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ABSTRACT

of the dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

**THE CHARACTERISTICS AND RESOLUTION PROSPECTS
OF ETHNOPOLITICAL CONFLICTS IN THE SOUTH
CAUCASUS UNDER CONTEMPORARY CONDITIONS**

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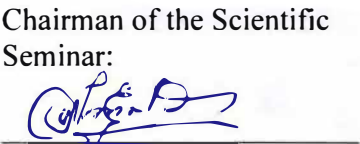
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I. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESEARCH

Relevance of the topic and the degree of its study. The South Caucasus has historically and geographically emerged as a center of ethno-political conflicts, facing open confrontations in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Consequently, the unresolved nature of these conflicts undermines regional stability, maintains tensions in interstate relations, and directly brings the interests of international actors into collision. The persistence of refugees, economic underdevelopment, and intergenerational ethnic confrontations renders the region highly vulnerable from a security perspective. Therefore, the resolution of these conflicts carries strategic significance not only for local stability but also for global security.

For the Republic of Azerbaijan, resolving ethno-political conflicts in the South Caucasus is of decisive importance in terms of national security and regional integration. Following the Second Karabakh War in 2020 and the anti-terrorist operation in 2023, the territorial integrity of the Republic of Azerbaijan was restored. In the post-conflict period, the protection of Azerbaijan's strategic interests has been characterized by efforts toward normalization of relations with Armenia and the consolidation of the peace process. Nevertheless, the persistence of other ethno-political conflicts in the region-particularly Georgia's issues with Abkhazia and South Ossetia-directly affects Azerbaijan's security and diplomatic strategies.

The resolution of ethno-political conflicts in the South Caucasus plays a vital role for Azerbaijan's national interests, both in terms of regional security and economic development. Ongoing tensions and open conflicts in the region-particularly those concerning relations with Armenia-directly affect the implementation of Azerbaijan's long-term strategic plans. In this regard, Azerbaijan's peace initiatives, including the peace agreement initiated with Armenia, serve as a crucial element in ensuring the future stability of the region. The President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, has articulated this position with precision: *"If the peace agreement is signed and the fundamental principles are implemented, then peace in the Caucasus*

*will be long-term and sustainable. This is our intention. I believe that the steps we have demonstrated and announced are a clear manifestation of our determination to contribute to peace in the Caucasus. We are rebuilding Karabakh, mobilizing our resources to strengthen our economy, because without that it would not be easy to allocate substantial funds. At the same time, we are promoting the peace agenda in the Caucasus. I believe that in all directions, the initiative is in our hands. This initiative serves, and must serve, the cause of peace”.*¹ In this context, Azerbaijan’s mobilization of resources for the consolidation of peace and the strengthening of cooperation with regional actors will not only help preserve stability in the South Caucasus but will also further reinforce the country’s strategic position. Azerbaijan regards the settlement of these conflicts as significant not merely for its own interests, but also for the broader development and security of the entire region.

Based on the above considerations, the relevance of the topic can be demonstrated as follows:

- Following the 44-day Patriotic War and the 24-hour anti-terrorist operations, the Republic of Azerbaijan restored its state sovereignty across all its territories. However, although a peace treaty with Armenia has been initialed, it has not yet been formally signed. Given that revanchist forces remain highly active in Armenia, this uncertainty exerts a serious negative impact on regional stability and prevents the full elimination of the risk of military incidents between the parties.
- Despite the passage of many years, Georgia has not been able to restore control over Abkhazia and South Ossetia, while the continued presence of Russian military contingents in the region further complicates the situation. This, in turn, creates gaps not only in Georgia-Russia relations but also in NATO and the European Union’s Caucasus policies. In other words, the

¹ Əliyev, İ. Cənubi Qafqaz: İnkişaf və əməkdaşlıq. ADA Universitetində keçirilən beynəlxalq konfransda çıxış / president.az. – Bakı, 29 aprel 2022. – [Elektron resurs]. URL: <https://president.az/az/articles/view/55909>

mentioned ethnopolitical conflicts intensify the already existing regional rivalry between the West and Russia.

- The conflicts in the region hinder the full realization of energy, transport, and logistics projects. The political disputes surrounding the opening of the Zangezur corridor after the Second Karabakh War are a clear example of this. The agreement reached between the parties in the United States on August 8, 2025, regarding the corridor demonstrates that the prospects for conflict resolution are closely linked to the future of regional economic integration.
- The return of refugees and internally displaced persons remains one of the most sensitive issues in the region. While Azerbaijan's "Great Return" program to the territories liberated from occupation is progressing rapidly, similar problems in Georgia remain unresolved. This factor illustrates that even protracted ethnopolitical conflicts have long-term socio-economic consequences and require not only military-political but also humanitarian approaches.

Thus, it becomes evident that ethnopolitical conflicts in the South Caucasus remain relevant, as they bring both the sovereignty and security concerns of states, as well as the interests of international powers, to a point of confrontation. In this context, the study of the topic holds significant scientific and academic importance.

The degree of research on the subject and the analysis of existing literature indicate that ethnopolitical conflicts in the South Caucasus—particularly the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict—have been extensively examined in historical, legal, and international political contexts. However, engaging all of this abundant material in a single study would be neither practical nor academically expedient. Therefore, it has been deemed necessary to select sources that are directly relevant to the topic, shedding light on the characteristics of the conflicts, the role of regional actors, and the prospects for resolution. This, in turn, ensures a systematic analysis and enables the drawing of concrete conclusions that correspond to the relevance of the topic.

In this regard, two fundamental works by E. Ahmadov “Armenia’s Aggression against Azerbaijan: The Policies of International Organizations and Major Powers”² and “Armenia’s Aggression against Azerbaijan: Documents and Materials”³ are devoted to analyzing the conflict within the framework of international law and to documenting Armenia’s acts of aggression against Azerbaijan with supporting evidence. Ahmadov’s works serve as essential sources for the subject, as they provide a detailed explanation of the positions of international organizations and the approaches of major powers toward the conflict. His research also offers a broad documentary and legal basis for analyzing the conflict within an international legal framework.

The works authored by M. Gasimli “Foreign Policy of the Republic of Azerbaijan (1991-2003)”⁴ and the two-volume “History of the Republic of Azerbaijan (1991-2021)”⁵ are valuable sources reflecting the place of the conflict in Azerbaijan’s foreign policy and the evolution of this policy. Gasimli’s studies not only analyze the political and diplomatic aspects of the conflict but also explain Azerbaijan’s stance toward it and its relations with regional powers since 1991. The author further presents Azerbaijan’s position in international relations during the years of independence in a broad context, which contributes to a deeper understanding of the role of the conflict in the country’s foreign policy.

² Əhmədov, E. Ermənistanın Azərbaycanca təcavüzü: Beynəlxalq təşkilatların və böyük dövlətlərin siyasəti. III kitab / E.Əhmədov. – Bakı: Letterpress, 2015. – 368 s.

³ Əhmədov, E. Ermənistanın Azərbaycanca təcavüzü: Sənədlər və materiallar / E.Əhmədov. – Bakı: Letterpress, 2015. – 324 s.

⁴ Qasımlı, M. Azərbaycan Respublikasının xarici siyasəti (1991–2003). I hissə / M.Qasımlı. – Bakı: Mütərcim, 2015. – 643 s.

⁵ Qasımlı, M. Azərbaycan Respublikasının tarixi (1991–2021): 2 cildə. I cild (1991–2003) / M.Qasımlı. – Bakı: Bakı Dövlət Universitetinin mətbəəsi, 2021. – 382 s.

The work “The Victory that Began in Munich”⁶ by M. İbrahimqızı reveals with irrefutable evidence that Armenian history is constructed on mythology and exposes the expansionist policies pursued by Armenian nationalists over the past two centuries. Based on authoritative sources and archival materials, the book presents scientific research supported by original stenograms, official records, maps, and reports of historical figures, offering an objective account of the true history and essence of Karabakh and the Karabakh conflict. This study provides comprehensive and in-depth information that dismantles falsified historical interpretations concerning the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict created as a result of Armenia’s aggression.

H. Mammadova, in her works,⁷ examines the place of the former Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh conflict within the foreign policy of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Her scholarly activity demonstrates that the conflict constituted one of the main priorities of the country’s foreign policy and that Azerbaijan’s international strategies were shaped with a focus on resolving this issue. Her research encompasses the approaches of the Azerbaijani state toward the conflict within international organizations and the broader sphere of diplomacy.

The book “The Information Model of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict”⁸ by N. Süleymanlı highlights the role of information warfare and propaganda in the conflict. Süleymanlı analyzes how the conflict was represented in the information space and evaluates the outcomes of Azerbaijan’s struggle in this domain. By showing how information technologies and media were employed as instruments in the conflict, the book contributes new perspectives to the subject.

⁶ İbrahimqızı, M. Münxəndən başlayan zəfər / M.İbrahimqızı. – Bakı: Zərdabi Nəşr, 2020. – 557 s.

⁷ Məmmədova, H. Ermənistan–Azərbaycan Dağlıq Qarabağ münaqişəsi Azərbaycan Respublikasının xarici siyasətində: tarix elmləri doktoru elmi dərəcəsi almaq üçün təqdim olunmuş dissertasiya / H.Məmmədova. – Bakı, 2011. – 332 s.

⁸ Süleymanlı, N. Dağlıq Qarabağ münaqişəsinin informasiya modeli / N.Süleymanlı. – Bakı: Hərbi nəşriyyat, 2011. – 279 s.

The monograph “The Participation of International Organizations in the Settlement of the Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict (1991-2005)”⁹ by S. Seyidova presents, for the first time, a comprehensive analysis of the history and causes of the conflict, as well as Armenia’s territorial claims against Azerbaijan, on the basis of newly uncovered archival documents. The monograph thoroughly examines the role of international organizations in the settlement of the conflict and sheds light, through new material, on their initial efforts aimed at conflict resolution.

The number of such sources can certainly be expanded; however, overall, the existing literature covers various aspects of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, including legal, diplomatic, political, and information warfare dimensions. These sources provide researchers with a broad and substantive knowledge base and create a rich body of literature for future studies.

Among foreign-language works, many significant researchers have analyzed different dimensions of the conflicts in the South Caucasus and its surrounding regions. Thomas de Waal’s “Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan between Peace and War”¹⁰ offers a comprehensive account of the historical and contemporary dynamics of the Karabakh conflict and provides an in-depth analysis of the contradictions between peace and war in the region. The author also examines the political situation in his work “South Ossetia Today”.¹¹ D. M. Lang’s “A Modern History of Georgia”¹² describes Georgia’s development in the modern era and its role in the South Caucasus. A. Dugin’s “Foundations of Geopolitics: The Geopolitical Future of

⁹ Seyidova, S. Ermənistan-Azərbaycan Dağlıq Qarabağ münaqişəsinin tənzimlənməsində beynəlxalq təşkilatların iştirakı (1991-2005-ci illər) / S.Seyidova. – Bakı: Elm və Təhsil, 2021. – 405 s.

¹⁰ Waal, T. Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War / T.Waal. – New York: NYU Press, 2013. – 406 p.

¹¹ Waal, T. South Ossetia Today / T.Waal. – 3 iyun 2019. – [Elektron resurs]. URL: <https://3dcftas.eu/publications/south-ossetia-today>

¹² Lang, D.M. A modern history of Georgia / D.M.Lang. – London: The Weidenfeld and Nicolson Asia-African Series, 1963. – 298 p.

Russia”¹³ explores Russia’s future geopolitical and geostrategic approaches, as well as its role in the South Caucasus. G. Khutsishvili, in his book “How to Resolve Conflicts”,¹⁴ emphasizes that the conflicts in the region (Abkhazia and South Ossetia) have deep historical roots, yet their resolution requires peaceful negotiations and compromise rather than violence and power politics. K. Kazım’s “The Caucasus after the Cold War”¹⁵ analyzes political changes in the region and the new form of international relations, while Y. Demirağ and C. Karadeli’s “Central Asia and the Caucasus from Past to Present”¹⁶ portrays both the historical background and the contemporary development of Central Asia and the Caucasus.

These works contribute to a profound and comprehensive analysis of ethnopolitical conflicts in the South Caucasus and neighboring regions.

Object and subject of the research. The object of the research is the ethnopolitical conflicts existing in the South Caucasus region, while the subject is the analysis of the historical roots, causes, and contemporary dynamics of these conflicts, as well as the exploration of resolution prospects and the formation of peace processes in the region.

Purpose and objectives of the research. The purpose of the research is to examine the historical development of ethnopolitical conflicts in the South Caucasus, their specific features under current conditions, and the effectiveness of regional and international efforts aimed at their resolution, while also identifying possible perspectives for ensuring peace and stability. The research pursues the following objectives:

¹³ Дугин, А. Основы геополитики. Геополитическое будущее России / А.Дугин. – М.: Арктогея, 1997. – 567 с.

¹⁴ Khutsishvili, G. How to Resolve Conflicts (first ed., Vol. IV) / G.Khutsishvili – Tbilisi, 2018.

¹⁵ Kazım, K. Soğuk Savaş sonrası Kafkasya / K.Kazım. – Ankara: USAK Yayınları, 2009.

¹⁶ Demirağ, Y., Karadeli, C. Geçmişten günümüze dönüşen Orta Asya ve Kafkasya / Y.Demirağ, C.Karadeli. – Ankara: Palme Yayıncılık, 2006.

- To conduct a conceptual analysis of the notion of conflict, its causes, and typologies, while also identifying the theoretical problems of ethno-political conflicts and their settlement;
- To study contemporary international practices in the regulation of ethno-political conflicts;
- To analyze, as ethno-political conflicts in the South Caucasus, Georgia's problems concerning Abkhazia and South Ossetia, as well as Adjara and Javakheti;
- To investigate Armenia's aggression against Azerbaijan (political, economic, diplomatic, cultural, etc.) in the context of the settlement of the Karabakh conflict;
- To identify the ethno-political consequences of the Second Karabakh War and analyze the new realities formed in the South Caucasus;
- To conduct a systematic analysis of the post-conflict environment and the peace process in the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict.

Research methods. The research methods employed in the dissertation reflect a comprehensive approach and involve the use of various theoretical as well as empirical techniques. Primarily, the comparative method has been applied to analyze ethno-political conflicts in the South Caucasus from different perspectives, theoretically examining the characteristics of ethno-political conflicts in other countries, and comparing their regional impacts. In addition, the historical method has been utilized to investigate the origins and causes of the conflicts. Through this method, information was gathered on the historical roots of the conflicts in the South Caucasus, their stages of development, and their role in international politics. The analytical method was further employed to examine the collected data, allowing for the study of the social, economic, and political aspects of various conflicts. At the same time, the dissertation made use of the normative legal analysis method, which enabled an assessment of the role played by international legal documents and normative acts in the resolution of conflicts.

Main theses submitted for defense. As a result of the research, the following theses are put forward for defense:

- The persistence of ethnopolitical conflicts in the South Caucasus is linked not only to the interstate relations and historical roots of the conflicts within the region but also to the interests of international actors.
- In the post-conflict period of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, international mediation does not prove effective in achieving long-term stability; rather, regional cooperation constitutes the key to the peace process.
- The resolution of Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia conflicts appears possible not through the application of international law, but through the harmonization of the interests of regional powers and the establishment of reconciliation mechanisms with local ethnic groups.
- The new geopolitical realities emerging in the South Caucasus after the Second Karabakh War have diminished the role of international mediators and led regional actors (such as Azerbaijan, Türkiye, Russia, etc.) to assume a more dominant position in the conflict resolution process.
- The settlement of ethnopolitical conflicts in the South Caucasus is achievable not only through regional cooperation and economic integration but also through the restoration of interstate trust and social dialogue, as the prevailing political and ethnic tensions are largely rooted in mutual mistrust.

Scientific novelty of the research. The research possesses the following scientific novelties:

- In previous dissertations, ethnopolitical conflicts in the South Caucasus were primarily analyzed either by focusing on individual conflicts or through the lens of global actors' influence. This dissertation, however, introduces a more holistic approach by examining the dynamics of conflicts and their resolution prospects within a regional context.
- Although the Karabakh conflict has been extensively studied in Azerbaijani political science, the post-conflict period remains a

relatively new issue and has not yet been analyzed in detail. In this respect, the dissertation provides a comprehensive analysis of the emergence of new geopolitical realities in the South Caucasus and their impact on the peace process, thereby identifying the transformative characteristics of ethnopolitical conflicts in the region.

- While it is traditionally accepted that instruments of international law play a central role in conflict resolution, this research challenges that assumption. It highlights the shortcomings of international law and advances the argument that regional powers may hold a greater role in resolving these conflicts.
- Alongside the Abkhazia and South Ossetia conflicts in Georgia, the study also undertakes a detailed analysis of less-researched issues such as Adjara and Javakheti. This comprehensive approach distinguishes the dissertation from previous studies, as it addresses not merely one dimension of conflicts but the broader spectrum of regional problems.
- In Azerbaijani political science, regional relations have largely been examined through the framework of classical balance-of-power approaches. This research, however, departs from that framework by placing greater emphasis on the restoration of interstate trust, social dialogue, and mechanisms of mutual understanding.

Theoretical and practical significance of the research. The theoretical significance of the research manifests itself at several levels. First and foremost, the dissertation expands the existing literature on ethnopolitical conflicts in the South Caucasus and presents it in a new context. This study provides a theoretical analysis of ethnopolitical conflicts not only as local and regional phenomena but also as structures that influence international politics. In this regard, it creates opportunities for the formation of a new scholarly approach that, by considering the historical, social, and geopolitical contexts of conflicts, explores potential pathways to their resolution. The findings of the research serve as a valuable source for enriching

theories of ethnic conflicts and their settlement, as well as for synthesizing different approaches.

The practical significance of the dissertation lies in its ability to generate in-depth recommendations and strategic approaches for researchers, diplomats, and international organizations engaged in conflict resolution processes. The analyses presented in the dissertation can be applied in practical activities directed toward the settlement of ethnopolitical conflicts. Furthermore, diplomats and international mediators conducting interstate peace negotiations may benefit from the proposals advanced in this study. In addition, the research findings carry substantial applied significance for the initiatives of non-governmental organizations, international peacebuilding programs, and regional cooperation platforms.

Approbation and application of the research. The main findings of the research have been presented by the author in scholarly articles and conference papers. Specifically, the author's presentations at three national conferences and one international conference (Paris) have been published as academic articles and proceedings. Moreover, seven academic articles-two of which were published in journals abroad (Ukraine's *Regional Studies* and Türkiye's *Academic History and Thought*)-have appeared in scholarly journals recommended by the Supreme Attestation Commission (SAC).

Institution where the dissertation was carried out. The research was conducted at the Department of International Relations, Baku State University.

Volume of the dissertation by sections, with the total volume indicated in characters. The dissertation consists of an introduction, three chapters, nine subsections, a conclusion, and a list of references. The total volume amounts to 223,728 characters. The breakdown of the volume of its structural parts is as follows:

- Introduction - 16,590 characters;
- Main content of the dissertation - 201,441 characters, including Chapter One - 67,879, Chapter Two - 65,725, and Chapter Three - 67,837 characters;
- Conclusion - 5,697 characters.

II. MAIN CONTENT OF THE RESEARCH

In the Introduction of the dissertation, the relevance of the topic is substantiated; the object and subject of the research, as well as its purpose and objectives, are defined; the scientific novelty, theoretical and practical significance are outlined; the theses submitted for defense are presented; and the structure and volume of the work are briefly described.

The first chapter of the research, entitled **“General Characteristics of Ethnopolitical Conflicts in the Contemporary Period”** consists of several subsections.

In the first subsection, **“The Concept of Conflict, Its Causes, and Typology”** the origins of the concept of conflict, its interpretation across different scientific disciplines, and various typologies of conflict are discussed. The term “conflict” derives from the Latin word *conflictus* and is defined as a broad concept encompassing military, social, economic, psychological, and legal confrontations. This part examines how the notion of conflict has been analyzed within sociology, psychology, economics, and legal studies. For example, in sociology, conflicts are regarded as a driving force of social development, whereas in psychology they are studied as confrontations between individuals and groups.

It is also emphasized that in international relations, conflicts are characterized as clashes of interests among states and international actors. Theoretically, realists highlight the anarchic nature of the international system and argue that conflicts are inevitable, while liberals stress the role of international organizations and economic cooperation in conflict resolution. According to John Burton’s approach, conflicts are unavoidable when people’s basic social and cultural needs are not met.

Among the main causes of conflict are imbalances of power, competition over resources, ideological differences, and economic inequalities. The subsection also provides an extensive discussion of the causes of ethnic conflicts, particularly ethnocentrism, identity politics, and the impact of globalization on such conflicts. The various

manifestations of ethnic conflicts are categorized as ethno-territorial, ethno-economic, ethno-social, and others. Such a classification facilitates a better understanding of conflicts and contributes to the development of strategies for their management.

Overall, this subsection underscores the multidimensional character of conflicts in social, economic, political, and cultural contexts, offering an in-depth analysis of their causes and typologies.

The second subsection, **“Ethnopolitical Conflicts and the Theoretical Problems of Their Settlement”** examines how ethnopolitical conflicts are explained within international relations theories and discusses the theoretical problems associated with their resolution. First, within the framework of realist theory, conflicts are understood as a natural outcome of power imbalances among states and clashes of interests. Realists argue that the international system is anarchic, and this anarchy makes conflicts inevitable. Power imbalances, competition over resources, and the pursuit of state security are identified as the main causes of conflict.

According to the neorealist approach, states cannot escape conflicts because the structure of the international system compels them to compete in order to guarantee their security. The concept of the security dilemma strengthens the realist perspective, emphasizing that steps taken by one state to enhance its own security cause concern in other states, leading to reciprocal security measures that may ultimately result in conflict.

The liberalist approach, on the other hand, highlights the role of international organizations, law, and diplomatic instruments in preventing and resolving conflicts. Liberals believe that international cooperation, economic interdependence, and democratic institutions can hinder the emergence of conflicts. They argue that interdependence among states makes conflicts less likely, since trade relations and economic cooperation reveal the high costs of war.

In the research, it is comparatively argued that the constructivist approach explains conflicts through the ideas, identities, and perceptions of states. According to this theory, conflicts arise when states perceive each other as threats, and their resolution is possible

only through changing these perceptions. Constructivists regard conflicts as socially constructed phenomena and see their resolution in the transformation of interstate identities and perceptions.

The instrumentalist approach, in turn, explains conflicts as tools used by states to advance their interests. According to this perspective, conflicts are deliberately employed to alter the balance of power, achieve political objectives, and gain control over resources. States manipulate conflicts as instruments to strengthen their positions.

The subsection also discusses the impact of xenophobia on ethnopolitical conflicts. Xenophobia defined as hostility and fear toward “outsiders” is explained as one of the key factors that generate tension in societies where ethnic differences provoke confrontation. Social identity theory is highlighted to show how the formation of group identity and group loyalty intensify conflicts.

Finally, the subsection emphasizes the importance of various mechanisms for the resolution of ethnopolitical conflicts, including third-party mediation, judicial and arbitration methods, public diplomacy, and socio-economic structural reforms. It is noted that mediation-especially by neutral actors-creates opportunities for peaceful resolution, while addressing socio-economic inequalities and promoting dialogue between ethnic groups are identified as vital elements in conflict settlement.

The third subsection of the chapter, entitled **“Contemporary International Practices in the Regulation of Ethnopolitical Conflicts”** analyzes issues of conflict regulation in modern international relations and reviews various approaches in this regard. It stresses that conflict regulation is no longer limited to resolving interstate confrontations but also encompasses complex conflicts involving non-state actors, terrorist organizations, and transnational corporations. The multi-level and complex nature of modern international conflicts demonstrates that traditional methods of resolution are insufficient and that new approaches are required.

This subsection highlights the growing role of international organizations, regional powers, and diverse diplomatic mechanisms in conflict resolution. International organizations such as the UN, the

European Union, and NATO not only engage in political mediation but also employ instruments such as humanitarian aid, peacekeeping forces, and economic sanctions. Regional powers, meanwhile, actively participate in the process by taking into account the impact of conflicts on regional stability. Such cooperation necessitates multi-level analyses and multi-dimensional solutions.

The importance of multidimensional approaches in conflict resolution is particularly emphasized. These approaches extend beyond political and military solutions, incorporating social, economic, and security dimensions. Eliminating social injustices, fostering economic development, and improving infrastructure are regarded as key factors for ensuring the sustainability of peace. Conflict regulation in contemporary practice is presented as a multi-stage process, with its phases analyzed from the potential conflict stage through the stages of manifestation and escalation. Each stage develops under the influence of various social, political, and economic factors, and analyzing these stages contributes to the effective management of conflicts.

The subsection also elaborates on the role of different methods in conflict resolution, including mediation, arbitration, and judicial mechanisms. Mediation processes are noted as playing a crucial role in preventing the deepening of conflicts and in fostering dialogue between parties. Moreover, the necessity of implementing social and economic reforms in the post-conflict period is emphasized as a condition for ensuring the durability of peace.

Examples from contemporary international practice are provided to illustrate successful experiences of conflict resolution. The settlement of the Northern Ireland conflict through the Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement, the Dayton Agreement in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the post-genocide recovery in Rwanda are highlighted as notable cases. In addition, Kosovo's achievement of independence and the regulation of its conflict with Serbia are explained through the role of international mediation mechanisms.

Overall, this subsection emphasizes the importance of multi-dimensional and comprehensive approaches in contemporary

international practice for resolving ethnopolitical conflicts, stressing that conflict regulation should not be limited to political solutions alone but must also be accompanied by social, economic, and humanitarian reforms.

The second chapter of the research is entitled **“The Characteristics of Ethnopolitical Conflicts in the South Caucasus: The Case of Georgia”**. The first subsection, **“The Abkhazia Problem as a Profound Ethnopolitical Challenge in Georgia”** explains that the Abkhazian conflict has long represented a complex ethnopolitical problem for Georgia. The roots of this conflict date back to the early 20th century and were shaped by the events that followed the Russian Revolution in the South Caucasus. During the Soviet era, the status of Abkhazia and its relations with the central authorities in Tbilisi became increasingly strained, with the legal and administrative status of the autonomous region being repeatedly altered within the borders of the Georgian SSR. Tensions escalated particularly during the Stalin-Beria period, when the Abkhaz people faced heavy pressure in their struggle to defend their national rights. Measures such as the prohibition of education in the Abkhaz language and the mass resettlement of Georgians into the region deepened ethnic confrontation. The situation further intensified with the Abkhaz demands in 1978 and 1987 for direct incorporation into the USSR and the establishment of the Abkhaz National Forum.

The Georgian-Abkhaz clashes of 1989, which resulted in the deaths of nineteen people, severely strained relations between Tbilisi and Sukhumi. Following the dissolution of the USSR in 1990, Abkhazia declared independence, though this was not recognized by Georgia. Georgia’s military intervention in Abkhazia in 1992 deepened the conflict and led to full-scale war. Although Abkhazians considered themselves victorious in their struggle for freedom after the 1992-1993 war, Georgia was unwilling to lose this autonomous territory.

The research further notes that Russia played a dual role in this conflict: on the one hand, it sought to support Georgia, while on the other, it assisted Abkhazia against the Georgians. Although the 1992-

1993 war resulted in Abkhazia achieving de facto independence, the international community did not recognize it, and Abkhazia continued to be regarded as legally part of Georgia. Under the auspices of the UN and the OSCE, negotiations were held several times between the parties in attempts to resolve the conflict. Georgia's defeat in 1992-1993 and the large number of refugees brought about significant demographic changes. The agreements signed in Moscow in 1994 marked certain steps toward conflict resolution, yet the adoption of a new Constitution by Abkhazia, once again proclaiming its independence, complicated the problem further. Although the Georgian government put forward various proposals for resolving the conflict, these efforts proved fruitless due to Abkhazia's refusal to abandon its independence claims.

The subsection also analyzes subsequent developments of the conflict. In particular, the 2008 war between Georgia and Russia once again underscored the international significance of the Abkhazian issue. Following the war, Russia recognized Abkhazia's independence and established two military bases there, though this recognition did not receive broad international support. During this period, Georgia intensified its Western integration policies and sought to resolve the Abkhazian conflict with Western backing, but these efforts failed to achieve results. The Abkhazia issue remains not only a problem for Georgia but also one of major significance in the South Caucasus and in international relations. Successive Georgian governments have continued their diplomatic and political efforts to resolve the problem, yet Abkhazia's close ties with Russia and its de facto control by Moscow have made conflict resolution increasingly difficult.

The second subsection, **“The South Ossetia Problem as a Manifestation of Ethnopolitical Tension in Georgia”** discusses one of the major ethnopolitical challenges faced by Georgia, whose roots extend back to the Soviet period. Although political and ethnic confrontations were artificially suppressed during the Soviet era, demographic changes in South Ossetia altered the balance of the population in ways favorable to the interests of Georgia's central government. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the conflict

resurfaced, and from the earliest years of Georgia's independence struggle it developed into political and military confrontations.

This part of the study notes that the South Ossetian conflict began in the late 1980s and escalated into a military conflict by late 1991 and early 1992. Relations between Georgian President Zviad Gamsakhurdia and the Ossetians were shaped by nationalist and separatist policies on both sides. During the early stages of Georgia's independence movement, South Ossetia, with support from Russia, sought to obtain independent status, but these efforts were rejected by Georgia's central government, resulting in armed clashes. By the early 1990s, South Ossetia had effectively slipped from Georgian control, establishing a de facto separatist regime. The 1992 Sochi Agreement introduced a temporary ceasefire, but the conflict entered a "frozen" state that lasted until the 2008 Russia-Georgia war. While in the 1990s the South Ossetian conflict was primarily characterized as an ethnic confrontation, underlying it was also the geopolitical rivalry between Russia and Georgia.

The 2008 war is evaluated by the author as a logical consequence of escalating tensions between Georgia and Russia. After Mikheil Saakashvili came to power, Georgia implemented economic and political reforms and strengthened its policy of Western integration, which in turn undermined Russia's interests in the South Caucasus. Georgia's aspirations to join NATO and the European Union antagonized Russia, prompting Moscow to support separatist movements in Abkhazia and South Ossetia to maintain its influence in the region. The August 2008 war began with Georgia's military operations aimed at regaining control over South Ossetia and Abkhazia. However, Russia responded with military force, leading to Georgia's defeat. As a result, South Ossetia and Abkhazia completely separated from Georgia and were recognized by Russia as independent states. This recognition, however, did not receive broad international support, and to date these regions remain recognized by only a handful of states.

All these developments demonstrate that ethnopolitical conflicts in the South Caucasus carry not only local but also global geopolitical

implications. The South Ossetian conflict remains a complex challenge to the establishment of long-term peace and stability in the region. The contradictions between Georgia's territorial integrity and the Ossetians' right to self-determination make resolution of the conflict even more difficult.

The third subsection, **“The Problems of Adjara and Javakheti as Issues of Political Security in Georgia”** analyzes the ethnopolitical and security challenges arising in two key regions of Georgia's modern history. The Adjara problem was largely associated with separatist tendencies and the region's attempts at de facto independence, a process that intensified under the leadership of Aslan Abashidze. Due to Abashidze's authoritarian rule, Adjara effectively turned into an enclave separate from Georgia, but in 2004, under the leadership of Mikheil Saakashvili, the central government reestablished control over the region. The resolution of the Adjara issue is regarded as a significant step toward restoring Georgia's territorial integrity.

The Javakheti problem, in contrast, has been more closely linked to ethnic separatism and Armenia's political interests in the region. The unfounded autonomy demands of the Armenian population in Javakheti, together with Armenia's influence in the area, pose a serious threat to Georgia's state sovereignty. The strategic location of Javakheti and the Baku-Tbilisi-Akhalkalaki-Kars railway project have further sharpened geopolitical interests in the region. Armenia's influence and the separatist activities of Armenian political organizations in Javakheti continue to threaten Georgia's internal stability.

Overall, this subsection analyzes the issues of Adjara and Javakheti-two major components of Georgia's struggle to preserve its territorial integrity and sovereignty-within a theoretical and historical framework.

The third chapter of the research is entitled **“Conflict Resolution Experience in the South Caucasus: An Analysis of the Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict”** The first subsection, **“Armenia's Aggression against Azerbaijan in the Context of the Settlement of**

the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict” highlights the resettlement of Armenians to the South Caucasus in the 19th century and the continuation of territorial claims against various regions of Azerbaijan, particularly Nagorno-Karabakh, since that time. It notes that during the Soviet period, socio-economic measures implemented by Azerbaijan in the region provoked “dissatisfaction” among Armenians, leading Armenian nationalists to file complaints with the central Soviet authorities. The subsection then examines the escalation of the conflict into the military domain in the late 1980s, amid the weakening and eventual collapse of the USSR, focusing on Armenia’s violent actions against Azerbaijanis and the deportation of the Azerbaijani population from the region.

It also addresses the internationalization of the conflict, emphasizing that beginning in 1993, UN Security Council resolutions called for an end to Armenia’s policy of occupation, but Armenia ignored these resolutions and continued the occupation. Azerbaijan’s diplomatic and military efforts to liberate its occupied territories are analyzed, along with various international mediation initiatives, including the OSCE Minsk Group’s proposed Madrid Principles. Armenia’s unwillingness to engage constructively in negotiations and Azerbaijan’s continued pursuit of a peaceful settlement are underlined.

In addition, the subsection explores theoretical analyses of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict within the frameworks of realism, constructivism, and postcolonialism, emphasizing how the conflict has been linked to state interests, ethnic identities, and the legacies of former empires. Armenian separatist activities against Azerbaijani territories and violations of international law are examined in detail.

The second subsection, “**The Ethnopolitical Consequences of the Second Karabakh War: The Emergence of New Realities in the South Caucasus**” focuses on Armenia’s policy of occupation and the new geopolitical and ethnopolitical realities brought about by the 2020 Second Karabakh War. The subsection highlights the key military and diplomatic outcomes of the war, noting that Azerbaijan’s successful military operations led to the liberation of occupied territories. Armenia’s provocations during the conflict and

Azerbaijan's counter-offensives are described in detail. Azerbaijan's victories on the battlefield—particularly the liberation of strategically important areas such as Fuzuli, Jabrayil, Aghdara, Shusha, and others—are discussed both militarily and ethnopolitically. The restoration of Azerbaijan's national identity and the defeat of Armenia's large-scale separatist ambitions are presented as central themes.

Attention is also given to the ineffectiveness of international organizations, including the UN and the OSCE, in resolving the conflict. Armenia's occupation policy is critically evaluated within the framework of international law, while Azerbaijan's process of restoring territorial integrity is emphasized. The trilateral declaration of November 10, 2020, is highlighted as a testament to Azerbaijan's diplomatic and military achievements and their significance for conflict resolution. In conclusion, it is noted that the 44-day Patriotic War not only ended with a military victory but also gave rise to new ethnopolitical realities in the South Caucasus.

The final subsection of the chapter, **“A Systematic Analysis of the Post-Conflict Situation in the Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict”** examines the post-conflict phase, which primarily encompasses peacebuilding and reconstruction processes. Following the Second Karabakh War, the “Great Return” program has focused on the reconstruction of liberated territories, the return of internally displaced persons, and the restoration of infrastructure. The rebuilding efforts include smart villages, green energy projects, and the construction of large-scale roads, airports, and social facilities. The restoration of the liberated areas of Karabakh also holds great significance in terms of reestablishing national identity.

On August 8, 2025, the initialing of a peace treaty between the parties in the United States was particularly emphasized, with the argument that the opening of the Zangezur Corridor holds the potential to transform the region's economic and geopolitical dynamics. At the same time, it is underscored in detail that Iran opposes the Zangezur Corridor, taking both diplomatic and military measures against it. Iran's main concern lies in the potential loss of the role of the North-

South Corridor and the strengthening of Azerbaijan and Türkiye through joint efforts.

In addition, it is noted that the peace process between Armenia and Azerbaijan, as well as the process of delimitation and demarcation of borders between the two states, is ongoing. Nevertheless, the activism of revanchist forces in Armenia continues to pose a threat to peace in the region.

In the **Conclusion** of the research, the results of the analyses carried out in all three chapters are summarized. These results are presented in three directions.

First, it is emphasized that the persistence of ethnopolitical conflicts in the South Caucasus is ensured not only by historical contradictions but also by the clash of strategic interests among international actors. Therefore, the resolution of these conflicts requires not only legal and political mechanisms but also the creation of an environment of mutual trust and the adoption of justice-based political approaches.

Second, it is highlighted that although the conflicts in Georgia-Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Adjara, and Javakheti-each possess distinct features, they all generally emerge within the context of ethnopolitical contradictions and resistance to central authority. The resolution of these conflicts cannot rely solely on international law but requires practical mechanisms that harmonize the interests of regional powers and ensure the socio-cultural integration of local populations.

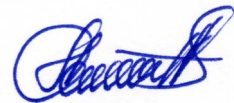
Third, while international mediation has lost its relevance in the post-war phase of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, the active participation of regional powers-particularly Azerbaijan, Türkiye, and Russia in the first stage, and later Azerbaijan, Armenia, and the United States-has become a decisive factor in ensuring sustainable peace. In this context, the Zangezur Corridor initially emerges as a strategic priority, both in terms of economic integration and in shifting the regional balance of power, thereby intensifying regional competition. However, on August 8, 2025, the parties reached an agreement on this issue in the United States.

Based on the findings, the author provides recommendations for future researchers, stressing that studies on ethno-political conflicts in the South Caucasus should not only be approached from a geopolitical perspective but also from the standpoint of socio-cultural dynamics and Azerbaijan's post-conflict peacebuilding experience, and that these should be comparatively analyzed with other regions. Furthermore, young scholars are advised to examine the security parameters of the Zangezur Corridor and other regional transportation projects within an analytical framework, prioritizing the defense of Azerbaijan's national interests. At the same time, they should conduct research directed at preserving diplomatic balance through cooperation with Russia in energy, with Türkiye in defense, with the West in political and institutional integration, and with Iran in transit relations.

The main content of the research has been reflected in the following published works of the author:

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