



---

## CASCADE Newsletter, November 2015

---

### Editorial

#### How influential are Orthodox radicals in Georgian society?

*By Silvia Serrano, lecturer in Political Science at the Auvergne University, Research fellow at CERCEC and CASCADE coordinator of Working Package 6 on 'Religion and Politics'.*

On 22 October 2015, the Tbilisi City Court cleared an Orthodox cleric and three followers of the charges of impeding an anti-homophobia rally held in Tbilisi to celebrate the International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia, on 17 May 2013. This decision brought the issue of Orthodox radicalism in Georgia, and more broadly, of religious radicalism in the Caucasus, back to the forefront.

The events of 17 May 2013 were widely covered in the Georgian and international media. TV broadcasts showed a small group of militants physically threatened by dozens of Orthodox activists under the gaze of indifferent police officers. The image of father Iotam, the superior of Ioane-Tornike Eristavi Monastery, chasing the militants with a stool as he was about to smash the window of a bus where the besieged had found refuge, went viral on social networks. A few days later, a petition initiated by intellectuals against the 'threat of theocracy' gathered several thousand signatures. The rally and counter-rally illustrated the divisions in Georgian society, and exemplified the polarization between 'liberals' in favour of individual freedoms, including

sexual orientation, and 'traditionalists'. The counter-rally was viewed by the former as evidence that groups led by uneducated priests, some of them with criminal records, were ready to resort to anything, including violence, to impose their obscurantist views. Although this interpretation is relevant, it ignores important developments which have to be taken into account in order to understand the role of public religion in post-Soviet Georgia.

This episode highlights the role of institutional actors, namely the State and the Church, in shaping social attitudes towards minorities. Orthodox radicals obviously enjoy – explicit or implicit – support from the patriarchate. After the arrest of Father Basil Mkalavishvili in March 2004 – one of the main instigators of numerous assaults against Jehovah's Witnesses, Baptists and others – the attacks against confessional minorities had dramatically decreased. Indeed, the behaviour of radical groups is largely determined by the messages sent by the authorities: passivity on the part of the government is interpreted as an authorisation of violence, while sanctions or court rulings draw red lines that are not to be crossed. The months following the coming to power of the 'Georgian Dream' coalition government in 2012 can be regarded as a test; the multiplication of conflicts over religious issues in the first two years of its rule can be correlated with the ambiguity and lack of direction of the new government. From this point of view, dropping the charge against undoubtedly aggressive individuals may be

interpreted as a signal that violence against minorities' rights advocates is tolerated by the state. At the time of writing, the prosecutor had not appealed.

The assertiveness and high visibility of radical groups is often analysed as evidence of the growing influence of the Orthodox Church over Georgian society. However, being active does not mean representing majorities in society. 'Traditional values' often referred to in public debate, although seldom defined, are certainly cherished by many Georgians. But it does not mean that they support violence against minorities' rights advocates nor that they share the hate speeches delivered by some priests in their sermon. A few days after 17 May 2013, when radical associations called for a second rally, no more than a few dozen people gathered and it went unnoticed.

Indeed, the most remarkable development stemming from the rally two years ago was the fact that discrimination according to sexual orientation became a public issue. It illustrates the transnational dimension of social questions now debated in post-Soviet societies. It also sheds light on the role of NGOs in defining the topics to be discussed, while the Church finds it difficult to set the agenda on a broader range of social issues. Focussing on social issues such as homosexuality is hence viewed as a means to

strengthen the ties between the Church and the 'people'. In other words, it may be better analysed as an alternative survival strategy to compensate for its lack of an audience on religious issues. Hence, the rise of Orthodox activism should not be considered as evidence of desecularisation, but rather as a politicisation of religion to counterbalance a still weak religiosity.

The process of reshaping the relation between the religious and the political in Georgia and across the Caucasus lies at the heart of Work Package 6 in the Cascade project. This Work Package looks into the complex and often contradictory dynamics that the dominant paradigm of secularisation / desecularisation cannot alone explain. In order to avoid the trap of simplification, this CASCADE research Work Package seeks to develop theoretical tools to address two mirroring processes: secularisation from below and desecularisation from above, a notion more explicitly expressed by the French 'désaïcisation'. Facing indifference from large segments of the population towards its teachings, the Church, seeks to respond by challenging the secularity of the state; dynamics that are unfolding in other parts of the Caucasus and have their impact on shaping social developments in the region.

## Publications

**CASCADE Policy Brief, Neil Melvin and Giulia Prelz Oltramonti [‘Managing Conflict and Integration in the South Caucasus: A Challenge for the European Union’](#), 31 October 2015.**

In 2014–15, the South Caucasus entered a new phase of its post-Soviet development. Georgia's conclusion of an Association Agreement with the European Union (EU) in June 2014 and Armenia's accession to the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union in January 2015 were the culmination of a decade of efforts to engage the South Caucasus with parallel integration projects. Meanwhile resolving the conflicts in the South Caucasus remains a key issue for the region's political stability and economic prosperity. In 2015–16, as the EU looks to reshape its role in the South Caucasus through reviews of its European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and its European Security Strategy (ESS), it will need to identify how it can formulate effective strategies to resolve the protracted conflicts in the absence of the offer of membership.

**CASCADE Working Paper, Jos Boonstra (FRIDE): [‘The South Caucasus concert: Each playing its own tune’](#), 28 September 2015.**

The countries of the South Caucasus have very different

interdependent relations with the EU, Russia, Turkey, the United States (US) and Iran. Tensions between the EU-US and Russia over Ukraine are further entrenching these interdependent relations and hampering development in the South Caucasus. How can Brussels increase its engagement in this important region in order to reduce Russian dominance and bolster security and democracy?

**CASCADE Policy Brief, Kakha Gogolashvili (GFSIS): [‘State of the fight against corruption in the South Caucasus’](#), 10 August 2015.**

This policy brief examines anticorruption policies in the three South Caucasus countries over the past two decades in light of their cooperation and commitments with the EU. From the point of view of democratic tradition, rule of law and governance, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia were pretty much equal when they became independent in 1992. Ten years later, all three countries were still facing similar governance problems. These included: the disconnect presided over by ruling elites between economic development and good governance; the lack of instruments for democratic oversight and monitoring; and a weak demand for democracy and governance free of corruption.

**Article, Sophie Hohmann: ‘Domestic violence in the Southern Caucasus: Armenia and Azerbaijan’, *Revue d’Etudes Comparatives Est-Ouest*, Vol. 46, N°2, 2015.**

Based on data collected between 2010 and 2014 and on taking into account various approaches, this article, available only in French, seeks to understand changes in gender relations in post-Soviet Armenia and Azerbaijan.

How do socio-economic and political factors combine to explain protests related to gender relations? A shifting equilibrium and the transformation of the established social order in these societies have provoked tension in gender relations and social relations more broadly. The concept of a ‘collapse of the masculine’ or a ‘crisis of masculinity’ in the post-Soviet era seems relevant in this field of research.

## Events

**CASCADE seminar: ‘The role of the EU, Turkey, Russia, the US and Iran in South Caucasus development and security’, 12 October, Mission of Georgia to the European Union Brussels.**

On 12 October 2015, at the premises of the Georgian Mission to the EU, the first CASCADE event in Brussels took place. The seminar: *‘The role of the EU, Turkey, Russia, the US and Iran in South Caucasus development and security’*, organised by FRIDE, highlighted the recently-published CASCADE working paper *‘The South Caucasus concert: Each playing its own tune’*, written by FRIDE researcher Jos Boonstra. The paper was presented as ‘food for thought’ generating interesting debate among the panellists and the audience.

Under the generous hospitality of H.E Ambassador Natalie Sabanadze, who opened the seminar, the discussion focused on the dense web of interdependencies around the South Caucasus and external actors’ interests in the region over governance and values; security and conflict; and trade and energy.

In his keynote speech, Gunnar Wiegand, Director for Russia, Eastern Partnership, Central Asia, Regional Cooperation and OSCE, in the European External Action Service, praised Boonstra’s paper but also constructively took up minor ‘flaws’ in the paper, by stating for example that China should also have been included as a player in the region, at least in the sphere of economic influence. Moreover, he stated that the EU is definitely a ‘Merchant’ since the EU is the primary trade partner in the South Caucasus, but not a ‘Vicar’. The ‘EU does not preach to its partners but it advocates that they have to pursue deeper democracy in order to achieve stability’.

The event consisted of two interrelated parts, the first focusing on how do regional and global actors seek to promote their values in the region and the second focusing on how the countries of the South Caucasus seek to strengthen their security with the assistance of external actors.

During the first panel, Nigar Göksel, senior analyst in the International Crisis Group, Neil Melvin, senior researcher at SIPRI, and Amanda Paul, senior policy analyst at the EPC, together with Gunnar Wiegand outlined the objectives of the EU, Russia, Turkey, the US and Iran in the region in the context of the ongoing crisis in Ukraine and the tensions between the West and Russia while raising questions that need to be addressed at a high political level. Ms Göksel pointed out that there is no information-sharing between Ankara and the West and given the fact that Turkey realised its limits in terms of foreign policy outreach in the region, raised the following query: ‘What the EU and the US can do with Turkey in terms of cooperation in the South Caucasus?’

Neil Melvin wondered ‘how far will Russia go to achieve its goals in the South Caucasus?’. Leverage and influence in the region stems from the protracted conflicts, thus it is not in the Kremlin’s interest to resolve or change the status quo in the region. In Iran’s case Amanda Paul’s main message was that Tehran has a long way to go in realising all hypothetical future expectations.

In the second panel Leila Alieva, president of the Centre for National and International Studies, stressed the importance of the extra-regional competition and how it affects the South Caucasus states in conducting their foreign policy. Kakha Gogolashvili, director at the Centre of EU Studies at Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies touched upon Georgia’s relations with each of the major external actors, underlining the good partnership with Turkey, the US’s declining role and its replacement by the EU’s presence and the low potential in regard to Tbilisi’s future cooperation with Tehran. Finally, Hrant Kostanyan, researcher at the CEPS, emphasised the fact that the EU will have to deal, sooner or later with the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), and stressed that Armenia is an interesting case-study of an EEU member who wants to forge close ties with the EU.



The event was a success, given the vigorous participation in the debate of about 90 participants, from EU institutions, member state representations, academia and NGOs. This sent very promising signals about the future of CASCADE events and the impact of the project, not only among policy makers but also among a broader audience.

**CASCADE research seminar: ‘The North Caucasus between Kadyrov and Al-Baghdadi’, 28 October 2015, Centre d’étude de la vie politique (CEVIPOL), Brussels, CECID Université Libre de Bruxelles.**

*Speaker:* Ekaterina Sokirianskaya, Project Director, Europe and Asia Programme, International Crisis Group

*Discussant:* Anne Le Huérou, Reader, University Paris Ouest Nanterre La Défense and Associate Researcher, CERCEC (EHESS/CNRS)

For two decades the North Caucasus conflicts was among Europe’s deadliest. Two bloody wars in Chechnya caused tens of thousands of deaths among Chechen civilians and Russian military. Chechen nationalist insurgency, transformed into an Al-Qaeda associated Jihadist movement in 2007 when its then leader Dokku Umarov declared a regionally based Caucasus Emirate (Imarat Kavkaz), which aimed to create an Islamist state based on Sharia law in the entire North Caucasus region. Since 2009 the epicenter of violence shifted from Chechnya to Dagestan where the conflict has always been religiously motivated. In 2010-2011 Dagestan was a full blown guerrilla warzone with attacks taking place daily. But in 2014 the number of victims of conflict decreased by 46 per cent, which some experts explain by the role of security services, while others by a mass exodus of local fighters to Syria to join the Islamic State (ISIS) or pro-al-Qaeda groups associated with Dzhedkhat al-Nusra. Indeed, state security services continue their heavy-handed counter-insurgency, while the influence of ISIS among regional radicals is growing: an estimated 2,400 Russian citizens are fighting in Syria, the leaders of formerly Al-Qaeda associated with the terrorist organisation ‘Caucasus Emirate’ overwhelmingly swore allegiance to ISIS leader Abubakr Al-Baghdadi in 2015.

This lecture addressed the issues of what has happened to the regional conflicts and why have local insurgency agendas been superseded by ISIS. It first analysed the Chechen factor in the North Caucasus, reminded the audience about the model of conflict management applied in Chechnya, and then analysed its implications and shortcomings. It claimed that despite superficial appearances, what we see in Chechnya has little to do with the resolution of the Chechen conflict. The Chechen republic has gone through a major reconstruction, has suppressed insurgency, and improved its image and official economic indicators. Its leader, Ramzan Kadyrov, has special relations with President Vladimir Putin, more autonomy than other regional leaders and Moscow’s near unconditional support. Kadyrov has used this to make Chechnya a virtually independent polity, with informal well-trained, combat-ready security structures inside the official ones, a parallel tax system, its own legal regime and, in effect, foreign relations.

However, the significant reduction in Islamist insurgency owes much to brutal force and widely applied collective responsibility. The status quo is based on military defeat of the separatists in an asymmetric war. Stability is fragile and overly personalised. The Kremlin has created and endorsed this system, but it does not control events on the ground, and while the Chechen leader’s loyalty to the Russian president seems genuine, it is unlikely to be easily transferable to successors. If the political landscape were to change in Moscow, Kadyrov’s army could well turn against the Kremlin.

North Caucasus conflicts are not just about Chechnya. Since 1999 when Vladimir Putin came to power on the wave of the war on terror, the conflict has spread from Chechnya to all North Caucasus regions, including the predominantly Russian Stavropol Krai. The fundamentalist ideology has spread broadly, especially among the sizable Salafi community in Dagestan. Insurgency is the most visible expression of instability, but the root causes of continuing violence are multiple. The lecture then analysed the ethnic, religious, economic and social factors feeding the conflict.

Finally the issue of North Caucasus fighters in Syria was analysed in some detail, including the local security context which forced Jihadists to leave the region, the strategies ISIS used to recruit and factors explaining the defeat of the Caucasus Emirate to ISIS.

#### **Other events:**

- On 9-10 October 2015, Silvia Serrano, coordinator CASCADE Work Package 6 on Religion and Politics, delivered the presentation ‘*Sharing the non-sacred: Rabati and the display of multiculturalism*’ at the conference ‘*Sacred Places, Emerging Spaces: Pilgrims, Saints and Scholars in the Caucasus and Beyond*’, organised by CASCADE partner Jena University (Germany).
- On 15 October, a CASCADE/CERCEC conference was organised in Paris, where Gavin Slade, post-doctoral fellow at the Freie Universität in Berlin presented his book ‘*Reorganizing Crime: Mafia and Anti-Mafia in Post-Soviet Georgia*’ (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
- On 23-26 September 2015, Anne Le Huérou, researcher in CASCADE Work Package 7 on Conflict, Violence and Peace Building, delivered a presentation at the EISA 9th Pan-European Conference on International Relations: ‘*State violence as a discourse and as practice in post-Soviet Russia: from everyday police routine to Chechen conflict*’, Sicily (Italy).
- On 23-26 September, Aude Merlin, researcher in CASCADE Work Package 7 on Conflict, Violence and Peace Building, delivered a presentation at the EISA 9th Pan-European Conference on International Relations: ‘*War Habitus and Reintegration in Post-war Situations in Caucasus: The Case of War Veterans*’, Sicily (Italy).
- On 17-19 September, Anna Zaytseva, researcher in CASCADE Work Package 6 on Religion and Politics, presented a paper ‘*Social dimensions of religious*

*confrontations (on the example of a Dagestani village in the plain area)*’ at the conference ‘*The North Caucasus as a space for intercultural dialogue*’, Piatigorsk (Russia).

- In August 2015, CASCADE researchers Anne Le Huérou, Neil Melvin and Silva Serrano attended the 9th World Congress of ICCEES (International Council for

East European Studies), and participated in the following panels: ‘*Aftermath of Civil Wars in Chechen and Abkhazian Politics*’; ‘*Politics of Religion and Ethnicity in Georgia*’; ‘*Eurasia’s Changing Security and Economic Landscape*’, Makuhari, Japan.

## Fieldwork

### **Fieldwork in Azerbaijan, in cooperation with ISSICEU, 28 September-2 October.**

CASCADE coordinator and researchers Laure Delcour and Kataryna Wolczuk conducted research in Baku from 28 September to 2 October. Their visit was designed as an exploratory mission to Azerbaijan as part of CASCADE Work Package 9 on Perceptions and Roles of the EU in the Caucasus. It was organised with the help of CASCADE’s ‘sister project’ ISSICEU and its Azerbaijani partner Farda Asadov (Khazar University). Interviews were conducted with officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Economic Development, as well as a group of researchers and civil society experts.

### **Fieldwork in Russia by Sophie Hohmann, [Arctic Research Coordination Network Project](#), Summer 2015.**

Sophie Hohmann carried out research fieldwork in Russia during the summer of 2015 in the region of Murmansk (Murmansk city, Apatity, Zapoliarnij, Nikel, Monchegorsk, Kirovsk, Teriberka) and in the Tajmir Peninsula (Norilsk and Dudinka). This project was carried out under the Arctic Research Coordination Network Project: Building a Research Network for Promoting Arctic Urban Sustainability (funded by the National Science Foundations, for 2013-

2017). This is a multidisciplinary project which focuses on the interconnections between the development of resources, climate change, and demographic trends in major Arctic cities.

### **Fieldwork in the North Caucasus with ISSICEU’s support.**

IGRAS researcher Anton Gritsenko conducted field studies in the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania and the Kabardino-Balkarian Republic from 20 to 28 October 2015. His trip was related to the work on Work Package 4 (Local Economic and Social Development) and 5 (Political Order, Democratisation and Civil Societies); the main objective was a study of local modernization processes. He carried out a number of interviews with experts, farmers and businessmen, members of local NGOs and officials. The mission was organised with support from CASCADE’s ‘sister project’ ISSICEU and its Russian partners from Kabardino-Balkarian State University, Aslan Chechenov, Timur Tenov and Alexey Gunya. In addition, Anton Gritsenko took part in the conference ‘Sustainable Development of Mountain Territories’ held in Vladikavkaz at the International Innovation Scientific-Technological Centre.

## Announcements

- On 20 October 2015, Giulia Prelz Oltramonti, researcher and teaching assistant at the Université Libre de Bruxelles and CASCADE researcher, successfully defended her doctoral thesis, entitled ‘*The exploitation of economic leverage in conflict protraction: modes and aims: The cases of South Ossetia and Abkhazia (1992-2008)*’. The thesis focuses on a key component of society relations, namely the creation and exploitation of economic leverage. It explores how and to what ends, in the context of protracted territorial conflicts, relevant actors craft it and use it. Two cases are examined,

namely the South Ossetian and the Abkhaz protracted conflicts between 1992 and 1993 respectively, and 2008. By following the developments of the two protracted conflicts from ceasefire agreements to renewed high-intensity hostility, the thesis provides an analysis of the two cases that focuses on trends and multifaceted power dynamics.

- On 11 November FRIDE/CASCADE researcher Natalia Shapovalova passed her ‘viva exam’ at the University of Warwick (UK). Her PhD thesis focuses on ‘*Advocacy and interest group influence in EU foreign policy*’ and one of the cases which she

