



Georgia and Azerbaijan: border delimitation and security challenges¹

The South Caucasus is an area inhabited by a variety of ethnic groups, many of whom settled there centuries ago, forcibly moved from one valley to another, and migrating here and there. The locals have several identities, including local, religious, ethnic and national ones. Conflicts between them can lead to discussions about an ethnic groups' affiliation to one nation or to one ethnic society. The whole area was a frontier for the Ottoman Empire, Persia and later for the Russian Empire, yet the locals have tried to maintain their self-identities which are sometimes amenable to being integrated into one or more competing states.

Contemporary state borders in the region represent the result of this long and ongoing process, with elements of ethno-national state-building begun after the collapse of the Russian Empire, partly supported by the Soviet authorities, and then accelerated by the collapse of the Soviet Union. Consequently, today we can see so-called ethno-national states whose borderlands are settled by different ethnic groups, considered inside the state as “others” (see for instance non-Georgian ethnic groups settled mostly along the borderline and non-Azerbaijani ethnic societies

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situated in the northern provinces). Current state and economic policies by national governments determines the presence or absence of conflict. As a result, boundaries in the region and policies towards them now represent a most challenging area for the central government. At the same time, the logic of economic development causes governments to seek to reshape their ethnic policy.

My paper aims to identify what historical cases are used to claim disputed areas by the governments concerned, and what problems they face, in delimiting the border between Azerbaijan and Georgia. The main question is “What factors cause the two states to freeze delimitation?”, while examining bilateral border cooperation under such conditions. To achieve my aim, it is necessary to define the factors determining the evolution of local borders, the emerging historical narratives used to justify ethno-national policies, and then describe geographic and ethnic features, consider security challenges along the boundary, the influence of the economy on the delimitation negotiations, and finally, depict cross-border cooperation.

This research is based on an analysis of the official documents of organizations, departments, and speeches made by officials from Azerbaijan and Georgia, and news material from local and state mass media. The historical part represents the result of work on documents collected in Russian and Azerbaijani archives. Travelers’ forums for Russian and non-Russian visitors crossing the borderline help to reconstruct the border atmosphere and the way locals cross the international border.

Relevant literature by Georgian, Azerbaijan and Russian researchers is also considered in this paper. Here I have to mention that Caucasian researchers prefer to concentrate on historical issues, showing a deep interest in, one influenced by social demands for, proving “historical rights to disputed areas” in Caucasian states. There are other researchers who consider the political outcomes of conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia and Abkhazia, being less concerned with other issues².

² Markedonov, Sergey. (2010) *Turbulent Eurasia*, Moscow: Academia Press; Alieva, Sevinj. (2010) ‘Azerbaijan i narody Severnogo Kavkaza (XVIII-nachalo XXI v.)’, Baku: Şərq-Qərb Press; Rakhmanzade, Shamil. (2015) ‘Pravovoi i sotsiokulturnyi analiz politicheskikh protsessov v severo-zapadnom regione Azerbajjana v 1917-1918 g. v kontekste stanovleniya natsionalnoi identichnosti,’ *Severo-Kavkazski yuridicheski vestnik* 4: 137-145; Mustafaeva, Sitara. (2013) ‘Izmeneniye granits i territory na Juzhnom Kavkaze (1917-1922),’ Research paper for PhD in History, Baku: Baku State University Press.

Introduction

In 1991, the three nations in the area began a state building process aiming at the creation mono-ethnic states. That idea had developed over a long time during the Soviet period³. As a result, by 1991 the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh had turned Armenians and Azerbaijanis into relentless enemies. The Georgian president Zviad Gamsakhurdia supported Georgian domination in a state divided into provinces, some of which were based upon non-Georgian local and ethnic identities, most notably in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, but also potentially including Adjara, Svanetia, Megrelia, Samtskhe-Javakheti, and Kvemo Kartli. The Azeri government changed presidents and consolidated its citizens for an anti-Armenian war while ignoring its ethnic minorities settled in the borderlands, whose dissatisfaction was growing in direct proportion to the level of corruption. Ethnic cleansing took place in these three states, though to differing degrees. Notably, this policy has made Armenia a largely mono-ethnic state. In 2011 the percentage of Armenians in the state population was 98.11%. As a result, today this state has no internal ethnically-based challenges, although its old administrative borders are still not recognized as its new state borders.

In order to concentrate on their main security challenges (the disintegration that led to conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia and Abkhazia, with the last two proclaimed independent states that are recognized now by Russia and several other states) the Georgian and Azerbaijan governments had to reduce conflict in other spheres. For success in state building, they had to delimit their borders to develop comparative stability in these regions. The Georgian government succeeded to its borderline with Turkey on the basis of the old Soviet border, but the Georgian border with Armenia, Russia and Azerbaijan is still under discussion. The Azerbaijan government has completed the delimitation of the Russian borderline (2010) as well as the redemarcation of the Iranian part (2009), while the Turkish area was again not reconsidered on the basis of old Soviet-era agreements.

These two states both have problems with their territorial integrity (Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and the South Ossetia). Azerbaijan's oil and gas resources and Georgia's location have made Baku and Tbilisi close partners even though they haven't succeeded in delimiting their

³ Derluigan, Georgi. (2005) *Bourdieu's Secret Admirer in the Caucasus: A World-System Biography*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

mutual border. Is this relationship defined by irreconcilable differences going back a long time or does it represent close interstate cooperation?

History

Today, local politicians in the region connect the area's disputes with the consequences of Bolshevik rule and a Russo-centric Soviet government secretly anticipating state disintegration and creating these conflict zones. However, such an interpretation ignores layers of local history, open to being activated at any time. We can state that the principle reforms that ultimately led to the current situation took place during the rule of the Russian Empire and later in the period from 1917 until 1920. Nonetheless, pre-Russian borders also cannot be considered as an ideal meeting the interests of all local peoples.

Before the Russian Empire entered the area, local borders were unstable and the power of local nobles and their relations with the Ottoman Empire or Persia defined the constantly shifting borderlines. When representatives of the Russian Empress and the Kartlo-Kakheti tsar signed the Georgievski treaties in 1783, "Georgia" included Kartlo-Kakheti with its Tatar provinces: Bambaki, Kazakhi, Shamshadil⁴. Russian researchers and officials used the ethnonym "Azerbaijan Tatars" or "Caucasian Tatars" to describe those Muslim locals speaking Tatar and settled in former Iranian provinces. This means that the eastern Kartlo-Kakheti border in eighteenth-century was to the east of the present line.

Going north, the border reached the Alazan river and the Kingdom adjoined to the Sheki khanate, the Elisu sultanate, composed primarily of Avar and Lezgin tribal communities known as the Jar-Balakan and mixed with Tsakhur and Inguiloy settlements⁵. The contemporary northern part of the Azerbaijan - Georgia borderline largely corresponds to the line of 1783. Russian researchers and officers as well as Georgian nobles serving in the Russian army described the neighboring tribal communities living in the mountains as "wild", raiding the Georgian peasants

⁴ Gldenstdt, Johann. (2002) 'Puteshestvie po Kavkazu v 1770–1773 gg.,' Saint Petersburg: Peterburgskoye Vostokovedeniye, 168; Ermolov, Alexey. (1991) 'Zapiski A.P.Ermolova, 1798–1826 gg.,' Moscow: Vyshaya Shkola, 272.

⁵ Dubrovin, Nikolay. (1866) 'Zakavkazye ot 1803–1806 goda,' Saint Petersburg: "Sankt-Peterburg" Press, 17-19; Bliiev Mark, Degoev Vladimir. (1994) 'Kavkazskaya voyna,' Moscow: "Roset" Press, 110-111.

for harvest⁶. Georgian officers in the Russian army also confirmed the idea that the land between the Alazan river and the ridge belonged to Georgian nobles, who were intimidated by Avars and Lezgins coming down from the heights to rob the locals. No descriptions took into account the high mountain location of those people. The Russian government, relying upon these reports, pushed the communities further into the mountains and turned them into bitter enemies. Mountainous tribes that signed treaties with Russian representatives executed their provisions selectively as they did not consider them binding. Such unstable relations supported the “wild” image of the highlanders among Russian troops and authorities and further justified Russian policy.

The Russian general Pavel Tsitsianov, himself of Georgian origin, in 1804 took the Azeri Ganga khanate that bordered Kartlo-Kakheti to the east, and gave it the name of Elizavetpol, in accordance with the Empire’s practice of erasing local toponyms in cases of strong resistance by the native population⁷. The first Russian territorial reform in Transcaucasia in 1813 joined Elizavetpol okrug to the Georgia gubernia while acknowledging the necessity for the Russian army to control the district. At the same time, Tiflis was the only Russian center in the area and this reform only consolidated all the districts under the Russian rule. General Tsitsianov had died in 1806 in his attempt to take Baku.

The Russian authorities started to develop a Lezgin cordon line⁸ along the northern part of the Georgian boundary in 1822⁹. The aim of such cordon lines was protection against attacks by locals. Cossacks were the main force against assaults: they had to live constantly in the forts and monitor the line. They used to build such lines along natural barriers, but the Lezgin line was an exception. The violence among the southern Dagestani and Azeri nobles and peasants (Jar-Balakan communities) against Russian rule were the reason for insulating them from the pacified Georgian areas. The cordon line’s location was rather distant from natural barriers, and the low number of soldiers serving here made the line an easy target for the highlanders¹⁰.

⁶ Gldenstdt, Johann. Op.cit.

⁷ Milyutin, Dmitry. (1999) ‘Vospominaniya, 1860–1862 gg.’, Moscow: “Ros. Arkhiv”, 120-123.

⁸ See the map of the Lezgin cordon line and the Mountainous Dagestan on: http://www.runivers.ru/mp/maps-detail.php?ID=579730&SECTION_ID=8210

⁹ Ermolov, Alexey. Op.cit. 301.

¹⁰ Potto, Vasily.A. (1994) ‘Kavkazskaya voyna,’ V. 5, Stavropol: “Kavkazskiy Kray”, 71.

After a new military campaign by general Ivan Paskevitch, the Lezgin cordon line was extended in 1830 with the construction of new forts: New Zaqatala, Balakan, Lagodekhi, Kartubani¹¹. The line led south from the Caucasus mountain range and the forts controlled all the important roads. It divided the Zaqatala okrug and Tiflis gubernia (governorate)¹². Later Paskevitch decided to divide the Jar and Balakan Lezgins into two districts to strengthen Russian power over them, and he moved the Jar and Balakan communities to the right bank of the river Alazan¹³. The displacement was supposed to help the authorities control resistant communities and they expected that local opponents would lose their familiar living places and communities' mutual support. The rule was not effective, though, and the Jar district was united with the Elisu sultanate under the rule of the Temporary Government subordinated to the Commander of the Caucasian army in Tiflis. Russian troops settled along the Lezgin cordon line could hardly be effective in executing their control over the rebels because the cordon line was not connected with any geographical barrier, located between the Alazan river and the Caucasus ridge. The river was an obstacle for getting supplies from Tiflis bases; while the garrison was deprived of any line of retreat.

The Russian government in 1840 divided the entire Transcaucasian area into a Georgian-Imeretia gubernia, with its capital at Tiflis, and a Caspian oblast centered on Shemakha, while later, in 1859, the Shemakha oblast became the Baku gubernia as its capital moved from Shemakha to Baku. The Georgian-Imeretia gubernia included the provinces of: Kartlia, Kakhetia, Imeretia, Guria, Akhaltsykh province, Armenian district, Jar-Balakan oblast and the Elisu sultanate¹⁴. It means the northeastern border passed to the east of the contemporary line. We can suppose the border was determined by security considerations. Authority over the Lezgin cordon line again changed in 1857, when authority was enhanced over neighboring parts of Shemakha gubernia (Nukha district)¹⁵. During the next administrative reform in 1859, Lezgin forts were granted

¹¹ See the map of the Caucasian area in the nineteenth century published in Encyclopedic Dictionary published by F.A. Brockhaus and I.A. Efron, available at: http://www.vehi.net/brokgauz/006/b26_824-0.jpg

¹² Petrushevski, Ilya. (1993) 'Jaro-Belokanskiye volnye obschestva v pervoy polovine XIX v.,' Makhachkala: Dagestanskoye Knizhnoye Izdatel'stvo, 86-88.

¹³ 'Pismo Glavnokomanduyuschego Kavkazskim korpusom generala Paskevicha voennomu ministru, aprel 1834 g.,' in *Rossiyskiy gosudarstvenny voenno-istoricheskiy arkhiv (RGVIA)*. F. VUA. D. 6243. L. 6.

¹⁴ 'Voeyenno-statisticheskoye obozreniye Rossiyskoy Imperii,' (1858), T. 16 (Kavkazskiy krai.), ch. 5. – Saint-Petersburg: Tipografiya Departamenta Generalnogo Shtaba, 219.

¹⁵ 'O razgranichenii Pravogo I Levogo krylev Kavkazskoy linii,' (1857) in *RGVIA*. F. 38. Op. 7. D. 328.

control over people living between the Bogos ridge and the Andi Koisu river and from Ossetia to Nukha¹⁶. Meanwhile authority over the line was subordinated to the commander in Tiflis. In 1860 the local authorities decided to abolish the Lezgin cordon line¹⁷ and to divide its area: the Jar-Balakan area, except highland societies, of Zaqatala okrug was subordinated to the commander in Upper Dagestan, who also had control of the Kvareli-Lagodekhi area in Tiflis gubernia¹⁸. As a result, Dagestan's southern border was made contiguous with the former Lezgin cordon line and the military command dissipated its force over areas geographically separated by the Caucasian heights. Therefore, in 1865 the Russian Emperor in his decree divided the Kvareli-Lagodekhi area from Zaqatala okrug, with the latter becoming an independent administrative unit subordinated only to the Caucasian Governor-General¹⁹.

In 1868 the western parts of Baku gubernia consisted of a new Elizavetpol gubernia, including Nukha, Shusha and Ganja, and the Shamshadil and Samukh areas. Caucasian Tatars (55.96%) - Azeris - and Armenians (35.43%) made up the population of Elizavetpol gubernia²⁰. The Elizavetpol and Tiflis gubernias with mixed border populations were not created on the basis of ethnicity, as Russian rule prioritized security challenges. Furthermore, the Russian government encouraged the spread of Christian (mostly Armenian) peoples within Muslim settlements, considering the latter as inspired by Turkish commissioners (in fact, the Turks were actively spreading anti-Russian claims and promises). Such suspicion created a circle of distrust, and Muslim locals often participated in revolts against the Russian authorities.

After 1917, the new South Caucasian governments, with the exception of Armenia, started to use former gubernia (administrative) borders to establish ethnonational states. Consequently, their claims for ethno-national states ran up against the non-ethnic borders of these administrative

¹⁶ 'O novom "voennom razdelenii" Levogo kryla Kavkazskoy linii, Prikaspiyskogo kraya i Nagornogo Dagestana,' (1859) August 19, in *RGVIA. F. 38. Op. 7. 370*.

¹⁷ 'Polozhenie ob uprazhnenii Lezginiskoy Kordonnoy Linii s Upravleniyami i ob Uchrezhedinii vzamen togo novykh Upravleniy dlya voisk v Zakavkazskom kraye, 1860, April 20,' *Polnoye Sobraniey Zakonov Rossiyskoy Imperii (PSZRI) (1862). T. XXXV*. Saint-Petersburg: Tipografiya II-go Otdeleniya Sobstv. H.E.M Kantzelyarii, 431.

¹⁸ 'O nekotorykh izmeneniyakh v upravlenii Prikaspiyskim krayem, 1860, July 18,' *PSZRI. Sobraniye vtoroye. T. XXXV. Saint-Petersburg, 1862*, 917.

¹⁹ 'Pismo Glavnokomanduyushhego Kavkazskoy armiey Voyennomu Ministru, 1865, May 14,' *RGVIA. F. 38. Op. 7. D. 495. L. 3-4*.

²⁰ Andreevskiy Ivan. (1894) 'Enciklopedicheski slovar' [in Russian]' T. XIA. Saint-Petersburg, izdateli. F.A. Brokgauz, I.A. Yefron, 619.

units. The Zaqatala okrug, Ganja (former Elizavetpol) and Tiflis frontiers became areas disputed between Georgia and Azerbaijan. The new state governments used turmoil among the European powers and Turkey during and after WWI to seek desirable borders. For instance, Azerbaijan signed a treaty with Turkey in June 1918 according to which the South Caucasian states had to define their borders immediately, while the Turkish army was entering the area and reaching Baku. According to the treaty those borders had to be recognized by the Turkish government²¹. Azerbaijani and Georgian representatives solved the dispute over Zaqatala okrug as the area was primarily settled by Muslims (91% as it proved²²) and Azerbaijan was able to reintegrate the area in late-June 1918.

The second disputed area with a mixed population covered the frontier between Ganja and Tiflis. The Turkish army had occupied the area in the spring and summer 1918, but had to leave the zone after the Mudros armistice was declared in October 1918. Georgian generals strongly supported the idea of ethnic cleansing to define the borders²³. In the summer of 1918, Georgians declared Borchalo uyezd belonged to Georgia despite the fact that Georgians were a minority here (Armenians 37%, Azerbaijanis 30%, Georgians 6%, according to population census of 1897). The Turkish army provoked a war between Georgia and Armenia when leaving Borchalo uyezd in November 1918²⁴. Under Allied pressure both sides agreed to neutralize the area²⁵.

An Azeri representative, Alimardan-bek Topchibashev, used diplomatic channels to claim the disputed area: in November 1918 in his memorandum to the Alliance he described western Azerbaijan's borders as including "Borchalo uyezd, 1/5 of Tiflis uyezd and 1/3 of Signakhi uyezd"²⁶. Neither this time, nor later, when English officers arrived in Transcaucasia as Allied representatives (in the winter and summer 1919), was the dispute solved. The latter had little

²¹ (1998) 'Azerbaijanskaya Demokraticeskaya Respublika (1918–1920),' Baku: "Elm", 86.

²² Ibid., 164.

²³ Kvinitadze, Georgy. (1985) *Moi vospominaniya v gody nezavisimosty Gruzii. 1917 – 1921 gg.*, Paris: "YMKA-PRESS", 229.

²⁴ Denikin, Anton. (2002) 'Ocherki Russkoy Smuty. Voorujenniye Sily Yuga Rossii. Raspad Rossiyskoy imperii. October 1918 — January 1919 in Russian,' Minsk: Kharvest, 266-267.

²⁵ Arkhipova, Ekaterina. (2016) 'Britanski sled na Yuzhnom Kavkaze (1918-1919),' *Novaya i Noveishaya istoriya*. 3: 216-223.

²⁶ Topchibashev, Alimardan. (1993) 'Memorandum, pred'yavlenniy nakhodyaschimsya v Konstantinopole pochetnym predstaviteleyam derzhav Antanty, chlenom pravitelstva Azerbajjanskoy respubliki, chrezvychaynym ministrom – poslannikom pri pravitelstvakh Blistatelnoy Porty, Armenii i Gruzii (November 1918 g.),' Baku: "Azerbaijan" Press, 21.

knowledge of the area and its inhabitants, and they made a hash of governing the region. The British pursued short-term goals and promised the disputed area to one and then the other side, ignoring the mixed ethnic population²⁷. Later, US representatives tried to create an American governorate, including all of the disputed areas under American rule, but failed as they had to leave. As a result, international interference did not help to resolve the Borchalo issue.

In May 1920 the Georgian government signed an agreement with Soviet representatives and received Zaqatala district²⁸, although the latter was a part of Azerbaijan, whose government did not participate in the negotiations and had been fighting against the Red army since April 1920. Obviously, the Soviet government was aware of the dispute over the area and expected to “buy” Tiflis’s representatives through this transfer, although they did not yet have the full control over Azerbaijan. However, the Bolshevik government was not able to implement the promise at the moment of signing and did not do so later, as a result of which the area in fact remained part of Azerbaijan, as confirmed in an official statement made in 1921 by the Transcaucasian Bureau of the Central Committee.

Sovietized Azerbaijan and Georgia discussed their border until 1922. As a result, Zaqatala district finally joined Azerbaijan but the Tiflis – Ganja frontier was divided in favor of Soviet Georgia: it received Signakh and Borchalo²⁹. This exchange, as a result of some deal, was maintained until 1991.

Geography, infrastructure and economy

The length of the contemporary border between Azerbaijan and Georgia is 480 km, 65% of which was delimited by 2006. Since then the negotiation process has been frozen.

The border runs from the meeting point of the Georgian and Azerbaijan borders with the Armenian borderline, mostly along mountain chains that connect the Lesser Caucasus with the

²⁷ Arkhipova, Ekaterina. Op.cit.

²⁸ ‘Peace Treaty between RSFSR and the Georgian Democratic Republic signed in Moscow, May, 7, 1920,’ (1922) in *Collection of valid agreements, treaties and conventions signed by RSFSR and other states*. Issue 1. Petrograd, 26-29.

²⁹ Mustafaeva, Sitara. (2009) ‘Process ustanovleniya azerbaijano-gruzinskoi granicy (1920–1922 gg.),’ *Vestnik VolGU*. Ser. 4. 1 (15): 98-102.

Great Caucasus. The area is covered with forests that in some places make the borderline rather transparent for illegal activities.

The line crosses the Qarayaz reserve (Azerbaijan) in a valley, meets the Jandari Lake (shared between Georgia and Azerbaijan) and goes up to the mountains, turns to the east and goes along the ridge and close to the road that leads to the disputed David Gareji Monastery (Georgia), before shifting above the Iori river. Coming to the Mingechevir reservoir (Azerbaijan), it turns along the Alazan river and follows the riverbed for several kilometers, before turning to the north at the road between Lagodekhi and Zaqatala, goes up through the Lagodekhi- Zaqatala Reserve and meets the Russian border³⁰.

Two roads connecting Rustavi (Georgia) and Ganja (Azerbaijan) cross the southern part of the border. There is one road between Lagodekhi and Zaqatala that transverses the states' northern boundaries. In addition, there are several provincial roads that terminate close to the borderline. Mostly locals use them. The railway between Baku - Ganja - Rustavi - Tbilisi connects two states. Over the last two years, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey have been working on a railway project to connect Baku, Tbilisi and Kars. This plan is overtly political as it excludes Armenia from the region's transport system, and Baku gave a loan to Tbilisi to support construction of the Tbilisi-Kars section³¹. In April 2016, the Azerbaijan Minister of Economy discussed connecting this railway to Nakhichevan through Iran³². Therefore, the economic significance of the border post on the railway is increasing.

The two states have three border posts for car drivers, with two of them located along the southern part of the border³³:

- a) "Red Bridge" (close to the Debeda river), on a highway which goes through following cities: Tbilisi, Rustavi, Ganja, Baku; this pass is international;
- b) "Vakhtangisi - Sadiqli", which can only be used by citizens of the bordering states moving from Rustavi to Ganja or vice-versa.

³⁰ See Azerbaijan map on: <http://www.freeworldmaps.net/asia/azerbaijan/map.html>

³¹ *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia* (2016) 'The Georgian, Azerbaijani and Turkish Foreign Ministers have visited the Georgian section of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway main line,' February 20.

³² *Black Sea News* (2016) 'Azerbaijan I Iran khotyat ob'editit' zhelezniye dorogi Nakhchyvan-Dzhulfa-Tebriz i Baku-Tbilisi-Kars,' April 21, <http://www.blackseanews.net/read/115195>

³³ See the map of Azerbaijan Republic with roads on: <http://www.travel-images.com/az-map-detail.jpg>

c) The third border post, “Tsodna”, is located in the northern area on the way from Balakan to Lagodekhi. This pass is also international.

Custom regulations order passengers to leave their cars and pass through the customs post on foot. Only drivers are allowed to stay in their cars. Usually a lot of local taxi drivers offer their services outside the customs post for those tourists who travel by minibus.

Officials of the two states have often repeated their desire to increase trade turnover and tourist flows³⁴. Azerbaijan has been the second most important trade partner for Georgia in recent years, only falling to fifth-place in 2016 with a trade turnover of USD 160 million³⁵, and supplying gas, oil and electricity. Georgia is the main transport corridor for Azerbaijan’s oil and gas and its significance increased following the conflict in Chechnya (Russia), where the Baku-Novorossiysk pipeline was passing before its reconstruction. Even after reconstruction, this pipeline has not recover its former importance for Azerbaijan, as the government sought to diversify their supply chains. Given the conflict with Armenia, Georgia was the only desirable transport partner for Azerbaijan.

Georgia received subsidized Russian gas until Mikheil Saakashvili’s government decided to change suppliers. In their negotiations with Russia, the Georgian authorities received gas as a levy on Russian supplies to Armenia that uses a pipeline passing through Georgia. Tremendous efforts were made to attract foreign investment for several pipelines running from Azerbaijan to Europe through Georgia. As a result, oil and gas pipelines built during the Soviet period, from Baku to Batumi, have been joined in connecting the two states by Baku – Supsa (since 1999), Baku – Tbilisi – Ceyhan (since 2006), and Baku – Tbilisi – Erzurum (2007) pipelines. Azerbaijan has invested heavily in the petroleum market in Georgia and now controls about 75% of it. This geopolitical environment confers a kind of forced character to their relations: Georgia is a transport corridor for the strategic source of Baku incomes and Azerbaijan is a comfortable supplier of hydrocarbon resources to Georgia.

³⁴ APA (2015) ‘Na propusknykh punktakh Azerbaydzhano-Gruzinskoy Granicy obespechen 24-chasovoy perekhod passazhirov, Border Posts Work 24 Hours,’ *APA.az*, July 28, <http://ru.apa.az/ekonomika-azerbaydjana/infrastruktura/na-propusknykh-punktakh-azerbajdzhanogruzinskoy-granicy-obespechen-24-chasovoj-perekhod-passazhirov.html>

³⁵ *Black Sea News* (2016) ‘Azerbaijan stal pyatym krupnym togovym partnerom Gruzii in Russian,’ April 29, <http://www.blackseanews.net/read/115531>

Delimitation and ethnic claims

The delimitation process developed slowly, under a joint Georgian and Azerbaijan committee on delimitation that had been called in 1996. By 2004 the two sides had resolved only 30% of the borderline³⁶. The new government of Mikheil Saakashvili, trumpeting Georgia's territorial integrity, accelerated the demarcation process even as it increased the pressure on non-Georgian citizens located in border areas, including Azerbaijanis living close to the "Red Bridge" border post.

Yet the states could only delimit 65% of the borderline by 2006 and following negotiations have not made any progress. Today the disputed districts include the abovementioned "Red Bridge" area, with Azeris living close to the border, the territory of the David Gareja monastery complex, and the Alazan river as part of the borderline. The challenge here is that the river has altered course since 1970³⁷. The negotiators have to consider every registered course change, of which there had been 69 by 2011. The Georgian mass media in 2011-2012 accused Azerbaijan of engaging in unilateral riverbank protection in order that Georgia would lose some areas. Meanwhile the head of the Georgian delimitation committee has demanded that the former borderline be followed despite the change in the river's course³⁸.

The ethnic factor is more complicated and plays against both sides. The location of Azeris in Georgia and so called "Georgians" (Ingiloys) in Azerbaijan hampers the delimitation process. In Georgia, Azeris are the ethnic majority in Gardabani and Marneuli townships, Ponichala (Sabana as called by locals), Garadjalar, Eris-Imedi, Kirach-Muganli – all of which are 30-40 km from the border line³⁹. All of these areas are along the former Tiflis – Ganja frontier which was a matter of dispute in the nineteenth century and again in 1918-1920. But since 2004 the political and national loyalty of local Azeris has been tested by the regional authorities, with support from

³⁶ *REGNUM* (2004) 'Zamestitel' glavy MID Azerbajjana o prioritetakh vo vneshney politike, Khalaph Khalaphov,' January 16, <http://www.regnum.ru/expnews/204658.html>

³⁷ *Panorama.am*. (2012) 'GeorgiaTimes: Nepredskazuemaya Alazan menyaet granicu mezhdru Gruzией I Azerbajjanom,' January 19, <http://www.panorama.am/ru/news/2012/01/19/georgia-times-azer/826714>

³⁸ *Day.Az* (2011) 'Prolivnye dozhdi uvelichat territoriyu Azerbajjana?' July 15, <http://news.day.az/society/273303.html>

³⁹ Arkhipova, Ekaterina. (2012) 'Azerbajjano-Gruzinskaya Granica: istoricheskiye factory poyavleniya sovremennykh territorialnykh sporov,' *Vestnik VolGU*. Ser. 4. #2:76-83.

Tbilisi. Step by step, Azeris lost rights to land, while cross-border mobility became more difficult⁴⁰. As a result, from 2008 they began to agitate for federalization while some radicals even claimed autonomy for Borchalo, the former Azeri name for what Georgians call “Kvemo-Kartli”. Furthermore, the Georgian authorities began a campaign against former Turk/Azeri toponyms, giving Georgian names to villages, rivers and mountains. Azeris have lived here since before the Soviet authorities defined local borders. Independent Georgia and Azerbaijan could not solve this territorial dispute in 1918-1920. The current disputed area was the subject of wars between Georgia and Armenia and between Azerbaijan and Armenia. This borderline ended as a compromise in an ethnically-mixed area that was offered and supported by the Bolshevik government. Today the Azerbaijan government has no claims on the area. Yet Azerbaijani politicians and members of Parliament (Milli Majlis) draw society’s attention to the facts of language and social oppression from time to time. The local Azeris established an NGO, “Borchaly”, whose purpose was to support education in the native language and retain Azeri toponyms, including Borchalo instead of Kvemo-Kartli. Notably, they have no separatist claims.

The ethnic identity of Ingiloys (mostly Muslim Georgians living in Balaken, Zaqatala and Qakh districts of Azerbaijan) was actively transformed over the last century under the influence of Tbilisi and Baku. who considered them as important ethnic and political factors in border delimitation. There are different theories explaining their origin. All of them serve to announce the ethnic group as either Georgians or Azerbaijanis. During the first years of independence, different Georgian governments tried to promote a Georgian identity among the Ingiloys through providing education in Georgian and cultural programs, but failed in changing their religious identity. Yet Azerbaijan ethnonational policy differs from Georgia’s and this group is not as active as Azeris in Georgia.

Avars are another ethnic group, Muslims and speaking Azeri as well as their native language, that have been incorporated into the Georgian, Azerbaijan and Russian borderlands. They reside in a cross-border region and played an important role in local policies until 2004. Later the Georgian community in Kvareli district had to leave their homeland under the pressure of the local ethnic policy. They moved to Russia. In Azerbaijan in the early 1990s some radical Avars

⁴⁰ Yepiphantzev, Andrey. (2010) ‘Nacionalnye okrainy Gruzii. Usloviya raspada 4,’ *Agentstvo politicheskikh novostei*. February 11, <http://www.apn.ru/publications/article22381.htm>; *RBC* (2004) ‘Gruzia zakryvaet granicu s Azerbajjanom,’ May 31, http://www.rbc.ru/index.shtml?news/daythemes/2004/05/31/31003922_bod.shtml

created armed groups in order to capture local power. But the leaders of Avar communities preferred to negotiate with the official government and gained representation within local authorities.

Ingiloy, Avars and Lezgins form the ethno-social map of the area, former Zakatala district, which is the second subject of Azerbaijan – Georgia dispute. The ethnic factor is combined with cultural ones. The dispute over the David Gareja monastery complex began in 1991. Located to the north-east of the “Red Bridge” and “Vakhtangisi - Sadiqli” border posts, this complex in Mount Gareja (which Georgians call Udabno) consists of 20 or so Christian complexes carved in the mountain, partly in Georgia and partly in Azerbaijan, consisting of the Chichkhituri, Udabno and Bertubani monasteries, the Church of Resurrection and about a hundred monastic cave cells. The main monastery of Saint David occupies the northern slope of the mountain bordering the two states.

Georgian and Azerbaijan communities crystallized into movements defending their rights over this archeological and religious complex. A Georgian association called “Udabno”, headed by Lado Mirianashvili, claims that the borderline was defined by the Soviet authorities with no regard for local cultural significance, while in 1948 the boundary became a testing ground for the Soviet Army. There was little significance to the Soviet border as it was solely an administrative boundary, which could not limit cross-border movement.

The Georgian government unilaterally declared its rights over the area only in 1991. The religious meaning of the complex strengthens the Georgian point as Georgians make pilgrimages here and have to cross the border to visit monasteries on the southern, Azerbaijani slope of the mountain. The “Udabno” group accuses the local Azerbaijan authorities of failing to maintain the monuments. They sought to move the borderline 13 meters into Azerbaijan and receive a corridor to the Bertubani monastery in order to maintain it.

In 2005, Georgian groups suggested exchanging the disputed area for land settled by Azeris close to the “Red Bridge” border post. However, in 2007 the states agreed demarcation in this district with no claims from Baku⁴¹. This became an argument for Azerbaijan’s representatives, as they could emphasize their non-interference in Georgian national policy. This approach became

⁴¹ *Day.Az* (2007) ‘Soglasovan uchastok Azerbaijano-Gruzinskoy granicy v Agstafinskom raione,’ March 7, <http://news.day.az/politics/72872.html>

the basis for demanding the same for Georgia's policy towards the Ingiloyts. In fact, Azerbaijani society has considered Georgia's nationality policy to be rather intolerant towards Azeris. For instance, journalists of the Azerbaijan media-group Zerkalo (pro-government, published in Russian) and of Eynulla Fatullayev's group (opposed to the government) have published articles and held several roundtables revealing the conditions of Azeris living in Georgia⁴².

Georgian mass media also supported and developed the idea of an area exchange between the bordering states. The Azerbaijan mass media reacted negatively and the Zerkalo media group established a committee for cultural and historical monuments which attracted researchers and officials. This group resolved to refuse any area exchange and pointed to Georgia as having occupied Azerbaijan's lands (Borchalo), where Azeris still live⁴³. So, while Azerbaijan officials do not provoke delimitation, they have to deal with more radical social actors, and take their positions into account.

The head of the Department for Monument Maintenance at the Azerbaijan Ministry of Culture, Rafiq Bairamov, stated that the authorities do maintain the complexes at David Gareja, which he argued were also important for Azerbaijani society. Azerbaijani researchers began to proclaim the affiliation between the Gareja monastery complex and the culture of ancient Caucasian Albania, and began to use the name "Keshikchidag" in relation to the complex in research and newspapers⁴⁴. The issue became potentially traumatic for Azerbaijani society as soon as the link with Caucasian Albania was drawn, as the latter's "heritage area" in Nagorno-Karabakh has already been lost.

Furthermore, Azerbaijan's officials came to recognize the military importance of the disputed area⁴⁵. This has been obvious since 2007. For instance, in 2004 the Azerbaijani representative on the joint delimitation committee, Khalaf Khalafov, was ready to accept the Georgian offers for an exchange, but by 2007, after Saakashvili requested a solution on these

⁴² *Echo* (2012) 'Pogranichnomu sporu mezhdru Azerbajjanom I Gruzijey byl posvyashen "kruglyi stol, organizovanni Kavkazskim issledovatel'skim tsentrom,' May 24, <http://www.echo.az/article.php?aid=3502>; Alai, Gulnara. (2015) "Gruzinskiye" li monastiri v Azerbajjane?' *Haqqin.az* November 21, <http://haqqin.az/news/57553>

⁴³ Alieva, Kamila. (2004) 'Po iniciative Bakinskogo centra iskusstv gazety "Zerkalo" pri Forume NPO Azerbajjana sozdana specialnaya komissiya po problemam kulturno-istoricheskikh pamyatnikov,' *Zerkalo* February 10.

⁴⁴ *Echo.Az* (2011) 'V 2011 godu udastsya razrechit' vopros delimitatzii, schitaet politolog Parvin Darabadi,' January 12, <http://www.echo.az/article.php?aid=785>

⁴⁵ Simonyan, Yuri. (2008) 'Otkrytaya dlya vsekh,' *Nezavisimaya gazeta*. January 21, http://www.ng.ru/courier/2008-01-21/16_gruzia.html

grounds, Khalafov refused any area exchange⁴⁶. At the same time, both sides considered declaring the complex a tourist zone under joint control⁴⁷. Georgian society reacted negatively to this compromise and the government was accused of trading the area in exchange for gas supplies from the Shah Deniz oilfield. In 2008 some radical movements in Georgia started to claim the whole Qakh district of Azerbaijan as part of the historical complex⁴⁸. The Azerbaijan government and public opinion responded angrily to such pretensions because of the problems with Nagorno-Karabakh and the seven Azerbaijan provinces lost during the war. The controversies threatened to undermine economic achievements and the sides stopped negotiations.

The states returned to discuss an area exchange on the basis of the Georgian offer in 2010. The Azerbaijan group continued to insist on the joint administration of the area with equal access. An incident in which a Georgian citizen was killed in the disputed area overshadowed negotiations. The young men had followed his cow across the borderline and been shot by an Azerbaijani border guard⁴⁹.

These states, with close economic relations and mutual influence in such important fields as oil and gas supply, faced a fundamental challenge of complicated ethnic fragments along the borderline, and were not able to reach a compromise.

In 2011, a Georgian researcher, Marika Lortkipanidze, suggested declaring the area a free Monastic Republic similar to New Athos Monastic Republic in Greece⁵⁰. Yet this proposal would give more authority to Georgia as the monks would belong to the Georgian Church. Although such a suggestion showed that there were approaches suggesting room for compromise, they were not widely supported.

Different social movements embarrassed negotiations with extreme claims for the total return of the disputed area. Less radical offers to neutralize the area as a dispute, as negotiations

⁴⁶ Khanagaogly, Timur. (2007) “Kenska volost” po-Azerbajjanski, *Nedelya*. May 11, <http://www.nedelya.az/articlen.php?catno=0340004>

⁴⁷ Suleymanov, Marat. (2007) ‘Voyna kak sposob uskoreniya mirnykh peregovorov: Azerbaijan za nedelyu,’ *REGNUM*. March 16, <http://www.regnum.ru/news/797122.html>

⁴⁸ *REGNUM* (2008) ‘Delimitaciya azerbajjano-gruzinskikh granic prodolzhaet ostavat’sya golovnoy bol’yu dlya oficial’nogo Baku I Tbilisi,’ November 27, <http://www.regnum.ru/news/1090221.html>

⁴⁹ *Trend* (2010) ‘Na gruzino-azerbajjanskoy granice ubit 17-letniy gruzin,’ April 14, <http://ru.trend.az/news/politics/foreign/1669131.html>

⁵⁰ *Panorama* (2011) ‘Sud’ba gruzinskogo monastyrya David Gareji: Monastyrsкая respublika ili gruzino-azerbajjanskaya eks-territoriya?’ September 23, <http://www.panorama.am/ru/society/2011/09/23/georgia-azerbajjan-church/?sw>

couldn't solve such issues as: who controls the military heights, whether the Azerbaijani army was ready to leave those heights, how the area could be managed when its primary inhabitants are monks, and how to provide and manage the tourist flow.

An Azerbaijan Milli Majlis deputy, Rasim Musambekov, sought to create a Georgia-Azerbaijan confederation to remove the issue of the disputed area. His idea was rather populist while indicating the closeness of interstate relations, but there are still doubts about such a confederation.

The joint border committee met again in 2011, when they again accomplished some geodetic work, but did not solve the underlying issue⁵¹. In May 2012, Azerbaijan established a border post near the main Saint David Gareji monastery, preventing the flow of pilgrims and aggravating negotiations.

Meeting at the NATO summit in Chicago in 2012, Azerbaijani representatives agreed to withdraw the border post⁵². The Heads of State met again in December 2012 and discussed the road issue and territorial dispute, but again the last question was not resolved. In 2014, the parties returned to the dispute and declared they expected a solution in 2015⁵³, but they failed and up to September 2016 there is no progress.

Other border areas were settled through compromises and exchanges, and the difficulties with the David Gareja monastery area can be explained by its historical meaning in national narratives. In addition, we have to take into account that the states lost the possibility of receiving reimbursement in exchange once other areas were solved. At the same time, both are trying to move towards a structural resolution for everyday border security challenges.

⁵¹ *Gruzia Online* (2011) 'Voprosy delimitacii gruzino-azerbajjanskoy granicy obsudily predstaviteli Tbilisi i Baku,' June 14, <http://www.apsny.ge/2011/pol/1308104645.php>

⁵² *Centr L'va Gumileva* (2012) 'Gruziny i azerbajjancy ne podelili podelit' pograničniy monastyr', May 23, <http://www.gumilev-center.ru/gruziny-i-azerbajjdzhancy-ne-podelili-podelit-pograničniy-monastyr/>

⁵³ *Black Sea News* (2014) 'Boleye 35% gosgranicy Azerbajjana I Gruzii podlezhit delimitacii,' February 13, <http://www.blackseanews.net/read/76618>; *Black Sea News* (2014) 'Delimitaciya azerbajjano-gruzinskoy granicy zavershitsya v 2015 godu,' December 9, <http://www.blackseanews.net/read/92018>

Border security

As the borderline was merely administrative until 1991, the new authorities had to expend a great deal of effort in order to materialize a state border. Of course, this took time as the first post-independence leaders were more concerned with their own authority and separatist wars, while the states' economies degraded. Consequently, after independence these new interstate borders were initially rather transparent and unable to prevent the cross-border movements of locals and criminal flows. Only after 2004 did these two states initiate full-scale works on constructing a border infrastructure. Their participation in the EU program for "Eastern Partnership" forced both governments to modernize existing border posts and build two additional posts for their citizens⁵⁴.

The main problem faced by custom officers on both sides is the low-level of border infrastructure inherited from the Soviet period, when these border lines served merely administrative (or "federal" according to John Prescott's terminology⁵⁵) functions. After the Soviet Union's collapse, their transparency promoted illegal migration, drug trafficking, and smuggling⁵⁶. Border officials on both sides would close the "Red Bridge" post or other smaller posts from time to time to prevent violations, increase penalties, and deprive locals of the right to cross the borderline for periods of up to a one year⁵⁷. However, limitations on crossing the border did not bring about the expected benefits, merely causing traffic jams and making long lines, especially during holidays.

Georgia became the region's tourist destination and now attracts a lot of Azerbaijani citizens preferring to spend their holidays in Batumi. In 2016 Azerbaijan officials sanctioned a bus

⁵⁴ Day.Az (2014) 'Na Gruzino-Azerbajanskoy Granice poyavyatsya novye KPP,' November 10, <http://news.day.az/economy/533781.html>

⁵⁵ Prescott, John R.V. (1965) *The Geography of Frontiers and Boundaries*. London, Hutchinson University Library.

⁵⁶ *Kriminalnyi Azerbaijan* (2011) 'Azerbajanskiye pogranchniki zaderzhali 112 prestupnikov,' June 6, <http://criminalazerbaijan.com/?p=11633>

⁵⁷ *Kavkazski uzel* (2004) 'Kontrol' za prokhozheniem gruzov cherez KPP "Krasnyi Most" na gruzino-azerbajanskoy granice kraine uzhestochen,' June 1, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/56287/>; *Black Sea News* (2014) 'Pogranchnaya sluzhba Azerbajana otchitalas' za 2014 god,' December 26, <http://www.blackseanews.net/read/92897>

route from Baku to the resort⁵⁸. News agencies mention that Azerbaijan officers usually make a long inspection⁵⁹, and travelers in forums often contrast their performance to the fast and kind work of Georgian border officers⁶⁰.

The states cooperate in the border security field both through bilateral relations and under the terms of regional integration. Notably, the third meeting of Border Agencies Heads of the GUAM states took place in Baku in September 2005 and participants discussed their cooperation in border security and the struggle against world terrorism, extremism, separatism, illegal migration and smuggling⁶¹.

In 2011 the EU and UNDP adopted a program to “Support integrated systems of border management in the South Caucasus” that provided a plan for the “Improvement of border operational methods and procedures” in Georgia and Azerbaijan. This created and developed strategies, procedures and methods for co-operation between the two countries’ Customs agencies, other relevant governmental authorities and trade officials, in order to facilitate trade flows and avoid the duplication of work.

Since the “Eastern Partnership” and Transcaucasian railway (Baku-Tbilisi-Kars) have been implemented, Customs officials in both states were forced to cooperate. However, continuing reports of border crossings being suspended show that both states prefer unilateral efforts to provide border security⁶². In addition, Azerbaijan this year introduced a charge for drivers entering the country in a car that does not meet Euro-4 standards. Such a policy limits visitors from Georgia, as a state with lower automobile regulations. At the same time, traveler’s forums complain about the high-level corruption at Azerbaijani customs.

⁵⁸ *Black Sea News* (2016) ‘Iz Baku v Batumi mozno budet dobrat’sya na avtobuse,’ July 4, <http://www.blackseanews.net/read/117994>

⁵⁹ *Baku.WS* (2015) ‘Na azerbajjano-gruzinskoy granice snova stolpotvoreniye,’ August 4, <http://baku.ws/59111-na-azerbaydzhanu-gruzinskoy-granice-snova-stolpotvorenie.html>; *Black Sea News* (2015) ‘Azerbajjano-gruzinskaya granica stala dostupnoye vladel’tsam avtotransporta,’ August 13, <http://www.blackseanews.net/read/103713>

⁶⁰ <http://lekso79.livejournal.com/1265671.html>; <http://perekati-pole.net/forum/index.php?action=recent>;

<http://litetrip.ru/peresechenie-granicy-gruzii-azerbajdzhana.html>; <http://www.otzyv.ru/>

⁶¹ *Kavkazski uzel* (2005) ‘V Azerbajjane sostoyalos’ zasedaniye glav pogranychnykh vedomstv stran GUAM,’ September 28, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/84594/>

⁶² *Gruziya Online* (2016) ‘Na azerbajjano-gruzinskoy granice vznikla mnogokilometrovaya probka,’ July 6, <http://www.apsny.ge/2016/other/1467839021.php>

Conclusion

In some cases, politicians return to the age before Russian rule to claim that the Russian Empire sundered the region's ideal borders. However, such statements again show the tendency of local political elites to blame someone else for contemporary social and economic challenges.

Before the eighteenth century, borders in the area were the result of wars between local quasi-states with one another or against surrounding empires, which is why borderlines were not along ethnic boundaries. The Russian approach to demarcating provinces had one purpose: to control a distant area. As Tiflis was the city where Russian authority found most support, and military forces were concentrated here, borders were created according to the distance from Tiflis. When other provinces or cities became loyal to Russian rule, centers of power could be moved or divided, and inner borders could change. Control was the main function of these borders during the nineteenth century.

When ethno-national governments started to create their own borders after 1918, they tried to apply ethnicity to former gubernia lines and provoked conflicts in the area. The Bolshevik authorities had to participate in a game of territorial promises began by Turks, British and Americans in 1918. The borders created during the Soviet period, while based upon Russian Imperial boundaries, were the result of compromise and area exchanges.

The issue of territorial disputes has been popularized in both states. For instance, in August 2014 in Baku, and later in July 2015 in Tbilisi, football matches between Azerbaijan and Georgia were accompanied by brawls between their fans. Georgian fans provoked the other side with banners saying "We remember Zaqatala, 1921" and appropriate maps. And after the match a fight between two groups of fans began⁶³. The Georgian claim is based on the events of 1918-1922 described above. But since negotiations regarding this area remain inconclusive, such provocations can find some support.

These provocations show the importance of boundary memorialization. Elites in both states actively participate in constructing images of the nation-state and its borders. Parallel separatist

⁶³ *REGNUM* (2014) 'V Baku proizoshla draka mezhdru gruzinskimi I azerbaijanskimi bolel'schikami,' August 1, <https://regnum.ru/news/1831814.html>

movements push them to actualize primordial ideas about “ancestral land”, remembering old disputes from 1918-1922 and before, while conveniently forgetting other events.

The requirements of the modern economy necessitate that contemporary states frequently develop a mutual dependence in crucial sectors, such as fuel or transportation, that make them partners even as ongoing border disputes threaten to destroy trust in one another. The problems of territorial integrity for both states make the David Gareja, Borchalo (Kvemo-Kartli) and Zaqatala issues rather painful for them. Consequently, we can hardly expect any progress in delimitation. At the same time, neither party has a strong and dependable ally in the region, and despite all the complaints about their respective ethnic policies, they prefer to close their eyes and freeze the delimitation process while continuing to cooperate with one another.

Border security cooperation develops slowly. EU programs provided the main impulse for the states here. However, usually they prefer unilateral efforts and consider border security challenges as inspired from outside, including from bordering states. Border officials make statements from time to time about their willingness to coordinate border policies, but all of these collective programs are implemented under the EU umbrella.

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The logo for KUBS (Kuban University) is centered on the page. It features a circular emblem with a grid pattern and four arrows pointing outwards. Below the emblem, the letters "KUBS" are written in a large, bold, blue sans-serif font.