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**ON HISTORY OF IDEA OF FEDERAL UNION WITH**  
**HIGHLANDERS IN 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY**

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**Abstract**

The author provides an insight into Russian foreign and domestic policy in the Caucasus in early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The author shows scaled-up activities of the leading European powers, striving at all costs to secure their predominance in the region. Persia and Turkey did not lag behind in this matter. It was during this period a decision was taken as to who the mountaineers would follow, whose policy would seem most acceptable to them. The author shows the actions the world powers recourse to with a view to curbing Russian influence in the region to prevent it from fulfilling strategic plans to cement its authority among the highlanders. They sought, in every possible way, to gain a foothold in the Caucasus by bribery, blackmail, and direct military clashes. Based on the sources, the author shows that the Russian government, despite its deep commitment to tough measures against the population of the North-Eastern Caucasus, successively was drifting towards the need for a peace agreement with the mountaineers. The Caucasus region was too significant in Russian foreign policy to recklessly and violently tick off its population, and thereby lose it. A radical revision of the Caucasian policy from suppression by force to peaceful consent is an act of displaying flexibility and a sound approach. This is an important merit of the Russian Emperor Paul I, whom Russian historiography is used to portraying as a monarch unbridled in his ambitions, deprived of the ability to speak reasonably and sensibly.

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## 1. Introduction

The attempts to recap the history of nations, including the numerous ethnic groups of Chechnya and Dagestan, have become crucial for national and cultural reassertion. Moreover, addressing the establishment of the Russian multinational state meets the interests of modern Russian society and domestic science.

The last quarter of the 18th century – 1813 was something special in the historical life of the North-Eastern Caucasus. Just then, a new direction for further development of the region was set in line with a political position in the system of global relations. Therefore, a constant interest of researchers (which will probably persist in the future) to this period is quite reasonable, although a whole collection of historical publication has already been written about the events of that time with many of them not to lose their scientific significance to this day.

Those concerned with past events happening in the region in the target period still have a long way to go to explore it in its entirety. The point here is not so much in a greater number of new sources spanning this period and being introduced into scientific circulation. Consideration should also be given to the differences in research criteria and approaches, which make it possible to read even well-known sources in a different way. This novel approach has been especially visible in the last two decades, when all external restraints were removed from research work. This immediately opened up wide opportunities for new assessments that would seem to be already known.

## 2. Problem Statement

Multiple nations residing in Chechnya and Dagestan have long had multilateral ties with each other and followed a common path of socio-economic and cultural development. This circumstance, as well as similar natural-geographical conditions, contributed to the development of common features in their economy and everyday life, in material and spiritual culture, in manners and customs, which made the North-Eastern Caucasus one of the most peculiar historical and ethnographic regions. It is particularly relevant to study the role of the Russian people in historical destinies of the non-Russian population of the country, as well as the inseparability of the destinies of the people of Dagestan, Chechnya and all of Russia in light of relations between the Muslim and Christian worlds. With all the nuances of the policy pursued by the Russian Empire, the integration of Chechnya and Dagestan into Russia allowed local peoples, without losing their religious, cultural and linguistic identity, to more fully use the opportunities provided by the great power for their development. The treaties between Russia and highlanders based on the so-called federal agreement are of paramount political and economic significance for both sides. These treaties would primarily undergird the population of the North-Eastern Caucasus around Russia, being a guarantor of protection against attacks from Persia and Turkey.

What is more, Russian-North Caucasian relations became particularly sound and acute in the late 20<sup>th</sup> – early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries when interethnic relations in the former Soviet Union exacerbated and the collapse of the powerful state caused a wave of military conflicts in the Caucasus.

The key issues constituting the problem are of great scientific and political importance and need to be explored, because they help overcome stereotypical, extremely simplified and untrue schemes that

consider the centuries-old relations of the peoples of Chechnya and Dagestan with Russia and among each other.

### **3. Research Questions**

The paper is based on a number of publications by Russian researchers –Hajiyev (1965), Gapurov (2004), Jakhiev (1985), Markova (1966) – who studied the history of relations between the population of the Caucasus and Russia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as well as on archival documents containing extensive material to study the features of the foreign policy interests of Russia and the leading world powers, and modalities for implementation. The paper provides a brief analysis of these publications, an attempt is made to identify the common and distinctive views of researchers on the problems raised in the paper.

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The paper attempts to summarize the experience of researchers on the target problem. Based on the sources, the authors seek to delineate the policies of Tsarist Russia, Shah Iran and Sultan Turkey in the Caucasus, use the Treaty of Georgievsk of 1802 as an example to disclose the potential and prospects of the federal agreement between the highlanders and Russia, denounce the desire of the world powers to turn the Caucasus into a colony and recognize the desire of mountaineers to decide their own destiny.

### **5. Research Methods**

A methodological toolkit rests on the principles of objectivity, scientific character and historicism, implying the exploration of facts and phenomena in all their diversity, in the definite historical environments promoting their emergence and development.

The paper applies a comparative-historical method that implies addressing phenomena and events within historical reality, changing under the influence of time and specific historical conditions.

### **6. Findings**

In late 18<sup>th</sup> century, following the internecine struggle between the Iranian rulers, Aga Muhammad Khan, the founder of the Qajar dynasty, came to power in Shah Iran. He considered the establishment of the Persians' power over the entire Transcaucasia and part of the North-Eastern Caucasus as his vital foreign policy. The first step in this direction was the campaign of the Iranian Shah in April 1795 to the Caucasus with an aim of subjugating the entire Transcaucasus and Dagestan to Persia, whose rulers had long become virtually independent from Iran.

By the end of 18<sup>th</sup> – early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Caucasus became a zone of political and economic interests of England and France that simultaneously initiated the Scramble for Asia and Africa.

The eastern powers of Persia and Port, as well as western England and France, were well aware of the importance of the Caucasus. The struggle of European countries for colonies became especially

pressing at the end of the 18th century during the Napoleon's campaign in Egypt. Soon this struggle spread to the Caucasus (Markova 1966).

Remarkably, Russia badly needed sea routes through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles, and therefore the treaty that was signed at the end of 1798 with Turkey, finally empowered it to take effective action that way. The treaty, concluded shortly after the Yassy Peace of 1791, granted the right to the Russian fleet through the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles (Foreign Policy Archives).

In 1799, the Sultan sent his people with rich gifts and a special royal mandate (firman) to Dagestan. Yet at the same time, the Sultan in his message advised the Dagestanis not to relax, but, on the contrary, to be ready for a possible war with Russia. As before, the Turks remained loyal to their approaches to public policy in the Caucasus. They strongly supported the raids of the north-eastern people to Georgia. Thus, Turkey demonstrated its hostility and intransigence towards Irakli II, a pro-Russian ruler.

Thus, the Russian government was forced to make minor amendments to its policy in the Caucasus in connection with the changes taking place in the international arena. A rescript dated January 5, 1797 issued by Paul I to General Gudovich most accurately demonstrates alignment and harmonization of the Caucasian policy. According to this document, the borders of Russia were moved to the Kuban – Terek – Kizlyar line (History of the Peoples of the North Caucasus, 1988).

Despite trying to handle Caucasian issues in a sensitive way, Emperor Pavel I was not at all going to abandon the idea of conquering such a profitable region. In his opinion, the problem had to be solved in a thorough and stepwise manner, avoiding military clashes. The emperor believed that if the local princes voluntarily entered into allegiance to Russia, this would not allow either Turkey, Iran, or European countries (England and France) to make statements accusing Russia of capturing the "Persians" or "Ottoman" lands. It was this fact that encouraged the bold idea of a "federal" alliance of the Dagestanis and Azerbaijani rulers under the protectorate of Russia.

The idea of a federation, from the outset, was doomed to failure due to the continuing internecine struggle (Gadzhiev, 1965). Yet, the policy pursued by both Paul I, the Shah of Iran and the Sultan of Turkey did not at all lead to the resolution of internecine conflicts.

After the assassination of Paul I (March 11, 1801), the Russian government became more consistent in its foreign policy. Diplomatic relations with the European powers were re-established.

However, Russia's new foreign policy irritated the Persian court. Being far from peaceful, Iran's plans were increasingly expanding, not without the European support. In January 1801, Great Britain signed a political and trade agreement with Persia.

The new Iranian Shah Feth Ali Khan hoped to take advantage of the rapprochement with England to start a war with Russia, continued to put forward claims to Georgia, demanding the recognition of his supreme power over Dagestan and Northern Azerbaijan. The Consul of Russia in Iran, Skibinsky, reported that the commander-in-chief of the Shah's troops Suleiman demanded to send "reliable pledges of loyalty to Baba Khan" from the Talysh, Baku and Derbent rulers (Jakhiev, 1985).

At the same time, the Russian command in the Caucasus was presented with a note from the Shah's government demanding the withdrawal of Russian troops from Georgia. It also emphasized that

Dagestan and Azerbaijan “have been subject to Iran for a long time and must obey the Shah’s authorities”.

Emperor Alexander I rejected the note of the Persian Shah and confirmed his patronage of Georgia and Dagestan. In response to this, in the summer of 1800, the Shah’s troops invaded the Transcaucasus (RSMHA, 1798).

The Iranian government had long nourished a plan for anti-Russian measures among the North Caucasian peoples.

With this in view, the Shah’s emissaries were repeatedly sent to Dagestan with his appeals, rich gifts and money. In addition, influenced by Feth Ali Khan, the fugitive Georgian Tsarevich Alexander and other Caucasian rulers dissatisfied with Russia tried to persuade the rulers of Dagestan to anti-Russian actions (RSMHA, 1988).

They could organize some local rulers led by the Avar Khan Umma Khan to rail against Georgia. They also intended to join the Shah’s troops for joint actions against Russia.

However, their plans were thwarted. In the fall of 1800, under the onslaught of Russian troops, the Persians were forced to retreat across the Araks River.

However, the Avar Umma Khan with his army of up to 15 thousand people approached the border Alazani River at the end of August 1800. In October, the fugitive Georgian Tsarevich Alexander arrived at the camp of the Avar Khan.

The head of the Russian-Georgian detachment, General Lazarev, in his letters to Umma Khan, persuaded him to relinquish with his army, but the Avar Khan did not heed his requests. On November 7, 1800 at the Yori River, a battle took place between the opposing sides. Ali-Sultan of Avar, his brother Khadzhi Akhmed Khan Dzhengutaysky, the son of Surkhay Khan Kazikumukhsky, Kazi Mulla, Tabasaran Qadi, Musa Khadzhi Aksaevsky and some other rulers of Dagestan, took part in the battle together with Umma Khan. The battle ended up with the defeat of the Dagestan rulers.

The defeat of Umma Khan at the Yori River made a strong impression on the Shah Iran. Soon the Shah withdrew his troops from the Caucasus. On February 8, 1801, the commander-in-chief of the Russian troops in the Caucasus, Kiorring, wrote to Emperor Alexander I that according to the General Consul in Persia Skibinsky, “Feth Ali Khan, having learned about the victory over Umma Khan, abandoned the intention to send detachments to Georgia”.

This report clearly suggests that Dagestan played a key role in Persia’s plans, namely in establishing its influence in the Caucasus.

Under the pressure of Russia, the Shah was forced to withdraw his troops. However, he was not going to give up his brutal plans in relation to the Caucasus. He believed that a fateful battle for the Caucasus was to come.

Notably, England, France and Turkey persistently pushed the Shah to such actions. Great Britain’s diplomacy was that much sophisticated.

Nevertheless, despite all the efforts taken by the Western European and Eastern powers, Russia’s Caucasian policy began to bear certain fruit. During the Caucasian campaign of V. Zubov in 1796, most of the Dagestani rulers expressed their willingness to enter to Russian allegiance.

The idea of creating a federal union made up of the rulers of Dagestan and Northern Azerbaijan was first voiced by Emperor Paul I, but it could not be brought to life due to certain reasons. However, one cannot discount the fact that many local rulers appealed to the Russian government for citizenship at the turn of the 18th-19th centuries. In June 1801, S.L. Lashkarev, the head of the Asian Department of the Foreign Affairs, drew up “a report for consideration” that was entitled as follows: “A General Note to the High Minister from the Undersigned about the Persian Khans, Devotees of Russia.” The author of the report emphasized that the time had come to present his “weak thoughts” about “all the khans at large, and about other nations who live nearby the Caspian Sea, and, thanks to their neighborhood and their present position, how much they can all be useful to the All-Russian Empire in expanding its trade to Persia, Bukharia and Khiva, as well as approving security and silence along the Caucasian line”. He also believed that if they put an end to civil strife between pro-Russian rulers and “establish” friendship and agreement between them “under the high imperial patronage”, then the Shah’s Iran “would not dare to make an enemy attack on any of them” (Foreign Policy Archives).

S.L. Lashkarev was sure that the federal union would attract the rest of the Caucasian rulers to Russian allegiance.

The General Note was approved by Vice-Chancellor Kurakin by whose order S.L. Lashkarev prepared a draft of “the highest rescript to the commander-in-chief in Georgia and the Astrakhan military governor Knorring.” The rescript was signed by Emperor Alexander I on December 24, 1801. In parallel, letters were sent to the rulers of the North-Eastern Caucasus, “the devotees of Russia”.

In this rescript, Alexander I wrote to Knorring that in order to spread “trade in Asia and to provide Caucasian and Persian regions, committed to me, with greater security and silence, I decided to establish a firm alliance and a friendly agreement under my supreme patronage between the aforementioned khans and highlanders, for their own and their peoples’ common good ...”.

In September 1802, the rulers or their envoys from the entire North-Eastern Caucasus gathered in the Georgievsk fortress, where they signed a general treaty of great importance. Under the treaty, the rulers were to be loyal to Russia, should stop any conflicts with each other, and in the event of an attack by Persia, “to take up arms unanimously to drive out their common enemy.” They were also instructed to provide support to Russian merchants bargaining in the region. In addition, local merchants who came to Russia were guaranteed patronage and protection. In general, this treaty brought together the rulers of the North-Eastern Caucasus under the auspices of Russia for protection from the claims of the Persians (History of the Peoples of the North ...).

During the congress, the Avar Nutsal applied to be admitted to Russian allegiance. In April 1803 in Khunzakh, Nutsal Sultan Ahmed solemnly swore allegiance to Russia.

The 1802 Treaty of Georgievsk, concluded between the rulers of Dagestan and Azerbaijan with Russia on the alliance under the “supreme patronage” of Alexander I, is, in the opinion of many researchers, a “federal” agreement. The well-known expert on the Caucasus Hajiyev (1965) attributes the collapse of the “federation” to those historical modalities of the Caucasus and due to the contradictions within the union it could not exist for a long time.

## 7. Conclusion

The socio-economic and political relations between the population of the North-Eastern Caucasus and Russia in the target period were intrinsically intertwined with the foreign policy prevailing at that time in the region. First of all, it was the struggle of the Russian Empire, the Iranian state, the Ottoman Empire for the establishment of spheres of influence.

1774–1813 is one of the decisive periods in the history of relations between the peoples of the region with Russia, Turkey and Iran. The North-Eastern Caucasus drew primary attention of the powers vying for dominance in the Caucasus. Saturated with important events, military conflicts caused by the implementation of the aggressive plans of Russia, Sultan Turkey and Shah Iran, the target period was accompanied by their exceptional Caucasian policy, the open intervention of the European powers (England and France) in the Eastern Question, of which the Caucasus was an integral part. Against this foreign policy background, the question of a federal treaty between Russia and the North Caucasian population was not totally lacking in reason, although it was premature due to the highlanders themselves being not ready for such agreement.

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