Regarding ethno linguistic composition, the Caucasus region is one of the most complex regions of Eurasia. There are three language families, that can only be found in this region, and are not related to any other language families: South Caucasian, with Georgian as its most well known language, Northwest Caucasian, that includes Circassian and Abkhaz, and Northeast Caucasian with Chechen as its most well known member. Besides these, several members of the Altaic and Indo-European families are also present in the region. From the Altaic family we could mention Turkic languages in the south (Azeri) and in the north (Karachai, Balkar, Kumyk) of the region as well. From the Indo-European family, Armenian forms a branch on its own within it, and two Iranian languages, Kurdish and Ossetian is also present. The region can also be a subject of interest in Huntingtonian terms, since Christian and Muslim ethnic groups are located mutually surrounding each other, as the black and white checks of a chessboard. Most groups of the South Caucasian language family, as well as the Armenians and Ossetians are Christians, while most of the Northwest Caucasian, the Northeast Caucasian and Turkic groups are Muslims, as well as the Kurds.

The region can be a subject of special interest due this complexity. It is a question though, whether we can regard it as part of Southeast Europe. If we try to define Southeast Europe as a region formed by common historical and cultural heritage, then it can be viewed as part of Southeast Europe. The Christian Byzantine Empire, and the Muslim Ottoman Empire played a key role in the history and cultural evolution of the region, as much as they did in case of the Balkans. While the Balkans was the western, the Caucasus region was the eastern frontier of these empires. In the 19th and early 20th centuries one more common feature was that both cases became a battleground between the Russian and the Ottoman empires, where most Christian ethnic groups aligned themselves with Russia, and most Muslim ethnic groups with the Ottoman Empire in both of these regions.

The Caucasus region has witnessed three dramatic events of ethnic cleansing and genocide between 1860 and 1960. First of these was committed by a Christian power against a Muslim ethnic group, the second one by a Muslim power against a Christian ethnic group, and the third one by a Communist regime against a group of its Muslim subjects.

In the first case, the armed forces of expanding imperial Russia literally erased old Circassia, what has previously been a demographic entity equal to Georgia. The region has been populated by Russian settlers thereafter.

In the second case the Ottoman Empire has erased about three quarters of the historical Armenian homeland a similar way. Most of this territory is populated by Kurds now.

In the third case, Stalinist Soviet authorities have deported several ethnic groups from the North Caucasus to Central Asia. During the deportations large numbers of these people died due to starvation, cold and atrocities. After a few decades they were allowed to return to their homelands, but the after effects of the trauma still cause political tensions today.

As in other parts of Southeast Europe, these 19th-20th century traumas are determining interethnic tensions of our days.

Key words: language families; Christianity and Islam; ethnic cleansing, genocide, deportation, Circassians; Armenians; Russian Empire; Ottoman Empire.

Map no. 1. Ethnic groups of the Caucasus today. Source of the map

1 http://www.grid.unep.ch/product/publication/CEO-for-Internet/CEO/images/ethnic.jpg
Before discussing specific cases, it is worth to get a short overview on linguistic and religious links in the region. The region is home of three unique language families, being present only here, and nowhere else in the world. These are the South Caucasian (or Kartvelian), the Northwest Caucasian (or Abkhazian-Adigei), and the Northeast Caucasian (Nakhian-Dagestani) families. They were viewed as a single Caucasian family until recently by many (as visible on Map no.1) but later analyses proved them to be three distinct families, basically unrelated even to each other. Besides these three families, the Armenian and Iranian branches of the Indo-European language family are also represented by indigenous groups, and several Turkic groups are present as well. The most significant members of the Northwest Caucasian family are the Abkhaz recently well known for their conflict with Georgia, and the Circassians on the Northwest environs of the Caucasus. The Circassians themselves can be divided to several smaller groups. The most significantly separate group are the Kabardians, living further east from the others, north of the middle section of the Caucasus range. Besides their geographic location, in the last couple of hundred years, the Kabardians have been distanced from Circassians further to the west mostly by political issues, such as a more cooperative attitude towards imperial Russia, and a stronger influence of Christianity. A common overall name for the rest of the Circassians, living further to the west is „Adygei”, but this group itself can be divided to further subgroups as well, such as the shapshug, the ubykh and the abaza. Since the term „Adygei” can in include different number of Circassian groups, (for example, today the Cicasians of the Karachai-Cherkes Republic and the abazas are often not included) to avoid conclusion, in this paper the term „Adygei-Circassians” will be used for all non-Kabardian Circassians. For many centuries, the Circassians have inhabited an extended region, but due to ethnic cleansings by the imperial Russian army in the 1860s, except for the Kabardians, they are little more than a Diaspora now, scattered among the descendants of 19th century Russian settlers.

2 Northwest Caucasian Languages
3 Shenfield – Who are (or were) the Circassians
4 Ibid.
The Northeast Caucasian family is located on the eastern section of the northern slopes of the Caucasus. It includes to distinct groups, the Nakh and the Dagestani languages. Nakh includes the Chechen and Ingush languages, while the Dagestani group includes dozens of small languages spoken in the republic of Dagestan.  

For a couple of centuries now, between the Northwest Caucasian and Northeast Caucasian groups, one Iranian and two Turkic groups have inhabited the middle section of the northern Caucasus. The Turkic Krachais and Balkars living more to the west, in the mountains southeast from the Circassians, while the Ossetians living on their east, between them and the Nakh groups. All three groups are the descendants of medieval steppe nomads, the Ossetians are supposed to be the descendants of the Alanians, while the Karachais and Balkars are that of the Qipchaks.

Historical sources suggest, that the range of the Northeast Caucasian languages already significantly shrunk by the Middle Ages. Before the Karachais, the Balkars, and the Ossetians have appeared in the middle section of the Caucasus, and assimilated the indigenous population they found there, these regions were also likely to be areas of the Nakh languages. In medieval sources, out of these two vanished Nakh ethnic groups, the one that inhabited present day Ossetia before the arrival of the Ossetians was known as „Dval”. The range of Northeast Caucasian languages also covered areas in present day Northeast Georgia.

The last remnant of this group in Georgia are the Bats today. While Nakh languages used to cover present day Ossetia, Northeast Georgia, the Karachai and the Balkar areas, the Dagestani group used to extend far to the south, covering the Northern half of what is now Azerbaijan, down to the Kura and Arax rivers. The ancient kingdom of the Dagestani group inhabiting this area was known as Caucasian Albania, and its language as Caucasian Albanian. Its speakers are likely to be assimilated by the Turkic Azeris in the beginning of the Seljuk period.

Besides the Karachai and the Balkar, two other Turkic speaking ethnic groups are native to the North Caucasus. One of those are the Kumyks, inhabiting the Caspian coastal regions of Dagestani, while the other group are the Nogais, who were before the Russian conquest dominant on the Steppes north of the Caucasus, but are only sporadically present these days.

Out of the South Caucasian family, the best known and perhaps the most important language is Georgian. Since Georgia has a long history of statehood of more than a millennia, today several linguistically distinct languages of the South Caucasian family are today mostly viewed as mere dialects of Georgian. Among these, we could mention the Svan languages of the mountainous regions of Northwest Georgia, or the Mingrelian of lowland West Georgia. The South Caucasian family also includes the Laz language, outside the boundaries of medieval Geogria, in the region of ancient Pontos, along the Black Sea coasts of present day Turkey.

South of Georgia, we can mention three most important ethnic groups that have played a crucial role in the history of the region: the Armenians, the Azeris, and the Kurds. Azeri language belongs to the Turkic languages, Kurdish is Iranian, and Armenians form a group on their own within the Indo-European family.

Out of the ethnic groups of te region, those that belong to Christianity are speakers of most of the South Caucasian languages (except for the Laz), as well as the Armenians and the Ossetians. Almost all the other groups mentioned here, follow Islam. Among the Muslim groups, significant Christian minorities are present among the Kabards and the Abkhaz, while among the Christians groups, a significant Muslim minority is present among the Abkhaz, and a small group of Georgians is also Muslim, known as the Ajars.

During the last millennia, it was much more sectarian orientation than linguistic ties becoming the primary factor determining the role of these small ethnic groups in great-power games in the region. Christian groups usually sided with Christian powers (the Byzantine Empire at first, and Russia later) while Muslim groups with Muslim powers (the Persian and Ottoman empires). This way, the same great power that was an apocalyptic enemy for one group, became an ally to rely on for the other. We can mention the strange parallels between the fate of the Armenians and Circassians. For Muslim Circassians, the Ottoman Empire was their last hope, and Christian Russia was the power exterminating them, while for Armenians, Christian Russia was their last hope, and the Muslim Ottoman Empire was the power exterminating them.

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5 Northeast Caucasian Languages
6 http://www.ethnologue.com/show_family.asp?subid=10-16
7 Jaimoukha, pp. 29.-39.
8 http://www.eki.ee/books/redbook/bats.shtml
9 Alexidze
10 http://www.ethnologue.com/show_family.asp?subid=48-16
11 http://www.ethnologue.com/show_family.asp?subid=1194-16
12 http://www.ethnologue.com/show_family.asp?subid=48-16
According to linguistic and religious ties, we can sort the ethnic groups of the region the way shown in the table below:

**Table no. 1. Linguistic and religious ties of ethnic groups in the region:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>South Caucasian</th>
<th>Northeast Caucasians</th>
<th>Northwest Caucasian</th>
<th>Indo-European</th>
<th>Altaic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dagestani</td>
<td>Nakh</td>
<td>(a minority of Kabards and Abkhaz)</td>
<td>Ossetians</td>
<td>Armenian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Georgians</td>
<td>Bats</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>Laz, Ajars.</td>
<td>All of the Dagestani groups</td>
<td>Kurdsa (and a small part of Ossetians)</td>
<td>Karachai, Balkar Kumyk, Nogai, Azeri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chechens, Ingush</td>
<td>Circassians, Kabards, Abkhaz</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Background**

Regarding its history and culture, the Caucasus region has been under the influence of three neighboring regions. Anatolia in the Southwest, the Iranian Plateau in the Southeast, and the Eurasian Steppe in the North. In most historical periods, each of these was home to a different culture, and the impact of these cultures determined the character of the Caucasus region. From this point of view, it is very interesting, that out of these three regions, two of them experienced a change in their own cultural character during early modern times. In the Eurasian steppe, the Slavic speaking Christian Russian Empire replaced the Turkic speaking Muslim Tatar Khanates in the 16th century, while in Anatolia the Turkic speaking Muslim Ottoman Empire replaced the Greek speaking Christian Byzantines in the 14th century.13

This meant a complete shift in external cultural and political influences on the Caucasus. While before these shift, Christian entities, such as Georgia and Armenia could expect support from Anatolia and hostility from the Steppes, after the shift, it became the other way around. The Christians of the Caucasus, who were in intensive interaction with Europe during Byzantine times, became isolated from Europe, surrounded by Muslims from all sides, and Russia became the only Christian power, on which they could rely in this situation. On the other hand, the shift resulted in similar consequences for the Muslims of the North Caucasus. After Christian Russian replaced the Muslim Tatar Khanates on the Steppes, they got stacked between Christian Russians in the north, and Christian Georgians in the south. This situation became fatally hopeless for the Circassians by the 19th century, after the Russian conquest of Georgia and Ossetia, and the elimination of the Crimean Khanate. This left them completely surrounded by Russian ruled Christians, and led to their catastrophe in the 1860s. Among Christians, the situation of Armenians became equally hopeless. By the beginning of the 20th century, they formed a network of Christian pockets surrounded by Muslim Turks, Kurds, and Azeris from all sides, a situation leading to the Armenian Genocide in 1915.

Today, for most people the expression “Caucasus Region” is equivalent for Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. This image is somewhat false, however, these three countries as a single group are more the result of 19th-20th century events, than a true historical category.

Present day Armenia and Azerbaijan only cover minor parts of the areas historically populated by Armenians and Azeris. As we will be able to see, the larger half of old Armenia now belongs to Turkey, while even today, the Azeri population in Iran is at least twice the size of the total population of Azerbaijan.14 Present day Armenia and Azerbaijan are separated from their related regions by borders drawn in the 19th century, as borders between the expanding Russian empire with Ottoman Turkey and Persia. Therefore, the present day Azerbaijan-Iranian and Armenian-Turkish borders are not significant historical, cultural, or geographical dividing lines, just mark the limits 19th century Russian expansion. The reason why despite this fact, still these are the present borders of independent Armenia and Azerbaijan is that while the turning points of history enabled the Armenian and Azeri communities of imperial Russia to achieve independent

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13 Ostrogorsky pp. 455.
14 http://www.ethnologue.com/show_language.asp?code=azb
statehood, the Azeri population of Iran, and especially the Armenian population of Turkey were not that lucky. The areas historically known as Armenia and Azerbaijan extend deep into present day Turkey and present day Iran.

Regarding these circumstances, it is doubt if we can view them as historically part of the Caucasus region. Before the Russian conquest, historical Azerbaijan was integral part of the Persian Empire, with closer cultural and religious ties to rest of the Iranian plateau, than to the narrower Caucasus region. At the same time, as late as the early 20th century, Armenian population has lived scattered throughout vast areas of what is now eastern Turkey, mixed among Turks and Kurds, with a culture that had more to do with Anatolia, than with the Caucasus Mountains.

On the northern slopes of the Caucasus we can find a region also with unique cultural patterns and a unique historical experience on its own. This region, the Northern Caucasus is now entirely part of Russia, and is outside the borders of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. Historically, however, this is the area that has mostly been referred to as the “Caucasus Region”. This area is marked by the presence of several small ethnic groups, and political units. Until the mid 19th century, the Circassians covered most of the western half of this region, forming an ethno cultural, linguistic and demographic unit, that was in size equal with Georgia, therefore if survived it could likely have become a fourth Caucasian country, equal with Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. Old Circassia however, has been virtually eliminated by the brutal actions of the imperial Russian army. The ethnic groups of the Northern Caucasus with deep warrior traditions have fiercely resisted any great power that tried to conquer the region, no matter if it was Persia, Byzantium, the Mongolian Empire, the Ottoman Empire, or Russia. As a consequence, in this region, politically clan system remained dominant well until the 20th century. While in the south, the Armenians and Azeris were for centuries integral parts of the Ottoman and Persian empires sharing a similar history with the Kurds, the North Caucasian groups have become neighbors of Russia as early as the 16th century. Perhaps an even more important factor was their neighborhood with the Turkic nomads of the Steppe for more than a millennium. Between the Northern Caucasus, and the southern Armenian-Azeri-Kurdish regions, lies Georgia. Not only its geographical location, but also its historical and cultural heritage places it between those two significantly different regions described above. It had close cultural and economic ties as well as intensive political interaction with the Byzantine, Persian, and Ottoman empires, but in contrary to the Armenians, Azeris, and Kurds, it more or less managed to preserve its own statehood until the Russian conquest. It had a strong tradition of independence and military values, similar to the North Caucasian groups, but in contrary with the clan system of those, it managed to acquire and maintain a well organized statehood since antiquity, with an established church, and a standardized literal language.

The three regions described above meant three different way of historical evolution. Throughout the last millennia, historical Armenia as well as Azerbaijan and Kurdistan were integral parts of the Byzantine, Seljuk, Ottoman, and Persian empires, mostly without statehood. Georgia has successfully maintained its statehood, although several times it temporarily broke up into smaller principalities or became Byzantine, Ottoman, or Persian vassal. Ethnic groups in the North Caucasus maintained their independence for most of the time, but without an institutional statehood, living mostly in clan systems.

I. Russian conquest of the North Caucasus, and the Circassian genocide

**Russian conquest of the Caucasus**

The Russian conquest of the region has occurred in several stages. The chapter below is trying to give a short overview on this.

Elimination of the Tatar Khanates, and foundation of Russian fortresses along the foothills of the Northern Caucasus

The Russian empire has conquered the Tatar Khanates along the river Volga during the mid 16th century, reaching the foothills of the Caucasus. For the next two hundred years, the Manich, the Yegorlik, and the Terek rivers became the southern boundary of Russian control in the region. This meant that Russian conquest has reached the foothills of the Caucasus, but did not enter the mountainous area, and the Northern Caucasian clans managed to maintain their independence at this stage. The first group of Russian settlers

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15 “The statehood of Armenia ceased to exist in the heartland in the 11th century. There did exist however an Armenian state in Cilicia beside the Mediterranean Sea until 1375, but that is not part of the Armenian heartland.”

16 Periodical Historical Atlas of Europe

17 Smith pp. 36-38.
were the Terek Cossacks. For the next two centuries, the Crimean Khanate became the main barrier against further southern Russian expansion. In contrary to the Kazan and Astrakhan Khanates along river Volga, the Crimean Khanate was close enough to the Black sea to acquire an Ottoman military umbrella, and this way avoid early Russian conquest.\(^\text{18}\)

This country formed a significant strategic barrier. Until the conquest of the Crimean Khanate, Russia did not have an exit to the Black sea, and this way, the Black Sea formed a “Turkish lake”. Due to this, Russian conquest could not make a use of maritime Black sea routes, while the Ottomans could use the sea to supply their Circassian allies in the Caucasus. The eastern part of the Crimean Khanate, the “Kuban Steppe” between the Manich, the Yegorlik, and the Kuban rivers, has literally formed a geographical barrier between Russian and Adygei-Circassia.\(^\text{19}\)

Russian expansion started again only after the elimination of the Crimean Khanate at the end of the 18\(^{th}\) century. The southern limit of Russian rule has remained the Terek river in the east, instead of the Manich-Yegorlik line, it was now the Kuban river in the west. From this time on, Russia could also use the Black sea for its expansion efforts. The North Caucasian clans were still independent from Russia, but their geo strategic positions became far more vulnerable. In the newly acquired Kuban steppe, Russian administration has largely replaced the native Nogai population with a new group of Russian settlers, the Kuban Cossacks.\(^\text{20}\)

Due to the circumstances described above, until the beginning of the 19\(^{th}\) century the Russians did not take serious efforts to pull the North Caucasian mountaineers under direct control. On the other hand however, this meant an often troublesome neighborhood between the mountaineers and the Russian Empire, with a boundary running along the above mentioned Terek and Kuban rivers. Along this line, the Russians had different relationship with different North Caucasian groups. Those groups, that were living on the western and eastern sections of the mountain range, close to the Black sea or the Caspian sea, and consequently close to Ottoman or Persian supplies, showed a fierce resistance. These were the Adygei-Circassians in the west, near the black sea, and the Dagestanis and Chechens in the east, near Persia.

Between the two edges, groups living in the middle section of the mountain range, thus further away from Ottoman or Persian influence, and stacked between Christian Russia in the north and Christian Georgia in the south, chose a more cooperative approach in their dealings with the Russians, and stepped on a path of what we could call “Finlandization” from the late 16\(^{th}\) century. Especially the Ossetians and the Kabardians followed this policy.\(^\text{21}\) Finally, Kabardians became officially vassals of the Russians in 1761, and the Russian fortress, “Vladikavkaz” was built on Ossetian territory in 1784.\(^\text{22}\)

After the elimination of the Crimean Khanate, (and putting Russian military presence to Ossetia) the next stage of the conquest was the acquisition of Georgia in 1801, what resulted in Russian troops right in the heartland of the Caucasus region. Christian Georgia in the southern side of the Caucasus, surrounded by Muslims from all sides, has repeatedly asked for Russian help in the previous decades, since Russia was the only fellow Christian power within its vicinity. In 1801, after a Persian army has sacked their capital, Tbilisi, the Georgian political elite decided that their situation is so serious, that a mere alliance with Russia is not enough against the Muslim threat. Consequently they made a decision, that voluntarily subjugation to Russia, a Christian empire, is the lesser evil compared to being subjugated by one of their two Muslim neighbors, either Ottoman Turkey, or Persia. The Russian army moved in via recently acquired Ossetia. The Georgian political elite was divided on this desperate decision, but those who objected, were quickly silenced by the arriving Russian military.\(^\text{23}\) By this step, Russia acquired a new procession lying one hundred kilometers south of its previous boundary, surrounded by hostile polities from all sides. Also the hostile North Caucasian tribes were located between Russia and newly acquired Georgia. Ossetia was the strip of land that attached Georgia to the Russian empire, and provided supply and communication lines through the otherwise hostile Northern Caucasus.

This new situation has mixed up the geostrategic balance of the region. Until the acquisition of Georgia, the Kuban-Terek line formed a clear, easily defendable southern boundary of Russia. Georgia however, as a Russian procession surrounded by hostile polities, and attached to Russia only by a narrow strip of land in Ossetia, has put the Russians to two choices: If they maintain the Kuban-Terek line, Georgia will soon collapse, if they make efforts to keep Georgia, that will only be possible through further conquest. The
Russians, already in a historical period of imperial expansion- obviously chose the latter, and used Georgia as a base for further conquests in the region.

Russian relations with Ottoman Turkey, Persia, and the Muslim North Caucasian tribes were already hostile before the acquisition of Georgia. After the Georgian conquest, these relations turned into a series of extremely bloody wars, lasting for several decades.

Map no. 2. The Northwest and Northeast Caucasian heartlands of resistance against Russia (shown in yellow) surrounded by Russian possession (shown in pink) in the mid 19th century. (Due to some reason, this map shows the entire resisting area under the name “Circassia”, including even the Chechen and Ingush lands.)

At first, Russia insured its new procession against its more dangerous foes, Ottoman Turkey and Persia. After the Russo-Persian war of 1804-1813, in the treaty of Gulistan, Russia acquired from Iran all what is now Azerbaijan. Besides the already existing mountainous route through Ossetia, this way a maritime route was opened up to the new Russian processions through the Caspian Sea and the port of Baku. The Russian acquisition of Azerbaijan also cut the Muslim Chechens and the Dagestanis away from Persian supplies, and made them surrounded by the possessions of hostile Christian Russia. In 1810, Russia acquired the Turkish Vassal Georgian kingdom of Imereti, what covered the western half of Georgia on the Black sea coast. The conquest of Imereti had the same results in the west as the conquest of Azerbaijan in the east. It opened up a sea rout from Russia to Georgia, and it isolated Muslim Circassians of the Northwest Caucasus from Ottoman supplies. The Russian conquests of Azerbaijan and Imereti has reverted the strategic situation. So far Christian Georgia was a besieged land surrounded by Muslim polities. From now on, it became part of a Russian ring around the Northern Caucasus, and the Muslim North Caucasian mountaineers became

24 www.adygaunion.com
25 Történelmi Világatlasz pp. 52
besieged polities, surrounded by Russian possessions. After this stage, it become unavoidable –unless if Russia loses all its Georgian and Azerbaijani possessions- that the Russians will sooner or later conquer the surrounded North Caucasian Muslim polities.

The question was only when and how. The answer to “when?” became the mind 19th century, and the answer to “how?” became a relatively usual conquest for the Chechens and the Dagestanis, but became a genocide for the Circassians, in which Circassia as it has been known for the previous centuries, simply ceased to exist.

In these wars, the two cores of resistance were Adygei-Circassia in the west, and Chechenia and Dagestan in the east. Between these two areas, Ossetia and Kabarda showed more willingness to subjugate to Russia. Therefore, we can talk about two resisting enclaves, one in the west, and one in the east. In the east, the Dagestani and Chechen resistance was led by the famous Imam Shamil, and his final defeat occurred in 1859. Here, although atrocities did happen, and a large portion of the population did fled, the Russian administration was basically satisfied with subjugation, and did not aim extermination. The Russian attitude became different for Circassia however, the western enclave of resistance, where fighting continued throughout the first half of the 1860s.26

The Circassian genocide

As it has been mentioned above, as recently as the mid 19th century, the Circassian ethno cultural area had such a significance, that had it survived, today it may be a fourth independent Caucasian country along with Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, equal to the other three. Old Circassia lied between Georgia in the south, Ossetia in the east, and the Kuban River in the north. In the west, Circassia extended as far as the Strait of Kerch. This area, especially its coastal parts along the Black Sea is the rainiest part of the Caucasus region, therefore suitable for agriculture. Today cities such as Krasnodar, Sochi, Tuapse, and Novorossiysk are located in what was Circassia.

In the second half of the 19th century, the Russian army has executed something that we can call nothing but an act of ethnic cleansing on such a scale, that many view it today as one of the forgotten genocides of history. The emptied territory was populated by Russian settlers thereafter, and the remnants of the Adygei-Circassian population can now be found in scattered pockets among them, especially in the Karachai-Cherkes Republic, the Adygei Republic, and around the city of Tuapse. The Kabardians whoever, who are viewed by some as part of the Circassian people, and viewed as a separate ethnic group by others, managed to avoid this fate by subjugating earlier to the Russian conquest, and still form a majority in the Kabard-Balkar Republic.

The military campaign that ended in the Circassian genocide, has occurred in 1860-1864, under the leadership of general Yevdokimov. After the Crimean war, when the Ottomans gave up all claims for the Northern Caucasus, the Russian leadership has decided to solve the Circassian question through forced resettlement. They gave the choice to the Circassian clans, to resettle to enclaves on the Kuban plains patrolled by the Russian military, or to resettle to the Ottoman Empire. Most of them chose either flight to the Ottoman Empire, or resistance, fighting literally until the last man. In the first year of the campaign, from the northern borderlands of Circassia along the Kuban River, four thousand families chose to move to Ottoman Turkey, the tribes of the mountainous interior chose resistance however. This time however, after the Crimean war, Ottoman Turkey did not provide the support it used to give before. Before the final clash, the Circassian leaders made a last attempt to resolve the conflict without the breakup of the Circassian ethno cultural area. In the fall of 1861, their delegation personally met Tsar Alexander II. in Yekaterinodar. They gave him an offer that Circassians are ready to subjugate to Russia, with the condition to let the existing Circassian villages and settlements continue to exist, and the withdrawal of Russian military units and Cossacks back to the northern banks of the rivers Kuban and Laba.

The Tsar refused the offer, and stuck on the previous Russian conditions: The Circassians either subjugate themselves to resettlement carried out by the Russian military within the empire, or they have to leave the empire, and that there is no third choice.

Map no. 3. Old Circassia27

26 Smith 48.-50.
27 http://www.gfbv.de/uploads/inhaltsDok/teaser_bild/1890.jpg
After negotiations in Yekaterinoder failed, the end became unavoidable. Only less than one tenth of the Circassian population, 150,000 people chose resettlement within the Empire. As of 1897, there were only 217,000 Circassians left in the empire. Out of them, 65,000 were Kabardians, who largely managed to avoid resettlement, and 152,000 were the remnants of the Adygei-Circassian population. Approximately 700,000 Circassians made the way to Ottoman Turkey, 500,000 in 1860-64, and another 200,000 in 1858, already right after the Crimean War. The Russian authorities granted free access to the Turkish and Greek ships transporting the Circassians, so that they could get rid of as many of them as possible. Still the number of Circassians perished during 1860-64 is estimated to be around another 700,000, about half of the original population, and that gives the reason, why many consider these events as a genocide. Many of the victims died fighting the invading Russian army, many of the civilians were killed in atrocities committed by the Russian army, many were killed by the difficulties of the chaotic escape to the Black Sea ports through the mountains, and many died of starvation and exhaustion on their way to Turkey, or as overloaded refugee ships sunk on their way.

During the Russian conquest of the Northern Caucasus, lots of people from the other Muslim ethnic groups of the region have fled to Turkey as well. What made the case of the Adygei Circassians different, was that in the case of other ethnic groups this flight did not result in the breakup of their homogenous ethno-cultural areas.

Impact of the Circassian genocide in Abkhazia, as a historical background of the Abkhazian-Georgian conflict

Despite being closely integrated with Georgia in medieval times, due to the impact of Ottoman rule, most of the population became Muslim by early 19th century. As a consequence, in the troubled years of the Circassian genocide, a majority of the Muslim Abkhaz population followed the Circassians to exile in Turkey. This lead to depopulation of large parts of Abkhazia in the 1870s. The Russian government repopulated the abandoned areas of Abkhazia with Christian settlers. Mostly with Georgians, but with Armenians and Russians as well. These events set the bases of the severe Georgian-Abkhazian conflict.
Throughout former area of the Armenian Kingdom, during the centuries of Muslim rule, the influx of Muslim population (Kurds, Turks, Azeris) have been constant at least since the battle of Manzikert in 1071. As a result of this, by the late 19th century, historical Armenia become a multiethnic and multireligious land with no clear majority group in most of its regions. The homogenous Armenian ethno cultural area has fragmented into a network of pockets scattered among the Muslim population. In the south of historical Armenia, the population became a mix mostly of Armenians and Kurds, in the northwest Armenians and Turks, and in the northeast (the region what is now Armenia) Armenians and Azeris.

The other side of this story was the increasing emigration of Armenians from the core area to surrounding regions, at first to regions that remained until Christian control longer for a while, and later to areas of commercial significance. The most important specific centers of this emigration were

- Cilicia on the Northeast corner of the Mediterranean sea, where an Armenian state was founded and existed till 1375
- Regions of Eastern Anatolia and Northern Syria, bordering Armenian core area.
- Commercial centers such as Constantinople, Smyrna/Izmir, Tbilisi, and Baku.

As a result, while the proportion of Armenians was declining within the Armenian heartland itself, it was increasing in the surrounding areas. By the late 19th century, the geographical distribution of the Armenian population formed a pattern that was trapped half way between a homogenous ethno cultural area, capable for being an ethnic core of a country on its own, and a mere diaspora. It was not only that Armenians ceased to form a clear majority in almost any regions of their ancient heartland, but also that the presence of the Armenian diaspora become so strong in neighboring parts of Anatolia and Syria, that it wasn’t possible any longer to define a clear boundary between the core area and the diaspora lands. Bulk of the Armenian population lived in a network of pockets and diaspora communities in the vast area bordered by the Alanya-Sivas-Batumi-Tbilisi-Baku-Tebriz-Alanya line. They formed a significant portion of the population almost everywhere within this region, but they did not form a majority almost anywhere. In most of the core area and parts of Cilicia their portion was between 30% and 50%, but seldom beyond 50%. The commercial centers of Constantinople, Smyrna/Izmir, Tbilisi, and Baku had larger Armenian urban communities, than any town in the heartland itself. If we take a look in the Armenians of Turkey, only about one third of them was living in those three vilayets (Van, Bitlis, Erzurum) that included the Turkish half of the Armenian heartland.

In the east, in the portion of old Armenia under Russian control, the situation was similar. Only about half of the total Russian Armenian community was living in the governorates of Yerevan and Kars, and they constituted less then half of the population in this area.

This was a trap situation, because the Armenian population has constituted a too high percentage of the population in a too compact area not to attempt the formation of a nation state on its own, but in practice this percentage was not high enough, and the area was not compact enough to successfully fight for a nation state and form it. Numerous and compact enough to raise the suspicion of the Ottoman state, but neither numerous nor compact enough to successfully fight against the atrocities committed by the Ottoman authorities.

Map no. 4. Distribution of Armenians in Turkey in the 1890s (rend numbers showing the percentage of Armenians in each district.

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34 Kurkijan
36 Estimate on my own, based on „La Question Arménienne, á la Lumière des Documents” by Marc Léart, and figures provided by the Patriarchate, discussed in the work of Karayan.
37 Ethno-Caucasus
38 Map: Verteilung der Armenischen Bevölkerung in Türkisch-Armenien, Kurdistan u. Transkaukasien, Gotha: Justus Perthes, 1896
A vicious circle started, where the formation of an Armenian state seemed to be increasingly inevitable due to increasing persecution by the Turks, but the increasing political activism of Armenians only further increased the hostility of the Ottoman state against them, what increasing hostility gave only further increasing self defence motivation for political activism and state formation efforts. Also, due to the geographical conditions described above, it would have almost been impossible to draw an ethno culturally fair border for a new Armenia. It was almost impossible to define an area where at the same time the Armenians constitute more than 50% of the local population, and the area also included more than 50% of the Armenian population of Turkey and Russia. Any solution where Armenians constituted more than 50% of the local population would have excluded more than 50% of the Armenian community outside the borders of the new state. Any solution that included more than 50% of the Armenians would have likely resulted in a state with more Muslims than Armenians.

Even in case of a lucky scenario, where the Armenian genocide did not take place, it seems it would have been impossible to form a viable Armenian nation state without large scale resettlement that may have been similar to the Greek-Turkish population exchange of 1922. As we will be able to see below, that is exactly what happened in a smaller scale during the formation of Soviet Armenia in 1918-1920.

The only alternative to an Armenian state formed by Greek-Turkish style mass resettlement would have been a situation where at least half of the population of Armenia were Muslims, and at least half of the Armenians were stacked outside the new country, under Muslim rule. As we will see, when drawing the borders of “Wilsonian Armenia”, President Wilson and his experts were aware of this, but expressed their idealistic hope that the ethnic groups involved and the new Armenian state will show restraint in this new situation, and that the new Armenia can be an example of peaceful interethnic coexistence. In aware of the extreme level of Muslim-Armenian tensions in the region in the previous decades, we can strongly question whether if such a solution could have worked. After World War 1, the assumption of the victors that the newly formed states will be able to harmoniously handle the presence of massive ethnic minorities within
their borders obviously failed if we look at the examples of interwar Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Romania, the eastern regions of Poland (the Kresy), and in the vicinity of Armenia we can mention the Sunni-Shia tensions in interwar Iraq. And in these cases, already existing tensions were not even as severe, as in the case of Armenia-Muslim relations. These examples give us the question whether if a large multiethnic Armenia, with almost half of its population Muslims, could function as a state at all without massive population exchange, or would it have inevitably fallen into an endless ethnic-sectarian civil war, something that we have recently seen in Lebanon, Bosnia, or Northern Ireland. Without a Greek-Turkish style massive population exchange, not only the fate of Muslims enclosed within the borders of a new Armenia, but also the fate of Armenians trapped outside those borders would have been doubtful.

The demographic history of the distribution of the Armenian nation is a good example of the phenomenon that often appears when ethnic groups of different religious denominations live side by side. While in the case of ethnic groups with the same religious-cultural background mixed marriages, assimilation and multiple identities are common, in case of groups with different religious background, separation in much stronger. As an ethno geographic consequence, in case of groups with identical religious background, the assimilation of small pockets of people beyond the ethnic boundary is usually rapid and spontaneous, resulting in relatively easily definable linguistic boundaries, but also a significant population with multiple identities along it. (As we can see it in the cases of the Hungarian-Slovak or the Serb-Bulgarian linguistic boundaries.) In case of groups with different sectarian background, small pockets of one group surrounded by the other tend to preserve their separate identity much more. Linguistic boundaries can geographically become extremely chaotic in this case, with several pockets of one ethnic group surrounded with the other one and vice versa, but seldom with multiple identities. For this pattern we can see examples in Transylvania, Bosnia, Northern Ireland, Lebanon, and of course old Armenia. Different religious backgrounds can maintain different ethnic identities even when languages already become identical.

*Distribution of the Armenian population before the First World War and the Armenian genocide.*

The Armenian genocide is often discussed as the first large scale genocide of the modern age. The detailed analysis of it is out of the capacity of this paper, and also it is an issue that it has a rich historiography on its own. Therefore here it will be discussed only briefly, especially regarding its long term consequences on the ethno geographic composition of the region.

The circumstances described above give a background for the genocide. As we could see above, the Armenians have been in a trap situation, since they have formed a part of the total population (at least 20-30%) to feel vast parts of Eastern Anatolia their own, but it seldom reached even 50% of the population in these districts. We don’t know how significantly did this geographical distribution help the Turkish forces to execute the genocide, but the fact that in most districts the Armenian population lived mixed with hostile and often pro-Turkish Muslim population was certainly disadvantageous in military terms for the chances of any insurrection or guerilla style Armenian resistance. As we can later see in this paper, the geographic distribution of Armenians in the Russian empire was about the same scattered, even there only different historical circumstances, and in fact a Greek-Turkish style massive population exchange between Armenia and Azerbaijan resulted in the formation of an Armenian nation state, covering only a fraction of historical Armenia, and much smaller than any of the plans for an Armenian state before and during World War 1.

The population of the geographical area that forms modern Turkey now, (not the entire Ottoman Empire as of 1914) was approximately 13 million people around 1914. This number is important, because we can only see in aware of this number, what percentage did Armenians constitute of the population of Turkey.

On the Russian side of the border, in the areas of present day Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, the total number of Armenians was 878 000 in 1897. From this, less then half, only 408 000 were living in the territory what is Armenia today, 60% of the 676 000 population of that region. 254 000 Armenians were living in what is Azerbaijan today (including Karabah) constituting about 16% of the total population of 1 614 000, and 216 000 in present day Georgia, slightly more than 10% of a population of 2 million. A further 100 000 Armenians were living in the Kars, Igdir and Ardahan regions, (where they constituted one third of the total population of 300 000 besides Kurds and Turks) what are the parts of Turkey today, but what were the parts of Russia that time. This means that the all together number of Armenians in Russian Transcaucasia was approximately 978 000 in 1897.

Figures for Armenians in Turkey are far less clear than that. The census of 1844 gave a figure of 2.4 million Armenians, about 20% of the total population of the geographic area what is now Turkey. After the

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39 Ethno Caucasus
Congress of Berlin however, from 1877-78 when European powers also started to get interested in the Armenian issue, official figures given by turkey quickly a steeply reduced, giving figures for less than one and a half million again and again until World War 1, with the last figure around 1.3 million, about 10% of the total population of what is now Turkey. This sudden and unexplained change makes the doubts of Armenian and pro-Armenian historians reasonable. If the official figures given by the Ottoman state between 1878 and 1914 were correct, it would mean that about half of the Armenian population simply disappeared between 1844 and 1878. Since no accounts of any large scale mass migration or genocide is known from between 1844-1878, it gives the assumption that official Ottomans figures from between 1878-1914 are likely to have been manipulated. Armenian estimates, based of the figures of 1844 and Armenian Church sources often give estimated figures of 2.5-2.7 million for 1914.40

If we view the official Ottoman figures, and Armenian estimates as the two extremes, it means that Armenian population in Turkey may have been somewhere between 1.3 and 2.7 million people around 1914, between 10-20% of the total population of the entire geographic are what is Turkey today. This is a significant percentage, especially regarding that the percentage of Croats in Bosnia, Magyars in Slovakia, Shiites in Syria are within that range today, and they do represent politically significant communities.

The genocide occurred in 1915. Since this paper is especially of demographic issues, the political background of the genocide will be overviewed only briefly.

After the independence of most states of the Balkans in 1878, nation building attitudes have appeared among Armenians as well. On the other hand, because of the very same reason, the Ottoman state, eager to keep together what was left from the declining empire, started to view its Christian subjects with increasing suspicion and hostility. The Armenian issue got a special context by the Russian expansion in the Caucasus that has been described in the previous chapter of this paper. As we could see, the Russian Empire was pushing its southern border more and more to the south in the region throughout the 19th century. In this process, Christian groups (especially the Armenians and Georgians) saw a kind of liberating force against their hostile Muslim neighbors, while for the Muslim ethnic groups of the region, (especially for the Circassians as we have seen) the Russians become a kind of doomsday nemesis. The Russian expansion enhanced the chances of the formation of an Armenian state, or at least the inclusion of most Armenians in a Christian empire, where they would have become an ethnic group favored by the establishment in contrary to their previous status under Muslim rule. At the same time, the Russian advance has also enhanced the suspicion and hostility of the Turkish attitude towards Armenians.

Russo-Turkish tensions became especially severe when the two empires joined World War 1 on different sides. This made pro-Russian or pro-Turkish attitudes of different ethnic groups along the frontlines crucial.

First massacres again Armenians occurred in the 1890s, under the rule of Sultan Abdul Hamid. The estimated number of victims was 30 000 to 100 000 people. When the revolution of the Young Turks occurred in 1908, a large part of the Armenian elite saw it as a possibility to a new compromise, but the government of the Young Turks soon turned out to be as hardliner on the Armenian issue, as the previous one.41

The genocide itself occurred in 1915. The Turkish armed forces collected and killed men of military age at first, and started a deportation of the rest of the population after that with forced marches to the Syrian desert. Most of the victims died due to exhaustion, dehydration or starvation. Most estimates put the number of victims between 1 million42 and 2 million43 people. Most estimates give figures around one and a half million. About 500 000 Armenians managed to flee to Russia across the border, and return to Turkish Armenia after it has been temporarily occupied by Russian troops.

It is also part of the story, that after a few months, Russian troops pushed westwards, and took control of most of the Turkish half of the Armenian heartland.44 As this happened Armenian refugees returned, and also Armenian irregular forces came along with the arriving Russian troops. According to the report of the Committee of the Paris peace conference, as Armenians gained the upper hand, the Armenian irregular forces took a revenge on the Muslim Kurdish and Turkish population of the area, killing masses of them, and hundreds of thousands of the Muslim population had to flee to Turkish held territories.45

At last however, the Turkish army again got the upper hand in the spring of 1918. In the days of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, the Turkish army pushed out the collapsing Russian army from Turkish Armenia,
and did not stop before reaching Russian Transcaucasia. This time, it was once again the Armenian population who had to escape, and this time it was the turn of the Turkish and Kurdish population to return in triumph.

Map no. 5. Turkish advance in the Caucasus and retreat of Armenian irregular troops from Turkish Armenia (Erzincan, Erzurum, Van, Ahlat, Malazgirt) after the collapse of the Russian army in the spring of 1918

It is subject of debates up till this day, how many lives did the Armenian genocide claim, as well as how many Kurds and Turks were killed by revenging Armenians after the Russian invasion of 1915-1916. It is unlikely for us ever to get exact answers to these questions. Figures for pre-war Armenian population in Turkey are unclear, and the number of those Armenians who survived but fled is unclear as well, it is impossible to exactly define the number of those who died.

It is a fact however, that according even to the lowest Ottoman figures, of the total population of those parts of the Empire that became modern Turkey after the war at least 10% were Armenians. It is also clear that a network of pockets of Armenian population covered a huge area from Alanya and Sivas to Mount Ararat. In contrast to these pre-war circumstances, today Armenian population in Turkey outside Istanbul is limited to one single village in Antakya district, and the first census of modern Turkey in 1927 recorded an Armenian community only one tenth of the last official Ottoman figures. This means that whatever happened, 90-95% of the pre-war Armenian population simply vanished from those parts of the Ottoman Empire that became modern Turkey.

The planned of Wilsonian Armenia

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46 Andersen and Pashkaladze, 2006
47 Ibid.
48 Karayan, pp. 6.-7.
49 90% if we take the official Ottoman figures for pre-war Armenian population, and 95% if we take Armenian estimates for that.
After the start of the Russian Civil War, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia declared their independence in 1918. At the Paris peace conference after World War I, plans did exist for a large and independent Armenia that besides Russian Armenia (approximately the equivalent of present day Armenia) had supposed to include Turkish Armenia as well. The eastern border of this proposed new state (towards Azerbaijan and Georgia) was not fixed at the peace conference, because the conference was discussing peace treaties with the defeated powers only. (Also, by the time the conference has ended in 1920, the de facto states of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan declared in 1918, were already under Soviet control, and Turkish Armenia was back to Turkish control by the summer of 1918.)

Therefore, the peace conference defined only the western border of the proposed Armenian states, the one with defeated Turkey, and this border was included in the Treaty of Sevres. This version for the western border of Armenia is known in historiography as “Wilsonian Armenia” because this boundary was mostly defined according to the suggestions of President Wilson and his experts.

As we can see on the Map 6, the new border would attach vast territories to Armenia. In the south the boundary ran south of Lake Van, in the southwest west of the town of Mush, in the west west of the town of Erzincan, and in the northwest, even the coastal city of Trabzon/Trebizond and its environs were supposed to be parts of Armenia.

As discussed above, due to the scattered geographical distribution of the Armenian population made it almost impossible to draw proper borders for an Armenian nation state. Such a state would have unavoidably trap large population of largely hostile Muslims within its borders, and trap large population of Armenians outside its borders. This likely instability within the proposed state was only further enhanced by the inclusion of the coastal areas around Trabzon/Trebizond, since this coastland did not include a significant Armenian population, most of its inhabitants were either Turkish or Greek, and it was planned to be given to Armenia only because of strategic reasons, to provide a maritime access to the new state.

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http://www.hayastan.com/armenia/history/armenia/files/sevres_agreement1.jpg
Even members of the Committee of the peace conference were fully aware of these risks. In their report, they draw a conclusion that in 1914, the total population of those Turkish and Russian districts that were supposed to form the new Armenia, was 3,570,000. Out of this population, at that time just 40% were Armenians, 54% were Muslims (49% Turks, Kurds and Azeris, 5% Laz) and 4% Greeks.\(^{51}\)

It is important to note, that not only the number of Muslims included within the borders would have been huge, but also the number of Armenians left outside it. Only one third of pre war Turkish-Armenian population\(^{52}\) and only one half of pre war Russian-Armenian population lived within this territory.\(^{53}\)

Of course, these patterns have significantly changed by late 1917. The genocide has reduced the number of Turkish Armenians at first, and after that, when Russian troops occupied the Turkish Armenian heartland, most Turkish Armenian refugees fled to this Russian-held territory, increasing again Armenian demographic presence. Also large portion of the Muslim population fled in fear of revenge. The report of the Commission recorded estimates regarding these changes as well. According to it, the total population of the planned Armenian state has reduced from 3,570,000 to 3,000,000 by early 1918, and out of it 50% were Armenians, 46% Muslims (40% Turkish, Kurdish, Azeri, and 6% Laz) and 3% Greeks. It is here, where the report of the committee expresses its hopes for restraint regarding the Armenians and the other groups in question, for the sake of the viability of the new state.\(^{54}\) And this is the assumption that seems to be a little bit too idealistic as we look at interethnic relations in the eastern fringe (Kresy) of inter war Poland, or inter war Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia, as well as if we look at the example of other states with also close to 50:50 Christian-Muslim ratio such as Bosnia or Lebanon.

At last, however, still in 1918, due to the collapse of Russia, Turkish Armenia fell under Turkish control as well, and even the remaining Armenian population had to flee to Russian Armenia. As a consequence, the Armenian state (that has fallen under Soviet control in 1920) was formed exclusively within Russian Armenia, and on a territory significantly smaller than that of proposed by President Wilson. Also, due to mass population movements, this smaller new Armenia became an ethnically largely homogenous state, in contrary to predictions of the peace conference. We can see the population movements leading to its formation in the chapter below.

Population exchange along the formation of Soviet Armenia and Soviet Azerbaijan

The period 1917-1922 – population movements along the formation of Azerbaijan and Armenia.

It is not widely known, but in the region of the Soviet Caucasus, one of the most dramatic changes occurred in 1917-1922, especially along the formation of modern Armenia and Azerbaijan.

It is the period, when Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia temporarily gained full independence. During the years of their brief independence, their borders shared with each other were mostly fixed as a result of a series of local wars and border clashes. At the end, the Soviet leadership took the borders formed as a result of these conflicts, as the basis of the borders of its new republics. These local wars were accompanied by ethnic cleansing and population movements, what especially between the new Armenian and Azeri states resembled the more well known Greek-Turkish population exchange.

Map no. 7. Border conflicts in the Caucasus during the brief period of independence\(^{55}\)

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\(^{51}\) Full Report of the Committee upon the Arbitration of the Boundary Between Turkey and Armenia, pp. 68.

\(^{52}\) Bitlis, Erzurum és Van vilájétek. Saját számítás az örmény patriarchátus becslése alapján amelyeket illetően a keleti vilájétekre vonatkozó adatok Marc Léart, közli a „La Question Arménienne, à la Lumière des Documents”-ben, míg a birodalom egészére vonatkozó patriarchátusi becsléseket Karayan a dolgozatban többször idézett írásában.

\(^{53}\) Karsz és Jeréván kormányzóságok, Ethno Caucasus

\(^{54}\) Full Report of the Committee upon the Arbitration of the Boundary Between Turkey and Armenia, pp. 70.-73.

\(^{55}\) Andersen and Egge, 2010
The Armenian-Azeri feud has been one of the most important conflicts of the Caucasus region in the post-bipolar world. Today the image of this conflict is two relatively homogenous nation states feuding over the possession of Karabakh. It is much less widely known, however, that not so long ago, the circumstances were fundamentally different. As described in the previous chapter, due to demographic tendencies of the previous centuries, in the beginning of the 20th century, the Armenian population was characterized by a scattered geographic distribution as a network of pockets from the Mediterranean Sea to the Caspian Sea. In this aspect, patterns of geographic distribution of Armenians were not significantly different in the Russian Empire, than in the Ottoman Empire. On the Russian side of the border, the Armenian population geographically also composed a network of pockets scattered among the Muslim population, as in Turkey. The only significant difference was that while in Turkey the Muslim groups living geographically mixed with the Armenians were the Kurds and the Turks, in Russia they were the Azeris. The degree of this geographic overlap was such that perhaps we can not even talk about distinguishable Azeri and Armenian linguistic areas, (except for the eastern half of present day Azerbaijan, where at least the rural population was already predominantly Azeri) but what is now Armenia and the entire western half of Azerbaijan together composed a mixed Armenian-Azeri region, with a larger portion of Armenians in the west, and a larger portion of Azeris in the east. The town of Yerevan had a large Azeri community, while Baku a large Armenian community.

These circumstances are clearly visible through data of the Russian census of 1897. In the approximate area what is Armenia today (without Karabah) 676 000 people were living back in 1897. Out of those, only

56 Parts of the governorates of Yerevan and Elizavetpol
408 000, 60.35% were Armenians. The number of Azeris was 215 000, 31.73% of the population, what is a very high percentage. The situation was similar on the other side of the present border. In the area what is now Azerbaijan (including Karabah) the population was 1 614 000. Out of those, 970 000 were Azeris, composing 60.09% of the population, while 15.73% of the population, 254 000 people were Armenians. There was a clear difference though between the eastern and western half of present day Azerbaijan. In the eastern half (Baku governorate) the percentage of Armenians was only 7.8%. In the western half of what is now Azerbaijan (where 43.5% of the population was living that time) the percentage of Azeris was 64.86%, and the percentage of the Armenians was as high as 28.27%. In this region, for example the area what is now the Azerbaijani exclave of Nakhiichevan, now with a homogenously Azeri population, had 101 000 inhabitants back in 1897, and 34.4% of them were Armenians then. Baku and Yerevan were themselves mixed. In Yerevan 43.2% of the population were Armenians, and 42.6% were Azeris, while in Baku 36% Azeri and 17% Armenians.

In 1918-1920, the founding fathers of modern Armenia and Azerbaijan were eager to form homogenous nation states among such ethno demographic circumstances. What of course, was possible only for the expense of the other.

The impact of the border wars and ethnic cleansing is visible if we compare the figures of the census of 1897 with the Soviet census of 1926. In 1926 the population of Armenia was 879 000. Part of the increase was due to the arrival of hundreds of thousands of Armenian refugees from Turkish Armenia. The percentage of Azeris was down from 31% in 1897 to 9% in 1926. This decrease was not just relative decrease compared to the increased number of Armenians. The absolute number of Azeris also significantly decreased, from 215 000 in 1897 to 77 000 in 1926. This means, that at least two thirds of the pre war Azeri population fled from what is now Armenia. The decrease of the Armenian population in Azerbaijan was at this stage less dramatic, from about 16% to 12%. As we can see, the border wars and population resettlements of 1918-1920 formed the demographic frames for the borders of modern Armenia and Azerbaijan. Later, since then almost the entire Azeri minority in Armenia and Armenian minority in Azerbaijan vanished (except for of course Karabah).

III. Stalinist deportations from the North Caucasus

Out of the three great ethno demographic changes in the region, the third one occurred in the middle of the 20th century, in 1943-1944. The subjects of these deportations were North Caucasian groups, and the pretext of the deportations was alleged collaboration of these groups with occupying German forces during World War 2. Compared to the Circassian and Armenian genocides, this event was less fatal only in that respect, that the deported groups were allowed to return and reestablish their homelands in the Khrushchev era.

If we look at the list of names of deported ethnic groups, we easily get a feeling, that these deportations were in fact the continuation of the policies of imperial Russia in the North Caucasus. The deportation included Karachais, and Balkars, Muslim (although Turkic and not Northwest Caucasian) groups from old Circassia, and the Chechen and the Ingush, those Northeast Caucasian groups, who were resisting 19th century Russian expansion the most fiercely. The deportation however spared the Ossetians and Kabardians, those two groups, who always showed more intent to cooperate with the Russians. The only exception in this respect were the Dagestanis, who were not included in the deportations. (And of course, those fragments of the Adygei-Circassian population that survived the genocide of the 1860s were spared as well. They were little more than a mere diaspora by this time anyway, with no strategic significance left.) In case of the Chechens and Ingush the charge against them was not even direct collaboration with the Germans, but simply that due to their ongoing revolts against Moscow, troops had to be moved from the front against them.

Almost the entire populations of Karachais, Balkars, Ingish, and Chechens have been deported. In November 1943, 69,267 Karachais were deported to the Asian half of the USSR, 45,501 to Kazakhstan, and 22,900 to Kyrgyzstan. In the winter of 1943-1944, 387,229 Chechens and 91,250 Ingush were deported to the east, out of them 239,768 Chechens and 78,470 Ingush to Kazakhstan, while 70,970 Chechens and 2278 Ingish to Kyrgyzstan. In 1944, 37,044 Balkars were deported, 60% to Kyrgyzstan, and the rest of them mostly to Kazakhstan.

The deportations caused the death of about 20-30% of the deportees, most of them died due to the cold, the starvation, and atrocities by the Soviet armed forces.

The abandoned homelands of these groups were divided between the neighboring Soviet administrative units. The Karachai area was divided between the Krasnodar and Stavropol districts and Georgia, the Balkar area was split between Kabardia and Georgia, Ingushetia between Georgia and North Ossetia, and Chechnya between Georgia, Dagestan, and the Stavropol District.

If we consider the combined effect of the Tsarist actions of the 1860s, and the Stalinist actions of the 1940s, by 1944 only the Ossetians, the Kabards, and the Dgestani ethnic groups managed to survive the previous one hundred years without deportation and major ethnic cleansing. The Adygei-Corcessians were hit by the Tsarist regime, while the Karachais, the Balkars, the Ingush and the Chechens more strongly by the Stalinist regime.

The deported groups could only return and reestablish their homelands in 1956-1957, after the Khrushchevian takeover. As it is used to be in such cases, the effects of the trauma became long lasting. The memory of deportations is a source of tensions not only between these groups and Moscow, but also between these groups, and those neighbors of them, who benefited of the abandonment of their homelands. In this respect, we can mention issues between the Balkars and the Kabards, as well as between the Ingush and the Ossetians. While most groups managed to retake their homelands, in case of the Ingush, a large piece of their homeland remained largely off limits to them, and was left in the procession of North Ossetia, leading to an armed conflict between the two groups as recently as the early 1990s.

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60 Polyan, Тотальные депортации «возмездия» народов Северного Кавказа и Крыма в 1943–1944 гг
61 Smith, pp. 60.
62 Smith, pp. 65-67
63 Smith, pp. 106.-119.
Closing Remarks

This paper made an attempt to get an overview on the historical backgrounds of ethnic tensions in the Caucasus region, as well as the historical background of ethno geographic features today. The Caucasus region has enough sources for several books on historical and interethnic issues, so this paper could not and did not attempt to give a detailed in depth description of all those. Several issues could not be included. This paper rather made an attempt to give an easily digestible essence of the three most large scale demographic events in the region, for the better understanding of present day conflicts.

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