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"Transcaucasia" or "South Caucasus"?

*Towards a more exact geopolitical nomenclature**

The region south to the Great Caucasus Mountain Range comprising the States of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan should be called "South Caucasus", instead of "Transcaucasia", "Transcaucasus" currently in use in Western languages.

The terms "Transcaucasus" and "Transcaucasia" in Western languages are translations of the Russian "Zakavkazje" meaning "The area beyond the Caucasus Mountain Range".

When we designate the territory located to the south of the Great Caucasus Range and comprising Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, by the term "Transcaucasia" (Russian "Zakavkazje") we are labelling that territory from a Northern perspective, from the viewpoint of a Northern Observer. This imparts to the term a special connotation, a certain political "colouring", historically understandable, but no longer justified under present conditions.

All Caucasia, which embraces not only the Great Mountains of Caucasus proper but also the country to the north and to the south of the Great Caucasian Range, is being designated by the common term "Caucasus". This is a Latinized form of the ancient Greek name for this region "Kaukasos". The Greek term may in turn be traced back to Old Iranian "kap kah" which means "Big Mountain". The ancient nomenclature reflects the historical importance of the area where Europe and Asia converge. Ancient Greeks made the Great Mountain Range the scene of the mythical sufferings of Prometheus, and the Argonauts sought the Golden Fleece in the mysterious land of Colchis on the Black Sea coast, south of the Range.

Thus, geographically, the term "Caucasus" represents a definite territory located between the Black and Caspian Seas, a wide isthmus separating these seas and divided by the Great Caucasus Mountain Range into two parts — North Caucasus and South Caucasus.

The lands to the north of the Great Caucasus Range are designated commonly as "North Caucasus" (instead of the obsolete "Predkavkazje" or "Ciscaucasia", i.e. Hither Caucasus), while the territory to the south of the Caucasus Mountain Range is traditionally named in Russian and Western languages "Zakavkazje" ? "Transcaucasia", this last term, as indicated above, having acquired a definite "political flavour".

Because of this, we think it expedient to replace "Transcaucasia" in these languages by the politically neutral and geographically more correct terms "South Caucasia" or "South Caucasia", Germ. "Südkaukasus", Fr. "Caucase méridional".

This issue has been raised by us more than once at different International Conferences on the Caucasus and, as a rule, positively received by their participants.

It should, however, be pointed out that the term "Transcaucasia" is so widely spread in international usage that, obviously, a certain period of time is needed for the latter term to be replaced by the correct "South Caucasus", Russ. "Juzhnyi Kavkaz".

In any case, we should always remind our Northern and Western colleagues of the need for more exact geographical nomenclature in connection with the Caucasus. The terminology of International Organizations' Projects devoted to the Caucasus should be changed accordingly: Referring to the southern part of the Caucasus they should adopt exclusively the terms "South Caucasus", "South Caucasia", "South Caucasian", in place of the currently used "Transcaucasus", "Transcaucasia", "Transcaucasian". The term "Transcaucasian" should be maintained only as denoting "passing through the whole of the Caucasus region in an East-West or North-South direction" (e.g., "The Transcaucasian Transit Route", "The Transcaucasian Corridor": The Latin preposition "trans-", apart from the meaning "beyond", carries also the meaning "through", cf. "Transatlantic", "Transsiberian", etc.).

Use of correct geographic nomenclature with respect to the Caucasian region is especially important now as the concepts of the "Peaceful Caucasus" and the "Dialogue of Cultures and Civilizations in the Caucasus" acquire ever more international political significance as an antithesis to the widely spread concept of the "Clash of Civilizations" in different parts of the World, including the Caucasus.

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