

Georgian boys dance group

“Preserve Our Culture.”

Photo © Ronald Wixman.



## *chapter* 4

# Russia and Neighboring Countries

## 4.3 TEST YOUR UNDERSTANDING

### Summary

For a number of years after World War II, the economy of the Soviet Union prospered, but by the late 1960s, it began to languish. Mikhail Gorbachev attempted reforms in the late 1980s with *perestroika* and *glasnost*. The reforms were partially successful, but the Soviet Union disintegrated. *Glasnost* revealed many human rights abuses during Soviet times.

The people of this world region continue to wrestle with new and old human rights abuses. The full rights of women have been recognized since early Communist times. However, individual women suffer from discrimination at times.

Population is not evenly distributed across this world region. Most people live on the fertile soils of the North European Plain west of the Urals. Populations are low in the cold climates of the north, especially in Siberia and in the mountains and deserts of the south. In the 1990s the populations of the Slavic countries began to fall as death rates exceeded low birth rates, resulting in slowly decreasing populations.

Ukraine and Moldova have some of the world's best farmland, and the warm climates of the Southern Caucasus make it possible to grow citrus fruits, tea, tobacco, cotton, and rice. However, much of the region's lands are too hot, cold, dry, or wet for agriculture. During Communist times, the government tried to increase the amount of farmable land with the Virgin Lands Campaign. The economic transition in the 1990s brought hardship for the agricultural sector as farmers had difficulty transitioning to a market economy. However, the 2000s has shown great growth.

Urbanization increased dramatically during Communist times but was planned by the government and linked to industrialization. The transition to market economies has led to suburban growth and the emergence of shopping malls. The inward orientation of Soviet Communism kept the world region from developing many global cities. Moscow ranks highest, and it and other cities are likely to rise in the global city rankings as Russia and its neighbors establish new political and economic links with the rest of the world.

### Questions to Think About

- 4.3A** Do you think that Mikhail Gorbachev's policies destroyed the Soviet Union, or was the country destined to disintegrate anyway? Explain.
- 4.3B** What kinds of human rights abuses occurred during Soviet times?
- 4.3C** Do you believe that women are more equal to men in the Slavic countries than women in your own country? Explain your answer.
- 4.3D** What are the population growth trends of the region's countries, and what causes these trends?

### Key Terms

*perestroika*  
*glasnost*

*gulag*  
Virgin Lands Campaign

## 4.5 SUBREGIONS

Russia and Neighboring Countries can be divided into subregions that share many similar characteristics:

- *The Slavic countries:* the Russian Federation, Ukraine, and Belarus, including neighboring Moldova.
- *The Southern Caucasus:* Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan.
- *Central Asia:* Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.

## 4.6 THE SLAVIC COUNTRIES

The Slavic countries of this subregion are the Russian Federation, Ukraine, and Belarus. Moldova also is included because many Slavs live there, and it is closely tied to the Slavic countries (Figure 4.25). The Russian Federation is by far the largest in land area of any country in the subregion and in the world. It is nearly twice as large as Canada, the

United States, or China. In mid-2010 it had 77 percent of the world region's area and 50 percent of the region's population, though its share is slowly falling.

Though the Russian Federation and the other countries of the subregion experienced economic hardship in the 1990s, the Russian Federation continued to exert considerable power. The Russian Federation remains a nuclear power and continues to hold one of the five permanent seats on the UN Security Council, the most powerful organ of the United Nations. With substantial portions of the world's natural resources, the Russian Federation is developing its economic potential. The leaders of the Russian Federation pressed to have their country added to the Group of Seven (G7), an informal organization representing the world's most wealthy countries. Though no official rules for membership exist, Russian representatives have been regularly invited to meetings since 2000, leading many to refer to the organization as the Group of Eight (G8).

### Countries

The Slavic countries seen on the map today became independent only in 1991 with the boundaries they had as

Soviet republics. This situation is also true for the Russian Federation, though the Russians controlled the Soviet Union and its predecessor, the Russian Empire. Prior to 1991, Ukraine was independent only for a brief period after World War I until it became part of the Soviet Union in 1922. Before that it was part of the Russian Empire. Belarus was never independent before 1991 and was usually part of either the Russian Empire or the Polish–Lithuanian Kingdom. Of the former Soviet republics, Belarus is the most closely tied to the Russian Federation. Since 1991, Belarusians have considered creating a Russian–Belarusian Federation.

Moldova, too, was never independent and has been a distinct territory for fewer than 200 years. It was part of the Romanian province of Moldavia until the Russian Empire annexed it in the 1800s and named it Bessarabia. Romania annexed the territory after World War I, but the Soviet Union annexed it again after World War II. Many Romanians and Moldovans hoped to unite their two countries after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, but the Russian military stationed in the country prevented this. Worried about a union of Moldova and Romania, Russians and Ukrainians living in Moldova declared their own republic in the Transnistria region. Other ethnic

minorities have made similar proclamations. The government has not been able to suppress these independence movements completely.

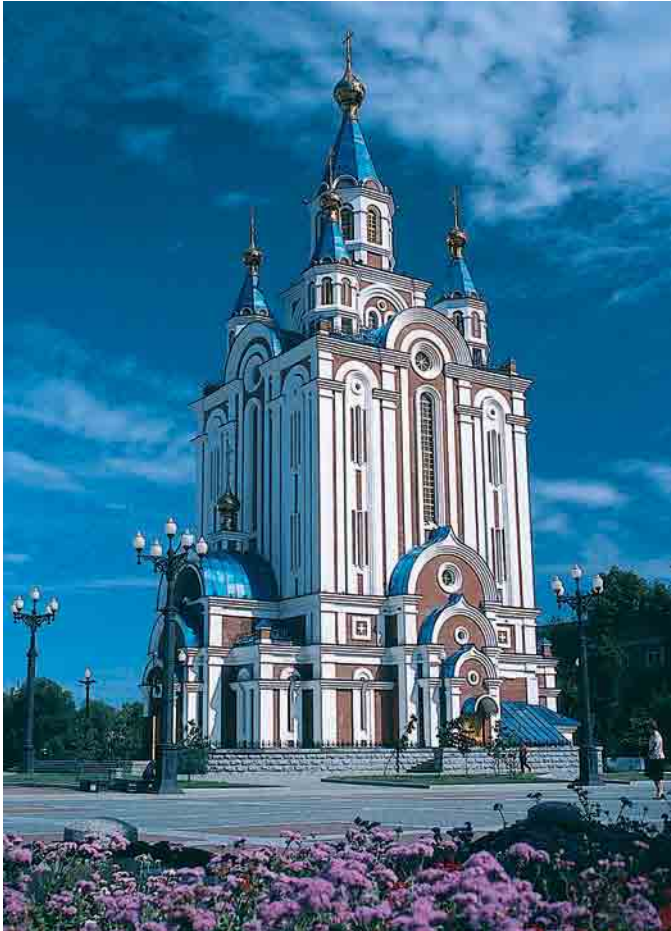
### Culture: Ethnicity

Native Moldovans are closely akin to Romanians and are not related to the Slavs (see Table 4.2). Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians are Eastern Slavs, offshoots of the broader Rus' people and culture that emerged in the 800s and 900s when the Rus' adopted Eastern Orthodox Christianity (Figure 4.26). All three Slavic groups are closely related as seen, for example, in the name *Belarusian*, which translates as “White Russian.” Differences between them developed after Poles, Lithuanians, and Austrians ruled the western lands of the Rus' from the 1300s to the 1800s. During this time, Ukrainians and Belarusians developed separate identities from Russians. Polish, Lithuanian, and Austrian influences are seen in the fact that nearly 20 percent of Belarus's population is Roman Catholic. A number of Poles and Lithuanians live in Belarus today after Poland's boundary was relocated in 1945.

The name *Ukraine*, meaning “borderland,” illustrates history's shifting boundaries and influences. To the Russians,



**FIGURE 4.25 Slavic Countries: Major Cities and Physical Features.** Note the distribution of the major cities and their concentration in the western part of the subregion.



**FIGURE 4.26** Russia. New Church, Kharbarovsk. Photo: © Ronald Wixman.

Ukraine is Russia's borderland, but to many Ukrainians, who have stronger ties with Europe than the Russians, Ukraine is Europe's borderland. Russian ties with Ukrainians and Belarusians were reestablished in the early 1800s when the Russian Empire extended west. Russification began soon afterward and was particularly strong during Soviet times. Today 78 percent of Belarus's population is Belarusian and 13 percent Russian, but 63 percent of the population regularly speaks Russian and not Belarusian. Not surprisingly, Belarus's leaders have expressed interest in uniting Belarus with the Russian Federation. In Ukraine, Russians, living primarily in the industrial areas of eastern Ukraine, account for 22 percent of Ukraine's population. Ukrainians, however, fear Russian domination and cultivate their ties with the West.

## Economic Development

Soviet economic policies tied the Slavic countries closely together, but many Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Moldovans prefer greater independence for their countries. They seek new trading relationships with other countries, but old connections are hard to break and new relationships difficult to form. For example, during Soviet times, eastern Ukraine

was the most important iron and steelmaking region of the Soviet Union. Eastern Ukraine can provide for Ukraine's economic independence today, but the area's industries depend on imports of oil and natural gas, primarily from the Russian Federation, to meet 85 percent of their energy needs. Belarus also has much heavy industry that can provide economic self-sufficiency, but with more than half of its trade with the Russian Federation, it too depends heavily on Russia. Moldova likewise still trades more with the Russian Federation than with Romania, though many Moldovans desire closer ties to Romania.

The Slavic countries developed heavy industry during Soviet times but did not keep equipment up to date (Figure 4.27). Through much of the 1990s, the economies of the Slavic countries shrank with the transition to capitalism as inefficient and uncompetitive factories across most industries downsized dramatically, even shutting down. A global financial crisis in 1998 depreciated the Russian ruble and further lowered living standards.

The economies of the Slavic countries began growing again in the 2000s. GDPs have increased on average by 6–8 percent in most years. Growth in Russia has been driven by modest bureaucratic reforms and soaring global prices for oil and natural gas (Figure 4.28), which Russia exports. Russia now ranks as the world's tenth-largest economy. However, Russia has become more dependent on oil exports,



**FIGURE 4.27** Kerch, Crimea. Following the end of the Communist regime in 1991, outdated, inefficient factories like this one were abandoned. In the 2000s they have been seen as sources of raw material. Thus they, like this one, have been stripped of their bricks, steel, and other materials, which were then sold. Photo: © Ronald Wixman.



**FIGURE 4.28** Moscow, Russia. New office building for LUKOIL, financed by profits generated from high oil prices brought about by recent global demand. Notice expensive cars in foreground parking lot. Photo: © M. Blinnikov.

which now account for 80 percent of all its exports. Oil and gas only accounted for about 13 percent of Russia's GDP in 1999 but increased to almost 32 percent in 2007. The Ukrainian economy has been helped by rising global prices for steel. Belarus has done little to reform its bureaucracy and economy, but its economy has flourished with cheap Russian oil and natural gas and economic growth in neighboring Russia, Belarus's main trading partner. Highly dependent on Russia, Belarus's economy can easily be damaged if Russia demands higher prices for its oil and natural gas.

### Foreign Investment

In the 1990s, corruption, poor infrastructure, and an unwieldy bureaucracy prevented much foreign investment from flowing into the Slavic countries. For example, from 1991 to the end of 2001, foreign direct investment (FDI) in Russia only amounted to US\$18.2 billion, small compared to the \$46 billion that was invested in China in 2000 alone. Adjusted for population size, only \$15 was invested per person in Russia in 2000. In comparison, FDI amounted to \$224 per person in Hungary and \$1,149 per person in the United States. Until the mid-2000s, Russia was capturing only about half of FDI in the CIS though it accounted for 70 percent of the population. After the mid-2000s, FDI in Russia expanded rapidly and reached a height of about \$70 billion in 2008. The world recession cut this total by at least half in 2009, though 2010 showed some recovery.

Cyprus, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, and the United Kingdom are investing the most.

The greatest amount of investment was mainly by foreign corporations interested in Russia's vast mineral wealth, namely oil, natural gas, and metal ores. The Russian automotive industry also received investment. For example, Volkswagen opened a new \$1.5 billion plant in Kaluga (southwest of Moscow) in 2007 to produce the VW Passat and Škoda Octavia. The company expanded the Kaluga plant in 2009 to increase capacity from 63,000 to 150,000 cars annually. Ford plans to boost its production of the Ford Focus in its plant near St. Petersburg. Mitsubishi, Toyota, Nissan, and Hyundai also plan to increase production at their Russian factories. In 2006, foreign cars outsold domestic Russian cars for the first time.

Other examples of FDI in Russia include Motorola, which is attempting to gain a huge share of the world's third-largest mobile phone market. Wrigley, the world's biggest chewing gum producer, has purchased A. Korkunov, a chocolate maker. In 2008, PepsiCo paid \$1.4 billion for a 76 percent share of a Russian juice maker named JSC Lebedyansky. Then in late 2010, PepsiCo agreed to pay \$3.8 billion for a two-thirds share of Wimm-Bill-Dann Foods, a Russian dairy and juice maker. If completed, it would represent the largest acquisition in Russia by an American company. IKEA has spent over \$2.5 billion in Russia (see Figure 4.24). Now with five stores outside of Moscow, IKEA is illustrating that wealth is beginning to spread beyond the capital city and St. Petersburg.

As noted previously (see the Point-Counterpoint box, p. 156), the Russian government forced many foreign companies to divest their holdings in Russia's natural resources, especially oil and natural gas. These actions have likely prevented some foreign investment. For example, the Russian government's attack on the oil company Yukos led Walmart to decide not to invest in Russia. The Russian government's bullying behavior is part of a set of larger problems. A corrupt bureaucracy and security services perpetuate themselves by skimming profits from natural resource industries. A variety of corruption indexes list Russia as one of the most difficult places to do business, more difficult than Nigeria and only somewhat better than Somalia. This may explain, for example, why IKEA suspended its investments in Russia. Nevertheless, foreign investment is growing dramatically in Russia despite the risks.

### The Russian Federation

The Russian Federation is a large country with considerable geographic diversity. Its political and economic geography requires special treatment. The Russian Federation is

the modern political state representing the land known as Russia. To many Westerners, Russia is a mysterious land, hidden in cold, dark forests on the eastern and northern fringes of Europe. Europeans have regularly included the Russian heartland within Europe but at the same time have considered Russians too “Asiatic” to be European. Europeans struggled for centuries to understand Russia, exemplified by Winston Churchill’s remark that “Russia is a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma.” Depending on their relationship with Europe and their desire to be within Europe, Russians themselves have frequently alternated between emphasizing their European qualities and their wider role spanning eastern Europe and northern Asia.

Many Russians see their country as a world power (see the Point-Counterpoint box on page 156) though economic difficulties seriously challenge this perception. As the Russian Federation struggles to maintain its influence in world politics, its relationships with the former Soviet republics have changed considerably. While external relationships have evolved in new directions, Russia’s internal

political geography and its economic and social relationships have all dramatically altered.

### Political Divisions

The internal political geography of the Russian Federation includes a mixture of political units. To a large extent the political geography of the country was inherited from the Soviet system, though some changes were made after 1991. The Kremlin, the center of government in Moscow, gave up much of its power over the political units in the 1990s but took it back in the 2000s.

The 89 political units fall into two categories: administrative and autonomous. The administrative units consist of 6 federal territories (*krais*), 49 regions (*oblasts*), and 2 federal cities (Moscow and St. Petersburg). Much like the states, counties, and municipalities of the United States, they were created to administer the large country. In contrast, the autonomous units, consisting of 21 republics, 1 autonomous region (*oblast*), and 10 autonomous districts (*okrugs*) (Figure 4.29), are able to craft many of their own laws and



**FIGURE 4.29** Russian Federation and Its Administrative Divisions. Notice the uneven allocation of power.

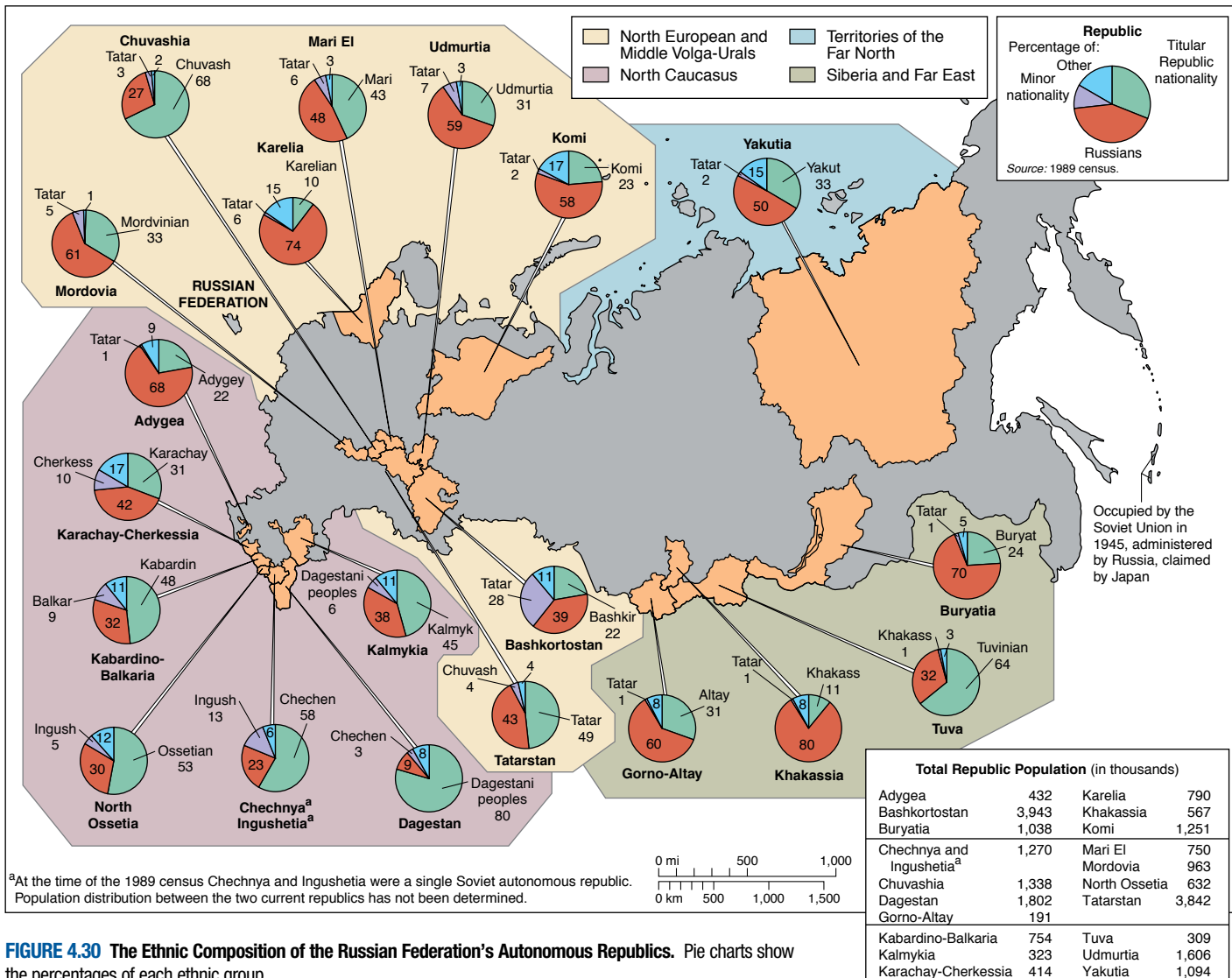
govern themselves somewhat differently than in the rest of the Russian Federation. The resource-rich republics tend to exercise the greatest authority over their own governance.

The autonomous territories were established by the Soviet Union to reflect the presence of ethnic minorities such as the Tatars and Sakha (Yakuts). Soviet law protected minority languages, religions, and cultures. However, only 52 percent of the Russian Federation's approximately 30 million non-Russians live today in the autonomous territories. As a way of controlling their vast country, the Soviets drew boundaries for the republics that deliberately left many members of ethnic groups outside their intended territories and included many Russians within them (Figure 4.30). Also, many recognized nationalities did not receive republic status. Of the 90 numerically significant groups recognized in the 1989 census, only 35 had a homeland. In addition to the previously mentioned policies of Russification, boundary drawing was clearly a means that

the Soviets used to divide and dilute non-Russian groups. The situation is particularly true in the North Caucasus, where the native peoples have most fiercely resisted Russian rule through history. For example, the Karbardians were grouped together with the Balkars, though they had more in common with their neighbors the Cherkessians.

The autonomous political units can be summarized into four groups:

*North European and Middle Volga-Urals:* Both areas have been integrated into the Russian state since the 1500s. The peoples of the North European territories mostly practice Eastern Orthodox Christianity. Their territories are largely in the boreal forests, which are agriculturally poor and have low population densities. The economies are resource-oriented, producing fuels for electricity, wood products, and ferrous metals. The Middle Volga-Urals group represents the meeting ground between Finno-Ugrian, Turkic, and Slavic peoples. The large numbers of



**FIGURE 4.30** The Ethnic Composition of the Russian Federation's Autonomous Republics. Pie charts show the percentages of each ethnic group.

Russians are Orthodox Christians, but many of the indigenous peoples are Muslims. Located in the mixed forest and forest–steppe region, these territories have economies that vary considerably, from traditional agriculture to extractive industries and modern manufacturing.

*North Caucasus:* Several autonomous territories occupy the foothills on the northern side of the Caucasus Mountains. Some extend into the steppe. Most of the peoples are Muslims, but Christians live in the area, too. The Russians were not able to exert full control over the area until the mid-1800s. Ethnically and linguistically, the area is one of the most complex places in the world. The various peoples, however, share certain economic and cultural similarities that facilitate a “mountaineer” identity. Their shared opposition to Russian rule has fostered cooperation with one another. The Chechens in particular have resisted Russian rule. Their attempts to make Chechnya independent of Russia since 1991 have resulted in bloody military conflicts between themselves and the Russian army.

*Siberia and the Far East:* These autonomous territories stretch east, with many along the Chinese and Mongolian borders. They contain Turkic or Mongolian peoples (Figure 4.31). Many are Buddhists and practiced nomadic herding until they were incorporated into the Soviet Union. They often keep their traditional ways of life amid large pockets of Russians who engage in extractive industries and raw material and food processing. Tuva was annexed only as recently as 1944. The 1993 Tuvan constitution claims complete sovereignty for the republic and the right of secession, though this policy violates the constitution of the Russian Federation. Violence directed at Russians caused many Russians to leave.

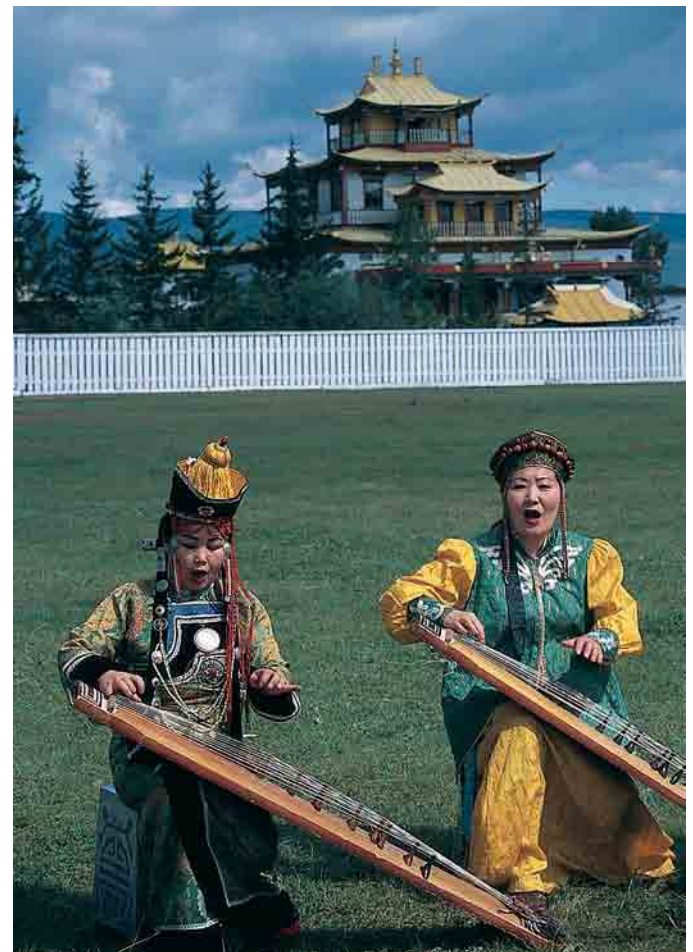
Stalin created the Jewish (Yevrey) Autonomous Oblast in 1934 and designated it as a homeland for Soviet Jews. It was hoped that it would be a counterattraction to Palestine (now Israel), but its remote location and harsh environment made it unattractive. In 1989 only 9,000 Jews lived there. Eighty percent of the population was Russian.

*Territories of the Far North:* More than 30 different ethnic groups live in the far north, many numbering only in the thousands. Seven of the groups have *okrugs* (autonomous districts) and only one, the Yakuts, have their own republic, meaning that the majority of peoples lack a designated homeland. The territories are rich in diamonds, gold, iron ore, timber, and other natural resources. During Soviet times, a flood of Russians seeking to exploit these resources reduced the percentages of the indigenous peoples to less than 16 percent in the *okrugs*. The Russians concentrated in towns associated with industry. Pipelines, other modern infrastructure, and the resulting pollution made it difficult for the indigenous peoples to practice their traditional ways of life, which include hunting, fishing, and reindeer herding. The Association of Peoples of the North formed in 1989 to voice the concerns of the indigenous peoples.

## Heartland and Hinterland in Russia

Another basis of regional differences in Russia is **heartland** versus **hinterland**. The heartland lies west of the Urals and includes many of the original territories of Rus’ and then Muscovy. It contains the greatest concentration of Russian people and accounts for much of the country’s economic and political activity. It is also known as the Russian homeland. The Moscow and St. Petersburg urban regions, the Volga River valley, and the Urals contribute to the heartland’s prominence. The Moscow region, approximately 400 km (250 mi.) square, is home to 50 million people and was the focus of Soviet central planning and transportation routes linking the entire country. Local manufacturing includes vehicle, textile, and metallurgical industries. St. Petersburg, a major Baltic port north of Moscow, is a smaller manufacturing center but still produces around 10 percent of the total Russian output, including shipbuilding, metal goods, and textiles.

Southeast of Moscow, the Volga River is lined by a series of industrial cities that use the river, linked since the 1950s by a canal outlet to the Black Sea. Around 25 million people



**FIGURE 4.31** Russia. Buryat singers at Datsan Temple (southeast of Irkutsk).  
Photo: © Ronald Wixman.



## 4.4 TEST YOUR UNDERSTANDING

### Summary

The Slavic countries share a similar history and culture. The Russian Federation is larger than all the others combined, and it is difficult for the other Slavic countries to break their dependence on the Russian Federation. The Russian Federation reorganized its internal political geography to give greater power to local voices, for both ethnic minorities and Russians. A heartland and hinterland distinction is significant within the Russian Federation. Economic restructuring continues, and new trading links develop as the Slavic countries compete in the global economy.

### Questions to Think About

**4.4A** What are the cultural similarities and differences among the peoples of the Slavic countries?

**4.4B** What kinds of foreign direct investments (FDIs) are the Slavic countries receiving, and what new trade links are the Slavic countries developing with one another and the rest of the world?

**4.4C** How is the Russian Federation's internal political geography structured?

### Key Terms

heartland  
hinterland

## 4.7 THE SOUTHERN CAUCASUS

Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan straddle the Caucasus Mountains and are frequently called the *Transcaucasus*, meaning “across the Caucasus” (Figure 4.33 and Table 4.2). This term reflects a Russian ethnocentric view of the region: these countries are on the other side of the Caucasus Mountains from Russia and were once Russian colonies. The more neutral term “Southern Caucasus” is used to refer to these countries, and “Northern Caucasus” is applied to the part of the Caucasus in the Russian Federation.

Armenia and Georgia are both mountainous with many peaks rising above 5,000 m (15,000 ft.). Azerbaijan is mountainous in the west along the borders of Georgia and Armenia, but the eastern areas of the country, formed by the Caspian Sea coast, are flat with areas below sea level. The origins of the word *Azerbaijan* are not clear, but one version derives from Persian words that mean “land of fire.” “Land of fire” could refer to the surface oil deposits that burned naturally in the past or to the oil fires in Zoroastrian temples that once dominated the region. Zoroastrianism is less prominent in this subregion today (although its modern-day adherents are in India and are known as Parsis), but it is a religious forerunner to Christianity and Islam, tracing its origins back to Azerbaijan. Zoroastrians believed that the Earth would be consumed in fire following judgment day. Interestingly, this belief developed in an area of the world where the Earth is oil-soaked and burns easily.

### Countries

Though the three countries of the Southern Caucasus are relatively new, the peoples and political relationships

extend far back into history. Armenians, for example, trace their ancestors back to 6000 BC. In the 100s BC the Armenian empire controlled most of the Southern Caucasus and stretched across what is now northern Iran, Iraq, Syria, and eastern Turkey. Modern Armenia is small compared to its predecessors and does not even include a majority of all Armenians. Important historical places,



**FIGURE 4.33** The Southern Caucasus: Countries, Cities, and Major Physical Features. Darkened areas within countries represent areas that have acted autonomously, often without the consent of their respective central governments.



## GEOGRAPHY AT WORK

### Policy Analysis

During Soviet times, social sciences such as political science and international affairs generally were neglected. After Georgia regained its independence in 1991, geographers largely filled the need in these areas. This meant that human geographers primarily became the first generation of Georgia's diplomats in 1990s. Since then, many geographers have been pursuing successful careers in the Georgian Foreign Service, serving as ambassadors in many countries (among them the United States) and as directors of various departments and units of the ministry. Among them is David Abesadze, who is head of the Policy Analysis Division of the Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. At the same time, he is assistant professor of Human Geography on the faculty of Social and Political Studies at Tbilisi State University.

Dr. Abesadze (see photo) graduated from Tbilisi State University and holds BA and MA degrees in human geography and a PhD in political science. He also studied political science at the Central European University (Hungary), where he earned an MA degree. He has been a fellow of nondegree programs at Stanford and Georgetown Universities, and a visiting scholar at the George Washington University and Johns Hopkins University.

Dr. Abesadze has many responsibilities at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia. For example, he regularly



**Dr. David Abesadze, Head of Policy Analysis Division of the Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.**

Photo: Courtesy David Abesadze.

monitors and analyzes regional and functional issues, predicts future situations, and recommends alternative courses of action to the ministry's leadership. He also works on certain analytical issues as tasked by the ministry's leadership and cooperates with the academic community, nongovernmental organizations, and think tanks to exchange expert views on matters relevant to Georgia's foreign policy.

Generally speaking, Dr. Abesadze's daily work at the ministry requires in-

depth analysis and prognosis of developments in world politics. He finds that being a geographer is highly advantageous to the performance of his duties. The extremely complex and dynamic nature of international politics makes it difficult for an observer to properly understand processes. Geography's ideas and principles remain highly applicable to a rapidly changing world. Therefore, Dr. Abesadze finds knowledge of geography and the skills of spatial analysis useful tools in pursuing his analytic work.

such as the medieval capital Ani and Mount Ararat, the historically accepted landing place of Noah's ark, are now in neighboring Turkey. This situation illustrates that the modern Armenian state encompasses only the eastern portion of historic Armenia.

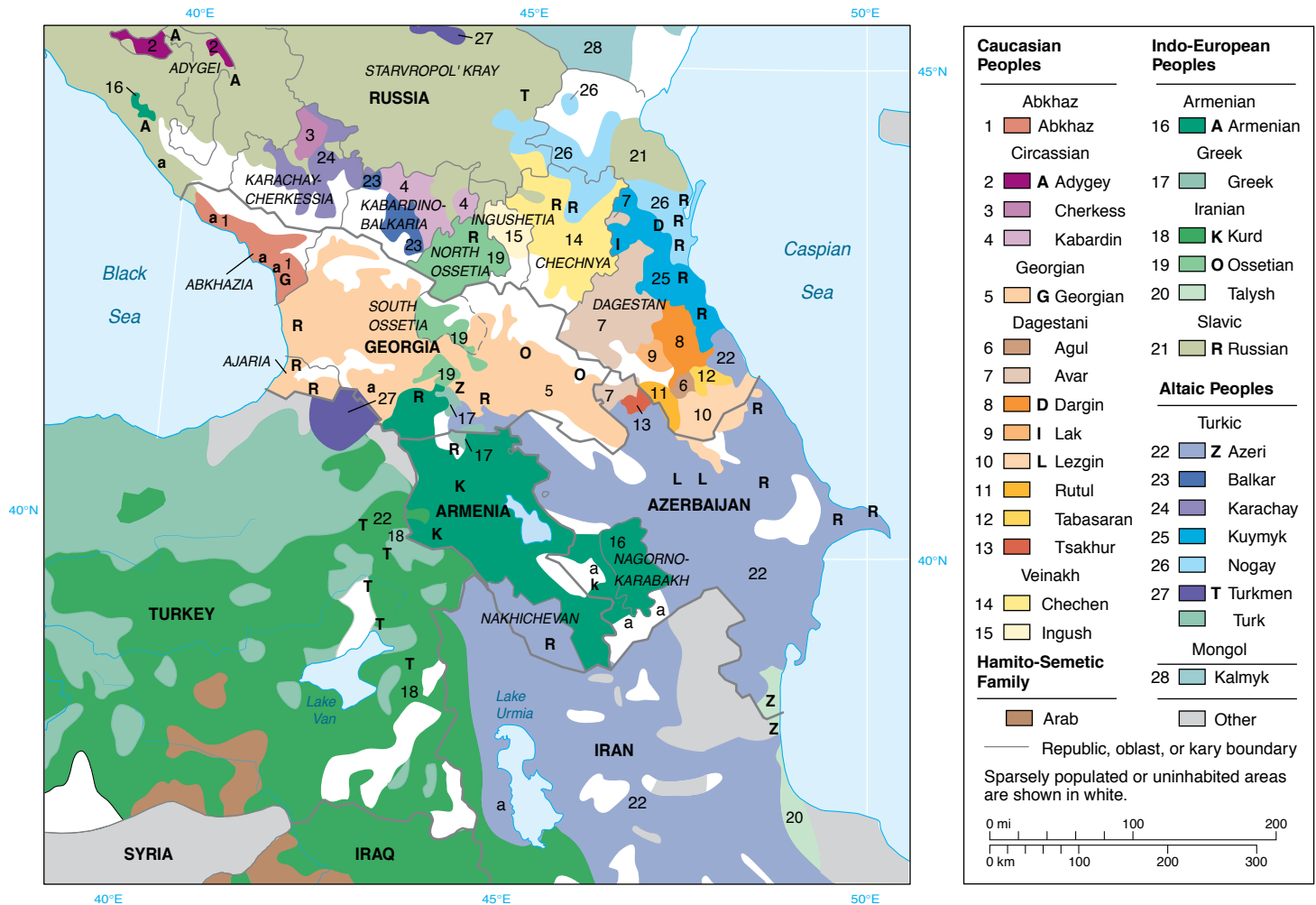
Georgians have lived in the Southern Caucasus almost as long as Armenians and likewise built empires that stretched across the subregion and beyond, reaching their height of power from the AD 1000s to 1200s. It was around this time that the Azerbaijanis (also known as Azeris) emerged as a people in the subregion.

Independence and self-rule are features of the distant past. Over the last 800 years, the peoples of the Southern Caucasus were ruled from the outside. The most notable foreign rulers were the Russians, who took control in

the 1800s and continued exercising their power until the Soviet Union dissolved in 1991. As former Soviet republics, Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan struggle with establishing a viable political and economic existence (see *Geography at Work: Policy Analysis*). Located between Russia, Iran, and Turkey, these countries reflect the differing cultures and political views of their larger neighbors. Past outside political control and continuing outside influence create tension and conflict between the countries of the Southern Caucasus.

### Culture

Though the Southern Caucasus is a small area of the world, the subregion is culturally very diverse (Figure 4.34), partly



**FIGURE 4.34 Ethnelinguistic Groups in the Caucasus Region.** Compare the distribution of groups to the location of political boundaries. Do these comparisons help to explain conflict in the subregion?

because it lies at the historic contact zone between the Turkish, Persian, and Russian empires. Many languages are spoken in the subregion. They are of different language families, so most have little in common. The Georgian language is in the Caucasian language family and has a unique alphabet. Armenian is Indo-European but stands alone in its own branch and has a distinct alphabet of 38 letters, derived mostly from Greek. Azerbaijani is in the Ural-Altai language family (see Figure 2.16).

The Georgians (see Chapter Opener) and Armenians are both Christian, and both adopted Christianity early in history, in the AD 300s. The Armenians claim their country was the first in the world to adopt Christianity officially. The Armenian Apostolic Church has been independent since the Middle Ages and expresses a unique view of Christianity. The Georgian Church is associated with the Eastern Orthodox Christian churches.

Arabs introduced Islam in the 600s and 700s into Azerbaijan. In the 1500s the Shia branch of Islam came to the country and now dominates, making Azerbaijan and

Iran the only two countries in the world where Shia Islam is practiced by the majority of the population and controls the government. Despite their close ties with Iran, Soviet secular policies influenced Azerbaijanis greatly. For example, Azerbaijani Muslims, unlike those in Iran, drink wine, and women are not veiled or segregated (Figure 4.35). In 1991 the Azerbaijani government also went against the wishes of Iran and adopted a modified Latin alphabet for Azerbaijani instead of the Arabic alphabet—the original alphabet of the Qu’ran and the alphabet used in many Muslim countries. The Latin alphabet is customarily used in Roman Catholic and Protestant countries but also in nearby Turkey, where the language is similar to Azeri.

## Ethnic Peace and Conflict

History has given rise to differing cultural combinations in the Caucasus. Some ethnic groups are closely related and others are not. Many live in peace, while others are locked in conflict. For example, the Ajarians, who have an autonomous

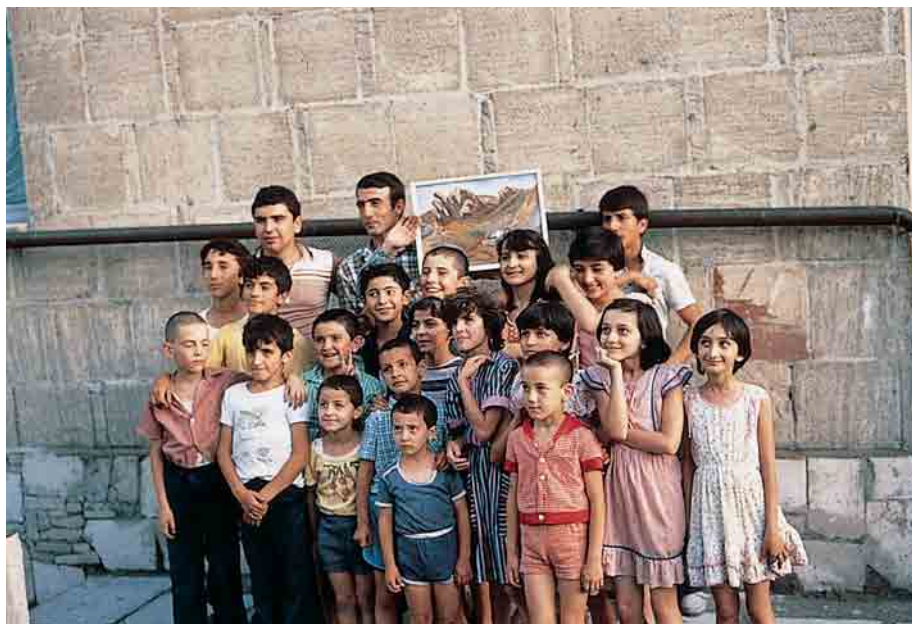
republic in Georgia (see Figure 4.33), live peacefully with the Georgians, though they are Muslims and the Georgians are Christians. Despite differing religions, the Ajarians are indistinguishable from Georgians, and most Ajarians consider themselves Georgians.

Relations among other groups have not been so peaceful. The Ossetians and Abkhaz both have their own autonomous republics within Georgia, but they distrust the Georgians and feel no loyalty to the Georgian state. Both groups sought independence for their republics in 1991 and 1992, but the Georgian military intervened and great bloodshed resulted. The Russian army helped to maintain a cease-fire in South Ossetia. Though Russian military personnel aided the Abkhaz cause, the Russian government worked with the UN to establish a cease-fire in Abkhazia.

The persecution of Armenians has had a lasting effect on this part of the world. In 1895 the Ottoman government massacred 300,000 Armenians within its realm. Again in 1915, during World War I, the Ottoman government tortured, exterminated, and deported its Armenian population, claiming that the Armenians were a threat. Somewhere between 600,000 and 2 million Armenians were exterminated out of a prewar population of about 3 million in what can be referred to as the “Armenian genocide.” Many Armenians became refugees, migrating across their traditional homeland or leaving it altogether. By 1917 fewer than 200,000 Armenians remained in Turkey.

It was not just this one period that inflicted a toll on Armenians. Over 1,000 years, foreign invaders wreaked havoc numerous times and scattered the population. Today over half of the Armenian population lives outside of Armenia in a diaspora. About half of the diaspora community lives in other CIS countries. The other half lives in communities from India across to Southwestern Asia, Europe, and North America, with a sizable number in the United States. Interestingly, many Armenians in the diaspora speak the western dialects of Armenian, associated with eastern Turkey, formerly in the Ottoman Empire. Armenians in Armenia speak the eastern dialects. Nevertheless, despite dialectical differences, the Armenian diaspora has close ties with Armenia. Many émigrés now serve in the Armenian government, and the Armenian government considers Armenians abroad to be members of the Armenian nation.

One of the largest conflicts since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 involved Armenia and Azerbaijan. In 1924 the Soviet government created an autonomous territory within Azerbaijan known as Nagorno-Karabakh. It was 94.4 percent Armenian. By 1979 Armenians represented only



**FIGURE 4.35** Southern Caucasus. Azerbaijani children. Photo: © Ronald Wixman.

76 percent of the region’s population. Armenians began to fear their loss of numbers and objected to Azerbaijani laws that restricted the development of the Armenian language and culture. Clashes between the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijanis began in the 1960s and developed into war by 1992. Armenian forces of Nagorno-Karabakh seized most of the territory and advanced westward to link their territory with Armenia. Afterward they moved into Azerbaijan proper, but success brought condemnation. The Turkish and Iranian governments warned the Armenians to cease hostilities. Finally, peace talks sponsored by the UN, Russia, Iran, and a number of other countries met with success, and the shooting war ended in 1994. In addition to Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenian forces continue to control approximately 20 percent of Azerbaijan. An official agreement on the governance and the political status of territories has not emerged.

Another large conflict erupted when the Russian military entered Georgia in August 2009 to support South Ossetian separatists (see the Point-Counterpoint box on page 156). In the process, it took control of key transportation routes, destroyed Georgian military bases, sank Georgian ships, and blockaded its main port. The damage weakened Georgia both economically and politically.

## Economic Development

The economies of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan suffered greatly from the ethnic conflicts, even in Armenia, where little fighting took place. In the 2000s, these three countries’ economies steadily improved. All three countries have climates warmer than those of the other former Soviet republics and can produce agricultural products not available to the north. Thus, during Soviet times, for example,

Georgia supplied over 90 percent of the Soviet Union's tea and citrus fruits. Armenia supplied fruits, especially grapes, and Azerbaijan produced tobacco, cotton, and rice.

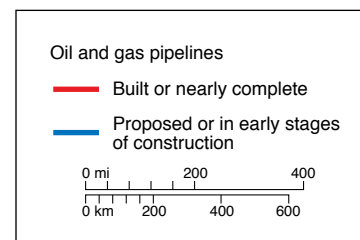
While encouraging agricultural production, Moscow limited industrial development in Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. These policies made these republics heavily dependent on the other Soviet republics, especially Russia, for markets in which to sell their agricultural goods and sources for their industrial goods. Such policies also created a situation in which all three countries still have relatively low ownership levels of consumer goods (see Figure 4.14).

Since 1991, these countries have worked to reduce this dependency on Russia by greatly altering and increasing their industrial and service sectors. Georgia, located on the sunny, warm, eastern shores of the Black Sea, has great tourist potential. For example, an \$80 million Sheraton Hotel opened in Batumi in 2010 and a Radisson is planned for 2012. Azerbaijan, located on the Caspian Sea, will become one of the world's leading oil producers if it is ever able to exploit its oil fields fully. Until recently most pipelines ran through Russia via Grozny (Chechnya) to the Russian port of Novorossiysk (Figure 4.36). This is an example of the Russian Federation's attempts to continue controlling events in the Southern Caucasus. However, a new \$4 billion pipeline leads to Turkey's Mediterranean port of Ceyhan and has allowed a consortium of Western oil companies to pump 1 million barrels a day through it

since early 2006. This pipeline and others are also a source of income for Armenia and Georgia. To avoid continued Russian control in other ways, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan are developing trading relationships with other countries, most notably with Iran, Turkey, the United States, and those in Europe.

## 4.8 CENTRAL ASIA

The former Central Asian republics of the Soviet Union now form five independent countries—Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Kyrgyzstan (Figure 4.37, Table 4.2). These countries have similar landlocked situations, arid or semiarid climates, and widespread Muslim faith. The subregion's fertile river valleys of the Amu Darya and Syr Darya are one of the cradles of human civilization. The area played an important role in the trading of goods and ideas from the time of the earliest civilizations in Mesopotamia, China, and the Indus River valley. Straddling old trade routes between east and west, most notably the Great Silk Road (see Figure 4.10), great cities such as Bukhoro (Bukhara) and Samarqand (Samarkand) (Figure 4.38) emerged. During the 700s and 800s, Bukhoro became one of the leading centers of learning, culture, and art in the Muslim world. Its grandeur rivaled that of the other Muslim cultural centers of



**FIGURE 4.36** Russia and Neighboring Countries: Pipeline Outlets for Caspian Sea Oil and Gas. Russia wants oil and gas exports from the countries of the Southern Caucasus and Central Asia to flow through its Black Sea port of Novorossiysk via the Grozny (Chechnya) pipelines. The countries of the Southern Caucasus and Central Asia and their international oil company partners are examining the routes through Turkey and Ceyhan on the Mediterranean Sea or through northern Iran. How does this example illustrate the interdependence of countries in the world economic system and the importance of individual countries and their actions?