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The Caucasus in the foreign policy of the Ottoman Empire (17th-late 18th centuries)

The role of the Caucasus region as a crossroads of inter-civilizational contacts, interaction of ethnic, economic and geopolitical factors at the junction of Europe and Asia is extremely large. The real and potential meaning of control over the Caucasus went far beyond the very fact of physical possession of this territory. Isthmus between the Black and Caspian Seas allowed to control the space much larger than its own size. It is no coincidence that it was eternal “apple of discord” between external forces: either to fall under the power of the mightiest power at the moment, or to split into zones of influence.

The Caucasus and the North Caucasus in particular have always been strategically important direction in the foreign policy of the Ottoman Empire. It wanted to expand its territory and control the main military and trade routes passing through Caucasian-Transcaucasian region. In addition, control over the Caucasian territories gave unhindered access to the states of Central Asia and strategic trade communications through these territories, in particular the Northern route of the Great Silk Road. The presence of the Turkic-speaking population and the predominance of Islam over other religions in the Caucasus-Transcaucasia region opened the way for the gradual and relatively "peaceful" penetration of the Ottoman Empire into these territories.

In Turkish historiography, the Caucasus region is considered as a natural priority in the foreign policy of the Ottoman Empire, and currently the Republic of Turkey. Unlike the Russian and Western traditional interpretation, Turkish historiography perceives the Caucasus region as an independent political unit, therefore, the issue of Turkey-Caucasus relations is not always viewed only through the prism of Russian-Turkish relations. Modern Turkish researchers, of course, cannot bypass the Turkish-Iranian and Russian-Turkish rivalry in the Caucasus in their studies, but at the same time, the Caucasus region itself is not perceived by them as the territorial property of Russia. They also pay due attention to the history of certain peoples of the North and Western Caucasus, especially those that were of particular interest to the Porte as strategic allies.

The generally accepted point of view in Turkish historiography is that the beginning of the Caucasian policy of the Porte was the capture of Kaffa (Feodosia) by the Turkish fleet in 1475, which became "the starting point in the political orientation of the Turks to the Caucasus." However, the gradual decrease in the role of Iran as one of the contenders for a leading role in the region brought to the fore the confrontation between Russia and Turkey during the reign of Catherine the Great. It was during this period that the formation of the Ottoman foreign policy in the Caucasian direction began: the Porte established political, economic and military ties with the local population, setting it up against the first colonial attempts by Russia. In the future, the Porte actively used various elements of "soft power", for example, the Murid movement. Ottoman support for Sheikh Mansur's uprising provoked further development of the Muridism movement in the North Caucasus. Thus, the political penetration of Porte into the Caucasus in the 18th century was a kind of "test of the pen" before the Great

Caucasian War, in which the Ottoman Empire played a significant role.

In the paper, based on Russian and Turkish sources, an attempt was made to investigate the reasons that led to the advance of the Ottoman Empire to the Caucasus, as well as the features of the formation and concrete manifestation of the Porte's Caucasian policy in the period under study, sometimes echoing modern realities.