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The War in Ukraine as a Factor in the Foreign Policy of European Union in the South Caucasus

Abstract

Since the start of war in Ukraine, the geopolitical landscape of EU's Eastern Neighborhood has experienced structural transformations. Under conditions of tectonic shifts within given geopolitical conjuncture, powerful actors like EU and Russia sought to preserve their influence in Eastern Europe, while smaller states of the South Caucasus tried to fulfill own aims. Using qualitative research methodology, the study examines wide range of secondary sources and concluded that the war in Ukraine caused in weakening Russian influence in the South Caucasus, whereas EU raised its capabilities as an international actor in the region, in parallel with the increased expectations of Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia.

Keywords: war in Ukraine, capabilities-expectations gap, political realism, EU's foreign policy, South Caucasus

Introduction

Since the beginning of the war in Ukraine started in February 2022, a problem of geopolitical rivalry between the European Union (EU) and Russian Federation in the EU's Eastern Neighborhood, including the South Caucasus region has become more important and relevant. Against the background of this conflict, relations between EU and Russia that had shaped over recent years, significantly modified, becoming more strained.

Based on the results of this very research, we argue that, Russia's concentration on Ukraine, notably affected its position in the South Caucasus in a negative way. In parallel with this, EU increases its capabilities in the region in accordance with

rising expectations of South Caucasian states. Analyzing situation in Ukraine and its impact on EU's foreign policy in the South Caucasus we assume that the EU has stepped up in the Eastern Neighborhood, and shows decisive stand in terms of maintaining influence in this space by distributing wide range of resources in both fronts – in Ukraine and in the countries of the South Caucasus.

After the disintegration of the USSR, along with Ukraine, South Caucasus states have also become an object of foreign policy aspirations of both EU and Russia. They have been trying to draw these states into their orbits through establishing and developing bilateral and multilateral relations. Russia appeared as an „initiating core” of such unions like Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)¹, Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)², while EU already being an association itself, initiated different platforms – European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), Eastern Partnership Initiative (EaP)³, Associated Trio⁴.

Analyzing the development of processes in European Neighborhood becomes clear that there are also differences in terms of approaches taken by Brussels and Moscow regarding the realization of foreign policy goals. Thus, unlike Russian Federation, which mainly attempts to manipulate the behavior of its neighbors through hard power, EU adheres soft power, where combination of political and socio-economic components occupies a central role⁵.

Pro-European aspirations of Ukraine and Georgia, the beginning of the prevalence of anti-Russian sentiments in Armenia, still low-key policy of Azerbaijan towards the relations with Russia, and the EU's growing engagement in the region, by reason of consistent steps, seen from Russian perspective as a threat to its geostrategic interests. In turn, EU evaluates current actions of Russian Federation in Ukraine as a critical danger, which undermines European security. Having geopolitical and ideological dimensions⁶, the war in Ukraine pushes both

¹ A. Kalyan, *Commonwealth of Independent States: Rise and Failure* [25 VII 2020], <https://thekootneeti.in/2020/07/25/commonwealth-of-independent-states-rise-and-failure/> (19 VII 2024).

² T. Bordachev, *The CSTO and EAEU in a New Era: From Abstraction to Practise* [30 III 2022], <https://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/the-csto-and-eaeu-in-a-new-era-from-abstraction/> (18 VII 2024).

³ G. Christou, *European Union security logics to the east: the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership*, „European Security” 2010, no. 3, pp. 413-430.

⁴ K. Gogolashvili, *Associated Trio on its way for creating a real regional cooperation* [9 VIII 2021], <https://www.strategieast.org/associated-trio-is-on-its-way-for-creating-a-real-regional-cooperation/> (25 XII 2023).

⁵ M. Lambert, *Soft power vs hard power: The diplomatic struggle of the Western world in the East* [11 XI 2018], <https://neweasterneurope.eu/2018/10/11/soft-power-vs-hard-power-diplomatic-struggle-western-world-east/> (20 XII 2023).

⁶ C. Chivvis, *Deterrence in the New European Security*, [in:] *West-Russia Relations in Light of the Ukraine Crisis*, ed. R. Alcaro, 2015, pp. 33-45.

Brussels and Moscow to be more active in distinct regions like South Caucasus, which is a part of common space – Eastern Europe.

In general, the main aim of the research is to determine the degree of impact of the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian armed conflict on the EU's foreign policy in the South Caucasus. The study will focus on recent developments related to the EU's relations with Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia in the context of war in Ukraine. In order to achieve our aim, the study will address the research question: „What changes have occurred in the EU foreign policy towards the South Caucasus since the beginning of the war in Ukraine?“

Current discussions on the topic

The war in Ukraine is obviously one of the crucial ongoing events, which nowadays, attracts focus of world community. Decisive position of official Kyiv towards the integration to the Euro-Atlantic structures, especially noticed after the signing of Association Agreement with EU⁷, and reluctance of Russia to accept this course of events⁸, considerably predetermined further trends of developing geopolitical processes in eastern part of Europe⁹.

The prerequisite for the start of full-scale military war in Ukraine was the recognition of the independence of so-called people's republics of Donetsk and Luhansk¹⁰.

As it has been widely believed, initially Russia planned to execute „blitzkrieg“, however strong resistance of Ukraine made Russian „blitzkrieg“ fail and seriously questioned the strength of Russian army.

From the very first day of the conflict, EU provides political financial and humanitarian support to Ukraine, which already achieved concrete results in promoting democracy, human rights, and other fundamental European values in domestic level.

⁷ G. van der Loo, P.V. Elsuwege, *The EU-Ukraine Association Agreement after Ukraine's EU membership application: Still fit for purpose*, European Policy Centre, Discussion Paper, 14 III 2022, https://www.epc.eu/content/PDF/2022/Ukraine_DP.pdf (25 I 2024).

⁸ N. Seskuria, *Russia Will Not Stop at Ukraine* [2 II 2022], <https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/russia-will-not-stop-ukraine> (14 I 2024).

⁹ A. Leveque, *The New Geopolitical Landscape in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood: Fragmentation of Economic Ties Post February* [28 IX 2023], <https://icds.ee/en/the-new-geopolitical-landscape-in-the-eus-eastern-neighbourhood-fragmentation-of-economic-ties-post-february-2022/> (18 IV 2024).

¹⁰ S. Pitchford, *Russian Recognition of Donetsk and Lugansk: Legal Analysis* [2 III 2022], <https://www.humanrightspulse.com/mastercontentblog/russian-recognition-of-donetsk-and-luhansk-legal-analysis> (15 XII 2023).

The concept of European security, which has been an essential element in the development of EU since the end of World War II, presently faces serious threat in form of Russian military actions in Ukraine. Such a scenario makes Union to increase its engagement in the South Caucasus as well because both regions are important for EU in terms of geostrategic perspective.

Currently, specialists evaluate tectonic geopolitical shifts in EU's Eastern Neighborhood via paying attention to the emerging realities in Ukraine and South Caucasus. For example, S. Scotti says that with the beginning of war Russia's focus largely drawn on Ukraine, which in turn, presents favorable opportunities for EU to take active steps towards the South Caucasus¹¹. Some researchers shared this view by emphasizing that, particularly after the start of war in Ukraine, West gained feasibility to pressurize Russia in the South Caucasus¹².

In turn, Taras Kuzio, argues that Russian „divide and rule” strategy through inhibition of peach settlement of conflicts like in Karabakh in former USSR space started since the 1990s, and in modern days EU has real chances to take a lead in the region as Kremlin faces challenges in terms of resource mobilization¹³.

Marcel Röthig claims that today's processes in South Caucasus seriously questions the ability of Russia to manage security poser in the region. This brings focus on EU, enhancing performance of which in the South Caucasus is of special importance in this regard¹⁴.

Theoretical approach and Methodology

As it appears, current international system of international relations experiences structural transformations¹⁵. The conflict in Ukraine, commercial conflict between USA and China, tensions in Middle East (ongoing events in Israel) and other occasions allow us to suppose that great powers which chiefly shape international order entered into the new phase of geopolitical rivalry, which is of

¹¹ S. Scotti, *Opinion: EU engagement in the South Caucasus is bringing stability and prosperity to the region* [6 VI 2023], <https://www.commonspace.eu/opinion/opinion-eu-engagement-south-caucasus-bringing-stability-and-prosperity-region> (13 XII 2023).

¹² B. Deen, W. Zweers, C. Linder, *The EU in the South Caucasus. Navigating a geopolitical labyrinth in turmoil*, „Clingendael Report”, III 2023, p. 77.

¹³ T. Kuzio, *The EU is flexing its muscles in Ukraine and the South Caucasus. It was about time* [29 III 2023], <https://emerging-europe.com/voices/the-eu-is-flexing-its-muscles-in-ukraine-and-the-south-caucasus-it-was-about-time> (13 XI 2023).

¹⁴ M. Röthig, *Is Europe ready to fill Russia's vacuum in the Caucasus?* [12 IX 2023], <https://www.ips-journal.eu/topics/foreign-and-security-policy/is-europe-ready-to-fill-russias-vacuum-in-the-caucasus-6981/> (20 XII 2023).

¹⁵ I. Hill, *2022: A global turning point* [13 XII 2022], <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpret/2022-global-turning-point> (25 III 2024).

hybrid character¹⁶. That is, political, economic, social and informational dimensions of the competition in this context becomes of vital importance.

Obviously, due to complexity of processes within the international relations, in concrete cases, it is usually difficult to rely on one theory aimed at explaining comprehensively a certain concept or phenomena. In the given article, we deal with two trends: War in Ukraine and its impact on EU's foreign policy in the South Caucasus. First trend can be understood as independent variable, while latter can be accepted as dependent one. Based on discussions over the problem, it seems rational to consider combination of a theory – Political realism and separate concept – „capabilities-expectations” gap, with the purpose of achieving our research aim.

Analyzing structural shifts within the framework of contemporary global politics, we are able to observe that actors of international system naturally pursue their own interests in international system and the factor of „power” in any interpretation is simply too significant to neglect.

There are multiple theories and approaches to study and explain essence of processes within the framework of international relations discipline. Political realism or simply realism as it is visible from the name, intends to explain real picture of international relations in own way¹⁷.

As a theory, it developed by American professor Hans Morgenthau. In his book „Policy among nations”, he suggested basic assumptions of the theory. Briefly, he argued that states, which are major actors of international relations, are obsessed with the maximization of power considering that they are not sure about the intentions of each other. Additionally, Morgenthau stated that international system is of anarchic nature that is there is no high authority, which can control behavior of actors¹⁸.

From our point of view, these assumptions can be reviewed in case of war in Ukraine, but with certain contribution to the theory in order to develop it. In this way, clarification of main concept placed within the realism – „power” should guide us better understand a core of current geopolitical processes. The „power” from our perspective should be defined as an ability of state or non-state actors to achieve desirable results in accordance with their interests through not only military might but also political, economic, socio-cultural and information power. Such kind of an approach explained by the nature of today's competition amid actors of international system, where rivalry occurs at the same time in all fronts.

¹⁶ M. Scott, *Ukraine shows all warfare is now hybrid* [22 II 2024], <https://www.politico.eu/newsletter/digital-bridge/ukraine-shows-all-warfare-is-now-hybrid/> (14 III 2024).

¹⁷ S. Antunes, I. Camisao, *Introducing realism in international relations theory* [27 II 2018], <https://www.e-ir.info/2018/02/27/introducing-realism-in-international-relations-theory/> (15 V 2024).

¹⁸ H.J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Peace and Power*, New York 1948.

Despite the fact that, according to realism, namely states are principal actors, we suggest to view also the EU as an important player since it has own interests in global politics although it is supranational union, not state. EU has resources to have influence on the happenings in regional or global scale. Despite there is no single European army, the fact of the presence of 22 EU countries in the NATO has noticeably increased strength of Union in military sphere as well. It gives a reason to think about it as an association, which possess all necessary attributes perceived like an international actor.

In turn, developments in Ukraine caused in activation of the EU in the South Caucasus, which can be explained by so-called „capabilities-expectations gap” introduced by Christopher Hill in 1993¹⁹.

The main purpose of the research was to identify the role EU can play within new world order. Hill (1993) claimed that in order to become an important international actor, Union should increase its capacities to deal effectively with third parties (non-EU states) taking into consideration their expectations. By the term of „capabilities-expectations” gap, an author intended to demonstrate the break between what EU planned to achieve and what been actually done practically. The importance of such factors like, an ability of member states to agree on the common policy of the EU, the functions EU can perform, resource availability and instruments on which the community may rely on while fulfilling its activities were the principal points in the scientific work of Hill.

As a way to close existing gap, he suggested the following solution: Either EU should increase its capabilities to manage own political activities or third parties have to decrease their expectations. Moreover, according to the perspective suggested by Hill, EU can concentrate its efforts on becoming a mediator of conflicts as one of the means to perform as an international actor. This point can be relevant one to explain recent activities of the EU in the South Caucasus.

Analysis of the impact of the Ukrainian conflict on EU’s policy in the South Caucasus from the point of view of a combination of realism and capabilities-expectations gap approach require clarify some concepts. Thus, in this paper, by power we refer not only to military, but also to political and economic aspects. Another point is that, we equate the notions of power and resources, underlining an importance of their availability for actors to achieve appropriate goals.

This article has been approached as a theoretical analysis of interconnection between two different trends. The research based on qualitative methods. Essentially, it collected data from secondary sources.

¹⁹ C. Hill, *The Capability-Expectations Gap, or Conceptualizing Europe’s International Role*, „The Journal of Common Market Studies” 1993, no. 3, pp. 306-328.

Realism in case of geopolitical contention between EU and Russia

Relations between official Kyiv and official Moscow have visibly worsened since the Euromaidan demonstrations and illegal annexation of Crimea. By that time the EU, which had already enjoyed cooperation with Ukraine, denounced actions of Russia in violating norms of international law²⁰. Taking in account, that this event became a serious challenge for European security policy, which has been playing a prime role in shaping EU's policies since the end of WWII, Brussels's response was unequivocal. Imposition of sanctioning measures against Russia with the purpose of weakening its capacity to conduct long-term military campaigns evolved throughout the years by reaching to unprecedented levels with the start of large-scale war in 2022²¹.

Russia justifies its actions in Ukraine as a response to the policy of West, especially stressing out the potential NATO expansion via membership of Ukraine in alliance, which evaluated by Moscow as a threat to its national security²². The assumption that, actors try to enhance their power under the conditions of unpredictability is applicable in this case, considering the fact that, Ukraine practically, has not accessed NATO or EU yet. American political scientist Joseph S. Nye argues that, war in Ukraine was not inevitable, however its possibility increased throughout the time, particularly due to Ukraine perspectives regarding accession to NATO²³.

Andrew Latham in turn, claims that some key assumptions of political realism in case of war in Ukraine are properly applicable. Referring to the theory of realism, he argues that, in order to survive under anarchic world, relatively weaker states naturally look for support of powerful partners, which will act as a „shield“. In line with realistic approach, if one power will notice that the state, which is under its influence, gradually moves away towards the influence of rival power, it will take all possible measures to hinder such a course of events. Moreover, if the country exposed to the aggression by stronger power resists enemy's attacks, then other powerful actors, which pursue the goal of weakening their

²⁰ *Russia, Ukraine and International Law* [21 II 2022], <https://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/european-issues/0623-russia-ukraine-and-international-law> (18 III 2024).

²¹ E.V. Sanchez, *The European Union's sanctions regime on the Russian Federation from 2014 to 2022*, „Quaderns IEE: Revista de l'Institut d'Estudis Europeus“ 2023, no.1, pp. 25-60.

²² K. Sonin, *How Russia could benefit from Ukraine's NATO membership?* [10 VIII 2023], <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/commentary/2023/08/10/world/how-russia-could-benefit-from-ukraines-nato-membership/> (14 I 2024).

²³ J.S. Nye, *What caused the war in Ukraine?* [5 X 2022], <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/what-caused-the-war-in-ukraine/> (25 I 2024).

rival, will use all resources to minimize the capabilities of that rival for achieving long-term objectives²⁴.

Transferring prior presumptions to the case of Ukraine, Latham claims that prerequisite for the start of war connected with the perception of Moscow that Ukraine leaves its scope of influence. As Russian „blitzkrieg” failed, Western world continued providing adequate support to Ukraine in order to weaken Russia and at the same time help Ukraine to preserve its independence.

Vasif Huseynov asserts that outbreak of war in Ukraine can be explained by combination of classical geopolitics and structural realism where great actors try to keep under the control the close areas, that is great powers chase to set up their hegemony in neighborhood²⁵. He argues that if we compare the policies of both West and Russia towards Ukraine, there is no substantial conceptual distinction – in both cases national interests and geopolitical components are basic elements²⁶. Furthermore, he presents his own conclusion in a following manner: „Hence, contrary to the observers who think that ‘Russia is winning’ in the crisis over Ukraine, the paper argued the outcomes of the crisis have been so far more in favor of the West rather than that of Russia”.

The war in Ukraine. A view from the South Caucasus

With the beginning of war, it became clear that the reactions of the South Caucasus countries related to the situation in Ukraine primarily depends on their national interests and present geopolitical realities.

- 1) Georgia’s position towards the war. Among South Caucasian countries, Georgia has shared many common points with Ukraine in terms of Europeanization and democratization. Indeed, afterwards of being included to „Associate trio” format, which meant to underline a special status of multilateral relations between these states (including Moldova) and EU, official Tbilisi and official Kyiv intensified implementation of proper reforms on the way to European integration²⁷. Both states followed the way of close cooperation based on similar interests. In 2019, Georgia and Ukraine agreed on establishment

²⁴ A. Latham, *How the Ukraine vindicates realism?* [15 IX 2022], <https://thehill.com/opinion/international/3643585-how-the-ukraine-war-vindicates-realism/> (10 I 2024).

²⁵ V. Huseynov, *Revisiting Ukraine crisis: Realist reflections on causes and consequences*, „CES Working Papers”, Centre for European Studies [Iasi], no. 4, pp. 582-596.

²⁶ Ibidem.

²⁷ A. Ciocoi, D. Zalkaliani, D. Kuleba, *Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine: A higher EU ambition* [24 VI 2021], <https://www.euractiv.com/section/eastern-europe/opinion/georgia-moldova-and-ukraine-a-higher-eu-ambition/> (18 IV 2024).

of High-Level Strategic Council²⁸. The purpose of agreement was to promote bilateral relations between parties to the higher level encompassing various spheres: political, trade and economic, defense and security, cultural and humanitarian.

It has to be underlined that, both states were predisposed to cooperate since the restoration of independence. Thus, Georgia and Ukraine became members of Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) and were co-founders²⁹ of local organization – GUAM, which was oriented to partnership with European structures, but gradually lost its relevance in last years³⁰.

However, reaction of Georgia to the crisis in Ukraine is still restrained³¹. The Georgian officials argue that since Georgia does not enjoy NATO's nuclear security umbrella and European Union's economic solidarity umbrella, Georgia's policy is cautious: on the one hand, it provides humanitarian aid to Ukraine, supports Ukraine politically and diplomatically in all international platforms, and ensures that Georgia's territory isn't used to circumvent international sanctions against Russia. On the one hand, Georgia does not impose bilateral sanctions against Russia and avoids the activities that may lead to military escalation with Russia.

Taking into consideration that accession to EU is the top priority in foreign policy of Georgia, and Russian factor is still important due to the ongoing occupation of Georgia's two regions, Georgia tries to conduct pragmatic and at the same time confident policy where accession to EU remains as a crucial goal for Georgian government.

- 2) Azerbaijan's position towards the war. Like in case of Georgia-Ukraine relations, Azerbaijan also has been forming relations with Ukraine in both bilateral and multilateral directions right from the start of 1990s. Both states joined BSEC and GUAM, in 1992 and 1997 respectively. Although, neither BSEC nor GUAM are not main integration trends at the present, at that time, deepening bilateral relations within the framework those organizations created a basis for further cooperation in different areas, including political, economic and military-technical spheres.

²⁸ J.S. Joja, *As tensions grow a strong Georgia-Ukraine partnership is essential for Black Sea Security*, Middle East Institute [14 IV 2021], <https://www.mei.edu/publications/tensions-grow-strong-georgia-ukraine-partnership-essential-black-sea-security> (13 IV 2024).

²⁹ Along with Azerbaijan and Moldova.

³⁰ R. Huseynov, *A new chance for GUAM* [1 V 2015], <https://politicon.co/en/analytcs/158/a-new-chance-for-guam> (1 V 2024).

³¹ W. Górecki, *Having your cake and eating it. Georgia, the war in Ukraine and integration with the West*, Centre for Eastern Studies [Warsaw] [7 VI 2022], <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2022-06-07/having-your-cake-and-eating-it-georgia-war-ukraine-and> (16 III 2024).

At the initial stage of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, Azerbaijan's stance regarding the conflict characterized as neutral³². Just two days before the start of war, was signed a Declaration on „Allied Interaction between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Russian Federation”³³. On the other hand, before signing these agreements, Azerbaijan signed a Joint Declaration with Ukraine³⁴, which repeatedly highlighted adherence of the Baku to the principles of territorial integrity and international law. Based on this, Azerbaijani government refused to recognize elections in occupied territories of Ukraine.

In turn, representative of the Russian Foreign Ministry Maria Zakharova expressed frustration of Kremlin regarding such an approach³⁵ accentuating that within the format of allied relations, position of Azerbaijan expected to be different.

It can be stated that, Azerbaijan is one of the few states in the world, which successfully implements balanced foreign policy via considering interrelation of regional and great powers' interests³⁶. In this regard, relatively successful maneuvering allows Azerbaijan to solve foreign policy objectives in a more effective way through minimizing risks of possible confrontations with other actors.

- 3) Armenia's position towards the war. Armenia, which is only country in the region that has been closely interrelated with Russia during the post-independence period – being a member of EAEU and CSTO, did not show clear support to Russia. That is, Prime Minister of Armenia, Nikol Pashinyan mentioned that, Armenia is not an ally of Russia in war against Ukraine³⁷. Armenia has experienced challenges in following the course of balanced foreign policy,

³² N. Mikovic, *Azerbaijan watches closely Russian invasion of Ukraine* Lowy Institute [11 III 2022], <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/azerbaijan-watches-closely-russian-invasion-ukraine> (26 XII 2023).

³³ President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, *Declaration on allied interaction between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Russian Federation* [22 II 2022], <https://president.az/en/articles/view/55498> (18 IV 2024).

³⁴ Idem, *Azerbaijan, Ukraine signed bilateral documents* [14 I 2022], <https://president.az/en/articles/view/55258> (25 I 2024).

³⁵ *Russian Foreign Ministry is dissatisfied with Baku's refusal to recognize occupied Ukrainian territories as Russian* [13 IX 2023], https://www.turan.az/ext/news/2023/9/free/politics_news/en/8584.htm (12 IV 2024).

³⁶ E. Jafarova, *The success of Azerbaijan's multi-vectored foreign policy. Center of Analysis of International Relations* [14 VI 2021], <https://aircenter.az/en/single/the-success-of-azerbaijans-multi-vectored-foreign-policy-727> (28 III 2024).

³⁷ H. Zehrunq, *PM: Armenia not Russia's ally in war against in Ukraine* [2 VI 2023], [https://kyivindependent.com/armenian-pm/#:~:text=Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan,an interview with CNN primanews](https://kyivindependent.com/armenian-pm/#:~:text=Armenian%20Prime%20Minister%20Nikol%20Pashinyan,interview%20with%20CNN%20primanews) (12 IV 2024).

as political and economic dependence of the country on Russia is high³⁸; suffice to note, the presence of Russian 102nd Military base in Gyumri³⁹, and the fact that many strategically important enterprises in Armenia belong to Russian companies.

At the same time, Armenia having influential diaspora in Western states (especially in US and France), supports relations with West too. Bojan Stojkovski characterizes an approach of official Yerevan on Russo-Ukraine war as a practical and principled position⁴⁰.

Also, an important factor affecting the foreign policy of Armenia recently, is that from the perspective of the state's government and Armenian people in general, Russia did not provide the necessary assistance within the framework of CSTO during the 44-day war against Azerbaijan. It led to the increasing mistrust about Russia as a warrantor of Armenian national security⁴¹.

EU's foreign policy in the South Caucasus in the context of war in Ukraine

Over the past decades, EU has passed a certain way from so-called „distanced engagement” to „growing engagement” in the South Caucasus⁴².

Existing stage of development of relations between EU and South Caucasus states can be considered as the most turbulent phase due to the increased geopolitical competition between EU and Russia. In order to inspect what alterations have occurred in the foreign policy of the European Union in the South Caucasus since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, it is important to describe approach of the EU towards the region during last years, especially after signing of Association agreement with Georgia.

³⁸ A. Mgdesyan, *Russia's powerful economic levers over Armenia* [1 XI 2023], <https://eurasianet.org/russias-powerful-economic-levers-over-armenia> (14 IV 2024).

³⁹ S. Potapkins, *Armenia 2023 – in search of a new security configuration*, Latvian Institute of International Affairs [2 X 2023], <https://www.liia.lv/en/opinions/armenia-2023-in-search-of-a-new-security-configuration-1119> (18 I 2024).

⁴⁰ B. Stojkovski, *Opinion: On Ukraine, Armenia seeks to avoid the dark side of history* [16 III 2022], <https://www.commonspace.eu/opinion/opinion-ukraine-armenia-seeks-avoid-dark-side-history> (18 III 2024).

⁴¹ A. Istepanov, *New directions in Armenia's foreign policy*, Ankara Center for Crisis and Policy Studies [7 XII 2023], <https://www.ankasam.org/new-directions-in-armenias-foreign-policy/?lang=en> (20 IV 2024).

⁴² L. Makhashvili, E. Avdaliani, *Europeanization as an instrument for Georgia's democratization*, „Law and World” 2023, no. 25, pp. 77-92.

By the time, Association Agreement the EU's came into force position in the South Caucasus was ambiguous⁴³. On the one hand, Georgia which wants to join EU and enjoy institutional, political, socio-economic cooperation with EU consolidated ties with it even more with signing document presented by Brussels.

On the other side, Azerbaijan and Armenia refused to sign the same document. Reasons for refusal were different. Azerbaijan through pursuing a balanced foreign policy cautiously evaluated such a perspective, whereas Armenia was already a member of the CSTO and the country's government was preparing to join the Russian-led EAEU.

The level of expectations of the South Caucasus states from the cooperation with EU, and the spectrum of capabilities of the Union to achieve its goals varied over time, chiefly due to: a) foreign policy objectives; b) geopolitical circumstances; c) internal aspirations.

Priority areas for cooperation between the EU and the countries of the South Caucasus

Although, EU is believed to be „late-comer” to the region⁴⁴, by virtue of consistent engagement it transformed into one of the important external actors for Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia. As it has been mentioned with regard to the C. Hill's approach, in order to perform as a well-coordinated mechanism towards the outsiders, EU had to find a niche, special space where its role as an actor would be unique. Throughout the years, EU defined this niche mainly in two directions:

- 1) Becoming a „Locomotive” of democracy dissemination and Western values in the world through promoting human rights, equality, rule of law etc.
- 2) Acting as a mediator in various conflicts in order to maintain peace and stability⁴⁵.

It is worth noting that, the principle of promoting the core values of the EU can be traced when it comes to forming relations with other countries too. Practically, political and institutional aid of EU addressed to that group of states, which associate themselves with Europe and want to join the Union clearly demonstrates that the prescription of establishing strong ties between parties to the certain degree based on adhesion to fundamental values of EU.

⁴³ L. Delcour, K. Hoffman, *The EU's Policy in the South Caucasus*, „L'Europe en Formation” 2018, no. 385, pp. 9-25.

⁴⁴ A. Paul, *The EU and the South Caucasus since independence* [25 XI 2016], <https://eu.boell.org/en/2016/11/25/eu-and-south-caucasus-25-years-independence> (10 IV 2024).

⁴⁵ C. Hill, *op.cit.*, pp. 306-328.

Additionally, since its engagement in the South Caucasus, Brussels has made visible attempts to perform as a mediator of violent conflicts in the region. That is, namely EU introduced Six-point peace plan to end armed conflict between Georgia and Russia, which happened in 2008 August. Moreover, EU members, especially France, which was one of the co-chair states of OSCE Minsk Group was involved to stimulate peaceful solution to the Azerbaijan and Armenia in Karabakh conflict⁴⁶. The aim of EU here also can be explained by making the region predictable and safe, because security is the main condition for pursuing European foreign policy.

Despite all the efforts of the Minsk Group to resolve peacefully the conflict, the situation in Karabakh remained unchanged until Second Karabakh war in 2020. During the II Karabakh war, EU's capabilities to influence the parties to the conflict decreased to a certain extent. It also led to the decrease of capabilities of EU in intraregional processes as well within this period. Chiefly, the reason why the EU faced challenges in this direction related to the activation of Türkiye and Russia. As a result, Russia became one of the parties, which signed trilateral statement. Additionally, to prevent possible escalations after the end of war, the joint Russian-Turkish Monitoring Centre was established⁴⁷.

The reluctance of regional powers to leave a room for the EU's active involvement in the South Caucasus, and internal problems the EU struggled against in terms of COVID-19 pandemic consequences challenged opportunities of the Union as an external actor in the region.

After the end of Second Karabakh war, Türkiye proposed its own initiative for regional cooperation – 3+3 with the participation of Türkiye, Russia, Iran, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia⁴⁸. In view of existing tensions with Russian Federation, Georgia rejected to participate in this platform. This decision clearly demonstrated the adherence to Georgia's commitment to pro-EU orientation, as Tbilisi is more inclined to accept those initiatives where the involvement of Brussels guaranteed. Therefore, expectations of Georgia from the cooperation with the EU remained at the same level.

However, the importance of restoring its reputation as a mediator in Karabakh conflict made EU to „come back” with new efforts. Thus, in October 2022, a meeting with the participation of Emmanuel Macron, Charles Michel, Ilham

⁴⁶ S. Abilov, *OSCE Minsk Group: Proposals and Failure, the view from Azerbaijan*, „Insight Turkey” 2018, no. 1, pp. 143-163; B. Wesel, *EU fails to act in Nagorno-Karabakh conflict* [10 VIII 2020], <https://www.dw.com/en/eu-fails-to-act-on-nagorno-karabakh-conflict-between-armenia-and-azerbaijan/a-55208668> (21 III 2024).

⁴⁷ J. Kucera, *Russia and Turkey open joint military center in Azerbaijan* [2 II 2021], <https://eurasianet.org/russia-and-turkey-open-joint-military-center-in-azerbaijan> (24 IV 2024).

⁴⁸ E. Javakhisvili, *The 3+3 Platform for Regional Cooperation: Conflicting Foreign Policy Preferences*, „Caucasus Analytical Digest”, no. 128, pp. 3-6.

Aliyev and Nikol Pashinyan was held in Prague. The most important outcome of the Prague meeting was declaration within which both Azerbaijan and Armenia formally recognized territorial integrity of each other. Both states reaffirmed their adherence to the principles of UN Charter and the Almaty Declaration, which was signed in 1991⁴⁹.

It should be also noted that, during the multilateral meeting it was agreed that, EU will send Civilian Mission to Armenia with the aim of coordinating situation. This step of EU can be assessed by Russian Federation as a strategic regional challenge⁵⁰. That is, under the conditions where strong focus is on Ukraine, Russia is at risk to experience the scarcity of resources to constrain Armenia's pro-European spirits, which increased after the II Karabakh war.

EU-Georgia relationships

Regarding Georgia, EU showed an extraordinary approach to increase its capabilities as an international actor. It is sensible to think about EU-Georgia relationship in the context of potential Eastern enlargement of EU. Granting candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova in a short time after the beginning of the conflict raised some questions.

Ukraine as being a state, which is involved in protracted conflict with Russia, could get the candidate status, while Georgia's quest for candidate that status was not confirmed in June 2022. Instead, Georgia was required to fulfill twelve recommendations to obtain the candidate status.

The twelve priorities presented by Commission to Georgia in 2022, encompassed following recommendations:

- 1) Address the issue of political polarisation, ensuring cooperation across political parties in the spirit of the 19 IV agreement;
- 2) Guarantee the full functioning of all state institutions, strengthening their independent and effective accountability as well as their democratic oversight functions, and further improve the electoral framework;
- 3) Implement a transparent and effective judicial reform strategy and action plan based on a broad, inclusive and cross-party consultation process,

⁴⁹ V. Huseynov, *In Prague, Armenia and Azerbaijan Make a Critical Move Toward Peace* [17 X 2022], <https://jamestown.org/program/in-prague-armenia-and-azerbaijan-make-a-critical-move-toward-peace/> (16 III 2024).

⁵⁰ *EU mission to Armenia will fuel confrontation, Russia warns* [17 I 2023], <https://www.euractiv.com/section/azerbaijan/news/eu-mission-to-armenia-will-fuel-confrontation-russia-warns/> (23 V 2024).

- ensuring a judiciary that is fully independent, accountable and impartial, and safeguarding the separation of powers;
- 4) Strengthen the independence of the Anti-Corruption Agency, in particular to address high-level corruption cases; equip the new Special Investigative Service and Personal Data Protection Service with resources commensurate to their mandates and ensure their independence;
 - 5) Implement the commitment to „de-oligarchisation” by eliminating the excessive influence of vested interests in economic, political, and public life;
 - 6) Strengthen the fight against organized crime, notably by ensuring rigorous investigations, prosecutions and a credible track record of prosecutions and convictions; guarantee accountability and oversight of law enforcement agencies;
 - 7) Undertake stronger efforts to guarantee a free, professional, pluralistic and independent media environment, notably by ensuring that criminal procedures brought against media owners fulfil the highest legal standards, and by launching impartial, effective and timely investigations in cases of threats against the safety of journalists;
 - 8) Move swiftly to strengthen the protection of human rights of vulnerable groups, including by bringing perpetrators and instigators of violence to justice more effectively;
 - 9) Consolidate efforts to enhance gender equality and fight violence against women;
 - 10) Ensure the involvement of civil society in decision-making processes at all levels;
 - 11) Adopt legislation so that Georgian courts proactively take into account European Court of Human Rights judgments in their deliberations;
 - 12) Ensure that an independent person is given preference in the process of nominating a new Public Defender (Ombudsperson) and that this process is conducted in a transparent manner; ensure the Office’s effective institutional independence⁵¹.

Step-by-step fulfillment of mentioned twelve objectives led Georgia to get a candidate status on 14 XII 2023. EU slightly modified its approach towards the issue of possible accession at the expense of Eastern Partnership members. If before the outbreak of the military conflict between Ukraine and Russia, the EU was equally concentrated on „Associate trio” members’ internal and external developments, then after the start of clashes in Eastern Neighborhood, the EU showed selective approach in terms of potential enlargement. Existed „6-3” vision (Out of six members of EaP three states, which refused to sign AA) was replaced by

⁵¹ Official website of European Union, *The Twelve Priorities*, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/12_Priorities.pdf (12 IV 2024).

„3-1(+1)” vision. To interpret this formula in other words, from our perspective, granting two states-Ukraine and Moldova candidate status on the one side, and enabling intermediate standby mode for Georgia for a while on the other side means:

- 1) EU refers to the matter of potential enlargement to the East cautiously in order to reinsure itself from „inefficient enlargement”.
- 2) The role of Georgia as the state, which throughout the years mainly shows strong commitment to the pro-Western orientation remains important for the EU.
- 3) Realistic picture of the situation in Ukraine pushes EU to seek for new approaches regarding the development of integration ties with the members of Eastern Partnership.
- 4) Capabilities of EU increases gradually rather than at once, and they are increasing accordingly with rising expectations of third parties.

In a general sense, it is important to acknowledge that the line of constructing policy towards the „outsiders” taken by EU largely based on specific, sanction-reward mechanism⁵². By sanction we refer to the any response of EU directed to the non-EU state intending to persuade that state to adhere the course which seen appropriate from the perspective of the Union. With regard to reward, it can be said that financial, economic, political, institutional support presented by EU to outsiders usually take place in condition if target country shows its pro-EU orientation.

In the current geopolitical conjuncture, Georgia continues showing its desire to be a part of EU. Originality of Georgian sample in the context of relations with EU also based on the detail that it is only country for which EU has become the primary external actor in international relations. The main goal of present Georgian government is to reach EU through fulfilling requirements of Brussels. The scenario, which occurred in Ukraine, makes visible that Georgia preserves pro-EU course, but leaving a needed space for maneuvering amid primary actors for the sake of national interests.

EU-Azerbaijan relationships

EU and Azerbaijan share the common view on the cooperation perspectives. Azerbaijan’s balanced policy in international arena considers supporting relations with other state and non-state actors based on mutually beneficial terms. Azerbaijan is a member of Non-Aligned Movement and was chair state from 2019

⁵² L. Makhashvili, E. Avdaliani, *op.cit.*, pp. 77-92.

to 2022, which also explains the reason why Baku regulates carefully links with regional and international actors⁵³. In turn, EU, which is interested in oil and gas resources of Caspian region, sees Azerbaijan as a reliable trading partner⁵⁴. It can be assumed that, despite existing contradictions on certain political issues, economic dimension of bilateral relationships has remained stable. The uniqueness of bilateral relations also based on the fact that, neither side perceived this relationship in terms of potential membership of Azerbaijan in EU. Considering the EU imposed a new package of economic sanctions on Russia due to military actions in Ukraine, the role of Azerbaijan as a gas provider increased⁵⁵. President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev and President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen signed a Memorandum of Understanding on strategic partnership in the energy sector, in July 2022⁵⁶. As part of the agreement, the parties agreed to increase the supply of natural gas to Europe by at least 20 billion m³ by 2027⁵⁷. The fact that NATO member – Türkiye is the main partner of Azerbaijan in all senses – political, economic, social, cultural, military etc. also has particular impact on European perception concerning Azerbaijan. Sanction-reward mechanism in the given instance based on mostly economic element. For many years, EU remains the biggest trade partner of Azerbaijan, which exports its natural resources to Europe.

EU-Armenia relationships

Since the restoration of independence, Armenia has been to the greatest extent close with Kremlin. However, recently the general trend in foreign policy of Yerevan sharply changing and cooperation with Europe is increasing. In his speech in October, 2023 Nikol Pashinyan mentioned that „Democracy is a strategic choice for Armenia”⁵⁸. It is not difficult to presuppose that, such a statement itself

⁵³ *Non-aligned movement*, <https://www.mfa.gov.az/en/category/international-organisations/non-aligned-movement-nam> (25 I 2024).

⁵⁴ *Azerbaijani MFA issued statement condemning so-called „elections” in a number of territories of Ukraine* [9 IX 2023], <https://apa.az/en/foreign-policy/azerbaijani-mfa-issued-statement-condemning-so-called-elections-in-a-number-of-territories-of-ukraine-411422/> (18 I 2024).

⁵⁵ G. Feyziyeva, *Azerbaijan's Growing Role in Europe's Gas Security*, „International Journal of Social Political and Economic Research” 2022, no. 2, pp. 63-70.

⁵⁶ *Ursula von der Leyen: Azerbaijan is Europe's reliable energy partner* [17 XII 2022], <https://en.vestikavkaza.ru/news/Ursula-von-der-Leyen-Azerbaijan-is-Europe-s-reliable-energy-partner.html> (16 III 2024).

⁵⁷ *EU and Azerbaijan to double capacity of Southern Gas Corridor* [18 VII 2022], <https://eu-neighbourseast.eu/news/latest-news/eu-and-azerbaijan-to-double-capacity-of-southern-gas-corridor/> (22 XII 2023).

⁵⁸ *Pashinyan: Armenia ready to integrate with European Union* [17 X 2023], https://charter97.org/en/news/2023/10/17/568010#google_vignette (17 IV 2024).

involves associations with EU, as according to Copenhagen Criteria, protection of human rights, democratic values are fundamental provisions for EU.

The image of Russia as an actor, which has enough power and resources to assure national security of Armenia, against the background of political developments in the region modified⁵⁹.

Withal, taking into consideration the existence of active Armenian diaspora in Western countries it can be assumed that Armenia's expectations will continue to increase. Economically, Armenia has lower to present compare to Azerbaijan, however political adherence to European course can open new possibilities for developing bilateral relations.

Conclusion

Since the beginning of war in Ukraine, EU and Russian Federation entered a new phase of geopolitical rivalry, which encompasses also South Caucasus. In emerging realities, protracted Russo-Ukrainian war stimulates EU to increase its capabilities to optimize foreign policy in the South Caucasus. Generally, incompetence of Russia to perform as a crucial external actor for all three states substantially determines the general trends in the region. Situational analysis given in the paper shows that smaller states – Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia are trying to solve their own objectives via taking into account tectonic shifts in terms of geopolitics.

In turn, EU mobilizing resources to achieve long-term goals in Eastern Neighborhood by consistent actions. Support of Ukraine remains as a key priority since objective reasons, while growing engagement in the South Caucasus goes contemporaneously with increasing capabilities and expectations.

In fact, the conflict in Ukraine caused in European Union' searching new directions of developing ties with South Caucasian countries. The declining capabilities of the Russian Federation to influence the foreign policy course of official Baku, Yerevan, and Tbilisi increasingly casts doubt on Russia's power to reintegrate small neighbors into its sphere of influence. At the same time, there is a visible trend in decreasing Russia's military, economic, political resources, which can be explained by West's influential and timely counter- measures. Moreover, based on this study, it can be argued that, integration model that EU presents to its partners from neighborhood is perceived by those states as a more perspective way compared to being dependent on Russia, which exerts pressure on them basically through hard power.

⁵⁹ G. Faulconbridge, *Armenia can no longer rely on Russia for military and defence needs* [2 II 2024], <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/armenia-can-no-longer-rely-russia-military-defence-needs-pm-pashinyan-says-2024-02-02/> (25 III 2024).

Ongoing war in Ukraine forms new geopolitical structure of not only the South Caucasus, but also whole EU's Eastern Neighborhood. As a matter of the fact, the war observably affected the foreign policy of Brussels towards Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia. In the ongoing confrontation with Russia, the role of the region will remain relevant, and to consolidate and develop advancement furtherly, Union should continue to demonstrate approach, within which EU's concentration on the South Caucasus will not be decrease because of war in Ukraine.

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Abstrakt

Anvar Ismayilli

Wojna na Ukrainie jako czynnik polityki zagranicznej Unii Europejskiej na Kaukazie Południowym

Od początku wojny na Ukrainie krajobraz geopolityczny wschodniego sąsiedztwa UE doświadczył strukturalnych przekształceń. W warunkach tektonicznych przesunięć w ramach danej koniunktury geopolitycznej potężni aktorzy, tacy jak UE i Rosja, starali się zachować swoje wpływy w Europie Wschodniej. W tym samym czasie mniejsze państwa Kaukazu Południowego próbowały realizować swoje cele. Wykorzystując jakościową metodologię badawczą, autor analizuje szeroki zakres źródeł wtórnych i dochodzi do wniosku, że wojna na Ukrainie spowodowała osłabienie wpływów Rosji na Kaukazie Południowym, podczas gdy UE zwiększyła swoje możliwości jako międzynarodowy aktor w regionie, równoległe ze zwiększonymi oczekiwaniami Gruzji, Azerbejdżanu i Armenii.

Słowa kluczowe: Unia Europejska, Kaukaz Południowy, polityka zagraniczna, wojna na Ukrainie

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