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External actors in Russia's Dagestan: competition and cooperation

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Abstract

The Republic of Dagestan is one of the 85 federal subjects of the Russian Federation. It is situated in the natural resource rich (hydrocarbons) Caspian Sea region of the North Caucasus within Russia. Dagestan is the richest republic in terms of hydrocarbon reserves in North Caucasus. Dagestan's geographical location is very strategic and significant as it lies at the crossroads of many civilizations, viz. Slavic, European, Turkish, Islam, and Persian. The republic is very crucial for the Russian Federation both for ensuring political and economic stability on its southern borders as well as for maintaining its influence over the large swathes of the Caucasus region, the West Asia and Central Asia. Since 1991, the North Caucasus region has been witnessing a string of violent conflicts affecting Dagestan. Thus, the region is attracting several external actors, like Azerbaijan, Iran, Turkey, US, and EU, who are interested in exploiting rich resources of Dagestan, and at the time they want to see a peaceful North Caucasus region, in general, and Dagestan, in particular, for carrying out energy trade smoothly. Some Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) belonging to these external actors are also active in the region in this regard.

Therefore, this paper analyses the roles of all these external actors both as Russia's competitor and as Russia's cooperative partner. It also examines their roles in mitigating conflict in Dagestan, and Russia's attitude towards their involvement in the North Caucasus region.

Keywords: Federal subjects, natural resource, Caspian Sea region, conflict, North Caucasus

Introduction

The Republic of Dagestan is one of the 85 federal subjects of the Russian Federation. The word "Dagestan" literally means "the land of mountains". It is situated in the southernmost part of Russia, known as North Caucasus, and in the eastern most extremity of the Caucasus. It is connected through land, with Azerbaijan, Georgia, Stavropol Krai, the Republic of Chechnya and Kalmykia, and sea with the Caspian littoral states, viz. Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Iran. Dagestan is very important to Russia in many ways as its territory provides opportunities of access to energy transportation routes, energy and raw materials. The total land area of the republic is 50,300 square kilometers and the total length from north to south is about 400 kilometers. Dagestan's geographical location is very significant as it lies at the crossroads of many civilizations, viz. Slavic, European, Turkish, Islam and Persian. From the military and strategic point of view, the republic is also very crucial for the Russian Federation both for ensuring socio-political and economic stability on its southern borders as well as for maintaining its influence over the large swathes of the Caucasus region, the West Asia and Central Asia. The length of its coastline is about 530 kilometers. Dagestan's portion of Caspian Sea coast is longest in the Russian coast of the Caspian Sea. The Dagestani shore at the Caspian Sea is rich in natural resources, viz. hydrocarbons, biological resources, including sturgeon etc. (Sagramoso 2007: 683-685; Strat Risks 2012) ^[22, 23].

Regional actors in the region

Dagestan's relation with neighboring Azerbaijan is complex. The differences lie in both ethnicity as well as religion. Azerbaijan is a majority Turkic-speaking country with Dagestani ethnic groups, viz. Lezgins and Avars, among the minorities, while Dagestan is a majority Caucasian-speaking republic along with significant Turkic-speaking ethnic groups. It has predominantly Sunni Muslims, while Azerbaijan has predominantly Shia Muslims. Around 130,919 ethnic Azeris inhabit Dagestan mainly in Derbent area in the southern part

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of the republic bordering Azerbaijan (*Census of the Russian Federation 2010) ^[1]. Mainly Lezgins and Avars of Dagestani ethnic lineage dwell in Azerbaijan and are counted among the minorities there (Dzutsev 2014: 1) ^[13]. The issue between Azerbaijan and Dagestan is about ethnicity, as Lezgins mainly inhabit the southern-most part of Dagestan and the northern part of Azerbaijan. They have been striving for unification for decades. Since 1991, they remain divided between two sovereign states, viz. Azerbaijan and Russia. Such problem has arisen due to the Soviet collapse. Prior to the Soviet collapse, Azerbaijan was a part of Soviet Union and the border between the RSFSR and the Azeri SSR had never been a hindrance to the Lezgins (Cornell 2001: 258) ^[12]. The first territorial claim by the Lezgins was raised in 1965 when a national organization under Iskander Kaziev, a Dagestani writer, raised voice against the Soviet policy of assimilation in relation to the Lezgins and demanded a separate unified territory comprising both the territories of Dagestan as well as Azerbaijan (Cornell 2001: 258-259; Birch 1987) ^[12, 9]. In the wake of Soviet collapse, an "All-Nation Congress of the Lezgin People" proclaimed in 1991 an independent state of Lezgistan comprising territories of both Azerbaijan as well as Dagestan which was viewed by many as an act committed out of sheer panic by Lezgins who feared of being separated along the Samur river as international frontier. However, it never materialized and Lezgistan never came into existence. In the 1990s, a Lezgin terrorist organization known as Sadval, with Kremlin's support, threatened to launch an insurgency in northern Azerbaijan with the objective of carving out parts of Azerbaijan's territory bearing significant Lezgin population. However, Kremlin's patronage to the movement later faded away and so the movement (Cornell 2001: 259; Dzutsev 2014: 1) ^[12, 13]. When Russia-Azerbaijan relations deteriorated by the summer of 1992, Russia proposed setting up strict border controls on the Azeri border. Thus, it would become mandatory for Lezgins crossing the border, to have visas for travelling either way. This decision put considerable hurdles in the way of person to person contacts among Lezgins across the border exacerbating the already tense situation. After massive demonstrations by Lezgins on both sides, the governments of Russia, Dagestan and Azerbaijan finally came to negotiating table (Cornell 2001: 259-260) ^[12]. Lezgins are better integrated into Azerbaijani society and mixed-marriages also happen to be a common phenomenon. In all, Lezgins living in Azerbaijan enjoy a better standard of education than the Lezgins living in Dagestan (Cornell 2001: 259; Akiner 1983) ^[12, 6]. Given the availability of natural resources along the coastline of Dagestan, Azerbaijan's interest for investment in the republic's Derbent city is considered as a security threat to both Dagestan and Russia. This type of investment shows the local population, which comprises one-third ethnic Azeris, that Baku is more liberal and supportive towards them than Moscow. It is feared by Makhachkala and Moscow that it might affect the people's allegiance for them in the area (Dzutsev 2014: 1) ^[13]. Nonetheless, Azerbaijan nowadays has been pursuing an aggressive assimilationist policies vis-à-vis its ethnic Avars and Lezgins who traditionally inhabit northern part of the country. These ethnic minorities in the country are being harassed and treated as migrants on their own ancestors' land. Furthermore, pressure on Dagestani ethnic groups in

Azerbaijan has become routine. Ethnic Lezgins on both sides are unhappy and critical of the actions of both the Azeri as well as Dagestani authorities over the issue of nationality policies (Dzutsev 2014: 2) ^[13].

Turkey's involvement in the Caucasus is not only crucial for the region and the country itself but also for the US and EU, as it also acts to promote the interests of the West (Khokhar and Wiberg-Jørgensen 2001: 77) ^[16]. Turkey gained prominence in the Caucasus after the Soviet collapse when strategic vacuum was left by Moscow in the former Soviet states of the region (Osakanian 2011: 23) ^[19]. Turkey's engagement in the Caucasus is increasing and thus its ascending power is described as "pivotal power", that implies it has the capability to influence both regional as well as international stability. Turkey today has become so significant regionally that its decline would trigger transboundary chaos, viz. communal riots, ethnic clashes, migration etc. A pivotal state's steady economic progress and stability would reinforce entire region's economic and political significance benefiting US trade and investment too (İşeri 2011: 45; Kennedy 1996: 37) ^[14, 15]. Turkey's ascending power in the region is also described as "the strategic partner", which implies that Turkey has become a country of both political and economic importance as well as a strategic buffer zone for the US interests (İşeri 2011: 45) ^[14]. Turkish role in the region is very much important for the US for carrying out upstream and downstream tasks for oil in the Caspian Sea region. Turkish harbors in the Black Sea and Mediterranean Sea also serve as hubs for Caspian oil transportation distribution (Kim and Eom 2008: 95) ^[17]. Turkey's strategic goal in the region is to establish itself as the primary regional energy hub for the transportation of hydrocarbons from the Caucasus, including Dagestan and Azerbaijan, via the Balkans to the Western Europe. There are many advantages associated with this energy-based foreign policy. Firstly, Turkey aims to cope with the ever-increasing demands of the growing domestic economy for the hydrocarbons, viz. natural gas and oil, and thus curbing its increasing energy dependence on non-reliable sources. Secondly, it intends to draw advantage from ongoing energy politics in the Eurasian space so that it can improve its image among the Western peers. If Turkey succeeds in obtaining a significant strategic role for the West, the other regional powers, viz. Iran and Russia, will recognize and respect Turkey's claim over the ongoing Eurasian energy deals. Turkey also wants to see the region as a zone of political stability and economic prosperity which it believes can be achieved only with the backing of regional powers, especially Russia and Iran (İşeri 2011: 45) ^[14]. Its main goal vis-à-vis Caucasus and Central Asia is to establish itself as a hub of Caspian Sea oil transportation network (Kim and Eom 2008: 95) ^[17].

Turkey's foreign policy has been directed to set up a plural regional order based on gaining access to the Turkic-speaking Caspian Sea region's rich resources, mainly oil and gas. The pipeline projects, which are meant for delivering Caspian energy resources to European markets through its soil, give shape to Turkey's economic interests in the region. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline, which supplies Azerbaijani oil from Baku oil-field to Turkey through Georgia, is a strong message to Russia that the countries of the South Caucasus are independent and sovereign actors, where Russia can influence but can't

dominate or dictate policy (İşeri 2011: 46-47; Starr and Cornell 2005: 17) ^[14, 21].

Turkey has been the third largest importer of the Russian gas with an annual volume of more than 23.15 billion cubic meters (İşeri 2011: 47) ^[14]. Turkey is also keen to improve trade relations with the Russian Republic of Dagestan by increasing trade volume from \$28 million to \$1 billion (World Bulletin 2014).

Iran has always been a significant entity in Russia's foreign affairs. It is Russia's one of the major trading and economic partners and the trade volumes between the two still continue to rise. The Dagestan-Iran relation is maintained within the framework of existing Russian-Iranian agreements. The trade and economic relations between Dagestan and Iran are carried out at the entrepreneurial level between the small and medium business entities and have a good significance in the overseas economic activities of the republic. Iran has been traditionally Dagestan's main trading partner and these relations are characterized by stable and positive elements with rise in commodity turnover. Dagestan and Iran are working together for further enhancing their strategic partnership. Dagestan exports timber, grain crops, ferrous metal goods, joinery and carpentry goods and centrifuges to Iran, and imports sugar, fruit, tea, vegetables, heating stoves, furniture, plastic goods, clothes items, carpets and other textile goods, dishes, etc. from Iran. Makhachkala seaport has transport links with seaports of Iran Amirabad, Enzeli, Neka and Nowshahr (*Ministry of Industry, Trade and Investment of the Republic of Dagestan).

The three littoral states of the Caspian Sea, viz. Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Russia, have bilaterally and peacefully settled their maritime boundaries making the northern part of the water body peaceful. However, the major maritime disputes in the Caspian Sea still exist between Azerbaijan & Iran and Turkmenistan & Azerbaijan, where Azerbaijan-Iran dispute over Araz-Sharg-Alov field in the Southwestern Caspian is the most significant (Starr and Cornell 2005: 20) ^[21].

International actors in the region

Brzezinski (1998) ^[11] believes that Eurasia is the world's largest continent and geopolitically axial, thus it is the chessboard upon which the competition for global primacy is being played. He finds Eurasia as the best geopolitical prize for the US and further says that global primacy of the US depends directly upon the sustainability of duration and effectiveness of its influence over the Eurasian mass (Brzezinski 1998: 30-31) ^[11].

The United States sees the Caucasian region significant for its national interest and it is stepping up its presence in the region over the question of national security after 9/11 events. Unlike the regional powers; viz. Azerbaijan, Turkey, Iran and Russia; the US, owing to its geographical distance, is not necessarily a part of the region's security complex, thus it has the option of pulling out of the Caucasian politics at any point of time (Cornell 2001: 384) ^[12].

Initially, in the backdrop of Soviet collapse, i.e. from 1991 to 1994, the US had least interests and with no defined policies for the Caucasus region, which comprised the newly independent successor states of the Soviet Union and southern part of Russia (Cornell 2001: 358) ^[12]. It started taking interests in the Caucasus in a number of fields only

after 1994, with the objective of ensuring certain regional gains in the region.

The US has more advantages than Russia in the South Caucasus, as the region has been relatively the most anti-Russian in the whole of Eurasia. The US gives impetus to the region for a number of reasons: for using Caspian and Caucasian energy for international market, as energy corridor for transporting Central Asian energy through pipeline connecting Europe, and military power projection by setting up NATO bases to counterbalance Iran and Russia in the region (Kim and Eom 2008: 91) ^[17].

Each of the three countries of the South Caucasus; viz. Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan; has been undergoing a difficult phase of economic and political reform, systemic transition and nation building since the Soviet collapse (Giragosian 2004: 43) ^[26]. They are characterized by the inability to set up a stable domestic political system, economic weakness and a weak national sovereignty with foreign dependence (Kim and Eom 2008: 91) ^[17]. The 2008 Georgia war has further made Georgia turn pro-West as well as anti-Russian and gave the impoverished country the reason to join NATO and allow US military bases (Yalowitz and Cornell 2004: 108; Kim and Eom 2008: 92) ^[26, 17]. It is clear that the weak political and economic systems of the countries in the Caucasus have turned the region into an arena of competition for influence, where Russia is striving to continue its existing influence and the US vying to gain new influence (Kim and Eom 2008: 93) ^[17].

The US is planning to establish the "East-West Superhighway" or "new Silk Road" to transport Caspian and Central Asian hydrocarbons to the western markets. The larger part of the goal is to lay a transportation network starting from western China, Central Asia and passing through Caucasus and Caspian region, traversing Black Sea, and finally ending in Europe. The BTC is an important pillar of this network (Starr and Cornell 2005: 20) ^[21]. It is important not only for trade but it has strategic and military implications. The recent US military operations in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, like Global War on Terror and Afghan War, have further established the strategic importance of Caucasus and Caspian Sea region, apart from hydrocarbons, for the Western interests (Starr and Cornell 2005: 21) ^[21]. Nabucco pipeline project is also a part of this transportation network being planned by the US and EU to diversify gas supplier and source and mitigate European dependence on Russia for natural gas. It is a trans-Caspian pipeline project meant to carry Caspian gas from Azerbaijan or Turkmenistan to the European market. However, this project is currently put on hold due to the lack of commitment both from the US and the EU (Petersen 2010: 30-31) ^[20].

The NATO's "Partnership for Peace" program launched in January 1994 has been started to create an atmosphere of trust between NATO and states of the former Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact. Through this program, the US has been encouraging the involvement of the Caucasian and Central Asian states for more cooperation and trust in the long run (Cornell 2001: 376; Borawski 1995: 233) ^[12, 10].

The eastward enlargements of the EU and Europe's energy-diversification needs to mitigate its dependency on Russian energy have confirmed the importance of Caucasus, including Caspian Sea Region, for EU's energy security. The discovery of huge hydrocarbon reserves in the Azerbaijani section of the Caspian Sea has projected not only Azerbaijan but Georgia, and Turkey also as a new

alternative transit system meant for energy supply to the European markets (Tsereteli 2013) ^[25]. After the Soviet collapse, the importance of the Caspian Sea Region has increased manifold with the Europe's growing demand for energy. The EU is urgently seeking an alternative energy supplier and source to mitigate its energy dependence on the West Asia and Russia which has been deemed an unreliable partner. For Europe, the Caucasus region is conducive both as alternative energy supplier and source as well as transportation routes, bypassing Russia, to connect Caspian energy with the European market (Alieva 2009: 44) ^[7]. The BTC oil pipeline has come up in 2006 as a result of the joint efforts of the EU, US, Turkey, Azerbaijan and Georgia which is believed to be an oil window to the Europe and is expected to address EU's oil needs in the long run (Starr Cornell 2005) ^[21].

The countries of South Caucasus, owing to both pre-Soviet Europeanization and Soviet style modernization, have been associating themselves with European identity and aspirations. They tend to incline more towards Europe and have thus opened up their economies for European investments (Alieva 2009: 43) ^[7].

Apart from energy, EU seeks to promote a regional multilateralism in the Caucasus and Caspian region. Thus, it has successfully acceded four Caspian Sea littoral countries, viz. Russia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, into the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) (Alieva 2009: 47) ^[7]. The OSCE had been involved in the North Caucasus since 1995 till 1999, with the purpose of ending the Chechen war and post-war reconstruction and rehabilitation of the region. Since instability and conflict in the North Caucasus threaten EU's interests too. There is a fear of the spillover of the conflicts of North Caucasus into South Caucasus threatening to create a new area of instability. This is detrimental to the EU's interests at a time when it is planning to set up a transit route in South Caucasus for the transportation of Caspian and Central Asian energy. Thus, a stable and peaceful North Caucasus is equally beneficial for both Russia as well as EU (Melvin 2007: 47) ^[18].

Due to the ongoing economic crisis, EU is lacking the capacity to take significant initiative in the region. The EU is getting slow in decision-making alone and has taken the back seat only to follow the US moves in the region. Thus because of EU's slow going and lack of commitment, its highly prioritized projects, like Nabucco pipeline project, for bringing Caspian natural gas to European market and lessening its over energy dependency on Russia are gathering dust (Tsereteli 2013) ^[25].

Russia's response to reconciliation approach towards Dagestan conflict vis-à-vis external actors

During the Yeltsin's presidency, Russia's bilateral relations with EU and US provided forum for discussions over the conflicts in North Caucasus, in general, and Dagestan and Chechnya, in particular, which evolved various approaches to handle the conflicts. However Russia, under Putin's presidency, underwent a dramatic and unfriendly shift in attitude towards international reconciliation and engagement in North Caucasus. Russia now calls such international engagement as external interference and thus rejects all international reconciliation efforts in the ongoing conflicts in Dagestan and Chechnya. Russian government in

December 2002 refused to extend the mandate of OSCE, an intergovernmental organization (IGO), for an assistance mission to Chechnya which had been battered by the Second Chechen War. All other OSCE's efforts towards mediation in the ongoing conflicts in the region have also been rejected by Russia (Melvin 2007: 35) ^[18]. Russia even threatened to stop its part of payments to the Council of Europe for criticizing its approach in the region and even took advantage of the post of Chairman of the Council's Committee of Ministers to block discussion over the issue in 2006. It also threatened to use its veto power in the OSCE to stifle any meeting about conflicts in the region (Melvin 2007: 36) ^[18].

Russia has assumed the stubborn and highhanded attitude towards any effort by its critics, be it international NGOs, IGOs or IOs. It has been resorting to violence to silence its critics. Even the media reporting anything against the government and its policies in relation to North Caucasus has come under brutal administrative crackdown. NGOs criticizing the government were also ruined either by violence or administrative crackdown (Melvin 2007: 35-36) ^[18]. The Russian-Chechen Friendship Society, a Finland based international NGO monitoring the human rights situation in Chechnya and Dagestan, was indicted of inciting ethnic and racial hatred by the Russian administration and forcibly closed down in October 2006. The NGO was also declared an extremist organization within the federal territory (Melvin 2007: 36) ^[18].

In all, rejecting the international efforts for promoting peace and stability in Chechnya and Dagestan, President Putin has been pursuing his own stubborn doctrines of "no dialogue" with the separatists, and "use of force" for promoting peace in the region (Melvin 2007: 45; Aliyev 2010: 339) ^[18, 8]. By doing so, he is strengthening the central control over the region and eliminating his opposition and criticism. Putin's brutal effort to bring peace, stability and order in the region seems a distant dream but what seems obvious is further conflict, instability and aggravated problem for the country, which also threatens his effort of consolidating federal power. His approach towards bringing order to the region undermines democracy and weakens rule of law (Melvin 2007: 45-46) ^[18].

The security policy pursued by the President Putin administration is based on coercion, i.e. fighting, capturing and killing the insurgents to defeat insurgency, which has witnessed the death of over thousands of civilians and, nevertheless, the insurgency is still on rise in the region. The federal administration has least bothered to address the socio-economic issues affecting the region and its main focus is indeed on greater political control, including through enhanced role of the security and intelligence agencies (Melvin 2007: 46) ^[18].

Outcomes of the international negotiations and engagements in the North Caucasus region

The wars in Chechnya in 1994-96 and Dagestan in 1999-2000 have got the international community engaged in a number of ways, like conflict resolution, assistance missions, human rights watch etc, in the North Caucasus region. The major external actors; viz. US, EU, Turkey etc.; have been involved in the North Caucasus, especially in conflict hit Chechnya and Dagestan, through multilateral forums like NGOs, IGOs, IOs etc., to promote long-standing peace and stability in the region which is potentially

beneficial for their interests too. Some domestic and international NGOs dealing with human rights issues, reconstruction, rehabilitation, humanitarian assistance, conflict resolution etc. have been active in the region since Russian independence. In April 1995, the OSCE, an intergovernmental organisation, had established a long-term assistance mission to Chechnya amid the first Chechen War in the region. And this step by OSCE was considered the most significant political engagement by an external actor. The OSCE Assistance Group to Chechnya successfully poured good efforts in the negotiations for ending the ongoing war. It also kept working in the war-torn region for several years in the field of reconstruction of the economy and infrastructure, and post-conflict rehabilitation. However, the operation of OSCE in the region came to an end when Russia refused to extend the permit of its Assistance Group in 2002 (Melvin 2007: 35) ^[18].

Nonviolence International (NI), an international NGO headquartered in Washington DC, launched its multi-sector peace-building program in the North Caucasus, especially in the war-battered Dagestan and Chechnya, in 2001; with the objective of conflict resolution, conflict de-escalation, reconciliation, reconstruction and rehabilitation in post-conflict societies. Under the 2001-02 peace-building programs, NI provided peace trainings to youth in the remote areas of Dagestan and Ingushetia. It also launched a number of programs meant for promoting inter-ethnic peace, and peace-building as well as tension reduction between villagers living on both sides of Dagestani and Chechen borders after the 1999 Dagestan invasion by Chechen insurgents. In addition, sports events, cultural and social awareness events, peace-education programs, training workshop and discussion clubs were also the part of peace-building activities in the region. Most of the NI's peace-building activities were organized in the rural areas (Aliyev 2010: 337) ^[18].

Under the North Caucasus Regional Peace-building program launched in 2005, NI defined some primary objectives; viz. peace-building, regional development, and inter-ethnic tolerance; for the North Caucasus region. Given the multi-ethnic fabric of Dagestani society, NI focused in promoting inter-ethnic cooperation and tolerance for Chechen migrants in the republic. It also worked towards promoting peace and harmony between Sufi and Salafi adherents of Islam (Aliyev 2010: 337) ^[18].

However, NI's endeavor of peace-building activities for promoting long-standing peace and stability in the region seems insufficient because of three reasons. Firstly, most of its programs are focused on inter-ethnic cooperation and tolerance; but the recent Dagestan and Chechen conflicts were based on Islamic extremism and not on ethnicity, and ethnicity is also not a factor in the ongoing conflicts in the region. Secondly, NI failed to reach out to the insurgents, which also limits its effort of ensuring peace. Thirdly, NI does not offer programs which may prompt the state authority to stop carrying out some heinous acts; like abductions, custodial torture and extra-judicial executions; against the innocent civilians in the name of anti-terrorism operations (Aliyev 2010: 337-38) ^[18].

Peacebuilding UK (full name: Centre for Peacebuilding and Community Development) is another international NGO operating in the North Caucasus since 2006. Its main objectives are – promotion of sustainable peace, protection of human rights and people's well-being, with a special

emphasis on women, children and youth in the fields of psycho-social rehabilitation, legal aid, peacebuilding, cultural & social programs and community development. It is currently operating in six republics in the region, including Dagestan and Chechnya. It also organizes trainings in the region for conflict resolution and transformation. In addition, it is also working for the reconstruction of basic infrastructure, especially educational and cultural ones, in Chechnya (*Peacebuilding UK official Website; Aliyev 2010: 338) ^[18].

The Humanitarian Dialogue in the North Caucasus (HDNC) is another international peace-building project undertaken by swisspeace in partnership some local organizations, namely "Peace Mission of General Lebed (PMGL)" based in Pyatigorsk, and the "Forum for Early Warning and Early Response (FEWER-Eurasia)" based in Moscow. The project began in April 2005 from Atschchoj-Martan area of Chechnya (*swisspeace official website; Aliyev 2010: 338) ^[18]. The project's objective is to promote peace by bringing the warring factions on to the negotiating table for talks on non-political issues; viz. issues of reconciliation, enhancement of human security, release of illegally detained persons and psychological rehabilitation; aimed at giving pace and effectiveness to the humanitarian operations (Aliyev 2010: 338) ^[18]. In February 2006, its objective was later expanded to include some other important issues like search for missing persons and gender aspects in Chechnya. This peace-building project gets funding from the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) (*swisspeace official website).

However, the project's effort towards promoting peace has proved insufficient in the region as it focused only on reconciliation between federal authority and representatives of Chechen civil society, and has not yet made access to the unsatisfied separatists. It also sought to strengthen the state institutions without emphasizing on the promotion of democracy in Chechnya and Dagestan, which implies - giving more powers to the corrupt and autocratic local authority in the region (Aliyev 2010: 338) ^[18].

Danish Refugee Council North Caucasus (DRC NC) is a Danish NGO which started humanitarian operations in the North Caucasus in 1997. Its main goal in the region is the "protection and promotion of durable solutions to refugee and displacement problems on the basis of humanitarian principles and human rights". DRC NC is carrying out the humanitarian assistance activities mainly in the conflict hit Chechnya, Dagestan, Ingushetia and North Ossetia; in collaboration with the UNHCR, the European Commission (EC) and EC's Humanitarian Aid department (ECHO) and the governments of Norway, Sweden as well as the US (*DRC North Caucasus).

Conclusion

From the above discussion, it is clear that the North Caucasus region, including Caspian Sea shore of Dagestan, has huge hydrocarbon reserves. External actors, viz. Iran, Turkey, Azerbaijan, US and EU, are seeing opportunity in this region of Russia. So, they want peace in the region for pursuing their interests smoothly. Following the 1991 Soviet collapse, the region emerged lucrative for the regional and international actors. At present regional actors, viz. Iran, Turkey and Azerbaijan, and international actors, viz. US and EU, are operating in the region and pursuing their vested

interests in relation to energy deals, pipelines, security, power projection etc. The national security of these regional actors is intertwined with the security of the Caucasus so much so that they together form a security complex.

The ethnic groups, Lezgins and Avars, reside both in Dagestan and Azerbaijan. Ethnicity is the main issue between Azerbaijan and Dagestan as Lezgins inhabiting Dagestan's southern-most and Azerbaijan's northern parts have been complaining of persecution by their respective governments and demanding unification of these areas for decades.

Turkey's role in the region is crucial for the West as it is inclined towards promoting interests of the US and EU in all the areas, be it energy or security. Its role in the region is described as pivotal power and strategic partner. Turkey intends to draw Caspian Sea energy and transport it to domestic as well as western markets. BTC oil pipeline fulfills all its aspirations and proves to be a potential oil supplier to the Europe.

Iran is a Caspian state which intends to gain more influence and lessen Russian influence in Caucasus without having any confrontation with Moscow. It is involved in a maritime dispute with Azerbaijan over Araz-Sharg-Alov field in the Caspian Sea. It maintains good relations with the Russian Republic of Dagestan and has been traditionally Dagestan's main trading partner.

The US also sees great opportunities in the region due to huge energy reserves in the Caspian region. Although it is not a part of Caucasian security complex, it associates its national security with the region since 9/11 events. The US' goal in the region is to set up the East-West Superhighway or New Silk Road to transport Caspian and Central Asian hydrocarbons to the western markets and thus mitigate Russian and Iranian influence in the region. Since the states of South Caucasus are politically & economically weak and anti-Russian too, US enjoys greater advantage over Russia towards engaging them in military alliance for new influence over the region. It has been engaging the South Caucasian states through NATO's Partnership for Peace program launched in 1994.

EU intends to engage in the region because it finds Caspian Sea region as a potential supplier of hydrocarbons towards diversifying energy supplier in order to mitigate its dependence on Russian energy. EU is also engaging the region in regional multilateral organisation like OSCE and EBRD. The OSCE was also involved in humanitarian assistance operations during Dagestan and Chechnya conflicts from 1994 to 1999. EU's lack of commitment and capacity in the region has rendered it a weak contender in Caucasian game. The indefinite stay on its Nabucco pipeline project also exposes EU's policy deficit in the region.

Putin shows unfriendly attitude towards any kind of international humanitarian aid in the conflict hit areas of Chechnya and Dagestan. He calls such efforts as interference into Russia's domestic matters and rejects them. The Putin administration's security policy employs coercive nature to combat insurgency and promote peace and stability in the region. Consolidating federal power is Putin's priority area of concern, rather than socio-economic conditions affecting people of the region.

Some international NGOs and projects/missions, like Nonviolence International, Peacebuilding UK, DRC NC, HDNC etc., are operating in the conflict hit areas of North Caucasus. Their goals are almost common, i.e. humanitarian

assistance, conflict resolution, rehabilitation, reconstruction, ethnic harmony, release of prisoners etc. The OSCE, an IGO, was active in Dagestan and Chechnya from 1994 to 1999 and helped in conflict reduction and negotiation between federal authority and Chechens during the First Chechen War. Nevertheless, all these international efforts have so far proved insufficient for promoting peace in the North Caucasus, including Dagestan.

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