

## **From Sochi to Yerevan (6 x 45')**

**In this fourth series (back in Russia!) Jelle Brandt Corstius travels from Sochi in Russia through the Caucasus to Yerevan in Armenia. Far from political power games and war intrigues, he visits remote mountain villages and meets proud people with a strong desire to be independent.**

### **Episode 1**

Our journey starts on the Black Sea in Sochi, the scene of feverish building for the Olympic Games. Jelle explores Sochi's hinterland, home to the Circassians, a proud Caucasian people with a tragic history. He visits a school where children learn a language with a 72-letter alphabet. Jelle talks to a herdsman and learns what it's like to belong to a tribe. He talks to Syrian refugees, who fled Circassia hundreds of years ago. Are they coming home now?

### **Episode 2**

Stalin was born in the town of Gori, in the mountains of Georgia. He spent his young life in various places in the Caucasus. The house where he was born is still there, complete with gift shop selling Stalin snow globes. How do the Georgians look back at Stalin? Is he a hero or a villain? Or both? Jelle visits the grave of Stalin's first wife, and the prison in Baku where he was once held. Then we head into the mountains. Even in the remotest villages, Stalin's influence can be felt.

### **Episode 3**

We're in Georgia and taking a closer look at the tense relationship with Russia. Little by little Russia is trying to pinch land from Georgia. In 2008 they did so in a war. We visit neighbours who are separated by barbed wire. Visiting the Khevsurs – who have traditionally guarded the Georgia's borders – we see how Russia is slowly but surely moving its border posts.

### **Episode 4**

The north of Georgia, in the Pankisi Gorge, is home to Chechens. They fled Russia during the wars in Chechnya. Now they're residents without a country. Making matters worse, the entire Chechen population was already deported once before, in 1944. We speak to survivors of the deportation. Some youngsters are radicalizing: they leave for Syria or blow themselves up in Russia. Others try to hold on to Chechen traditions and still dream of independence.

## **Episode 5**

Poor Armenia. It's one of the most isolated countries in the Caucasus and thus completely dependent on Russia. The border with Turkey is closed because of the Armenian genocide, which happened 100 years ago and which Turkey still refuses to acknowledge. The border with Azerbaijan is closed because of Nagorno-Karabakh, which is held by Armenia, but is still the site of sniper fire. No wonder that Armenia is the poorest country in the Caucasus, and a relic from the Soviet era.

## **Episode 6**

Whereas things are really bad in Armenia, things couldn't be better in Azerbaijan. And that's all because of oil and gas, which the country has plenty. It was one of the world's first oil industry centres in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and now it's experiencing a new oil boom. We spend the day with an eccentric billionaire, Jelle bathes in crude oil and we explore the rich history of the capital Baku.