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Book Review: Politik und Gesellschaft im Kaukasus: Eine unruhige Region zwischen Tradition und Transformation

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BOOK REVIEWS

**Olaf Leibe, editor, *Politik und Gesellschaft im Kaukasus: Eine unruhige Region zwischen Tradition und Transformation*. Wiesbaden: Springer Verlag, 2019. x, 490 pages
978-3-658-26373-7; 978-3-658-26374-4 (eBook)**

Reviewed by: Paul Crego, Library of Congress, retired

Politik und Gesellschaft im Kaukasus: Eine unruhige Region zwischen Tradition und Transformation, edited by Olaf Leibe is a collection of articles on a variety of topics that concern the Caucasus Region of the former Soviet Union. The majority of the articles reference the South Caucasus, i.e Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia. There are also articles on the North Caucasus, a collection of smaller jurisdictions that are contained within the Russian Federation. Some articles are limited to one republic, while others combine more than one. Other articles speak of the Russian Federation in contact with the countries of the South Caucasus. Unrecognized jurisdictions, specifically Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabakh, are also referenced.

Four of the twenty-five articles are written in English, with the remaining in German. Some of the English could have used better editing. The twenty-five authors are from a variety of European countries, counting the three countries of the South Caucasus as European.¹ Each article has contact information for the author/authors of the article and there is a detailed bibliography accompanying each article, making possible further research for those who are interested in more detail on a particular topic.

For the purposes of this review for *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*, five articles are most relevant, although many others contain material on religion in the context of these societies and post-Soviet developments. The five are: “Die Europäisierung Georgiens,” by Oliver Reisner; “Islam in postsowjetischen Aserbaidschan,” by Arif Yusunov; “Georgien im Spannungsfeld zwischen liberaler Demokratie und Rechtspopulismus am Beispiel der Minderheitenpolitike,” by Natia Khorguashvili-Kinne; “Interreligiöse Familien im ethnografischen Portrait. Jüdisch-christliche Koexistenz in Racha, Georgien,” by Michael Frederic Stürmer, and “Die historische Rolle des Islam, der Aufstieg des Islamismus und das politische System Ramzan Kadyrows in Tschetschenien,” by Christoph Giesel und Hermann Giesel.

Reisner’s article covers a number of different aspects of the way in which politics and society are discussed within an understanding of how post-Soviet Georgia considers itself to be a part

¹There is a considerable amount of discussion on the metageography of the South Caucasus and I will not attempt any discussion of this controversy in this review.

of Europe and how international alliances are understood mainly on that assumption. Relevant to this review are paragraphs on how minorities, ethnic as well as religious, are protected or not within Georgia, and how those protections might be understood as European or not.

Khorguashvili-Kinne's article discusses the minority question in Georgia in more details. Some of the issues revolve around whether different minority groups are characterized as both religious and national minorities. Questions as to whether Georgian Muslims are actually Georgians are asked. Often the minorities are defined by the native languages they speak. There are a variety of different native languages spoken in Georgia. The government's ability to fund Georgian-language instruction is important to the way in which language minority groups are able more fully to participate in civil and political society.

Stürmer's article on Jewish families in the Georgian region of Racha is interesting, but the size of the Jewish community there now for several decades has been so small that there is scarcely sufficient data to make any conclusions. Late Soviet and post-Soviet migrations of Jews from this region to Israel has nearly emptied Racha of its previous Jewish population. This article, however, does give us a survey of the ancient arrival of Jews into what has become Georgian territory and this is very important to an understanding of the Jewish place within the ethnic mix of Georgia over the past two centuries.

The article by Christoph and Hermann Giesel gives an interesting survey of the complexities of Chechen Islam in the decades of post-Soviet Russia, including the times of the two wars fought by Chechens against the Russian state. Also discussed are the ways in which the current leader Ramzan Kadyrov uses Islam as part of his policies in Chechnya, both in terms of his internal rule and in the way he has charted a course within the Russian Federation. Subjects covered include the Sufi traditions of the North Caucasus, the suppressing of Sufism during Soviet times, how Islam has returned to Chechnya in the last two decades in battles between a more traditional Sunni Islam and the more radical Salafism.

This volume will prove itself to be an excellent reference, especially to those who cover a wide range of topics in their research of the Caucasus region. Individual articles with their bibliographies will be useful to researchers who are looking at the specifics of the various developing societies being covered, but also as a source of the ways in which the various societies interact within their respective nations and to groups that cross national boundaries.