

**Mkhitaryan Gohar, ADMINISTRATIVE-POLITICAL UNITS OF THE EASTERN
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In the monograph are studied the administrative-political units of the Eastern Transcaucasia, relations between them and the Russian Empire in the second half of the XVIII century. The topic is of special scientific significance for the comprehensive study of the historical, geopolitical and economic processes in the Transcaucasian direction of Russian foreign policy and the ethno-political situation in the Eastern Transcaucasia. Also, the actuality of the topic is essential for the study of the geopolitical interests of the Russian State and the Eastern Transcaucasian khanates, which provides a basis for a most in-depth analysis of a number of currently unresolved issues in Transcaucasia, particularly the Artsakh Issue, against the historical and scientific background. The monograph aims to explore the relations between the Eastern Transcaucasian khanates and the Russian Empire under the background of the geopolitical and regional developments in the second half of the XVIII century.

The Eastern Transcaucasia is a critical political hub of the Black Sea and Caspian Sea basin, a strategic way to the Middle East that has always been in the center of regional developments, having a unique role in the political processes. In this context, in the second half of the 18th century the political role of the Eastern Transcaucasian Khanates is highlighted that appeared in the field of political-military and trading-economic interests of the Iranian, Ottoman and Russian Empires. This implied the formation of the specific political relations between khanates of the Eastern Transcaucasia and the above-mentioned states whose study helps to emphasize many issues of strategic and constructive significance formed in the political processes.

Based on the analysis of the source materials, the policy of the Iranian, Russian and Ottoman Empires toward the Eastern Transcaucasia in the second half of the 18th century is revealed. Thus, Iran could not put up with the loss of the region that the country historically owned, as well as with the fact of the reinforcement of the opposing powers' (Russian and Ottoman empires) impact in the region. Though Kerim Khan Zend sought to reaffirm Iran's "historic rights" over Transcaucasia, he actually recognized the autonomous rule of the local rulers for having insufficient military-political and diplomatic potential. The Ottoman Empire was also unable to solve the Transcaucasian issue solely and taking into consideration the potential cooperation between Russia and Iran (through the example of 1720-1730) aimed to gain the affection of Transcaucasian khans and rulers. Russia implemented the Transcaucasian policy through the long-term solutions and mechanisms, regulated relationships with the rulers of the Ottoman Empire, Iran and Transcaucasia. So, in the 1750-1770s, taking into account the Iranian-Turkish political factor in Transcaucasia and Daghestan, the Russian diplomacy refused the military intervention in the region for a while. During those decades the Russian policy toward the khanates was characterized by diplomatic interference which became

a concept; a mechanism for making counterbalances in later years. In 1780s after solving the Transdnestrian, particularly the Crimean problem successfully, the Russian Empire skillfully applied to the principle of political equilibrium toward the most powerful rulers of Transcaucasia - the Georgian king Heraclius and the Ghubaian Fath Ali Khan, thus protecting Transcaucasia from the emergence of unipolar power.

Unlike the first half of the 18th century, when the Russian-Turkish-Iranian relations were regulated by a number of agreements, Iranian, Russian and Ottoman Empires adopted the policy of neutrality by excluding the military intervention in the region in 1750-1780s. The lack of central government in Iran was in line with Russia's military and political interests. The situation would have enabled the peaceful integration of the Eastern Transcaucasia into the empire. Therefore, taking the advantage of the unstable state of Zend dynasty's power, after the Russian-Turkish War (1791-1793) Russia was planning to integrate the Eastern Transcaucasia into the empire exclusively in a peaceful way by maintaining the Ottoman Empire's policy. The establishment of solitary power of Agha Mohammed Khan in Iran in 1794 aimed at the reestablishment of the national borders that existed during the Safavid state. The examination of the official documents of that period proves that the Russian authorities showed political indifference to the invasion of Eastern Georgia carried out by the ruler of Iran in 1795, and used it as a motive for military intervention in the region and a pretext for getting the support and sympathy of the peoples of Transcaucasia. The Russian Empire used the Agha Mohammed Khan's invasion of Eastern Georgia as a motive for launching the military intervention in the region. Both the invasion and the destruction of Tbilisi were a major blow to the Georgian statehood. The spread of the Russian domination from the Caucasian ridge to the South put these khanates to the dilemma: to support Russia, to recognize the supreme power of Iran unconditionally or to fight for their sovereignty? The Khanates' concept of maneuvering lost its viability after 1795, thus returning Eastern Transcaucasia to the Iranian state system. On the other hand, due to the "The disaster of Tbilisi in 1795" the region had doubts about the usefulness of the Russian Empire's protection. Khans were to face the historic and political election. Was it worth suffering from the "Qajar Danger" for the sake of Russian support? Khanates should be politically oriented toward the Russian and the Ottoman Empires or Iran.

The examination of archival materials and literature lets the author to evaluate the Caspian Expeditions organized under the leadership of V. Zubov in 1796 from a new perspective. Certainly, at that time the Russian Empire was not concerned about the fate of the Transcaucasian peoples tortured by Agha Mohammed Khan. Acting as a "liberator" and "rescuer" for the people, the Russian Empire pursued the goal of expanding the borders of the state and using the South Caucasus for purely imperialist interests. That region had serious military-political significance for Russia as it could serve as a barrier to make the southern borders of the country invulnerable, at the same time being a convenient and reliable base to the Caspian Sea basin, for moving to Iran's Caspian regions and Atropatene trying to achieve the ultimate goal of the tempting

prospect of moving to the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean. In the opinion of the Russian authorities the elimination of the threat from the southern borders of the Russian Empire was connected with the creation of the security zone on the west coast of the Caspian Sea in the face of the Muslim Buffer Powers under the leadership of Fath-Ali Khan's family members.

The Transcaucasian policy of the Russian Empire in the second half of the 18th century prepared a fertile ground for carrying out the task of capturing this strategic region in the first quarter of the 19th century. So, in 1800, the emperor Paul I decided to annex the Eastern Georgia to the Russian Empire. That ambitious plan was brought to life by Alexander I, the Russian emperor's (1801-1825) famous decree signed on September 12, 1801. Taking into account the expansion of the Russian influence in Transcaucasia, the khanates of Karabakh, Shaki, Shamakhi, Derbent, Quba and Baku recognized the dominance of the Russian Empire in 1805-1806. And by the Treaty of Gulistan signed on October 12, 1813, these khanates were legally included in the Russian Empire experiencing some serious administrative and economic changes in the first half of the 19th century.