

Non-military challenges in the Black Sea

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Abstract. Ethnic groups or national minorities are far from being understood as stable and convergent units in the nation's security efforts. This issue is backed by a substantial scientific record, treated differently in relation to the prevalence of certain political, economic, social and, above all, cultural factors. From an academic point of view, the record of ethnicity-security relations is not uniform and convergent either. Different schools of thought in the political science and security fields look at the issue from different angles. The present article aims to highlight a number of issues related to non-military challenges in the Wider Black Sea Region in the context of the war in Ukraine. We will further assess possible vulnerabilities in the Black Sea riparian states that may become a threat to national security.

1. Security relations between the state and ethnic groups. Theoretical dossier

One of the seminal works in the field is *The Politics of Nationalism and Ethnicity* by professor James Grant Kellas of the University of Glasgow; originally published in 1991 and widely reprinted, it examines the issue from the perspective of understanding ethnicity and nation from a community point of view. The nation is "a group of people who feel they belong to the same community because of common historical, cultural and origin ties", benefiting from an objective dimension (territory, language, religion, descent) and a subjective one, easily exploited from the perspective of weakening security (Kellas 1991, 2). Usually, the subjective dimension feeds or even ignites the ideology or form of behaviour called "nationalism", which is designed to bring into the consciousness of the members of the nation the common features and aspects that differentiate them from others. Nationalism not only constructs the programme of awareness about the nation ("national self-consciousness"), but also determines the set of desirable attitudes and the programme of action (Kellas 1991, 3). Ethnic groups are comparable to nations and ethnocentrism to nationalism, and where the nation can be associated with the majority acting in an inclusive way, the minority (ethnic group) will act in the opposite direction to counterbalance power relations.

From this perspective, the ethnic group becomes an issue of national security concern, as long as they usually relate differently to the nation. If we consider a third element in the equation, the state (which does not always overlap with the nation), which can be understood as a form of societal (rather than community) organisation, the relationships become more complicated. Most often, the state intervenes (on the side of the nation) to balance relations with ethnic groups, especially in the form of minority groups within some states. In order to clarify these issues, we need not only to understand that security theories of nation-ethnic group relations start from what is the fundamental premise and purpose of the Scottish professor's work, the existence of an integrative theory of the politics of nationalism and ethnicity (Kellas 1991, 8), but also to differentiate between social groups assimilated into communities and societies and the ways in which these can affect relations between them.

The two concepts proposed by Ferdinand Tönnies over a hundred years ago, but still applicable, community (*Gemeinschaft*) and society (*Gesellschaft*) are useful for the current interpretation of the relationship between the state (nation-state) and ethnic communities (Tönnies 2011, 37-102), especially since within the concept of the nation-state the organic, communitarian dimension is dissolving, becoming anaemic, according to the studies of the Italian-born professor of political science Giovanni Sartori, who drew attention to this form of weakening twenty years ago (Sartori 2007, 39).

2. Intercultural relations and security

From a theoretical point of view, scholars believe that intercultural relations can also be characterised by misunderstandings, misinterpretations and miscommunications. There are numerous theoretical developments on this issue, namely studies that operationalise the concept of misunderstanding, extend it to the still volatile spectrum of the semantic sphere in intercultural communication and propose a number of categorical developments of it. Illustrative in this respect is the article signed by Volker Hinnenkamp, from the University of Augsburg, *The Notion of Misunderstanding in Intercultural Communication* (with a study conducted on German-Turkish intercultural dialogue), which, from the perspective of positioning misunderstanding in the area of intercultural dialogue, within the limits of common understanding, projects the area of intercultural contact as the archetypal *locus* of the study of misunderstanding.

Basically, misunderstanding in intercultural contexts is based on the very cross-cultural nature of communication, that is cultural differences, sometimes present in linguistic and paralinguistic distinctions (Gumperz 1978; Gumperz and Roberts 1991; Bernstein 2016), sometimes in more subtle differences in certain reference patterns, especially in abstract concepts. People generally misinterpret or misconceive the behavior of individuals with cultural patterns different from their own because they see everything from the perspective of their own culture, relating their interpretation of reality to the functional and explanatory short-circuits of the mind accustomed to their own cultural habitus.

In the multicultural sphere, a significant security component with a high potential to develop vulnerabilities is the communication process. Theorists speak of several pathological typologies of communication: manipulation, propaganda, disinformation, intoxication, imposture (Lesenciuc 2017, 86).

3. The Black Sea - "an area of utmost strategic interest"

An area of "great strategic importance" (Jens Stoltenberg 2022) in today's geopolitical equation, the Black Sea has constantly been characterised by tensions in various forms. After 2014, the Black Sea area has truly become a hotspot, where *soft-power* politics have taken second place to the conventional war unleashed by the Russian Federation in Ukraine, preceded by the illegal annexation of Crimea. The armed conflict of this period has been complemented, however, by the discourse with ethnic overtones, heightening tensions in the area. Romania, a NATO member state and an important factor of stability in the Black Sea area, shares an important element of the societal component of Black Sea security: the ethnic Tatar community,

which is directly connected to the conflict in Crimea, given its origins with the Tatars on the peninsula, and the ethnic Turkish community, whose motherland, Turkey, is not only a Black Sea riparian state, like Romania, but also a strategic partner of our country and a NATO member. In this context, we think it is necessary to follow up our research with a chapter dedicated to the Black Sea security from the perspective of ethnic minorities in Dobrogea.

The Wider Black Sea Region entered a new era in 1991, along with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and the security context has been in a constant movement ever since. The number of riparian states has grown from the original four - Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey and the Soviet Union - to six: Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey, Ukraine, the Russian Federation and Georgia, with interests and challenges growing exponentially.

The Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 confirmed the threats and risks mentioned in the country's national defence strategies for the periods 2014 - 2019 and 2020 - 2024 regarding Russia. The 2015 document referred to deteriorating relations between the Russian Federation and NATO in the wake of the annexation of Crimea. The same document also referred to Russia's policy of consolidating its regional power status, which endangered regional stability and the European course of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia.

In 2020, the Black Sea is defined as "an area of utmost strategic interest" for Romania and the Russian Federation is unequivocally indicated as one of the main threats.

In the spectrum of threats to Romania in the National Defence Strategy for the period 2020 - 2024, on the first position in the set of elements that may affect national security and regional stability is the direct action on community confidence, on community resilience to respond effectively to the challenges caused by hostile interference.

In this strategic context defined by the Romanian state's projective documents, but rather taking into account the new security context, redefined after the invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation, the Black Sea Region is shaped along lines of interest that can be reduced not only to economic aspects, always invoked, but also (or especially) to cultural aspects. The Black Sea is becoming a forum for discussions on security interests that propose to freeze the serious and resource-consuming ethnic conflicts in the early years in the east of the region (in the Caucasus area, up to the Caspian Sea, where territories and ideologies were disputed in Chechnya, Dagestan, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh), then in the north, in Crimea, the theatre of numerous conflicts between the region's two major players, Russia and Turkey, and then in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, in a conflict that has extended in 2022 to the whole of Ukraine, including the north-western Black Sea, the Snake Island, not to mention the simmering conflict in Transnistria. The Black Sea became the world's most heated area in 2022, a space where economic and political divergences overlap with cultural divergences, in a crumbled frame from an ethnic, religious and linguistic point of view and, above all, from the dominant ideologies and narratives perspective.

A Black Sea region that is more militarised than it has been throughout the Cold War, linking routes that pass through territories of discord, fuelled by ethnic, linguistic and religious differences, leads to a special interest in this area and in the sources of possible divergence if

diversity is not seen as a value but as a source of differentiation, hatred and conflict. A region that was not included in the division of spheres of influence after the end of World War II, which led to the embolisation of trade arteries in areas where the necrosis of entire regions where conflict is maintained and which were previously presented, has found itself faced with an increased flow of interest through the competition of orientation towards Western democracy or Russian authoritarianism.

4. Cultural causes of differentiation in the Black Sea region

In Bulgaria, according to the 2011 Census, besides the majority Bulgarian community, which represents 84,8% of the total of 7.364.570 citizens, only two other ethnic groups are officially recognized: Turks (8,8%) and Roma (4,9%). Besides them, there are also smaller groups of Russians, Armenians, Ukrainians, Macedonians, Greeks, Jews, Romanians. In its 2014 report, The European Council's Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities pointed out that Bulgarian citizens of other ethnicity than those listed in the census documents were not encouraged to declare their ethnicity. The main mother tongues in Bulgaria are, besides Bulgarian, Turkish and Romani, and the main religions are Christian (Orthodox) and Islamic.

In Turkey, the only recognised official language is Turkish, and the only accepted ethnic minority groups are Armenians, Greeks and Jews, but even they cannot fully exercise their rights. As regards the existence of official and up-to-date information on the ethnic composition of Turkish society and mother tongue, the state does not ask citizens about their ethnic or religious origin, and the last census from which data on mother tongue is available is the one of 1965. Until 1990, citizens were still able to declare their mother tongue, but the information was never made public. According to an international minority rights organisation, an analysis of the ethnic composition of Turkey's population should be undertaken with caution, as the state does not allow access to official information, and what information does exist is collected unofficially from some communities. The roots of this policy must be sought in the 1930s, when modern Kemalist Turkey saw the first manifestations of nationalism based not on ethnic, linguistic or religious reasoning, but on an ideology of supremacy, which was driven by two theories with a strong ideological basis, *Türk Tarih Tezi* or "Turkish history thesis", a pseudo-historical projection, in line with pre-Nazi racist scientism, concerning the areas of migration of people of this origin from Central Asia, the cradle of Turkish civilisation¹, and *Güneş Dil Teorisi* or "the theory of the sun language", also a pseudo-scientific projection, this time coming from linguistics, assuming that all languages are descended from proto-Turkish. These two theories, although scientifically refuted, were maintained during the Kemalist period and led to the emergence of a type of Turkish nationalism which, in the ideological wake of the fourth decade of the last century, produced ideological effects nationwide. A number of important researchers have focused on this period, the landmark study being *Race, Assimilation and*

¹ On this background of interest in a Turkish identity construct, Kemalism also put the cultural substrate, the Hittite civilisation, at the forefront, to underlie national uniqueness. The research of the Azerbaijani Ahmet Ağaoğlu, a naturalized Turk, one of the founders of pan-Turkist theories (which are still used today in Turkey's international relations) and a consistent promoter of these ideas (Landau, 1995), is well known in this respect.

Kemalism: Turkish Nationalism and the Minorities in the 1930s by Soner Cagaptay (2004:86-101).

The last census conducted in the Russian Federation dates back to 2010, and according to data from that time the main minority groups were Tatars (5.310.649 – 3,87%), Ukrainians (1.927.988 – 1,4%), Bashkirs (1.584.554 – 1,15%), Chuvash (1.435.051 – 1,05%), Chechens (1.431.360 – 1,04%), Armenians (1.182.388 – 0,86%), Avars (912.090 – 0,66%) and Moldavians (744.237 – 0,54%), with the remaining 8,5% representing many smaller ethnic groups. Incidentally, according to the 2010 census, 193 ethnic groups and subgroups were declared in Russia. In order to understand ethnic diversity in the Russian Federation, however, it is enough to present the linguistic map of minorities on the territory of the state, which includes forty-one Altaic languages: seven Mongolian, three Tungusic, thirty-one Turkic and nine Uralic languages: six Finno-Ugric, two Samoyedic and one Yukaghir (created by geographers Ihaan Yilmaz Byraktarli and Maximilian Dörrbecker in 2011 and uploaded by Dörrbecker for common use on Wikimedia).

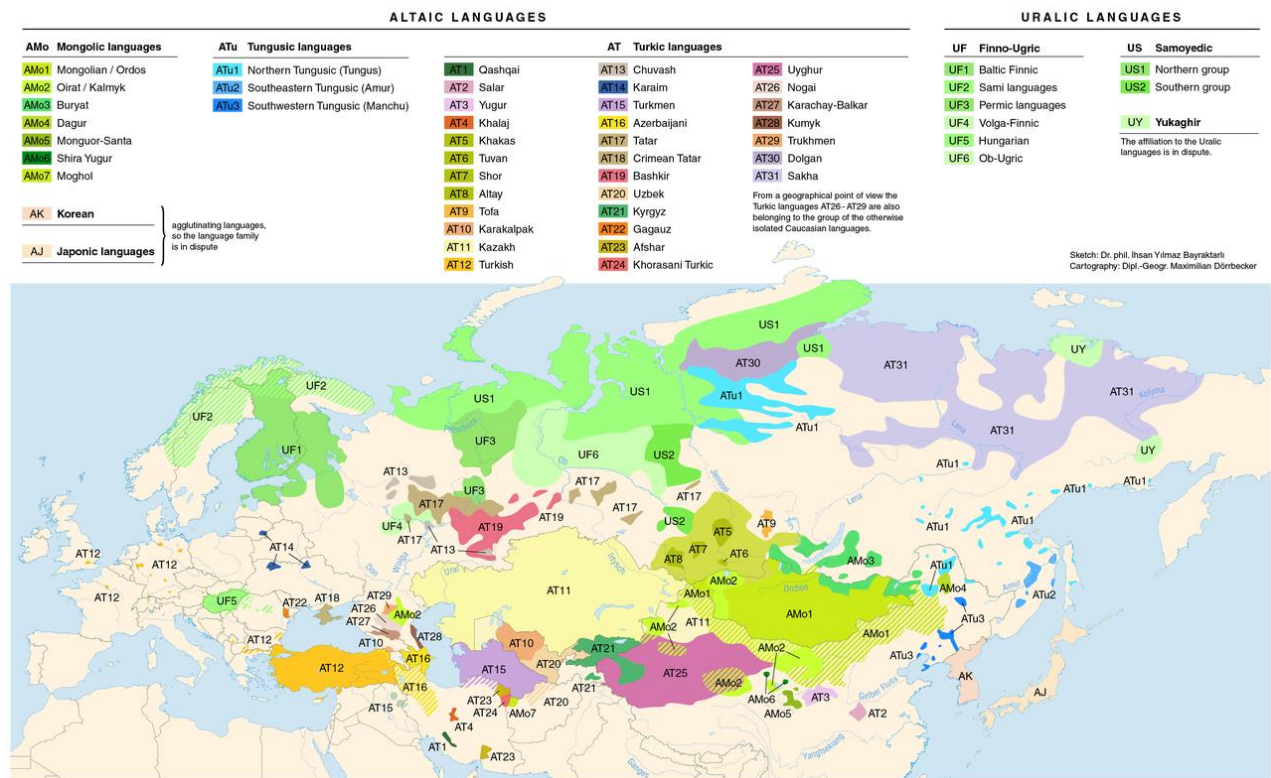


Fig.1 Linguistic map of the spread of Altaic and Uralic languages in the Russian Federation, https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/c/c2/Linguistic_map_of_the_Altaic%2C_Turkic_and_Uralic_languages_%28en%29.png

But it is the religious component that defines the identity of Russia's minority groups. According to an ethnic minority rights organisation, after 1980 there was a strong revival of Buddhism in Russia, and after the collapse of the Soviet Union there was a revival of Islam and Muslim culture, levers in the cultural sphere used by Vladimir Putin for political purposes. In September 2015, just one year after the illegal annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, an action labelled by the West as a territorial robbery and contested even by Turkey, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan attended the inauguration of the largest mosque in the Russian capital in Moscow at the invitation of President Vladimir Putin. The large number of ethnic groups in Russia is a direct consequence of the way the federation is organised, with local languages in ethnic republics recognised alongside Russian as official. However, this is not a guarantee of human rights, given that with the arrival of Vladimir Putin at the helm of the country, there is an increasing emphasis in public discourse on "national unity and Russian patriotism" and a series of bans restricting citizens' rights. A landmark moment in the recent history of the Russian Federation is the annexation of Crimea followed by a series of abuses and attacks on freedom of expression and the security of the citizens of the peninsula that led to numerous signals from international authorities about frequent human rights violations. The most frequent cases of flagrant human rights violations (and we rank them in terms of their coverage in the public space - media and social networks) were those of Crimean Tatars, who were persecuted, kidnapped, arrested. The Mejlis of the Crimean Tatars (the executive body of the National Parliamentary Congress of Crimean Tatars) was banned in April 2016 by the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation and included on the list of potentially extremist organisations (RADOR 2016).

According to the 2001 census, the main minority groups in Ukraine were Russians (17,2%), Romanians and Moldavians (0,8%), Belarusians (0,6%), Crimean Tatars (0,5%), Bulgarians (0,4%), Hungarians (0,3%), Poles (0,3%), Jews (0,2%) and Armenians (0,2%). According to Minority Rights Group International, the Roma minority is one of the most marginalised communities in Ukraine, estimated by the Council of Europe to number around 260,000. Ukraine has also not been spared criticism of its national minority policies in recent years. The "Language package" adopted by the Supreme Rada in Kyiv containing a series of laws regulating the use of the Ukrainian language in an increasingly wide area sparked discontent among neighbouring countries in early 2021. In a rhetoric of its own, Ukraine defined as ethnic communities only the indigenous peoples on its territory (Crimeans, Karaites and Crimean Tatars), but not national minorities (Russians, Romanians, Hungarians, Poles, Greeks, Bulgarians) (Basilica.ro 2021).

In Georgia, the most recent census was conducted in 2014, and according to official data the largest ethnic communities are Azerbaijanis (6,3%) and Armenians (4,5%). Other ethnic groups registered in the census are Russians (0,7%), Ossetians (0,4%), Ukrainians (0,2%), Greeks (0,1%) and also in very small groups are Jews and Poles.

In Romania, according to the 2011 census, there are 20 ethnic communities. However, information on the ethnic structure of the population has existed since 1930. If 92 years ago, out of a total of 14.280.729 Romanian citizens 22% were members of ethnic communities, in 2011, out of 20.121.641 Romanian citizens, 16,54% were of an ethnicity other than Romanian,

and following the 2021 census, out of 19.053.815 Romanian citizens registered, 1.767.447 (9,27%) declared themselves members of national minorities. The ethnic communities officially recognised by the Romanian state are Italians, Albanians, Macedonians, Lipovan Russians, Jews, Germans, Armenians, Bulgarians, Croats, Ruthenians, Hungarians, Turks, Tatars, Czechs, Slovaks, Greeks, Roma, Poles, Serbs and Ukrainians.

Located in the close proximity of the Black Sea and part of various bodies of the Wider Region, the Republic of Moldova is a territory that is subject to detailed analysis, because, according to the 2014 census, excluding Transnistria, ethnic minorities make up 17,9% of the total population (1.935.412 citizens), of which 6,6% Ukrainians, 4,6% Gagauz - a Turkic Christian Orthodox population, speaking a Turkic language close to modern Turkish and written initially in Greek characters, later in Latin characters, and then, under the circumstances of the process of Russification, in Cyrillic spelling - , 4,1% Russians etc. The Transnistria mentioned above is a self-proclaimed separatist state - the Transnistrian Moldavian Republic, recognised only by Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh and South Ossetia, themselves territories that are not recognised as states by the international community except Russia - and Gagauzia is a self-proclaimed autonomous region.

Of the wider Black Sea region, perhaps the most ethnically and linguistically complex area is precisely the one in which most conflicts have been maintained over the last 30 years: the Caucasus area. Between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea there are territories where Indo-European languages are spoken: Kurdish in eastern Turkey and northern Iran, Farsi (Persian) in Iran, Ossetian in the two autonomous republics, South Ossetia included in the Georgian territory and North Ossetia within the Russian Federation, Russian in the northern sub-Caucasian area, Caucasian languages: Nakh languages, spoken by Chechens and Ingush (populations that are included in the Russian Federation), with dialectal varieties in Georgia (Batsbi language) that cannot be understood by speakers of the Vainakh dialectal continuum, Dargin language of the Dagestan that is included in the Russian Federation - Dagestianian language, as a result of the ideologization of the sciences, is considered to be a creole language, a subdivision of Slavic languages, with Turkic influences, and the other languages of the autonomous republic of Dagestan, the Caucasian Avar of the Nakh language family, the Caucasian Lezgian language with three dialectal varieties and multiple sub-dialects, the Caucasian Lak language with more than ten dialects, also of the Nakh language family, the Turkic Kumyk language, also partly spoken in North Ossetia, Chechnya and Ingushetia, and is rarely considered as a basis for identity in security studies - Abkhazian, also spoken in Turkey, Syria, Jordan and the Georgian autonomous republic of Adjara in the south-west of the country, on the Black Sea coast, but in particular Georgian (and other Kartvelian languages, including Svan from the Svaneti and Kodori Gorge regions of Abkhazia, Zan from Colchis, with the Mingrelian and Laz dialectal varieties, also spoken in Adjara and in north-eastern Turkey) and Armenian, spoken in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, plus Turkic languages, including, above all, Turkish and Azerbaijani, which are also spoken in Iran, Iraq, Georgia and the Russian Federation, create a picture in thick contours of an extremely complex ethnolinguistic reality. An illustration of this situation is provided by the 2012 language map of the Caucasus by Asya Perelsvaig and Jake Coolidge, taken from Glauco D'Agostino's study (2019).

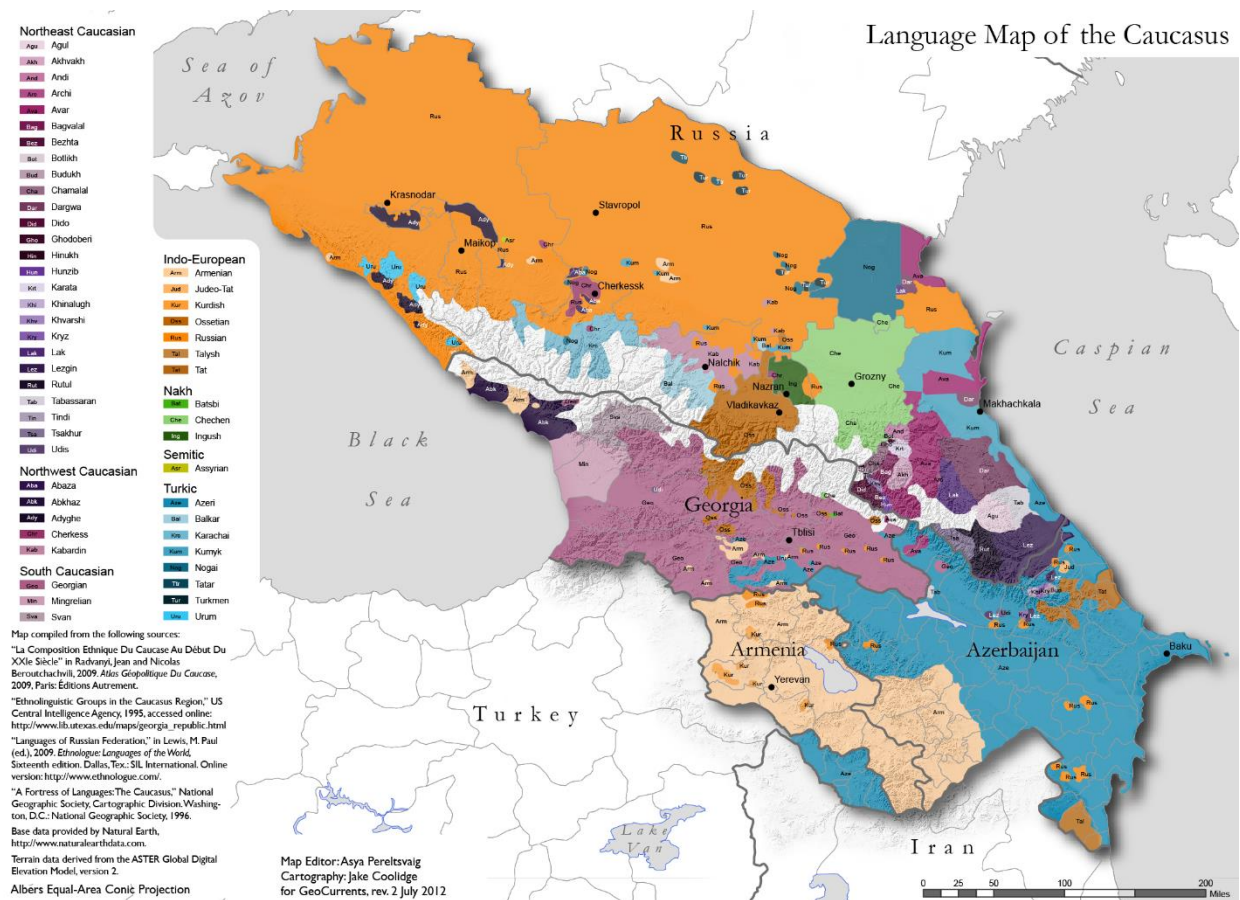


Fig.2 Language map of the Caucasus region, <https://www.geocurrents.info/gc-maps/gc-language-map-of-the-caucasus>

Comments and conclusions

But the issue of ethnic minorities in the Black Sea is much more complex than can be illustrated simply by looking at the numbers. The Black Sea, before being considered a geopolitical hot spot, is a territory in which representatives of the most diverse ethnic groups live and express themselves, and, above all, a space in which these ethnic groups dispute their differences of identity. The ethnolinguistic variety of the Black Sea can only superficially be summed up as identity disputes between citizens of the few riparian states, belonging to ethnic groups that can be included in complex ethnic families: Slavic, Caucasian, Turkic, Greek, Armenian, Jewish, Romanic, etc. Looking at the ethnic mix from a religious perspective, the Black Sea is a region where identity can be expressed in relation to Orthodox Christianity and Islam, but also to other religions (Judaism) or cults. It is therefore the ethno-religious network of the Black Sea region that must be understood and treated as such, in accordance with a series of factors that have favoured the movement of large masses of people on the one hand, and the domination of empires on the other. The heterogeneity of this area is due not only to this unparalleled ethnic distribution, but also to the cultural variety caused by administrative factors

that have evolved over time, including dialectal variations in the languages of the administration of the great Black Sea empires (the Ottoman and Tsarist empires). Not least, the ethnic variety of the region is determined by waves of migration (including recent ones, which peaked in 2015) from the Middle East.

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