Ethno-territorial conflict and coexistence in the Caucasus, Central Asia and Fereydan

Rezvani, B.

Citation for published version (APA):
Chapter Eight

It Was a Winter Morning: Conclusions

What are the reasons behind the ethno-territorial conflicts in Central Asia and the Caucasus? Why do Fereydan and parts of Central Asia and the Caucasus remain peaceful, while other parts of the two latter regions are afflicted by ethno-territorial conflicts? As I wrote in the first chapter of this book: “I have always wondered why there are enduring ethno-territorial conflicts in some multi-ethnic parts of Central Eurasia and not in other parts. What are the conditions which make conflict in one area more likely than in others?”

I have heard many (partial) explanations from different people, inside and outside the regions, and in and outside the field. Once a Georgian told me that the reasons for the conflicts in the Caucasus are people’s emotional attachment to their “language”, “religion”, and “land”. Another one told me that it is all about competition between different ethnic groups. Other people think that the main reason lies in the traumatic histories of the past. Yet other people think that all these were brought about by the awakening of ethno-nationalism after glasnost and perestroika, and because all people love freedom and hence independence, etc. All these are simple, often emotional, explanations which seem to be quite plausible. Nevertheless, they offer only partial explanations for certain conflicts, while they fail to explain other conflicts.

After having conducted this study and applied systematic methods such as qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) and statistical analyses, in addition to case descriptions, it is time to answer these questions. It is hoped that this study is successful in offering better understanding and explanations of these conflicts, as well as in improving the state of theoretical explanation of ethno-territorial conflicts in general. In the following pages, the results of my research will be presented and discussed, compared with similar studies, and relevant policy and research recommendations will be proposed.
Research Results

Ethnically and religiously heterogeneous regions, such as the regions covered by this study—Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Fereydan—are often said to be conflict-prone. My research concludes otherwise: only a small proportion of all ethno-territorial encounters in this study are afflicted by conflict. Apparently, conflicts erupt only under certain circumstances and when certain conditions are met.

The aim of this study has been to explain why in some parts of these regions ethno-territorial conflicts have occurred in recent decades, while other parts have had a peaceful recent history. Starting from a political geographic point of view, special attention was given to the impact of territorial factors in combination with other social and political factors. The conditions taken into the analysis were as follows: ethno-political subordination, religious difference, linguistic difference, traumatic peak experience, autonomous setting, titular demographic dominance, contiguity to titular kinfolk, transborder dominance, and the mosaic type of ethno-geographic configuration.

The main question of this study was as follows: Which (combinations of) conditions can explain the occurrence of ethno-territorial conflict in (post-)Soviet Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Fereydan (Iran), from the late 1980s onwards?

That question also included the following sub-question: To what extent is the ethno-geographic configuration an explanation for the occurrence of ethno-territorial conflict in (post-)Soviet Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Fereydan (in Iran), from the late 1980s onwards?

In order to answer the research question(s), I constructed a dataset of 129 ethno-territorial encounters and filled it in on the basis of fieldwork, literature, and governmental and non-governmental (statistical) data. Needless to say, there were many problems, and many arbitrary decisions were taken. In addition to thorough descriptions of ethno-territorial conflicts, systematic qualitative comparative (QCA) and statistical analyses were performed using this dataset.

All selected conditions appeared to enhance the chances of ethno-territorial conflict. Encounters that fulfil these conditions have higher chances of being afflicted by ethno-territorial conflict than encounters that do not fulfil these conditions. A demographic dominance of ethno-territorial groups in their autonomous titular territories appeared to enhance the chances of ethno-territorial conflict drastically. A transborder dominance also enhances these chances to a rather large extent. Transborder dominance is a situation in which an ethno-politically subordinated group is contiguous to its kinfolk’s titular territory. In addition, in this situation the kinfolk is at least three times more populous.
than the subordinated group’s overlords. Concrete examples are the Uzbek in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

Being located in a mosaic type of ethno-geographic configuration appears to be a necessary condition for the emergence of ethno-territorial conflict: it is present in all combinations of conditions which explain ethno-territorial conflict. Although only a modest proportion of all ethno-territorial encounters situated in a mosaic type of ethno-geographic configuration were afflicted by ethno-territorial conflict, all ethno-territorial conflicts in this study—in the Caucasus or the southeastern part of Central Asia—were situated in areas which can be typified as a mosaic type of ethno-geographic configuration.

The mosaic type of ethno-geographic configuration refers to an area which is ethnically very fragmented and in which relative homogeneous pockets of ethnic concentration exist. Because of the properties of this configuration, the mobilization of a people for an ethnic cause—and hence for conflict—is easier; the enemy can be better localized and targeted; and, above all, a strong and often exclusive association exists between the ethno-territorial groups and their habitats—that is, their living areas or ethnic homelands.

The most important combination of conditions for the explanation of ethno-territorial conflict is the combination of possession of territorial autonomy and location in a mosaic type of ethno-geographic configuration. A combination of location in a mosaic type of ethno-geographic configuration and transborder dominance can also explain the occurrence of ethno-territorial conflict.

As Russia is the strongest of all the (post-)Soviet republics, the occurrence of ethno-territorial conflict has a higher threshold there and requires more causal conditions. In the Russian Federation, in combination with being located in a mosaic type of ethno-geographic configuration, both ethno-territorial groups need to have demographic dominance in their respective titular autonomous homelands and adhere to different religions. The condition religious difference can, nevertheless, be replaced by the traumatic peak experience of one of the encountering groups. In other words, either religious difference or traumatic peak experience is sufficient in combination with titular demographic dominance and location in a mosaic type of ethno-geographic configuration.

It is important to note that these conditions can bring about these outcomes only in a certain context. The Soviet ethno-political system was itself an important reason why these conflicts erupted in the Soviet Union. The hierarchical ethno-territorial federalism and the ethnic competition which was engineered in that system (see e.g. Bremmer 1997; Martin 2001a; Martin 2001b) facilitated the centrifugal forces when the Soviet
Union was coming to an end and was, in fact, a state in disarray (Van der Wusten & Knippenberg 2001).

Although glasnost and perestroika were meant to revive the Soviet empire, they had a reverse effect. The Soviet economy deteriorated afterwards and the openness and ethno-nationalism became widespread. The August coup d’État (1991) destroyed the last hopes of keeping together the old empire. The Soviet Union collapsed, but its problems did not finish. The newly independent Soviet successor states inherited the old empire’s problems.

The situation in Iran, at that time, was in sharp contrast to the chaotic situation in the (post-)Soviet republics. The Iran–Iraq war ended in 1988, and with that the Iranian economy received a boost. Although Iran still suffered under many economic sanctions, the end of that war made more budget available for recovery and post-war development projects, and hence the economic and social situation in the country also improved in many ways. Although the post-war economic situation was not as bright as expected, it still increased the life expectancy of young men and increased their prospects in life. Fereydan, as a mainly rural region, benefitted indirectly from the end of the war. Even though the end of the war was not without its problems, it still brought more social stability to Iran.

Important differences between the Soviet and Iranian ethno-political systems were their modes of subordination as well as their territorial or non-territorial management of ethnic and religious diversity. In the Soviet Union the non-titulars were subordinated to the titulars in the corresponding union republics. As the system was hierarchical, many subordinated groups possessed territorial autonomy themselves within a union republic belonging to their overlords. The Iranian system was not characterized by ethno-territorial hierarchy. All non-Shi’ite Muslims were politically subordinated to the Shi’ite Muslims. Although there exists cultural autonomy for the recognized (Islamic and non-Islamic) religious minorities, these are not strictly territorially based. Indeed, a main difference between the Iranian and the Soviet ethno-political systems is the lack of territorial autonomies in Iran. The fact that Fereydan, the Iranian little Caucasus, has remained free of ethno-territorial conflicts is a good indication that ethno-religious diversity alone does not cause ethno-territorial conflict: it can cause such conflict only in interaction with, and in a context of, certain ethno-political systems.

---

201 In Iran there are relatively underdeveloped regions such as Baluchistan and Kurdistan, and relatively developed ones such as Tehran and Eastern Azerbaijan. Fereydan, located in Ostan-e Esfahan, one of the more developed ostans of Iran, is nevertheless mainly a rural region and more or less comparable to the Iranian average in most aspects.
Ethno-political subordination, however, appears not to be a very important condition for the emergence of ethno-territorial conflict. Although most ethno-territorial conflicts in this study are separatist (vertical) wars, ethno-political sub-ordination does not appear to be a very important condition in explaining ethno-territorial conflict, as most minorities did not rebel against their hosting union republics or states. A more important condition than being ethno-politically subordinated is possessing territorial autonomy.

The possession of territorial autonomy and titular status of an ethnic group, whether within a union republic/state or in a lower-ranked autonomous territory, enhances its opportunities for ethnic mobilization and hence ethno-territorial conflict. In most (six out of eight) ethno-territorial conflicts, whether horizontal or vertical, ethno-territorial groups were titulars in certain territories and possessed territorial autonomy at different levels. In the only horizontal ethno-territorial conflict, the Ingush and Ossetians, although both being ethno-politically subordinated to their titular overlords, the Russians, were titulars in their own respective titular autonomous territory. It is also notable that the Ossetians, who unlike the newly established Ingush autonomous apparatus, possessed a better-functioning autonomous apparatus, were better able to mobilize armed groups. In the vertical conflicts also, the Abkhazians and Ossetians in Georgia, the Pamiris in Tajikistan, the Armenians in Azerbaijan, and the Chechens in Russia, all possessed territorial autonomy.

The possession of territorial autonomy, apparently, prompts states to react more resolutely against ethnic strife and separatist claims in and by the autonomous units than against similar strivings elsewhere in their territory. For example, while the Armenian separatist ethnic strife in the Republic of Azerbaijan led to a full-scale separatist war in Nagorno-Karabakh, ethnic strife by the ethnic Talysh and Lezgins in that republic did not lead to such warfare. Similarly, the Armenian ethnic strife in, and de facto control of, the southern Georgian region of Javakheti did not encounter resolute Georgian military reaction, while similar strivings by the Abkhazians and South Ossetians did encounter highly emotional and resolute reactions from Georgia and Georgians. One reason may be that the autonomous apparatuses in these regions may have a wider outreach thanks to their official and legal statuses. The host states may also calculate that the next step for the autonomous territories is effective separation, while in other cases of ethnic strife, other options, such as offering territorial autonomy, may still be negotiable.

Titular demographic dominance appears to be a very important explaining condition. The demographic majority of titulars enhances their ability to implement ethnic policies and hence also their opportunity to mobilize their constituency for an ethnic cause such as ethno-territorial
conflict. Such a demographic dominance also makes the (exclusive) association of a territory with the titular ethnic group stronger. Those encounters in which the encountering groups constitute a demographic majority in their respective titular autonomous territories have a dramatically higher chance of being afflicted by ethno-territorial conflicts than do other encounters.

Ethnic kinship also appears to be relevant in explaining ethno-territorial conflict. Ethnic kinship has a subjective dimension and can be based on different criteria—for example, language, religion, race, or even tribal pedigree—in different parts of the world. In contrast to many parts of the world (for example, the Balkans and Lebanon) where ethnic identities are mainly based on religion, in the Soviet Union they are mainly based on languages. This is also true to a great extent in Iran. Therefore, in this study, a similarity in the languages spoken by ethnic groups usually also means an ethnic kinship. It appears that ethnic groups who speak intimately similar languages do not come into ethno-territorial conflict with each other.

Confessing the same religion, however, has not prevented ethno-territorial groups from fighting an ethno-territorial conflict with one another. Examples are the Abkhazians and Ossetians, who have been involved in ethno-territorial conflicts with their fellow Orthodox Christian Georgians. A minority of Muslims exists in all these predominantly Orthodox Christians ethnic groups. Similarly, the Sunni Uzbeks have engaged in conflicts with their fellow Muslim Tajik and Kyrgyz neighbors. On the other hand, most encounters between religiously different groups have not led to ethno-territorial conflicts. Therefore, no support is found for Huntington’s (1993; 1997) thesis of the “Clash of Civilizations”. Religious difference appears in only half of the ethno-territorial conflicts in this study. Only in the Russian Federation did it appear to be an explaining condition in combination with being situated in a mosaic area and possessing titular demographic dominance. Even there it could be replaced by the condition traumatic peak experience, as those conflicts in which the two involved parties adhered to different religions were also those cases in which one group had been traumatized.

The relation between having a different religion and being traumatized is a solid one in this study. Traumatic peak experience in the Russian Federation appeared to be an explaining condition in combination with being situated in a mosaic area and possessing titular demographic dominance. In the Russian Federation, however, the same combination of conditions could explain the emergence of ethno-territorial conflict, when traumatic experience was replaced by the condition religious difference. This is not very surprising because only Muslims have experienced such major traumas in the North Caucasus. The memories and even physical
results of the genocidal deportations in the 1940s are still very vivid in the North Caucasian collective memory. It is notable that most Chechen leaders involved in the Chechen conflict were born or raised in exile. And the North Ossetian-Ingush conflict is about Prigorodny, an Ingush district which was transferred to North Ossetia after the Ingush were deported, and which was never returned to them after they were formally rehabilitated. Another ethno-territorial conflict marked by religious difference, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, is also marked by traumatic peak experience. Although Armenians having experienced a major trauma was not a necessary condition for explaining this case, it most probably played a role in the emergence and course of the conflict, and the trauma was echoed in the Armenian discourses at the time.

**Discussion**

Although ethnicity can at times be politicized and regarded as an instrument in order to achieve political goals, its cultural foundations are undeniable. Since an ethno-territorial conflict is a conflict between two ethnic groups, it seems very plausible that cultural factors play a role. Huntington (1993; 1997) maintains that conflicts occur along civilizational fault lines. As civilizations, in his view, are mainly founded on religions, these fault lines are places where adherents to different religions encounter. The Caucasus and the Balkans are good examples of areas where such clashes may occur, according to Huntington’s theory of the “Clash of Civilizations” (1993; 1997). Other authors (e.g. Harff & Gurr 2004: 31-32; O’Sullivan 2001: 94-95) have also pointed to the role of religion in ethnic wars. It was beyond the scope of this study to investigate whether religion, as an ideology, can in one way or the other be the main reason behind the eruption of a war. The Wahhabi/Salafi insurgencies in the North Caucasus, however, confirm such ideas. These insurgencies should not be regarded as ethno-territorial conflicts, however, because these wars do not follow the logics of an ethno-territorial conflict; Wahhabism/Salafism is not an indigenous sect of Islam in the region and does not enjoy much support among the local population; the Wahhabi/Salafi militant groups are usually multi-ethnic, consisting of many local and foreign ethnic groups (particularly Arabs and Pakistanis); and, finally, the local population are usually the main victims of Wahhabi/Salafi actions.

On the other hand, not much support is found for the theory that religious difference causes ethno-territorial conflicts. The findings of my study are consistent with those of Cornell (1998a), who asserts that the existing ethno-territorial conflicts in the Caucasus are not religious-based wars. In addition, my findings do not accord with Huntington’s (1997;
1993) theory, as most encounters between religiously different ethnic groups remain peaceful and as half of the conflicts studied were fought between ethnic groups with the same religious background.

The idea that the Balkans is a scene of the “Clash of Civilizations” stems from the fact that in the Balkans, ethnic boundaries are mainly shaped around religion, their populations’ language being the same. In the former Soviet Union, however, language is the main denominator of ethnicity. Indeed, this study showed that ethnic kinfolks, measured on the basis of intimacy between their languages, do not come into conflict with each other. This finding is consistent with the ideas of primordialism and ethnic nepotism.

Religious difference appears to explain ethno-territorial conflict only in the North Caucasus, and only in combination with a mosaic configuration and demographic dominance of the titulars in their autonomous territory. Moreover, in this explanation, religious difference can be replaced by the condition of having undergone a traumatic peak experience, as only the Muslims in the North Caucasus were subjected to the Stalin-era genocidal deportations. This finding, however, does not support Kaufman’s (2001) thesis of modern hatreds, which maintains that the events in the recent past are among the main reasons for the emergence of ethnic conflicts. Kaufman’s understanding of trauma and events in the recent past is much broader than in my study. Not all cases of past conflict have led to new conflicts. For example, the Armenian–Georgian war in 1918 in southern Georgia and northern Armenia has not led to new conflict.

Ethno-political systems play an important role and condition the emergence of conflicts. The most important conditions for explaining ethno-territorial conflict in this study were those derived from the ethno-political systems, particularly those with a territorial character. The Iranian ethno-political system is very different from the (post-)Soviet one. One most important difference between them is that the Soviet ethno-political system was based on an ethnic national view of nationality, and ethnicity was politicized therein. Its hierarchical ethnic federalism was the main factor which contributed to the politicization of ethnicity and ethnic competition (see e.g. Bremmer 1997; Martin 2001a; Martin 2001b). The findings of my study contradict the claims of those who regard ethnic federalism as a guarantor of stability in a multi-ethnic state. For example, Ronald Hill (2003), who regards ethnic diversity as a problem (Hill 2003: 201-223), maintains that the Soviet Union undertook positive attempts to solve this problem, but was nevertheless unsuccessful (Hill 2003: 223). My study has shown otherwise: ethnic diversity does not necessarily lead to ethnic conflict. The Soviet ethno-political system itself caused ethno-territorial conflict by establishing a hierarchical matrioshka-like system of
nested, ethnically based territorial autonomies. Although ethnic federalism may accommodate ethnic demands and prevent ethnic conflicts in the short term, this kind of federalism may lead to a dissolution of the state in the long run (Van der Wusten & Knippenberg 2001: 288-289). The ethno-political system of the Soviet Union, with its hierarchical ethno-territorial manifestation, created ethnic competition and latent ethnic conflict. The demise of the state in the late 1980s and the early 1990s triggered and catalyzed the conflict-generating mechanisms in the system and caused many formerly latent conflicts to erupt. Violent ethno-territorial conflicts did not emerge where the ethno-political system did not provide conditions for them and no opportunity structures existed.

The possession of territorial autonomy by ethnic groups, especially in a hierarchical fashion, was a main conflict-generating condition in the Soviet Union’s ethno-political system. This conclusion is consistent with that of Cornell (2002a), who concluded that territorial autonomy is a very important condition in explaining ethno-political (in fact, ethno-territorial) conflict in the Caucasus. In his study the proposition that “the existence of territorial autonomy significantly increases the risk of conflict” (Cornell 2002a: 123) was supported by eight out of nine cases.

My study, nevertheless, has significant differences from that of Cornell (2002a). Cornell’s study stops short of both thorough statistical and qualitative comparative analyses and deals only with a limited number of cases, and only in the South Caucasus. In addition, his conception of demographic factor(s) is very different from mine. His findings do not support the importance of demographic factors. The factor “relative demography” in Cornell’s (2002a) study does not include political autonomy. On the other hand, the factor which was included in my study and proved to be very important was “titular demographic majority”—that is, “demographic majority of a titular group within its own territorial autonomy”. Moreover, although Cornell (2002a) identifies areas of ethnic concentration, it is not clear according to what criteria they should be delimited. Demographic majority is not really measurable without knowing its delimited territorial realm. One needs to know the borders of a territory in order to measure the demographic weight of an ethnic group within that territory.

The results of my study are consistent with Toft’s (2003) and Coakley’s (2003a : 2003b) ideas about the mobilizational effects of an intersection of territorial autonomy and ethnic demography. According to Coakley (2003b: 313-314), “political autonomy that is congruent with the geographic spread of an ethnic community tends to reinforce ethnic commitment, other things being equal”. According to Toft (2003), ethnic separatism is more likely in territories which contain the highest
concentration of an ethnic group, and especially where the majority of their population consists of that ethnic group. Although Toft (2003) has not formulated it explicitly in this way, all her examined cases included those in which minorities possessed territorial autonomy. All in all, there is ample evidence that ethnically based territorial autonomies increase the chances of ethno-territorial conflict.

Another demographic factor also appeared to be important in my study. This study has concluded that the lack of territorial autonomy can be compensated by transborder dominance. In all conflicts in which ethno-territorial groups possessed autonomy, these groups were demographically dominant in their respective titular autonomous territory, except in Abkhazia, where the titular ethnic Abkhazians did not constitute the majority (nor even the plurality) of the population there. Therefore, one may conclude that the possession of autonomous territory or transborder dominance, in combination with location in a mosaic ethno-geographic configuration, suffices for the explanation of conflicts outside the Russian Federation; or it can be concluded that in a mosaic ethno-geographic configuration, possession of autonomy should necessarily be accompanied by titular demographic dominance—the Abkhazian conflict being an odd case. The oddity in the Abkhazian conflict might be explained by the severe political instability in Georgia when that conflict erupted.

The evidence from my study accords with Van der Wusten’s and Knippenberg’s (2001) observation that ethnic politics prevail in a time when the state is in disarray. The ethno-territorial conflicts all emerged after glasnost and perestroika, when the Soviet Union was in demise and when its successor states’ authorities still had problems with political legitimacy. In cases where chaos and the lack of political legitimacy were extraordinary, regionalism and sub-ethnic competition prevailed and interacted with ethnic competition. The examples are the Tajikistani Civil War in which different factions of Tajiks (with their strongholds in different parts of the country), along with the Uzbek and Pamiris minorities, fought with and against each other, and the second Uzbek-Kyrgyz conflict in southern Kyrgyzstan, which followed the expulsion of President Bakiyev, who enjoyed much support among his fellow southern Kyrgyz. This situation is somewhat similar to that of the fragile states in Africa, in which different factions fight each other for the capture of the state and its resources (Dietz & Foecken 2001). Given the fact that the allocation of resources in the Soviet planned-economy and in the post-Soviet economies were (and in many cases still are) very much state-centered, it matters a great deal who is in power in a certain republic. It matters especially in the poorer republics such as Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, because the competition for resources, and hence control of
the state, is more important in such contexts. Although Georgia was not a poor republic in the Soviet Union, the civil war between the (supporters of) Gamsakhurdia and his opponents took a heavy toll on that country. Western Georgia, in and around Abkhazia, was particularly chaotic at that time. Apparently, in such a politically unstable situation, the ethnic Abkhazians could wage a rather successful separatist war without constituting the demographic majority in their titular autonomous territory.

Almost all conflicts emerged when the state was in crisis and disarray. Only the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict emerged at a time when the Soviet Union was still not in serious demise and was politically less chaotic. The reason is probably because almost all conditions of conflict were present in that conflict, while other conflicts fulfilled fewer conditions of conflict. Therefore, it can be concluded that it was easier for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict to emerge when it was still rather difficult for the others to emerge. In other words, the more severe the situation of political instability is, the easier it is for ethno-territorial conflicts to emerge.

Political instability provides an opportunity structure for the mobilization of ethnic groups. Nevertheless, such mobilization for ethnic politics and particularly ethnic conflict is dependent on other factors, the most important of them being the possession of territorial autonomy, and also—though it is less important—titular demographic dominance and transborder dominance.

This study proved that being located in a mosaic type of ethno-geographical configuration is important in the explanation of ethno-territorial conflicts. All ethno-territorial conflicts were located in a mosaic area; therefore, it appears to be a necessary condition in the explanation of ethno-territorial conflicts. A fair criticism may be that the fact that all ethno-territorial conflicts in this study were located in a mosaic area does not mean that this factor is a necessary condition everywhere else in the world. Obviously, many ethno-territorial conflicts erupt in the world without being situated in a mosaic type of ethno-geographic configuration. Nevertheless, it is fair to say that its properties make the chances of conflict in a mosaic type higher than in other types of ethno-geographic configuration. In addition to the earlier-mentioned ethno-territorial conflicts in Ethiopia (Chapter 2), the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia are good examples. The conflicts in Bosnia, Croatia, Macedonia, and Serbia including Kosovo in the early and late 1990s occurred in a mosaic type of ethno-geographical configuration. Even though we have still not measured it against our criteria of mosaicness, a glance at the ethnic map of the Balkans seems to confirm the mosaic type as the prevalent type of ethno-geographic configuration in a large part of the Balkans.
In addition, there are more reasons to believe that the presence of a mosaic type of ethno-geographic configuration is a necessary condition for the emergence of ethno-territorial conflicts in the (post-)Soviet space. Elsewhere in the (post-)Soviet space, where the ethno-geographic configuration is not a mosaic one, the possession of territorial autonomy, whether or not accompanied by a demographic majority, has not led to the eruption of ethno-territorial conflicts. On the other hand, the Transnistrian ethno-territorial conflict is located in an area which can be identified as a mosaic type of ethno-geographical configuration. That ethno-territorial conflict can also be explained in a similar way to the Kyrgyz–Uzbek and Tajik–Uzbek ethno-territorial conflicts, respectively in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The Russian–Kazakh ethno-territorial encounter in Kazakhstan, which is not located in a mosaic configuration but in which the subordinated group (i.e. the Russians) have transborder dominance, has not been afflicted by ethno-territorial conflict. The same situations appears, for example, with regard to the position of Russians in the Baltic republics. There also, in the absence of mosaic type of ethno-geographic configuration, the possession of transborder dominance by Russians has not led to ethno-territorial conflict.

Moreover, smaller conflicts and clashes, which could not be typified as ethno-territorial encounters, have also occurred mainly in mosaic areas. Most of these clashes and conflicts—for example, Chechens versus Avars and Laks, Kumyks versus Laks and Avars, Azeris versus Lezgins in Dagestan, Avars and Lezgins against Azeris in Azerbaijan, clashes between many North Caucasian groups and Russians (especially the Russian Cossacks), and not forgetting the Meskhetian pogroms in Uzbekistan—have occurred in areas which are characterized by a mosaic type of ethno-geographical configuration. All facts indicate that the mosaic type of ethno-geographic configuration is a factor with conflict-facilitating power.

**Recommendations**

Can the results of this study help to resolve and prevent conflicts? Although conflict resolution or prevention have not been the main scope of my study, its results are nevertheless relevant for that purpose. The manipulation of factors can be regarded as a method of conflict resolution.

---

202 Actually, it depends on which borders should be regarded as hard borders and how ethnic groups are identified there, depending on the questions of whether or not the Moldavians and Romanians, Ruthenians and Ukrainians, or the Orthodox and Catholic Ukrainians should be taken separately and identified as separate ethnic groups, or whether the Orthodox Russians and Ukrainians in Moldova should be placed in a single ethnic category. Nevertheless, that area appears to be a mosaic one by most decisions taken.
In this context, forced migration and ethnic cleansing as well as ethnic assimilation might seem to be tempting options in order to alter a mosaic type of ethno-geographic configuration. It is, nevertheless, insane to create suffering and bloodshed in order to prevent them! Moreover, this study has shown that a mosaic type of ethno-geographic configuration can never lead to ethno-territorial conflict without being combined with other factors.

More important is preventing or diminishing the politicization of ethnicity. The ethno-political system of the former Soviet Union proved to be very important in that respect. It was the combination of a mosaic type of ethno-geographic configuration and the consequences of that ethno-political system—such as autonomous setting, titular demographic dominance, and transborder dominance—that explained the occurrence of ethno-territorial conflict. The choice of the Soviet leaders for a territorial federation on an ethno-national basis was essential in this respect and encouraged ethnic nationalism instead of civic nationalism in the long run. Why is a territory so important in this respect? The social and political relevance and significance of territorial factors and territoriality have been emphasized by many authors (see e.g. Anderson 1988; Ardrey 1967; Coakley 2003a; Coakley 2003b; Cornell 2002a; Dijkink & Knippenberg 2001; Dostál & Knippenberg 1992; Ghai 2000; Gottman 1973; Knight 1982; Knippenberg 1996; Knippenberg & Dostál 1979; Murphy 1989; Rezvani 2010; Roessing 1991; Sack 1986; Storey 2001; Toft 2003). A territory may stimulate ethnic nationalism in three ways. First, a territory may provide recognition by outsiders. As a consequence of the universal acceptance of the ideology of the nation-state, a territory is an asset for any ethnic group trying to preserve its distinctiveness as a group. Second, a territory may serve as a focus of identification for the ethnic group itself, by providing a homeland or “fatherland”. Third, control over territory means opportunities for mobilizing resources, whether they are human or non-human.

Therefore, the legacy of the Soviet nationalities policy can be regarded as the main contributor to the outbreak of the ethno-territorial conflicts—and disturbed inter-ethnic relations in general—in the (post-)Soviet space, because it created hierarchical modes of ethnic and ethno-territorial competition. This means that non-territorial policy options to cope with ethnic or cultural diversity—such as the Iranian ethno-political system or other systems on a personalistic basis—offer a better chance for peaceful coexistence of the ethnic groups involved. Another option is to create territorial competition within an ethnic group, to which the Swiss case can testify.

As far as future research on ethnic conflicts is concerned, this study underlines the importance of the incorporation of territorial factors
for their explanation. The same holds true for the incorporation of the ethno-geographical configuration, but this concept should be developed further, both theoretically and methodologically. As a Persian expression says: *Ma hanuz andar kham-e yek kuheim*—which can be roughly translated as: “We are still at the corner of the first street”.

I began this book with “It was a summer evening…” I do not remember when I wrote the first sentence of this book, but it was a winter morning when I finished the last one. A long distance has been passed over, and a longer distance remains to be passed. But it is not yet late. There is still time to go. Remember, it was a winter *morning* when I wrote this final chapter, but not a winter *evening*. 