

# THE FORMATION OF A COMMON CULTURAL SPACE AS A PROBLEM OF CULTURAL SECURITY OF THE CASPIAN SEA COUNTRIES

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## ABSTRACT

The Caspian Sea region is one of the strategically important spaces, attracting the attention of many countries, not only those that border it. The peculiarity of Caspian region is its polyculturalism, social variability, economic versatility. But this region is unique not only geopolitically, but also in its historical unity of states with very different cultures and mentalities. Therefore, achieving cultural security is impossible without the formation of a common mental substratum that is close to all representatives of the Caspian countries. It is impossible to create a common cultural and information space without taking into account the dynamics of peoples' identities and their increased cultural awareness. The effectiveness of Russian policy in the Caspian region, both on Russian territory and on an interstate scale, depends on the resolution of these issues. The difficulties lie in historical civilisational differences: European cultural models coexist here in close unity with traditional economic practices, so the Caspian can be seen as an 'island of juxtaposition of worlds' - 'East and West'.

Today the five independent states with access to the sea are the main actors. Nevertheless, powers such as China, Turkey, the United States and leading European countries are fighting for influence in the Caspian basin. For the Russian territory, the Caspian is the concentration of numerous major geopolitical challenges. Today Russia is faced with the need to ensure cultural security in this region. Therefore, cultural security is aimed at maintaining national security through the development of cultural identity, which is very relevant to the task of forming a common mental space in the Caspian region.

**Keywords:** *Caspian region, cultural security, communication space, intercultural dialogue, multiculturalism, educational migrants.*

## INTRODUCTION

The Caspian region is a point of intersection for many states, including Russia. All these littoral states have their own specificities, manifesting themselves in the economy, politics, culture and forms of everyday life. The Russian cultural landscape, which has emerged in the coastal territory of the Caspian Sea, has a similar peculiarity. Its distinctive features are multiculturalism, multiconfessionalism, socio-political variability and economic diversity.

When the natural objects of a particular territory are intertwined with the socio-cultural uniqueness, researchers speak of a "cultural landscape", which can be defined as "a cultural environment conditioned by

landscape specificity" [1]. Cultural landscape, as a result of "the interaction of culture and space" [2], includes information about cultural activities of people, as a result of which a worldview is formed, corresponding to the given natural and climatic environment and "generating a special mythology, ritual, serving the economic and spiritual life of the peoples inhabiting a certain territory" [1].

The Caspian cultural landscape is characterized by its motley diversity and, therefore, requires for its study not only from the perspective of "three projections (corporeal, verbal and visual)" [1], but also from the "civilizational, gender, genetic, noumenal" [1] components, which reveals the specificity of the relationship between sea and society in the historical and cultural dynamics. The cultural

landscape of the Caspian Sea is dynamic, with old concepts and traditions disappearing over the centuries, giving way to new ones, and returning again. All this has created a rather contradictory space built on mutually exclusive principles.

As a result of this interaction, frontier cultural landscapes are formed and function/ They are multilayered and dynamic, have historical, cultural, scientific and artistic value. Therefore, the cultural communication of the peoples inhabiting the Caspian coast directly leads to the solution of the problem of "human resources and the development of labour relations" [3] in a heterotopic space. Here geopolitical processes are intertwined with the economy and politics of the states, necessitating their mutual cooperation. This is where the specificity of the development of this region is seen.

As for Russia, the Caspian Sea represents a concentration of numerous geopolitical challenges, among which the most important are "the environmental problems of the reservoir, trade and economic cooperation, the political agenda, and aspects of the overall security of the Caspian region, taking into account the interests of all littoral states" [4]. Therefore, ensuring cultural security, i.e. 'the ability of societies to maintain specific characteristics despite changing conditions and real or virtual threats' [5] is an urgent need. This task cannot be achieved without strengthening the cultural identity of the peoples of the Caspian region. In other words, the problem of cultural security is, to a great extent, connected with the problem of intercultural dialogue, so the integration educational processes in the Caspian region are impossible without the creation of a common cultural and informational space. That is why the aim of the article is to analyse the existing possibilities for the creation of such a space, while ensuring cultural security in the Caspian region's social space, which is being transformed by political, economic and environmental factors.

## **THE FORMATION THE INTERCULTURAL SPACE OF THE CASPIAN REGION: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**

In the process of forming a common intercultural space of the Caspian region one can monitor .the formation of civilizational differences of the states, that are particularly active in the zone of cross-border communication. As noted earlier, "the state of inter-ethnic relations directly depends on the dynamics of identity transformation of various social, territorial and ethnic groups" [6]. Increasing migration processes breaks the usual stereotypes of traditional societies, blurring the contours of identities and involving them in heterotopic communicative space, requiring the formation of a common language of coexistence of different traditions in a common space. Such a language can only be formed through "cross-cultural analysis of the indicators of ethnic,

confessional and regional levels of self-consciousness, as well as the process of self-identification" [6], which in modern conditions becomes an acute problem. The desire of a social group to preserve its original cultural identity does not always coincide, and even more often runs counter to the tasks facing society as a whole.

The desire to preserve its traditional cultural identity leads to the formation of new mythologies of the traditional picture of the world, creating simulacra of adaptation mechanisms in a changing society and having a powerful impact on the consciousness and behaviour of the individuals of a particular community. This becomes an obstacle, sometimes insurmountable, to the development of civil society institutions and the formation of a new cultural policy, which is the only one that can provide adequate responses to the challenges of the modern world. Therefore, effective interaction among the Caspian countries need a cultural dialogue to build a new identity in line with the modern demands of the age.

In the Caspian region, the "technological culture of secularized Europe" [7] coexists with traditional methods of economic management; world religions (Buddhism, Orthodoxy and Islam) coexist with national cults that have retained their appeal to the present day (Zoroastrianism, paganism, shamanism). This is due to historical processes of mutual influence of cultures of different peoples, which in one way or another have left their mark on the development of the Caspian states. A special role was played by the rivalry of three large states: Russia, Turkey and Persia.

The Caspian Sea has been a complex multifunctional culture-forming symbol since antiquity. Reflecting the arch-typical ideas about the cycles of life, the sea is an example of "hydro-political character" [8]. In this regard, the Caspian Sea represents an axis in spatial and temporal projection, around which the history of different peoples, including Russia, unfolded.

The close contacts between the different peoples of the Caspian basin can be clearly seen in the toponymy. Almost every nation has given the sea its own name, which is why the Caspian has changed many names over its millennia-long history. Thus, in antiquity, the sea was called "Hyrcanian after the name of the coastal country Hyrcania (the country of Wolves) and Arabs called it Khazar after the name of the Khazars, a Turkic people living on the northwest coast. The name is still sometimes used in modern Azerbaijani, Turkish and Persian. The fire-worshippers of Apsheron called the Caspian Sea Vargana and Chekat-De-Ti, the Arabs - Jurjan, the Chinese - Sihai (i.e. Western Sea), the Iranians - Kolkum, Hindus - Vorukasha, Turkmens - Kukkuuz, Kazakhs - Atyrau, Turks - Kuchuk-Deniz, Tatars - Ak-Deniz" [9]. "Ak-Deniz" can mean either the White Sea or the Great Sea. The Mongols called the Caspian Sea "Chagan-nor, which also means the White Sea, a lake. The Russians referred to it as the "Blue Sea" and then as the Khvalyn or Khvalisskiy Sea" [9].

By the name of the adjoining countries and cities, the sea was called "Saray (the capital of the Golden Horde),

Tabasaran, Albanian, Derbent, Shemakhi, Apsheron, Shirvan, Salyan, Mugan, Abeskun, Khorasan, Gilan, Mazandaran, Turkmen, Avar, Persian, Deylan and Kurgan. Other sources call it the Sea of Aliens, Bakuk, Kungar, Torm, Sirsap, Eren, Vrakan, Guzugun, Pahlavi, Sarez, Dorts, Kemrut, Kizilbash (Kizilbash was the name given to the Persians for their custom of dyeing their hair with henna), The sea of Etil, as Etil is the Volga River flowing into the Caspian Sea. Persian sources also mention Gurgan, Shizir, Gurzum, the sea of Bab and others" [10].

When Byzantium was conquered by the Turks, the trade route with the East moves to the Volga-Caspian, i.e. it goes through Russia. Baku becomes a significant port. This is demonstrated by the change in the name of the sea, which begins to be called the Baku Sea. The accession of the Astrakhan Kaganate to Russia opened up the possibility for Russians to take control of the lower Volga and gain direct access to the Caspian Sea. In this case, Russia could get the status of an intermediary in trade relations between the continents of East and West, which would enrich the country and raise its international status.

From the second half of the 16th century Astrakhan became a 'gateway to Asia', equipping its merchant ships to the Caucasian and Persian shores of the Caspian Sea - Derbent, Baku and Gilan. Consequently, the Moscow government took a number of measures to protect the Volga route, building Samara, Saratov and Tsaritsyn along its banks, and turning Astrakhan into an impregnable fortress. However, complete security was not achieved. At that time the Caspian Sea became the scene of Don and Yatsk Cossacks' campaigns. One of the most daring was the Don Cossack Stepan Razin's campaign "for zipuns" in the spring of 1668.

From the beginning of the 18th century, the economic importance of the Caspian Sea increased in Russia's eastern policy. It was in Russia's interests that Peter I set out to prevent "any other power from establishing itself on the Caspian Sea" [11]. In addition, the emperor planned to "establish a large merchant city at the mouth of the Kura River where the trades of Georgians, Armenians, Persians, as in the centre, would be united and from there would continue to Astrakhan" [12]. However, the results of the campaign to Persia were not so bright: the successors of Peter the Great did not retain the conquest and in the early 1830s all territories in the Caspian Sea were returned to Persia, at the same time Russia's trade with the Caucasus and the western Caspian areas continued to develop.

An important aspect of Russian Caspian policy at that time was the religious factor. The majority of the Caspian population were Muslims, Orthodox Christians (Astrakhan) and Buddhists (Kalmykia). Russia helped Christians living in Transcaucasia, primarily Armenians and Georgians, and "could not allow Muslim influence to grow here, primarily Sunni influence, which was personified with the Ottoman Empire" [13].

After the Crimean War, the Russian Empire resumed its offensive policy on the Caspian and Central Asian

frontiers. In 1871, by decree of Catherine II, Field Marshal-General Grigory Potemkin formed a new naval flotilla on the Caspian Sea. The Russian authorities developed ports and improved conditions for their naval representatives in the Caspian Sea. The Naval Department attracted Russian businessmen to develop the Caspian Sea. For example, the merchant society "Caucasus and Mercury" based in Astrakhan "maintained an urgent communication steamer on the Caspian Sea and talked about establishing a steamer connection to Krasnovodsk" [14].

The maritime authority also took care of the educational process, opening the Caspian Maritime Library in Astrakhan in 1860. Russian naval personnel not only carried out combat and administrative tasks, but also carried out scientific research under the guidance of leading scientists who came to explore the Caspian region. The Naval Department provided material assistance to the Caspian explorers.

Peaceful trade and research works were hindered by pirate raids of "non-peaceful" Turkmens, Kalmyks and Cossacks on coastal settlements and ships near the eastern shore of the Caspian Sea. The Kazakhs living on the Mangyshlak peninsula also caused problems for the Russian authorities. All this required the authorities to formulate a carefully considered policy in the Caspian and Central Asian directions. The Kazakhs living on the Mangyshlak Peninsula also created problems for the Russian authorities on the Caspian Sea. The policy in the Caspian and Central Asian directions required a concentration of efforts by all departments of the Russian Empire.

In the XIXth century, representatives of Western countries became interested in the Caspian, attracted primarily by the sea's natural resources. In 1877, for example, the Russian government did not allow the Nobel brothers to transport oil along the Volga and the Caspian in their own ships, although they "did not prevent the transit of European and Persian goods through the Caspian and Caucasus, as well as Persia and Russia to Transcaucasia and Central Asia" [15].

The conquest of Central Asia strengthened the position of the Russian Empire on the Caspian border, and the Conventions of 1881 and 1893 defined the borders between Russia and Persia. Russia achieved recognition of its sovereignty over the Caspian Gulf of Hasan-Kuli, "our border with Persia, to the east of the Caspian Sea satisfies all the needs of the Trans-Caspian region" [16]. Moreover, militarily and strategically, all advantages were on Russia's side. These legal guidelines were in effect until 1917.

After the 1917 revolution, the Soviet government abandoned its military presence on the Caspian Sea, and all previous agreements with Persia were declared null and void and a new treaty (1921) was concluded, declaring the Caspian Sea "a body of water for common use: both states were granted equal rights of free navigation" [17].

In the new world economic order, the Caspian Sea can be presented as an "island of conjugation of worlds" - "East and West", as a geopolitical space attracting leading world players, in the arena of which the "fracture" of technological and world economic modes and the formation of a new multipolar world order takes place.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Caspian region has gained strategic importance, and the five independent states with access to the waters - Russia, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Iran - have become major actors. They determine the relationship between the Caspian states. Although the Caspian Sea is not only the place of interest of 'coastal' countries, powers such as China, the United States and leading European states compete for influence in the Caspian basin. That is why security issues are important and relevant today in economic, political and cultural terms.

Large oil reserves have attracted the attention of the global oil business to the Caspian Sea. In February 2020, an article by Matthew Bryza, a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council's Centre for Global Energy, entitled "The Greater Caspian region: A new Silk Road, with or without a new belt," was published on the U.S. Atlantic Council website. The article discusses the region's infrastructure redevelopment project as an alternative to China's initiative "One Belt, One Road" (BRI) and the Russian Eurasian Economic Union [18]. The "Greater Caspian Region" is "the space of five littoral countries (Russia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Iran) and closely located countries historically, economically and culturally related to the Caspian Sea (Armenia, Georgia, Uzbekistan)" [19].

The main aspect of U.S. policy regarding the Caspian Sea is the creation of "new energy, freight and information logistics lines that will help stabilize post-war Afghanistan and form new models of cooperation that could complement or compete with China's Russia" [18]. U.S. efforts are aimed at creating and operating a network of oil and gas pipelines from the Caspian Sea to the Black Sea and the Mediterranean, together with Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey.

Such plans pose a direct threat to Russia, which opposes these initiatives, faced with the need to respond quickly to new challenges in the Caspian space. These challenges need to be met with effective responses. One possible answer is to ensure cultural security, that is, "the ability of a society to preserve its specific characteristics despite changing conditions and real or virtual threats" [5].

## **PRESERVING CULTURAL SECURITY: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS**

In this article we are interested specifically in the problem of cultural security, which is closely related to the identity markers of culture, despite changing conditions and real or virtual threats. Cultural security is seen as "activities that evoke trust in the cultural identity and prosperity of individuals, support and respect them, enable

them to express their identity and meet their cultural needs" [20]. Culture in this case is understood as a specific belonging of an individual, a people, a nation.

The very process of ensuring cultural security is «human activity at different levels» - individual-state-humanity - «to identify, prevent and eliminate dangers and threats that can cause irreparable damage to progressive development» [21].

Problems of cultural security are closely linked with the problem of intercultural dialogues, which can be both constructive and unequal in their attempts to impose "the values of some cultures to others" [22].

In other words, we're not just talking only about preventing ethno-cultural and ethno-confessional conflicts, the destruction of cultural monuments, spiritual degradation, etc., but also about "maintaining national security through the "development of cultural identity" [23], which is very relevant to the task of forming a common mental space in the Caspian region.

It is clear that each state seeks to strengthen its sovereignty, to defend its political and economic interests in the Caspian Sea, so joint projects to create a common cultural and information space are impossible without taking into account the cultural specifics of the Caspian countries. The "efficiency of Russian policy in the region, both on the Russian territory and on the interstate scale, depends on the methods to be used to solve this task [3].

Integration processes are in direct dependence on the degree of change in the traditional identity of social groups. Under the influence of migration processes there is a real threat of the disappearance of "own" culture, which is being eroded in the multicultural space. Therefore, in order to stabilize the situation and to coexist peacefully in a single territorial space, it is necessary to create a common cultural space, i.e. to form the most similar picture of the world for all members of a given society. This is quite problematic, because the fear of losing "their" identity develops a protective stance when the culture of newcomers serves as "the only criterion and point of reference on the scale of development in comparison with "others" [24]. It is clear that not always the tasks of preserving the traditional cultural identity of a local cultural group will coincide with the tasks facing society as a whole. And this presents quite a serious problem, especially when the task of creating a unified cultural and informational field is faced.

The common historical past of the Caspian states and today's demographic problems of Russia are factors that outline a new trend, which is now becoming a real challenge for the social system in southern Russia. The reason is that the new wave of migrants from neighbouring countries are young people who have received education in accordance with the educational standards of their state and do not know the Russian language.

On the one hand, radical changes in the space of post-Soviet Caspian republics under the influence of communication processes with Western countries have

accelerated the processes of destruction of traditional values and the formation of civil societies.

On the other hand, the fear of losing "own place" and getting "lost" in the stream of innovation has intensified, leading to a protective stance towards the traditional worldview, which has largely prevented productive cultural contacts. As a result, in order to adapt to the modern world and at the same time preserve traditional structures, an illusory worldview picture is constructed on the basis of new mythologies that protect the familiar way of life of a particular community. It is also very important, that the worldview's value of young migrants was formed in a situation of ambiguous attitude to the history and culture of post-Soviet Russia.

The processes of reaching agreements on the legal status of the Caspian Sea, economic cooperation, and socio-cultural interaction are difficult. The desire to divide zones of influence in the Caspian Sea leads to the deepening of disputes between the countries. It is much more effective to agree on the joint rational use of Caspian resources. The problems of the Caspian Sea should be solved exclusively by the Caspian states, without the interference of "third parties". The search for individual trajectories of geostrategy development in the interrelation of science, education and business is necessary for each issue. Problems related to cultural security, history, and the current state of intercultural communication in the region should in the future become part of the general educational environment to develop a unified approach to the development of the Caspian space.

The modern world represents "a spontaneous process of transcultural crossings, migrations, i.e. plurality" [25], and the effectiveness of cultural security of a certain region depends on how this plurality will be comprehended and realized. Within any modern state, different cultural worlds with their own culture, religion, politics, and level of economic development coexist. The Caspian region is one of such spaces.

Attempts to form a unified communicative (information-educational) space conceal hidden risks of attempts to preserve "own" cultural identity by cultivating old and, most importantly, creating new mythologemes of the traditional worldview, allowing the formation of simulacra of adaptation mechanisms, and having a powerful impact on the consciousness and behaviour of individuals in a particular community.

When different worldviews overlap and collide in the same space, the process of communication becomes more difficult and slower. Moreover, many cultural practices "cannot coexist peacefully in heterotopia" [21], thus creating pockets of tension. A change in traditional thinking must go in the direction of recognizing "others" as equal participants in the cultural dialogue, which at the moment seems extremely difficult.

To a certain extent, information culture comes to the rescue, allowing for dialogue in virtual space. Especially significant in the formation of a unified cultural space is

communication and learning at home in a distance form. All countries are now involved in the format of distant, virtual communication, and this is a real opportunity to find a common language on a number of problems concerning mutual cooperation.

Inter-university programmes (e.g. joint projects between central Russian and Astrakhan universities, as well as those of the Caspian states) are promising in this direction, with a focus on "formation of a personnel reserve of highly qualified specialists, creation of interuniversity councils of young scientists, interstate council of young specialists" [3].

## CONCLUSION

The Caspian Sea region is one of the most important in the Euro-Asian space. It attracts the attention of many countries, not only those that border it. Therefore, the achievement of cultural security requires the formation of a common mental substrate close to all its representatives of the Caspian countries, namely, the creation of a common cultural and information space. This requires the cultural self-consciousness of the peoples of the Caspian region to be increased. The effectiveness of Russian policy in the Caspian region, both on Russian territory and on an interstate scale, depends on the resolution of these issues.

Despite certain successes in solving individual issues of the Caspian problem, a full-fledged multilateral dialogue has not yet been achieved. The consultations conducted by the "Caspian Five" countries have gradually transformed into a multifaceted discussion of a whole range of problems related to the organization of interstate dialogue in the Caspian Sea.

The "Consortium of Higher Education Institutions of the Caspian Region in the Transport and Logistics Sphere" was created; the creation of a Centre for Humanitarian Cooperation of the Caspian countries, aimed at promoting the Russian language and culture, is expected. [26]; the Caspian International Discussion Club in order to develop a dialogue between Russian and foreign elites; and the publication of the encyclopaedic dictionary "Caspian" has begun.

The work to preserve and promote the cultural heritage of the Caspian countries is becoming important in ensuring the cultural dialogue. A lot is being done in this sphere. For example, at the First Conference of the Parties to the Tehran Convention in May 2007, all the Caspian countries decided to celebrate annually Caspian Day on August 12 [27]. On this day, in addition to cultural events, conferences, roundtables, and meetings are held with the participation of representatives of government agencies, nongovernmental and non-governmental organizations, and scientific institutions. The purpose of such events is not only the practical accumulation of scientific and theoretical knowledge, but also its active use in the development of a national course regarding the Caspian Sea.

The most important problem is the creation of a common information and educational space. In recent years, Astrakhan State University has become a platform for scientific and educational projects in the Caspian region, including both educational and political, economic and socio-cultural aspects. The creation of a common educational space has a special importance within the framework of strengthening cultural security.

The common historical past of the Caspian states and the demographic problems in Russia are factors that have outlined a new trend, which is now becoming a real challenge for the educational system in southern Russia, because the new wave of migrants from the near abroad are young people who have received education already in accordance with the educational standards of their state and have virtually no command of the Russian language. An important fact is that the value of the worldview of young migrants was formed in the situation of ambiguous attitude to the history and culture of post-Soviet Russia. This leads to difficulties in integrating foreign students into the Russian educational space and causes certain communication problems with Russian students.

The marker of modern culture is virtual reality, which intertwines the global and the local and triggers new processes of digital adaptation. In the process of virtual communication, "foreignness" is overcome, while "reality must either be "recognized" taking into account modern adjustments, or reinterpreted, creating new contours of the inhabited space" [28].

Therefore, joint university programs are becoming an effective way to solve many problems in overcoming "foreignness" and getting to know another culture in order to form a unified communication space. Academic mobility and double-degree programs, organization of webinars with the participation of foreign scientists, joint publications in scientific journals, and online meetings are becoming increasingly popular. ASU is actively cooperating with Caspian Sea universities, opening branches of Russian universities in Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, etc.

All this is directly linked to building an optimal model of acculturation based on consideration of ethnic and socio-cultural characteristics of educational migrants who carry their own cultural patterns, which complicates the process of communication and adaptation. Entering a new cultural space, migrants consider their culture and its attitudes as the starting point, which is explained by the vital need to order their life activities through the adoption of norms and patterns of behavior in accordance with the cultural characteristics accepted in a particular society (group).

## AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

The article has been written by a team of authors, all authors have taken equal part in the theoretical analysis of the problem and in carrying out the research. I.V. Mametiev was responsible for the historical aspect of

forming the intercultural space of the Caspian region; L.L. Tikhonova analysed and summarized the ideas of Russian and foreign authors on the issue. M.Kh. Kusmidinova analysed the problems of religious security of the Caspian region. E.V. Khlyshcheva researched the problem of cultural security of the Caspian region countries, summarized the data, and wrote an original manuscript.

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