

Foreign Policy of the European Union Towards the South Caucasus

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Abstract

The European Union shares many common interests with the South Caucasus countries. After the last enlargement, EU's relations with the South Caucasus countries, have become one of the European Union's main external priorities and this enlargement brought the South Caucasus closer to the EU. In this framework, the European Union is seeking an increasingly close relationship and trying to strengthen ties with South Caucasus countries. The role of the European Union is increasing in this region day by day. Although, lacks of coherent policies for the region, the EU is continuously increase the level of involvement in the South Caucasus. The South Caucasus countries were included in the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) the Black Sea Synergy (BSS), the Eastern Partnership (EaP). EU's regional projects and bilateral and multilateral cooperation with the countries of the region is increasing. The EU gives economic and technical assistance all of the countries of the region, encourages these countries to contribute to the peaceful settlement of Frozen Conflicts which could easily lead to war and cooperates on security threats such as terrorism, organised crime and illegal migration.

Keywords: Eastern Partnership, Black Sea Synergy, European Neighbourhood Policy,

Introduction

The South Caucasus has been transition region for the energy and transportation routes between East-West and North-South Eurasia for centuries. Today, this role continues increasingly. Therefore, the South Caucasus has a growing significance for the EU. One of the major geostrategic priorities of the EU is to create "a ring of friends" outside its borders. Thus, the EU seeks to preserve good relations with this region. Especially, the accession of the new member states to the EU in 2007 strengthened the EU's interest in enhancing relations with the South Caucasus countries. The European Security Strategy stressed "the need to avoid new dividing lines in Europe", and called on the EU to "take a stronger and more active interest in the problems of the South Caucasus". The European Security Strategy also underlines that "We need to extend the benefits of economic and political cooperation to our neighbours in the East while tackling political problems there. We should now take a stronger and more active interest in the problems of the Southern Caucasus, which will in due course also be neighbouring region"¹.

Relations between the EU and the South Caucasus are very important in areas such as energy, transport and security. The EU promotes the cooperation, stability, in the region and encourages dialogue among the states of the South Caucasus, boosting regional economic and trade relations and supports their efforts to conflict settlement in the South Caucasus. The EU also helps to the development of democratic state structures, free market mechanisms in the region and provides technical assistance to these three states in the region. The countries of the South Caucasus became members of the EU's European Neighborhood Policy in 2004. Besides, the EU included the countries in its "Black Sea Synergy" initiative in 2007 and Eastern Partnership in 2009. These South Caucasus countries considers the ENP, BSS and EaP as important factors contributing to their integration into the EU.

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¹ A Secure Europe in a Better World, European Security Strategy, Brussels 12 December 2003, <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/78367.pdf> (21.01.2011)

As a result of the inclusion of all three countries of the region into the ENP, Black Sea Synergy and the EaP, the EU has also increased its interest to the resolution of frozen conflicts in the South Caucasus². Because, with the EU's last enlargement, brings the frozen conflicts of the South Caucasus in closer vicinity of the EU. Frozen conflicts threat to regional stability and constitute a main security problem in the South Caucasus region. These conflicts also closely connected to problems of organized crime, state weakness in the states of the South Caucasus. The resolution of these conflicts is therefore very important for ensure the stability and security in the region³.

The EU is also promoting democracy and human rights in the region and trying to increase political, economic and trade relations within the region and between the EU and the South Caucasus. In this context, important instruments of the EU towards this region are the European Neighbourhood Policy(ENP), Black Sea Synergy (BSS) and Eastern Partnership (EaP). All of the countries of the South Caucasus were included in the ENP in 2004. The inclusion of the South Caucasus to the ENP is very important for regional security and stability. Because, the EU also views the region as an unstable region because of the Frozen Conflicts, terrorism and organized crime. Especially, the Frozen Conflicts threats not only regional security but also international security and security of the EU.

In the context of the ENP, the EU has developed Action Plans with all of these three countries. These Action Plans contains goals to be achieved in the short and medium terms and includes various topics such as energy, Frozen Conflicts, democratization, human rights, poverty etc. With the EaP, the EU is trying to increase political, economic and trade relations with these countries. Moreover, The EU appoints European Union Special representative for the South Caucasus in order to provide the consistency of its activities and developing contact with governments, civil society and other political actors in the region.

Importance of the South Caucasus for the EU and EU's Increasing Involvement in the Region

The priorities of the EU's foreign policy towards the South Caucasus are stability, security, democracy, human rights, security of energy supply, prevent illegal migration from this region to the EU and market economies in the region.

EU citizens supports the EU's involvement in the region as a "near abroad". According to Eurobarometer, 67% of the population of the 27 EU members believe EU's assistance to neighbouring countries will reduce the risk of war or conflicts in Europe. 62 % of EU citizens also believe that close cooperation with neighbouring countries will reduce illegal immigration into the EU⁴.

On the other hand, populations in all three countries are of the opinion that the EU can support their economic and political transformation and see themselves as part of the "family of European nations"⁵. Peoples of the region thinks that the EU can guarantee peace, security, democracy and stability in the region. Each of the three government attaches great importance to relations with the European Union. For example, the Azerbaijani National Security Concept declares "integration with the European and Euro-Atlantic structures" to be the country's second most important policy priority, after restoration of territorial integrity"⁶.

² Rainer Freitag Wirminghaus, "Prospects for Armenia and Azerbaijan between Eurasia and the Middle East", *The Wider Black Sea Region in the 21st Century: Strategic, Economic and Energy Perspectives*, (Ed. Daniel Hamilton and Gerhard Mangot) p.53

³ Svante Cornell, Anna Jonsson, Niklas Nilsson, Per Haggström, "The Wider Black sea Region: An Emerging Hub in European Security", *Silk Road Paper December 2006*, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Silk Road Studies Program, p.60-61. http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/docs/Silkroadpapers/0612Blacksea_P.pdf (Cited on, 02.11.2011)

⁴ The EU's relations with its neighbours, A survey of attitudes in the European Union, September 2007, Special Eurobarometer, http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_285_en.pdf (13.04.2012)

⁵ Armando Garcia Schmidt, *The European Union and the South Caucasus – Three Perspectives on the Future of the European Project from the Caucasus*, Tigran Mkrtchyan, Tabib Huseynov and Kakha Gogolashvili, Europe in Dialogue 2009/01, BertelsmanStiftung, p.11.

⁶ Tabib Huseynov, "The EU and Azerbaijan: Destination Unclear", *The European Union and the South Caucasus – Three Perspectives on the Future of the European Project from the Caucasus*, Tigran Mkrtchyan, Tabib Huseynov and Kakha Gogolashvili, Europe in Dialogue 2009/01, BertelsmanStiftung, p.61.

It also said “*Integration into the European Euro-Atlantic political, security economic and other institutions constitutes the strategic goal of the Republic of Azerbaijan...Close cooperation of the Republic of Azerbaijan with the European Union will contribute to the stability in the Caucasus and will promote the European values in the region*”⁷.

As Mkrtchyan notes Armenia’s European orientation represents a top priority for Armenia’s foreign policy⁸. Moreover, Armenia’s National Security Strategy said “*The development and consolidation of Armenias relations with the European structures, and with the European Union above all, is a priority direction for the country’s foreign policy. The further intensification of the country’s cooperation with the EU will promote the consolidation of democracy, strengthen the rule of law, and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms...Through its regional initiatives, the EU promotes a favourable environment for the establishment of lasting stability and cooperation in the South Caucasus region. Armenias inclusion in the European Neighbourhood Policy is a major step forward toward European integration*”⁹.

Membership of the EU and NATO is also one of the Georgia’s foreign policy priorities. Georgian people thinks their country as European and part of family of Europe. Moreover, Georgia’s National Security Concept, adopted on December 23, 2011, also emphasize the aspiration of the Georgian people to achieve integration into the EU¹⁰. Concept said: “*Georgia aspires to become part of European and Euro-Atlantic structures, which will enable it to consolidate its democracy and strengthen its national security...Deepening cooperation with the EU supports the further strengthening of Georgia’s democratic institutions and security as well as its economic integration with the EU*”¹¹.

After the end of the Cold War, relations between the EU and the South Caucasus region have developed rapidly. As Gogolashvili writes, in the early 1990s, the EU has provided economic aids, financial grants, technical assistance to the South Caucasian states by using of the unified technical assistance instrument TACIS and has developed Partnership and Cooperation Agreements.¹²With the TACIS Program, the EU has provided large amount of technical assistance to the South Caucasus States. Under the TACIS program, Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus –Asia (TRACECA) has been developed in order to increasing transportation infrastructure in the former Soviet Union republics including South Caucasus.

As well as financial and technical aid for countries of the South Caucasus and regional projects like TRACECA and Interstate Oil and Gas Transmission to Europe (INOGATE) are very important for promoting development of the South Caucasus states. Especially, the TRACECA programme provides technical assistance covering rail, road, aviation and maritime transport connections from Central Asia to Europe¹³.

Development of a wide network of transport, oil and gas pipelines and communication linking the Central Asia through the Caucasus to Europe is very important for the EU. “Diversification of the traditional Moscow-centred trade and transport flows and open up newer alternative trade routes to the South is one of the principal aims the TRACECA Programme.

⁷National Security Concept of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 23 May, 2007, http://www.un.int/azerbaijan/pdf/National_security.pdf, (Cited on 30.06.2012)

⁸Tigran Mkrtchyan, “Armenia’s interests in the EU policies”, The European Union and the South Caucasus – Three Perspectives on the Future of the European Project from the Caucasus, Tigran Mkrtchyan, Tabib Huseynov and Kakha Gogolashvili, Europe in Dialogue 2009/01, BertelsmanStiftung, p.14.

⁹Republic of Armenia National Security Strategy, January 26, 2007 http://www.mfa.am/u_files/filedoctrine/Doctrineeng.pdf (Cited on 30.06.2012)

¹⁰Kornely Kakachia, “Georgia’s Identity-Driven Foreign Policy and the Struggle for Its European Destiny”, Caucasus Analytical Digest No. 37, 29 March 2012, p.6-7.

¹¹2011 National Security Concept of Georgia, <http://www.nsc.gov.ge/National%20Security%20Concept.pdf>, p.18 (Cited on 30.06.2012)

¹²Kakha Gogolashvili “The EU and Georgia: The Choice is in the Context”, The European Union and the South Caucasus – Three Perspectives on the Future of the European Project from the Caucasus, Tigran Mkrtchyan, Tabib Huseynov and Kakha Gogolashvili, Europe in Dialogue 2009/01, BertelsmanStiftung, p.95.

¹³Communication From the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament, Black Sea Synergy- Anew Regional Cooperation Initiative, http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/com07_160_en.pdf (03.09.2010)

These alternative transport routes will lead to the South Caucasus states to access European and world markets. Authorities of these Caucasian Countries think better transport and trade routes with the West support the political and economic independence of their countries. These transport and trade routes are also expected to increase further regional cooperation among the partner states”¹⁴.

In 1994, all three states of the South Caucasus began negotiating Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs). PCAs were signed with all three countries of the South Caucasus in 1996 and entered into force in 1999. They are very important factors in the bilateral relations of each of the three countries with the EU¹⁵. “The EU trade relations with each of these three countries are governed by a Partnership and Cooperation Agreements”¹⁶.

PCAs aim to provide a framework for the political dialogue between the parties allowing the development of political relations; to foster their sustainable economic development; to develop its economy and economic relations between the parties; to promote trade and investment; and so to support the efforts to consolidate its democracy; to provide a basis for legislative, economic, social, financial, scientific, technological and cultural cooperation¹⁷.

EU’s appointment of the European Union Special Representative (EUSR) for the region and the inclusion of the all states of the region in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), BBS and EaP demonstrate EU’s intention to play a more active role in the South Caucasus¹⁸. In ENP Action Plan with Armenia, published on March 2, 2005, Armenia was invited “to enter into intensified security, political, economic relations with the European Union”. ENP Action Plan includes eight priority areas for cooperation between Armenia and the European Union: conflict resolution, regional relations, democracy, the rule of law, human rights, combating corruption, economic development and poverty reduction, environment, improvement of investment climate and energy strategy¹⁹.

All of the South Caucasus states have not yet become candidates for EU membership and they will not become candidate for a member of the EU in short or medium term. Yet, the country most willing to join to the EU is Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia is lower than Georgia in implementing reforms for integration with the EU. The EU continues to develop closer political and economic ties with three countries of the region. On the other hand, these countries consider the ENP an opportunity for their further EU integration. The implementation of the ENP is important to both sides: The EU will gain more influence through the ENP. The three South Caucasus states will enable to forge closer ties with the EU²⁰.

Trade between the EU and the South Caucasus countries has increased in recent years. Since 2004, the EU has become the main trade partner of each country (in 2009 trade with the EU represented 30.4 % of overall trade for Armenia, 42.8 % for Azerbaijan and 29.4 % for Georgia). But, these countries’ share of overall EU trade remains less than 0.5 % altogether. 98.8 % of total exports of Azerbaijan to the EU consist of oil and gas. 71.5 % of total exports of Georgia to the EU consist of mineral products. 64.3 % of total exports of Armenia to the EU consist of base metals and derivatives and pearl and other precious stones (% 18.8).

¹⁴ Sanem Özer, “A Common Foreign and Security Policy Towards the Caucasus? With Special Reference to some EU Member States”, Yayınlanmamış Doktora Tezi, İstanbul, 2006, p.138

¹⁵ Tabib Huseynov, “The EU and Azerbaijan: Destination Unclear”, The European Union and the South Caucasus – Three Perspectives on the Future of the European Project from the Caucasus, Tigran Mkrtchyan, Tabib Huseynov and Kakha Gogolashvili, Europe in Dialogue 2009/01, BertelsmanStiftung, p.52.

¹⁶ “South Caucasus”, <http://ec.europa.eu/trade/creating-opportunities/bilateral-relations/regions/south-caucasus/> (10.04.2012)

¹⁷ Sanem Özer, “A Common Foreign and Security Policy Towards the Caucasus? With Special Reference to some EU Member States”, Yayınlanmamış Doktora Tezi, İstanbul, 2006, p.130

¹⁸ Tracey C. German, “Visibly Invisible: EU Engagement in Conflict Resolution in the South Caucasus”, 03 December 2007, <http://www.tandfonline/doi/abs/10.1080/09662830701751144>, (12.04.2012) p.358.

¹⁹ Tigran Mkrtchyan, “Armenia’s interests in the EU policies”, The European Union and the South Caucasus – Three Perspectives on the Future of the European Project from the Caucasus, Tigran Mkrtchyan, Tabib Huseynov and Kakha Gogolashvili, Europe in Dialogue 2009/01, BertelsmanStiftung, p.14.

²⁰ Elkhan Nuriyev, “Azerbaijan and the European Union: new landmarks of strategic partnership in the South Caucasus-Caspian basin”, Southeast European and Black Sea Studies Vol. 8, No. 2, June 2008, p.156.

Moreover, all three South Caucasus countries benefit from the EU's Generalised System of Preferences (GSP). GSP is offering them a particularly advantageous access to the EU market²¹. The Georgian Government started negotiations with the European Union over an agreement on a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) in December 2011. The agreement requires Georgia to allow more regulation, curb monopolisation and conduct meaningful institutional reforms. These negotiations would lead toward more transparency in Georgia's economy, fewer technical barriers to trade²².

On the other hand, the EU decided to launch negotiations on a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area with the Armenia in order to boost economic growth and investment with the Armenia. EU Trade Commissioner Karel De Gucht said *"The EU is Armenia's first trade partner and a deep and comprehensive free trade area will enable closer economic integration of Armenia with the European Single Market thereby helping the boost economic growth in the country."* The free trade area will be part of the broader Association Agreement which has been negotiated with Armenia since July 2010, in the framework of the Eastern Partnership and the European Neighbourhood Policy²³.

Georgia and Armenia have been members of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) since 2000 and 2003 respectively. Azerbaijan applied for membership in 1997, and the process is still ongoing.²⁴

In 2008, a feasibility study on possible future Free Trade Areas (FTAs) between the EU and respectively Armenia and Georgia – both WTO members- showed that deep and comprehensive FTAs could bring significant economic benefits to both countries. As regards Azerbaijan, the country first needs to accomplish its accession to the WTO before negotiation of an FTA could be considered. In this context, Azerbaijan is receiving technical assistance from the EU to help it to prepare for membership. Therefore, the future Association Agreement between the EU and Azerbaijan, negotiations on which also began in mid-July 2010, will include only an objective of negotiating a deep and comprehensive FTA in the future once Azerbaijan has become ready for it²⁵.

In EU Foreign Affairs Council, on 8 December 2009, the EU reaffirmed its intention to promote stability, cooperation, prosperity and good governance in the South Caucasus including through technical assistance programs²⁶.

Frozen Conflicts and Importance of Security and Stability in the South Caucasus for the EU

There are many problems in the South Caucasus for the EU which want to be surrounded by ring of friendly and stable states. In this context, Frozen Conflicts in this region not only destroy infrastructure, but also encourages criminality and illegal migration; They also deters investments and economic and trade relations²⁷. Nagorno Karabakh, South Ossetia and Abkhazia conflicts are key impediments to further regional cooperation peace and stability in the South Caucasus²⁸.

²¹ "South Caucasus", <http://ec.europa.eu/trade/creating-opportunities/bilateral-relations/regions/south-caucasus/> (10.04.2012)

²² George Khelasvili; "Georgian Foreign Policy: Holding the Line amid Uncertainty", Caucasus Analytical Digest No.37, 29 March 2010, p.9

²³ "EU launches free trade negotiations with Armenia", 20 February 2012 Bilateral relations Brussels, <http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/press/index.cfm?id=777>, (10.04.2012)

²⁴ "South Caucasus", <http://ec.europa.eu/trade/creating-opportunities/bilateral-relations/regions/south-caucasus/> (10.04.2012)

²⁵ "South Caucasus", <http://ec.europa.eu/trade/creating-opportunities/bilateral-relations/regions/south-caucasus/> (10.04.2012)

²⁶ "EU Strategy for the South Caucasus", http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/EU_Strategy_for_the_South_Caucasus, (Cited on 30.05.2012)

²⁷ A Secure Europe In a Better World, European Security Strategy, Brussels 12 December 2003, <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/78367.pdf> (21.01.2011)

²⁸ Tabib Huseynov, "The EU and Azerbaijan: Destination Unclear", The European Union and the South Caucasus – Three Perspectives on the Future of the European Project from the Caucasus, Tigran Mkrtchyan, Tabib Huseynov and Kakha Gogolashvili, Europe in Dialogue 2009/01, BertelsmanStiftung, p.49.

The issue of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) are important problems in the Caucasus. The EU is concerned of refugees and IDPs. Peaceful settlement of the Nagorno Karabakh, South Ossetia and Abkhazia conflicts would boost stability in the region and strengthen regional security and cooperation. In this context, the EU should take a more active role to facilitate settlement of these three conflicts²⁹. According to Mkrtchyan, if the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is solved peacefully, realization of ENP plans with Armenia and Azerbaijan will be difficult³⁰.

Nagorno Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia conflicts are threats not only for stability in the Caucasus region, but also for the EU. These conflicts undermine efforts in the field of regional cooperation, impeding economic development and further destabilising the area and create security vacuums that are outside of government control, providing ideal conditions for security problems such as terrorism, organised crime and illegal migration³¹.

In the Commission's Communication on "European Neighborhood Policy Strategy Paper" of 12 May 2004, Commission recommends *"Increased efforts to promote the settlement of conflicts in the region and to develop good neighbourly relations are needed. Concrete steps forwards needed to be made by each of the three countries to make further progress in implementing their respective Partnership and Cooperation Agreements, in particular to strengthen the rule of law, and to promote conflict settlement"*³²

Current EU involvement in the resolution of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is very limited. The EU has adopted a "wait and see" approach to the Nagorno Karabakh conflict. Because, there is not any consistent EU strategy for the South Caucasus. It has not been actively involved in the Nagorno Karabakh conflict resolution process. It only provides its support to the OSCE and the UN in their efforts to solve the frozen conflicts in the region. Financial assistance from the European Commission is the most direct form of support for conflict resolution. The EU has provided important financial aid for the rehabilitation of territories damaged during the conflict, railway line, electricity supplies, drinking water and irrigation and the reconstruction of schools³³. The EU should follow a more proactive policies in bringing about a resolution to the three frozen conflicts, which are the main obstacles to regional cooperation. According to Miester, "the EU should take over from France the position of the Co-Chair in the Minsk Group"³⁴.

There is a need to find new ways of spreading security beyond its borders to ensure the long term stability of the EU, together with the security of its citizens. Unstable peripheries, such as the South Caucasus, pose a threat because their instability could spill over into security core and thus threaten the gains already accomplished there in terms of stable security. German Defence Minister Volker Ruhe's statement that "Western Europe has to project stability to the East; otherwise instability will come to the west" reveals the position of Europe in the face serious threats. Therefore, the EU has taken steps towards boosting its involvement in conflict resolution efforts in the South Caucasus³⁵.

The EU should support the South Caucasus countries's efforts to combat security threats such as terrorism and organised crime.

²⁹ Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament Wider Europe- Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours, Brussels, 11.3.2003 COM (2003) 104 final, http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/com03_104_en.pdf (12.04.2012)

³⁰ Tigran Mkrtchyan, "Armenia's interests in the EU policies", The European Union and the South Caucasus – Three Perspectives on the Future of the European Project from the Caucasus, Tigran Mkrtchyan, Tabib Huseynov and Kakha Gogolashvili, Europe in Dialogue 2009/01, BertelsmanStiftung, p.34

³¹ Tracey C. German, "Visibly Invisible: EU Engagement in Conflict Resolution in the South Caucasus", 03 December 2007, <http://www.tandfonline/doi/abs/10.1080/09662830701751144>, (12.04.2012) p.358.

³² Communication From the Commission European Neighbourhood Policy Strategy Paper, {SEC(2004) 564,565,566,567,568,569,570} http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/strategy_paper_en.pdf (Cited on 30.06.2012)

³³ Tracey C. German, "Visibly Invisible: EU Engagement in Conflict Resolution in the South Caucasus", 03 December 2007, <http://www.tandfonline/doi/abs/10.1080/09662830701751144>, (12.04.2012) p.367.

³⁴ Stefan Miester, "A new core for the EU South Caucasus Policy", <http://www.easternpartnership.org/publication/2010-11-18/new-core-eu-south-caucasus-policy>, 18.11.2010, (Cited on 30.06.2012)

³⁵ Tracey C. German, "Visibly Invisible: EU Engagement in Conflict Resolution in the South Caucasus", 03 December 2007, <http://www.tandfonline/doi/abs/10.1080/09662830701751144>, (12.04.2012) p. 358.

Russia interested in the South Caucasus and follows proactive policies in the region as a former hegemon of the region. Russia is trying to use Nagorno Karabakh conflict for keeping its leading positions in the region. If the Nagorno Karabakh Conflict remain unresolved, Russia will continue to influence on Azerbaijan³⁶. Therefore, Armenia's military, political and economic dependence on Russia is another question in the region.

European Parliament resolution of 20 May 2010 on the need for an EU strategy for the South Caucasus focused on frozen conflicts in the region. EP *“considers that the EU needs to play more active political role and develop strategy to assist the transformation of the South Caucasus into a region of sustainable peace, stability and prosperity and to use fully its potential to contribute to fully...guaranteeing peace, security and stability in the region is essential for improvement of the standard of living, for the achievement democratic standards and respect for human rights for all, and to maximise regional and macro-regional development opportunities...”*³⁷.

The European Neighbourhood Policy and the South Caucasus

With the ENP the EU started a new relationship which would not, include a perspective of membership in the short or medium term. Thus “EU aims avoid drawing new dividing lines in Europe and to promote stability and prosperity within and beyond the new borders of the Union. It also aims to develop a zone of prosperity and a friendly neighbourhood- a ‘ring of friends’- with whom the EU enjoys close, peaceful and co-operative relations”³⁸.

The EU's strategy for the ENP was elaborated in the Commission's Communication on “European Neighborhood Policy Strategy Paper” of 12 May 2004³⁹. With this strategy paper, the European Commission also recommends the inclusion of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia within the scope of the ENP. This document underlines “a ring of countries sharing the EU's fundamental values and objectives”; an increasingly close relationship, economic and political integration. The main rationale of the ENP is “all but membership” or “sharing everything but institutions”⁴⁰.

In 2003, when the EU launched its European Neighbourhood Policy, the South Caucasus was initially not even included. South Caucasus was included in the ENP soon after its initiation. Thus, inclusion of the South Caucasian states in the ENP could be considered as a new stage in the EU's engagement in the region.⁴¹

As German noted, the EU's former external relations commissioner “Benita Ferrero Waldner has described the ENP aimed at using the EU's soft power to leverage reforms that will facilitate the expansion of the zone of prosperity, stability and security”⁴².

As Bağcı notes, the Action Plans are political agreements that are not binding. The level of cooperation with the EU rests on the desire of each country. There are many issues in action plans such as political dialogue, economic and social cooperation and development, trade related issues market and regulatory reform Justice and Home Affairs, transport, energy, information society, environment, research and development.

³⁶ N. Nechayeva-Yuriychuk, “The Frozen Conflicts Influence on Security and Energy Stability in Black Sea Region”, Proceedings of the Third International Symposium on the Strategy and Security Studies, İstanbul, April 15-16 th 2010, p.214.

³⁷ Draft Report on a EU Strategy for the South Caucasus, (2009/2216(INI)) Committee on Foreign Affairs, 11.1.2010, http://europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/afct/pr/799/799032/799032en.pdf, (Cited on 01.07.2012)

³⁸ Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament Wider Europe- Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours, Brussels, 11.3.2003 COM (2003) 104 final, http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/com03_104_en.pdf (12.04.2012)

³⁹ Communication From the Commission European Neighbourhood Policy Strategy Paper, {SEC(2004) 564,565,566,567,568,569,570} http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/strategy_paper_en.pdf (Cited on 30.06.2012)

⁴⁰ Hüseyin Bağcı, “The Neighborhood Policy: Putting Old Wine in a New Bottle? A Turkish Perspective”, 2. Uluslararası Strateji ve Güvenlik Çalışmaları Sempozyum Bildirileri, Beykent Üniversitesi Stratejik Araştırmalar Merkezi, p. 30.

⁴¹ Kakha Gogolashvili “The EU and Georgia: The Choice is in the Context”, The European Union and the South Caucasus – Three Perspectives on the Future of the European Project from the Caucasus, Tigran Mkrtchyan, Tabib Huseynov and Kakha Gogolashvili, Europe in Dialogue 2009/01, BertelsmanStiftung, p.99.

⁴² Tracey C. German, “Visibly Invisible: EU Engagament in Conflict Resolution in the South Caucasus”, 03 December 2007, <http://www.tandfonline/doi/abs/10.1080/09662830701751144>, (12.04.2012) p.360.

Given the wide range of areas covered by the ENP, the Commission offered a new financial instrument called “European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) to finance costs of implementation of Action Plans⁴³.

“Black Sea Synergy” and the South Caucasus

The Black Sea region includes Greece, Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania and Moldova, Ukraine, Russia, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. Although, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Moldova and Greece are not littoral states but, their history, proximity and close ties make them natural regional actors⁴⁴.

Black Sea Synergy initiative launched by the April 15, 2007 EC Communication to the Council and European Parliament. The main aim of the Black Sea Synergy is the development of cooperation within the Black Sea region and also between the region and the European Union⁴⁵.

At the outset, Black Sea Synergy would focus on those issues and cooperation sectors which reflect common priorities. Consequently, this communication formulates a number of short- and medium-term tasks related to these areas. Democracy, respect for human rights and good governance, managing movement and improving security, the Frozen Conflicts, energy, transport, environment, maritime policy, fisheries, trade, research and education networks, science and technology, employment and social affairs and regional development⁴⁶.

Eastern Partnership and the South Caucasus

Last important initiative in the EU’s involvement in the South Caucasus is the Eastern Partnership. The European Union launched the Eastern Partnership initiative at its Prague Summit on 7 May, 2009, setting within the framework of its Neighborhood Policy, goal of developing economic and political relations between the EU and six countries of the Black Sea region⁴⁷. The EU and six partners adopted following joint declaration: “*The main goal of the Eastern Partnership is to create the necessary conditions to accelerate political association and further economic integration between the European Union and interested partner countries. The significant strengthening of EU policy with regard to the partner countries will be brought about through the development of a specific Eastern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy. With this aim, the Eastern Partnership will seek to support political and socio-economic reforms of the partner countries, facilitating approximation towards the European Union. This serves the shared commitment to stability, security and prosperity of the European Union, the partner countries and indeed the entire European continent*”⁴⁸.

The EaP creates new possibilities for deepening bilateral relations and multilateral relations. It has brought in particular a perspective of new enhanced bilateral framework agreements –Association Agreements- between the EU and its Eastern Neighbours, and firmly embedded possible future bilateral deep and comprehensive free trade areas in this framework⁴⁹.

The Eastern Partnership also could develop closer ties among the partner countries themselves. EaP will provide additional impetus to the economic and social and regional development of the partner countries.

⁴³ Hüseyin Bağcı, “The Neighborhood Policy: Putting Old Wine in a New Bottle? A Turkish Perspective”, 2. Uluslararası Strateji ve Güvenlik Çalışmaları Sempozyum Bildirileri, Beykent Üniversitesi Stratejik Araştırmalar Merkezi, s. 30.

⁴⁴ Communication From the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament, Black Sea Synergy- Anew Regional Cooperation Initiative, http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/com07_160_en.pdf (03.09.2010)

⁴⁵ Joint Statement of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the countries of the European Union and of the wider Black Sea area, 14.02.2008 http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/blacksea/doc/joint_statement_blacksea_en.pdf (04.09.2010)

⁴⁶ Communication From the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament, Black Sea Synergy- Anew Regional Cooperation Initiative, http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/com07_160_en.pdf (03.09.2010)

⁴⁷ Eastern Partnership, <http://www.eu2011.hu/eastern-partnership>, (Cited on 04.11.2011)

⁴⁸ Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit Prague, 7 May 2009, Brussels, 7 May 2009 8435/09 (Presse 78) http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/er/107589.pdf (12.04.2012)

⁴⁹“South Caucasus”, <http://ec.europa.eu/trade/creating-opportunities/bilateral-relations/regions/south-caucasus/> (10.04.2012)

It will facilitate good governance, including in the financial sector, promote regional development and social cohesion, support of efforts in the field of democracy and human rights and help to reduce partner countries's socioeconomic disparities⁵⁰.

The partners do not start from the same point in their relations with the EU and do not have identical objectives for their relationship with the EU⁵¹. But they all share a common aim to increase relations. In this context, Association Agreements (AAs) can create a strong political bond and promote further convergence by establishing a closer link to EU legislation and standards⁵².

The EaP adds a new multilateral framework to the EU's relations with its partners. It provides a forum to share information and experience of partners' steps towards transition, reform and modernisation and facilitates the development of common positions and joint activities. On the other hand, there is substantial complementarity between the EaP and the Black Sea Synergy and other regional and international initiatives⁵³.

The Eastern Partnership opens new opportunities for the partner countries. The programme covers major key areas of cooperation: political association, economic integration and visa liberalization. Moreover, it also upgrades the civil society's status in the new programme through Civil Society Forum⁵⁴.

EU's Energy Security and The South Caucasus

The South Caucasian region is located at the junction of Europe, Central Asia and Middle East with rich in natural resources. It is a production and transmission area and it is an important region for the EU's energy supply security. The South Caucasus gives an important opportunity to the EU to ensure its energy supply security and it is therefore an important part of the EU's external energy strategy.

“Azerbaijan's strategic weight in the region has increased in recent years thanks to its role as an energy supplier and transit country” and Western companies have invested a lot in Azeri energy sector⁵⁵. Several oil giants, such as British Petroleum, Total Fina Elf and Statoil have signed partnership agreements with the country. Moreover, the pipeline developments have helped reinforce the perception of Azerbaijan as a reliable energy partner⁵⁶.

The European Union currently relies on Russia for 30% of its oil and 50% of its gas supplies. The biggest partner of the EU on the energy import is Russia who supplies 50 percent of the EU's gas. Moreover, this dependency is higher in the Central and Eastern Countries of the Union⁵⁷. On the other hand, Russian Federation is interested in to keep its status as the main supplier of oil and gas into Europe. But, BTC and BTE pipelines influenced negatively on Russia's positions in the region and these pipelines attaching the countries of the South Caucasus to the EU. When, as a result of the January 2006 Ukrainian-Russian natural gas dispute, Europe's confidence in Russia's supply was shaken, the European Union renewed its search for new non Russian export routes⁵⁸.

⁵⁰ Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit Prague, 7 May 2009, Brussels, 7 May 2009 8435/09 (Presse 78) http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/er/107589.pdf (12.04.2012)

⁵¹ “South Caucasus”, <http://ec.europa.eu/trade/creating-opportunities/bilateral-relations/regions/south-caucasus/> (10.04.2012)

⁵² Communication From the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council, Eastern Partnership, SEC (2008) 2974, COM (2008) 823 final

⁵³ Communication From the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council, Eastern Partnership, SEC (2008) 2974, COM (2008) 823 final

⁵⁴ Leila Alieva “Azerbaijan and Eastern Partnership: partnership through empowerment”, 25.01.2011, <http://www.easternpartnership.org/print/publication/2011-01-25/azerbaijan-and-easternpartnership-through-empowerment>, (29.03.2012)

⁵⁵ Sabine Fischer, “The European Union and security in the Black Sea region after the Georgia crisis”, Southeast European and Black Sea Studies, Vol.9, No.3, September 2009, p.335

⁵⁶ Elkhan Nuriyev, “Azerbaijan and the European Union: new landmarks of strategic partnership in the South Caucasus-Caspian basin”, Southeast European and Black Sea Studies Vol. 8, No. 2, June 2008, p.161

⁵⁷ S.Mohsin Hashim, “Power-loss or power-transition? Assessing the limits of using the energy sector in reviving Russia's geopolitical stature”, Communist and Post Communist Studies, 43 (2010) p.268

⁵⁸ Carol R.Saivetz, “Tangled Pipelines: Turkey's Role in Energy Export Plans”, Turkish Studies, Vol.10, No 1, 95-108, March 2009, p.95

After, the Russian-Ukrainian gas dispute in January 2009 has underscored the need for Europe to ensure its energy security by diversifying its suppliers again and focused new attention on Nabucco Project within the EU⁵⁹. The southern energy corridor and its key project, the Nabucco pipeline has become a priority in the European energy supply diversification debates⁶⁰.

In this framework, EU strongly supports the multiplicity of both suppliers and transport pipelines for its energy supply diversification. Accordingly, the EU seeks to establish a long energy corridor that could bring Eastern Caspian hydrocarbon resources to Western Europe via Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkey and Southeastern Europe⁶¹. In addition to reducing its energy dependence on Russia, creation of an alternative energy corridor between the Caspian Sea and Europe could also decrease the price for natural gas for European energy consumers by increasing the competition in the market⁶².

The EU aims to provide a secure and a safe transit route in the region. Due to the several ethnic conflicts in the region EU's efforts haven't been fully successful so far. Even so, the EU started several projects. In this context, Interstate Oil and Gas Transmission to Europe (INOGATE) is a very important instrument for the EU to ensure the security of energy supplies. It is an important factor in relations between the European Union and the South Caucasus region. It aimed at enhancing energy security and diversifying energy supply.

The pipeline diplomacy of European Union and the US has focused mainly on the creation of the "fourth energy corridor" an east-west energy transit route, bypassing Russia, which connects Europe to gas from Central Asian and Persian Gulf states⁶³. In this context, the Southern Corridor is a priority Project which diversify energy supply routes and increase EU energy security. The Southern corridor includes the Nabucco gas pipeline, Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) and ITGI (Turkey-Greece-Italy pipeline). Furthermore, Trans-Caspian gas pipeline connecting Turkmen and Kazakh gas fields with Europe.

Direct Access to Caspian energy resources is the only reasonable way for the EU to ensure European energy security. The EU needs to back major energy infrastructure projects between Europe and the Caspian region such as Nabucco. According to Miester, this support can attract the east Caspian states into the project and help to resolve the Frozen Conflicts in the region.⁶⁴

At present, the European Union countries receive energy from the Caspian Sea region through Russia. Russia has signed long term import contracts with the Central Asian and Caspian states. It takes Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijani oil and gas at very low price levels, and re-exports these energy supplies to the EU member countries at very high price levels⁶⁵. Therefore, reinforcing pipeline networks will be necessary for ensuring EU's energy supply security and for extending the internal energy market to partner countries⁶⁶. Moreover, rebuilding railway networks would reconnect countries currently separated by conflict and facilitate regional economic restoration⁶⁷.

⁵⁹ Stephen Larrabee, "The United States and security in the Black Sea region", Southeast European and Black Sea Studies, Vol.9, No. 3, September 2009, s.304

⁶⁰ Stefan Miester, "A new core for the EU South Caucasus Policy", <http://www.easternpartnership.org/publication/2010-11-18/new-core-eu-south-caucasus-policy>, 18.11.2010, (Cited on. 30.06.2012)

⁶¹ Elkhan Nuriyev, "Azerbaijan and the European Union: new landmarks of strategic partnership in the South Caucasus-Caspian basin", Southeast European and Black Sea Studies Vol. 8, No. 2, June 2008, p.158

⁶² Oktay Tanrısever, "Turkey as an Energy Corridor Between the Caspian Sea and Europe", [http://blog.lib.umn.edu/whenders/international issues/2010/09/turkey as an energy corridor b.html](http://blog.lib.umn.edu/whenders/international%20issues/2010/09/turkey%20as%20an%20energy%20corridor%20b.html) (01.01.2011)

⁶³ Argyris Tsiaras, "Pipeline Wars a briefing on The Nabucco-South Stream Rivalry and the Geopolitics of Natural Gas in Eurasia", Yale Economic Review Fall 2010, p.22

⁶⁴ Stefan Miester, "A new core for the EU South Caucasus Policy", <http://www.easternpartnership.org/publication/2010-11-18/new-core-eu-south-caucasus-policy>, 18.11.2010, (Cited on. 30.06.2012)

⁶⁵ Oktay Tanrısever, "Turkey as an Energy Corridor Between the Caspian Sea and Europe", [http://blog.lib.umn.edu/whenders/international issues/2010/09/turkey as an energy corridor b.html](http://blog.lib.umn.edu/whenders/international%20issues/2010/09/turkey%20as%20an%20energy%20corridor%20b.html) (01.01.2011)

⁶⁶ Communication From the Commission European Neighbourhood Policy Strategy Paper, {SEC(2004) 564,565,566,567,568,569,570} http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/strategy_paper_en.pdf (Cited on 30.06.2012)

⁶⁷ Ronald Asmus, Thomas de Waal, Jacqueline Hale, Peter Semneby, "Europe and the South Caucasus: The Best Approach?", <http://carnegieendowment.org/2010/11/04/europe-and-south-caucasus-best-approach/i18>, (Cited on 30.06.2012)

In this context, Azerbaijan is not only an oil and gas producer but also an important transit country for oil and gas supplies to the EU from the Caspian Basin and Central Asia. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipelines provide large volumes of oil and gas from Azerbaijan and other Caspian Basin producers to reach European markets.

Recognizing the importance of Azerbaijan, the European Union and Azerbaijani officials signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in Brussels on 7 November 2006 on the strategic energy partnership between the EU and Azerbaijan⁶⁸. The memorandum aims at increasing the security of energy supply to Europe, and at integrating Azerbaijan into Europe's internal energy market⁶⁹.

With this Memorandum of Understanding, EU and Azerbaijan recognize that in the field of energy, the EU and Azerbaijan share convergent interests and both could benefit from the integration of their respective energy markets, thereby enhancing the energy security of both sides. In this context, the gradual harmonisation by Azerbaijan to the EU energy acquis would constitute a significant step towards Azerbaijan's objective of gradual economic integration and deepening of political cooperation with the EU⁷⁰.

European Commission President, Jose Manuel Barroso and President of Azerbaijan, İlham Aliyev also signed a joint declaration on gas delivery for Europe in Baku on 13 January 2011. *“Our common objective is to see the Southern Corridor established and operational as soon as possible...with the creation of this route from the Caspian region to the European market also corresponding to the shared strategic objective of the European Union and Republic of Azerbaijan to diversify gas delivery routes and establish direct energy and transport links”*⁷¹.

On 13 July 2009 Jose Manuel Barroso, the president of the EU commission and prime ministers of five countries have put their signatures to the joint declaration for the Nabucco Gas Pipeline, which is expected to play a crucial role in delivering Caspian energy resources to the European Market. The agreement is accepted as the milestone for the Nabucco Natural Gas Pipeline Project, being planned to carry natural gas from the Caspian and Middle East regions via Turkey to Europe⁷². But Russia impedes the Nabucco Project would bypass Russian territories in delivering Caspian and Central Asian oil and gas to Europe.

As Svante Cornell writes, the energy related cooperation between EU and Azerbaijan increases their interdependence and gives the European Union an important stake in the security, stability and development of the South Caucasus as a whole⁷³.

Conclusion

Its geographic location on the cross roads of major East-West transportation and pipeline routes, in close proximity to Europe and rich oil and gas reserves are making the Caucasus indispensable for the EU. Especially, the South Caucasus connects Central Asian and Caspian oil and gas resources to Europe.

⁶⁸ Elkhan Nuriyev, “Azerbaijan and the European Union: new landmarks of strategic partnership in the South Caucasus-Caspian basin”, Southeast European and Black Sea Studies Vol. 8, No. 2, June 2008, p.162

⁶⁹ Tabib Huseynov, “The EU and Azerbaijan: Destination Unclear”, The European Union and the South Caucasus – Three Perspectives on the Future of the European Project from the Caucasus, Tigran Mkrtchyan, Tabib Huseynov and Kakha Gogolashvili, Europe in Dialogue 2009/01, BertelsmanStiftung, p.65

⁷⁰ Memorandum of Understanding on a strategic partnership between the European Union and the Republic of Azerbaijan in the field of energy, 7 Kasım 2006, http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/energy_transport/international/regional/caucasus_central_asia/memorandum/doc/mou_azerbaijan_en.pdf, (11.04.2012)

⁷¹ Joint Declaration on the Southern Gas Corridor, http://ec.europa.eu/energy/infrastructure/strategy/doc/2011_01_13_joint_declaration_southern_corridor.pdf, (10.02.2011)

⁷² “Intergovernmental Agreement for Nabucco Project is conducted”, <http://www.enerji.gov.tr/index.php?dil=en> (15.05.2011)

⁷³ Tabib Huseynov, “The EU and Azerbaijan: Destination Unclear”, The European Union and the South Caucasus – Three Perspectives on the Future of the European Project from the Caucasus, Tigran Mkrtchyan, Tabib Huseynov and Kakha Gogolashvili, Europe in Dialogue 2009/01, BertelsmanStiftung, p.66 (E.Svante Cornell et al. 2006, The Wider Black Sea Region: An Emerging Hub in the European Security, Central Asia Caucasus Institute, Silk Road Paper)

The European Union wants to decrease its dependence on natural gas resources from Russia and oil resources from the Middle East by creating alternative pipeline routes to transport these supplies.

The accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the European Union in January 2007 has brought the borders of the EU eastwards to the Black Sea and to the South Caucasus and the EU has appeared as a new actor in the region. But, now the EU is also closer to regions of conflict, weak state structures, international terrorism, weapons, drugs and human trafficking. Moreover, the Frozen Conflicts are obstacles to development and democratization, peace and stability in the South Caucasus. The EU can play a positive role in the South Caucasus in a number of different areas.

The EU is continuously increasing its involvement in this region by establishing bilateral and multilateral cooperation. Within its ENP, the BSS and the EaP, the EU is playing an important role in the region.

Although the ENP, the Black Sea Synergy and Eastern Partnership represent positive developments in the EU-South Caucasian relations, the EU should enhance its involvement in the South Caucasus in the future. EU programmes and activities in many fields such as research, education and culture programmes towards South Caucasus should be increased. Moreover, the EU should play a more active role in the Nagorno Karabakh conflict resolution process. Cooperation of the South Caucasus countries with the EU could guarantee a democratic, secure and stable region.

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