

EU Influence on Azerbaijan-Georgia relations after the Second Karabakh War: economic, political, and security perspectives

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Abstract

This research article inspired by Jan Zielonka (2006) book “Europe as Empire: The Nature of the Enlarged European Union” examines the dynamic relations between Azerbaijan and Georgia and contributions of the European Union to these relations. The period researched is after the Second Karabakh War (2020) with special focus on the European Union’s facilitation of relations between the two republics. Both countries have specific linguistic, ethnic, and religious backgrounds which are one of the major considerations in the article. By analyzing the speeches of state leaders after the Second Karabakh War (2020) from both nations made in bilateral meetings in official state visits, categorized into economic, political, and cultural themes the research indicates that Azerbaijan prioritizes economic relations, while Georgia emphasizes political solidarity, particularly mutual assertions of territorial integrity. Furthermore, the article suggests that the EU’s contribution to Azerbaijan-Georgia relations encompasses political, economic, and security fields. The study concludes that the economic field is more actively integrated between Georgia and Azerbaijan, with the EU’s impact being felt first in the economic sector, followed by political and security areas.

Keywords: EU-Azerbaijan-Georgia relations, post-Karabakh War dynamics, economic cooperation, political integration, security collaboration

Introduction

It seems difficult to find a region like the South Caucasus, characterized by its diversity rather than unity. The region comprises three major nations, each with distinct linguistic, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds. These nations-Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia-speak different languages, utilize different alphabets, and have unique ethnic roots. Armenians have ties to Eastern Anatolia and the Middle East (Partizpanyan, 2023), Azerbaijan is a Turkic nation, and Georgians have a heritage unique to the Caucasus. Moreover, religious differences further contribute to the distinctiveness of these nations. Most Armenians adhere to the Armenian Apostolic Church (Martirosyan, 2023), a branch of Oriental Christianity. Georgians identify with Orthodox Christianity (Ghoghoberidze, 2023), while Azerbaijan is predominantly Shia Muslim (Nuruzade, 2016). These differences in

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language, culture, ethnicity, and religion have historically contributed to the distinct identities and separate trajectories of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, making the concept of unity in the South Caucasus a complex and multifaceted challenge. Achieving unity in the diverse South Caucasus region necessitates a remarkable phenomenon capable of overshadowing the inherent differences among its peoples. After eight decades since Karl Marx's call, "Workers of the world, unite!" (Marx & Engels, 2008) reverberated in the South Caucasus, there was a belief that Marxist ideology could transcend the region's inherent differences. However, this ideology merely served to mask these differences for approximately 70 years. Following the dissolution of the USSR, these differences resurfaced with greater clarity and intensity.

However, there exists an additional phenomenon capable of mitigating these differences: economic interests, which necessitate cooperation and integration. The EU might be a good example of the role of economic interdependence in evading the arch grievance and hatred. Europe which harboured countless wars steamed from religious, ethnic and ideological mosaic only managed to come over them in 20th century after the devastating Second World War. Since 1950, Europe, previously marked by persistent battlefields and national animosities, succeeded in reconciling its differences. Regions such as Alsace and Lorraine, historically entrenched in Franco-German conflicts, have undergone a transformative shift, now serving as the cradle of the European Union. Robert Schuman, by emphasizing the potency of economic cooperation, stated, "The solidarity in production thus established will make it plain that any war between France and Germany becomes not merely unthinkable, but materially impossible" (Schuman, 1950). Ernst Haas (1961) and David Mitrany (1961) who made the Neofunctionalism theory famous to explain integration processes in the EU and beyond claims that growing economic interdependence between nations which later will lead to the decline of nationalism and evade national hatred finally result in understanding of importance of integration by newly formed technocrats. This economic integration, they claim that, will necessitate integration of other fields like political, educational, cultural and every detailed part of life. They name this phenomenon as "Spillover Effect".

However, there might be a sceptic approach that there had already been a union between these three states during and after WWI period. It is better, notwithstanding, to understand that those unions were dictates of the historical processes and later the socialist ideology. The will of people and rationality of decisions can be questioned in the process of forming Special Transcaucasian Committee (1917), Transcaucasian Commissariat (1917-1918), and Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic (1918).

A. Moravcsik and F. Schimmelfenning (2009) propose that for an effective and fully functional integration, states need to go through a series of stages. First, they must define their "National Preferences." Next, they should engage in "Substantive Bargains" to align their interests. Finally, they need to establish a regulatory body to oversee the implementation of the agreements, a phase termed the "Institutional Choice" stage (Moravcsik & Schimmelfenning, 2009). However, it is challenging to determine what the national preferences of these states were and whether the subsequent stages were effectively carried out. Historical turmoil often prevented these stages from being fully argued or implemented, as survival became the primary concern.

In the complex geopolitical landscape of the region under study, the convergence of historical legacies from three former imperial powers¹ sets the stage for intricate dynamics and strategic considerations, warranting thorough examination. Several scholars have undertaken efforts to comprehend the geopolitical dynamics in the South Caucasus region especially after the Second Karabakh War (Dugin, 2023; Deen, Zweers, & Linder, 2023; Huseynov, 2024). Some scholars have attempted to analyze the broader geopolitical context, viewing it through the lens of the longstanding confrontation between Russia and Turkey (Isaev, 2020; Yavuz & Huseynov, 2020). Alternatively, other scholars have interpreted the situation as a form of cooperation between Russia and Turkey in the region, amidst the involvement of other powers with vested interests in the area (Isachenko, 2020).

Shiriyev and Kakachia (2013) claimed that Azerbaijan and Georgia stand out in the Caucasus region for their prolonged absence of conflict with each other. They argue that while discussions about relations after the collapse of the Soviet Union once served as a key reference point, the paradigm has shifted and now (refers to the period in 2010s), following the events of the 2008 August war, which resulted in recognizing breakaway republics, Abkhazia and South Ossetia by Russia, the focus has turned to distinguishing between periods before and after that war (Shiriyev & Kakachia, 2013).

Recently, after the Second Karabakh War, another significant milestone has been introduced to further differentiate periods. The aftermath of the war has not only influenced the region but also had repercussions beyond it. For instance, Samkharadze (2022) noted that Georgia's historical strategic ties with Azerbaijan have encountered scepticism and pragmatism due to Russia's involvement, widely recognized as an invader of Georgian territory. Consequently, Georgia refrained from participating in Azerbaijan's 3+3 initiative². Semercioglu (2021) argued that the nature of relations between the two countries shifted from cooperation to pragmatism following the Second Karabakh War, reflecting a new balance of power. Moreover, Huseynov (2024) pointed out Sergey Lavrov's

¹ Russia, Turkey and Iran were once imperial states as Russian (Romanov) Empire, Ottoman Empire and Qajar Empire.

² This was initiated by Azerbaijan to bring 3 South Caucasus republics (Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia) and 3 of their neighbours (Russia, Turkey and Iran) closer to one another.

speech which blamed the West for undermining cooperation under the 3+3 formula in the region. However, contrary to perception, he says that “In fact, the major blow to the 3+3 initiative seems to have been struck by Iran rather than the West” emphasizing Iran’s strong objections to the Zangazur corridor (Huseynov, 2024, p. 73).

Ergun and Valiyev (2024) utilize the concept of "normative power," coined by Ian Manners, to describe the EU's influence on the South Caucasus republics. They assert that the EU initially engaged with the region through Cooperation and Partnership Agreements (1999), deepening relations over time. However, they argue that the EU's approach lacked country-specific policies, instead employing a "one-size-fits-all" strategy, which they deem as a failure in addressing the individual needs and circumstances of each state (Ergun & Valiyev, 2024, pp. 182-183).

Previous research on Azerbaijan-Georgia relations has largely concentrated on the pre-war period, when the geopolitical realities and regional balance of power differed significantly from the post-2020 context. This study, therefore, focuses on the post-Second Karabakh War period to reassess these bilateral dynamics. Additionally, while most existing literature examines the EU’s direct relations with individual South Caucasus states, this article addresses an important gap by analyzing the EU’s indirect influence on bilateral relations between Azerbaijan and Georgia. In doing so, it questions whether the EU's normative power approach remains relevant or whether its traditional economic instruments prove more effective in the evolving geopolitical environment. Another noteworthy gap the article intends to fill is that so far, the role of the EU in the region has been portrayed as that of a normative power, seen as an example of how laws are made and implemented. However, one crucial point has often been overlooked: the original reason for the creation of the EU — beginning with the European Coal and Steel Community and later the European Economic Community — was to revitalize war-torn Europe and, through economic cooperation, eliminate the possibility of future wars. By addressing these gaps this article offers several contributions which can be used scholars want to understand current situation in the region.

The central aim of this research is twofold:

1. To identify and compare the priorities of Azerbaijan and Georgia in their bilateral relations after the Second Karabakh War.
2. To assess the role of the European Union in fostering cooperation between the two countries across economic, political, and security domains.

The research posits that the EU is apt to facilitate economic interactions, leveraging its successful track record in this domain. This article contributes to the existing literature by shifting focus from the EU’s direct bilateral relations with individual South Caucasus states to its indirect but

significant influence on bilateral dynamics, particularly between Azerbaijan and Georgia. It also addresses the question of whether the EU's traditional economic instruments remain more effective than its normative power approach in a rapidly evolving geopolitical environment.

1. Methodology

To grasp the contemporary trend of relations between Georgia and Azerbaijan and assess the EU's contribution, this research comprised two distinct parts: a discourse analysis of speeches by state leaders from both nations. Data primarily sourced from the official website of the President of Azerbaijan and the state media outlet Azertac, supplemented by other news sources for objectivity. Speeches were categorized into two segments: visits to Azerbaijan and visits to Georgia. Importantly, the analysis focused exclusively on visits occurring after the Second Karabakh War, given the altered realities, and shifting priorities in the region. A total of seven high-level mutual visits between Azerbaijan and Georgia after the Second Karabakh War (2020) were analysed. These visits were exclusively at the presidential and head of government level, excluding other official visits by state officials.

The research employed sampling methodology, focusing on the most recent visit of Georgian Prime Minister (16.03.2024). Sentences from these visits were categorized into three groups: economic, political, and cultural. The number of sentences in each category was then counted and compared to discern any trends or shifts in emphasis across the visits. However, there is a major limitation here which is that this result might explicitly describe the period of research and cannot be used for future predictions. Another one is that grouping sentences under the given categories are relative and other people might consider it being part of another category or all of them.

Another part utilized a qualitative content analysis method to understand the EU's contribution. To collect data EU policy documents, press releases, and official statements related to the South Caucasus region and specific initiatives like TRACECA (Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia) and other initiatives after the Second Karabakh War (2020) were chosen. Specific attentions were given to determine the EU's competence in foreign policy initiatives and which steps are welcomed in the region by both states. Moreover, the EU's promotion of relations between Azerbaijan and Georgia was divided into three key dimensions: Political, Economic, and Security. It's important to note that these dimensions can be interpreted variably by different researchers, allowing for flexibility in their scope and depth.

To ensure data validity, triangulation was employed by cross-checking statistical data from both Azerbaijani and Georgian sources. Also published scripts of speeches by both states' medias (in English) were compared to eliminate chance of misinterpretation. And finally, the methodology, results and discussions were reviewed by an expert in international relations and Western Studies to ensure the robustness of the analysis.

2. Nature and priorities of bilateral relations of Azerbaijan and Georgia

Diplomatic relations between Azerbaijan and Georgia were established on November 18, 1992, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union (MFA of Azerbaijan, 2024). These bilateral relations encompass various key areas such as cultural, political, economic, and military cooperation. Among these, the economic field emerges as particularly crucial and well-developed.

The role played by Azerbaijan went beyond economic income for Georgia. Azerbaijan demonstrated itself as a trustworthy partner during hard times. Because of the new, unfriendly regime, Russian policy against Georgia became more severe starting in the middle of 2006. Putin even compared Mikheil Saakashvili to Beria³ (Vaisman, 2006). Gas prices have been threatened to rise from the \$110 per 1,000 cubic meters of gas to \$230 by Gazprom (Myers, 2006). Georgia was notified by Russia that if it were to approve the sale of the Mozdok-Tbilisi-Erivan pipeline (a.k.a. North Caucasus-Transcaucasia Gas Pipeline), the price might be negotiated. The shipment of gas to Georgia would stop on January 1, 2007, if the price could not be agreed upon or the pipeline was not sold. Putin even attempted to entice Azerbaijan to join this initiative and warned the president not to meddle to further isolate and pressure Georgia into agreeing (Shiriyev & Kakachia, 2013, p. 51). Situation started to deteriorate for Georgia considering long winter ahead and to find escape route Georgia's Prime Minister, Zurab Nogaideli, went to Turkey to negotiate the purchase gas from the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline as well as obtain transportation fees (a certain amount of gas to be given to Georgia as fee). A week later, he travelled to Azerbaijan to guarantee the nation's energy security. Here sides agreed to resist Russian hegemony as well as to inform each other in case of new developments. Ultimately, after further bilateral negotiations, Azerbaijan and Georgia struck an agreement in late December 2006 that provided Georgia with 1.3 million cubic meters of gas per day at a cost of USD 120 per 1000 cubic meters, with a rise to \$135 USD in 2007. Additionally, after discussions with the

³ Lavrentiy Beria (1899–1953) was a Soviet politician and one of the most powerful and feared figures in the Soviet Union during the Stalinist era. He served as the head of the Soviet security and secret police, including the NKVD (the predecessor of the KGB), from 1938 until 1946. Beria played a central role in Joseph Stalin's Great Purge, overseeing mass arrests, executions, and deportations of perceived enemies of the state.

leaders of Georgia and Azerbaijan in Tbilisi on February 7, 2007, Turkey decided to provide Georgia a portion of its gas share from Azerbaijan's Shah-Deniz field to shield Georgia from Russia's blackmailing efforts (Shiriyev & Kakachia, 2013).

After the Second Karabakh War, Georgia-Azerbaijan relations could have been predicted to diminish because it was thought that Georgia refrained from joining the initiative of “3+3”, despite maintaining regular relations with Armenia, Iran, Turkey, and Azerbaijan. From first glance it could have been claimed that Georgia's reluctance to join the 3+3 initiative stems from two main factors. Firstly, it considers Russia as an occupant of Georgian territories and refuse to cooperate. Secondly, the potential opening of the Zangezur corridor could diminish Georgia's transit significance between Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Europe (Gegelia, 2021) since possibility of relocating trade routes to Zangazur corridor is high. However, despite these initial assumptions, Georgia-Azerbaijan relations have actually shown a significant improvement, although the nature of this cooperation has remained primarily bilateral rather than multilateral.

This can be observed from the meetings of the state leaders of both countries too. Irakli Garibashvili's visit on September 29, 2021, marked the initial official leader-scale meeting following the Second Karabakh War (President.az, 2021). In total, there have been four visits by Georgian Prime Ministers to Azerbaijan (President.az, 2023a; President.az, 2023b; Azertac, 2023) and one by President Salome Zurbashvili (President.az, 2022). In turn, the Azerbaijani president has paid two visits to Georgia (Agende, 2022; Azernews, 2023). In all these meetings economic agenda was prioritized then followed by political cooperation especially emphasizing territorial integrity of both states. However, the recent visit by Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze on 16 March 2024, who succeeded Irakli Garibashvili, to meet with Ilham Aliyev is noteworthy. What adds to its significance is that Kobakhidze is the first Prime Minister to visit Azerbaijan after Georgia gained Candidate status in the EU in December 2023 (European Commission, 2023). In the meeting, which was open to the public, leaders delivered speeches on various topics, primarily focusing on three fields: economic, political, and cultural (See Table 1). President Aliyev primarily discussed the role of Georgia as an energy corridor between Azerbaijan and Europe, emphasizing Azerbaijani investments in Georgia. On the political agenda, the Azerbaijani side mainly discussed reforms in Georgia and cooperation. Culturally, the historical relations and the ancient roots of both nations in these lands were emphasized. Interestingly, the Georgian Prime Minister focused more on the political agenda than on other sectors, particularly highlighting Georgia's territorial integrity. The essence of the economic discussion also cantered on Azerbaijani investments, and finally, the Prime Minister supported President Aliyev's assertion regarding the ancientness of relations between the two nations.

Table 1. Characteristics of sentences leaders used in their speeches

	Economic vitality emphasized sentences	Political vitality emphasized sentences	Cultural vitality emphasized sentences
Ilham Aliyev	20	13	4
Irakli Kobakhidze	4	10	1
Total	24	23	5

Source: Official Website of President of Azerbaijan Republic

Based on the data, it might be claimed that Georgia and Azerbaijan have slightly differing priorities. Azerbaijan, having restored territorial integrity, focuses on attracting investments and solidifying its position as a hub between East and West. In contrast, Georgia prioritizes territorial integrity due to the unresolved status of breakaway regions, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia.

We can divide this economic interaction into two parts: 1. Direct Trade relations between Georgia and Azerbaijan. 2. Georgia's transit role between Azerbaijan and third countries. The first includes trade of products that destination is Georgia or Azerbaijan. In January Georgia accounted for 3.5% of total export of Azerbaijan. In total trade flow Azerbaijan exported more goods (92.4%) rather than importing (7.6%) (The State Statistical Committee of Azerbaijan, 2024).

Since 2020 due to Covid-19 pandemic state borders of Azerbaijan with all its neighbours have been closed and Georgia is one of the countries that suffered more. Deputy minister of Economy of Georgia, Mariam Kvrivishvili, claimed that this closure cost Georgia 1.5 million tourists and 400 million dollars (JAMnews, 2024). Before the closure, the monthly number of border crossers from Azerbaijan to Georgia over the age of 15 was approximately 92900. By 2023, this number had significantly decreased to 13100. The lowest recorded number was in 2021, with only 4200 people crossing the border (see Table 2). Initially, both air and land travel were banned during the early years of the closure, but currently, it is possible to fly to Tbilisi and other cities.

Table 2. Average number of border crossers from Azerbaijan to Georgia (2018-2023)

Year	Monthly average number of visitors to Georgia over age 15 and older from Azerbaijan.
2018	88200
2019	92900
2020	17700
2021	4200
2022	9600
2023	13100

Note: The figures reflect only the number of Azerbaijani citizens crossing the border, not including Georgian Azerbaijanis living in Azerbaijan.

Source: National Statistics Office of Georgia (2024)

In 2023, Azerbaijani citizens spent approximately \$6 million in Georgia, ranking seventh in expenditure among foreign visitors, just after Armenia. It should be noted that the total revenue from tourism in Georgia in 2023 amounted to \$4.125 billion (Taktakishvili, 2024).

3. The role of the European Union in Georgian-Azerbaijan relations

Azerbaijan's geopolitical position sets it apart from other Southern Caucasus republics. With direct borders to former imperial powers, Iran, Russia, and Turkey, Azerbaijan's diplomatic relations and strategic considerations are distinctly influenced. Stemming from this reality, Azerbaijan faces two significant implications, one negative and the other positive:

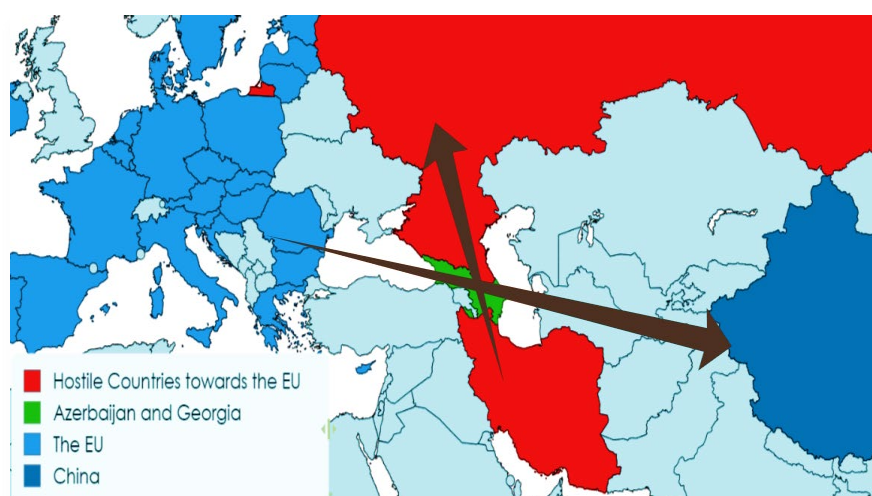
Firstly, this geographical reality imposes constraints on Azerbaijan's geopolitical autonomy, compelling the country to carefully tailor its foreign policy to navigate between the interests of its influential neighbours. Nevertheless, this geopolitical constraint does not impose imminent pressure on Azerbaijan, as one of its neighbouring countries, Turkey, maintains a strong alliance with Azerbaijan (Veliyev, 2022). Moreover, Azerbaijan engages in an "allied interaction" with Russia, further attenuating potential geopolitical pressures (President.az, 2022). If we expand our consideration from geographical borders to economic ones, the European Union emerges as a prominent economic partner for all region states. Among these, Azerbaijan stands out as one of the few states in the region maintaining positive relations with four of its neighbours. Azerbaijan's relationships primarily revolve around economic and geopolitical interests. It shares strong economic and political ties with Russia, predominantly economic connections with Iran and the EU, and a mixture of militaristic, cultural, and economic relations with Turkey. However, the dynamics vary for other regional states. For instance, while Armenia enjoys positive relations with Iran, the EU, and Russia, Turkey is perceived as a hostile neighbour. Similarly, Georgia maintains good relations with the EU and Turkey, and to a lesser extent, Iran, but views Russia as an occupying force in certain Georgian territories.

Secondly, the advantage of Azerbaijan's geopolitical positioning lies in the fact that the EU, a major trade partner of China, seeks alternative transportation routes that bypass traditional pathways through Iran and Russia which are under sanctions. Northern routes through Russia and southern routes avoiding Iran are deemed less advantageous for freight transport. Among the limited viable options, the South Caucasus corridor (Middle Corridor) traverses Azerbaijan and Georgia, making it a strategically important route for facilitating trade between Europe and Asia (see Figure 1). In

addition to the EU's interest in alternative trade routes, Iran and Russia, heavily reliant on each other due to sanctions, view Azerbaijan as a vital corridor for trade.

Being different from the previous one this corridor seems only benefit Azerbaijan since the infrastructure which stretches from Iran border to Russian customs solely passes through Azerbaijan soil bypassing Georgia. Consequently, Azerbaijan strategically leverages its geopolitical position, serving as a hub for both sides by maintaining a balanced policy towards all parties involved.

Figure 1. Geopolitical positioning of Azerbaijan and Georgia



Source: Generated by the Author

According to Deen et al. (2023), the EU's objectives in the South Caucasus encompass four main goals: promoting European values of human rights and democracy, enhancing security and stability, fostering trade and investment, and mitigating Russian influence in Georgia. Moreover, Jan Zielonka (2006) claimed that the European Union's preferred foreign policy instrument is the export of laws and regulations. Foreign trade and aid are secondary priorities, with peace enforcement ranking third, if considered at all. Additionally, there is no single institutional framework for exercising European foreign policy.

But specifically, the role of the European Union's role in Azerbaijan-Georgia relations is multifaceted and multilayered. This involvement can be grouped into three primary categories, each with several layers: political engagement, economic and energy cooperation, and security and defence

Political engagement

In this dimension, the EU has actively engaged in mediating for peace in the region, addressing both the former Nagorno-Karabakh issue and current situations in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Their

involvement also includes fostering cultural integration between different ethnicities in Georgia and Azerbaijan, thereby promoting local unity. Additionally, the EU has been steadfast in ensuring the territorial integrity of both states. During his official visit to Georgia in 2021, European Council President Charles Michel affirmed the European Union's commitment to Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity. He emphasized the EU's support and said, "... You know that the EU is committed to Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity. It is also very important for the [EU Monitoring Mission]. We know that the situation is complex and difficult for the local people. I would like to tell the local people: you are not alone. The EU is committed to peace, stability and security" (Dumbadze, 2021). In his interview with a local news site in 2017 the former Head of the EU Delegation to Azerbaijan, Ambassador Kestutis Jankauskas asserted the EU's support for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Azerbaijan (Baba, 2017).

Economic and energy cooperation

The EU's engagement in economic relations with the South Caucasus commenced in 1993 through the TRACECA (Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia) initiative. This program sought to enhance economic links between the EU and the newly independent post-Soviet states alongside Turkey (Asia Regional Integration Center, 2024). In 1994, the "Contract of the Century" facilitated the export of hydrocarbons from Azerbaijan to the West, particularly to EU member states. Among these countries, Italy accounted for the largest share, comprising 46.6% of Azerbaijan's total exports. Other EU nations involved included Greece (3.6%), Spain (2.65%), Croatia (2.5%), the Czech Republic (2.4%), and Portugal (1.9%) (Workman, 2023). In 1999, the departure of the first oil tanker carrying Azerbaijani oil from the Supsa port of Georgia, facilitated by the Baku-Supsa oil pipeline, marked a significant milestone. This event underscored the growing importance of pipelines traversing Georgian territory and represented an initial substantial contribution by the EU to foster economic interaction between Georgia and Azerbaijan. The ownership structure of this pipeline was predominantly divided between BP, representing British capital with a 30.4% share, and SOCAR, which held a 25% stake (SOCAR, 2024). Another significant project was the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline, which became operational in 2006. This pipeline played a crucial role in transferring approximately 80% of Azerbaijan's crude oil exports. Ownership of the pipeline was shared among various stakeholders, including BP with a 30.1% stake and SOCAR with a 33.7% stake (SOCAR, 2024). It's worth noting that at that time, the UK was a member of the EU. The EU's support

here was not only limited to the financial support but extended to political backing of the projects which eased pressure from the northern neighbour.

When Azerbaijan started to export its natural resources to Europe Georgia began receiving 3.10 USD per ton for Baku-Supsa pipeline project and its share from this trade is 1.2 USD for each ton. Nonetheless, Russia opposed many larger projects, such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan, which intended to transport resources through Georgia to Turkey. To further highlight the vitality of this pipeline, the first oil shipment to the Ceyhan port occurred on May 28, 2006, which also symbolizes Azerbaijan's 1918 independence from Russia. After a year, in 2007, the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum, or South Gas Corridor, was inaugurated. This megaproject boosted Georgia's importance for the region by transferring gas to Turkey. The impact of these pipelines on the Georgian economy cannot be overstated. According to former Energy Minister Natig Aliyev, Georgia transported 76.3 million tons of oil through its territory with just only Baku-Supsa pipeline between 1999 and 2016 (Babayeva, 2016), earning 91.56 million USD in revenue alone. Furthermore, the Trans-Anatolian Pipeline has enhanced Georgia's significance for the European Union, enabling the EU to access diversified gas sources via amicable territories.

The aftermath of the Second Karabakh War underscores that the European Union's engagement with the South Caucasus republics is primarily limited to economic interactions. This is largely due to the reluctance of both Turkey and Russia to relinquish their influence to Western powers voluntarily. Examining the relationship between Georgia and Azerbaijan reveals that their ties are predominantly economic and political relations playing a secondary role.

This cooperation extends beyond just carbohydrate resources to include green energy, which has recently become a trend. According to the International Renewable Energy Agency, Azerbaijan has a technical potential of 23040 MW of solar energy, 520 MW of energy from small hydropower plants, 3000 MW of wind energy, and 380 MW of bio-waste energy (Huseynli, 2023). Following the 2020 war, Azerbaijan regained control of its green energy resources, leading to a significant surge in green energy production. This increase followed the declaration by the President of Azerbaijan that the region would be designated as a "green energy" zone (Azerbaijan Renewable Energy Agency under the Ministry of Energy, 2024).

According to the European Commission's Green Paper of March 8, 2006, the EU aims to implement an energy policy focused on three key objectives, including sustainability. This involves actively combating climate change through the promotion of renewable energy sources and enhancing energy efficiency (The EU Commission, 2006). According to Romanian President Klaus Iohannis (2022), considering the current security challenges posed by military aggression against Ukraine,

enhanced cooperation and solidarity are essential to address shared challenges. Azerbaijan has emerged as an attractive partner for the EU in this context. During the same meeting where President Iohannis delivered his speech, leaders from Azerbaijan, Georgia, Romania, and Hungary signed an agreement for an underwater electric cable beneath the Black Sea. This cable aims to transport green energy from Azerbaijan to Europe (Euronews, 2022). The agreement entails the construction of a 1100-km electric cable with a capacity of 1000 MW under the Black Sea, connecting Azerbaijan to Romania (A news, 2022). This project is believed to reduce the EU's energy dependency on Russian exports, especially given the implications of the Ukrainian war.

Security and defence

Emma J. Stewart (2011) argued that Russia has been the primary competitor to the EU in terms of expanding normative power in the South Caucasus (Stewart, 2011). Amid this rivalry demonstrating the superiority of EU normative power in resolving territorial disputes through EU values, and thereby proving Russian normative power to be obsolete and inherently offensive, could bring the South Caucasus closer to the EU. However, after more than three decades of unsuccessful negotiations and conflict resolution attempts, the Nagorno-Karabakh issue could not be resolved through diplomatic means but instead through military action. This war undermined the EU's normative power in the region, which it had been promoting for a long time.

After the war, Azerbaijan gained geopolitical confidence, reducing its dependency on third parties in Armenia-Azerbaijan relations. Consequently, the EU needs to intensify its efforts to attract Azerbaijan. The war-hardened Azerbaijani army, now seen as a contributor to Caucasus stability (U.S. European Command, 2024), has garnered the attention of EU officials. Although the EU lacks its own effective military forces, NATO, of which only four EU countries (Austria, Malta, Cyprus, and Ireland) are not members, actively cooperates with South Caucasus states through several agreements. These include the Partnership for Peace with Azerbaijan and Armenia, and various military drills and systems upgrades in all respective countries.

The EU still maintains its European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM) in Georgia, established after the August War in 2008. After the missed opportunity in Azerbaijan, the EU hopes to address this issue peacefully. The primary goals of the mission are to ensure that there is no return to hostilities, to facilitate the resumption of a safe and normal life for local communities living on both sides of the Administrative Boundary Lines (ABL) with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, to build confidence among the conflict parties, and to inform EU policy in Georgia and the wider region

(European Union External Action, 2024). Moreover, the EU's contribution to security extends beyond the monitoring centre. On December 14, 2023, the European Council granted candidate country status to Georgia (Delegation of the European Union to Georgia, 2023). This status granted Georgia the opportunity to receive over €100 million annually in technical and financial assistance, which will promote the rule of law and political stability. This opportunity is believed to strain Russian Georgian relations, which have already been fragile, potentially leading to a more assertive Russian foreign policy towards Georgia. Consequently, there is a belief that Georgia will take steps to balance Russia's influence in the region. For instance, the controversial "foreign influence bill", passed by the Georgian parliament, sparked massive protests among Georgians who claimed it could hinder Georgia's path to the EU and tilt the country towards closer ties with Russia (Brussels Times, 2024).

Even though the EU, Georgia, and Azerbaijan are interested in deep cooperation, there are still points of scepticism and resistance that the EU faces. Delcour and Wolczuk (2020) found that in both Georgia and Azerbaijan, the EU's role as a promoter of values encountered challenges, particularly regarding gender and minority rights. Additionally, the EU's promotion efforts of human rights were often perceived as meddling in domestic affairs. The findings suggest that the EU as an entity of International Relations also may do the only thing that they can do better than the others in order make the system work smoothly. The EU appears to face challenges in effectively pursuing all the objectives outlined earlier. It may need to consider prioritizing one objective, particularly in the South Caucasus region. The research proposes that focusing on economic pursuits, if not for all foreign policy endeavours, at least for the South Caucasus, could be beneficial. This assertion is grounded in the core purpose behind the EU's creation: to promote economic collaboration in Europe. This is evidenced by the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1951 as the inaugural step, prioritizing economic integration not initiatives like the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) which highlights political ambitions. Efforts such as the formation of a European Army ultimately ended in fiasco, further reinforcing this claim.

4. Comparison between EU's approaching to Azerbaijan and Georgia

The EU's approach to Georgia and Azerbaijan in terms of security is shaped by regional realities. While engaging in peacebuilding and conflict resolution, the EU acknowledges Russia's entrenched presence in the region, particularly near Georgia's breakaway republics (Abkhazia and South Ossetia), which border Russia. Despite this, the EU has taken no decisive steps to address these

conflicts since their inception, opting instead for a passive role focused on humanitarian aid rather than assertive political or military intervention.

This reluctance may stem from historical dependency on Russian energy resources. The EU feared that robust support for Georgia's territorial integrity could provoke Russia—which has formal alliances with the breakaway republics (NATO, 2014)—risking renewed military escalation and disruptions to resource flows to Europe. Even after the Ukraine war reduced EU reliance on Russian energy, the bloc appears inclined to maintain the status quo. This hesitancy could be attributed to competing priorities, such as the Ukraine crisis, internal EU disputes, and migration challenges or the EU was satisfied with the status quo.

The EU's perceived indifference has strained its relationship with Georgia, slowing the latter's EU integration process despite strong domestic pro-EU sentiment. Some scholars argue that Georgia's recent overtures to Russia—the primary instigator of its territorial disputes—reflect a pragmatic shift to resolve the issue bilaterally. Ultimately, despite Georgia's longstanding reliance on the EU for diplomatic and economic cooperation, it has seen little tangible success in conflict resolution, both during the 2008 Russo-Georgian War and in its aftermath.

Regarding the Karabakh issue, we can divide the EU's involvement into two main phases: the period before the decisive 44-Day War (2020) and the period after it. Initially, the EU's approach to the region was similar to its approach to Georgia, reflecting a broader strategy that considered the South Caucasus as a whole while overlooking the distinct characteristics of each republic, including their domestic and foreign policies. However, there are several nuances that differentiate Azerbaijan from Georgia in this context. One key factor is the soft power of the Armenian diaspora within the EU, which has influenced the Union's stance. Another is the involvement of external actors, such as Turkey and Iran, who have significant interests in the region. Additionally, while the EU had a physical presence on the ground in Georgia, it was unable to implement a similar level of engagement in the former Nagorno-Karabakh issue. This reluctance has led to a perception in Azerbaijan, both among officials and the public, that the EU disproportionately promotes Armenian narratives, fostering Euroscepticism in the country.

After the second Karabakh war in 2020, the EU's involvement temporarily intensified, resulting in active negotiations in Brussels. However, this process was interrupted by the escalation of the Ukrainian-Russian conflict. During this initial phase, six high-level meetings were held in Brussels between 2021 and 2023, which generally fostered a positive atmosphere (Table 3). Notably, at the first gathering of the European Political Community, President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan of Armenia, European Council President Charles Michel, and French

President Emmanuel Macron met and achieved favorable outcomes, agreeing to deepen collaboration on border issues (Huseynov, 2022). However, this favorable atmosphere shifted during the Granada meeting, which took place without Azerbaijan's participation. Hikmat Hajiyev, Assistant to the President of Azerbaijan, explained the reason behind Azerbaijan's absence as a response to France's perceived destructive stance in the region. Specifically, he cited France's decision to send military supplies to Armenia and the refusal to include Turkey in the meeting as key factors. According to Hajiyev, these actions undermined the neutrality and balance required for constructive dialogue, leading Azerbaijan to abstain from the discussions (Hasanly, 2023).

Table 3. High Level Meetings Between Azerbaijan and Armenia facilitated by the EU

Meetings	Date	Parties	Discussed	Result
1stBrussel Meeting European Council (2021)	December 14, 2021	President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan of Armenia, and President Charles Michel of the European Council.	Humanitarian issues, prisoner exchanges, and border security.	Agreement to establish a joint commission on border demarcation.
2nd Brussel Meeting European Council (2021)	April 6, 2022		Peace negotiations, border issues, and transport links	Agreement to advance discussions on a peace treaty.
3rd Brussel Meeting Council of the EU (2022)	May 22, 2022		Progress on border demarcation and humanitarian issues.	Commitment to continue dialogue.
4th Brussel Meeting EU (2022)	August 31, 2022		Peace treaty negotiations and border security.	Agreement to intensify efforts toward a peace agreement.
5thBrussel Meeting Embassy of Azerbaijan to Belgium (2023)	May 14, 2023		Finalizing a peace treaty and addressing humanitarian concerns.	Commitment to further negotiations.
Prague meeting Huseynov (2022)	October 6, 2022	President Ilham Aliyev, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, President Charles Michel, and French President Emmanuel Macron.	Border issues and humanitarian concerns.	Agreement to deploy an EU civilian monitoring mission to the Armenia-Azerbaijan border.

Granada Meeting Huseynov (2022)	October 5, 2023	The meeting was planned to include President Ilham Aliyev, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, President Charles Michel, French President Emmanuel Macron, and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz. However, President Aliyev canceled his participation shortly before the meeting.	Peace treaty negotiations and regional connectivity.	Commitment to continue negotiations under EU mediation.
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The approach that the EU used for each country changed based on both the Union's interests and the dynamics of the region. However, one constant in these approaches is that the EU acted as a pragmatic actor in international relations.

Conclusions

This study aimed to examine the role of the EU in shaping Azerbaijan–Georgia relations in the aftermath of the Second Karabakh War (2020), with a particular focus on economic, political, and security dimensions. To achieve this objective, the research employed a mixed-methods approach, combining discourse analysis of official speeches delivered by Azerbaijani and Georgian state leaders during bilateral visits post-2020, and qualitative content analysis of EU policy documents, press releases, and statements related to the South Caucasus. By categorizing the themes of these speeches and analyzing the EU's involvement across different sectors, the study identified the varying priorities of Azerbaijan and Georgia in their bilateral relations and assessed the extent and nature of the EU's influence.

Two major conclusions can be drawn from this research. The first conclusion is that Georgia and Azerbaijan prioritize their bilateral relations differently: Azerbaijan places more emphasis on economic aspects, while Georgia focuses on political considerations. This divergence likely stems from Georgia's desire to secure unwavering support for its territorial integrity, whereas Azerbaijan aims to enhance its intermediary role in global economic politics to attract more funds for the reconstruction of the newly acquired Karabakh region. Another conclusion is that the EU's role in the relations between Georgia and Azerbaijan appears to be more successful in the economic sector. This success stems from the EU's foundational purpose of revitalizing economic ties within Europe.

Considering the regional dynamics outlined above, several policy recommendations can be made. The EU should prioritize strengthening economic cooperation, with a focus on renewable energy projects, transport infrastructure, and investment in post-conflict areas such as Karabakh.

Additionally, the EU should support defense diplomacy by implementing training and capacity-building initiatives for the security institutions of both Georgia and Azerbaijan, ensuring that such efforts do not inflame tensions with Russia. Lastly, at the political level, the EU should adapt its engagement to align with the specific priorities of each country, placing particular emphasis on reaffirming Georgia's sovereignty and facilitate trilateral cooperation between Turkey–Azerbaijan–Georgia under EU auspices to enhance connectivity and trade efficiency.

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