

University of California, Berkeley
Berkeley Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies
Center for Slavic and East European Studies

Annual Caucasus Conference

***The Past as Prelude: The Cultural, Social, and
Political Roots of Identity in the Caucasus***

May 17, 1996

The Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies and the Center for Slavic and East European Studies invite you to a conference entitled “The Past as Prelude: The Cultural, Social, and Political Roots of Identity in the Caucasus,” to be held at UC Berkeley on Friday, May 17, 1996. The conference will bring together a group of leading scholars to analyze the roots of identity in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Russia’s North Caucasus region, with particular emphasis on key myths, cultural references, and representations of the “other” in the identities of the many peoples of the region.

As you know, the Caucasus is a volatile and fascinating area of great geopolitical importance. Its strategic significance rests in its very large fossil fuel reserves; the security concerns and interests of outside powers (including Russia, Turkey, Iran, and the West); and its location as the possible route for pipelines bringing oil and gas from the Caspian Sea and Central Asia to the international marketplace. The extreme volatility of the region is evidenced by the still unresolved ethnopolitical conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, Chechnya, and South Ossetia; the conflict between groups of “titular nationalities” in Azerbaijan and Georgia; and economic distress and political disorder throughout the region. Most importantly, the region’s extraordinarily rich and complicated history and its extreme ethnic heterogeneity make it a fascinating object of study in its own right.

Nevertheless, the Caucasus remains the most understudied region of the former Soviet Union. To begin to address this weakness, we have established a Graduate Training and Research Program on the Contemporary Caucasus at UC Berkeley with the help of a three-year grant by the Ford Foundation. This year’s conference will lay the foundation for subsequent conferences to be held in each of the three coming academic years dealing with contemporary topics, as follows: (1) “Nationalism, Ethnopolitics, and Conflict in the Caucasus”; (2) “The Geopolitics of Oil, Gas, and Ecology in the Caucasus and Caspian Sea”; and (3) “State Building and the Reconstruction of Shattered Societies.”

The conference is intended for a general audience. We will provide background material for those who are unfamiliar with the region’s languages, histories, and cultures.

This conference is made possible by a grant from the Ford Foundation to the Berkeley Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies and from the US Department of Education to the Center for Slavic and East European Studies.

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Introduction by **George W. Breslauer**, Chair, Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies, UC Berkeley.

Panel I:

Johanna Nichols, UC Berkeley. *Languages and Ethnic Groups in the Caucasus: Overview and History.*

Michael Khodarkovsky, Loyola University. *Russia and the Caucasus Through the Beginning of the 19th Century.*

Harsha Ram, UC Berkeley. *The Caucasus: Literary Exile and Colonial Policy in the 19th Century.*

Ronald Suny, Stanford University. *Nation-making, Nation-breaking: The Caucasus in the Soviet Empire.*

Chair: **George W. Breslauer**, UC Berkeley.

Panel II:

Richard Hovannisian, UC Los Angeles. *Armenia: The Evolution of a Modern Identity.*

Tadeusz Swietochowski, Monmouth College. *Azerbaijan: The Legacy of History in a Borderland.*

Stephen F. Jones, Mount Holyoke College. *Georgians: Europeans and Asians, Christians and Muslims?*

Sergei Arutiunov, Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, Moscow. *Representations of the "Other" in Russia's North Caucasus.*

Chair: **Nicholas Riasanovsky**, UC Berkeley.

Concluding Remarks by **Victoria E. Bonnell**, Chair, Center for Slavic and East European Studies, UC Berkeley.