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# Preface to the Special Issue and Map Supplement

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**T**he papers in this special issue of *Eurasian Geography and Economics* are designed to illustrate key aspects of the Caucasus region 15 years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. For a region that is so complex in both physiographic and human aspects, we had to be quite selective in our choice of subjects. As a result, we present an overview as well as five specialized papers on aspects of the economic, political, and population geography of the Caucasus. Originally, we intended to focus solely on the North Caucasus, the federal Russian part of the region, but because the links across the Caucasus are still intense in political and human terms, we decided to include one paper (Radvanyi and Muduyev, 2007) that considers the nature of these linkages between Transcaucasia (as the Russians call it) and the North Caucasus. Two papers offer more detail about the post-Soviet population developments in the two largest regions, Stavropol’ Kray (O’Loughlin et al., 2007) and the Republic of Dagestan (Eldarov et al., 2007); another reflects on the impacts of the Chechen wars on the neighboring regions (Vendina et al., 2007); and a fifth contrasts the perspectives from the federal center, Moscow, and those from the various stripes of political ideology in Russia with the opinions of the local populations about the causes of conflicts in the region (Kolossoff and Toal, 2007).

The map supplement in this preface includes two reference maps (Figs. 1 and 2) that show the locations of all places discussed in the individual papers. We generally followed the guidelines of the U.S. Board on Geographic Names (<http://geonames.usgs.gov/foreign.html>) in transliteration, although we used the more common English equivalents for certain well-known locations (e.g., Grozny instead of Groznyy). Although the boundaries of the Caucasus are well defined by the Black and Caspian seas on the west and east, the north and south limits are not. The full extent of the three states of the Caucasus (Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia) are usually included on the south, but the northern boundary lies somewhere in the vast stretches of southern Russia, among “the sun-baked hills, brownish-green and violet in the distance, with their quiet shadowy tones, the plain with the misty distance and, flung

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above them, the sky” (Anton Chekhov, *The Steppe*). In our analysis, we do not include Krasnodar’ Kray, the republic of Adygeya, nor Kalmykia. Neither could our surveys or field work encompass the republics of Ingushetia or Chechnya because of the ongoing military conflicts, although all of these territories are visible on the land cover/elevation map.

In Figure 3, we overlaid a land cover map on a digital elevation model of the region to present the dominant physical geographic character of the area. The data for the Caucasus land cover map relies primarily on land cover data from the University of Maryland’s Global Land Cover Facility (GLCF) (<http://glcf.umiacs.umd.edu/index.shtml>). This land cover dataset was created using AVHRR satellite data acquired between 1981 and 1994 using a decision tree classifier and finer resolution Landsat imagery (Hansen et al., 1998). For the map shown here, the data were downloaded and georeferenced to the boundary files from ESRI (country borders) and the University of Washington Central Eurasian Atlas (oblasts and rayons; <http://geo.lib.washington.edu/website/ceir/>).

To simplify the presentation of the land cover data, the original 14 categories were reclassified into the 7 shown on the map. For the Forest category, we combined the original Evergreen Needleleaf/Broadleaf, Deciduous Needleleaf/Broadleaf, Mixed Forest, and Woodland categories, because each has more than 40 percent canopy cover with trees exceeding 5 m in height (Hansen et al., 2000). Similarly, the Shrubland category combines Wooded Grasslands and Open and Closed Shrublands that are dominated by bushes, shrubs, and the occasional tree. The remaining categories—Grassland, Cropland, Barren, Urban or Built-up, and Water—correspond directly to the original University of Maryland vegetation categories.

These primary land cover data were then enhanced visually by overlaying them onto topographic relief data also available from the University of Maryland (<http://glcf.umiacs.umd.edu/data/>; USGS, 2004). The topographic data were collected from the Space Shuttle *Endeavor* in February 2000, and cover most of the globe. Data used in this map were captured at a resolution of three arc seconds (nominal 90 m pixel resolution) and projected to UTM zone 38N for processing and display. Once projected, a hillshade was created from the original digital elevation data using ArcGIS 9.1. The contrast between the northern and southern slopes is evident in Figure 3. The northern slopes, from the high peaks (including El’brus at an elevation of 18,506 feet, or 5,642 meters) to the piedmonts to the steppe, are more gradual than the precipitous drop to the plains to the south. The narrow coastal bands are relatively heavily populated, with numerous large cities (Baku, Derbent, Makhachkala, Sochi, Sokhumi) visible on the land cover map. Forested slopes at high elevations (and glaciers at the highest) contrast with the grassland steppes to the north, generally trending to drier scrubland to the east along the Caspian shores. The bifurcation of the North Caucasian republics into a mountainous south and a piedmont north is also clearly indicated in the elevation/land cover map.

The final map (Fig. 4) shows the ethnic mosaic of the Caucasus region. While we managed to obtain rayon-level data from the 2002 All-Russian Census (Goskomstat Rossii, 2004) for the Russian North Caucasus, information for the three south Caucasian states (Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia) is just becoming available, as results from the first post-Soviet censuses held in those countries have trickled out during the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In an effort to detect the more significant population shifts in the South Caucasus due to ethnic cleansing and migration related to conflicts in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabakh since the last Soviet census of 1989, we have consulted a series of recently published population studies on these countries (Rowland, 2004, 2006, 2007) based on the most recent censuses. We have then merged the relevant data gleaned therein with the detailed information available in Beroutchachvili and Radvanyi (1996).

Rather than mapping majority populations for the rayons, we opted for ethnic pluralities, defined as a threshold of 40 percent in one group, as defined by Russian Federation's public administration categories of ethnicity, especially in the census. In the majority of cases, particularly in the Russian-dominated steppe regions in the north of the region, the plurality is also the majority, but in the heterogeneous cultural landscapes of lowland Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachayevo-Cherkessia, and southern and eastern Stavropol' Kray, many rayons do not have a dominant group. By our estimation, only 9 of approximately 150 rayons in the North Caucasus do not have an ethnic plurality.

While the map indicates the locations of 20 nationalities, there are both greater complexities and more similarities not visible on that map. Smaller ethnic populations, especially in Dagestan, are not indicated, although we discuss their distribution and movement in the individual papers. On the other hand, the shared characteristics of groups, such as religion (in the North Caucasus, Russians and Ossetians are dominantly Orthodox Christian; the others are Muslim) and language (Turkic, Caucasian, Slavic, and Iranian linguistic families), are not shown. By including the "ethnic map" in this supplement, we are not equating ethnicity with a single primordialist character nor assuming that its "groupness" is always clearly bounded and evident (Brubaker, 2004). Indeed, in Dagestan, despite the oft-noted presence of dozens of nationalities, there is a widespread shared sense of "Dagestani" identity that transcends and overlays administrative, ascriptive, ethnic identities. However, inter-ethnic marriage is low (only 4 percent in Dagestan, according to our December 2005 survey) and ethnicity is the favored shorthand for both locals and outsiders in attempts to make sense of regional complexities and challenges.

We thank the editors of *Eurasian Geography and Economics* for the opportunity to present the results of our public opinion surveys, aggregate data collection and analysis, and field work in one of the most beautiful places on this planet. The maps were designed by John O'Loughlin and Frank Witmer and the final presentation graphics prepared by Tom Dickinson, Nancy Thorwardson, and Ted Holland. We hope that this project will stimulate further work on a region that unfortunately suffers from a (media-driven) perception as remote and dangerous.

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Fig. 1. Country and republic/kray borders in the Caucasus regions, with selected rayons and cities discussed in the papers of the special issue.

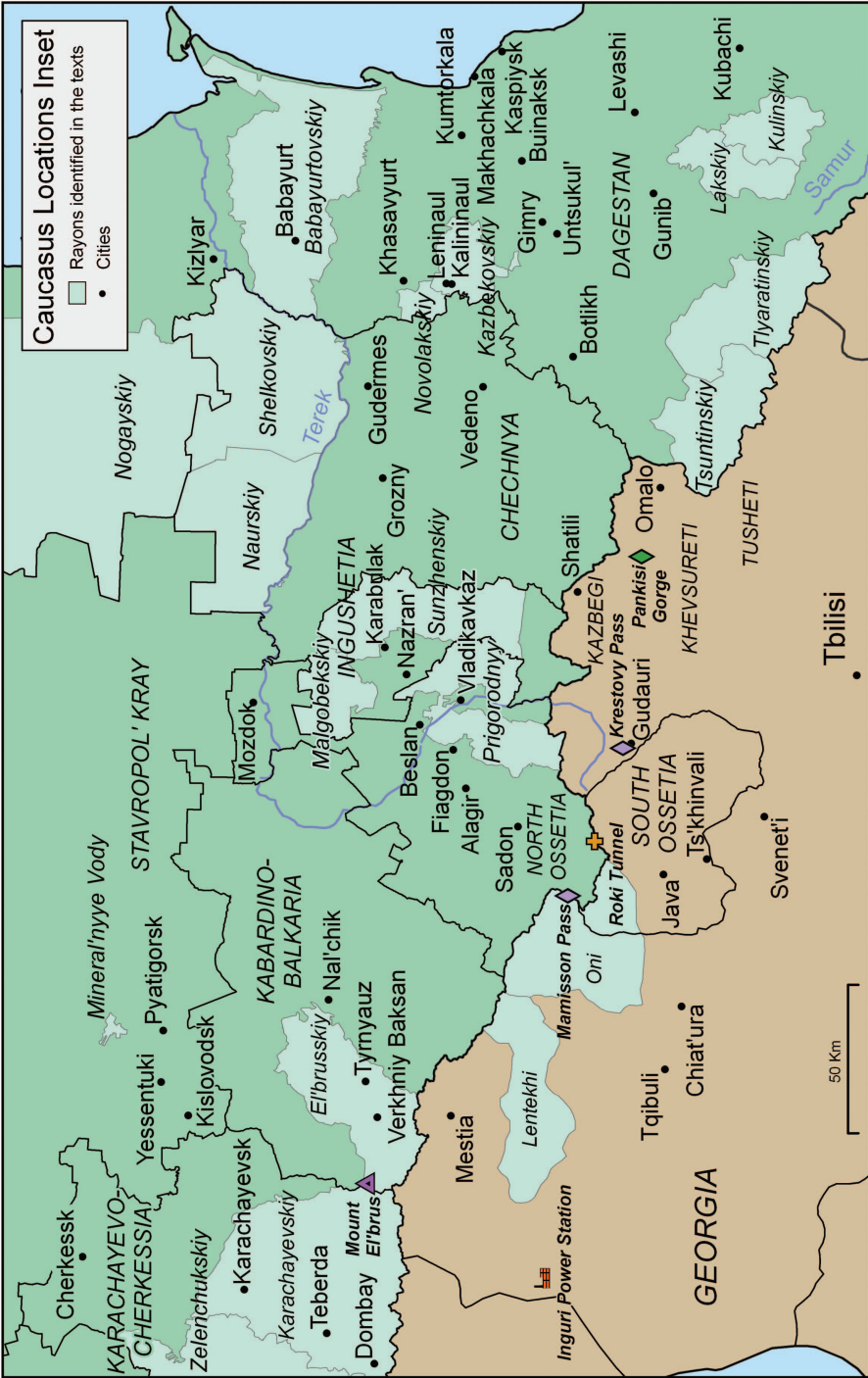
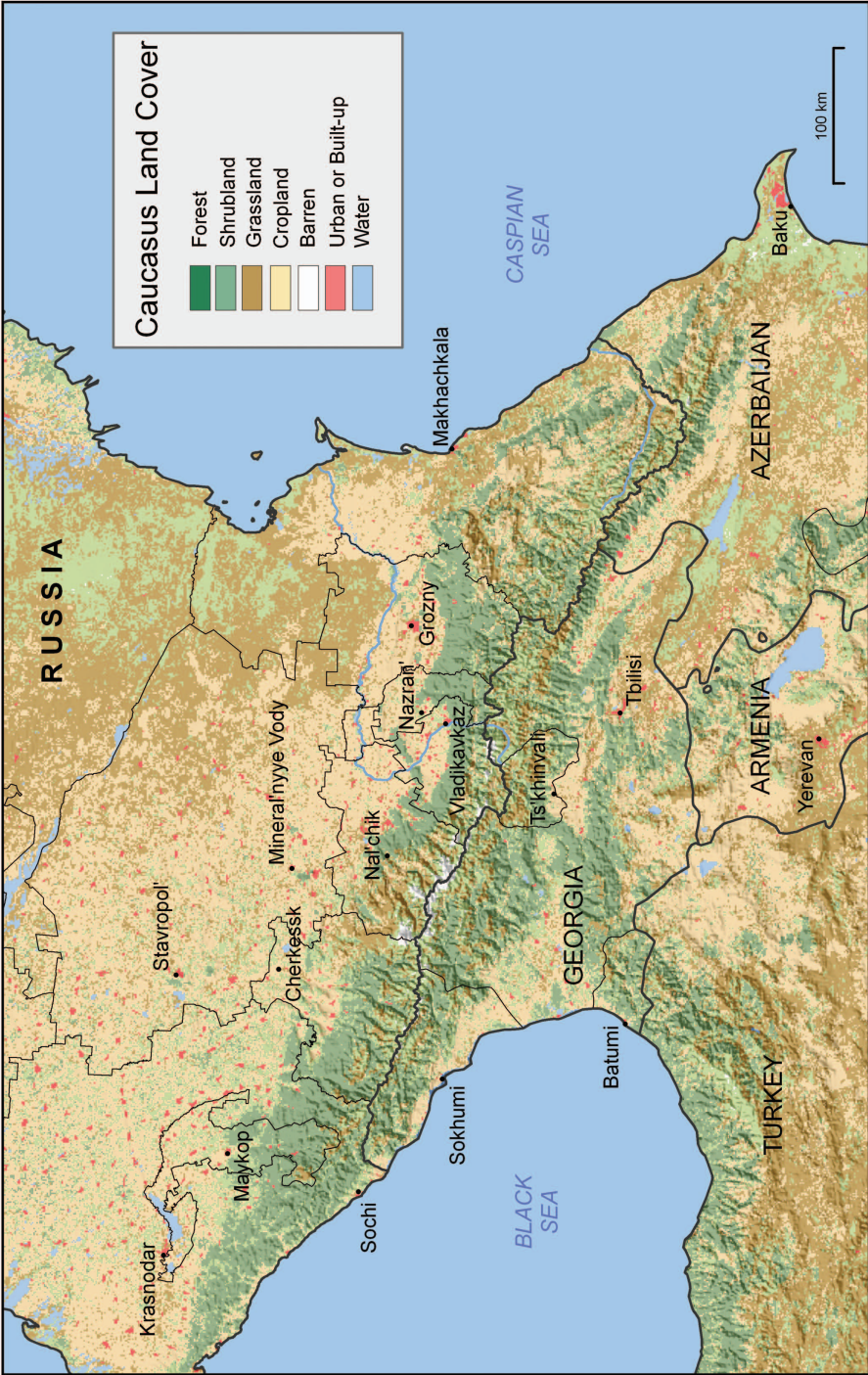
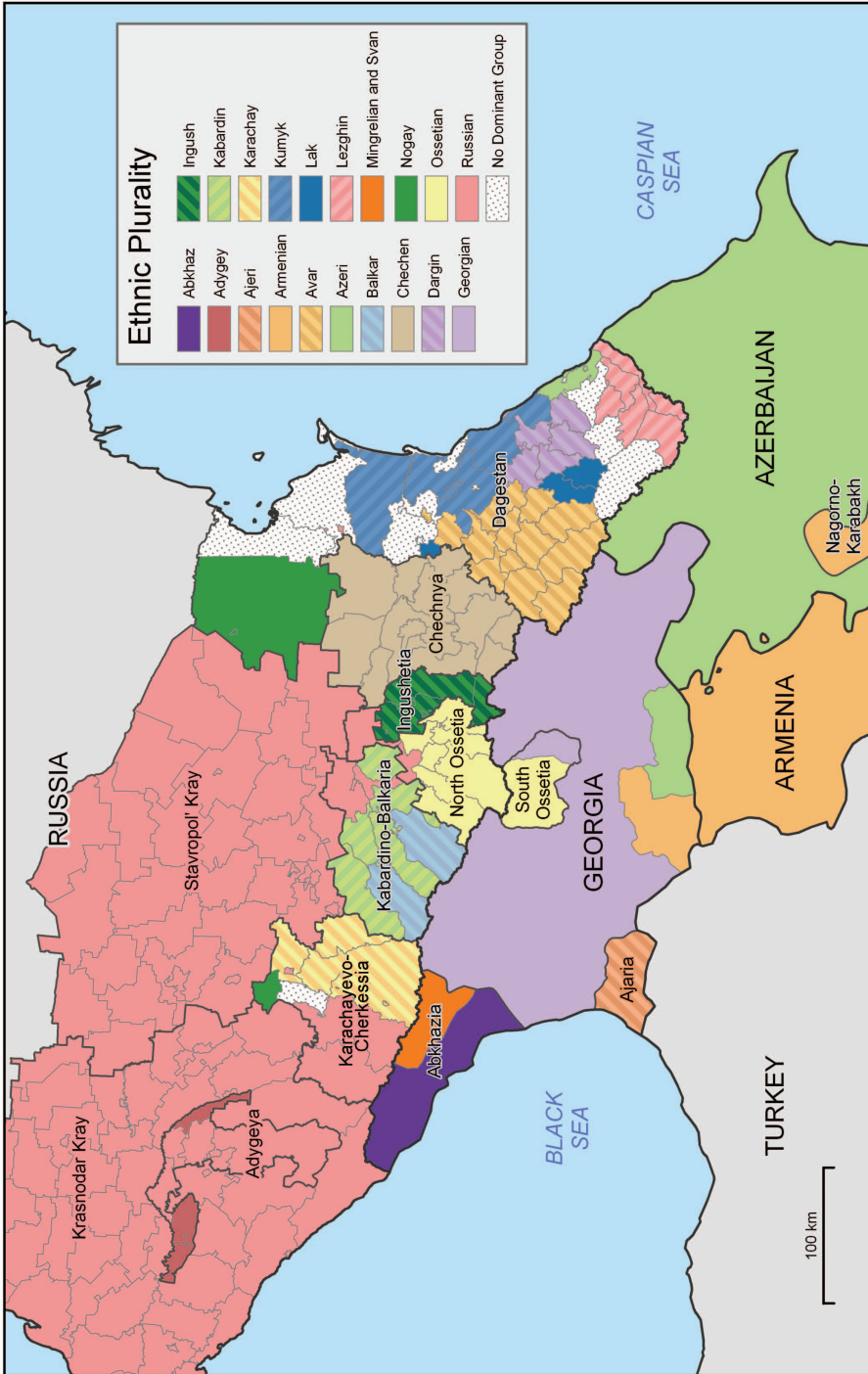


Fig. 2. Caucasus locations near the Russian-Georgian border, with rayons and cities discussed in the papers of the special issue.





**Fig. 3.** Land cover map of the Caucasus with digital elevations. Data from University of Maryland's Global Land Cover Facility (GLCF) (<http://glcf.umiacs.umd.edu/index.shtml>) and U.S. Geological Survey (<http://glcf.umiacs.umd.edu/data/>).



**Fig. 4.** Ethnic pluralities in the Caucasus. *Sources:* Compiled by authors from Beroutchachvili and Radvanyi (1996), Goskomstat Rossii (2004), and Rowland (2004, 2006, 2007).