. Eyvazov (2015), who study the problem for some time wrote: *“As soon as the Caucasus withdrew from the sphere of total Soviet control, the process of regional inter-state organization gathered momentum. The ethnic conflicts, sub-regional de facto alliances and counter-alliances reflected the compatibility and incompatibility of security interests. They stemmed, directly or indirectly, from the relations among the newly independent states and regional powers. In this way, restoration of the relations in the security complex was intensified in the late 20th century.”* (p. 66)

Here it should be added that more profound and integrated studies of the deep-cutting ethnopolitical factors of the national and regional security systems in the Central Caucasus will help the political elite and world community achieve stable peace and sustainable development for the region. So far, however, the efforts needed to use the already accumulated security-related tools and methods in the ethnopolitical sphere have not been made. A collective fundamental work dealing with the problems of the Southern (Central —K.A.) Caucasus does not offer a single view on ethno-political security, even though eleven authors, who covered 209 pages, touched upon the subject of regional conflicts (Morozov & Lutovinov, 1999). This means that the post-modernist approach still dominates in academic studies and continues to camouflage ethnopolitics as a different social sphere.

It seems that the ethnopolitical problems may move, albeit slowly, toward consensus through abandoning authoritarian-great power methods (political intrigues, mass clashes, ethnic purges, and deportations). The globalization era presupposes that politicians should learn the lessons of history and that the Central Caucasian nations should share responsibility for regional peace and stability and national security; they should never forget their past achievements—they should be promoted and emulated. In principle, ethnic contradictions can be kept under state and public control, they can be regulated by law and settled according to the principle of fairness that will not encroach on the states' territorial integrity.

Analysts have pointed out that the 20th century was a century of outbursts of ethnic separatism, bloody ethnic conflicts, and wars that rocked many countries. *“As the 20th century drew to its close we could accept its main lesson: we need an international order with the necessary*

political, economic, and financial tools to avert and settle all outbursts of ethnic separatism and ethnic conflicts.” (The South Caucasus Network for Civil Accord, 2001).

This fully applies to the present ethnopolitical stage in the Caucasus: there are more obvious sentiments of ethnic and national identities and homogeneity and more active processes of national state-building. It is no secret that these processes encourage the idea of ethnic self-determination and are responsible for the far from unambiguous ideas about its realization: autonomy in a multi-national state; political and territorial separation from the state, or separatism with the aim of creating an independent state; reunification of peoples scattered across several states; unification with another culturally and historically kindred state.

The political developments of the last two decades revealed that the above can be described as ethnic separatism which, when combined with other factors, contributed to nearly all the armed conflicts in the Caucasus. Most academics and politicians agree that the Armenian-Azeri conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh is the central link in the long chain of armed ethnopolitical clashes in the region. The conflict deprived Azerbaijan of 20 percent of its territory, now occupied by Armenian armed forces, and generated the problem of about 1 million refugees and forced migrants. This upsets the regional balance and prompted other ethnic conflicts fraught with territorial losses for other states. Shukiurov (2000), has pointed out in this connection that *“separatism badly hit all newly independent states in the south of the CIS, apart from Armenia”* (p. 79) and has defined this as one of the major specific features of post-Soviet ethnopolitical development in the Caucasus.

Tsyanok (2007), described all ethnopolitical transformations conducive to the conflict type of ethnic relations as follows: *“Throughout the last half of the 20th century the world knew over 300 ethnic conflicts that from time to time slid into violence. Armed confrontation cannot be ruled out even in those cases when the sides in the ethnic conflicts are not completely aware of what caused the contradictions in the first place, but are always ready to mold an enemy out of a neighbor. Nagorno-Karabakh and the Armenian-Azeri relations may serve as an example of the above: this is a clash between the ‘historical claims’ of the two countries to the same territory. The conflict is not an ethnic one: it is caused by the fear of small ethnic groups of losing their ethnicity and lifestyle. Ethnic stereotypes are the tools the elites on both sides used to mobilize the population.”*

There is no shortage of expert assessments and analytical studies of the Karabakh problem; however, there is a

common agreement that the first separatist movement on the post-Soviet expanse that developed from an internal ethnopolitical crisis into an inter-state armed conflict became the smoldering seat of regional tension and an object of the world's community close attention. This means that its settlement will bring stability and security not only to Azerbaijan, but also to the Central Caucasus.

In this way, the ethnopolitical security of any country is the categorical imperative for all Central Caucasian nations and for the region as a whole. This author believes that no matter how important all spheres of social life (economic, socio-political, cultural, etc.) are, the future of national statehoods and the countries' involvement in the globalization processes primarily depend on ethnopolitical security, the object of which is being born before our eyes in a painful and bloody process.

Rothschild (2000), an American expert on ethnic politics, has demonstrated a very interesting approach to the subject. He has identified the errors that should be avoided and warned against the destructive impact of ethnocentric impulses on social development. It has been already seen that it is very easy to mobilize the ethnic factor under conditions of ethnic, social, economic, resource, etc. asymmetry. The author is convinced that ethnocentric intentions should not be ignored or underestimated and that politically organized ethnicity should be monitored, while the international community and the states should pursue adequate policies in relation to states that produce migrants.

CONCLUSIONS

The idea of state sovereignty of any nation should be limited to human rights; that is, the Central Caucasian states should trim their involvement in public affairs and allow the individual to choose freely, irrespective of his nationality. The Central Caucasian statehood is obviously ethnocentric (there is only one state language in each of them, while the titular nations enjoy wider rights on the official and everyday level). To keep the ethnocentric trends in check, these countries should recognize the ethnic-national minorities and support them.

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