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Abhandlungen

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Abstract: Soviet Federalism at Work: Lessons from the History of the Transcaucasian Federation, 1922–1936

This paper starts from a discussion of a forgotten page of South-Caucasian history, the existence from 1920 to 1936 of a Transcaucasian Federation (ZSFSR) uniting Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, in order to reconsider two claims generally made about the Soviet regime. First, that the building blocs of the Soviet state were national republics, a fact that only consolidated after the Second World War. Second, that Soviet federalism was a mere Potemkin village camouflaging an exceedingly centralized state. The author argues that federalism was taken seriously because it provided Soviet leaders, notably in the initial period of the USSR, with original political and administrative tools, that allowed for a management of multinational societies and multilevel conflicts, and created structures of mutual control between Transcaucasian actors. This argument is made on the basis of numerous published and archival sources coming from the three Transcaucasian republics and Russia, as well as European and Turkish diplomatic sources. Far from being a footnote in the history of the Soviet Union, the ZSFSR can indicate new paths for a wider reconsideration of the political uses of federalism in authoritarian regimes.

Keywords: Soviet Union, Transcaucasian Federation, Federalism, 1920ies, 1930ies

The Stalin constitution of 1936, in its quest for social order and political symmetry, laid the ground for a key Soviet mantra, emphasizing the national character of Soviet republics. Official interpretations of Soviet federalism after the Second World War fully embraced the idea that Union republics were in essence national units whose coming together at the beginning of the 1920s had created a “wholly new and higher type of federation”.¹ This idea stands, however, in contradiction with the practices of early Soviet federalism which demonstrate that the republics were not considered as coterminous with national boundaries in the strict meaning of the concept, even though some would already extol the “separate rooms” of the various national units.² The contingencies of early Bolshevik state-building and the diverging theories of territorial constituency-making

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1 LEVIN *Sovetskaja federacija*, pp. 216–217.

2 SLEZKINE *The USSR as a Communal Apartment*, p. 415.

ing led to experiments in asymmetric federalism, with heterogeneous building blocks and rights.³ Foremost among these experiments is the case of the Transcaucasian Federal Socialist Republic (ZSFSR) or Transcaucasian Federation, an embedded federation grouping the three republics of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbajdzhan from 1922 to 1936. These republics, which gained “federal immediacy”⁴ with the Stalin constitution, were until then part of the USSR as components of the Transcaucasian Federation. Exploring the history of this Federation fills a lacuna in Caucasian studies but is also a reminder of early Soviet practices in federalism.



Fig. 1: Russian, Georgian, and Armenian workers haul the barge of the Transcaucasian Federation', *Martakoč*, 22 April 1923, No. 47

However, the liveliness of the debate over federalism in the first years of the Bolshevik regime bears testimony to the fact that it was not perceived as an empty shell.⁷ The debate was particularly strong during the drafting of the first Soviet Constitution, a time when the exact nature of interactions between central and territorial organs was widely discussed. Later on, federalism remained a key feature of the Soviet system, an idea that did not exclude violent politics.⁸ It could be inserted in a broader theoretical debate

Soviet federalism does not, at first sight, fit in with the Western-modelled ideal type of federalism, premised upon democracy and liberal values.⁵ Democratic centralism in the Bolshevik Party was seen from the very beginning as a major obstacle to the existence of any real territorial autonomy. Similarly, the instrumental conception of law that dominated the early decades of the regime precluded a clear-cut repartition of competences, since central organs could routinely modify this repartition without much regard for such concepts as the hierarchy of norms or the supremacy of the constitution.⁶

3 WATTS *Comparing Federal Systems*, pp. 125–130; SUNY *A State of Nations*.

4 I hereafter refer to the concept of “federal immediacy”, a phrase modeled on the Early Modern German “imperial immediacy” (*Reichsunmittelbarkeit*) in the Holy Roman Empire, to emphasize the political importance attached to gaining Union status.

5 BURGESS *Comparative Federalism*; LIVINGSTON *A Note on the Nature of Federalism*, pp. 81–95.

6 A subtle analysis of these early discussions in PLOTNIEKS *Petr Stučka i istoki Sovetskoj pravovoj mysli*, pp. 83–90.

7 An overview of these debates, prepared by the Institute of Soviet Law, was published in 1930: REJCHEL' (ed.): *Sovetskij federalizm*; PALIENKO *Konfederacii, federacii i Sojuz Socialističeskich Sovetskich Respublik*.

8 RIKER *Federalism*, p. 40; RAFFASS *The Soviet Union*.

about the connection between federalism and authoritarianism. Contrary to what normative interpretations suggest, federalism is not bound to liberal democracy but is a political form that has also been mobilized by authoritarian regimes, as forms of constitutionalism have too.⁹ In the late 19th century, Bismarck made use of federal institutions in order to stifle the democratic movement that fed on national politics, prompting Austrian constitutional lawyer Hans Nawiasky to write in 1928 that “Bismarck was a federalist because he was a monarchist”.¹⁰ As an ideology based on state rights rather than individual rights, federalism could also be a powerful tool of conservatism, a fact that left-wing and Soviet lawyers denounced in the early 1920s.

Histories of the Caucasus in the interwar period generally adopt a national focus, which leaves little room for the consideration of regional structures of power, and no less than Ronald Grigor Suny himself could call the ZSFSR a “pseudo-federal system”.¹¹ A recent essay on regional integration in the Caucasus includes the ZSFSR as one of its failures and assumes that “the dearth of the references to the ZSFSR in the scholarly literature reflects the fact that the new Federation relatively quickly became a hollow and ineffective structure, with real power exercised by republican leaders in Baku, Tbilisi, Yerevan and of course Moscow”.¹² The few works related to the Federation were essentially published by Armenian and Georgian scholars in the 1980s and their mix of positivist history and communist rhetoric has failed to gain full credibility among historians, despite real contributions.¹³ The contention of this paper, however, is that this dismissive assessment of the Transcaucasian Federation which is not based upon archival evidence fails to take up the question in a meaningful way. During its lifetime, the ZSFSR was actually frequently discussed, both in the Soviet Union and abroad, as a particularly interesting example of federation within a federation.¹⁴

The Transcaucasian Federation was quite obviously *not* a Union republic based on nationality. According to the Soviet census of 1926, the Federation’s population of nearly 5.8 million was made up of 44 different nationalities, twelve of which had populations above 30,000.¹⁵ Moreover, the three dominant nationalities – Georgians, Armenians and Turks-Tatars – were not confined to their republics, in a striking case of “ethnic imbrica-

9 GINSBURG/SIMPSON (eds.): *Constitutions in Authoritarian Regimes*, pp. 1–20.

10 NAWIASKY *Grundprobleme der Reichsverfassung*, 1928, p. 140, quoted by RAUH *Föderalismus und Parlamentarismus*, p. 49.

11 SUNY *Looking Toward Ararat*, pp. 140–142; BABEROWSKI *Der Feind ist überall*.

12 DE WAAL *A Broken Region*, p. 1718.

13 The first scholarly work after 1936 is to my knowledge: PARKOSADZE *Principy sovetskogo federalizma*; CHARMANDARJAN *Spločenje narodov*; CKVIT’ARIA *Amierk’avk’asiis Pederaciis šekmna*; CHAC’ATRJAN *Andrp’ederac’iaji peta-iravakan statusē*.

14 ANANOV *Zametki*; KUNZ *Une nouvelle théorie de l’Etat fédéral*. Brussels 1930, quoted by VON BEYME *Der Föderalismus in der Sowjetunion*, pp. 90–91; AMBROSINI *Autonomia Regionale e Federalismo*, p. 134.

15 The first three nationalities were officially Turks-Tatars (1,4 mln), Georgians (1,3 mln) and Armenians (978.000). CSU SSSR. *Vsesojuznaja perepis’ naselenija*, pp. XVI–XVII; on the difficult definition of ethnic categories, HIRSCH *Empire of Nations* and CADIOT *Le laboratoire impérial*.

tion” (*čerezpolositsa*), as S. Abramov put it in 1935.¹⁶ The resistance of the so-called national communists to the creation of the Federation in 1922, culminating in the crisis between Sergo Ordžonikidze and the Georgian Central Committee in the fall gave rise to several works during the Cold War and in the 1990s.¹⁷ The Georgian Affair nonetheless needs to be approached in a non-normative way and put into the context of what was and remained the main role of the ZSFSR – dealing with a deeply divided region and restoring a measure of unity and order. The ZSFSR was indeed closer to the original Bolshevik conception of sovereignty, as class-based and internationalist, than other national republics, an idea conveyed by the parodist cartoon *The Barge Haulers of the ZSFSR*, featured by numerous Transcaucasian newspapers in 1922–1923, where Georgians, Armenians, Turks and Russians could be seen hauling out the boat of the Federation.¹⁸ It was also closer to the Soviet ideal of a *Sojuz* between equal republics than the Soviet Union, let alone the Russian Federation (RSFSR), being based upon the principle of autonomy. The republic was, in this conception, not a national unit but a political unit designed to keep a check on national passions and inculcate communist values. The federal mechanisms of the ZSFSR were as important in establishing order in the Caucasus of the 1920s as sheer domination and repression. In the early Soviet context, far from being a “Potemkin village”, federalism was integral to building power relations, and was part of a conscious effort to create intermediary political buffers and “redundancies” that partially replaced top down authority by horizontal controls and checks, making Bolshevik power more palatable.¹⁹

A Response to Disunity

In a famous letter sent to the Caucasian communists soon after the Sovietization of Georgia, on 14 April 1921, Lenin warned them against slavishly imitating Russian Bolshevism and invited them to develop their own path toward socialism by taking into account regional specificities.²⁰ Beyond its appealing anti-chauvinistic commitment, this letter was tightly connected to Moscow’s unwillingness to grant too much aid to a region ruined by several years of economic disruption due to independences and wars. On 9 April 1921, a telegram directed to Sergo Ordžonikidze, head of the Transcaucasian Front of the Red Army and of the Caucasian Bureau of the Party, emphasized the impossibility

16 ABRAMOV *Federativnoe ustrojstvo Zakavkaz’ja*, p. 20.

17 This episode is so famous in Soviet history that I do not think it necessary to address it hereafter. The crisis started on 22 October 1922, with the resignation of nine out of the eleven members of the Georgian Central Committee. A commission headed by Dzeržinskij was sent to Tiflis to evaluate the situation and Lenin simultaneously sent a personal envoy, Rykov. Despite substantiating the ruthless behavior of Ordžonikidze, the affair did not stop the creation of the Federation, since Lenin was already seriously weakened. SMITH *The Georgian Affair of 1922*, p. 531–534; LEWIN *Le dernier combat de Lénine*, pp. 55–73.

18 Martakoč’ (22 April 1923), No. 47; DULLIN/FORESTIER-PEYRAT *Flexible Sovereignties of the Revolutionary State*.

19 LANDAU *Federalism*.

20 CHARMANDARJAN *Spločenie narodov*, p. 21–22.

of any Russian economic help to the region and the consequent necessity to “create a regional economic organ for Transcaucasia” in order to accelerate a self-reliant reconstruction.²¹ Although three Soviet republics had been established since the Soviet invasion of Azerbajdžan in April 1920, something more was needed to reestablish a regional integration. Admittedly, Russia had started vertical integration by signing bilateral agreements transferring some competences to Moscow in areas such as finances, posts and telegraphs, and military affairs.²² Justified by the necessities of the civil war, these treaties created but a few direct subordination channels: although the most important decisions could be transferred through the Party command line, most of the daily interaction between Russia and the republics went through Russian consuls and representatives in the region, notably Boris Legran in Tbilisi, who could not act without cooperation from local authorities.²³

Regional integration at the Transcaucasian level was thus the dual outcome of unsatisfactory bilateral relations between Russia and the republics and Russian unwillingness to pay for Caucasian reconstruction. It was ultimately a question how to create a network of self-help between nations that had been fighting violently among themselves for more than three years. A symbolic step was made in late April 1921 when a Transcaucasian administration of railways was recreated, followed at the end of June by an agreement unifying foreign trade for the three republics.²⁴ This success of functionalist integration cannot be explained without integrating personal politics. The Transcaucasian project emerged by mid-1921 in the mind of Sergo Ordžonikidze and his close associates. After having completed the Sovietization of the region in the past year and a half, Ordžonikidze was keen to consolidate a basis of power extending to what he saw as one region, in the direct continuity of the Caucasian viceroyalty existing until 1917. National republics should not be an obstacle to the realization of such a project for a man whom foreign consuls already called a “near heir to the viceroys of the Caucasus”.²⁵ Unsurprisingly, Ordžonikidze first came up with the project of a federation in a letter to Stalin and the Russian Central Committee, on 8 September 1921.²⁶ In a politically astute maneuver,

- 21 Lenin to Ordžonikidze, 9 April 1921, quoted in GENKINA (ed.): *Obrazovanie SSSR*, p. 269.
- 22 The first such treaty was signed between Azerbajdžan and Russia, on 30 September 1920, see ARSPIHDA, f. 28, op. 1, d. 66, l. 9; MUSTAFA-ZADE *Dve respubliki*, pp. 153–155; ČISTJAKOV *Vzaimootnošenija sovetских respublik*, pp. 125–126; SUCHECKI *Geneza federalizmu radzieckiego*, pp. 148–150.
- 23 Protocol of the Georgian Central Committee, 9 September 1921, SŠSA PA, f. 14, op. 1, d. 8, l. 4; Čičerin insisted that their role was that of coordination with the republics: Čičerin to Ordžonikidze, 19 June 1921, in: SARKISJAN *Diplomatičeskaja missija RSFSR*, p. 98.
- 24 Kavbiuro protocol, 4 September 1921, SUICA, f. 735, op. 1, d. 1, l. 5; MERKVILADZE *Sozdanie i ukreplenie sovetской gosudarstvennosti*, pp. 42–43; for the independence period, YILMAZ *An Unexpected Peace*, pp. 37–67.
- 25 Report of the Iranian consul-general in Baku, Sâ'ed ol-Vezâra, 27 Sha'bân 1339 (6 May 1921), quoted by BAYÂT *Tûfân bar farâz-e Qafqâz*, p. 385.
- 26 Ordžonikidze to the Russian Central Committee, 8 September 1921, RGASPI, f. 85, op. 18, d. 327, ll. 1–3; SMITH *The Georgian Affair of 1922*, pp. 529–530.

Ordžonikidze succeeded in presenting his project as the best way to contain national hatreds and rebuild the region.

The Transcaucasian Bolsheviks were heavily influenced by the Tsarist precedent of a regional power as a direct result of their life experience. First established in January 1846 by imperial decree, the Transcaucasian viceroyalty had survived until the end of the regime, with an intermezzo from 1883 to 1905 when the Caucasus was supposedly on the path to normalization.²⁷ In popular conceptions, the viceroyalty enjoyed an indubitable measure of support, as it illustrated a form of regional identity and embodied allegiance to the Tsar through the figure of the viceroy.²⁸ The viceroyalty had a clear territorial power framing as all kinds of public and private institutions adopted the Transcaucasian mould for their activities. Ironically, senior Tsarist officials justified the creation of an *Ochbrana* office for the entire Transcaucasia by the fact that Russian Social Democrats were themselves organized on this scale.²⁹ It was rather on the failed Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic (April-May 1918) that Bolshevik leaders heaped criticism, as it allowed them to disparage the nationalist leaders of the Georgian Menshevik, Armenian Dashnak and Azeri Musavat parties and accuse them of fostering inter-ethnic strife.³⁰

The process that led to the creation of the Transcaucasian Federation is of broader relevance, since it was the first Soviet experiment in mobilizing the masses around the federal idea, a fact the representatives of Transcaucasia were quick to cite during the negotiations over the constitution of the Soviet Union.³¹ A mass *agitprop* campaign was actually launched in the Caucasus in November 1921 around the idea of a “federation among equals”, a theme that was later picked up during the creation of the Soviet Union as a whole.³² Central authorities asked for detailed reports about popular reactions to the project and Ordžonikidze, together with Sergej Kirov and Aleksandr Mjasnikov, supervised the process to avoid opposition.³³ In March 1922, an intergovernmental agreement established an executive Transcaucasian body, the “Federal Council”, whose ambiguous nature served to allay fears of disempowerment among national communists.³⁴ Still, national leaders who were marginalized in the process, such as the Azeri Nərimanov Nəri-

27 RHINELANDER The Creation of the Caucasian Viceregency, pp. 15–40; LE DONNE La réforme de 1883 au Caucase, pp. 21–35.

28 AUCH Muslim-Untertan-Bürger; ISMAIL-ZADE Voroncov-Daškov.

29 DALY The Watchful State, pp. 53–57.

30 Among many other critical works, see ARKOMED Materialy po istorii otpadenija.

31 Thomas De Waal suggests that “the Caucasus set the blueprint for the Soviet Union, not the other way round”. DE WAAL The Caucasus, p. 74; GEVONDJAN AndreSFSR masnake’ut’juny, pp. 45–54.

32 Politburo protocol, 29 November 1921, RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 237, ll. 1–2; on the campaign, TAMRAZOVA Dejatel’nost’ kommunističeskich organizacij, pp. 22–23; MENTEŠAŠVILI Bol’shevistskaja pressa Zakavkaz’ja.

33 Kirov to Ordžonikidze, 30 October 1921, RGASPI, f. 85, op. 18, d. 342, l. 1; Protocol of the Georgian Central Committee, 2 December 1921, SSSA PA, f. 14, op. 1, d. 8, l. 37.

34 ZKK protocol, 22 March 1922, SSSA PA, f. 13, op. 1, d. 17, l. 12; VAN DEN BERG De regering van Rusland, p. 63.

manov and the Georgian Filipp Macharadze, emphasized the dangers of nationalist reactions to the Federation.³⁵ “I have always told the same thing at the Kavbiuro’s meetings”, wrote Nərimanov to Lenin in January 1922, “unification is a necessity, but we should not hurry too much”.³⁶ This discontent notwithstanding, the federalization of Transcaucasia was judged successful enough to inspire similar projects for Central Asia, where territorial structures were still hotly disputed in an attempt to accommodate local leaders while ensuring the efficiency of Bolshevik power. The decision to create national republics instead of a Turkestan republic was not seen as an obstacle to the establishment of a Central Asian Federation.³⁷

Transcaucasian Interests?

As the first Transcaucasian Congress of Transcaucasian Soviets was being held in Baku in December 1922, one could have paraphrased Massimo d’Azeglio’s famous observation: now that Transcaucasia had been made, Bolshevik leaders still had to make Transcaucasians.³⁸ Making Transcaucasians was simultaneously a political, an intellectual and a material endeavor. The Federation was marketed to the inhabitants of the region through numerous and sometimes unexpected media, such as the Transcaucasian branded cigarettes that could be bought in 1923. This project of making Transcaucasians was considered serious enough that the federal leadership established a series of institutions entrusted with studying the region and producing cadres of regional communist elites.³⁹ Policies of cultural and social modernization were largely discussed at the Transcaucasian level, as is demonstrated by measures toward women, religion or education.⁴⁰ The most important of them was the Transcaucasian University of the 26 Commissars, in Tbilisi.⁴¹ The university was part of the network of communist universities and affiliated with the Transcaucasian Regional Committee (ZKK), the Party’s successor to the Kavbiuro. Recruiting students in all three republics starting from the academic year 1923–1924, the University set itself the goal of creating a common political identity and producing new elites for the region.⁴² Transcaucasian identity, the curriculum insisted, was the best way to ensure that the region remained tightly connected to the new Soviet state, while retaining a strong level of autonomy. M. M. Dubenskij, lecturer for economic geography, em-

35 Macharadze to Cchakaja, 18 March 1922, RGASPI, f. 157, op. 1c, d. 14, l. 2.

36 Narimanov to Lenin, 9 January 1922, ARSPIHDA, f. 609, op. 1, d. 71, ll. 67–68, quoted by BAYRAMOVA *Azərbaycan rəhbərliyində ixtilafar*, pp. 134–135.

37 EDGAR *Tribal Nation*, pp. 57–58; URAZAEV *Rol’ RSFSR i SSSR*, p. 122.

38 The first Constitution of Transcaucasia did not mention a Transcaucasian citizenship distinct from All-Union and republic citizenships, but the Constitution of 1925 introduced the concept (Chapter 2). ANANOV *Zametki*, p. 121.

39 KAS’JAN/ROGDAEV *Zakavkazskaja naučnaja asociacija*, pp. 97–104; REISNER *Die Erforschung Kaukasiens*, pp. 179–208.

40 KAMP *Women-initiated unveiling*, pp. 205–228; LAYCOCK/JOHNSON *Creating “New Soviet Women”*, pp. 64–78.

41 GEVORGJAN *26 komisarneri anvan andrkovkaşjan*, pp. 12–22.

42 Protocol of the university board, 19 June 1924, SSSA PA, f. 128, op. 1, d. 2, l. 221.

phasized in his course syllabus: “The strong attention devoted to Transcaucasia does not mean at all less attention for the Soviet Union as a whole, of whom Transcaucasia is an inseparable part, economically and politically.”⁴³

Training a new Transcaucasian elite was, however, not sufficient, since there always remained the danger that they would once again fracture along national lines. Transcaucasian authorities had to demonstrate that they were best placed to defend republic interests and transform them into regional ones. As early as 1922, the Federal Council succeeded in such a move by advocating for the Azeri project to launch a trade fair in Baku. A Transcaucasian coalition proved to be essential in overcoming the resistance of the Russian Commissariat for Foreign Trade, and the fair opened its pavilions in September 1922, becoming in later years a symbol of Transcaucasian autonomy in trade with the “East”.⁴⁴ The existence in 1922–1923 of a Transcaucasian commissariat for Foreign Trade created a distance from Moscow and autonomy for local economic actors, who could with its complicity bypass many rules of the central government’s monopoly of foreign trade.⁴⁵ Šumjackij, the Russian ambassador to Teheran, complained during the first Baku fair about the policy of “commercial separatism” pursued by Transcaucasian actors in the region.⁴⁶ Producing such coalitions of interests was vital to the Federation, whose elites were otherwise too prone to split. These coalitions were also key moments to test the cohesion of the new elite, and served in the early years of the Federation to eliminate those political leaders who did not support Ordžonikidze’s project.⁴⁷



Fig. 2: The Transcaucasian permanent representation in Moscow and Shalva Eliava, head of the Transcaucasian government, *Ogonek* (10 July 1927), 28 (224)

A vital place for the production of this Transcaucasian vision was the Permanent Representation of the ZSFSR in Moscow. In July 1927, the Soviet journal *Ogonek* ran a centerfold of pictures of the Republic Representations in Moscow, featuring the *Art Nouveau* mansion at 6 Malj Rževskij Street, that hosted the Transcaucasian Representation.⁴⁸ Permanent Republic Representations were a key, although neglected, feature of Soviet federalism, and Sahak Ter-Gabrielian, the first Transcaucasian representative who served until 1927, took his task very seriously.⁴⁹ An Old Bolshevik, he was first appointed as repre-

43 Course syllabus for economic geography, 15 September 1923, SŠSA PA, f. 128, op. 1, d. 2, l. 90.

44 FORESTIER-PEYRAT Red Passage to Iran, pp. 85–86.

45 Federal Council protocol, 15 July 1922, SŠSA PA, f. 13, op. 1, d. 20, l. 110.

46 Šumjackij to the Federal Council, 10 September 1922, SUICA, f. 612, op. 1, d. 62, ll. 9–10.

47 Narimanov complained in December 1923 in a letter sent to Stalin and published during the Perestroika, BÜNYADOV *Istoriya Azerbajdzana*, p. 268.

48 *Šest’ respublik v Moskve*, in: *Ogonek*, (10 July 1927), 28 (224).

49 ANANOV *Sistema organov gosudarstvennogo upravlenija*, pp. 167–169; KROCHOTKIN *Postojanye predstavitel’stva*, pp. 89–97; POTICHNYJ *Permanent Representations (Postpredstva)*, pp. 50–83.

sentative of Soviet Armenia to Moscow, but he fully embraced his mission to defend Transcaucasian interests in All-Union institutions starting from April 1923.⁵⁰ The reports regularly sent to the Transcaucasian government by the Permanent Representation, conserved in the Georgian National Archives, are a precious source to understand the way those interests were produced and defended. In order to produce coherent Transcaucasian positions, in early 1924 Ter-Gabrielian obtained a decree demanding that all official interaction between state institutions of Transcaucasia and Moscow be channeled through the Representation.⁵¹ Here, in the small building of the Mal'j Rževskij Street, a few consultants and experts were to formulate Transcaucasian opinions and interests on the entire scope of issues dealt with by the central organs. Instructions were not always sent from Tbilisi, forcing the Representation to improvise the Transcaucasian stances.

As the permanent representative had a sit in the All-Union government, Central Executive Committee and in the Council of Labor and Defense (STO), he could participate in the elaboration of all central legislation. The monthly reports of the Representation emphasized the necessity of defending Transcaucasian interests by introducing amendments to bills prepared by central organs. In September 1926, Ter-Gabrielian complained that Transcaucasian commissariats should respond more quickly to the Representation's requests concerning law-making issues since the ZSFSR would otherwise remain powerless against bills that could go counter to its vital interests.⁵² Economic legislation was particularly important, he reminded in his activity report for 1925–1926: the Representation had intervened on bills concerning cooperatives, mining, land property and land use, and budget rights, with a view to smoothing relations between the republics and All-Union institutions.⁵³ For instance, during discussions on the industrial tax (*promyslovij nalog*), the representative expressed the Transcaucasian desire to keep as much Baku oil revenue in the region as possible and opposed proposals made by Ukraine and Uzbekistan to share the income generated by this tax.⁵⁴ Of course, Ter-Gabrielian's reports were self-serving in their presentation of the achievements of the Representation. However, they point to a key dimension of the way Transcaucasians were 'made' at the level of political elites.

For these elites, a key aspect of the ZSFSR was the possibility to use its political structure to make the most out of the mechanisms of Soviet federalism in financial terms. Despite the fact that its leaders tried to negotiate new tax structures for the region, Transcaucasia perennially generated a budget deficit and relied upon permanent subsidies from Moscow. Out of a budget of 68 million rubles in 1925–1926, the ZSFSR could pay only

- 50 Decree of the Transcaucasian SNK, 28 April 1923, SUICA, f. 617, op. 1, d. 16, l. 7; the creation of a unified representation was demanded by Russian authorities: Karachan to Orachelašvili and Mjasnikov, 21 March 1923, SUICA, f. 617, op. 1, d. 67, l. 42.
- 51 Circular letter of the Transcaucasian SNK to republican SNKs, 6 February 1924, RGASPI, f. 298, op. 1, d. 167, l. 1.
- 52 Report of Ter Gabrielian to the Transcaucasian SNK, 5 September 1926, SUICA, f. 616, op. 1, d. 1, l. 169.
- 53 Report of Ter Gabrielian to the Transcaucasian SNK, undated, SUICA, f. 616, op. 1, d. 1, l. 185; see also *Kratkij obzor dejatel'nosti Zakavkazskogo Central'nogo Komiteta*, p. 12.
- 54 Report of Ter Gabrielian to Orachelašvili for August–September 1926, SUITsA, f. 616, op. 1, d. 1, l. 329.

36 million from its direct income, the remainder being provided by Moscow as subsidies.⁵⁵ The quest for Moscow's money was an ideal way to bring together Transcaucasian interests in a time when the fight against economic underdevelopment was the main tenet of Bolshevik power in the region. Budget negotiations occupied an important portion of the Representation's activity in the 1920s and its reports boasted of the particular proximity it enjoyed to the All-Union organs thanks to day-to-day intercourse: "Last year, we obtained from the VSNCh [Supreme Economic Council] 6.5 million rubles for our industry, but we agreed on 10 million rubles this year, a change that was made possible thanks to our constant connection to the work of the VSNCh".⁵⁶ The Representation was actually quite effective in obtaining funds for extra-budgetary projects.⁵⁷ The fiscal year 1925–1926 saw 1.9 million rubles allocated to the ZSFSR for public works, health, culture and regional development. With a population of 5.8 million, it matched the subsidies obtained by Ukraine and its 29 million citizens. This was well above the *per capita* subsidies of the RSFSR, which could get only 6.4 million rubles. Money was used for projects all across the region, being allocated to combating animal plague, building resorts on the Black Sea, agricultural colonization, support for the press, the construction of a bridge in Tbilisi, as well as refugee aid.⁵⁸

On a permanent basis, central subsidies helped to finance the administrative apparatus of the Transcaucasian Federation. Embedded federalism was costly, and administrative expenses were twice as high as in the rest of the country – 2.06 rubles per citizen per year, against an average 1.09 ruble in the USSR as a whole.⁵⁹ This is partly explained by the fact that compared to the republic administrations, the federal apparatus was disproportionately made of executive and senior positions, due to the federal focus on coordination, planning and law-making. In addition, the federally sponsored regional bureaucracy of around a thousand employees created an opportunity for patronage and patrimonial practices, whose importance for Stalinism has been recently reassessed by John Arch Getty.⁶⁰ Since September 1923, a decree of the Transcaucasian government concentrated the power to appoint federal officials in the hands of its chairman Mamia Orachelašvili, a Georgian follower of Ordžonikidze.⁶¹ Staying in this office from 1922 until 1927, Orachelašvili fully used patronage opportunities to support Sergo's network

55 Dochody i raschody ZSFSR, pp. 103–104; for a general insight into budget rules of the Transcaucasian Federation, Položenie o bjudžetnyh pravah ZSFSR.

56 Activity report of the Transcaucasian representation for 1925–1926, SUICA, f. 616, op. 1, d. 1, l. 182.

57 Activity report of the Transcaucasian representation for period 1 January–13 February 1926, SUICA, f. 616, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 158–164; KRYLOV Bjudžetnoe pravo SSSR, p. 141; JAKUBOVSKAJA Stroitel'stvo sojuznogo sotsialističeskogo gosudarstva, pp. 303–304.

58 Activity report of the Transcaucasian representation for 1925–1926, SUICA, f. 616, op. 1, d. 1, l. 181.

59 ZSFSR na novom etape. Tiflis 1929, p. 37, quoted in MERKVLADZE Sozdanie i ukreplenie Sovetskoj gosudarstvennosti, p. 348.

60 GETTY Practicing Stalinism, pp. 2–6.

61 Report of the German consul-general in Tiflis, 23 November 1923, PA AA, Länderabteilung IV (1920–1936), Russland, R 84197.

in the region.⁶² That central subsidies should pay for such a structure was part of the political bargain that ensured stability in the region in return for a great deal of autonomy. The Federation was therefore an integral part to the functioning of the “regional clique” ruling the region.⁶³

A Political Buffer

This political bargain demanded that national conflicts in the South Caucasus should be solved within the framework of the ZSFSR, without bothering central institutions. Transcaucasian authorities had thus tackled border and land conflicts between the three republics in the early 1920s. Starting from 1922, a special body was created in the Transcaucasian Central Executive Committee to solve these these problems.⁶⁴ The Commission on Land, Water and Forest Disputes was to transform highly political conflicts into technical questions by producing geographical, economic and anthropological expertise. While similar Soviet enterprises have been described elsewhere in the production of republic territories, the Transcaucasian case diverged insofar as it had to resolve intense conflicts in South Ossetia, Karabach, Zangezur and Nachičevan.⁶⁵ Moreover, the resolution of these conflicts relied upon horizontal negotiation in the framework of the Transcaucasian Federation. Although parts of the compromises produced in the 1920s have been criticized in the last years of the Soviet Union, one should not underestimate the practical achievements of the Federation in solving numerous territorial conflicts at a local scale. Until the very end of the 1920s, it remained very active and was assigned new missions to settle pending disputes.⁶⁶ The Transcaucasian elite quickly got accustomed to this autonomous conflict resolution, a fact which was expressed during the Georgian uprising in late August 1924, when Ordžonikidze and his allies first kept Moscow uninformed about the course of the revolt and had several leaders executed without central approval, much to Stalin’s dissatisfaction.⁶⁷

As a political buffer, the ZSFSR was to maintain this distance while allowing for control and order. Although Soviet federalism never developed a system of constitutional review like Western federal regimes, the control of constitutional competences between ad-

- 62 Report of the German consul-general in Tiflis, 20 April 1925, PA AA, Länderabteilung IV (1920–1936), Russland, R 84197.
- 63 EASTER *Reconstructing the State*; RIGBY *Early Provincial Cliques*, pp. 3–28; HARRIS *The Great Urals*.
- 64 For a detailed example of this process in a dispute between Armenian Zangezur and Azerbaijani Kurdistan in 1923, see SUICA, f. 607, op. 1, d. 13.
- 65 SAPAROV *From Conflict to Autonomy*, pp. 99–123; SAPAROV *From Conflict to Autonomy in the Caucasus*, notably pp. 125–139; DULLIN *La frontière épaïsse*, pp. 94–95.
- 66 Minutes of a special conference of the Transcaucasian CIK, 29 January 1929, SUICA, f. 617, op. 1, d. 2535, ll. 2–7.
- 67 See SSSA PA, f. 14, op. 2, d. 40 and 41; JIKIA 1924 c’lis ajanq’eba; Stalin to the members of the Politburo, 5 September 1924, in: GATAGOVA/KOŠELEVA/ROGOVAJA (eds.): *CsK RKP(b)-VKP(b) i nacional’nyj vopros*, p. 233.

ministrative levels was debated in the 1920s.⁶⁸ Ukrainian leaders were particularly keen to defend their positions through constitutional arguments and deny “implied powers” to central authorities.⁶⁹ In the absence of judicial review, constitutional and political control could be exerted downward and, more significantly, upward, by Central Executive Committees and Councils of People’s Commissars. The Transcaucasian CIK could block decisions taken by the republics in case it considered them unlawful, but the republics could also appeal against decisions taken by Transcaucasian bodies thanks to an amendment to the Transcaucasian Constitution of April 1925. Similarly, relations between Transcaucasia and All-Union organs included such mechanisms. In this context, Transcaucasian institutions functioned as a field where conflicts could be resolved without central intervention, and created redundancies that could prevent political mistakes.⁷⁰ Moscow was quite satisfied to have this organ serve as a mediating body for conflicts between regional actors, as is illustrated by the conflict that erupted between Adjar party boss Tachsim Chimšiašvili and the Georgian leadership in October 1925.

On 12 October 1925, Chimšiašvili vented his anger against Georgia, accusing its leadership of implementing a “nationalistic, chauvinistic and colonial” policy in Adjara.⁷¹ He decided to go directly to Moscow to plead his case against his Georgian rivals, but the Politburo was loath to intervene. On 15 October, Stalin sent a cable to the Transcaucasian Regional Committee, finding an excuse in the constitutional rules of the ZSFSR: “Although we recognize the right of the Adjar CIK to appeal to Moscow, I consider it more desirable that they appeal first to the Transcaucasian CIK, the highest organ of the Federation”.⁷² Following this cable, Ordžonikidze, Orachelašvili and Šalva Eliava, chairman of the Georgian government, suggested the creation of a joint inquiry commission of the Adjar, Georgian and Transcaucasian CIKs.⁷³

The ZSFSR, in a sense, could be compared to a self-regulated arena, where Bolshevik power was not so much exercised from the center as performed through mutual surveillance of Transcaucasian actors. In nationalities policy, with minorities scattered around the region, every republic could claim to defend the rights of its co-nationals through the institutions of the Federation. Federal institutions laid great emphasis on the use of all Transcaucasian languages in their interaction with society and multiplied procedures designed to service minorities in each republic.⁷⁴ Fact-finding missions were organized in minority regions by inquiry commissions. Thus, in the spring and summer of 1925, Chimšiašvili led an inquiry commission to Muslim regions of Southern Georgia and Ar-

68 DJABLO Konstitucionnyj kontrol’ zakonov, pp. 77–93 and DJABLO Sudebnaja ochrana konstitucij; ZAGOR’E Nužna li nam sudebnaja ochrana Konstitucii, pp. 501–502; KIŠKIN Vysšie organy vlasti SSSR, pp. 32–42.

69 MASSIAS/HUBENY-BELSKY Droit constitutionnel des Etats, pp. 227–228.

70 BOURDIEU Sur l’Etat, pp. 40–41; LANDAU Federalism. Redundancy and System Reliability, p. 188.

71 Third session of the Adjar CIK, 12 October 1925, SŠSA PA, f. 14, op. 1, d. 605, l. 16.

72 Stalin to the ZKK, 15 octobre 1925, RGASPI, f. 558, op. 1, d. 3335, l. 1.

73 Ordžonikidze, Orachelašvili and Eliava to Stalin, SŠSA PA, f. 14, op. 1, d. 605, l. 34.

74 Report of the German consul-general in Tiflis, 29 August 1923, PA AA, Länderabteilung IV (1920–1936), Russland, R 84197; CHAČ’ATRJAN Andrp’ederac’aji peta-iravakan statusč, p. 103.

menia and Armenian Communist Azatian led a commission to Abkhazia.⁷⁵ The Transcaucasian Party Control Commission and Worker's and Peasant's Inspectorate also played a central role in this effort by organizing numerous cross-republic inspections and seeing to the harmonization of legal and administrative practices.⁷⁶ The importance of self-regulation and practical concerns in the morphology of republics brings us to a conclusion similar to what Arne Haugen has argued about Central Asia, that Union republics were not conceived as divisive, but cohesive, since they brought some semblance of unity to highly heterogeneous and conflict-prone local contexts.⁷⁷

Self-regulation and autonomy enabled Transcaucasian leaders to maintain a high profile during the 1920s. The prestige of the Federation attracted foreign consuls, eager to learn more about Soviet policies in "Oriental republics". The special status of Transcaucasia was illustrated in March 1925, when a special session of the All-Union CIK convened in Tbilisi, in the Great Theater House.⁷⁸ Although this session had to review problematic aspects of Soviet power in the region, Ordžonikidze managed to transform it into a power display and an exaltation of his achievements at the head of the Transcaucasian Federation. He insisted that foreign journalists be invited to the event, as well as diplomats.⁷⁹ Due to the particular position of the ZSFSR at the interface between the USSR and the Middle East, observers from Turkey and Iran were particularly attentive to what they perceived as possible hints to new directions in Soviet diplomacy.⁸⁰ Although part of the Soviet Union, Transcaucasia could still enjoy a measure of international profile through such opportunities which regional leaders tried to perpetuate, notably in regional policies toward the "East".⁸¹ The following year, similar comments could be made about the role they played in the organization of the Turcological Congress held in February 1926 in Baku, with a view to influencing the entire Middle East.⁸²

75 Report of the inquiry commission headed by Cimšiašvili, 3 May 1925, SSSA PA, f. 13, op. 3, d. 314, l. 1; BLAUVELT "From Words to Action", pp. 243–244.

76 Report of the Party Control Commission and Worker's and Peasant's Inspectorate on nationality policy in Transcaucasia, 6 July 1929, GARF, f. R374, op. 27, d. 1483, ll. 45–117; RADŽABOV CKK-RKI Azerbajdžana, pp. 32–33; DATUAŠVILI Amierk'avk'asiis sabč'ota pederaciuli, pp. 290–298.

77 HAUGEN *The Establishment of National Republics*, p. 90.

78 KIRILLOV/SVERDLOV Grigorij Konstantinovič Ordžonikidze, pp. 192–193; BABEROWSKI *Der Feind ist überall*, pp. 536–546.

79 NKID to the NKID plenipotentiary in ZSFSR, 25 February 1925, RGASPI, f. 157, op. 1s, d. 15, l. 58.

80 Report of the Turkish consul-general in Tbilisi, 6 March 1925, BCA, 30.10.0.0/247.672.1.

81 BALDAUF *Schriftreform und Schriftwechsel*, pp. 422–427; GASIMOV *Zwischen Europa, Turan und Orient*, pp. 534–558.

82 FRINGS *Playing Moscow off Against Kazan*, pp. 249–266; FRINGS *Sowjetische Schriftpolitik; 1926 Bakù türkoloji kongresinin 70. yıl dönümü*; ALIŞTADT *The Politics of Culture in Soviet Azerbaijan* pp. 72–77.

The Intricacies of Embedded Federalism

In spite of indisputable achievements, the Transcaucasian Federation was not an entirely successful creation. The main problem had to do with the frailty of the arrangements described above: personal politics and concrete relations of power were central to the functioning of Soviet federalism, and constitutional norms could be adapted to new contexts by permanently “remaking the rules”.⁸³ This was directly expressed in the Transcaucasian case by Ordžonikidze’s departure, in summer 1926, to North Caucasus and later to Moscow, as head of the All-Union Party Control Commission and Workers’ and Peasant’s Inspectorate.⁸⁴ In a letter to Stalin, his close associates Orachelašvili and Kachiani argued that Sergo was a key part in ensuring common Transcaucasian interests against factional trends.⁸⁵ At the beginning of the 1920s, Macharadze had prophesied in a letter to the Russian Central Committee that Ordžonikidze’s brutality during the creation of the Federation would foster in reaction hostility to the federalist idea itself, and 1926 confirmed this idea.⁸⁶ Orachelašvili who succeeded Ordžonikidze as head of the Party Regional Committee did not enjoy the same personal authority or ruthlessness, and centrifugal opinions progressively gained ground. After Kirov’s departure from Azerbajdžan, the Caspian republic entered a phase of internecine fights between its leaders that the new First Secretary, Levon Mirzojan, was unable to resolve.⁸⁷

The first expression of this crisis was the multiplication of conflicts between the Republics and Transcaucasian institutions. The distinction between planning and executive tasks, supposed to delimit the respective fields of the ZSFSR and the Republics, was in practice quite hard to draw.⁸⁸ Jašvili, the Transcaucasian Commissar for Labor, thus complained to the Party Regional Committee in January 1928 that Republican commissariats “adopted their own legislation without consultation with the Transcaucasian Commissariat, and often violated the laws in force in the ZSFSR”.⁸⁹ The cohabitation between Transcaucasian and Georgian institutions, which often shared premises, was particularly sensitive. A conflict re-erupted in 1927 between the Transcaucasian and the Georgian GPU and Zalman Argov, head of the secret department of the Transcaucasian GPU, wrote in spring 1928 to complain about Lavrentij Berija, head of the Georgian GPU.⁹⁰ The Regional Committee had to create a special commission in May-June 1928 to demar-

83 BURBANK *Souveraineté eurasiennne*.

84 PAVLOV Anastas Mikojan, p. 29.

85 Kachiani and Orachelašvili to Stalin, 9 August 1926, RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 777, ll. 41–42.

86 MERKVILADZE *Sozdanie i ukreplenie sovetsoj gosudarstvennosti*, p. 345.

87 BABEROWSKI *Der Feind ist überall*, pp. 409–410.

88 Šaverdov, chairman of the Transcaucasian CIK, to the ZKK, 19 September 1927, RGASPI, f. 157, op. 3, d. 248, ll. 168–169.

89 Jašvili to the ZKK, 13 January 1928, RGASPI, f. 157, op. 3, d. 248, ll. 126–127; for the legal basis of the Transcaucasian Commissariat, see the *Položenie o Narodnom Komissariate Truda*, pp. 100–101.

90 THOM Beria, le Janus du Kremlin, pp. 18–19; AGABEKOV OGPU, pp. 27–28; ALLILUEV *Alliluevy-Stalin*, pp. 89–90.

cate the prerogatives of the two institutions.⁹¹ Novruz Rizaev, head of the Azeri GPU in 1927–1929, was also accused by Tbilisi of creating a vast system of corruption based on smuggling operations along the border with Iran.⁹² In these different conflicts, however, the absence of an arbiter able to pass lasting compromises was felt, a fact allowing for a prolongation of tensions.

Many conflicts revolved around the very way the region had been organized since the beginning of the 1920s. The relative vacuum of power, and the intensification of political struggle in the Soviet Union as a whole in 1927–1928, created some room to criticize the ZSFSR. In October 1927, Qəzənfər Musabəyov, an associate of Orachelašvili and Ordžonikidze, rebuked Vagaršak Ter-Vahanian, a Trotsky partisan, who wanted a “review of the federalist experiment” in Transcaucasia.⁹³ In the Republics, voices rose to attack the power of the federation over the Republics. In early 1928, a member of the Yerevan communist youth, Katanjan, attacked the head of the Armenian Gosplan, Poğosjan, for having nationalist opinions in economic planning against the Federation. Similar views could find a public expression in Georgian newspapers and journals.⁹⁴ Significantly, the Republics regained several prerogatives, such as the right to have again separate finance commissariats. More symbolically, 1927 saw the adoption of a new Constitution in Azerbajdžan that imitated the Georgian Constitution and proclaimed the right of secession of the Azeri Republic from the ZSFSR, in contradiction with the Transcaucasian Constitution of 1925.⁹⁵ Stating that Azerbajdžan was a “sovereign state”, the Constitution played on the ambiguous status of the three South Caucasian Republics, which were neither Union Republics, nor merely autonomous ones.⁹⁶ In April 1927, Armenia followed suit, demonstrating the way the idiosyncrasy of the ZSFSR could beget a serious constitutional problem when faced with a weak leadership.

Such conflicts between Republics and Transcaucasian organs were obviously a major threat to the definition of Transcaucasian interests. The Republics were more and more tempted to maintain direct contacts with Moscow. In September 1928, the Secretary of the Azerbajdžani Central Executive Committee alerted the Party Regional Committee about the conflicts between special envoys of Republics he had witnessed during a trip to Moscow. Each Republic tried to negotiate directly with Moscow on industry financing, while “the voices of the Transcaucasian government and planning committee cannot be heard”.⁹⁷ The multilayered nature of the Federation was frequently mentioned as the rea-

91 Protocol of the special ZKK commission on delimiting the competences of the Transcaucasian and Georgian GPUs, 19 June 1928, SŠSA PA, f. 13, op. 6, d. 10, l. 143.

92 ALLILUEV Alliluevy-Stalin, pp. 91–93.

93 MUSABEKOV Izbrannye stat'i, pp. 154–158.

94 Katanjan to the editorial committee of the *Zarja Vostoka* and Ruben, 12 March 1928, HAA, f. 1, op. 8, d. 27, ll. 114–119; for a case involving the *Ekonomist Gruzii* in spring 1928, see JAKUBOVSKAJA Razvitie SSSR, p. 155.

95 SKRIPILEV (ed.): Sovetskoe gosudarstvo i pravo, p. 163.

96 KOTLJAREVSKIJ Pravovaja priroda Zakavkazskich respublik, pp. 17–24; ALIEV Konstitucionnoe razvitie, pp. 56–57.

97 Qarayev to the ZKK, 4 September 1928, SŠSA PA, f. 13, op. 6, d. 20, ll. 62–63.

son for these attempts to bypass cumbersome hierarchies and limit red tape.⁹⁸ The Permanent Representation complained about such initiatives, which went counter to its role as unifying voice for negotiations with Moscow. The new representative Mamulia insisted that the role of the Representation, trapped between All-Union institutions who wanted a better control on the implementation of central decisions in Transcaucasia and Transcaucasian institutions unwilling to cooperate, found it increasingly difficult to fulfill its tasks.⁹⁹ A series of conflicts erupted between republic and Transcaucasian organs on direct contacts with Moscow: the head of the Transcaucasian Water Administration, former Chekist and future Azeri leader Mircəfər Bağirov, battled in 1927–1928 against his Republic counterparts who tried to negotiate directly with Moscow and Leningrad to hire Russian water experts.¹⁰⁰ The Federation, as mediating field between Moscow and the Republics, therefore experienced a predicament during these years, demonstrating the necessity of combining both constitutional mechanisms *and* political leadership to make the ZSFSR work.

The Great Turn and the Pitfalls of Internal Competition

This first crisis of the Federation is a central factor to understanding what became, in the following year, a condensed process by which the ZSFSR was successively revived and dismantled. The key years correspond with the period of Stalin's Great Turn of 1929–1931, when Transcaucasia experienced a brief revival due to the imperatives of the Five-Year-Plan. Debates about economic centralization and territorial organization in 1928–1929 brought a welcome boost to the federation, by recognizing Transcaucasia as one self-sufficient planning unit.¹⁰¹ Stalin resolutely supported this idea and demanded in a letter to Molotov, in August 1929, that Transcaucasian leadership over the region be strengthened, in order to successfully launch industrialization.¹⁰² Great plans for electric industry, water works, railways and agriculture meant a renewed emphasis on regional integration. This was translated into a decision of the Politburo, on 30 October 1929, that considerably increased the power of Transcaucasian organs.¹⁰³ Their financial and economic competences were widened: the ZSFSR Gosplan was entrusted with the planning for regional electrification and irrigation, the Transcaucasian Statistical Administration

98 Report of the Party Control Commission and Worker's and Peasant's Inspectorate on nationality policy in Transcaucasia, 6 July 1929, GARF, f. R374, op. 27, d. 1483, l. 48.

99 Activity report of the permanent representation for October–November 1927, SUICA, f. 616, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 124–126.

100 Bağirov to the Transcaucasian SNK, 1st July 1927, SUICA, f. 616, op. 1, d. 1, l. 424, and protocol of the Armenian SNK, 22 October 1927, l. 441.

101 Report of the German consul-general in Tiflis, 17 September 1929, PA AA, Länderabteilung IV (1920–1936), R 84197; VEZIROV [et al.]: *Očerki istorii*, p. 135.

102 Stalin to Molotov, 21 August 1929, in: KOŠELEVA [et al.] (eds.): *Pis'ma I. V. Stalina*, p. 146.

103 Direktiva CK VKP o dal'nejšej rabote Zakkrajškoma, 30 octobre 1929, RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 765, l. 16; decree of the Transcaucasian CIK, 29 November 1929, *Sistematičeskoe sobranie zakonov ZSFSR*, pp. 119–121.

was now submitted to the federal Commissariat of Finance and got supervisory powers.¹⁰⁴ More significantly, a new Transcaucasian Commissariat for Agriculture was established in a decision that caused long discussions among regional leaders. This was indisputably a comeback of the federal level, duly noted by foreign observers.¹⁰⁵

Federal institutions stood at the forefront of the decision adopted in December 1929 to implement full collectivization in many districts of the region. As the Georgian historian Lomašvili remarked, Transcaucasia was never a priority for central leaders during the first collectivizing campaign.¹⁰⁶ In November 1929, the Kaminskij commission set a target of collectivizing 80 % of Transcaucasian households only by 1933, which was modest in comparison with other republics.¹⁰⁷ Federal leaders inflated these targets to enhance the importance of their region in Moscow's eyes *and* to put under pressure Republic leaders who reacted by raising the targets even higher. After a series of meetings and public statements, the Regional Committee adopted very high collectivization targets in a decision taken on December 15, 1929.¹⁰⁸ This is not the place to present a general picture of the disasters produced by collectivization in Transcaucasia.¹⁰⁹ We can confine ourselves to mentioning that widespread revolts shook Soviet power in the region and necessitated numerous military operations over more than two years to be crushed. Episodes of outright rebellion in frontier areas such as the Talyš Mountains, Ajara and along the Turco-Armenian border alternated with simmering discontent and the mass flight of peasants into the mountains, the forests and toward Iran and Turkey.¹¹⁰

What is relevant here is the fact that collectivization and discontent with it quickly revived the debate surrounding the Federation. After March 1930, in an attempt to exculpate themselves for these failures, Republican leaders tried to put the blame on the Transcaucasian leadership, a version of events reiterated in GPU reports sent directly to Moscow.¹¹¹ The simultaneous difficulties of industrialization, which pit republican rulers against each other for more funds, only added oil to the fire. Disagreement was publicly expressed in 1930, when the new Transcaucasian leader, Beso Lominadze, tried to reestablish the credentials of the Federation. Although he had personally been skeptical of collectivization, he now had to produce a compromise and acknowledge a few errors. A letter he sent to all Party cells in the region met with strong opposition in Azerbajdžan.

104 Položenie o Narodnom komissariate finansov ZSFSR; FORESTIER-PEYRAT *Fighting Locusts Together*, pp. 536–571.

105 Report of the German consul-general in Tiflis, 6 December 1929, PA AA, Länderabteilung IV (1920–1936), Russland, R 84153.

106 LOMAŠVILI *Velikij perevorot* and LOMAŠVILI *Iz istorii kolchoznogo stroitel'stva*, pp. 156–157.

107 Report of the Kaminskij sub-commission, 14 December 1929, reproduced in IVNICKIJ (ed.): *Tragedija Sovetskoj derevni*, pp. 46–47.

108 ZKK decision, 15 December 1929, SSSA PA, f. 13, op. 7, d. 17, l. 18.

109 For Soviet accounts, besides LOMAŠVILI, see GHAZACHEČ'JAN *Hajastani kolntesajin giughac'iu-t'jan patmut'junč*; BLAUVELT *Resistance and Accommodation in the Stalinist Periphery*, pp. 78–108; GRANT *An Average Azeri Village*, pp. 705–731.

110 Report of the GPU border guard, 18 March 1930, RGVA, f. 25873, op. 3s, d. 40, l. 107; ZKK decision, 16 June 1930, SSSA PA, f. 1, op. 1, d. 4, ll. 1–4.

111 KNIGHT *Beria, Stalin's First Lieutenant*, pp. 41–43.

In October the Baku Party Committee decided to publicly criticize the letter and, after being rebuked by the Regional Committee for nationalism, appealed to Moscow. Although the Central Committee officially sided with the ZKK, its endorsement was full of reserves.¹¹² A few days later, Lominadze was demoted and arrested in the context of the Syrcov-Lominadze case that revealed the existence of an opposition group around the chairman of the Russian SNK, Sergej Syrcov.¹¹³

The implications of the affair were twofold. On the one hand, it brought to light the numerous tensions among regional leaders which had emerged due to the decline of Ordžonikidze's clique. In an effort to pacify relations in the region, Kirov was sent on a special mission to Baku, Yerevan and Tiflis at the end of 1930.¹¹⁴ Structurally, the crisis revealed the limits of Transcaucasian self-regulation in situations of political and social tension. Whereas the Federation could still be praised in official publications, such as G. N. Gabisonia's *History of the Creation of the Transcaucasian Federation*, central leaders had growing qualms about the initial bargain that had given birth to it.¹¹⁵ In October 1931, at an Orgbiuro meeting, Stalin inveighed against the "lack of Party organization" and "ataman government [*atamanschbina*]" peculiar to the way the Federation was managed.¹¹⁶ The responsibilities of the Federal leadership in the failures of the Great Turn were directly mentioned in the ensuing discussion and excessive centralization in Tiflis was characterized as a distinctive leftist deviation.¹¹⁷

A Puzzling Demise

The fact that the Transcaucasian Federation never recovered from the blow it suffered in 1930–1931 was due to the errors committed by its leaders during this period.¹¹⁸ A few years later, the project of a new Soviet Constitution that was announced in 1935 provided an opportunity to suppress the Federation without attracting too much attention. As far as the ZSFSR is concerned, though, the constitutional reform remains very enigmatic. In March 1936, Musabəyov, who was then head of the Transcaucasian government, outlined the radiant future of the federation as a constituent republic in the new Stalin Constitution.¹¹⁹ A few months later, the chairman of the Transcaucasian government would be surprised to learn that the Transcaucasian Federation was abolished by the new Constitution. On 12 June 1936, a speech by Lavrentij Berija, who chaired the

112 Decision *O konflikte mezhdu Zakkrajkomom i CK AKP(b)*, 19 October 1930, RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 801, ll. 15 and 31–32; report of the German consul-general in Tiflis, 19 November 1930, PA AA, Länderabteilung IV (1920–1936), Russland, R 84153.

113 DAVIES *The Syrtsov-Lominadze Affair*, pp. 29–50; KNIGHT *Who Killed Kirov?*, pp. 150–151.

114 EASTER *Reconstructing the State*, p. 87; ISKENDEROV S.M. *Kirov v Azerbajdzane*, p. 209.

115 GABISONIA *K istorii obrazovaniia*. The book was translated in Georgian a year later, under the title *Amierkavkasiis pederatsiis daarsebis istoriisat'vis*.

116 Speech held in an Orgbiuro meeting, 19 October 1931, RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 132, l. 96.

117 Stenographic report of discussions at the Orgbiuro, 19 October 1931, RGASPI, f. 17, op. 114, d. 265, ll. 75–137.

118 SAHAKJAN *Khorhrdajin Hayastane*, pp. 25–26.

119 MUSABEKOV *Četyrnadcat' let Zakfederacii*.

Transcaucasian Regional Committee of the Party since 1932, was published in all newspapers, explaining this demise as a logical consequence of Marxist dialectics, since the Federation had played its role in reestablishing peace, public order and prosperity in a region once torn apart by nationalism, ethnic strife, and imperialism.¹²⁰ Actually, the first drafts of the Constitution elaborated at the end of 1935 still mentioned the Transcaucasian Federation.¹²¹ Although available archives do not provide a definitive answer on the process by which the ZSFSR was abolished, one fact can be ascertained: Berija did not fight to maintain the Federation.

The mystery that veils the last five years of the Federation is not unrelated to the riddle which still permeates Berija's life, despite a few biographical attempts by historians. In a recent biography, Françoise Thom relies upon the memoirs of Berija's son to claim that Berija was a Georgian nationalist at heart, who fostered a deep distrust toward the Federation since the early 1920s.¹²² When becoming boss of the Regional Committee, he felt no incentive to revive a Federation he loathed and simply let it die. Berija's inner feelings might well have been so, but this psychological explanation remains impossible to prove. It is important to keep in mind that Berija did not belong to the first generation of Caucasian Bolsheviks who had established the Federation. His activity in 1920–1922 was being partially shady and he could not claim the glory Ordžonikidze and the likes drew from this founding moment, a fact that made him closer to Stalin.¹²³ His ascent in 1931–1932 was personally opposed by close associates of Ordžonikidze – notably Lavrentij Kartvelišvili, his predecessor as Georgian First Secretary – and Berija had many of them “exiled” to Moscow or other parts of the Union during the 1930s.¹²⁴ He still polemicized with some of them, notably in 1935 when he decided to publish his account on the history of Transcaucasian organizations.¹²⁵

The fact that Berija remained First Secretary of the Georgian Party after he became First Secretary of the Party Regional Committee is in itself telling.¹²⁶ In 1931–1932 he had virulently protected the competences of his Republic against the Federation and infuriated Orachelašvili who denounced the nationalist policies implemented by Berija to Ordžonikidze. Mentioning a Georgian embargo on the export of wood to Armenia, Orachelašvili noted that “this sounded like 1922, not 1932”, a reference to the economic travails the federation had helped overcome in its first phase.¹²⁷ As soon as he became head

120 BERIJA *Novaja Konstitucija SSSR*, pp. 14–15.

121 Protocol of the Akulov subcommittee on “Central and local organs of state power”, 8 October 1935, GARF, f. R3316, op. 40, d. 27, ll. 94–95 and 152–153.

122 THOM *Berija, le Janus du Kremlin*, pp. 100–101; BERIA *Berija, mon père*, pp. 37–38.

123 See the interesting remarks made by Orachelašvili as reviewer of two dissertations on the Transcaucasian Federation, in 1934, defended at the Institute of Marxism-Leninism, where he emphasizes the importance of memory to consolidate the Federation. RGASPI, f. 298, op. 1, d. 30 and d. 31; KHLJEVNIUK *In Stalin's Shadow*, pp. 36–39.

124 BRACKMAN *The Secret File of Joseph Stalin*, pp. 209–210.

125 Report of the Polish consul-general in Tiflis, 6 February 1934, AAN, f. 322, sygn. 12.

126 Politburo protocol, 16 October 1932, RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 903, l. 8.

127 Orachelašvili to Ordžonikidze, 1 Aug. 1932, RGASPI, f. 85, op. 29, d. 472, ll. 1–2; see also Mga-bloblišvili, Georgian SNK chairman, to Berija, 8 Sep. 1932, SSSA PA, f. 14, op. 7, d. 17, l. 13.

of the regional Committee, Berija hastened to suppress two institutions which had tried to implement stronger control over the Republics, the Transcaucasian Supreme Court and the Prosecutor's Office.¹²⁸ Berija's policy was successful because it appealed to two structural evolutions that affected Soviet power in the region. The first had to do with the fact that he behaved as a *primus inter pares* among Republic leaders, more than as a Transcaucasian ruler. Although he did not use the concept at the time, he acted as a defender of "Republican rights", a role he would play again during his brief struggle for power in 1953.¹²⁹ His networks, a close associate remarked at the time of his fall, were personal more than institutional, and were not linked to the Federation the way Ordžonikidze's networks had been.¹³⁰ Moreover, since the Syrcov-Lominadze affair, the Federation had been associated with shady political undertones, and some distance from it could even benefit the new leader of the region.

Additionally, one has to study the structural dimension of a crisis that had to do with fundamental imbalances. Whereas the Federation was a rational construction in the early 1920s as a way to bring together regional elites around the Bolshevik project, a new form of rationality now criticized what was perceived as its excessive cost. The First Five-Year Plan was the heyday of the so-called rationalization movement in the industry and administration, after a long genesis in the 1920s.¹³¹ The disasters of the Plan in the Caucasus made the Federation vulnerable to attacks on the ground of efficiency. The political cost of Transcaucasian federalism and its voluntary institutional redundancies were now greater and more difficult to advocate as money was scarce and investments were to be driven above all by the rising economic targets of the Plan. As soon as July 1929, Musabəyov conceded the "costliness of the apparatus" in the Federation.¹³² An October 1931 report by the Moscow Central Committee pointed to administrative costs of 18 % in ZSFSR against 16 % in Russia, 15 % in Ukraine and 12 % in Belorussia.¹³³ Although the difference cannot be considered excessive, a special commission was established in November to trim administrative expenditures in the Federation.¹³⁴ As Berija took over regional leadership, this trend evolved toward a full-fledged dismantlement of Transcaucasian institutions.

In November 1932, the ZKK commission for administrative spending cuts adopted stringent measures: it closed several institutions of the Transcaucasian apparatus and re-

128 Complaints to Stalin by Dolidze, the Transcaucasian prosecutor, remained unanswered. ZKK decision, 29 October 1932, SŠSA PA, f. 13, op. 12, d. 18, l. 148; Krasikov, All-Union Prosecutor, to the All-Union CIK, 20 November 1932, GARF, f. R8131, op. 10, d. 67, ll. 5–6; MŖIJKOV O nekotorych teoretičeskich aspektach, pp. 11–12.

129 KNIGHT Beria, Stalin's First Lieutenant, pp. 189–190.

130 See Vsevolod Merkulov's testimony on Beria's ruling style: Interrogation of Vsevolod Merkulov, October 1953, in MOZOCHIN (ed.): Politburo i delo Berija, pp. 449–463.

131 CHIMOVIČ Režim ekonomiki v SSSR, pp. 106–109; MORET From technicians to classics, pp. 173–186.

132 Report of the Party Control Commission and Worker's and Peasant's Inspectorate on nationality policy in Transcaucasia, 6 July 1929, GARF, f. R374, op. 27, d. 1483, l. 48.

133 Report of Party Instructor Frenkel', 15 October 1931, RGASPI, f. 17, op. 114, d. 265, l. 21.

134 GEVONDJAN Razvitie konstitucionnogo zakonodatel'stva ZSFSR, pp. 13–14.

duced many others. The secretariat of the Transcaucasian government lost 10 % of its staff, the CIK 20 %, and the commissariat for Labor up to 75 %, while many administrations were outright abolished.¹³⁵ Six of the most important industrial trusts of Transcaucasia were liquidated and their assets transferred to the republics.¹³⁶ The trend continued in early 1933, when the RKI and the Transcaucasian Control Commission of the Party completed a survey of payrolls in Transcaucasian institutions: out of 764 institutions inspected in the region, 173 were closed, while the staffing and payroll of the remaining 591 was cut. Federal-level institutions were proportionally strongly affected by the campaign, many of them were left with very little means.¹³⁷ A case in point was the Transcaucasian Commissariat for Light Industry, which lost 55 out of its 70 employees: the commissar complained that his institution was no longer able to meet its duties, but he received little support from the Transcaucasian government to which he complained.¹³⁸ As intermediate actors, Transcaucasian administrations were now increasingly caught between central planners and the people tasked with implementing the plan in the Republics.

At this point, efficiency meant national striving for “federal immediacy” of Transcaucasian Republics: such an immediacy could at the same time be presented as nationally legitimate, and economically more efficient.¹³⁹ The nationalist vision of the region drew legitimacy by relying on Marxist dialectics to envision the demise of the ZSFSR as the very consequence of the progress of communism and the end of interethnic strife. Politically and legally speaking, the existence of the three Transcaucasian republics as subunits of an embedded Federation was seen as less and less acceptable in a time when the full political and cultural equality of the Union republics was emphasized.¹⁴⁰ Defenders of the Federation such as Orachelašvili could therefore be countered when they still tried to justify the Federation as a legacy of the Civil War: was their defense of the Federation not a way to minimize the achievements of socialism since 1917?¹⁴¹ Between 1931 and 1933, the share of the state budget in Transcaucasia that was managed by the Federation fell from 128 to 85 billion rubles, whereas the share of the Republics increased from 161

135 Protocol of the ZKK commission on reducing administrative expenditures, 15 November 1932, SŠSA PA, f. 13, op. 12, d. 18, ll. 97–110.

136 CHARMANDARJAN *Spločenje narodov*, p. 153; ŠABANOV *Razvitie sovetskoj gosudarstvennosti v Azerbajdžane*, p. 110.

137 Report of the ZKKK-RKI, approved on 14 January 1933, SUICA, f. 617, op. 1, d. 6792, ll. 17–19.

138 Letter of the interim commissar to the chairman of the Transcaucasian government, January 1933, SUICA, f. 617, op. 1, d. 6792, ll. 3–4.

139 BRANDENBERGER *National Bolshevism*, 2002; YILMAZ *The Soviet Union and the Construction*, pp. 511–533; GURULI/TUŠURAŠVILI (eds.): *Lavrent’i Berias mimoc’era*.

140 SLEZKINE *The USSR as a Communal Apartment*, pp. 446–447.

141 Orachelašvili made this point in a famous speech pronounced at the Tbilisi Party Committee, on 22 February 1932. The text was widely circulated in several languages: ORACHELAŠVILI *10 let Zakavkazskoj federacii*, p. 27; ORACHELAŠVILI *Amierkavkasiis pederacii*; a similar argument a few years later, ORACHELAŠVILI *Sergo Ordžonikidze*, pp. 12–18; ORACHELAŠVILI *V bor’be zavoevannaja federacija*, pp. 170–176.

to 292 billion rubles.¹⁴² Republics and central institutions progressively found common ground in deciding to circumscribe the obscuring screen of the Federation.¹⁴³ The Permanent Representative to Moscow, Vašadze, lamented this indifference in October 1932 in a letter where he described the pitiful state of his institution, ever less able to ensure intermediation between Transcaucasia and central State bodies.¹⁴⁴ The Representation was increasingly limited to minor tasks, such as supervising Transcaucasian students in Moscow and Leningrad.¹⁴⁵

Despite concrete indications of the material decline of the Federation, contemporary observers did not anticipate its disappearance. Whereas official rhetoric by the summer 1936 ascribed the Transcaucasian Federation to the “transitory period” of communism and saw in it an obsolete residue of the NEP, there was no way to foresee such a turn a few months earlier.¹⁴⁶ In 1934, the Institute for Soviet Construction and Law of the Communist Academy entrusted S. Abramov with a preliminary research on Transcaucasian federalism, whose first results were presented in October 1934 at a meeting of the Institute.¹⁴⁷ Abramov was sent to Tbilisi for a month to conduct a field study of the Transcaucasian organs, a merit duly noted by the head of the Institute, Evgenij Pašukanis.¹⁴⁸ The examination of Transcaucasian solutions to concrete problems was crucial, as they might “be extended to Central Asia”. Ironically, the participants of the session mentioned the potential creation of a Central Asian Federation at the very moment when the Politburo decided to bury the Central Asian Bureau and all hopes of such a sister Federation further in the East.¹⁴⁹ The participants of the debate emphasized the apparent contradictions in the evolution of the Federation: I. D. Levin was confused about the direction taken by the ZSFSR and whether “the competences of the ZSFSR were expanding and the competences of the republics receding” or quite the contrary.¹⁵⁰ Although they disagreed on numerous legal, economic and administrative problems related to the ZSFSR, all legal experts agreed that the topic should be further studied for theoretical and practical reasons.

142 KAKABADZE Edinyj gosbjudžet ZSFSR, p. 82.

143 Report of the German consul-general in Tiflis, 17 November 1931, PA AA, Länderabteilung IV (1920–1936), Russland, R 84153; the only Soviet work that mentions this trend to my knowledge is BEGIJAN Razvitie sovetsoj gosudarstvennosti, p. 87.

144 Vašadze to Berija, 11 October 1932, SŠSA PA, f. 13, op. 10, d. 20, l. 59; on direct trips of republic officials to Moscow, see Berija to Akopov and Ter Gabrielian, 5 December 1934, HAA, f. 1, op. 14, d. 35, l. 10.

145 KVARACHELJJA Kommunističeskaja partija, p. 113; ZKK protocol, 5 February 1935, SŠSA PA, f. 13, op. 13, d. 3, ll. 44–45.

146 DIMANŠTEJN Stalinskaja konstitutsija, pp. 22–33.

147 Minutes of discussion on Abramov’s report, 7 October 1934, ARAN, f. 360, op. 4, d. 343.

148 ARAN, f. 360, op. 4, d. 343, l. 20.

149 ARAN, f. 360, op. 4, d. 343, l. 1; ROSLJAKOV Sredazbjuro TsK VKP(b), p. 349.

150 Minutes of discussion ..., ARAN, f. 360, op. 4, d. 343, l. 6.

Conclusion

The disappearance of the Transcaucasian Federation was of particular significance for the South Caucasus, since it marked an acceleration in the nationalization of the three Republics. As the dismantlement of Transcaucasian institutions gathered pace at the end of 1935, non-Georgian officials left Tbilisi to Yerevan, Baku, and Moscow. In May 1936, the Italian consul in the city noted that the end of the Federation would “develop ever more the national identity of Tbilisi, and favor the strong nationalist tendencies by eliminating non-Georgians from top political and administrative positions”.¹⁵¹ The demise of the ZSFSR thus completed a process of national homogenization excoriated by Stalin during the Georgian Affair, fifteen years earlier.¹⁵² Although, in the region, the Great Terror of 1936–1938 is currently overwhelmingly interpreted in terms of Russian repression against Caucasian nations, it was also a clear case of repression by each titular nation against its minorities. By proclaiming the triumph of Soviet internationalism and economic development in the ZSFSR, Soviet leaders of the late 1930s actually paved the way for a strengthened national character of each republic.

This contradiction between avowed internationalism and an undercurrent of nationalism remained a major feature of Soviet South Caucasus, but it was not enough to entirely discard the idea of a region-based organization of Soviet republics in later years. While the ZSFSR could be taken as an example for Central Asian republics in 1934 by lawyers of the Communist Academy, it remained in ordinary peoples’ minds in the 1960s, when many citizens wrote to higher authorities to suggest the creation of three regional federations for Transcaucasia, Central Asia and the Baltics, despite continued dynamics to ‘nationalize’ the republics.¹⁵³ There was, however, no revival of such a federation, even though the period witnessed attempts to recreate organs of regional coordination for clusters of republics. The Transcaucasian Party Bureau (*Zakbjuro*) in existence in 1963–1964 bore little resemblance with its predecessor, being essentially focused on economic issues and lacking the support of a corresponding state apparatus.¹⁵⁴

Despite this ultimate evolution, the history of the Transcaucasian Federation should be considered relevant for what it says about the importance of federal mechanisms in Soviet power. We could argue in a *microstoria* approach that the ZSFSR is a privileged vantage point since it is both exceptional and normal, exacerbating features that have remained unobserved in Union republics that seem to better fit the nation-state model.¹⁵⁵ Federalism provided Soviet leaders with numerous tools they could use to strike a balance between central control and regional autonomy. As we have demonstrated, federalism was not limited to the formal existence of the Republics, since it was also practiced

151 Report of the Italian consul-general in Tiflis, 29 May 1936, ASMAE, Affari Politici, 1931–1945, URSS, b. 19.

152 SLEZKINE *The USSR as a Communal Apartment*, p. 426.

153 Summary of suggestions made by Soviet citizens concerning the new Constitution, 1962–1964, RGASPI, f. 84, op. 3, d. 39, ll. 36, 54, d. 40, ll. 42–45, 94, d. 41, l. 28; OBERENDER “Am besten wäre es, man schwiege über die Exzesse”, pp. 517–521.

154 CHOTINER *Khrushchev’s Party Reform*, pp. 194–195; *The Future of Soviet Federalism*, p. 335.

155 ROSENAL *Construire le macro par le micro*, pp. 141–159.

on a daily basis through mechanisms allowing for republic interests, conflicts resolution and legitimacy building. On the other hand, as demonstrated by the history of the Transcaucasian federation, constitutional barriers were not that strong in the Soviet practice of federalism, and personal leadership played a key role in determining the exact power relation between institutions. Finally, the demise of the Transcaucasian federation reminds us of the tremendous part played by imperatives of economic efficiency in the remoulding of Soviet federalism during the 1930s. This feature opens new opportunities for a comparative discussion of Soviet federalism in an international context, as economic factors were precisely seen in other parts of the world as the determinant to understand the “obsolescence of federalism” or, to put it more optimistically, the “rise of a new federalism” in the Western world.¹⁵⁶

Abbreviations

AAN	Archiwum Akt Nowych (Archives of Modern Records), Warsaw Fond 322: Ministerstwo spraw zagranicznych (Ministry of Foreign Affairs)
ARAN	Archiv Rossijskoj Akademii Nauk (Archives of the Russian Academy of Sciences), Moscow Fond 360: Institute of Soviet Construction and Law of the Communist Academy
ARSPIHDA	Azərbaycan Respublikası Siyasi Partiyalar və İctimai Hərəkətlər Dövlət Arxivini (Azerbaijani State Archives of Political Parties and Social Movements), Baku (sources cited according to the literature)
ASMAE	Archivio Storico Diplomatico (Archives of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Rome
BCA	Başbakanlık Cumhuriyet Arşivi (Republican Archives, Ankara)
CIK	Central'nyj Iсполnitel'nyj Komitet (Central Executive Committee)
d.	delo
f.	fond
GARF	Gosudarstvennyj Archiv Rossijskoj Federatsii (State Archives of the Russian Federation, Moscow) Fond R374: Central Control Commission of the Party-Workers' and Peasants' Inspectorate of the USSR Fond R3316: Central Executive Committee of the USSR Fond R8131: Chief Prosecutor's Office of the USSR
GPU	Gosudarstvennoe Političeskoe Upravlenie
HAA	Hajastan Azgajin Archivner (National Archives of Armenia), Erevan Fond 1: Central Committee of the Armenian Communist Party
PA AA	Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts (Archives of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Berlin

156 To quote a famous article by Harold Laski in *The New Republic* in May 1939, LASKI/CLARK The Rise of a New Federalism.

- RGASPI Rossijskij Gosudarstvennyj Archiv Social'no-političeskoj istorii (Russian State Archive of Social and Political History), Moscow
Fond 17: Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party
Fond 84: Anastas Mikojan
Fond 85: Sergo Ordžonikidze
Fond 157: Micha Cchakaja
Fond 298: Mamia Orachelašvili
Fond 558: Iosif Stalin
- RGVA Rossijskij Gosudarstvennyj Voennyj Archiv (Russian State Military Archive), Moscow
Fond 25873: Transcaucasian Military District
- RKI Raboče-Krest'janskaja Inspekcija (Peasants' and Workers' Inspectorate)
- RSFSR Rossijskaja Sovetskaja Federativnaja Sotsialističeskaja Federacija (Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic)
- SNK Sovet Narodnych Komissarov (Council of People's Commissars)
- SŠSA PA Sakartvelos Šinagan sakmeta Saminist'ros Arkivi – P'olitik'uri Arkivi (Archives of the Interior Ministry of Interior of Georgia – Political Archives), Tbilisi
Fond 1: Special Folder of the Transcaucasian Regional Committee and the Georgian Central Committee
Fond 13: Transcaucasian Regional Committee
Fond 14: Central Committee of the Georgian Communist Party
Fond 128: Transcaucasian Communist University
- SUICA Sakartvelos Uachlesi Ist'oriis Cent'raluri Archivi (Central Archives of Modern History of Georgia), Tbilisi
Fond 607: Central Executive Committee of the ZSFSR
Fond 612: Federal Council of Transcaucasia
Fond 616: Permanent Representation of the ZSFSR in Moscow
Fond 617: Council of People's Commissars of the ZSFSR
Fond 735: Foreign Trade Representative for Transcaucasia
- VSNCh Vysšij sovet narodnogo chozjajstva (Supreme Economic Council)
- ZKK Zakavkazskij Kraevoj Komitet (Transcaucasian Regional Committee)
- ZKKK Zakavkazskaja Kraevaja Kontrol'naja Komissija (Transcaucasian Regional Control Commission)
- ZSFSR Zakavkazskaja Sovetskaja Federativnaja Sotsialističeskaja Respublika (Transcaucasian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic)

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