

Need for recognition of all the groups involved

An initial problem with promoting this proposal lies in the need of local groups for recognition. In fact, it was only recently, after several centuries embedded in larger imperial entities, that the Caucasian nations really became aware of their ethnic identities. Small nations that just recently paid a high price for their sovereignty will find it extremely difficult to abandon a portion of this sovereignty to merge once more with a regional unit. From this standpoint, the region may not yet be ready to launch a EU-type integration process and acknowledge interdependence as a major factor in the quest for security.¹⁹

Another difficulty lies in the need to recognize sub-regions. We may applaud the change in the second version of the CSP that makes room in the regional structure for secessionist entities. However, the three secessionist entities are not the region's only sub-units. Other minority and potentially secessionist groups (including the Lezgins and Talysh in Azerbaijan or the Armenians and Mingrelians in Georgia) are also looking for more independence. Why would Nakhichevan or Ajaria not be in this group as well? This question is more serious than might initially appear. The regional structure foreseen by the CSP ("3 + 3 + 3 + 2"), which includes only independent states and secessionist republics, might actually encourage other sub-units to declare their independence in order to become part of the SCC, the regional body acting as the "contact group for regional stability." This is certainly not the intention of the CSP promoters. Since the thrust of this pact is to get beyond conventional ideas of sovereignty and have federated states participate in the regional structure, the authors of the CSP should take their reasoning to the limit and include all self-governing units and sub-units in this structure, not just the ones that have already won their independence by legitimate or other means. This approach would avoid the appearance of "situational secessionisms" and instead encourage human groups seeking representation to ask for a territorial self-governing autonomy that would afford them *de facto* access to the regional multilateral forum and provide an alternative to the call for full sovereignty as the only way of being heard.

If we turn to more theoretical terms, we can imagine other formulas for representing SCC members that would help to recognize solely territorial entities. In this region studded with ethnic, linguistic and religious camps, it might be more appropriate to think about a South Caucasian Peoples' Community (SCPC) with oversight of security and collective rights. Formulas for membership in the "People's SCC" could vary from an ethnic federalism (or non-territorial autonomy) to consociative democracy. Often depicted as academic solutions designed in Western think tanks, these two forms of representation actually have local roots. One of the most successful applications of the principle of non-territorial autonomy, in both duration and operation, was the *millet* system of the Ottoman Empire. Consociative democracy is a power-sharing formula used at various levels in Russian Dagestan, in itself as diverse an ethnic mosaic as the rest of the Caucasus.

¹⁸ Francis Gutmann, "Russie, hydrocarbures et politique," *Géopolitique*, no. 54, pp. 70-73; Pierre Lorrain, "La manne du pétrole et la guerre de Tchétchénie," *Géopolitique*, no. 54, pp. 74-76.

¹⁹ See Giulsheh Pashaeva, "Myths and Realities of the South Caucasian System of Regional Security," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (7), p. 26.