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CAUCASUS – CAPTIVE OF GLOBAL ILLUSIONS AND REGIONAL TRAPS

The first years of the third millennium set new challenges to the world. The forming new world order creates new problems, changes stereotypes and traditions, forms new thinking and new moral value system, creates new, global enemies. The lack of clear rules and mechanisms, determining the nature characteristics of the new era cognitively binds the changes to such stable terms as legitimacy, state, nation, sovereignty.

The global world order is principally different from the previous one, regarding subjects, objects and objectives of international regulation. One of the main aims of regulation is directed towards decreasing the risk of military conflicts and war. This determines the objects of regulation which include relations and problems of these states which are important for the subjects of the world order, but most likely to bring a conflict between them. In organizational aspect the world order is a network with elements of stratification in which the borders of the post-Soviet space are some of the main segments in the international regulation.

The contemporary international relations more and more turns into a battle field between the most powerful and vivid geopolitical images – the states, regions, political and military blocks. A new global geopolitical space is created in which

the constantly changing key political images of the world are crossing, interrelate and compete with each other.

Fragmentation, which accompanies globalization, maintains the role of the national state in its capacity of stabilizing force and factor. Modifications, which are part of the process of disintegration in the post-Soviet space sharply raises the question of the forms and mechanisms through which the sovereignty of the new subjects of international rights is realized. For strategic regions with dynamically changing structure such as the Caucasian area the form of sovereignty, as well as center-periphery relations (in subregional and regional plans) are an important trump in the process of self-identification of the national states. Their creation is related to the establishment of clear ‘borders’, different by nature from the blurred ‘frontiers’, typical for the traditional states. In modern days the states again are oriented towards the frontier and not the borders, but for different reasons. In the past the state was happy with the frontier because of the weakness of the power apparatus and the impossibility to establish the authority along its external borders. The borders of contemporary state turn into frontiers because of their relation to the other regions and involvement in different sorts of transnational communities.

The border is a cognitive term of the geopolitics, which in the end of the 20th – beginning of the 21st century forms as one of the leading approaches in the analyses of international relations. Bound to the numerous and various communication networks, the land transforms into a geopolitical space, forming itself as an active subject and object of the social and political relation. A result of the modification of the cognitive perception of the world is the interpretation of the geopolitics as a change in the understanding of the geographical space and politics.

The border is not merely a line on the geographic map, end, limit of a geographical space or only a territory. It is a defined end of the power space, i.e. end of territories, stratified with the help of power technologies, touch zones, crossing, imposing on different, often different types of spaces and power

structures. Such political ‘buffers’ create non-standard geopolitical images especially in contact between the different political cultures. A typical buffer zone is the Black Sea – Caspian area where global, regional and subregional political and economic interests cross each other.

The Caucasian region is also a typical example for the transformations, which accompany the fragmentation of the post-Soviet space. The sovereignty crisis of the created after the collapse of the Soviet Union Caucasian states is in direct connection to the borders, outlining contemporary Caucasus in which political, economic, clan, ethno-national and confessional problems interweave. Caucasus is a strategic region with dynamically changing structure.

The possibilities of establishing or expanding the respective borders are directly dependent on the strength and capabilities of the power structures and their positions amongst the border population. Both the frontier and the border create conditions for the formation of communities with their own laws and rules which regarding the realities, related to internal and external factors manage to establish or not the set objectives.

The historical reminiscences of the processes from Soviet consolidation to post-Soviet fragmentation after the end of the Cold War prove the wide range of irredentist and secession actions. The Soviet federalism in its hybrid form is relevantly expressed in the disintegration actions of the Caucasian subjects. The immanent contradictions of the Stalin’s nationally. Administrative division are revealed fully in the international and domestic confrontations. The attempts to implement full and shared sovereignty in the Caucasian region traditionally end with military conflicts, contact groups and permanently expanding presence of the international factor in their legal solutions. The lack of real state integrity in Georgia and Azerbaijan de facto determines the level of conflict but not the legal characteristic of the existing state structure.

The impossibility to grade by importance the identification elements in the Caucasian area does not change the fact, that in every specific case the determining element is limited to the sphere of ethnicity, religion or economy. All forms of confrontation are permanently present in Caucasus. The ethnic belonging or loyalty to different states turns into enemies the nations with the same religion and the religious belonging divides the representatives of a certain ethnic group or unites nations, speaking different languages.

In the post-soviet Caucasian space the ethno-national conflicts are an implicit part of the confessional elements of confrontation. In social aspect religion is now a proof of identity and active element of the political tool set. The variety of national minorities and religions in the region expands the perimeter of unpredictability of the achieving of specific objectives. The sought by the Georgia and Azerbaijan integrity goes through the conflicts, military defeats, international actions and weakening of the national and regional security. The ethnically monolith Armenia, closed in the geopolitical belt of Turkey and Azerbaijan through militarization of society and moderate relations with Georgia makes its way to Europe and Russia.

In the post-Soviet space of changes emerges the phenomenon of 'unrecognized states' which is a trade mark mainly of the South Caucasian region. The institutionalization of the unrecognized states in Georgia and Azerbaijan begins objectively with the abolishment of the autonomous status of South Ossetia and NKAR. The idea of nationally-state succession which is in the core of the 'Renaissance project' determines the legitimacy of the post-Soviet Georgia and Azerbaijan. The incorporation of the unrecognized formations is a priority objective for Georgia and Azerbaijan and kind of a visa for the 'civilized world'.

The regional confrontation between the illegitimate for Tbilisi (Abkhazia and South Ossetia) and for Baku (Nagorno Karabakh) subjects in South Caucasus becomes a major segment in the international scheme in Eurasia. This problem is

strongly dependent on the second segment of the Black Sea – Caspian model of international regulation – the energy deposits and their transportation corridors.

The disputed integrity and energy corridors outline the geopolitical borders in the region and determine the geostrategic ambitions of the global and regional participants in the processes in the Caucasian area. Each border has its own life, which outlines the participants, accents and projections of the solutions to the problems. The dynamics both in number of participants and their role in the Caucasian configurations is determined by the conjuncture in global and regional plan.

Projected in the future the geopolitical ambitions of each of the players in the Caucasian solitaire obey the main principle of international relations – pluralism of sovereignties. The disputed steps, surprising unions and inconsistent subjective factor outline the increasing unclearness in the battle for presence and influence in Caucasus.

The bipolar confrontation in a modified form with new players and accents again opposes the two super powers from the near past. The problem is multiplied by the expanded borders of the buffer space whose increasing amorphousness changes models and stereotypes. It includes not only the Eurasian region of the former USSR, but also the now turned into Euro-Atlantic zone states from the former Central and Eastern Europe. The borders of unions and alliances of the former principal (the Russian Federation) in the post-Soviet space and in the former Soviet zone (the states from the Soviet block) multiply the instability and confrontation as well as the now objective reality of interdependence inside and outside the known in the near past geopolitical scheme.

The new form of mutually motivated dialogues between Russia and its former ideological opponents (the USA and the western block led by them) also outlines the increasing corrective of the change. The political negotiations and

diplomatic decisions on the ‘unrecognized states’ case in the post-Soviet space turn into litmus for the stronger positions of Moscow in the global confrontation. The energy power of the Federation forces the states of the EU in to solve the individually the problem of their own needs of strategic materials. This breaks the monolith unity of the European Union in the various world and regional organizations.

Washington also faces the strategic challenge to pursue its global objectives, projected in the big Black Sea region, bearing in mind the ‘energy paradise’ of Moscow and its deepening in economic and military-technical aspect relations with Beijing and Delhi.

The Caucasian alternatives in temporal aspect go through the complex system of contradicting projections of regional and global ambitions. The time factor turns in a reference point for the possibilities, regarding the outlining realities of change in the Caucasian region. The specifics and variety of problems in the three South Caucasian republics and of the unrecognized states outline the moving borders of the regional traps. They are in dynamic interdependence with the geostrategic ambitions of the other participants in the Caucasian solitaire. The contemporary trap in which the Caucasian region is limits but at the same time releases the forces of creation and destruction whose confrontation will continue to determine the future accents in the Black Sea – Caspian region. The regional traps and geopolitical illusions are in constant confrontation leaves its mark on the processes in the region.

In time and space the alternative solution to the controlled instability in the Caucasian frontier is bound to the parameters of influence and forms of solution to the short- and long-term accents in the political, social-economic, ethno-national and confessional variety in the Eurasian space. The increasing disintegration in the region is related to the changes in the neighboring geopolitical spaces and fight for predominance. The temporal and geostrategic parameters of the Caucasian

projection are also predetermined by the permanent problem in history. How feasible or hypothetical are the possibilities of reviving the imperial project of the Russian (Soviet) empire, which to determine the power center of the controlled instability in the Caucasian region? Future will tell if the accent will be Russian, European, American, Chinese or other, of transnational organizations.

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