



Compendium of
**POLICY
MEMOS**

**Religion and Soft Power in
South Caucasus**

Policy Perspective

Ansgar Jödicke & Kornely Kakachia (Eds.)

2017

RELIGION AND SOFT POWER IN SOUTH CAUCASUS

POLICY PERSPECTIVE

Editors: Ansgar Jödicke

Kornely Kakachia

TBILISI

2017



საქართველოს პოლიტიკის ინსტიტუტი
GEORGIAN INSTITUTE OF POLITICS

The Georgian Institute of Politics (GIP) is a Tbilisi-based non-profit, non-partisan, research and analysis organization founded in early 2011. GIP strives to strengthen the organizational backbone of democratic institutions and promote good governance and development through policy research and advocacy in Georgia. It also encourages public participation in civil society-building and developing democratic processes. Since December 2013 GIP is member of the OSCE Network of Think Tanks and Academic Institutions.

*This publication has been produced from the resources provided by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SCOPES-Program). The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Georgian Institute of Politics and the Swiss National Science Foundation (SCOPES-Program).

© Georgian Institute of Politics 2017

Tel: +995 599 99 02 12

Email: info@gip.ge

www.gip.ge

CONTENTS

Forward	4
Biopolitical conservatism and “pastoral power”: a Russia – Georgia meeting point By Andrey Makarychev & Alexandra Yatsyk.....	7
Foreign Policy of the Georgian Orthodox Church: Interplay between the West and Russia By Salome Minesashvili.....	17
Implementing EU’s Normative Agenda in the South Caucasus: Contradictory Effects By Eiki Berg & Alar Kilp.....	25
Turkey in Georgia: pursuing the “soft power” politics By Vahram Ter-Matevosyan.....	33
Turkey’s Soft Power in Azerbaijan and the Gülen Movement By Fuad Aliyev.....	41
Religion as a factor in Kurdish identity discourse: Case study on Armenia and Turkey By Lia Evoyan & Tatevik Manukyan.....	49
Iran’s Soft Power in Georgia – Weak for now, Bigger Potential for the Future By Mariam Gabedava & Koba Turmanidze.....	57
Iran’s Soft Power Policy in Armenia: Cultural Diplomacy and Religion By Tatevik Mkrtchyan.....	63
Iranian soft religious power in Azerbaijan: old new threat for Baku By Anar Valiyev.....	69
About Authors	75

Forward

For centuries, the South Caucasus was a region where external powers exercised strong influence. While independence has changed the situation and autonomous states evolved after the breakdown of the Soviet Union, both dependencies from - and necessary partnerships with - powerful neighbours are still the reality in Georgia and Armenia and Azerbaijan.

In this context, the term “soft power” became popular, drawing special attention to a specific type of external influence that is based on attraction rather than coercion. First mentioned in a publication by Joseph Nye in 1990 (with a more detailed elaboration in 2004), the term underwent a stellar career in political science and among policymakers. World powers like USA, Russia, and to some extent the EU or Turkey, included the term in their own foreign policies though the meaning differs from capital to capital. In contrast, the smaller countries of the South Caucasus mostly perceive soft power as something dangerous that threatens their autonomy. This holds especially true when it comes to religion.

Obviously, in the field of culture, transnational attraction can be based on religious grounds. Religious ties include emotions, feelings of proximity, and solidarity. Thus, religion can be a platform on which states wield soft power and gain influence in the South Caucasian democracies. The papers in the following booklet ask what part religion plays in soft power policies or how it influences in soft power policies.

Religion in the South Caucasus is diverse. However, the religious policies in the three countries struggle with similar problems. All three countries have repeatedly proved that they consider themselves to be secular countries. Nevertheless, all three countries have

had to somehow integrate the religious factor in society, and all of them included religion to some extent in the construction of national identity.

Religious-based soft power combines two politically ambivalent factors: the external influence, and the fuzzy social force of religion. It is not by chance that wielding soft power through religious channels threatens political elites.

It was in this controversial situation that the contributors to this booklet did their research on religion and soft power in the South Caucasus. The three-year project was financed by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SCOPES-Programme) and coordinated at the University of Fribourg/Switzerland (Social Sciences Department). The research group consisted of both young and more experienced researchers from the Caucasus and abroad, and included researchers from different academic disciplines. The detailed outcomes will be published in a volume by Routledge this year. With the generous support of Iv. Javakishvili Tbilisi State University and the Georgian Institute of Politics, participants in the research project presented a policy oriented summary of their research results at a conference in Tbilisi on March 13/14, 2017 and published them in this booklet.

It is risky to transport the results from academic writing to political discussion for several reasons. First, most of the researchers are not familiar with this kind of development. Politically, the topic of our research is very relevant and controversial although the inclusion (or exclusion) of normative statements depends very much on the academic discipline. The research group consisted of researchers from political science, international relations, history, oriental studies and the academic study of religions—all of them with

a different understanding of “religion” and “politics”. Second, the political perception of religion is still highly controversial. Academic researchers specialising on religion often emphasize frictions in the religious groups and historical dependencies. In contrast, social scientists with closer relations to politics often see religion as a uniform factor that is unable to join a rational political discourse.

The conference aimed to encourage a well informed and nuanced public discus-

sion about the factor of religion in national and transnational politics. We hope that this publication will be of interest to many institutions and organizations, government officials, regional analysts and to all those who are involved in researching problems related to the role of religion in South Caucasus and its political development.

Ansgar Joedicke
Project Leader

**BIOPOLITICAL CONSERVATISM AND
“PASTORAL POWER”:
A RUSSIA - GEORGIA MEETING POINT**

ANDREY MAKARYCHEV
ALEXANDRA YATSYK

Introduction

This paper seeks to unveil biopolitical dimensions of Russia's increasing self-assertion in Georgia, a country that has faced the loss of two of its regions and continues to face intense political pressure from the Kremlin. We argue that one of Russia's strongest policy instruments is biopolitical, since it is aimed at imposing a socially conservative agenda of biopolitical "normalization" widely supported in Georgian society (Thornton and Sichinava 2015). In this context, the idea of empire acquires visible biopolitical connotations: Russia intends to reshape borders by expanding its version of biopolitical conservatism (Makarychev and Yatsyk 2015) and include the Georgian population, which shares the Orthodox values constitutive for Putin's ideology, in the sphere of the Russian normative counter-project.

The concept of biopolitics has a rich academic legacy, yet it also denotes a specific type of policy that distinguishes it from geopolitical strategies. In January 2016 Russian President Vladimir Putin explained the annexation of Crimea in predominantly biopolitical – as opposed to geopolitical – terms, claiming that Russia is more concerned about people than about borders. As a policy, biopolitics is conducive to the emergence of a specific Russian identity based largely on the idea of defending the threatened lives of people looking for protection, rather than on the logic of material gains through territorial acquisition. For Russia, territory as such is not necessarily at the top of its priorities – the Russian Army did not fully occupy Georgia in August 2008, and Russia is reluctant to fully and immediately absorb Abkhazia and South Ossetia (along with Donbas and Transnistria). In the meantime, Russian dominance is, to a larger extent, based on influencing different groups of the population through discourses that culturally and (bio)politically

reconnect them to the Russian collective Self.

Our argument is three-fold. First, we approach biopolitics not in a narrow technical sense as a set of policy tools that are meant to protect or control (groups of) population; we claim that biopolitics necessarily presupposes as its key strategy the social construction of a population that is never "given". Through biopolitical instruments it can be constructed differently – as a unified community supposedly sharing common normative grounding (the "Russian world"); as a group of internally displaced people that need to be taken care of (refugees in conflict areas); as recipients of humanitarian assistance, and so forth. These role identities are situational and depend on the contexts created by different modalities of biopower.

Second, the application of biopolitical – i.e. focused on controlling groups of population – instruments strengthens imperial logic in Russian foreign policy. This argument can be explored on the grounds of the projection of Russian "pastoral power" to Georgia, with its strong conservative components and moral appeal, as well as on the basis of Moscow's policy of gradually incorporating its population through passportization.

Third, we deem that the practice of biopolitics in the South Caucasus is a battlefield for a number of projects competing with each other. Being an object of Russian biopower, Georgia itself develops biopolitical approaches and thus includes them in the process of its identity-making. This reciprocal biopoliticization of Russian–Georgian relations creates spaces where the two actors either compete with each other (over loyalties of the residents in Abkhazia and South Ossetia), or find themselves in a complementary position over a plethora of policy issues pertaining to the conservative agenda with its strong biopolitical elements.

“Pastoral Power” and Russian – Georgian Relations

A major source of biopolitical discourses and practices in this field is the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) that, in accordance with Michel Foucault’s thinking, can be seen as a biopolitical institution of “pastoral power”. Religion must be included in the biopolitical sphere of taking care of human lives. Along the lines of Foucault’s reasoning, pastoral power is a power of taking care of lives through “modern biopolitical rationalities” (Hannah 2011, 230-231). As Mika Ojakangas (2005, 19) posits, from the times of antiquity states exercised power “over land, whereas the shepherd wields power over a flock... The task of the shepherd is to provide continuous material and spiritual welfare for each and every member of the flock”. Pastoral power has strong connotations with biopower since its object is “people on the move rather than ... static territory” (Golder 2007, 165); biopower and pastoral power share other important characteristics – normative / spiritual components and surveillance mechanisms.

After Russia lost many forms of influence in Georgia as a result of the August war of 2008, one of the few channels of communication that remained between the two peoples was maintained by the two Orthodox Churches (Kornilov and Makarychev 2015). The accentuation of cultural and religious affinity with Georgia is for Moscow a biopolitical instrument allowing for emphasizing the incompatibility of “traditional” Orthodox values with the EU’s liberal, emancipatory agenda, which, according to its critics, “calls for respecting sin” and “forgets about nations and patriotism” (Devdariani 2014). As a Georgian Orthodox priest noted,

“We have a common Orthodox spirit with Russia...I like the way the Russian state treats same-sex marriages; it is important for us here. When the West came to resist God, we see that

we can save ourselves only with Russia”.

But it is not necessarily that the ROC directly instructs the GOC on specific policy issues. There is no strong evidence of Georgia’s high importance for the ROC, which does not have a well-developed and articulated policy towards Georgia, yet it is the GOC that explicitly or implicitly uses the conservative discourse emanating from the ROC for the sake of signifying the traditional value-based core of Georgian authentic identity. *“Presumably, what irritates the West is the high authority of religion in Georgia, which appears to contravene experiences of democratic countries. Yet our patriarch does have a high authority that they (the West. – authors.) would like to destroy”*, - this statement by a Georgian priest resembles the conspiracy theories that are also popular in Russia. The same goes for Eurosceptic voices in the Georgian religious community: *“Perhaps, Europe has already detached itself from Christianity... It does not deem it essential any longer to fill your liberties with eternal values ... The most fundamental for Europe is the untouchable freedom of choice. Yet is there a deep wisdom in this?”*.

Against this backdrop, the ROC undoubtedly has an essential influence on Georgian Orthodox culture, to a large extent through Russian language theological literature. Yet, as one of local priests mentioned,

“since 1990s the situation has changed. When Georgian priests begun to move out of Georgia and the USSR, to Greece or Romania, we have started learning from others. Older priests are closer to Russian religious traditions, while their younger colleagues share more with the Balkan canons”.

The specificity of the latter is mostly related to such religious practices as frequency of Eucharist or confession, though these canonical differences have also contributed

to the spread of European cultural values to the Georgian clergy in general. The shared Orthodox faith can also produce some ambiguity towards Russia. Some priests within the GOC are not happy to see themselves dependent on their Russian brothers.⁵

“As I see it, we don't have such big problems with Russia as we do with the West... Both of them are empires that wish to control the world... We don't want to be parts of either of the two projects... As far as Russia's policy is concerned, it is rude... If Russia comes again with its aggressive attitudes – well, something that already happen can repeat... We have lost a lot, yet kept intact our language, faith and morals, which are the main values for us... You Russians have force and culture, we also have our own spirituality, and we all together can say to the West – no, what exists with you will not exist here; we can take from you something good, but not homosexuals”.

The GOC is a diverse and fragmented agglomeration of different religious platforms, and does not speak with a single voice on policy issues. Within the GOC there are priests who share classical theories of Western conspiracy against Orthodoxy, and there are also those who accept the liberal values of human dignity and freedom. Yet both of them see Russia as an empire.

“Georgia does not wish to submit itself to Russia, since this would entail a loss of the political freedom that we have gained... A blend of Christianity and imperialism does not give us anything healthy. The spirit of Byzantium that could have had historical roots nowadays looks obsolete. Russia does have that kind of inclinations, which is bad... In the meantime I can't say that the ROC is short of the holy spirit”

The GOC is thus a controversial institution: it may both support the European integration of Georgia and team up with Stalinist sympathizers; Ilia the Second may be critical of Russia's policy in the occupied territories,

while also meet the explicitly-pro-Kremlin group of the “Night Wolves” biker club, which is known for its neo-imperial image (Chinkova 2014, Kevorkova 2013). However, even if we take the GOC narratives that radiate pro-Russian sympathies, the question arises: are those sympathies a product of Russian biopower, or do they stem from the ideological consonance of the two kindred churches? It is true that the Patriarch Ilia has called Putin “a wise ruler who will necessarily help reunite Georgia... Russia's idea is about the protection of spirituality” (Apsny 2013). It is also true that Georgian priests can refer to their Russian spiritual teachers in public pronouncements and copy many practices of the ROC, but still the latter is overwhelmingly perceived by the Georgian Orthodox community as an external force indirectly influenced by the Kremlin:

“There is a presumption that people who propagate pro-Russian sympathies might have been working for Russian special services, or for kindred Georgian organizations for which religious connections are important”.

There is an undeniable potential for ROC influence in Georgia, but that hardly leads to direct practical implications. The head of the GOC has, on numerous occasions, made pro-Western statements, and celebrations of the 30st anniversary of his enthronement were held without representatives of the ROC. It is telling that GOC representatives try to keep a critical distance from Russian policies towards Ukraine. Thus, the Metropolitan Nikolay suggested that “what happens in Ukraine is close to us: in 1993 we went through pretty much the same. In an Abkhazian village a monk, who never took arms in his hands, was killed just because he represented the GOC” (RIA 2015). By saying that, the Georgian priest drew a parallel between separatists in the two countries, and indirectly identified GOC with the Kyiv-based Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

Normatively, Russian religious diplomacy revolves around a conservative agenda that plays a political role: the pro-LGBT vs. anti-LGBT dichotomy transforms into a pro-EU vs. pro-Russian dilemma. Thus, some in Georgia think that Russia manipulates the widely spread religious feelings and the veneration of Orthodox values to isolate Georgia from the West:

“Church in Georgia is a key identity maker. It imposes two bans on those who are supposed to be loyal to the idea of the nation – on being non-Orthodox and being LGBT... On May 17 2013 Orthodox priests called for joining a homophobic demonstration. 40,000 people celebrated hegemonic masculinity against a dozen of their LGBT opponents”.

Yet some of Georgian priests didn't support this idea:

“The May 17 event has elucidated a stark difference between locally educated priests and those who had the experience of studying in Europe. Everyone was contacted by the Patriarchy and invited to come to the public action with their entire parish, but not everyone liked this... It's a shame that this manifestation took place under the aegis of the GOC”.

Meanwhile, representatives of a different religious group were in agreement that

“LGBT is a convenient point of consolidation for the Church... Even if LGBT disappears from the agenda, the Church would find another issue – they would campaign against Coca-Cola, McDonald's, etc.”.

Relations between the two Churches are complicated by the religious situation in Abkhazia, where the Orthodox clergy of local origin started to gain influence in the diocese only in the 1990s and welcomed the military success of their compatriots in the war of 1992-1993. By contrast, the clergy of Georgian origin continued to hope for a unity of all lands that are claimed as the “canonical territories” of the Georgian Orthodox Church (Jeromonakh Dorofey 2006). Plans

of the Abkhazian clergy to create their own Church with the assistance of the Moscow Patriarchate were supported after the war of 2008.

The Moscow Church has taken the pragmatic stand of non-recognition of the independence of the Abkhaz Orthodox Church. The Russian Patriarch Kirill stressed many times that both Abkhazia and South Ossetia continue to fall under the jurisdiction of the Georgian Orthodox Church. The ROC did not challenge the outcome of the August war of 2008 but followed the principle of respecting the borders of the “canonical territories” (Venediktova 2013). In response, the Tbilisi Patriarchate refused to recognize the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Ukraine, which had proclaimed its independence from Moscow. Answering why the GOC has made such a decision, one of our experts suggested that “should we support any of these churches, we'll lose the Orthodox unity”.

ROC's support for the integrity of the canonical territory of the GOC comes out of the fear of losing influence in post-Soviet countries and the interest to have the GOC on its side in issues that are important to the ROC - its property in Estonia and uneasy relations with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. Unlike the Kremlin, the ROC is disinterested in reconsidering the extant borders, and for pragmatic reasons is more interested in keeping relations with Georgia rather than with Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Yet politically, the stand of the ROC has created controversy, since the head of the Georgian Orthodox Church keeps insisting that the lost territories will ultimately return to Georgia (Rosbalt 2013). The Georgian Patriarch has also said that Moscow Patriarch Kirill does everything possible to help restore the unity of Georgia (Apsny 2013). The reaction in Abkhazia to this statement was predictably negative.

Nevertheless, as our interviewee said,

“non-officially the ROC administers the Abkhaz diocese by sending monks and priests to serve in Abkhazian churches... A local fellow of mine admitted that these actions were not canonic, yet the Georgians simply close their eyes to it. We don't protest and don't make a case out of it since we can't physically be in Abkhazia, yet our co-believers who need spiritual help remain there”.

The GOC itself is unhappy with some of the ambiguity of the ROC's policy toward the two break-away territories.

“We are very concerned about what is going on in Abkhazia. In words, the ROC recognizes it as an integral part of the Georgian patriarchy, yet de-facto ROC administers the Abkhazian Church. Churches over there are reshaped in closer compliance with the Russian style. This is an intentional policy of doing away with traces of the Georgian Orthodoxy. It is impossible to hold services in the Georgian language there any longer. This is an unfriendly stance”.

Another Georgian priest shared similar concerns:

“Georgians are being expelled from Abkhazia... A few remaining priests proclaimed their independent parish... Their policies are non-canonical... It would be ideal if the ROC

could be an intermediary between the GOC and the Abkhaz priests, but instead the ROC started taking a top-down position... GOC does not raise this issue, being reluctant to agitate anti-Russian attitudes. But emotions persist”.

However, high representatives of the GOC raised some issues internationally: for example, Archbishop Andrian Gvazava asked UNESCO to monitor churches and monasteries in the regions that are beyond the Georgian government's control (Interpressnews 2015). The Holy Synod of the GOC issued a statement accusing the ROC of converting churches built in Sukhumi and Tkvarcheli in September 2013 into Russian Orthodox Churches. As the President of International Foundation for Unity of Orthodox People Valery Alexeev explained, however, Russian Orthodox priests only attended the ceremonies according to the agreement between the ROC and GOC on the spiritual nurturing of Russian soldiers located in Abkhazia (Prikhody 2014). Therefore, controversies over separatist territories inhibit religious communication even though the two churches share a common conservative agenda grounded in strong practices of biopolitical regulation and control over human bodies.

Conclusion

In this article we have reached three main conclusions. First, the application of biopolitical policy tools creates new forms of inclusions to and exclusions from political communities-in-the-making, and thus it influences practices of border making and unmaking, the logic of which might not coincide with national jurisdictions. We have seen that biopolitical instruments (care and protection of human lives) are inseparably connected with constructing role identities of groups of people as related

to protecting and taking care of their everyday lives. This explains the role of biopower as one of nodal points in Russian neo imperial project.

Second, we have justified the application of biopolitical frame for studying vast areas of consonance between Russian and Georgian religious discourses. Apart from ideological affinity we have seen that both parties use each other for political gain: the ROC is eager to project its conservative agenda onto Georgia for the sake of expand-

ing the Moscow-patronized community of Orthodox believers, while the GOC refers to the authority of ROC for boosting its exceptional role in Georgian society and politics.

References

1. Apsny. 2013. "Rech Ilyi Vtorogo na vstreche s gruzinskoi diasporoi Rossii." Apsny (21 January), at <http://www.apsny.ge/2013/soc/1359267799.php>, accessed October 10, 2013.
2. Chinkova, Elena. 2013. "Gruzinskaya "ottepel'": Russkie ikony i 'Nochnye volki'." Komsomolskaya Pravda (25 October), at <http://www.kompravda.eu/daily/26150/3039287/>, accessed March 10, 2015.
3. Devdariani, Nana. 2014. "Evrodesant v Patriarkhii, "Rossiya-Gruzia: Expertniy Dialog". Kavkazskoe sotrudnichestvo (26 May), at <http://www.georgiamonitor.org/detail.php?ID=562>, accessed March 10, 2015.
4. Golder, Ben. 2007. "Foucault and the Genealogy of Pastoral Power". *Radical Philosophy Review* 10 (2), 157-176.
5. Hannah, Matthew. 2011. "Pastoral Power". *Spatiality, Sovereignty and Carl Schmitt*. Stephen Legg, ed. London and New York: Routledge: 227-233.
6. Ieromonakh Dorofey (Dbar), 2006. "Kratkiy ocherk istorii Abkhazskoy Pravoslavnoy Tserkvi." Noviy Afon: "Stratofil" Publisher.
7. Interpressnews. 2015. "Patriarchate of Georgia addresses UNESCO regarding monasteries in the breakaway region." Interpressnews (15 July), at <http://www.interpressnews.ge/en/society/70624-patriarchate-of-georgia-addresses-unesco-regarding-monasteries-in-the-breakaway-region.html?ar=A>, accessed 10 August 2015.
8. Kevorkova, Nadezhda. 2013. "Patriarch of Georgia: Our church and people never cut ties with Russia". RT (22 July), at <https://www.rt.com/op-edge/patriarch-georgia-russia-ties-438/>, accessed April 10, 2015.
9. Kornilov, Alexander and Andrey Makarychev. 2015. "Russia's soft power in the South Caucasus: discourses, communication, hegemony." *Religion, Nation and Democracy in the South Caucasus*. Agadjanian, Alexander, Joedicke, Ansgar and Evert van der Zweerde (eds.) London and New York: Routledge, 238-254.
10. Makarychev, Andrey. *From Chechnya to Ukraine: Biopolitical Patriotism in Times of War*. Washington DC: Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies, September 9, 2015, available at <https://www.wilson-center.org/article/chechnya-to-ukraine-biopolitical-patriotism-times-war>
11. Makarychev, Andrey. *Reassembling Land or Reconnecting People? Geopolitics and Biopower in Russia's Neighborhood Policy*. Washington DC: PONARS Policy Memo 367, September 2015, available at <http://www.ponarseurasia.org/memo/reassembling-lands-or-reconnecting-people>
12. Makarychev, Andrey and Alexandra Yatsyk. 2015. "Refracting Europe: Biopolitical Conservatism and Art Protest in Putin's Russia." In *Russia's Foreign Policy: Ideas, Domestic Politics and External Relations*. Cadier, David and Margot Light (eds) Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 138-155.
13. Ojakangas, Mika. 2005. "Impossible Dialogue on Bio-power: Agamben and Foucault". *Foucault Studies* 2, May, 5-28.
14. Prikhody. 2014. "Golos druga: uslyshat' i poniat'." Prikhody (29 April), at <http://prichod.ru/orthodoxy-everywhere/14261/>, accessed April 10, 2015.
15. RIA. 2015. "Mitropolit Nikolay: glavnaya problema - v nereligionosti mnogikh liudei." RIA-Ukraina news agency (26 May), at <http://rian.com.ua/interview/20150526/368052105.html>, accessed 10 August 2015.
16. Rosbalt. 2013. "Il'ya Vtoroy posle nagrazhdeniya potreboval vernut' Abkhaziyu i Yuzhnuyu Osetiyu." Rosbalt Agency (22 January), at <http://www.rosbalt.ru/exussr/2013/01/22/1084343.html>, accessed Oc-

tober 10, 2013.

17. Thornton, Laura and Davit Sichinava. 2015. "Public Attitudes in Georgia Results of April 2015 survey carried out for NDI by CRRC Georgia." NDI, at available https://www.ndi.org/files/NDI%20Georgia_April%202015%20Poll_Public%20Issues_ENG_VF_0.pdf, accessed February 26, 2016.
18. Venediktova, Nadezhda. 2013. The Role of the Church in the Georgian-Russian Relations. Available from: <http://www.international-alert.org/blog/role-church-georgian-russian-relations-english-0#sthash.gGog8l5.dpbs>, accessed January 5, 2016].

**FOREIGN POLICY OF THE GEORGIAN
ORTHODOX CHURCH: INTERPLAY
BETWEEN THE WEST AND RUSSIA**

SALOME MINESASHVILI

Introduction

The Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC) is seen as a main proponent of ideological resistance to Georgia's pro-Western orientation. Church representatives often portray Western values as a threat to Georgian traditions. As a result, some claim that the Georgian Orthodox Church is one of the major tools of Russian propaganda, conveying the Russian narrative to the Georgian nation¹. But critics often perceive anti-Western propaganda and pro-Russian narrative as be-

ing identical. Despite its opposition towards the West by some of its representatives, the GOC as an institution exhibits somewhat contradictory behavior. For instance, on several occasions the GOC has made statements officially supporting Georgia's Western integration. In the political context of Russia/West dichotomy, this appears to be contradictory and leads to questions about the role and expected behavior of the GOC in Georgia's foreign policy.

The GOC between Russia and the West: Mixed Behavior and Rhetoric

The Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC) is powerful enough to play a considerable role not only in Georgia's domestic affairs, but also in the country's foreign policy. Moreover, the GOC pursues its own foreign policy that does not always coincide with that of the state. However, how the different policies intersect or clash is a matter of concern. As the GOC is primarily perceived as an ideological institution in value terms, its value affinity or opposition towards certain political actors is often linked to its political position. However, this linear relation does not always reflect reality.

On 7 November 2016, an official delegation of the Georgian Patriarchy visited NATO headquarters and the EU structures in Brussels and met with institutional representatives, including with James Appathurai, NATO Deputy Assistant Secretary General for Political Affairs. After their return, the Patriarchy issued a statement

on the meeting, saying that the church had misperceptions about NATO and the EU and their policy on a number of issues. Two such issues include removing religion from the school program and resisting a constitutional amendment on defining marriage as a union between a man and a woman,² some of the key opposing points towards the West.

This statement came as a surprise considering that the GOC has multiple times openly expressed that it finds the West culturally less appealing and even inferior in moral terms.³ Representatives of the Church frequently describe the West's flawed spirituality, partly owing to technological development, as a threat to the notion of Georgianness. Some of the EU requirements towards Georgia in the framework of the Eastern Partnership are considered as an act of imposing those values. This perception of threat varies among different groups and

¹ Netgazeti.ge. (9 May, 2016). "Saqartveloshi rusuli propagandis tsinaaghmdeg gaertianebuli organizatsiebis gegmebi" [Plans of organizations in Georgia united against Russian propaganda]. Netgazeti.ge. Available at: <http://netgazeti.ge/news/113152/> [Accessed 28 December, 2016].

² Democracy & Freedom Watch. (16 November, 2016). Georgia's Orthodox Church realizes it is wrong about EU and NATO. Available at: <http://dfwatch.net/georgias-orthodox-church-realizes-it-was-wrong-about-eu-and-nato-46554> [Accessed 20 December, 2016]

³ Preaching of the Patriarch. (27 July, 2014). Youtube video, Orthodox Videos. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-y7zrhGVGOo> [Accessed 20 December, 2016]

representatives within the church. In 2011, Patriarch Ilia II appealed to the nation „to protect its history, past and traditions because what flows from the West is unacceptable for Orthodoxy”⁴. In 2010, the Patriarch even called on Georgian parents to avoid sending their children abroad at an early age as this could damage their cultural and spiritual development.⁵

The GOC appears to be clearly hostile towards the ideological basis of the West. However, the Church as an institution has always refrained from openly declaring its position about Georgia’s Western integration in political terms. On the contrary, the GOC has expressed some support several times. During a meeting between the European Commissioner, Stephen Füle, and the Patriarch, Ilia II said that the Church “will do everything to help Georgia become EU member”.⁶ He expressed similar sentiments at a meeting with Austrian President Heinz Fischer, stating: “Georgia has chosen the European path. [...] Our choice is very firm and we will definitely achieve it”.⁷

On the other hand, the GOC has a common ideological basis with the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) and Russian state in terms of its national-ideological ground. The Church maintains good relations with the ROC and also tries to maintain contact with

the Russian government. However, even taking into consideration their ideological closeness, some opposition to the Russian side exists within the GOC.

The GOC positions itself at the ideological orbit of Eastern Orthodoxy, which is mainly advocated by the ROC. The latter also developed its ideology by rejecting the values that mainly stem from the West.⁸ The GOC ideology corresponds to the ideas dominating the ROC discourse such as Orthodoxy as a unique civilization, anti-globalization and focus on homosexuality as a major point for opposition towards the West.⁹ At the same time, as an alternative to the secularized West, the Russian state employs an ideology that blends traditional values with the idea of Orthodox civilization.¹⁰

The GOC also maintains positive relations with the ROC and the Russian state and its representatives, advocating for improving relations between the two countries. In November 2016, Patriarch Ilia II paid his fifth visit to Russia since August 2008 War, to participate in the events marking the 70th birthday of the Russian Patriarch Kirill. The Georgian Patriarch, when referring to his counterpart, stated that “regulation of relations between Russia and Georgia is very important for the two countries. We need each other”.¹¹ At pre-

⁴ interpresnisi [Interpressnews]. საქართველოს კათოლიკოს-პატრიარქი რუის-ურბნისის ეპარქიას სტუმრობს. [Catholicos-Patriarch of Georgia visits Ruis-Urbnisi Eparchy]. 10 November 2011. Available at: <http://www.interpressnews.ge/ge/sazogadoeba/184026-saqarthvelos-katholikos-patriarqi-ruis-urbnisis-eparqias-stumrobs.html?ar=A> [Accessed 23 January, 2017]

⁵ Civil.ge. (3 October, 2010). “Patriarch: refrain from sending children abroad for education”. Civil.ge. Available at: <http://civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=22722> [Accessed 27 December, 2016].

⁶ Civil.ge. (4 March, 2014). “Patriarch: Church will do everything to make Georgia EU member”. Civil.ge. Available at: <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=27008> [Accessed 27 December, 2016].

⁷ <http://civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=28283>

⁸ Ramet, S.P. (2006). “The way we were - and should be again? European Orthodox Churches and the “idyllic past”. In: T.A. Byrnes and P.J. Katzenstein, eds. “Religion in an expanding Europe”. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁹ Popkova, I. (2011). “Russian Orthodox concordat? Church and state under Medvedev”. Nationalities papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity, 39(5), 667-683.

¹⁰ Leustean, L.N., 2015. Eastern Christianity and the liberal international order. In: Barnett, M., Bob, C., Onar, N.F., Jenichen, A., Leigh, M. and Leustean L.N. (eds.). (2015). Faith, freedom and foreign policy: challenges for the transatlantic community. Washington DC: Transatlantic Academy. Kornilov, A. and Makarychev, A., 2015. Russia’s soft power in the South Caucasus: discourses, communication and hegemony. In: Agadjanian, A., Jodicke, A. and Van Der Zweerde, E. (eds.), 2015. Religion, nation and democracy in the South Caucasus. London and New York: Routledge.

¹¹ Civil.ge. (21 November, 2016). “Georgian Patriarch visits Moscow”. Civil.ge. Available at: <http://civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=29640> [Accessed 26 December, 2016].

vious meetings, Ilia II has also met with Russia's former and incumbent presidents, Dimitri Medvedev and Vladimir Putin. During his visit in January 2013, the Patriarch called the two nations "friends and brothers" and appealed to the Russian president as "a wise leader of state, who can change the situation and Georgia can once again be united".¹²

But on the other hand, ideological affinity does not exclude skepticism or some distancing from the side of the GOC when its interests are threatened. In 2015, the Patriarchate of Georgia addressed UNESCO with a request to monitor monasteries and churches beyond the control of the Georgian government. In 2013, the GOC issued a statement that accused the ROC of sanctifying newly built churches in Abkhazia.¹³

The GOC displays an ambivalent political

position that can sometimes seem puzzling from an ideological point of view. Contrary to the development of Russia and the West as opposing poles in Georgian politics, the GOC seems to hold both in its orbit. The GOC's frequently ambivalent and occasionally supportive position on Western integration contradicts its ideological hostility towards the West on the one hand, and, on the other hand, its closeness with the ROC and advocacy for improving relations with Russia. However, as previously noted, even the latter comes with some contradictions. Ideology does not always play a decisive role in the GOC's foreign policy or the way it interacts in Georgian state's foreign policy. There are multiple factors that can shed a light on the Church's foreign policy and its potential behavior in the future.

The GOC and Western Integration as Georgia's Foreign Policy Priority

The Georgian Orthodox Church operates in a complex political reality where the government's official policy is pro-Western, which has substantive public support. In this context, the GOC should be viewed as a political player that has to maneuver in the unequivocally defined political environment in order to avoid any major clash with the government as well as maintain high support among the public.

Since 2004, all the governments have maintained a strong pro-Western foreign policy. After 2012, anti-Western groups, which had been restrained by the strict

pro-Western discourse under the Saakashvili government, began to operate more freely in the rather relaxed political atmosphere created by the Georgian Dream coalition.¹⁴ However, despite this change, the Georgian Dream government has also declared Euro-Atlantic integration a top priority of Georgian foreign policy.¹⁵ According to the IRI public opinion polls, an overwhelming majority of the Georgian population supports a pro-Western policy. The share of supporters of the EU membership varied between 88% and 85% throughout 2013 and 2016. And the support for NATO membership varied be-

¹² Грузия онлайн. (26 January, 2013). "Речь Илии Второго на встрече с грузинской диаспорой России". [Speech of Ilia II at the meeting of Georgian diaspora in Russia]. Available at: <http://www.apsny.ge/2013/soc/1359267799.php> [Accessed 21 December, 2016].

¹³ Makarychev, A. (January 2016). "The limits to Russian soft power in Georgia". PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo: No.412. Available from: http://www.ponarseurasia.org/sites/default/files/policy-memos-pdf/Pepm412_Makarychev_Jan2016_1.pdf [Accessed 22 December, 2016]

¹⁴ Kakhishvili, L. (2016). "Georgia - the choice: the perceived West-Russia dichotomy in Georgian politics". In: Knodt, M. and Urdze, S. (eds.). "Caucasus, the EU and Russia - Triangular cooperation?" Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5771/9783845257402-165>

¹⁵ Civil.ge. (7 March, 2013). "Parliament adopts bipartisan resolution on foreign policy". Civil.ge. Available at: <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=25828> [Accessed 28 December, 2016].

tween 85% and 79% in the same years.¹⁶ In the face of the wide-spread public and government support for Euro-Atlantic integration, the Church would risk its popularity by openly standing against any of the Western institutions from a political perspective, even though the GOC maintains the prerogative of cultural resistance, considering that it sets the moral agenda in the country.

As a player in the political context with its own interests, the Church can be flexible in its political position, depending on the context. Even though the West is hardly a normative-ideological choice for the GOC, it can become a political one depending on the circumstances, such as level of the government and public support of the Western integration. For instance, the GOC has made statements supporting the EU at times that coincided with major milestones in EU-Georgian relations, and increased political and public interest in the EU. Since 2013, two major events have taken place in the EU-Georgia relations: the signing of Association Agreement and DCFTA in June 2014 and developments in the process of negotiations over visa liberalization. The whole process was characterized by strong optimistic and EU-favoring political discourse that consequently influenced the Georgian public and their expectations. The fact that the GOC chooses these moments to make statements in support of the EU indicates the extent to which the Church can adjust its

position to the existing situation.

For instance, in December 2015, the European Commission launched the visa liberalization process by releasing a report that Georgia met all the criteria for a legislative proposal to the European Council and Parliament to lift visa requirements for Georgians. During the visit of Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili and EU ambassador to Georgia Janos Herman to the Patriarchate, Ilia II called the occasion “a huge achievement, a celebration for the entire Georgian population and the Georgian Church among them”. But he also expressed hope that “Europe will not only bring much goodness, but will also protect our culture”.¹⁷ A similar statement of support was made by the Patriarch at the event dedicated to celebrating the signing of the Association Agreement with the EU.¹⁸

This shows that the Church can be flexible in response to changing circumstances, including the prospects of closer relations with the EU, as well as the prevailing mood in the Georgian political spectrum and public. In addition, the Church appears to be ignoring the government’s policy of dichotomy between Russia and the West and seeking to maintain safe relations with both of them. For example, when the Patriarch announced his support for Georgia’s EU membership in March 2014, he added: “when we speak of joining European structure, it does not mean that we are limited in having links with other organizations”.¹⁹

¹⁶ International Republican Institute. (2016). Public Opinion Survey: Residents of Georgia. IRI. Available at: http://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/wysiwyg/georgia_2016.pdf

¹⁷ Netgazeti.ge. (20 December, 2015). “Ilia II: imedia evropi ara marti bevr siketes mogvitans, aramed daitsavs chvens kulturას” [Ilia II: I hope that Europe will not only bring much of goodness to us, but will also protect our culture]. Netgazeti.ge. Available from: <http://netgazeti.ge/news/86231/> [Accessed 28 December, 2016].

¹⁸ Ipn.ge. (27 June, 2014). “Ghmertma dalotsos kveli adamiani, vints shromobda am bednieri dghisatvis”. [God bless every person who worked for this happy day]. Ipn.ge. Available at: <http://www.interpressnews.ge/ge/sazogadoba/287882-ilia-meore-ghmerthma-dalocos-yvela-adamiani-romelic-shromobda-am-bednieri-dghisathvis.html?ar=A> [Accessed 21 December, 2016]

¹⁹ Civil.ge. (4 March, 2014). “Patriarch: Church will do everything to make Georgia EU member”. Civil.ge. Available at: <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=27008> [Accessed 27 December, 2016].

The GOC and Russia: How Realistic is Ideological-Political Affinity?

The GOC shares value affinity with the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), which complements good relations between the two institutions. The ideologies of both Churches revolve around a conservative agenda. However, ideological closeness can also be seen as an intermediary for politically motivated interests. These interests, independent of ideological similarities, draw the two churches closer. For example, the two churches provide mutual support for each other against breakaway churches: the ROC recognizes the GOC's canonical territorial integrity including on the territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, but in exchange the GOC supports the ROC's canonical rights in Estonia, Moldova and Ukraine.²⁰ With this policy, the ROC maintains its legitimacy in the Orthodox world and avoids the risk of pushing the GOC into the camp of the ecumenical Patriarch. At the same time, this behavior complements Kremlin's interest to assert the ROC's role as a mediator in the Caucasus.²¹

Furthermore, the GOC seems to have another reasoning for maintaining close ties with the ROC and the Russian state: it considers religious and ideological closeness as a tool for improving deteriorated Russia-Georgia relations. Good relations with the ROC and the Russian state are regarded

as a potential means for conflict resolution, which has become the basis for the Georgian Church's appeasement policy towards Russia. The GOC also sees itself as a mediator in this process. In 2013, during one of his meetings in Moscow, Patriarch Ilia II has emphasized the role of religion in two countries' relations: "Georgia and Russia have huge spiritual wealth and we should take care of our Orthodox faith. Orthodoxy helped us and helped Russia"²⁴. Realizing its influential role in Georgia and assuming/hoping the same from the ROC in Russian state, the GOC becomes an advocate for improving Russian-Georgian relations through the interference of religious institutions. As Patriarch Ilia II told his Russian counterpart during a visit to Moscow: "Although we are not politicians and cannot take serious steps in this sphere, it is possible to somehow influence the processes".²³

In sum, the GOC's close relations with the ROC and the Russian state seems to be based on a blend of ideological and political interests. Occasional opposition from the GOC shows that some threat to the political interests might shake up this harmony. Therefore, simple ideological affinity with Russia cannot predict the GOC's behavior unless it is combined with complementing pragmatic interest.

²⁰ Conroy, K.M. (2015). "Semi-recognized states and ambiguous churches: the Orthodox Church in South Ossetia and Abkhazia". *Journal of State and Church*, 57(4): 621-639.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Грузия онлайн. (26 January, 2013). "Речь Илии Второго на встрече с грузинской диаспорой России". [Speech of Ilia II at the meeting of Georgian diaspora in Russia]. Available at: <http://www.apsny.ge/2013/soc/1359267799.php> [Accessed 21 December, 2016].

²³ Civil.ge. (21 November, 2016). "Georgian Patriarch visits Moscow". Civil.ge. Available at: <http://civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=29640> [Accessed 26 December, 2016].

Conclusion

The Georgian Orthodox Church can influence not only cultural and ideological moods in Georgia, but also politics, including foreign policy. Therefore, its attitude and position towards the two major poles in Georgian foreign policy, Russia and the West, are important and, for some, a matter of concern. The GOC does employ its own foreign policy, which at times diverges from the government's position, as is the case of Russia and cultural resistance of the West. However, the GOC is not simply an ideolog-

ical institution in terms of its foreign policy, but rather it is also a political player that has to take into consideration both domestic and international political context. This maneuvering between ideology and politics, and its adjustments based on pragmatic interests, makes the GOC flexible in its political positioning. This means that the Church can change its stance in accordance to changing circumstances in the Georgian government's policy, the level of public support and the actions of external political actors.

**IMPLEMENTING EU'S NORMATIVE
AGENDA IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS:
CONTRADICTIONARY EFFECTS**

EIKI BERG
ALAR KILP

Introduction

It is not a secret that the EU has sought to influence regional developments by imposing liberal democratic norms on the third countries interested in closer relations with the union. Given that this soft power approach may effect change, we analysed the role of EU normative powers in influencing human rights dialogues. We also saw how both the political establishments and societies at large have adapted to these new circumstances. Further to the east, the lever for Europeanization seems to be eroding. To that end, the EU has continuously reaffirmed that its support for and cooperation with target countries must be conditional on the promotion of civil liberties and democratic reforms. While there is concern that the EU's normative policies may be ineffective if they are not fully implemented on the ground, it is possible that the prospect of EU integration could prove to be an attractive aspiration for large segments of these societies. Fully implementing EU norms,

however, may drive these countries into conflict with the conservative mores sustained by the state/religious institutions.

This memo focuses on the South Caucasus where the EU has tried to “softly” increase its leverage by imposing liberal democratic norms on the countries in a region interested in closer relations with the union. Although all three are Eastern Partnership countries, they are moving in different directions: Georgia is interested in integration with Western structures; Armenia was heading along the European track but made a sudden U-turn in September 2014 when it aligned itself to the Eurasian Customs Union; Azerbaijan has remained undecided. This variation is reflected by the (un)willingness of the political elite of these respective countries to participate in human rights dialogues, to harmonize national legislations with European norms and values, and finally, to implement new regulations in practice.

Problematic implementation

It appears that accepting European norms has only been welcomed on the surface, while the implementation of new regulations in practice has been problematic. When comparing the three Caucasian countries, striking differences appear. Georgia has been the most keen on adapting its own value system and has become more liberal and reform-minded. Azerbaijan has the least desire to change, preferring to keep things as they are. Armenia falls somewhere in between – accommodation of European norms is welcome, yet inaction and the government's slow approach to improving law enforcement reveals difficulties in implementation. An additional challenge to implementing EU norms could be the asymmetric relation between the South Caucasus countries and the Union: meeting the pre-

scribed norms will not be rewarded with an invitation to accession talks.

During the seven rounds of EU-Armenia human rights dialogues and nine rounds of EU-Georgia dialogues, the sides discussed the existing mechanisms for the protection of human rights in these countries. Georgia is the only one of the three that has passed a comprehensive anti-discrimination law protecting homosexuals from discrimination, while Azerbaijan has preferred to avoid human rights dialogue of any kind and, in many ways, has not been inclined to adopt the EU's normative agenda. Regardless of the position of the countries' governments, the EU norms have had a minimal effect on the way these societies treat their ethnic, religious and sexual minorities. Participating in dialogue is usually perceived as an easy

task to fulfil, but implementation poses enormous challenges because all three societies are, for the most part, religious, deeply traditional and defined by conservative values.

The Armenian Apostolic Church and the Georgian Orthodox Church are considered national churches with special status and privileges in Armenia and Georgia, respectively. They have played a major role in identity politics and national consolidation efforts. Religious affiliation is largely nominal in Azerbaijan; percentages for actual practicing members of a faith are much lower. In terms of religiosity, Armenia and Georgia sit at one end of the religious spectrum while Azerbaijan has a place at the opposite, more secular extreme. The comprehensive data of the World Values Survey, which combines multiple dimensions of religiosity, demonstrate a repeating pattern where Azerbaijani society is the least and Georgian society the most religious in terms of self-identification, regular religious practice, the importance of religion in socialization and public trust in religious institutions.

There are innate cultural predispositions towards the values of democracy in both Georgia and Armenia, which should also logically apply to that part of the Western value system supporting tolerance, diversity and respect for minorities of all forms (Matrosyan 2015). Yet this may be wishful thinking. What is the most striking is the fact that all three countries reformed their legislations to ensure the rights of sexual minorities as a follow-up to their entry into the Council of Europe in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Furthermore, Georgia and Armenia have made a big leap forward in the framework of human rights dialogues conducted by the EU. Yet, at the societal level radical

attitudes are slow to disappear. Politicians seek popularity by playing on society's values and national ideologies. Priests take part in homophobic rallies and warn people not to go against "God's will". Police feel reluctant to step in when ultra-orthodox Christians attack those who promote change.

The EU expects that the change of value orientations will naturally follow liberalization of legislation regulating sexuality, gender and family. On the surface, this expectation makes sense because all South Caucasus countries are maintaining their commitment to strengthening of "democracy, rule of law, human rights, and fundamental freedoms" (Riga Declaration of May 2015). In practice, however, the liberalization of legislation regulating sexuality has not been supported or initiated by social demand (which typically has been the case in Western European societies). Instead of having an intended positive effect on social attitudes, the laws passed in parliament have intensified social polarization over the issue, as we have seen in the case of the anti-discrimination law in Georgia.

South Caucasus countries differ in their geopolitical aspirations, state reactions to EU, and levels of religiosity. They share, however, strongly traditional and conservative attitudes toward gender and sexuality. The societal perceptions in the South Caucasus highlight masculinity as a safeguard for the survival of society and the family.¹ Women must be protected; they should only be marginally present in public and should serve their husbands in every way. Unmarried heterosexuals over 30 are rarely accepted in society; those with no children and not in a relationship are under enormous social pressure. Most families in the South Caucasus see homosexuals as shameful because their

¹ See Georgia: Between Modernity and the Middle Ages, <http://www.gwi-boell.de/en/2013/05/30/georgia-between-modernity-and-middle-ages> [Accessed 21 November 2016]; LGBT Rights in the South Caucasus, <http://www.gwi-boell.de/en/2013/05/30/lgbt-rights-south-caucasus> [Accessed 21 November 2016]

apparently “deviant” behaviour threatens social unity and the continuity of the family. Homosexual men are seen as a source of insecurity and weakened self-defence because it is thought that young men may be “infected” and thereby destroy society from the inside. Sexual minorities become objects of public aggression, social ostracism and violence. In short, those who want to belong in society must adopt traditional values regarding cultural norms and religious morals.

When we turn to the World Values Survey results, the least tolerant society is Azerbaijan, in all possible categories: 58 percent did not want to have people of a different race as neighbours, 26 percent did not want people who speak a different language as neighbours and 58 percent did not want to

have unmarried couples living together as neighbours. Only Armenia beats Azerbaijan in religious exclusivity – 57 percent of Armenian respondents want to have people of a different religion as neighbours. The survey results also confirm that the South Caucasus countries remain the three least tolerant societies in Europe in terms of attitudes towards homosexuality, despite their level of Europeanization and the depth of integration with the EU (Kuyper et al. 2013). Among the 15 European countries surveyed by World Values Survey 2010-2014, South Caucasus societies were the top three in the percentage of respondents who considered homosexuality “never justifiable” – 95 percent in Armenia, 93 percent in Azerbaijan, 86 percent in Georgia.

Quest for pro-European stance

As demonstrated above, the EU’s ability to win hearts and minds may face considerable challenges due to cultural differences over social issues and its mixed record in support of diversity and the human rights agenda. Although Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan have chosen different development tracks and have displayed uneasy and varied allegiances to the imposition of EU norms, all three are conservative societies with intolerant views on sexual minorities. George Mchedlishvili from Chatham House notes that ‘taking a firm and principled line in support of protections for LGBT communities, for example, could come at a political cost’ (2016, p. 11), and that this is the biggest dilemma for Europeanization in the region. Whether that has an effect on public perceptions of EU integration will be discussed next.

The EU is an important player in the region whose main interest is providing stability and security along its borders by promoting a normative value system. Its policy is based on the sincere belief that the trans-

formation of the South Caucasian countries serves this purpose. It has proven to have limited soft power potential – it remains attractive but only to a relative degree. Public opinion polls show more favourable attitudes towards EU integration in Georgia and less favourable attitudes in Azerbaijan (Caucasus Barometer 2013). The largest share of non-supporters came from Armenia (23 percent), whereas Azerbaijanis stood out with their indifference on this question (32 percent of respondents did not care about their country’s Europeanization). Two years later, the support rate for EU membership had dropped to 42 percent in Georgia while staying more or less the same in Armenia (39 percent). At the same time, the number of respondents against EU membership increased to 16 percent of the Georgian sample (Caucasus Barometer 2015).

Dominant national religious institutions in Georgia and Armenia constitute a challenge for the EU. These religious institutions have a privileged status by default; they are relative-

ly autonomous from the government; they are highly trusted by society; they play a role in the political processes and, as far as the legal regulation of gender, family and sexuality is concerned, these institutions have their own interests and stake in the game. In regard to the introduction of liberal EU norms, these religious institutions are the local bastions of conservative attitudes par excellence. At moments of unrest, the leaders and representatives of these institutions are the ones which argue that national values and traditions are at risk of being compromised.

This means there is a good reason to assume that very religious people are most likely to reject the EU's normative agenda, which goes against the traditional value system and shakes the authority of religious institutions. The most logical outcome would be a clear rejection of EU membership aspirations, which might be seen to "let the devil in". For example, while in 2013 both Georgia and Armenia were finalizing preparations to meet the AA/DCFTA preconditions set by the EU, in the form of several rounds of human rights dialogues which enabled the start of anti-discriminatory legislation, there were clear examples of violence against sexual minorities in both countries in 2012. In May 2012, a diversity march in Georgia took place against the background of aggressive

protests by opponents of the demonstration, and at the same time three youngsters burned down DIY, the first gay bar in Armenia. There were clearly heightened tensions in all three countries, yet this angst is not reflected in the public opinion polls.

To sum up, tensions run highest in selected policy areas (liberalization of norms related to gender and sexuality) where changes are not enthusiastically welcomed by local populations, yet opposition to a single dimension of EU policies seems to coexist with a general positive attitude regarding the EU. The first wave of the Annual Survey Report of Eastern Partnership countries (2016) demonstrated that the EU enjoyed a high level of trust in general, and that in Armenia and Georgia the EU was trusted even more than national political parties, the parliament or the government. If and when dissatisfaction about the imposition of liberal social norms has an impact on the general reception of Europeanisation in the South Caucasus are questions for policy-makers in the EU. They will need to decide whether to make corrections in the imposed policies and see the EU's role grow in the region, or the opposite: leave things as they are, and conclude that support will probably remain too limited to implement social change in value systems.

References

1. Annual Survey Report of Eastern Partnership countries, 1st Wave. 2016. EU Neighborhood Info Centre. Available from: <http://www.eaptc.eu/en/news/view-find-out-more-perceptions-of-the-eu-in-eastern-neighbourhood-countries-1209.html> [Accessed 15 January 2017]
2. Caucasus Barometer 2013 [online]. Available from: <http://caucasusbarometer.org/en/datasets/> [Accessed 11 August 2016].
3. Caucasus Barometer 2015 [online]. Available from: <http://caucasusbarometer.org/en/cb2015/codebook/> [Accessed 21 November 2016].
4. Kuyper, L., Iedema, J., & Keuzenkamp, S. 2013. *Towards tolerance. Exploring changes and explaining differences in attitudes towards homosexuality in Europe*. Hague: The Netherlands Institute for Social Research.
5. Matrosyan, T. 2015. Introduction. In: A. Agadjanyan, A. Jödicke, E. van Zweerde, eds. *Religion, Nation and Democracy in the South Caucasus*. Routledge: London, New York, 165–167.
6. Mchedlishvili, G. 2016. *Changing Perceptions of the West in the South Caucasus: Adoration No More*. Chatham House. Available from: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/publications/research/2016-02-12-west-south-caucasus-mchedlishvili-final.pdf> [Accessed 15 January 2017]
7. Riga Declaration (21-22 May 2015). Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit. Available from: http://eeas.europa.eu/eastern/docs/riga-declaration-220515-final_en.pdf [Accessed 15 January 2017]

**TURKEY IN GEORGIA: PURSUING THE
“SOFT POWER” POLITICS**

VAHRAM TER-MATEVOSYAN

Introduction

Turkey's relations with neighboring countries have been widely discussed in academic literature. The Turkish ruling party's foreign policy agenda based on "zero problems" with neighbors was initially widely hailed. However, since 2011 the policy has been criticized over the mismatch between its ends and means. One of the overlooked components of Turkey's expanding foreign policy is its relations with neighboring Georgia. Until recently, most studies mainly concentrated on the geopolitical, bilateral and regional dimensions of those relations, paying little or no attention to the soft power politics that Turkey has been exercising since the beginning of the 2000s. Georgia interests Turkey for various strategic and political reasons, although there

are equally important cultural, religious and social factors that play a significant role in shaping Turkey's policy towards Georgia. It is the combination of these policies that shapes the essence and objectives of Turkey-Georgia relations. This paper examines the key determinants that shape and define the essence of their deepening bilateral relations. Primarily, it discusses various projects that Turkey has carried out in religious, cultural, educational and humanitarian spheres. It addresses some occasional issues of mutual discontent and argues that, parallel to expanding relations between the two nations, there is a growing opposition to Turkey in Georgia supported by some political forces and the Georgian Orthodox Church.

Framing the problem

According to some experts, Turkey has elaborated and is carrying out a clear-cut and comprehensive regional policy in the South Caucasus, which has enabled it to become a regional actor. Another group of researchers claim that Turkey pursues different interests vis-à-vis each South Caucasian political entity, meaning no unified and integrated Turkish foreign policy exists for the South Caucasus. Yet another group of analysts posits that Turkey still lacks a long-term policy toward the states of the South Caucasus and that local processes alone define Turkish political objectives. Some even argue that the major obstacle for Turkey's all-embracing policy in the region is the absence of diplomatic relations with Armenia, the establishment of which would lead to Turkey's full and complete geopolitical presence in the region.

A set of complex and systemic factors has influenced the development of the Georgian political elite's perceptions of Turkey. In elaborating policy approaches toward Turkey, the attitudes of the Georgian leadership

(both under Mikheil Saakashvili and later under the Georgian Dream coalition) seem determined by a number of geopolitical, economic, infrastructural and simply pragmatic factors. For instance, former Georgian President Saakashvili referred to Turkey-Georgia relations during his presidential term as a 'golden age'. Indeed, his administration was an outspoken supporter and protagonist of an even deeper Turkish presence both in the Georgian economy and in the whole region. During his presidency, Saakashvili spoke several times about the glory of Turkish history, culture and its political system.

The things started to change, however, in the led-up to the 2012 elections. While campaigning for the elections, a number of single-seat candidates from the Georgian Dream coalition (then in the opposition) for the Batumi, Shuakhevi and even Gardabani districts, as well as party leaders, artists and TV anchors, promoted anti-Turkish sentiments at election rallies. Most vocal among them was Murman Dumbadze, a former associate pro-

fessor at Adjara State University and a former member of the conservative Republican Party, who built his reputation on being an ardent opponent of rebuilding mosques in Adjara. He was expelled from the Republican Party but was handpicked by the leader of the Georgian Dream coalition, Bidzina Ivanishvili, to be nominated as a coalition majoritarian candidate. He was elected to parliament and later became a deputy speaker. Beka Mindiashvili, an official at the Georgian Ombudsman's office, claims that all election campaigns since 2007 have been known for their 'electoral xenophobia', because of a calculatingly constructed 'image of enemy' and other phobias. He particularly underlined the fact that during the 2012 elections, the Georgian Dream coalition conceived of Turkophobia and "a new 'enemy'" of the country was identified - "the Aziziye mosque and the smell of chorba and doner kebab on Batumi Boulevard."

Following the change of power in 2012-2013, Georgia's new leadership, the Georgian Dream coalition, gave in to the concerns of some public circles. At the same time, it was also forced to recalibrate its anti-Turkish rhetoric following backlash from

Azerbaijan and Turkey. Some statements in the first months of Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili's new administration caused anxiety both to the previous administration and inside the Turkey-Azerbaijan alliance. Some statements made after the elections questioned the financial and economic expediency of some regional projects, most strikingly the Kars-Akhalkalaki railway, which was initiated in 2007 to connect Turkey and Azerbaijan through Georgia. Turkish entrepreneurs in Georgia followed suit and voiced their fears about different bureaucratic obstacles that they had begun to experience. However, after visiting Baku and Ankara, PM Ivanishvili made a few remarks that eased the tense atmosphere. In the same vein, former Georgian Minister of Defense Irakli Alasania, whose party was a member of the Georgian Dream coalition, also noted that Georgia's relations with Turkey are 'exemplary and accelerating as our [Georgia's] interests increasingly intertwine'. Overall, it can be noted that even though the new administration continued relations with Turkey, compared to the Saakashvili government, it is less enthusiastic towards Turkey.

Cultural-religious implications of Turkish soft power politics in Georgia

In parallel with the economic expansion, which has been widely discussed elsewhere, Turkish leadership has also attached particular importance to religious, educational, cultural and humanitarian initiatives. Some interpreted the advancement of these initiatives as purposeful steps to shape a positive attitude towards Turkey in Georgian society; others saw a lack of synchronization among these policies. The fact remains that, just like in dozens of other countries, Turkey started to apply leverage to spread its religious, ideological and cultural influence in Georgia. By and large, those initiatives are coordinated by three increasingly influen-

tial state institutions attached to the Turkish Prime Ministry: the Turkish Cooperation and Development Agency (Türkiye İşbirliği ve Kalkınma İdaresi, TİKA), Yunus Emre Turkish Cultural Centres and the Presidency of Religious Affairs (the Diyanet).

TİKA has implemented a number of large-scale projects in Georgia since 1994. The programs completed in recent years have included improving social and economic infrastructures and services; repairing and furnishing educational centers; organizing educational programs (vocational, language teaching, etc.), health care and improving the quality of drinking water and

sanitation. According to the 2012 annual report, Georgia has received 4.23% of TİKA's overall financial, vocational and technical support, which made Georgia the seventh largest TİKA beneficiary based on spending. Georgia was also the second largest beneficiary in the post-Soviet space, after Kyrgyzstan. It should be noted, however, that the Georgian beneficiaries of TİKA are mostly in Muslim-populated territories, and only a few programs have been implemented in Tbilisi and Gori. The 2014 annual report, which was published in late 2016, however, shows that Georgia's share from TİKA budget has significantly decreased as it was the sixth on the list of seven countries in the Central Asia and Caucasus region receiving assistance from TİKA in 2014.

In 2007, Ankara decided to set up Yunus Emre Turkish Cultural Centers worldwide, which aimed at balancing the influence of the Gülen Schools and promoting the Turkish language, literature, history, culture and art. These centers have been established based on the model of the Goethe-Institut, British Council, Instituto Cervantes and other similar institutions. Bülent Arınç, the Turkish deputy prime minister, inaugurated the Yunus Emre Turkish Cultural Center in Georgia in May 2012 in Ivane Javakhsishvili Tbilisi State University. According to the Embassy of Turkey in Georgia, the Yunus Emre Turkish Cultural Center has also opened departments of Turkish Studies in Akaki Tsereteli State University in Kutaisi, the second largest city in Georgia, and in the Samtskhe-Javakheti State University in Akhaltsikhe, a city in the south-east of Georgia which has a size Armenian population.

The activity of the third state institution, the Presidency of Religious Affairs or the Diyanet, has focused on a couple of spheres in Georgia which predominantly relate to religious and spiritual issues. Unlike the previous two institutions, the Diyanet has been

active in Turkey since 1924 and has expanded its activity abroad since the 1980s. Subsequently, it has significant experience in dealing with Muslim communities abroad. According to the 2014 national census, only 10.7% of the Georgian population identified as Muslim. However, the leaders of Muslim organizations claim that the real number is at least twice that, as many people don't feel comfortable declaring their religious identity. The Muslim populations in Georgia live primarily in the regions of Kvemo Kartli, Kakheti and Adjara and comprise followers of both Shiism and Sunnism. The Diyanet and its consultants provide various religious services in Georgia: helping Georgian nationals in organizing the hajj, teaching imams, training theologians and providing scholarships for post-graduate studies. It also coordinates financial support and advises in the restoration of mosques and the building of new ones. The Turkish consulate in Batumi supports the Diyanet in spreading Islamic literature in Georgian in Adjara, and sends Turkish religious leaders there to preach in various mosques. The Diyanet leadership visits Georgia regularly and holds meetings with the leaders of Georgia's muftiates. It was also behind the initiative to open the second biggest madrasa in Georgia in the village of Meore Kesalo in 2000. In 1995, the Presidency of Religious Affairs established the Eurasian Islamic Council (Avrasya İslam Şurası, EIC), which has become an important factor in promoting Turkey's interests among Muslim communities in the Balkans and former Soviet states. So far, the EIC has organized eight conferences that have been attended by Georgian Muslim community leaders, including muftis from Adjara.

In addition to the above-mentioned state institutions, a number of Turkish educational institutions belonging to the Fethullah Gülen network also operate in Georgia. Before the rift between Recep Tayyip Erdoğan

and Fethullah Gülen in December 2013, that network provided significant support to many Turkish policy initiatives. As long as the Turkish government and the Gülen network peacefully coexisted in Turkey, many of their activities in Georgia, and elsewhere for that matter, complemented each other and were mutually supportive. As independent actors, the two groups have sometimes challenged each other and engaged in fierce competition, but by and large the government and the Gülen network have contributed to creating a positive image of Turkey among many Georgians.

The Gülen schools in Georgia are widely known as “Turkish schools” and operate under the auspices of the Çağlar Educational Institutions (Çağlar Eğitim Kurumları, ÇEK), established in February 1993. Since then, the ÇEK has established seven schools and one university in Georgia. With the exception of the first two schools and the university, the other five were established after the Rose Revolution during Saakashvili’s presidency.

Turkish citizens are largely responsible for both administrative duties and teaching at the Gülen schools. These schools are known for their state-of-the-art facilities and advanced technical equipment. They pay special attention to students’ participation in the Turkish Language Olympiads (Türkçe Olimpiyatları), which allow students to visit Turkey, be acquainted with the program organizers and establish contacts. Notably, a flexible and complementary system has been established between the schools and the university. Pre-school and middle school graduates receive discounts for university tuition. During their university years, students also have the opportunity to periodically take part in Turkish cultural events and often visit Turkish educational and academic institutions. Even though these schools were established by the Gülenists, according to a professor at the International Black Sea University, there is no overt propaganda for the Gülen movement or for Turkey in the curriculum.

Conclusion

This analysis of political and economic dynamics indicates that in deepening bilateral relations, Turkey and Georgia pursue different objectives deriving from different (geo)political realities and ambitions. If Turkey aspires to a geopolitical, economic, religious and socio-cultural presence in Georgia, then Georgian policy towards Turkey is based primarily on trade, economic and social factors. Most Georgian public and political figures, as well as the vast majority of the research community, is positively oriented towards Turkey’s presence in Georgia’s economic and strategic spheres. Nevertheless, there is visible and growing resistance from some political forces, the Georgian Orthodox Church and church-affiliated circles. Due to the importance of these groups for Georgian society, a sizeable part of the

population support their resistance. Parts of society have started to speak about the inherent problems that Georgia faces when it allows a strong Turkish presence in Georgia’s strategically important domains, a discussion which could be joined by a sizeable part of the population. Since 2004, Turkey’s growing influence in the Georgian economy, Georgia’s engagement in the energy programs directed from the Caspian region to the West and the on-going ambiguity in relations between Georgia and Russia have created a systemic opportunity for Turkey to extend its political influence in Georgia.

Religion also plays a role in Turkey’s policy towards Georgia. Unlike the economic and political dimensions of Turkey’s soft power politics, the religious component faces certain difficulties and hurdles. The criticism and

counteractions by the Georgian Orthodox Church and different sections of Georgian society have visibly limited the options for Turkish religious influence. In spite of that, a limited number of communities in Georgia are poised to cooperate with Turkey in religious affairs. For now, Turkey has not been able to completely rely on these groups for two reasons: their number is small and cooperation could

lead to conflict with the religious majority organization in Georgia. This indicates that the religious part of Turkey's soft power policy toward Georgia remains subordinated to the general goals of popularization. As manifestations of soft power on religious groups have become more visible, the distinction between the religious aspects and the cultural and economic aspects of soft power has grown.

**TURKEY'S SOFT POWER IN
AZERBAIJAN AND THE GÜLEN
MOVEMENT**

FUAD ALIYEV

Introduction

This memo analyses the role of the Turkish transnational non-state actor – the Gülen Movement and its role in Turkey’s soft power towards post-Soviet Azerbaijan – before the split between the current Turkish government and Fethullah Gülen in 2013. The effect of this split on Turkish soft power in Azerbaijan is also analyzed.

The case of Turkish religious actors in Azerbaijan has demonstrated that transnational non-state religious actors operating across state boundaries can be a successful soft power tool. While ethnic solidarity has played a much stronger role in advancing Turkish soft power, Islamic rhetoric has also contributed to a more general sense of brotherhood.

The Gülen Movement, a non-state religious actor, has been the most effective channel for advancing this soft power. The movement achieved public acceptance and, more importantly, the acceptance of the ruling elite, by delivering an attractive message and adapting to local conditions, compromising on many crucial elements of the Islamist - and even post-Islamist - agenda. Other non-state religious actors from Turkey and even the state institution, the Diyanet, have not been as successful.

In terms of Turkey’s declared foreign

policy instruments (engaging all political actors, supporting democratic processes, expanding economic integration and increasing sociocultural relations and interpersonal communication), the Gülen movement has been active in all areas with the exception of supporting democratic processes in Azerbaijan.

It argues that the Gülen Movement was the most successful not only among the Turkish groups operating in Azerbaijan, but also among the other competing religious actors, until relations between the Gülen Movement and the Turkish ruling party, the AKP, soured. This process has seriously damaged prospects for both Turkish religious soft-power and Gülenists in Azerbaijan. With the weakened position of Gülen’s followers in Azerbaijan, Turkish foreign power has lost one of its most important and effective non-state channels. Given the importance of transnational non-state religious actors in terms of effective soft power, this development can limit Turkey’s influence in Azerbaijan, as well as in other countries where the AKP government could act against its former transnational ally. The new status quo means Turkey will need an alternative transnational non-state (or state) actor to replace the embattled Gülen Movement.

Turkish foreign policy and soft power

Since coming to power in 2001, the AKP government has, in many ways, continued the foreign policy patterns of previous governments, even as it gives more attention to soft power, particularly in the Muslim world. Turkey’s new foreign policy is inspired by historical and cultural ties with its neighbors. Under the AKP government, we have seen saw Turkey’s gradual activation in regional

politics in the Middle East, the Balkans and the Caucasus. This new foreign policy of regional expansion in the broader neighborhood, with more embedded prospects for soft power, could be interpreted as a forced step by the AKP government to reduce the military’s traditionally strong influence on Turkish politics in both the domestic and international spheres¹.

¹ Jung, D., 2012.

Turkish soft power foreign policy is based on three principles: political and economic justice; the balance between security and freedom; and trade and economic development². In addition, the AKP government has defined four foreign policy instruments: i) engaging all political (including non-state) actors; ii) supporting democratic processes; iii) expanding economic integration; iv) increasing sociocultural relations and inter-

personal communications³. All these instruments include elements of soft power, and are implemented by government agencies, as well as NGOs and business communities, which actively involve non-state actors.

Religion has been an important part of AKP's soft power in its foreign policy strategy, which has resulted in a more active role for Turkey in the Middle East and Muslim Eurasia.

Turkey's soft power in Azerbaijan

The Turkish government has used three of its four declared foreign policy instruments in Azerbaijan:

- i) Engaging all political (including non-state) actors: Turkish governments have avoided working directly with Azerbaijani political parties and NGOs, preferring to deal with the government or semi-government institutions. However, Turkish governments have been able to utilize Turkish movements and NGOs, including faith-based ones, to promote issues on their foreign policy agendas (e.g. Osman Nuri Topbaş, Mahmut Ziya Hidayi Foundation, Gülen Movement).
- ii) Expanding economic integration has been one of the most important instruments of Turkish soft power in Azerbaijan. Trade between the two countries has been growing; today Turkey is Azerbaijan's second biggest importer and Azer-

baijan one of Turkey's most important oil and natural gas providers⁴. Azerbaijan is also the second largest recipient of Turkish foreign direct investments, with Turkey being the largest investor in Azerbaijan's non-energy sector⁵. In addition, Azerbaijan's national oil company, SOCAR, has emerged as a significant foreign direct investor in Turkey and is currently implementing several important investment projects there⁶.

- iii) Increasing sociocultural relations and interpersonal communications: Turkey has utilized linguistic and ethnic commonalities based on the two countries' shared Turkic Oghuz roots. The "Turkic brotherhood" sentiments were more compelling than those of "Muslim brotherhood", due to the highly secularized nature of Azerbaijani society and sectarian differences.

Turkish religious actors in Azerbaijan

Turkish religious influence, represented by state and non-state religious organizations based in Turkey, has been manifold in post-Soviet Azerbaijan. It has also played a crucial role in the revival of Sunni Islam in the traditionally Shi'a majority country⁷. Moreover, Turkish religious influence has

been more powerful in Azerbaijan than in other post-Soviet countries due to their historical, geographic, linguistic and cultural closeness.

The chart below provides an overview of the Turkish religious groups that are active in Azerbaijan:

² Kalin 2012, p. 14

³ Ibid. p. 17

Actor	Capacity to deliver attractive messages to target audiences	Ability to adapt to local conditions
Gülen Movement	Given the secularized nature of Azerbaijan and cautious attitudes towards independent and foreign religious activism, the Gülen movement's secular humanitarian and educational messages worked well with the general public and the government. Its capitalist pragmatism and business activities on all levels helped position it not only as a friend of the nation, but also of the ruling elite.	Gülen integrated into the local conditions, avoiding all links to religious activism and operating purely as an educational, humanitarian and business network. It has always followed the established rules and never challenged the status quo or criticized the government.
Diyanet	The Diyanet is an official Turkish state institution and has agreement with the Azerbaijani authorities to operate as a religious actor. Its target audience is limited to practicing Sunni Muslims.	The Diyanet integrated into existing religious structures, cooperating with Baku State University and the region's official Islamic body, the Caucasus Muslims Board.
Süleymancılar	The Süleymancılar operates a limited number of training courses targeting mainly Sunni Muslims, especially in the northern regions of Azerbaijan.	The Süleymancılar has been able to mainly adapt to local conditions by cooperating with formal and semi-formal institutions. There was previously some cooperation with the Caucasus Muslims Board in the northern regions of Azerbaijan.
Mahmut Ziya Hudayi Foundation	The foundation has less capacity for influence, and is limited to a network of madrasas and humanitarian activities targeting the youth and, more generally, the Sunni audience.	The foundation has been able to mainly adapt to the local conditions by cooperating with formal public institutions within the existing framework.
Mustafa Sungur community	The Mustafa Sungur community is limited to targeting young people through informal networks.	The community has not fully adapted to local conditions, operating mainly based on purely religious proselytism and being subject to government interventions as a result.

⁴ Kartaş and Macit 2015

⁵ Kartaş and Macit 2015, Yavan 2012

⁶ Kartaş and Macit 2015

⁷ Balci, B. and Goyushev, A., 2012.

Until recently, most Turkish religious actors cooperated with each other despite their differences and disagreements at home. However, the split between the government and the Gülen Movement in 2013

dramatically changed the status quo. The movement's deteriorating relations with its home country have negatively affected its relations with Azerbaijan and significantly undermined its success there.

Turkey's soft power and the Gülen movement in Azerbaijan

The Gülen Movement was a central pillar of the foreign policy formulated by Ibrahim Kalin, which focused on expanding economic integration and increasing sociocultural relations and interpersonal communications in Azerbaijan⁸. Hundreds of different Turkish and local business enterprises are part of the network, either as active members and donors or as sympathizers. The Gülen movement is also the most obvious example of the active and successful utilization of Turkey's sociocultural connections and ethnic-linguistic kinship in Azerbaijan by a faith-based network. Its focus on education and humanitarian projects made it easy for two decades of Turkish governments to benefit from the movement's positive image of a reliable, helpful and caring partner.

The AKP government, like its more secularist predecessors, recognized the global influence of this movement and its beneficial role in enhancing Turkish soft power⁹. The Gülen Movement initially cooperated closely with the AKP, based on their common Islamic roots.

Relations changed in 2013, however, when the power struggle between Gülen and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan led to a split between the movement and the AKP govern-

ment. The conflict moved beyond Turkey into Azerbaijan in 2014, resulted in a weakened Gülen network. Moreover, recent developments in Turkey have made it harder for the movement to maintain its claims of apolitical interests: Gülen was blamed for the July 2016 attempted military coup, and his alleged followers and supporters have faced an unprecedented purge. In addition, the Azerbaijani government's full support of Turkish President Erdoğan in these activities has buried all hopes and chances for the movement in Azerbaijan. Connecting Fethullah Gülen to terrorism and inventing a new label for the movement – FETÖ (Fethullahçı Terör Örgütü, Fethullah-followers Terrorist Organization) further aggravated the movement's changes to operate openly and legally. As a natural result of developments in Turkey and Azerbaijan within the context of the Erdoğan-Gülen war, Turkish religious soft power, and consequently Turkish soft power in general, has been on the wane in Azerbaijan. Thus, not only has the Gülen Movement suffered from the purges and lost support from official Turkish institutions and diplomacy, but Turkish foreign power has also lost one of its most important and effective channels.

⁸ Kalin 2012

⁹ Balci 2014

References

1. Balci, B. and Goyushev, A., 2012. Changing Islam in Post-Soviet Azerbaijan and its Weighting on the Sunni/Shiite Cleavage. In: B. Maréchal and S. Zemni, eds. *The Dynamics of Sunni-Shia Relationships: Doctrine, Transnationalism, Intellectuals and the Media*. London: Hurst, 195-215.
2. Balci, B., 2014. The Gülen Movement and Turkish Soft Power. *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* [online], 4 February. Available from: <http://carnegieendowment.org/2014/02/04/g%C3%BClen-movement-and-turkish-soft-power> [Accessed April 2016].
3. Jung, D., 2012. The Domestic Context of New Activism in Turkish foreign policy. *International Journal*, 67 (1), 23-38.
4. Kalin, I., 2012. Turkish Foreign Policy : framework, values and mechanisms. *International Journal*, 67 (1), 7-21.
5. Kartaş, S. and Macit, F., 2015. Turkey-Azerbaijan Relations: The Economic Dimension. *Journal of Caspian Affairs*, 1 (1), 23-46.
6. Yavan, N., 2012. Türkiye'nin Yurt Dışındaki Doğrudan Yatırımları: Tarihsel ve Mekânsal Perspektif. ("Turkey's Foreign Direct Investments: Historical and Spatial Perspective" in Turkish), *Bilig*, 63 (Autumn 2012), 237-270.

**RELIGION AS A FACTOR IN KURDISH
IDENTITY DISCOURSE: CASE STUDY
ON ARMENIA AND TURKEY**

LIA EVOYAN
TATEVIK MANUKYAN

Introduction

The Kurdish factor has acquired important geopolitical significance in current regional developments. It has become a political tool of interstate relations, manipulated by all the countries involved, as well as by Kurdish political and military organizations. Today the Kurdish organizations in Iraq, Turkey, Syria and Iran are trying to transform from objects of regional policy to politically self-determined players that realize their own political agenda. They are seeking the means and tools to cooperate and influence each other, albeit without much success. These Kurdish organizations are presenting

their ambitions within new geopolitical realities: the prospect of a solution of the Kurdish problem, reshaping borders, regional destabilization. Furthermore, they are trying to establish a unified policy with neighboring, smaller Kurdish communities. In this policy memo, we analyze the interaction and identity formation between the Kurdish/Yezidi communities in Turkey and Armenia within the context of the soft power policies of national actors in Armenia and Turkey. We will demonstrate how the construction of ethnic and religious identities strongly depends on politics and international relations.

The Kurdish/Yezidi community in Turkey and Armenia

The present population of Turkey is approximately 18% Kurdish (The World Factbook 2016).

The majority of Turkey's Kurds are Sunni Muslims and are followers of Shafi'i madhab. In Kurdish society, the mystical dimensions of Sunni Islam are more common, such as the tariqa and orders of Sufi religious philosophy. The dominant order in Kurdish society is the Naqshbandi. Naqshbandi is the most active Sufi tariqa in Turkish politics today. It is the most applicable tool for social interaction between politics and religion in Turkey and has played a major role in the development of political Islam. This tariqa is also a unique bridge between Turkish and Kurdish societies.

With the Naqshbandi Sufi tariqa as a strong base, the Turkish Justice and Development Party (AKP) managed to gain the support and trust of a considerably large section of Kurdish society when it came to power and in the years that followed, countering the atheistic leftist ideas of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) with the ideology of Islamic unity.

Nurcu is the other school of Islam fol-

lowed by the Kurds. Muhammed Fethullah Gülen, the founder of the Gülen movement, added pan-Turkism to Nurcu pan-Islamic ideas in an attempt to unite the Turkic people and Turkic-language states under the veil of Islamic ideology.

Until recently, this was considered one of the most important tools for the implementation of Turkish foreign policy, especially in relations with Turkic-language communities. The movement had a unique and important "soft power" function in Turkey's foreign policy.

There are a significant number of Kurds in the Nurcu movement since, for the Kurds, membership in the Nurcu movement was an easy way to start a successful public and political career in the years of the AKP's rule.

Alevism is a comprehensive and popular religious movement among Turkish Kurds which, as a religious identity, has at times manifested more powerfully than national identity.

Some Kurds also follow Yezidism. However, in contrast to the clear ethnic term "Kurds" and the clear religious terms "Sunni", "Alevi", etc., the term "Yezidi" has a

disputed religious or ethno-religious meaning. The Yezidi (Ezdi) is an ethno-religious group, whose main identity is religion - either Yezidism or Sharfadin. There are currently 35,308 Yezidi living in Armenia (according to the last census of the Republic of Armenia, RA).

There is a significant academic and political discourse concerning the perception of "Yezidi" identity, however, whether it is a separate ethno-religious group or just a religion. The vast majority of Armenian Yezidis consider themselves ethnic Yezidis practicing Yezidism. Meanwhile Kurds claim that there is no such ethnicity, but there are ethnic Kurds who practice Yezidi religion. A small minority of Yezidis in Armenia (2162 people according to 2011 Census of RA) considers itself, however to be ethnically Kurds and not Yezidi. This minority is also Yezidi from the point of view of religion, but tends to separate its religious identity (Yezidi) from its ethnic identity (Kurdish).

In contrast to Armenia, where the Yezidis are a small minority (1.3 %), Kurds constitute approximately 18% of the total population of Turkey. The Kurds' have had very difficult and contradictory relations with the Turkish government since the formation of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, when the state implemented a clearly designed and strict assimilation policy towards Kurdish national self-consciousness.

However, some Kurds were able to resist the policy of assimilation due to the efforts of the PKK, which has organized and led the most comprehensive and enduring Kurdish movement in Turkey in centuries. The key to the PKK's success is that it has based its activity on Kurdish national self-identity, rather than the religious, tribal principle typical to Kurdish political groups. The PKK

has played a major role in awakening the national self-consciousness of Kurds.

A new phase for the Kurdish people began in 2002/2003, with the AKP came to power in Turkey.

During the AKP government, the Islamic factor and general democratic liberties were integrated into Turkey's Kurdish policy. The abolition of the "Kurdish taboo" and new geopolitical developments provided Kurds in Turkey with the opportunity to establish their ethnic identity and be successfully integrated in regional activities. They even started to try to conduct their own ethnic and religious "soft power" policy towards the Kurdish communities in neighboring countries. The AKP even began negotiations with the PKK, which successfully resulted in the "Declaration of Peace".

It was obvious that the Turkish government was trying to achieve its objectives through interactions with PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan. In 2013, negotiations between the AKP and Ocalan resulted in Ocalan declaring a ceasefire and the PKK starting to leave the territory of Turkey. These negotiations were conducted by the National Intelligence Organization (MIT), led by Hakan Fidan.

On 7 February 2016, however, then-Prime Minister Davutoğlu announced that Abdullah Ocalan would no longer participate in the process of regulating the Kurdish issue. After isolating Ocalan, the Turkish government launched major military actions against the PKK and political persecution against the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP)¹.

During the recent armed conflicts, 483 Turkish soldiers were killed and 2,859 were injured. According to official Turkish data on armed actions against the Kurds, 7,078 Kurdish guerrillas were killed, includ-

¹ On November 4, 2016, the HDP leader Selahhettin Demirtas, together with co-chairperson Vigen Yuksekdag, was arrested by AKP regime in Diyarbakir.

ing PKK losses during a Turkish Air Force bombing in Iraqi Kurdistan (Hürriyet 2016). These developments make it clear that, since

the snap elections in November, the political situation has changed and Erdoğan has developed a new plan for the Kurdish issue.

Soft power policy towards the Kurdish/Yezidi community in Armenia

The Kurdish/Yezidi minority in Armenia is at the crossroad of different political interests, which means different external actors are trying to influence it. In this section, we will examine the different aspects of these soft power policies.

According to data collected during our fieldwork in Armenian Kurdish/Yezidi villages, cooperation between Armenia and Turkey's Yezidis is inter-tribal and personal in character. Despite their affiliation to the same tribes, relations between Armenia's Yezidis and Turkey's assimilated Kurds were disrupted due to religious differences. However, some interpersonal communications have been restored. In an interview with the authors of this policy memo, the president of "Sinjar" Yezidi National Union NGO in Armenia, Boris Murazi, stated that he has visited the Yezidis' refugee camp in Batman, Turkey several times, and he has personal contacts there and cooperates with the refugees. He stated that there is cooperation between Yezidis in Armenia and Turkey, but not on a regular basis.

On the other hand, in recent years cooperation appears to be growing between Armenian and Iraqi Yezidis both on the state and personal/social levels. Formal meetings between Armenian and Northern Iraqi statesmen periodically take place in Yerevan and Erbil. In addition, in the context of developing political and economic cooperation between Armenia and Northern Iraq, there are plans to open an Armenian consulate in Erbil.

The closed border between Turkey and Armenia makes any direct communication between them difficult, which is why evidence indicates most communication among

Kurds along both sides of the Araks River is coordinated by Kurdish organizations based in EU countries and elsewhere.

One of the main issues discussed by the two groups is the PKK, specifically bringing the group into contact with Armenia's Kurds/Yezidis and even establishing a presence in Armenia. During our interviews and informal talks, we found no empirical evidence of a PKK presence in Armenia. PKK is a political organization with strong military elements that is recognized as terrorist organization by Turkey and many other states, so its presence in Armenia would not be welcome in the country today. In addition, Armenia's Kurdish/Yezidi community has little interest in the PKK and its activities.

However, there is some evidence that the PKK is implementing a "soft power" policy towards Armenia's Kurds/Yezidis. During our interviews, several Kurds/Yezidis stated that the PKK uses Kurdish organizations based in European countries, such as the Institute Paris de Kurdes, Kurdish Institute of Brussels, etc. to influence young Yezidi/Kurds by offering them education and jobs in Europe. Several Yezidis also said that various European Kurdish organizations have offered them financial support to spread the ideologies of PKK and its leader Abdullah Ocalan. The Yezidis not only refused; they were deeply offended by the proposal. They viewed the suggestion as a dishonor to their identity and religion and an attempt to force them to assimilate. On the other side, during informal meetings, Brussels-based pro-PKK Kurds expressed their concerns about Armenia's Kurdish/Yezidi community, arguing that Yezidis should recognize they are

ethnic Kurds, and Yezidism is the original religion of ancient Kurdish people.

This illustrates that the PKK seeks to use ethnicity, rather than religion, as a powerful “soft power” tool to influence the Armenian Kurdish/Yezidi community.

PKK’s main interest towards Armenia’s Yezidi community is its desire to promote its ideology, to use the community in pro-PKK projects, with the future creation of Kurdistan - and the opportunity of using the Armenia’s “Kurdish factor” - in mind. However, as noted above, this has proved to be unsuccessful so far as Armenians prefer emphasizing their ethno-religious identity as an established and respected national minority in Armenia.

This means that one of the main obstacles for cooperation between Kurds/Yezidis in Turkey and Armenia is the major religious discourse between them, to even a greater degree than Yezidism vs Sunni Islam, which in turn affects identity perceptions and creates an even larger ideological gap between them.

Concerning the relations between Armenia’s Kurds (not Yezidis), the PKK and Turkey’s Kurdish parties, there might be some contacts on a personal level, but there are no formal connections to that organization. This is proved by the disappointment expressed by European Kurdish NGO members with Armenia’s Kurdish community, which is not willing to cooperate with them.

In conclusion we can state that religion is used as a soft power both towards and by Kurdish/Yezidi people. The Kurdish/Yezidi transnational organizations, such as NGOs, private universities and schools, foundations, media, etc., try to implement a “state-like” policy towards the Kurdish/Yezidi population, often using “soft power” elements. That is usually realized through EU-based organizations, due to the rather large and influential Kurdish/Yezidi communities in Europe. We have done research

in the most active Kurdish institutions, Institute Kurde de Paris in France and Kurdish Studies Institute in Brussels, as well as held meetings and informal workshops with Kurdish community leaders and representatives, academicians and journalists. We found that Kurdish, pro-PKK organizations are represented in a larger group and are present in France, Belgium, Sweden, Germany and Austria. Moreover, most of the EU-based Kurdish organizations are propagating PKK ideology and Kurdish nationalism. Their main target groups are Kurds/Yezidis living in EU, Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran. Armenia is also targeted, but not as much, due to the small number and lack of integration of Kurdish/Yezidi community in the country, as well as the lack of the expected outcome. According to personal meetings and workshops in Institute Kurde de Paris and Kurdish Studies Institute in Brussels, these organizations are more interested in Kurds living in Turkey, rather than those living in Armenia. Meanwhile both have personal contacts with the Armenian Kurdish/Yezidi community and try to occasionally implement unambitious educational projects and student exchanges to attract Armenian Kurdish/Yezidi. However, the reaction in Armenian Kurdish/Yezidi minority has been limited because the larger and stronger Yezidi community often rejects any EU-based pro-PKK Kurdish organization support, opting instead for more developed cooperation with the Yezidi communities in Northern Iraqi and Germany. European Yezidis are mainly based in Germany, where they provide support for Yezidi identity formation and have become a marker against Kurdish nationalist identity formation during the past several years.

One of the main barriers for realizing this “soft power” policy is the identity of Yezidism, which is a closed community and not open to foreign influence. Turkey’s

Kurdish organizations and those based in EU countries, to varying degrees, are trying to use a consistent “soft power” policy on Armenia’s Yezidis in order to convert them to Kurdish identity using ideological, cultural and linguistic factors as psychological tools. On the other hand, Armenia’s Kurdish com-

munity is not of great interest for non-Armenian Kurds due to its small size. While “non-Armenian Kurds” are more interested in Yezidis, who are the largest minority group in Armenia, foreign outreach to the Armenian Yezidis has not been successful so far due to their strong religious identity.

Conclusion

Kurds’ religious differences (Naqshbandi, Nurcu, Yezidi, Alevi) are potent ways to influence and gain leverage over the Kurdish community and are used both by the Turkish authorities and external powers to control and guide Kurdish processes for their own political gains and interests. This is especially relevant in the communities that are still in the process of identity shaping. Fluid identities are the main targets for “soft power” policy efforts.

“Soft power” as a concept originally understood as an element of a state’s foreign policy is not quite applicable to this study in one sense, because Kurds do not have a state. However, the analysis shows how religion becomes an element in international relations, including for non-state actors. Thus we can claim a specific case of “soft power” transformation and make the following conclusions: unclear and fluid ethnic and religious identity markers can be divided based on the regional political situation. Some existing cases or political situations are not always applicable to Joseph Nye’s origi-

nal “soft power” concept, as they are not state-directed and continuous.

PKK and Kurdish transnational organizations support Kurdish ethno-nationalism. Referring to Turkey’s policy towards its minorities, we can state that in recent years, a new tendency has developed concerning the acceptance of religious minorities, including Yezidis and Alevi. This could result in dividing the larger Kurdish community into smaller subgroups, thus acting against national consolidation around the PKK. Religion is used as a “soft power” policy instrument within the ideology of the ruling AKP’s Kurdish policy, which tends to separate the Kurdish community from the PKK. Therefore, Turkey is implementing a fluid and situational policy towards Kurds and Kurdish trans-national organizations using the “factor of Islam” as a “soft power” tool. The Armenian state supports Yezidi identity as a specific ethno-religious identity. As a consequence, Yezidis are integrated into Armenian society and do not cooperate with the larger, pan-regional Kurdish community.

**IRAN'S SOFT POWER IN GEORGIA -
WEAK FOR NOW, BIGGER POTENTIAL
FOR THE FUTURE**

MARIAM GABEDAVA
KOBA TURMANIDZE

Iran as a political actor in Georgia: insignificant on the surface

As Iran attempts to overcome its international isolation and the economic damage caused by decades of sanctions, it may be interested in intensive engagement with Georgia. There are many reasons why Georgia is attractive to Iran: their geographic proximity, Georgia's status as the South Caucasus hub for international investment and economic development, and its economic and political openness and access to European markets. Additionally, unlike European countries, the Georgian government and population seem to welcome ties with Iran.

Iran and Georgia are not major trade or investment partners by any measure. Still, given the recent removal of decades-long sanctions on Iran, realistic grounds exist for more mutual trade between the two countries.

Of the three South Caucasus countries, Iran's relations with Georgia are the least developed for three reasons. Firstly, the lack

of a shared border presents an obvious hurdle. Secondly, Georgia's traditional alignment with the West is an obstacle. Thirdly, Georgia's dominant Orthodox faith and the general wariness of the Church and large sections of the population towards Islam and Muslims is a factor. Iran in particular is popularly seen as an old imperial subjugator, and this legacy, combined with the fear of Islamic fundamentalism, could be a major deterrent for the broader Georgian public in welcoming close ties. Additionally, the need to avoid antagonizing Russia may be the single most important factor in determining Iran's policy and involvement with the South Caucasus, particularly in Georgia.

Because of all the above factors, Iranian engagement in Georgia is likely to be most intensive with the population it has the most in common with: the ethnic Azeri Shi'a Muslim minority in Georgia.

Georgia's ethnic Azeri minority

Georgian Azeris are overwhelmingly Shi'a Muslims, as are most Iranians. While religion was very much discouraged and persecuted for the 70 years of Soviet rule, religiosity has thrived in Georgia since its independence. This has included a revival of Islam. As there is little opportunity for religious education in Georgia, Iran is seen as a resource in this regard, and one

that is all too eager to offer its help.

Besides religious kinship, there are other factors that make Georgia's ethnic Azeri minority a good target for potential influence. This group is a good illustration of the failings of Georgia's minority policies, which means most types of foreign support are likely to be welcomed.

Marginalization and its consequences

Georgia's Azeri minority currently makes up about 6.5 per cent of the population and has a high birth rate. It is predominantly Muslim and concentrated close to the border with its kin-state Azerbaijan. The Azeri minority has a very low level of knowledge of the Georgian language, and generally a low level of integration in the Georgian state and society. All of this makes the majority

of ethnic Georgians, along with the ultra-nationalistic Georgian Orthodox Church and the state, suspicious of them.

According to measurable criteria, the Azeri population's socio-economic situation does not differ much from that of the rest of Georgia; however, Azeri citizens perceive their poverty as more acute.

The reported religiosity of Azeris is much

lower than in the rest of the population – only 10% say they attend religious services at least once a month, compared to 36 % of the rest of the population. It is interesting that when asked to identify their religion, a sizable portion of Kvemo Kartli Azerbaijanis identify as Muslim, without Sunni or Shi'a labelling. This points to minimal observance of Islam beyond it being one nominal facet of their default identity.

The majority of Kvemo Kartli Azeris don't have even a basic knowledge of the Georgian language. The lack of language skills contributes to an effective withdrawal of minorities (especially those living in the minority-populated regions, far from the cap-

ital) from Georgian society. Lack of access to Georgian TV and the absence of minority language programming means that minority-heavy regions are receiving their news and entertainment from their kin-states across the border or from Russian TV channels. This inevitably leads to minorities being integrated into the information spheres of foreign states and disengaged from Georgian political and social discourse.

Alienation and discrimination are not openly discussed by the Azeri community. While this can be attributed to a desire not to stand out too much, it can also be an indication of their withdrawal from the Georgian public sphere.

Minority policy in Georgia

Georgia's policy regarding religious minorities is heavily shaped by the strong political influence of the Georgian Orthodox Church. The Orthodox Church has been funded since the signing of the Concordat in 2002, as a form of restitution for the damage inflicted by the Soviet regime. For the same reason, other "traditional" religious groups have also received state funding since 2014: the Muslim community, the Armenian Church, the Catholic Church and the Jewish community. The state does not provide a rationale for the specific amounts granted to each group. This lack of transparency, as well as the potential for state control of the religious groups, has been criticized by local civil society organizations.

The creation of the Administration of all Muslims of Georgia (Mufti Administration of Georgia) in 2011 is largely seen as orchestrated by the state. It can be interpreted as the state's attempt to make it easier to manage the security threats that the Muslim population may entail, and curb the foreign liaisons of local Muslim groups. However, this security-based approach is also viewed

as creating more potential security challenges in the long run. Excluding various Muslim groups from the official leadership may push their activities underground and make controlling or engaging them more difficult for the state.

Given the low religiosity of the population, the Georgian Muslim community does not seem to have any clear leadership with significant grassroots legitimacy. Instead, it is the secular local elders and leaders who have influence, rather than any national or local religious figure.

State funding notwithstanding, human rights groups point to a worsening minority rights situation. The state's unwillingness to prevent violence and effectively investigate violent incidents illustrates an environment of impunity regarding the violation of religious rights. This is also a potent signal for Shi'ite Muslims, among other minorities, that the Orthodox Church's dominance permeates not only the personal beliefs of the Georgian population, but the civil service as well, and may be placed above the rule of law in practice.

Tools of influence: Islamic education in Georgia

The Azeri population of Kvemo Kartli is not particularly religious. However, in recent years there appears to be growing interest in a religious way of life. Given the limited willingness of the Georgian state and society to go beyond their declared “tolerance” of diversity, very little of this interest is facilitated by the state.

There are limited opportunities to receive an Islamic education in Georgia. Madrasas that provide basic religious instruction do exist, but outside the national education system. The lack of qualified instructors is mentioned as the main reason for the low level of religious education among Muslims in Georgia. Currently, no accredited Georgian educational institution offers a course in Islamic studies and the only real sources of education are foreign.

Out of the three main countries providing educational opportunities for Georgian Muslims – Iran, Azerbaijan and Saudi Arabia – Iran is cited as the most active. These learning opportunities are not only religious. While these are not officially tied to foreign governments, the Iranian Embassy in Tbilisi is said to be actively engaged and providing funding in cash, to avoid documented ties.

Several Iranian religious organizations are reportedly working in Georgia, particularly in the town of Marneuli. Among them, Alhi Beyt was the only one named by our interviewees. It is active in supporting the madrasas and providing them with religious literature. The organization was also reported to be active in Tbilisi, where it provides free classes in Farsi and supports religious teaching.

The Al-Mustafa International University of Qom in Iran has operated a Georgian branch since 2011. It offers a five-year Azeri language program of theology, which is free, and provides accommodation for all students free of charge. Upon completion

of the five-year course, the institution offers the possibility to attend graduate-level studies in Qom itself. However, the institution is not accredited by the Georgian educational authorities and its diploma is not recognized by the state as a certificate of higher education. Still, with its reported aim of supplying a cadre of people to serve the religious needs of the Muslim community in Georgia, the civilian concerns of diploma recognition may not be crucial.

It appears that Iran’s involvement in education is welcomed by locals, although some are noticeably suspicious of the motivations behind it. Many talked about the need for education in “traditional Islam”, as opposed to the teachings of various radical sects, particularly the Wahhabis. They maintained that unlike the fundamentalist groups, who are using religion only as a cover for their violent activities, followers of traditional Islam are peace-loving and benevolent. According to them, supporting such teaching would leave little space for the wayward sects and ensure both spirituality and national security. The sceptics are not in favor of Iranian religious activism and would much prefer if relations were strictly secular, related to the economy and secular education.

It seems that the state is not particularly pleased with the level of Iranian involvement either, though it does recognize that it must be able to offer alternatives before it can restrict the current situation. At this stage, there are no alternatives for religious education in Georgia, because there is a deficit of qualified Islamic theologians. The state appears to be watching the situation carefully for now, but no active steps are currently being taken. Meanwhile, both the state and the local expert community consider foreign-educated Muslims to potentially serve the interests of those foreign countries.

The effects of Iranian activities: piety vs. practicality

Despite Iran's efforts, the ethnic Azeri public in Kvemo Kartli does not seem to be won over. Both the public opinion survey and the in-depth interviews show that Iran is not currently viewed as a model to aspire to. Its products and universities are not highly respected, nor do Iranians seem to be favored as business or personal partners. This is a crucial impediment to Iran's soft power in the region, as the local population attaches far more importance to worldly goods than religiosity. Facing the more pressing needs of employment, education, economic development and social services, Georgian Azeris are compelled to be more practical and judicious in their preferences for friendships and alliances.

Religious ties, including pilgrimage, and medical tourism were mentioned by local community leaders as the most developed ties at the moment. Several people mentioned that some medical visits are at least partially paid for by the Iranian side, which seeks out poor patients to receive such help.

The population of Kvemo Kartli rates the current state of Georgian-Iranian relations as not very intense and almost all say they would welcome deeper ties, particularly in

the economic sphere. In their opinion, Georgia should strive to have good relations with all its neighboring countries, including Iran, and should try to benefit from Iran's huge domestic market.

According to our survey, Iran's influence is very low in the region. The majority of those surveyed would rather not buy Iranian products and Iran ranks low as a destination to receive an education. This comes in stark contrast to the apparent good standing and influence of Turkey, as well as, predictably, their kin-state Azerbaijan.

Only a small number of students go to Iranian universities, most study religion and all of them return to Georgia upon graduation, mostly to get involved with religious institutions. Given the existing discrimination and a lack of employment opportunities for Kvemo Kartli Azeris, the religious realm is seen as the only sphere where they can fully realize their knowledge and potential. In contrast, nearly all interviewees noted the relatively high number of students going to Turkish universities, graduates of which apparently have much better chances of success in secular activities.

Conclusion

Iranian soft power influences are currently low, but there is some potential for future development. Iran has some potential for influence, primarily through the Azeri Shi'ite population of Kvemo Kartli. For now, the local population is more interested in the social and economic aspects of bilateral relations. Religious relations are given relatively low weight. The main obstacles to Iran's influence are the Azeris' current low religiosity and their access to Turkey as a destination for work and education, made particularly

easy by a shared language. However, Iran's energetic efforts toward teaching and reviving religiosity in this population and the evident material rewards of association with Iran may eventually help overcome this obstacle. Additionally, the high social prestige of Iranian-trained religious leaders in the community indicates that Iran's soft power may gain more substance in the future. Iran's expected persistence and long-term planning may well turn Iranian soft power from a possibility into a reality.

**IRAN'S SOFT POWER POLICY IN
ARMENIA: CULTURAL DIPLOMACY
AND RELIGION**

TATEVIK MKRTCHYAN

Introduction

Since the breakup of the Soviet Union, the Islamic Republic of Iran has emerged as one of the most reliable allies of the Republic of Armenia. Iran recognized Armenia's independence three months after its declaration in 1991, and over the years the two countries have strengthened their political and economic ties through economic, cultural and educational projects. In addition, they cooperate in many other sectors, including energy, sport, environmental protection, healthcare, and agriculture (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2012).

The two countries' history of good relations creates the potential for stronger bilateral ties, especially since they do not have any disputes over their shared border - or any ethnic or religious tensions.

Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the development of positive neighborly relations between Armenia and Iran is based on a number of components with two major aspects: their respective diasporas and the geopolitical constellation. Both diaspora communities provide an economic and cultural link between the two countries. In particular, the presence of the Armenian community in Iran is an important element of Tehran's bilateral relationship with Armenia. For centuries, a sizeable and fairly prosperous Armenian community has resided in Iran. The Armenian community of Iran has continuously enjoyed a certain amount of political, religious and cultural protection. Armenians in Iran are recognized as a religious rather than national minority, including guaranteed representation in the parliament and on local councils. There are more than 200 churches across the country. In contrast, The Iranian community in Armenia is small. According to the 2011 census, which included an optional question on religious affiliation, there are 812 Muslims in Armenia, which is 0.027 per cent of the total population. However, various research publications, as well as information

provided by non-governmental organizations, estimate the number of Muslims in Armenia to be around 8,000, about 80 percent of which are resident non-citizens who stay in Armenia for extended periods of time. The majority of these Muslims are from Iran; others come from elsewhere in the Middle East and India. Most of them are businessmen, students or diplomats. The ratio of Shi'as to Sunnis is about 3:1.

Alongside the diasporas, Armenia-Iran partnership is reasoned by geopolitical and economic factors. Armenia's main southern transit route and strategic access to Asia and the Middle East passes through Iran. Armenia cannot access these strategic regions via Azerbaijan and Turkey due to closed borders.

The religious aspect in Armenia-Iran relations is worth noting: the two governments like to emphasize the capability of the "Christian Armenia" and "Islamic Iran" to maintain positive relations as well as peaceful coexistence of the two that the two countries managed to have for centuries.

This policy memo focuses on the role of religion as one of the cultural variables of Iran's soft power in Armenia. Iran's soft power in Armenia is part of Iran's broader Islamic-cultural foreign policy, which is implemented through socio-cultural and scholarly activities. By analyzing the motives and factors affecting Iran's cultural policy in Armenia, which can be considered cultural diplomacy, one can identify the specific ways religion is integrated into this policy.

In considering Iran's activities, we will look at the instruments Iran deploys in Armenia. In particular, we will analyze religion's role and the way it is implemented in Iran's cultural diplomacy. Given that there is not a significant Islamic community in Armenia Iran's policy cannot be considered to primarily support Shi'ism in the country. Furthermore, the basis for missionizing in

Armenia is low compared to other countries with large Muslim populations. The case of Iran's soft power policy in Armenia will demonstrate that the role of religion in transnational relations can be limited to cultural and civilizational relations.

The analysis of Iran's long-term cultural

relations with Armenia illustrates that Iran's soft power is enhanced by cultural diplomacy and activities with a gradually expanding religious component. Simultaneously, the tendency towards further relations provides a platform for increasing soft power capabilities and resources in Armenia.

Soft power and cultural diplomacy

In this policy memo we use the Joseph Nye's definition of soft power: "soft power draws on the national resources that can lead to a country's ability to affect others through the co-optive means of framing the agenda, persuading, and eliciting positive attraction in order to obtain preferred outcomes." The purpose of cultural diplomacy, as a type of soft power, is for the people of a foreign nation to develop an understanding of the nation's own ideals and institutions, in an effort to build broad support for its economic and political goals.

Thus, cultural diplomacy revolves around the themes of dialogue, understanding and trust. The goal of Iran's cultural diplomacy is to influence Armenian society and use that influence, which grows with time, as a sort of goodwill reserve to win support for policies. It seeks to induce a positive view of the country's people, culture and politics. Through its cultural diplomacy in Armenia, Iran engenders greater cooperation between the two nations. Iranian cultural diplomacy

also includes aid for changing the policies or political environment of the target nation, which in turn prevents, manages and mitigates conflict with that country.

One of the difficulties in the literature related to soft power is that it focuses on the attempts to influence and/or on the results of soft power. Both are difficult to measure, especially in terms of influencing how a foreign country sets its agenda or its preferences, as we cannot know for sure what lead to a change in these areas. I argue that one can learn more about a country's foreign policy from its soft power capabilities and activities than from its de facto influence (such as agenda setting which is difficult to observe). Thus, this policy memo focuses on the resources and capabilities of Iranian soft power in Armenia. In this memo soft power is viewed as one of the tools that Iran uses in its foreign policy. Iranian culture, including its religion, is the medium through which the Iranian state supports a positive perception of itself in Armenia.

Cultural diplomacy and religion

Backed by the two factors of diaspora relations and geopolitics, Iran has developed specific tools of cultural diplomacy and soft power in Armenia. Armenians and Iranians are presented as people who have long lived together peacefully and are nations with cultural and civilizational proximity, although they fought in the 5th century.

The importance of such intercultural relations has always been stressed by both parties. The main idea behind this cultural diplomacy is that 'the relations formed in the sphere of culture provide a solid foundation for the development and deepening of Armenia-Iran relations in political, economic and other spheres.'¹ The deep-rooted inter-

¹ Meeting (9 July 2015) of President Serzh Sargsyan and Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance of Iran Ali Janati (Armenian News 2015, Armedia 2015).

cultural relations between Iran and Armenia were also stressed during a meeting of the Catholicos of All Armenians and the Minister of culture of the Islamic Republic of Iran on 11 July 2015 (Armenianchurch.org 2015).

One possible reason for mutual respect between the two peoples is the fact that Shi'a Islam and Christianity are both considered minority cultures in the respective countries. Consequently, there is no fear of possible influence, at least in terms of rhetoric. Moreover, while promoting and spreading religious content in Armenia, Iranian efforts mainly emphasize the universal values and

philosophical aspects of Shi'ism. In almost every speech by Iranian supreme leader, president, cultural attaché or ambassador, one will hear of universal and common values for humanity (justice is one common theme). For example, Iranian Ambassador Seyyed Kazem Sajjad said at the commemoration of Ashura in 2016 in the Blue Mosque: 'The Iranians respect the moral values and struggle for the justice (...). The aim of today's event is to show the whole world that Shi'ite Muslims are very peaceful and that they live next to Christian Armenians very peacefully and respect mutual religious rituals.'

Means and performance of Iran's cultural diplomacy in Armenia

Interestingly, Iran's approach to public diplomacy is not a simple image-making policy. It is largely cultural and mostly reflects on Persian heritage with some references to Shi'a Islam that is the focus of our memo.

The cultural centers that constitute the backbone of Iran's cultural diplomacy are all sub-branches of the Islamic Cultural Relations Organization (ICRO). Through this organization the Supreme Leader of Iran dispatches representatives to cultural organizations and Islamic centers abroad. In general, these centers share the same general framework, though the activities vary from country to country: in Armenia and partly in Georgia, they normally organize cultural events, language courses, bilingual translations, journal publication, conferences, and interreligious and intercultural dialogue, while in Azerbaijan the religious aspect is given a special focus.

The Cultural Centre of the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Armenia is a branch of the Iran-based ICRO, which organizes the events for each year. In general Iran-Armenia bilateral cultural relations consist of both routine and strategic communication between the two countries and the development of lasting relations with key

individuals through scholarships, exchanges, training/teaching, seminars, conferences and access to media channels. The Blue Mosque and events organised in the Mosque (Farsi courses, religious ceremonies, Quran readings and teaching classes, and etc.), publication activities, radio broadcasting, academic conferences and other cultural activities (exhibitions, concerts) including the Nowruz festival in Yerevan are the main events which are organised by the Iranian Cultural Centre and the Embassy of IRI in Armenia.

As Armenia itself supports constructive relations with Iran in terms of geopolitics and economy, Iranian cultural diplomacy in Armenia is based on a positive grounds/bases. This policy involves presenting a comprehensive understanding of Islam and Iranian culture and civilization, promoting ethics and Islamic sciences, introducing celebrities and the grandeur of Islamic and Iranian history, building active contacts to strengthen the bonds of friendship, promoting knowledge of the Farsi language and literature, and last but not least encouraging the understanding of mutual cultures and human experiences.

The activities and initiatives of the main

Iranian organizations demonstrate that the Iranian community in Armenia has started to open its religious activities to the public revealing the approach showing that the celebration of its religious festivals and ceremonies in Yerevan holds a political meaning alongside the religious one. Through their cultural activities, Iranians try to promote an understanding of Iranian culture; they reach out not only via language, literature and historical narratives, but also via religious ac-

tivities. In 2016 many Armenian and Yazidi guests were invited to publicly celebrate the very important festival of Ashura, with extensive media coverage on Armenian public television. The 38th anniversary of Islamic Revolution was celebrated on 9th of February (2017) in Yerevan in a very large audience with participation of the Armenian Prime Minister Karen Karapetyan and a lot of high ranked politicians and representatives of cultural and educational spheres.

Conclusion

The use of cultural elements in international relations targets the emotions and subconscious feelings of the audience. Religion is an appropriate factor in this kind of foreign policy.

From a soft power perspective, Armenia as the only Christian neighbour of Islamic Republic of Iran, is a priority in Iran's neighbourhood policy, and Iran's cultural policies successfully enhance its soft power in Armenia. The transfer of Iranian cultural knowledge, art, ideas, beliefs and customs, while providing a platform for mutual understanding and intercultural communication, supports and ensures Iran's political and economic goals.

Thus, this specific political relationship between the two countries leads Iranian foreign policy to transform its religious message into a cultural and moral stance, by stressing the universal values and meanings of Iranian Shi'a Islam. For instance, a conference commemorating the death of Imam Khomeini or the Islamic Revolution is presented under the umbrella of the universal and humanistic character of Shi'a creeds and beliefs. For now, Iranian soft power in Armenia does not show any intention of religious influence or proselytism, as both states have been tolerant towards their respective Muslim and Christian minorities. Thus, the two cultures—including their religions—can be interpreted as proximate, and as the

main cultural tools for strengthening and developing bilateral relations. Religion and religious differences are not used to divide; rather religion is used by the Iranian government to strengthen its political relations with Armenia. Thus, the religious difference in Iran-Armenia relations, while assisting governments in their national interests, facilitates political and economic relations.

Moreover, the fact that the two countries' religious differences do not hinder their alliance suggests that the soft power strategy holds an additional communicative value providing basis for intercultural/interreligious dialogue. Iranian activities in Armenia can be interpreted as proof that different religions are not necessarily an obstacle to good bilateral relations. Moreover, both parties always stress this in their rhetoric. Cultural diplomacy in Armenia-Iran relations offers a counter-narrative in which diverse peoples and their traditions can coexist, strengthening each other through mutual understanding and building new traditions together. For example, the annually celebrations of Islamic Revolution and commemorations of death of Imam Khomeini become something which turns to be "tradition" so this can be one of the indicator of increasing religious component of Iranian soft power in Armenia.

**IRANIAN SOFT RELIGIOUS POWER IN
AZERBAIJAN: OLD NEW THREAT FOR
BAKU**

ANAR VALIYEV

Introduction

The collapse of the Soviet Union and independence of Azerbaijan paved the way for establishing diplomatic, economic and political relations between Baku and Tehran. During the early years of Azerbaijan's post-Soviet independence movement, Baku considered Tehran a natural ally. This support stemmed from Ayatollah Khomeini's statement condemning the Soviet Army invasion of Baku in January 1990, the return of Azerbaijanis to their (mostly Shi'a) Islamic roots, the opening of borders, and Iranian humanitarian assistance, all of which made Tehran a hero in the eyes of average Azerbaijanis. However, the situation changed during the rule of the second president of Azerbaijan, Abulfaz Elchibey. Proclaiming a Western, particularly Turkish orientation and accusing Iran of violating the rights of Azerbaijanis in Iran, he alienated the Iranian establishment. Iranians, in turn, supported

Azerbaijan's rival, Armenia, providing fuel and economic assistance to Yerevan during the Karabakh war. Since 1993, relations between Azerbaijan and Iran have fluctuated. However, neither side risked crossing the point of no return and both refrained from harsh actions. Today, Azerbaijani-Iranian relations are among the most complicated in the region, having experienced radical transformations over the last 25 years. Cordial friends and brotherly nations at the end of the Cold War, Baku and Tehran almost engaged in armed conflict in the Caspian Sea in summer of 2001, and relations have since remained tense. Azerbaijan and Iran in its turn very often resorts to many tools to exert their soft power over each other that raise suspicions of political establishment. From this perspective, religious factor remains one of the most important tools of Iranian soft power in Azerbaijan.

Background

As one of the fathers of the concept of soft power, Joseph Nye, states, soft powers refer to "the capability of an entity, usually but not necessarily a state, to influence what others do through direct or indirect international influence and encouragement". From this perspective the Shi'a heritage of Azerbaijan represents the main source of Iranian religious soft power. There are several tools that Iran successfully uses in Azerbaijan. Among them, a Fatwa – religious order of some cleric – could be considered as one of the most effective tools of soft power. Although literature does not look at these orders as part of soft power, nevertheless in our case we may consider it as an important element. In Azerbaijan a certain share of religious people follow the call of respected Iranian theologian in various issues, spanning from the time for observing Ramadan to following certain po-

litical orders. Although fatwas dare not legally binding, nevertheless, certain group of people take these orders literally and follow them. It is worth mentioning that the secular government can not present something against fatwas and only the secular nature of the country allows the government to minimize the influence of this very important tool of Iranian soft power.

An impact of Iranian religious soft power can be also seen in the example of the Islamist Party of Azerbaijan (IPA). The party is one of the organizations in the country that has been very much influenced by Iran. Iranian religious missionaries have been energetic in southern Azerbaijan, as well as in villages around Baku, where the population is predominantly Shi'a Muslim. The party, the core member of which comes from the village Nardaran, is influential in Baku vil-

lages. The case of social unrests in Nardaran village in summer of 2002 and the shoot-out in 2015 can serve as perfect examples of how the party was able to use its power in the village in order to push its own agenda.

In November of 2015 the law enforcement agencies of Azerbaijan were involved in deadly clashes with the supporters and followers of the recently established Muslim Unity Movement of Azerbaijan. Its leader, prominent Shi'a cleric Taleh Bagirzade, spent several months behind bars before being released in 2010. During the clashes in Nardaran village several people were killed while more than 20 were arrested. The Unity Movement was an organization that could implement its religious agenda but not under the banner of Islamic Party. For a very short period, the Unity Movement was able to attract many followers and promote itself. With social media on the rise in Azerbaijan, the Movement was able to send its messages across the all levels of society. Bagirzade slowly became a leader who could unite the Shi'a movement against the government. He acknowledged that, at this juncture, Azerbaijan is not ready to become an Islamic republic, but neither did he say he opposed the Iranian system. In fact, he has also publicly noted that Azerbaijan was ruled by Sharia law up until the 19th century, while stopping short of calling for its re-introduction. It is interesting that events in Nardaran and arrest of Bagirzade in 2015 coincided with execution of Al Nimr in January of 2016, a Shi'a cleric who lived in Saudi Arabia for many years and was given the death penalty. Iranian press and propaganda machine did not lose the moment to compare both leaders and announce them as martyrs for the Shi'a cause. Such tactic worked in Shi'a communities across the world. But in Azerbaijan, due to the marginal nature of religious politics, it is hard to expect that martyr role of Bagirzade would trigger the same effect as in other

Shi'a dominated societies.

Iran tries to exert its soft power through religious literature. For years, Iranian missionaries, as well as various organizations, could easily import and sell religious literature in the specialized shops and on the streets. Translated into Azerbaijani language, this literature was able to shed the light on many issues in religious affairs. From almost 1992 till 2010, much of the literature explaining Islam and religious issues came from Iran. Most Azerbaijanis learned about religion from Iranian religious literature. However, since the establishment of State Committee for Work with Religious Organizations, it has become more difficult to import literature. For example, by 2010 the committee reviewed more than 18,000 books and banned around 348 titles from being sold in Azerbaijan.

TV channels are also used as part of the propaganda machine about the Iranian lifestyle and its religious order in Azerbaijan. The Iranian political regime and its unappealing entertainment industry (in comparison with Turkish or Russian) is hardly attractive for Azerbaijan. Nevertheless, the Iranian government is actively seeking to increase its cultural-humanitarian linkage to Azerbaijan. One tool for such cultural intervention is Sahar TV, a TV channel broadcasted from Iran to Azerbaijan. The TV channel is easy to access in south Azerbaijan. The content of the TV programs is usually anti-Azerbaijani and official Baku constantly expresses its concern. Much of Sahar's programming deals with religion, which is a clear example of Iran exporting the ideals and values of Iranian Revolution.

Finally, Iranian authorities also pay specific attention to humanitarian ties with Azerbaijan. Imam Khomeyni Imdad Committee was one of the influential organizations in Azerbaijan in 1990s. The organization appeared in Azerbaijan in 1993 with the purpose of helping Azerbaijani displaced peo-

ple and refugees. In 2001 there were more than 400 places in Azerbaijan where the committee was distributing aid. Iranian aid organizations also distributed small grants and other assistance to refugees from the Karabagh region and to young families. Before it was closed in 2013, the amount of aid reached 25 million dollars. However, beyond providing aid, the committee was responsi-

ble for promoting the ideas of Khomeinism and the Iranian revolution. Specifically in the southern regions of Azerbaijan, one can easily find the books by Iranian theologians translated into the Azerbaijani language. In 2013 Azerbaijani officials closed committee due to the fact that the Azerbaijani economy was more developed and foreign charities were no longer necessary.

Implications

Religion will continue to be the major vehicle of Iranian soft power in Azerbaijan. However, here unfortunate paradox happens. Azerbaijani establishment curbs and put obstacles for creation of independent (from state) Shi'a clergy since it would immediately fall under the influence of Iranian theologians. Due to the fact that major Shi'a schools are located in Iran, the new generation of Azerbaijani Shi'a clergy would need to follow certain rules or procedures established by Iranian clergy. That could be dangerous for secular Azerbaijani government to implement. Meanwhile, the population distrusts the state clergy, who were educated in Azerbaijan. Under this policy, the Azerbaijani government has been obstructing the creation of an independent clergy, arresting pro-Iranian theologians and strengthening the state-controlled Shi'a bureaucracy that does not enjoy a high level of public trust.

Having such situation we can expect the growth of Iranian soft power in Azerbaijan if Shi'a Islam to become a force that could monopolize political and civil realms of the country. The situation has been exacerbated with the absence of independent and educated Azerbaijani clergy. Although Iran was naturally a source of spiritual guidance for Azerbaijanis right after independence, its influence gradually was limited through government actions. As a rule, Shi'a Muslims do not have clerical hierarchy. Thus, the Azerbaijani Sheikh ul-Islam is not an ab-

solute interpreter of dogma or sacred law. That is why, Iranian religious authorities could in theory enjoy more spiritual authority among Azerbaijani Shiites, which may partially explain why independent religious communities reject the official clergy's spiritual authority. Such a situation makes the Azerbaijani Shi'a population vulnerable to influence from senior members from Iran. For example, Sheikh Fazlullah Lankarani, a very popular ayatollah among the youth until his death.

Most importantly, in line with what has been suggested earlier and as indicated by recent polls, the potential for Islamization in Azerbaijan is weakly institutionalized so far, in the sense that there are very few religious leaders who can lead such movement. Results of the several surveys also show that population does not know or trust those outside of their own community. Therefore, there is no single independent religious leader who can capitalize and mobilize masses unlike in Iran. As shown, apart from a few isolated examples, to date there is not an independent Shi'a clergy in Azerbaijan, and the development of such a clergy seems to be dependent on growing Iranian influence. Recent arrests of the leadership of the Islamic Party and some independent scholars from Nardaran area indicate that the government is also preventing the creation of independent Shi'a groups.

The absence of independent religious

groups has negative and positive sides too. On the positive side, the arguments are that no force can use religion for its own benefits. And falling this independent clergy falling under the influence of Iran could be problematic for the country. Meanwhile, it is bad for the country that many young people lack a trusted role model or having heard nothing from their clergyman, follow fatwas from Iran.

The influence of Iranian religious soft power may decrease in the country if Baku pursues a committed policy. This scenario envisions active social policies and spreading the oil revenues to a larger share of population, which would decrease social dissatisfaction and diminish the social base of pro-Iranian elements. Moreover, political

pluralism, a vibrant civil society and active party politics may further diminish the role of IPA and any other pro-Iranian political party. Today, IPA capitalizes on certain protest elements and the image of "fighter with regime". With most of its leadership in jail, the party still holds strong positions and become even stronger due to its active usage of social media. If this party becomes involved in politics, it could be marginalized political party into political life may marginalize it or transform into a mainstream party. Meanwhile, the authorities hope that a national version of Islam will emerge, erasing the already weak borders between Sunnism and Shiism. This would be a victory for the government.

Conclusion and recommendation

Iranian soft power in Azerbaijan may take various forms and can lead in different directions. Taken into consideration the recent softening of pressure on Iran, Tehran may limit its soft power toward Azerbaijan and began full fledged neighborly cooperation. Once Iran feels secure enough and does not perceive a threat from Azerbaijan, Iranian actions to expand its soft power should slowly decrease. Nevertheless, there are many other possible outcomes. Azerbaijani authorities and various agencies understand that due to the nature of Iranian regime, Tehran capitalizes on Azerbaijan's vulnerability. The government would have to gradually diminish the influence of radical ideologies through tight control over foreign missionary work and initiate a Sunni-Shia dialogue to reduce

sectarian tensions in society. A national public debate involving independent and official clerics, scholars and NGOs would then need to be organized to effectively guarantee religious freedom. Independent religious communities, in particular Salafi groups, would also need to clearly warn their members of risks connected to terrorism and militants and engage in genuine dialogue with official clergy and Azerbaijani authorities. Surprisingly, the source of Iranian soft power depends on Azerbaijan itself. Iranian soft power will grow if Azerbaijani statehood becomes weaker and the country begins to experience economic problems. The future of Iranian soft power, strangely enough, is the result of Azerbaijan's politics inside the country.

ABOUT AUTHORS

Fuad Aliyev studied at Azerbaijan State Economic University, the Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan and Central European University (Budapest, Hungary). He is currently an adjunct professor at ADA University, Khazar University and Azerbaijan University in Baku. His fields of expertise are Islam in post-Soviet countries and Islamic political economy. Fuad Aliyev was the 2011-2012 Fulbright Scholar at the John Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies' Central Asia-Caucasus Institute. He was also a Hubert Humphrey fellow in 2005-2006 and was affiliated with the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill as well as the Brookings Institution. Fuad Aliyev is the author of several publications on Islamic economics and finance, political economy of transition and Islamic activism in Azerbaijan and abroad.

Eiki Berg is a professor of International Relations at the University of Tartu. His research has focused on critical geopolitics and particularly the studies of borders and border regions. Among his recent research activities, most prominent have been studies about territoriality and sovereignty issues in contested states. He has published widely in leading peer-reviewed journals on bordering practices, identity politics and power-sharing in post-conflict settings. He is co-editor of *Routing Borders Between Territories, Discourses and Practices* (Ashgate 2003) and *Identity and Foreign Policy: Baltic-Russian Relations and European Integration* (Ashgate 2009). During the years of 2003-2004 he served as an MP in the Estonian Parliament and observer to the European Parliament in the EPP-ED faction, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Human Rights, Common Security and Defence Policy. In 2012, he received a National Science Award in the field of Social Sciences for his research on 'Identities, Conflicting Self-Determination and De Facto States'.

Lia Evoyan holds a PhD in World Histo-

ry and International Relations. She obtained her BA and MA from the Turkish studies department at Yerevan State University. Evoyan specializes in Turkey-Azerbaijan political relations and has more than ten academic publications. She has more than five years of extensive academic research experience in both local and international environments. Currently, Evoyan is employed as an officer in the International Relations Office at Yerevan State University. She is fluent in Armenian, Russian, English and Turkish.

Mariam Gabedava is a researcher with the Georgian Institute of Politics. Mariam obtained her Master of Public Policy from the Hertie School of Governance (Berlin, Germany) and her MA in political science from Central European University (Budapest, Hungary). She also holds a BA in international relations from Tbilisi State University (Georgia). Mariam has worked in Georgian civil service and civil society organizations. Her research interests include corruption and corruption control, minority policy and religion.

Ansgar Jödicke is a senior lecturer at the University of Fribourg (Department of Social Sciences). His areas of research are religion and politics, in particular political religious education (politics) in Europe and the relationship between religion and politics in the South Caucasus. Together with Alexander Agadjanian and Evert van der Zweerde, he recently edited the volume *Religion, Nation and Democracy in the South Caucasus* (Routledge 2015). Ansgar Jödicke has coordinated several research projects in the South Caucasus and in Switzerland. Among them, the SCOPES project 'Religion and Soft Power. Religious Communities in the South Caucasus as Objects of External Influences' (2014-2017) led to the results published in this volume.

Kornely Kakachia is a professor of Political Science at Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi

State University, Georgia, and Director of Tbilisi based think tank Georgian Institute of Politics. His current research focuses on Georgian domestic and foreign policy, security issues of the wider Black Sea area and comparative party politics. He was a recipient of IREX and OSI fellowships and was a visiting fellow at Harvard University's Black Sea Security program, (2009– 2010) Harriman Institute, Columbia University (2011) and The Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies. He is the co-editor of *Georgian Foreign Policy: The Quest for Sustainable Security* (2014).

Alar Kilp has been a lecturer in Comparative Politics at the University of Tartu since 2004. His research specializes in religion and politics as well as church-state relations in post-communist Europe. He obtained his Ph.D. in political science at Tartu in 2012 with a dissertation titled *Church Authority in Society, Culture and Politics after Communism*. He has co-edited a special issue on 'Religion, the Russian Nation and the State: Domestic and International Dimensions' (*Religion, State and Society* 2013) and published articles in *Religion, State and Society*, *Studies in Church History* and *Proceedings of Estonian National Defence College*. His recent papers on religious nationalism and legal regulation of same-sex relations have appeared in volumes published by Brill.

Andrey Makarychev is a guest professor at the Johan Skytte Institute of Political Science at the University of Tartu, Estonia. His areas of expertise are Russia-EU relations, post-Soviet countries, issues of biopolitics and mega-events in Eastern Europe and Eurasia. His record of previous institutional affiliations includes George Mason University (Fairfax, VA), the Center for Conflict Studies (ETH Zurich), the Danish Institute of International Studies (DIIS) and Nizhny Novgorod Linguistic University. He is a co-editor of the book *Changing Political and Economic Regimes in Russia* (Routledge,

2013), and author of numerous articles published by *Global Governance*, *International Spectator*, *European Regional and Urban Studies*, *Problems of Post-Communism*, *Demokratizatsiya*, *Journal of International Relations and Development*, *Cooperation and Conflict*, *Europe-Asia Studies*, *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, *Turkish Foreign Policy Review*, *Weltrends* and other international journals, as well as book chapters in edited volumes published by Ashgate, Palgrave Macmillan, Nomos, etc.

Tatevik Manukyan is a research fellow at the Armenian National Academy of Sciences, specializing in the Kurdish issue in the Middle East. She teaches in the Chair of Turkish Studies of the Faculty of Oriental Studies at Yerevan State University and in the Oriental Studies Department of the International Scientific Educational Centre of the NAS RA. Manukyan is the author of more than ten scientific texts regarding the historical background, formation and development of the Kurdish conflict in the Middle East; Kurdish policy in Turkey; the Kurdish elements in Azerbaijan; etc.

Salome Minesashvili is a doctoral student at the Berlin Graduate School for Transnational Studies at the Free University of Berlin. She received master's degrees in international Political Theory from the University of Edinburgh and in Transformation in the South Caucasus from Iv. Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University. For her dissertation, Salome is working on national identity change contextualized in similar foreign policies of Georgia and Ukraine. Her research interests include international relations theories, foreign policy analysis and transformation processes in the former Soviet Union.

Tatevik Mkrtchyan is a PhD student and junior researcher at the Centre for Civilization and Cultural Studies (Yerevan State University). She was a lecturer in Arabic language at Yerevan Brusov State University

of Languages and Social Sciences, Armenia (2011-2014). Her PhD thesis focuses on Shi'a religious doctrine and discourse in the Nahj al-Balagha. Her field is Arabic and Islamic Studies, with her most recent research interests being the Shi'a religious political governmental system of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Iran's relations with the South Caucasus.

Vahram Ter-Matevosyan is the head of the Turkish Studies Department at the Institute for Oriental Studies of the National Academy of Sciences of Armenia, and assistant professor at the Department of Political Science and International Affairs at the American University of Armenia. He holds postgraduate and graduate degrees from Bergen University (Norway), Lund University (Sweden), the Institute of Oriental Studies (Armenia). He was a Fulbright Scholar at the University of California, Berkeley, and a visiting professor at Duke University, NC. His main research interests include political Islam, Kemalism and Turkish domestic and foreign policy issues as well as regional security problems. His previous work has been published in *Turkish Studies*, *Middle East Studies*, *Insight Turkey*, *Journal of Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, *Iran and the Caucasus*, *Études Arméniennes Contemporaines*, *Turkish Review*, *Caucasus Analytical Digest* and *Contemporary Eurasia*. He authored the award-winning monograph *Islam in the Social and Political Life of Turkey* in 2008 and co-authored *History of Turkish Republic* in 2014.

Koba Turmanidze is the director of CRRC-Georgia, a non-profit research organization. Koba earned a Master of Public Administration from American University (Washington, DC) and an MA in political science from Central European University (Budapest, Hungary). He also holds a diploma in history from Tbilisi State University.

Currently, Koba is a doctoral candidate in comparative politics at Central European University. Before joining CRRC-Georgia, Koba worked in several civil society organizations, as well as in civil service. His research interests include authoritarianism, regime change and voting behaviour.

Anar Valiyev is an assistant professor at ADA University in Baku. He received his bachelor's (1999) and master's (2001) degrees in history from Baku State University. From 2001 to 2003 he studied public policy at the School of Public and Environmental Affairs at Indiana University in Bloomington, where he received his second master's degree. In 2007 he successfully defended his dissertation at the Department of Urban and Public Affairs of the University of Louisville, KY. From 2007 to 2008 he was working as an assistant professor at the Faculty of Social Studies of Masaryk University in Brno, Czech Republic. Dr. Valiyev is the author of numerous peer-reviewed articles and encyclopaedia entries. His areas of expertise are democracy and governance, public policy of post-Soviet republics and urban development and planning.

Alexandra Yatsyk is a visiting researcher at the Centre for Russian and Eurasian Studies of Uppsala University in Sweden and the director of the Center for Cultural Studies of Postsocialism at Kazan Federal University in Russia. She is an author and editor of works on post-Soviet nation building, sports and cultural mega-events, biopolitics and art, including *Celebrating Borderlands in a Wider Europe: Nation and Identities in Ukraine, Georgia and Estonia* (Nomos, 2016), *Mega-Events in Post-Soviet Eurasia: Shifting Borderlines of Inclusion and Exclusion* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), *New and Old Vocabularies of International Relations After the Ukraine Crisis* (Routledge, 2016) and others.



September 2017: 234x156: 272pp

Hb: 978-1-138-63461-9 | £105.00
eBook: 978-1-315-20672-1

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

Religion and Soft Power in the South Caucasus: An Introduction; *Ansgar Jödicke*; Part I: The Case of Georgia Chapter 1: Turkish Soft Power Politics in Georgia: Making Sense of Political and Cultural Implications; *Vahram Ter-Matevosyan* Chapter 2: Common Faith in Scrutiny: Orthodoxy as Soft Power in Russia-Georgia Relations; *Salome Minesashvili* Chapter 3: Iran's Soft Power Policy in Georgia; *Mariam Gabedava* and *Koba Turmanidze*; Part II: The Case of Azerbaijan Chapter 4: Iranian Soft Power in Azerbaijan—Does Religion Matter?; *Anar Valiyev* Chapter 5: Examining Salafism in Azerbaijan: Transnational Connections and Local Context; *Kamal Gasimov* Chapter 6: Islam and Turkey's Soft Power in Azerbaijan: the Gülen Movement; *Fuad Aliyev*; Part III: The Case of Armenia Chapter 7: Religion as a Factor in Kurdish Identity Discourse in Armenia and Turkey; *Lia Evoyan* and *Tatevik Manukyan*; Chapter 8: Iran's Soft Power Policy in Armenia: Cultural Diplomacy and Religion; *Tatevik Mkrtchyan*; Part IV: The EU – Russia Framework Chapter 9: Face to Face with Conservative Religious Values: Assessing the EU's Normative Impact in the South Caucasus; *Eiki Berg* and *Alar Kilp*; Chapter 10: Russia as a Counter-Normative Soft Power: Between Ideology and Policy; *Andrey Makarychev* and *Alexandra Yatsyk*; Part V: Prospects Chapter 11: Prospects for Thinking Soft Power beyond Joseph Nye; *Andrey Makarychev*;

Soon to be released!

Religion and Soft Power in the South Caucasus

Edited by **Ansgar Jödicke**, University of Fribourg,
Switzerland

Series: Routledge Studies in Religion and Politics

By exploring the role of religion in transnational relations between Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and their surrounding neighbours, this volume helps explain how transnational religious and political relationships intermingle in the South Caucasus. The concept of 'soft power' is the heuristic starting point of this investigation to define the importance of religion in the region. Drawing on a prestigious three year project supported by the Swiss National Foundation the book brings together academics from the South Caucasus and Western Europe to offer original empirical research and contributions from experienced researchers in political science, history, and oriental studies.

Hb: 978-1-138-63461-9 | £105.00

For more details, or to request a copy for review, please contact: Robyn Doyle, Author Marketing & Communications, Robyn.Doyle@tandf.co.uk

ISBN 978-9941-449-73-4



9 789941 449734