



MIGRATION PROCESSES IN THE LIGHT OF FROZEN CONFLICTS IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS

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Introduction

The South Caucasus is a region which, since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, has gained strategic importance in the rivalry between powers. Initially, the main competitors who strove for the most influence in the region were the United States and the Russian Federation (as the international legal successor to the Soviet Union), later joined by China.¹ Over time, as the region was only gaining in importance, the game was joined by more players, i.e. international organizations (predominantly NATO and the European Union) and regional powers — mainly Turkey and Iran.² This web of interests, relations and hostilities is made even more intricate by the fact that the countries which make up the South Caucasus region are diverse in terms of politics, economy, culture and ethnicity.

As a result of the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, the South Caucasus witnessed the emergence of three states: Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. However, this new

¹ See Agata Włodkowska-Bagan, *Rywalizacja mocarstw na obszarze poradzieckim* (Warszawa: Difin, 2013); Agnieszka Bryc, *Rosja w XXI wieku. Gracz światowy czy koniec gry?* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne, 2009).

² See Agnieszka Bryc, “Bezpieczeństwo w poradzieckim ładzie międzynarodowym,” in *Bezpieczeństwo obszaru poradzieckiego*, eds. Agnieszka Bryc, Agnieszka Legucka and Agata Włodkowska-Bagan (Warszawa: Difin, 2011); Nadezhda Arbatova, “Frozen Conflicts and European Security,” *Security Index* 16, no. 3 (2010); Joanna Piechowiak-Lamparska, “International Risk Factors Occurring in the Caspian Sea Region,” *Athenaeum* 56 (2017): 193–204.

political map did not represent the numerous national groups. What remained neglected were such nationalities (and their interests) as Abkhazians, Ossetians, Adjarians, Armenians and Azeris settled in the Nakhchivan and Nagorno-Karabakh provinces. On the other hand, the possibility to consolidate and develop statehood was given to Armenians, Azeris and Georgians living in their respective former Soviet republics. In the case of the Caucasian nations, the nation-building processes have always been turbulent and to see this, it suffices to trace the history of Georgia, which goes back almost three thousand years. However, in the 1990s, many of the dormant national, ethnic, territorial and religious conflicts and tensions gradually escalated.

Migration processes in the South Caucasus region are conditioned by many factors. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the relocation of populations to settle on the territory of nation-states and to gather within ethnic groups became a pronounced trend. It was a natural process which marked a gradual normalization after decades of resettlement and forced migration processes. Many years of authoritarianism and suppression of any nationalist manifestations and actions led to their sudden eruption just shortly after the change in the geopolitical situation. It should be emphasized that after the end of the Cold War, the situation in other ethnically, culturally and religiously heterogeneous regions looked the same or was even more dramatic. One example of such an internally conflicted region is the Western Balkans.³ The second important factor conditioning migration of population was economy. The newly established Caucasian states were in an extremely difficult economic situation, which only hindered their functioning. Economic migration and the resettling of populations from rural areas to urban agglomerations were to be the answer to the problem of unemployment and poverty. However, those were relatively natural migration processes, mainly voluntary and associated with positive motivation to build a state and improve its economic situation.

The unfreezing of dormant conflicts resulted in their military escalation, which often turned into civil wars, particularly just after the Caucasian states gained independence. In the South Caucasus region, there are three cases of still unresolved frozen conflicts: 1) the conflict between Georgia and Abkhazia, 2) the conflict between Georgia and South Ossetia, and 3) the war over Nagorno-Karabakh between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Due to the open nature of these conflicts, the situation of the residents of these areas is truly complicated. Also, the dynamics of the frozen conflicts should bring changes in the migration processes and ethnic structure of Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh.

The aim of this article is to answer the question about the impact of frozen conflicts and their course on the processes of migration in the South Caucasus region. The answer to this question requires a critical analysis of the geopolitical situation of the region and an analysis of the course of individual conflicts. Undoubtedly, this is a very unusual analytical situation when in a given area for decades there has been a conflict of a varying course — from unfreezing and civil war, then another freezing and attempts at normalization as well as peaceful solutions such as the establishment of autonomous republics, to the next war resulting in secession and the establishment of para-states which operate in the international arena. So far, there have been numerous analyses of these conflicts and their effects on the internal situation of the states as well as the international security system and the balance of power in the region. However, in this

³ See Agnieszka Szpak, "Secesja państwa w świetle prawa międzynarodowego (na przykładzie Kosowa i Krymu)," *Państwo i Prawo* 12 (2014): 38–53.

context, the following article presents an interesting attempt to find certain patterns of migration which would depend on the phase (freezing and unfreezing) of these conflicts.

Frozen Conflicts vs Migrations

Presently, frozen conflicts are one of the most interesting phenomena in the theory and practice of contemporary international conflicts. The very fact that a given territory remains in a state of permanent suspension between military operations and peace causes constant tension and uncertainty in this area.⁴ This uncertainty mainly concerns the issue of military security, and this tension leads to many incidents that can very quickly bring about the resumption of regular military operations. Naturally, the freezing and unfreezing of conflicts is conditioned by numerous factors ranging from those that are ethnic and religious in nature to those that are political or relate to territorial issues.

Currently, there are quite a lot of conflicts in the world which remain frozen. Many of them occur in the post-Soviet area,⁵ such as the conflicts in Abkhazia, South Ossetia,⁶ Transnistria,⁷ and Nagorno-Karabakh.⁸ It is also predicted that the conflict in Eastern Ukraine, primarily in the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, and the annexation of Crimea may in fact turn into frozen conflicts of an unstable international legal status.⁹ Examples from other regions of the world include the frozen conflicts in Kashmir,¹⁰ the Korean Peninsula, and Western Sahara.¹¹ Another case is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the Middle East. The issues of the division of Cyprus or the independence of Kosovo also remain unresolved and not all interested parties recognize them as settled. These examples show that unresolved territorial or national disputes occur in many regions and have various

⁴ See Thomas D. Grant, "Frozen Conflicts and International Law," *Cornell International Law Journal* 50, no. 3 (2017): 361.

⁵ See John O'loughlin, Vladimir Kolossov and Gerard Toal, "Inside the Post-Soviet De Facto States: A Comparison of Attitudes in Abkhazia, Nagorny Karabakh, South Ossetia, and Transnistria," *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 55, no. 5 (2014): 423–456.

⁶ See Emmanuel Karagiannis, "The 2008 Russian–Georgian War Via the Lens of Offensive Realism," *European Security* 22, no. 1 (2013): 74–93; Cory Welt, "The Thawing of a Frozen Conflict: The Internal Security Dilemma and the 2004 Prelude to the Russo-Georgian War," *Europe-Asia Studies* 62, no. 1 (2010): 63–97; Jan Brodawski, *Gruzja po rewolucji róż: Obraz przemian polityczno-społecznych w latach 2003–2018* (Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, 2019).

⁷ See Magdalena Dembińska and Frederic Mérand, "The Role of International Brokers in Frozen Conflicts: The Case of Transnistria," *Asia Europe Journal* 1, no. 1 (2019): 15–30; Adrian Rogstad, "The Next Crimea? Getting Russia's Transnistria Policy Right," *Problems of Post-Communism* 65, no. 1 (2018): 49–64.

⁸ See Svante E. Cornell, *The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict* (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 1999); Behlül Özkan, "Who Gains from the 'No War No Peace' Situation? A Critical Analysis of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict," *Geopolitics* 13, no. 3 (2008): 572–599; Thomas de Waal, "Remaking the Nagorno-Karabakh Peace Process," *Survival* 52, no. 4 (2010): 159–176.

⁹ See Anna Fournier, "From Frozen Conflict to Mobile Boundary: Youth Perceptions of Territoriality in War-Time Ukraine," *East European Politics and Societies* 32, no. 1 (2018): 23–55; Yuliya Zabyelina and Anna Markovska, "Ukraine: Organised Crime, Politics and Frozen Conflicts," in *Handbook of Organised Crime and Politics*, eds. Felia Allum and Stan Gilmour (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2019), 105–118.

¹⁰ See Sumit Ganguly et al., "India, Pakistan, and the Kashmir Dispute: Unpacking the Dynamics of a South Asian Frozen Conflict," *Asia Europe Journal* 17, no. 1 (2019): 129–143.

¹¹ See Irene Fernández-Molina and Raquel Ojeda-García, "Western Sahara as a Hybrid of a Parastate and a State-in-exile: (Extra) Territoriality and the Small Print of Sovereignty in a Context of Frozen Conflict," *Nationalities Papers* 48, no. 1 (2020): 83–99.

causes, but their common element is the long-lasting suspension of said disputes, often decades-long, and the disagreement as to the ultimate status and outcome of the conflict.

Migrations understood as relocations of people are a process which takes place regardless of geographical territory or time frames.¹² As Everett S. Lee writes, “[m]igration is defined broadly as a permanent or semipermanent change of residence. No restriction is placed upon the distance of the move or upon the voluntary or involuntary nature of the act, and no distinction is made between external and internal migration.”¹³ There are numerous reasons which make people relocate; however, what should be borne in mind is the issue of voluntariness and free choice with respect to establishing a place to live.¹⁴ Economic or cultural migrations are rarely associated with coercion to change residence; most often they are motivated by the desire to improve living conditions through e.g. higher earnings or additional development opportunities.¹⁵ However, it is worth noticing there are also migrations for reasons independent of the migrants themselves and the population movement is a forced process, as in the not infrequent cases of migrations caused by wars, armed conflicts,¹⁶ natural disasters,¹⁷ and resettlements.¹⁸

Undoubtedly, frozen conflicts are an interesting phenomenon not only from the perspective of the international security system but also with regard to migration. There can be many causes of frozen conflicts, but each of them — including the ones arising from nationality, religious or territorial grounds — may contribute to the uneven distribution of a population. The question therefore arises to what degree the specific tension caused by a conflict’s not being resolved significantly affects the flow of people in a given area. Another important question is whether this is a single refugee migration and thus a permanent settlement in another, safer area, or whether, perhaps after the freezing of an unfrozen conflict (or a wave of incidents), refugees will return and settle down again in the disputed territory. Each of the discussed conflicts is different; however, as an increasing number of international conflicts fail to achieve resolution, it is worth looking for certain regularities and patterns in this regard.

Frozen Conflicts in the South Caucasus Region

At the turn of the 21st century, the South Caucasus region due to its geopolitical location became an area of great strategic importance¹⁹ as it is the region where the

¹² See P. Neal Ritchey, “Explanations of Migration,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 2, no. 1 (1976): 363–404; Paul Boyle, Keith Halfacree and Vaughan Robinson, *Exploring Contemporary Migration* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014).

¹³ Everett S. Lee, “A Theory of Migration,” *Demography* 3, no. 1 (1966): 49.

¹⁴ See Stephen Castles, “The International Politics of Forced Migration,” *Development* 46, no. 3 (2003): 11–20.

¹⁵ See Philip Martin, “Economic Aspects of Migration,” in *Migration Theory: Talking Across Disciplines*, eds. Caroline B. Brettell and James F. Hollifield (New York: Routledge, 2014); Julius Issac, *Economics of Migration* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

¹⁶ See William B. Wood, “Forced Migration: Local Conflicts and International Dilemmas,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 84, no. 4 (1994): 607–634.

¹⁷ See Jane McAdam, *Climate Change, Forced Migration, and International Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

¹⁸ See Alexander Betts, *Forced Migration and Global Politics* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2009).

¹⁹ See Revaz Gachechiladze, “Geopolitics in the South Caucasus: Local and External Players,” *Geopolitics* 7, no. 1 (2002): 113–138.

influences of Europe, Central Asia and the Middle East intersect, which at the same time makes it culturally rich, ethnically and religiously diverse, yet unstable and with the potential for conflict. As a result of the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the South Caucasus witnessed the emergence of three states: Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. The first conflicts arose as early as 1991 and 1992 — at the beginning of the consolidation of statehood and nation-building processes. As Thomas D. Grant notes: “two situations are widely understood to be frozen conflicts: Transnistria in Moldova and Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan. In addition, two further situations, also in the territory of States formerly part of the USSR, are widely understood to be — or to have been frozen conflicts: South Ossetia and Abkhazia, both in Georgia.”²⁰

The conflicts in Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh were the cause of the South Caucasus’s destabilization. As Agnieszka Bryc believes, the unfreezing of conflicts in the post-Soviet republics was a consequence of the “social engineering” of former USSR leaders. It was expressed in suppressing the national aspirations of individual ethnic groups living in the Soviet Union and in promoting the theory of the “Soviet nation.” Those decisions contradicted the ethnic, geographical and religious divisions, and were accompanied — particularly during the Stalinist period — by deportations, persecutions, and changes in the borders of the constituent parts of the Federation, which resulted in ethnic tensions.²¹ In fact, the dissolution of the Soviet Union did not directly cause the outbreak of conflicts in this region; however, it did lead to the unfreezing of tensions that for decades had remained frozen. Currently, in the Southern Caucasus a multi-faceted geostrategic game is being played by global players, primarily the United States, Russia, China, NATO and the European Union, as well as regional players such as Turkey and Iran.

For the Russian Federation, the South Caucasus region is its near broader, and thus a direct sphere of influence. Regulating and using ethnic and territorial conflicts is one of the most important tools of Russian foreign policy in the region as well as one of the main destabilizing factors. The South Caucasus is of strategic importance for Russia not only because of the state’s desire to maintain its former sphere of influence but primarily because of the region’s location between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, which combines the potential for mining energy resources with their further transport and distribution to Turkey or Eastern Europe. In the 1990s, the importance of Caspian deposits increased significantly thanks to new possibilities for their mining and transport. As a result, European countries began to consider the opportunity of diversifying energy supplies and bypassing Russian infrastructure. Since the beginning of the 21st century, the South Caucasus, and above all Georgia (as the country with the most pro-Western stand), has become the focus of the integration policy of the European Union (as a political and economic organization) and NATO (as a political and defense organization). As early as in the 1990s, the EU and the United States included the Caucasian states in their aid and development programs, which over time turned into well-functioning partnerships. Naturally, those activities differed between individual countries, but all of them threatened Russia’s hegemony in the region.

This geopolitical situation made the game of using frozen conflicts and unfreezing them according to the needs of competitive players an important tool of influence. On the other hand, it should not be forgotten that Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia are sovereign states potentially able to resolve conflicts on their own territory.

²⁰ Grant, “Frozen Conflicts,” 377.

²¹ Bryc, *Rosja w XXI wieku*, 62.

The Georgian–Ossetian Conflict

The war in South Ossetia broke out in January 1991 and continued until the ceasefire in July 1992. It was a particularly difficult time for the Georgian state, as on the one hand, the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic ceased to exist, and on the other, the newly established state had to face not only political or economic problems but also separatist aspirations in the territory of Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Adjara. The South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast, which existed until 1990 within the Georgian SSR, was a solution which, ever since the introduction of the policy of korenization (*коренизация*, or nativization), was dampening the aspirations for Ossetian autonomy and was only partially satisfactory for the Ossetians.²²

The fact of depriving the Ossetians of this ersatz of autonomy resulted in mass protests and the deepening of national sentiments. Furthermore, the nationalist slogan “Georgia for Georgians,” promoted by President Zviad Gamsakhurdia, was one of the hotspots in the broader context of smoldering separatist aspirations. In turn, the slogan of Ossetian nationalists “One nation — one republic” reflected their aspirations to merge with North Ossetia and establish one Ossetian republic under Russian tutelage.²³ In 1989 the territory of South Ossetia was inhabited mainly by Ossetians — approx. 66% (ca. 65,200 people) and Georgians — approx. 29% (ca. 28,700 people); other nationalities were Russians, Armenians and Jews.²⁴ As a result of the war, about 100,000 Ossetians left the region of South Ossetia and the territory of Georgia proper and settled mainly in North Ossetia. Additionally, around 23,000 Georgians left South Ossetia and settled in the territory of Georgia proper. Eventually, most of the Ossetians left Georgia, and most of the Georgians left South Ossetia.²⁵ This means that as a result of the civil war, approximately 123,000 refugees were forced to change their place of residence, which significantly affected the ethnic structure of Georgia as well as South and North Ossetia. It should be noted that this forced migration was a consequence not only of military operations but also, above all, of the awakened nationalist sentiments in Georgia and of South Ossetia’s desire for independence. It was an ethnic conflict and a political dispute over the territory.

The Abkhaz–Georgian Conflict

Similarly to the Georgian–Ossetian conflict, the Abkhaz–Georgian conflict must be seen as a part of a narrative dating back to at least the second half of the nineteenth century. However, the Abkhaz–Georgian war broke out in August 1992 and lasted until September 1993. Analogously to South Ossetia, Abkhazia strove for the status of an

²² See Emil Souleimanov, *Understanding Ethnopolitical Conflict: Karabakh, South Ossetia, and Abkhazia Wars Reconsidered* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); S. Neil MacFarlane, “Frozen Conflicts in the Former Soviet Union — The Case of Georgia/South Ossetia,” in *OSCE Yearbook 2008*, ed. IFSH (Baden Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft mbH & Co. KG, 2009), 23–34.

²³ See Stylianos A. Sotiriou, “The Irreversibility of History: The Conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 66, no. 3 (2019): 172–185; Agnieszka Bryc, *Rosja w XXI wieku*; Tomasz Stępniewski, *Geopolityka regionu Morza Czarnego w pozimnowojennym świecie* (Lublin–Warszawa: Instytut Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej, 2011).

²⁴ See Vladimir Kolossov and John O’Loughlin, “After the Wars in the South Caucasus State of Georgia: Economic Insecurities and Migration in the ‘De Facto’ States of Abkhazia and South Ossetia,” *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 52, no. 5 (2011): 631–654; Pal Kolstø and Helge Blakkisrud, “Living With Non-recognition: State-and Nation-building in South Caucasian Quasi-states,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 60, no. 3 (2008): 483–509.

²⁵ See Kolstø and Blakkisrud, “Living With Non-recognition,” 483–509.

independent state, and the catalyst for the conflict was the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the widespread discussion about the right to have a state, not only for Georgians, but also for Abkhazians. The Abkhaz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, which had existed until that time, was not a sufficient solution and, in addition to the ethnic issues, the dispute over territory was brought to the forefront.²⁶

As a result of the Soviet ethnic relocation policy in 1989, around 46% of Georgians (ca. 239,000 people) lived in the Abkhazia region, where they constituted the largest ethnic group, followed by Abkhazians — around 18% (ca. 93,000 people), Armenians — around 15% (ca. 76,000 people), and Russians — around 14% (ca. 74,000 people). The ethnic structure itself indicates deep Soviet and later Georgian interference.²⁷ From the beginning of the 1990s, Abkhazia tried to gain sovereignty and redefine its relations with Georgia. In turn, the nationalist sentiment in Georgia and the election of President Zviad Gamsakhurdia led to the abolition of Abkhaz autonomy and to the outbreak of the armed conflict, which in turn led to Georgia losing its control over the separatist province. Thanks to Russia's military assistance, Abkhazia won this war, but the final outcome of the conflict was influenced by political issues — Georgia declared its accession to the Commonwealth of Independent States and in exchange Russia withdrew its military support for Abkhazians.²⁸

As a result of the war, almost all Georgians left the Abkhazia region — estimates range from between 200,000 and 250,000 (the difference is due to the unconfirmed number of casualties). Moreover, many Armenians and Russians also moved out from the region.²⁹ It is believed that both sides committed war crimes against civilians. Additionally, Georgian authorities were unable to safely evacuate people of Georgian origin and thus a certain number of refugees were killed. Around 60,000 Georgians returned to their homes in Abkhazia after signing the Russian-Georgian agreement; however, they again escaped to Georgia proper after the Six-Day War in 1998 and the Kodori crisis in 2001.³⁰

The Russo-Georgian War of 2008

A conflict in which Georgia was on one side, and Russia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia on the other had been growing for several years until it escalated to military operations in 2008. The reasons for this war should be sought in ethnic and territorial conflicts between Georgia and Abkhazia and South Ossetia; however, of no less importance was the Russian-Georgian political conflict and, more broadly, the conflict between Russia

²⁶ See Rachel Clogg, "The Politics of Identity in Post-Soviet Abkhazia: Managing Diversity and Unresolved Conflict," *Nationalities Papers* 36, no. 2 (2008): 305–329; Wojciech Górecki, *Abchaskie elity wobec niepodległości. Studia i Materiały/Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych* 103 (1996).

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ See Alexandros Petersen, "The 1992–93 Georgia-Abkhazia War: A Forgotten Conflict," *Caucasian Review of International Affairs* 2, no. 4 (2008): 187–199.

²⁹ See Wojciech Górecki, "Abchazja," in *Konflikty zbrojne na obszarze poradzieckim. Stan obecny, perspektywy uregulowania, konsekwencje*, eds. Krzysztof Strachota, Wojciech Górecki and Maciej Falkowski (Warszawa: Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich, 2003); Catherine Dale, "The Dynamics and Challenges of Ethnic Cleansing: The Georgia–Abkhazia Case," *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 16, no. 3 (1997): 77–109.

³⁰ See UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Background Note on the Protection of Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Georgia* (2005), Accessed 11 June 2020, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/472756782.html>.

and the West over influence in the South Caucasus region. The context of this conflict is very extensive and concerns issues relating to national sovereignty, spheres of influence, military and energy security, the potential for cooperation, frozen ethnic problems and many others.³¹

The tension between Georgia and the separatist republics had been escalating since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, through two civil wars as well as many smaller incidents, while the ongoing political dispute over the right to sovereignty, independence and one's own territory was being gradually unfrozen. In the process of unfreezing and fueling the conflict between the sides, an undeniably huge role was played by Russia and the actions this state took in the region and towards Abkhazians and Ossetians. The process of granting Georgian citizens of Abkhazian and Ossetian origin Russian passports lasted for several years, until the number of people who changed their citizenship to Russian became critical.³² Moreover, in February 2008, Kosovo announced its sovereignty, which for the provinces seeking secession was an impulse to take actions aimed at gaining independence.

As a result of military operations of Georgian, Abkhazian, Ossetian, and also Russian forces, there are currently *de facto* two states — Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which function under Russian tutelage. These states have not been recognized by most countries and international organizations, but their reintegration into the Georgian state is hardly likely.³³ Amnesty International in its report indicates that nearly 192,000 Georgians and Ossetians were resettled as a result of these military operations. Some refugees were unable to return to their places of residence due to war damage.³⁴ In turn, the report of the UN Secretary-General indicates that over 100,000 people were resettled, with 20,272 people remaining so until 2014.³⁵ Forced migration due to the war and the secession of rebellious provinces has become permanent. However, it is worth noting that border incidents still occur and despite the established *status quo*, the conflict can be unfrozen at any time.

The Nagorno-Karabakh War

The conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh dates back to the beginning of the 20th century. Similarly to the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, it is ethnic and territorial in nature.³⁶ The actual war lasted from February 1988

³¹ See Sergey Markedonov, "Unfreezing Conflict in South Ossetia: Regional and International Implications. Reassessing Security in the South Caucasus," *Regional Conflicts and Transformation* (2011): 33–46.

³² See Vincent M. Artman, "Documenting Territory: Passportisation, Territory, and Exception in Abkhazia and South Ossetia," *Geopolitics* 18, no. 3 (2013): 682–704.

³³ See Vladimir Kolosov and John O'Loughlin, "After the Wars," 631–654; *The Great Power (Mis)management: the Russian-Georgian War and its Implications for Global Political Order*, ed. Alexander Astrov (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2011).

³⁴ See Amnesty International, *Civilians in the Line of Fire: The Georgia-Russia Conflict* (London: Amnesty International Publications, 2008), 61, Accessed 11 June 2010, <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/52000/eur040052008eng.pdf>.

³⁵ See United Nations, *Status of Internally Displaced Persons and Refugees from Abkhazia, Georgia, and the Tshkinvali Region/South Ossetia, Georgia: Report of the Secretary-General* (2014), 6, Accessed 12 Jun 2020, https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/68/868.

³⁶ See Ohannes Geukjian, *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in the South Caucasus: Nagorno-Karabakh and the Legacy of Soviet Nationalities Policy* (London: Routledge, 2016); Shannon O'Lear and Robert Whiting, "Which Comes First, the Nation or the State? A Multiple

until the ceasefire in May 1994; however, the tension between the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic and the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic had been growing since the 1960s, although starting in 1923 the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast was part of the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic. Nevertheless, riots and armed incidents began in 1987, when the Karabakh Committee postulated first the incorporation of Nagorno-Karabakh into the Armenian SSR and then the establishment of an independent republic.³⁷ The narrative of this conflict is based on the separatist aspirations of the Armenians inhabiting the Nagorno-Karabakh region. However, the background of the conflict also includes pogroms of the Armenian and Azeri populations as well as Russian manipulation of both of these countries.³⁸

The first major confrontations between the Armenians and the Azeris took place in 1998 and were initiated by the Armenians and the pogrom of Armenians in Sumgayit. The dissolution of the Soviet Union was also in this case a catalyst for undertaking separatist struggles and proclaiming independence of Nagorno-Karabakh in 1992.³⁹ In 1989, the region in question was inhabited mostly by Armenians, who constituted about 76% of the population, and Azeris (24%). According to the figures provided by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, over 1 million people became forced migrants as a consequence of this conflict. About 684,000 refugees escaped from the Nagorno-Karabakh area to Azerbaijan, while 72,000 people experienced internal forced migrations within Armenia. In turn, 185,000 people migrated from Armenia to Azerbaijan and 299,000 people from Azerbaijan to Armenia. Around 35,000 Armenians returned to Nagorno-Karabakh by 1996, and 25,000 Azeris returned to the Fizuli District.⁴⁰

Forced migrations caused by the conflict resulted in Nagorno-Karabakh now being inhabited almost 100% by ethnic Armenians. Yet it should be remembered that this is a conflict that has been going on for decades and that no predictable outcome can be foreseen. The people of Nagorno-Karabakh face not only a lack of military security but also economic and social problems. Maintaining the *status quo* of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic would not have been possible without Russia's support, which for Armenia means the need to remain in the Russian sphere of influence. Despite many attempts to negotiate and conduct a peace process, to this day there are armed incidents that keep fueling political tension in the region.⁴¹

Scale Model Applied to the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict in the Caucasus," *National Identities* 10, no. 2 (2008): 185–206.

³⁷ See Cornell, *The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict*.

³⁸ See Özkan, "Who Gains," 572–599.

³⁹ See Tracey German, "The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia: Security Issues in the Caucasus," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 32, no. 2 (2012): 216–229.

⁴⁰ See UNHCR, *UNHCR Publication for CIS Conference (Displacement in the CIS) — Conflicts in the Caucasus* (1996), Accessed 10 Jun 2020, <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/publications/refugeemag/3b5583fd4/unhcr-publication-cis-conference-displacement-cis-conflicts-caucasus.html>.

⁴¹ See Thomas Ambrosio, "Unfreezing the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict? Evaluating Peacemaking Efforts under the Obama Administration," *Ethnopolitics* 10, no. 1 (2011): 93–114; Lincinia Simão, "The Problematic Role of EU Democracy Promotion in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 45, no. 1–2 (2012): 193–200; Emma Klever, "The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan: An Overview of the Current Situation," *European Movement* 24 (2013).

Conclusions

In 1996 the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees stated that “[t]he Caucasus has experienced five major conflicts, creating more than 2 million refugees and internally displaced people. While most of the conflicts are relatively quiescent, none of them appears close to finding a lasting solution. Hundreds of thousands continue to live in temporary shelter. [...] But it is in the South Caucasus that the mosaic of peoples has shattered most decisively. In Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, up to 1.5 million people have fled from their homes as a result of ethnic fighting.”⁴² Including refugees forced to leave their homes after the Russo-Georgian War and numerous incidents in Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh, the total number of refugees in the South Caucasus can reach even 2 million people; however, it is difficult to accurately estimate this number.

The question remains whether the states of the South Caucasus are able to deal with the issue of forced migrations caused by tensions and military operations resulting from the fluctuations of frozen conflicts. For this reason, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia certainly face significant economic and socio-political problems. Analysis of migration flows indicates that when a conflict is temporarily frozen, the majority of refugees do not return to their homes. This means permanent, decades-long change in one’s place of residence where people are forced to rebuild their lives, often after having lost everything they owned. Meanwhile, the South Caucasus is the arena where the interests of many actors intersect, so the freezing and unfreezing of conflicts leading to migration crises is, broadly understood, in interest of Russia, the US, NATO, the EU and regional actors. The South Caucasus states which lost their territorial integrity and struggle with internal problems are vulnerable to manipulations, and not only to those coming from Russia.

Frozen conflicts undoubtedly influence forced migrations. It does not seem, however, that there exists a specific pattern of population movement related to the unfreezing of conflicts. It is evident that a large number of civilians in the regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia escaped from the territories of military operations, yet there are no precise data as to how many of them returned to their homes when the conflict was frozen again. The situation in Nagorno-Karabakh is different as it is inhabited almost exclusively by a population of Armenian origin. However, many questions still remain unanswered. In future research, it is worth investigating the effects of forced migrations on the economic and social situation of states; on this ground, predictions can be made as to the course of fluctuating migrations which depend on the freezing and unfreezing of conflicts.

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⁴² UNHCR publication for CIS Conference.

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MIGRATION PROCESSES IN THE LIGHT OF FROZEN CONFLICTS IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS

Frozen conflicts are a specific category: they often remain unsolved for many years and lead to tense geopolitical situations. The South Caucasus is a place where the interests of many actors intersect, and the players profit from the freezing and unfreezing of conflicts that cause crises and thus destabilize the region. The goal of this research is to analyze the influence of frozen conflicts and their course on the migration processes in the South Caucasus region. Questions thus arise: 1) whether tension caused by an unsolved conflict significantly influences population flow, and 2) whether after unfreezing there is a one-time refugee migration and the exiles return to re-settle the disputed territory after the conflict (or a series of incidents) has been frozen. To find the answers, the study focuses on the Georgian-Ossetian conflict, the Abkhaz-Georgian conflict, the Russo-Georgian War of 2008 and the Armenian-Azerbaijani Nagorno-Karabakh War. The analysis of migration flows reveals that frozen conflicts have a significant impact on forced migrations, and that the majority of exiles do not return to their former homes when the conflict is temporarily frozen. For refugees, this means permanent, decades-long change in their place of residence, loss of property and the necessity to rebuild their lives. However, there seems to be no particular pattern of population resettlement in relation to unfreezing conflicts.

KEY WORDS: migrations, frozen conflicts, South Caucasus, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh

PROCESY MIGRACYJNE A ZAMROŻONE KONFLIKTY NA KAUKAZIE POŁUDNIOWYM

Zamrożone konflikty są szczególną kategorią konfliktów, które często przez wiele lat pozostają nierozwiązane i są przyczyną napiętej sytuacji geopolitycznej. Na Kaukazie Południowym krzyżują się interesy wielu graczy, dla których korzystne jest rozmrażanie i zamrażanie konfliktów powodujących kryzysy i tym samym destabilizację regionu. Celem badań jest analiza wpływu zamrożonych konfliktów i ich przebiegu na procesy migracyjne w regionie Kaukazu Południowego. Powstały zatem pytania: 1) czy napięcie spowodowane brakiem rozwiązania konfliktu wpływa znacząco na przepływ ludności, a także 2) czy po rozmrożeniu mamy do czynienia z jednorazową migracją uchodźczą a po zamrożeniu konfliktu lub fali incydentów następuje powrót uchodźców i ponowne zasiedlenie spornego terytorium. W tym celu dokonano analizy konfliktu gruzińsko-osetyjskiego, gruzińsko-abchaskiego, wojny rosyjsko-gruzińskiej z 2008 roku oraz wojny azersko-ormiańskiej o Górski Karabach. Analiza strumieni migracyjnych wskazuje na to, że zamrożone konflikty mają znaczący wpływ na przymusowe migracje, a większość uchodźców nie wraca do swoich domów, kiedy następuje czasowe zamrożenie. Oznacza to trwałą, liczoną w dekadach, zmianę miejsca zamieszkania i utratę majątku oraz konieczność budowania życia na nowo. Nie wydaje się jednak, aby istniał jakiś konkretny wzorzec przemieszczania się ludności w związku z rozmrażaniem konfliktów.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: migracje, zamrożone konflikty, Kaukaz Południowy, Abchazja, Osetia Południowa, Górski Karabach