

Why the Neutrality of Azerbaijan Is Important for the European Union

SHAMKHAL ABILOV* and BEYRAK HAJIYEV**

ABSTRACT *Fragile stability in the South Caucasus is hugely dependent on the neutrality or so-called balanced foreign policy course of the Republic of Azerbaijan. To substantiate this argument, this paper explores the historical and geopolitical factors in the region that conditioned the neutrality course of Azerbaijan and the stability in the South Caucasus. It further evaluates recent developments around the region and the EU's interests, responses, and shortcomings to deal with them; and eventually concludes that preservation and further consolidation of this foreign policy course of Azerbaijan also serves the best interest of the EU.*

Not only is it far from clear who is to be made resilient against what where there is no more or less benign government but, where countries are only just coming out of war, their first priority is national survival and their demand is for security guarantees. Would sovereignty and equality not be a better leitmotiv for EU strategy in the neighborhood?

Sven Biscop¹

Introduction

The EU and Azerbaijan have been working on a new treaty framework since 2017. A new treaty would replace the current Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) that entered into the force in 1999. How comprehensive and ambitious the new treaty is, is not yet clear. Many believe it is going to be like the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) signed between the EU and Armenia in 2017, which is not as ambitious as

the Eastern Partnership Program (EaP). On the official website of the EU, negotiations with Azerbaijan are categorized as an upgraded version of the PCA.² Armenia's CEPA is also in the same category.³ Yet, we should also acknowledge the fact that Azerbaijan is not a member of the Eurasian Economic Union of Russia, which prevented Armenia from signing the EaP's Association Agreement/Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area AA/DCFTA. This fact enables us to assume that, compared to Armenia, there are at least technically

* Baku Engineering University, Azerbaijan

** Ghent University, Belgium

Today, differently from Armenia and Georgia, Azerbaijan does not envision allying with NATO or CSTO. Rather, Azerbaijan makes episodic decisions based on its interests without crossing redlines

more options for Azerbaijan and the EU to cooperate. Although there are relatively more options for collaboration, the fundamental factor that must be acknowledged by the EU and Azerbaijan is the new treaty should avoid altering Azerbaijan's neutrality, which is currently a determinant factor in assuring the fragile security, stability, and balance of power in the entire South Caucasus region.

Azerbaijan's Geographical Location: Curse, Blessing, or Just a Piece of Land?

Geographically, Azerbaijan may be considered to occupy an unfavorable or favorable position, depending on the geopolitical context. It is a landlocked country, relying on neighboring Georgia for access to European energy markets. At the same time, Azerbaijan is the only country in the world that shares a border with Iran and Russia. The hardest time for Azerbaijan begins when relations between the EU and Russia, or the West and Iran, hit bottom. Traditionally,

Azerbaijan has pursued a so-called balanced foreign policy course, yet tension between Azerbaijan's neighbors and the West puts the country into a difficult situation and endangers its course. The sad news is that the West/EU does not get along well with Azerbaijan's neighbors most of the time, particularly with Iran and Russia. Put differently, Azerbaijan's balanced course is under constant threat without a security guarantee.

According to former U.S. National Security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, Azerbaijan is not just a piece of land in the middle of nowhere, but one of the most important geopolitical pivots of the Eurasian continent.⁴ Thus, occasionally, the country uses its location as a bargaining instrument to trade off and to gain recognition and influence. Azerbaijan "presents itself as a 'defensive shield' for the Caspian Sea: it opens or blocks the access to many significant extra-regional actors, oil- and gas-thirsty."⁵ Recently, Azerbaijan has attempted to activate the Caspian Sea's transport potential as well via multi-billion port and railway projects.⁶ The fact is, in addition to Azerbaijan, Iran and Russia around the Caspian Sea contemplate the same position for themselves. Differently from Azerbaijan, however, they tend to block access to foreign actors most of the time, not open it.

A Complex Geopolitical Context

Since independence, Azerbaijan has pursued policies aimed at opening the Caspian Sea to international in-

vestments, particularly in the energy sector. To do so, Azerbaijan had to get rid of the actors obscuring realization of this goal. Thus, in the very first years of its independence, Azerbaijan forced Russian army units to leave its territories, suspended its participation in Common Wealth of Independent States (CIS) gatherings, and began to negotiate the deal of the century –oil contracts with Western oil companies.⁷ Eventually, the country lost Nagorno-Karabakh and the surrounding seven regions due to Russia's backing of Armenia. The Khojaly massacre –one of the bloodiest events in Azerbaijan history– happened in this context on February 26, 1992, where more than 600 people were brutally killed and tortured, and hundreds wounded, while Azerbaijani incumbents were negotiating oil deals in London.⁸

The fact that the Russia of the 1990s is not the Russia of the 2000s and 2010s also should be considered. It was much weaker then, having been economically and financially destabilized and thrown into political chaos due to the unexpected break-up of the USSR. Nonetheless, it did not allow radical undesired shifts in the South Caucasus periphery without its consent. Lesson learned: without a security guarantee, making sharp moves might have undesired consequences for a small state. Russia was, is, and will be an important factor in the South Caucasus region –one whose interests and concerns should be taken into account. Eventually, at the end of 1993, Azerbaijan returned to CIS and offered a share to a Rus-

sian oil company in energy contracts signed in 1994.⁹

Azerbaijan's Neutrality or So-Called Balanced Policy

The same complex geopolitical context has persisted in the region since 1994. After Russia's revival in the mid-2000s, its security threat has been felt in the region more often than usual. Thus, in 2010, Azerbaijan had to re-evaluate its policies toward the economic and security structures of the Euro-Atlantic space. Whereas, in the National Security Concept adopted in 2007, Azerbaijan had envisaged “integration into the European and Euro-Atlantic political, security, economic and other institutions as the strategic goal of the Republic of Azerbaijan,”¹⁰ in its military doctrine adopted in 2010, Azerbaijan's integration with Euro-Atlantic structures was not listed as a strategic goal. Article 29 of the same doctrine prohibits deployment of any foreign military bases on the soil of Azerbaijan.¹¹ The same principle applies to Azerbaijan's sector of the Caspian Sea. According to Article 3.6 of the recent convention signed among the Caspian littoral states in 2018, the “presence in the Caspian Sea of armed forces not belonging to the Parties” is prohibited.¹² And in 2011, Azerbaijan became a member of the Non-Alignment Movement.¹³

Today, differently from Armenia and Georgia, Azerbaijan does not envision allying with NATO or the Collective Security Treaty Organization

Azerbaijan neither aims to integrate with the EU's economic structures via AA/DCFTA, nor plans to join Russia's Eurasian Economic Union any time soon

(CSTO). Rather, Azerbaijan makes episodic decisions based on its interests without crossing redlines. From time to time, Azerbaijan allies with the European Union, for instance, when it comes not to recognize the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula and Sevastopol, and it supports different NATO operations. Although Azerbaijan has contributed to NATO-led operations in Afghanistan since 2002, and has cooperated with NATO in the framework of Partnership for Peace since 1994 and the Partnership Interoperability Initiative since 2014, Azerbaijan's membership in NATO has never been on the agenda of either officials in Baku or Brussels.¹⁴

Besides, Azerbaijan has \$5 billion worth of arms deals with Russia.¹⁵ Even though in the local media Azerbaijan's membership in the CSTO is occasionally discussed, few believe in its plausibility due to two significant facts. First, Azerbaijan does not believe in Russia's good faith, considering its past experiences and Russia's current aggressive policies in the region. Second, Azerbaijan's number one enemy, Armenia, is in

CSTO; Armenia will use its veto right to prevent Azerbaijan membership to secure Russian support in the preservation of the status quo in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in its own favor.

Azerbaijan follows the same policy course in the economic sphere. Azerbaijan neither aims to integrate with the EU's economic structures via AA/DCFTA, nor plans to join Russia's Eurasian Economic Union any time soon. Although there are public discussions around joining either of these economic blocks, there are no concrete actions being taken to indicate any definite commitment. The EU's EaP could potentially undermine this situation, but Azerbaijan declined to sign the AA/DCFTA within the framework of the EaP and offered a new treaty framework to cooperate with the EU.

Azerbaijan's decision not to sign the AA/DCFTA agreement with the EU not only had geopolitical implications; it was also related to technical and economic factors. First, Azerbaijan is not a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO), and without being a member of the WTO a country can't sign a free trade agreement. Second, Azerbaijan's economy is not in a position to compete with the mature EU producers. Thanks to massive incomes from energy resources, unlike Georgia and Armenia, Azerbaijan did not pay attention to the diversification of its economy. The energy factor also plays a major role in keeping Azerbaijan away from economic blocks because, at least for



Azerbaijan's FM Mammadyarov (L) and EU Foreign Policy Chief Mogherini (C) address a press conference at the end of an EU-Azerbaijan Cooperation Council on April 4, 2019.

EMMANUEL DUNAND / AFP / Getty Images

now, Azerbaijan can sustain itself via predominantly exporting oil and gas. Another important factor is that the Georgian and Ukrainian experiences show that signing an FTA with the EU does not necessarily guarantee economic success. According to recent reports:

Georgia's exports to the EU fell by about 10%, while Moldova's increased by 10% and Ukraine's by just 3%. Imports from the EU increased in all three DCFTA countries (most in Ukraine, less in Georgia and least in Moldova) and trade deficits expanded.¹⁶

Taking into account the above-mentioned political and economic factors, Azerbaijan's incumbents chose the policy of wait-and-see. It is what experts call Azerbaijan's balanced foreign policy course and the signifier of Azerbaijan's independence or neutrality.

The EU's Interest

The primary motivation of the EU to cooperate with Azerbaijan is Azerbaijan's access to Caspian Sea energy resources and Central Asia. Azerbaijan is one of the vital ways for "Asian oil and gas resources to reach Europe without passing through Russia and Iran..."¹⁷ Compared to the unstable Middle East and unpredictable Russia, the relatively stable and predictable energy-rich countries in Central Asia are considered potentially secure suppliers for Europe's increasing gas demand. Countries in Central Asia are also interested in a European option, as access to the European market will bring extra revenues and decrease their dependence on China and Russia. Thus, to reach Central Asia was in the EU plans, even before the crisis in the Middle East and the Russia-Ukraine gas crisis in 2006 and 2009.¹⁸ In 1993, the EU initiated

the Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia (TRACECA) project in Brussels to connect Europe to Central Asia and China. In this regard, the EU's TRACECA is 20 years older than China's famous Belt and Road Initiative, which dates back to 2013.

After the launch of China's Belt and Road Initiative, the EU had to re-evaluate its Central Asia policy and increase its presence in that region. In the EU's recent Global Strategy paper, Central Asia is categorized as a region where the EU has major interests.¹⁹ According to the EU Parliament's briefing on the EU's new Central Asia strategy:

Central Asia is an often-overlooked region, but one that is gradually becoming more important for the European Union. Although the Central Asian countries are less of a priority than those of the Eastern Neighbourhood, the EU has steadily intensified diplomatic relations with the region, at the same time as ramping up development aid. European trade and investment, above all in Kazakhstan, have made the EU the main economic player in Central Asia, ahead of Russia and China.²⁰

Currently, Azerbaijan and the EU actively cooperate in the development of the Southern Gas Corridors (SGC), which envisions the shipment of Caspian gas (currently only Azerbaijan gas) to European markets by 2020. The EU is one of the major investors in TANAP (Trans Anatolian Pipeline) and Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) in the framework of the SGC since they are identified as projects of common interest.²¹ TANAP got

a €500 million loan from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), and the "TAP project received a €1.5 billion loan from the European Investment Bank, which is the largest ever single loan to an energy project."²² This time, the U.S. is out of the game and has no major stakes in the projects as it once did in the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan and Baku-Tbilisi-Supsa projects, and is not the guarantor of the security of the SGC. It is time for the EU to step in to secure its interest.

The U.S.-Asia Pivot

The U.S.-Asia pivot complicates the situation further for Azerbaijan and the EU. The U.S. is gradually leaving the South Caucasus, creating a power vacuum. The possible expanded vacuum most likely will be filled by Russia if the EU cannot solve the differences among its members in the area of the CSDP. This fact also forces the EU to think hard on its defense and strategic autonomy, and how to guarantee its interest in its broader neighborhood.²³ Recent EU endeavors around Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) should be understood in this context.

The U.S.' active presence in the region was due mainly to two factors. The first factor was the U.S.' military operations in Afghanistan. The territory of Azerbaijan was used as a logistic hub to supply NATO forces in Afghanistan.²⁴ According to the *Foreign Policy Journal*, "At the peak of the war, more than one-third of U.S. non-lethal mil-

itary supplies such as fuel, food, and clothing passed through Azerbaijan either overland or in the air.”²⁵ The second factor was Azerbaijan’s energy resources in the Caspian Sea and their secure shipment to the European energy market to decrease the U.S.’ European allies’ dependence on the Russian monopoly.²⁶ In this vein, the U.S. was the sole guarantor and investor in the construction of two major pipelines in the region: the Baku-Tbilisi-Supsa, and the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan, both of which bypass Iran and Russia.

In 2015, the U.S. Congress lifted a 40-year oil exportation ban.²⁷ Some experts predict that the U.S. will surpass Saudi Arabia by the end of 2019, as the U.S. has doubled its oil production in the last 10 years.²⁸ Eventually, U.S. oil companies Exxon and Chevron will seek to sell their shares in Azerbaijan’s oil field and focus on domestic production in the U.S.²⁹ Recent developments in the oil sector, including the so-called shale gas revolution in the U.S. and major Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) projects across transatlantic regions might leave Azerbaijan in a vulnerable situation.

Starting in 2011 with the Obama Administration’s decision to gradually withdraw U.S. military forces from Afghanistan, Azerbaijan has been losing its importance as a logistic hub. It is not only the EU and Azerbaijan, which might be affected by the U.S.-Asia pivot. The U.S.’ strategic shift to the Asia-Pacific region is also being felt in the South Caucasus, as Georgia’s and Ukraine’s NATO dreams were downed during the last NATO

The key takeaway from the crises in Georgia and Ukraine is that the EU’s willingness in its Eastern neighborhood is limited

summit in 2018. Today, NATO’s flag does not wave anymore in front of Georgia’s administrative buildings together with the EU’s and Georgia’s flag, as it did a couple of years ago.

It is a fact that, today, the presence of the U.S. in the South Caucasus region is not felt as it was two decades ago. Besides the departure of Exxon and Chevron, the Trump Administration has also proposed, “to slash funding for USAID –one of the last remaining Western government development departments working in Azerbaijan.”³⁰ The U.S.-Asia pivot was a rational choice because the U.S. could not continue the rivalry against, China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea at the same time. The bad news for the EU is that there is not much time left for it to step in if it wants to protect its interests in the region. Recent events show that the EU is willing, but not yet ready to replace the U.S. to secure its cause in the South Caucasus.

The EU’s Global Strategy: Implications for Stability and Security

To address the issues related to the U.S.’ Asia pivot, the migration cri-

sis, and changing dynamics in the neighborhood and emerging global challenges, EU policymakers were summoned to update the EU's global strategy in 2016. The new Global Strategy, "Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe" is qualitatively different from the first European Security Strategy, "A Secure Europe in a Better World." In the first European Security Strategy, the EU envisioned the development of a "world of well-governed democratic states" as a precondition for its security and stability.³¹ Thus, the EU actively engaged in promoting democracy in its eastern and southern neighborhoods through the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) and attached various humanitarian principles to its programs to achieve its goals. The Arab spring and the Ukraine crisis were litmus tests for the EU to recognize its limits in every sense –in democracy promotion and the preserving of stability in its southern neighborhood, as well as its lack of means to support its cause vis-à-vis Russia's hard power in Eastern Europe. Thus, the recent Global Strategy withdraws democracy promotion as the number one priority of the EU and instead introduces a new term: "resilience."³²

According to the new strategy, the resilience of neighboring countries is a new priority for the EU. For many, it means that as far as a neighbor country is stable, it is enough for the EU and when it comes to democracy, a country's level of democracy is the internal affair of the state. The EU will get involved if it is asked to do

so. This explains why the EU hesitates to suspend the nuclear deal with Iran and impose sanctions as the U.S. has done; the EU pays the price for instability in its periphery, not the U.S. Thus, in its new strategy, the EU tends to carry out policies to stabilize its neighborhood. The EU's stance is already good news for Azerbaijan's neutrality, as it is not provoking and sends a relatively positive message to the incumbent regime in Azerbaijan. The EU's previous active democracy promotion meant mingling in the internal affairs of the country from the perspective of Azerbaijani incumbents, who consider Azerbaijan democratic already and thus EU policies, unnecessary.

The new Global Strategy also addresses the EU's shortcomings –especially its strategic autonomy. Thus, a year after the publication of the Global Strategy in December 2017, the member states decided to create PESCO. According to the Council document, PESCO envisages "enhanced coordination, increased investment in defense and cooperation in developing defense capabilities."³³ Currently, there are 17 projects being carried out within the PESCO framework, the successful implementation of which will increase the strategic autonomy of the EU.³⁴ A stronger EU with integrated hard power instruments is desired in the absence of the U.S. in the region to balance Russian pressure, to guarantee the security of the Southern gas corridors, and secure the shipments of the energy resources of the Caspian Sea to the European energy market.



The Georgia and Ukraine Crisis as a Litmus Test

The Russian-Georgian war of 2008 and the Ukraine crisis of 2014 enable us to conclude that “The main objective of the current Russian grand strategy is the establishment of a sphere of influence in its near abroad. That excludes power sharing, for a sphere of influence implies exclusivity: Russia wants to be the only external power with the right to interfere.”³⁵

Although the Russian-Georgian war of August 2008 was not directly related to Georgians’ European aspirations, it revealed that no one is going to make war with Russia over a small country. Hours after Georgia’s adventurist moves to annex its breakaway territories, Russian armies were stationed within 40 km of Tbilisi.³⁶ The Russian Army also seized the Baku-Supsa pipeline, which car-

ries Azerbaijani oil. The operation of other major pipelines in the region, the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan and the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum pipelines might also be affected in case of extensive warfare in the region. Surprisingly, operation of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan stopped during the war, not because of Russian seizure, but because of an explosion on the pipeline in eastern Turkey.³⁷ Whether it was accidental or planned remains unclear. The fact is that neither the EU nor the U.S. did anything except blame Russia and sanction a few sectors in Russia, without affecting their own interests at home.

A similar scenario happened in Ukraine. As the geopolitical situation around Ukraine was comparable with that of Azerbaijan, it requires particular attention. Ukraine is the biggest country in the EU’s eastern neighborhood, just as Azerbaijan is in

EU representatives and leaders of the Eastern Partnership Group attend the 10th EU-Eastern Partnership Council Meeting in Brussels on May 13, 2019.

EMMANUEL DUNAND
AFP / Getty Images

the South Caucasus. Until 2013, like Azerbaijan, Ukraine was wandering between the EU and Russia without choosing either. In Eastern Europe, there was a relative balance between the EU and Russia in terms of spheres of influence, until Moldova chose the EU by signing AA in 2013, and Belarus became one of the founding members of the Eurasian Economic Union together with Russia and Kazakhstan. Ukraine's decision would change the regional balance in favor of either Russia or the EU. Thus, it was a difficult task for the Ukrainian incumbents to decide what path to choose.

Ukraine first chose Russia, which brought about the Euromaidan events. Eventually, under public pressure, Ukraine had to cancel its previous deal with Russia and sign the Association Agreement with the EU, and was thus drawn into chaos. Ukraine's geopolitical miscalculations and denial of Russian policymaker's zero-sum mentality created another conflict quarry in the Eastern European region. Ukraine lost Crimea and Sevastopol, and two separatist entities –Donetsk and the Luhansk People's Republics– emerged thanks to Russian backing in the eastern part of Ukraine. This is exactly what happened with Azerbaijan around Nagorno-Karabakh when Azerbaijan forced Russian armies out of its territories and negotiated oil deals in the beginning of the 1990s. Nothing explains the situation better in Ukraine than Mearsheimer's quote:

One also hears the claim that Ukraine has the right to determine whom it

wants to ally with, and the Russians have no right to prevent Kiev from joining the West. This is a dangerous way for Ukraine to think about its foreign policy choices. The sad truth is that, might often makes right when great power politics are at play. Abstract rights such as self-determination are largely meaningless when powerful states get into brawls with weaker states.³⁸

The annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol and the inflaming of secessionist movements in the eastern part of Ukraine made the Russian factor in frozen conflicts in post-Soviet space more discernible at the international level. Eventually, for the first time, EU officially recognized Russian involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in the report on "the state of EU-Russia political relations," stating:

Russia is directly or indirectly party to a number of protracted conflicts in the common neighbourhood –in Transnistria, South Ossetia, Abkhazia, Donbas and Nagorno Karabakh– that constitute serious impediments to the development and stability of the neighbouring countries concerned, undermine their independence and limit their free sovereign choices.³⁹

The sad news is that in the Ukrainian case the EU and the U.S. behaved the same again –imposing selective sanctions and making a couple of statements.

The key takeaway from the crises in Georgia and Ukraine is that the EU's willingness in its Eastern neighborhood is limited.⁴⁰ Another takeaway

is that the EU loses against Russia in the absence of the U.S. in the region and will continue to do so, as it procrastinates the establishment of integrated hard power instruments. In reality, “the EU plays an insignificant role in regional security issues”⁴¹ and in most cases fails to (re)act adequately. If the trend continues, the EU’s envisioned Global Strategy will be nothing more than a declarative paper. As Coelmont stated, “A strategy without capabilities is nothing but a hallucination.”⁴²

Conclusions: The Importance of Azerbaijan’s Neutrality

Azerbaijan is a geopolitically neutral country and one of the pivot areas of the Eurasian continent. Azerbaijan officials frame this situation as a balanced foreign policy and a signifier of Azerbaijan’s sovereignty. In reality, Azerbaijan’s balanced foreign policy course is nothing more than a myth. Azerbaijan is a small country, which could not stand-alone against strong Russian pressure without the presence of the U.S. in the region. Thus, it was the U.S. that once balanced Russia, Azerbaijan took advantage of this situation and maneuvered in a very narrow circle. Without the U.S., Azerbaijan’s balanced policy, neutrality, and sovereignty will be difficult to sustain. In that context, Azerbaijan’s neutrality is more given, rather than chosen. Whether chosen or given, however, Azerbaijan’s neutrality works for the EU, to some extent for Russia, and of course, for Azerbaijan, and has been the determinant factor in the stabili-

Azerbaijan’s EU turn might lead to massive instability in the South Caucasus region, since Russia holds the strategic Nagorno-Karabakh card in its hands

ty of the South Caucasus until today. Therefore, any kind of change in the status of Azerbaijan whether toward Russia or the EU is undesirable.

The Ukraine crisis enables us to make an analogy. As in Eastern Europe, there is a balance of interests between the EU and Russia in the South Caucasus. Georgia is with the EU, Armenia has to be with Russia, and Azerbaijan is neutral. Any change in geopolitical status of Azerbaijan can alter the balance of power in the region in favor of either the EU or Russia.

An Azerbaijani policy shift toward Russia is undesirable for the EU because Azerbaijan is the only viable way for the EU to get access to Central Asia. Thus, in its newly negotiated agreement, the EU should somehow turn a blind eye to Azerbaijan’s internal problems when it comes to democracy and human rights in order not to push Azerbaijan into Russia’s orbit. It is not accidental that Azerbaijan’s potential membership in the Russian-led CSTO or EEU is raised whenever EU institutions criticize the Azerbaijani government on the grounds of human rights violations.



Representatives from Greece, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Turkey, Albania and the EU officials attend the inauguration ceremony in Thessaloniki, Greece for the Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) on May 17, 2016. GIANNIS PAPANIKOS / AFP / Getty Images

Azerbaijan's EU turn would be desirable for the EU –if the EU possessed the necessary means to back this turn. As the Ukrainian and Georgian cases prove, however, the EU does not have these means. Thus, from today's perspective, Azerbaijan's EU turn is not even desirable for the EU since the EU is not ready to support it. It would be dangerous, as recent experience shows: Russia does not tolerate anyone in its backyard, and cannot endure any undesired change without its consent. Thus, Azerbaijan's EU turn might lead to massive instability in the South Caucasus region, since Russia holds the strategic Nagorno-Karabakh card in its hands.

A country should not make the same mistake twice. As quoted by Biscop, those who ignore the facts and allow religion, ideology, or emotions in decision making, lose.⁴³ Unfortunately, Nagorno-Karabakh is not a single

fact, to see what can happen if red lines are crossed. Thanks to Russia, we have the Ukrainian and Georgian cases. Where else should Russia occupy to show its redlines? The U.S. is retreating from the region along with its oil companies and the EU is weak, unable to protect itself without the U.S. After a dramatic hike in oil prices in the early 2000s and Putin's ascendency, Russia has made a comeback. It is now much stronger and more aggressive than it was in the early 1990s, when the EU and U.S. enjoyed enlargements. The question is who will guarantee the security of Azerbaijan?

If Azerbaijani neutrality works for the EU, and is less costly, why not consolidate it? No one knows how long the neutrality of Azerbaijan will last in the absence of the U.S. in the region. Thus, it is time for the EU to step in and to support Azerbaijan's neutrality and sovereignty and to secure its

interest in the South Caucasus and Central Asia. ■

Endnotes

1. Sven Biscop, "A Strategy for Europe's Neighbourhood: Keep Resilient and Carry On?" *ARI 4*, (2017), retrieved November 8, 2018, from <http://www.egmontinstitute.be/a-strategy-for-europes-neighbourhood/>, p. 1.
2. "Negotiations and Agreements," *European Commission*, retrieved December 23, 2018, from http://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/negotiations-and-agreements/?fbclid=IwAR313K-eQ_yi1albNsFvQ5cmayjwNmwo2UJ1WiFYXOQCwnXelliHsJmQNF4o#_being-updated.
3. "Negotiations and Agreements," *European Commission*.
4. Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives*, (New York: Basic Books, 1997).
5. Inessa Baban, "Azerbaijan's Identity in the South Caucasus: 'Geopolitical Pivot' or 'Geostrategic Actor?'" *IRIS*, (May 26, 2016), retrieved November 9, 2018, from <http://www.iris-france.org/43014-azerbaijans-identity-in-the-south-caucasus-geopolitical-pivot-or-geostrategic-actor-2/>.
6. "The New Port in Alat," *Port of Baku*, retrieved from <http://portofbaku.com/en/The-New-Port-in-Alat/>.
7. Shamkhal Abilov and Ismayil Isayev, "Azerbaijan-Russian Relations: Azerbaijan's Pursuit of Successful Balanced Foreign Policy," *Journal of Central Asian and Caucasian Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 19 (2015), pp. 121-122.
8. Shamkhal Abilov and Ismayil Isayev, "The Consequences of the Nagorno-Karabakh War for Azerbaijan and the Undeniable Reality of Khojaly Massacre: A View from Azerbaijan," *Polish Political Science Yearbook*, Vol. 45, (2016), pp. 292-293.
9. Elizabeth Fuller, "Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy and the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict," *Istituto Affari Internazionali Working Paper*, No. 13 (2013), retrieved from <http://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/iaiw1312.pdf>.
10. "National Security Concept of Azerbaijan Republic," (May 23, 2007) retrieved from http://www.e-qanun.az/framework/13373?fbclid=IwAR3_B6mDdBlhzaATfmPttAVaa0zQaf5qSjVK-c19iLZXdlStjL12XR9L9w.
11. "Military Doctrine of Azerbaijan Republic," (June 8, 2010), retrieved from http://anl.az/download/meqale/azerbaycan/2010/iyun/124735.htm?fbclid=IwAR1gygzDkmstwWBWkbUvVv-xaql31-j8CHtKyTOw6ppzUeuTFau4_B15TTQdY.
12. "Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea," *President of Russia*, (August 12, 2018), retrieved from <http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/5328>.
13. Arifa Kazimova, "Azerbaijan Joins Ranks of Non-Aligned Movement," *RFE/RL*, (May 25, 2011), retrieved March 9, 2019, from https://www.rferl.org/a/azerbaijan_join_nonaligned_movement/24200776.html.
14. "Relations with Azerbaijan," *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, (October 26, 2018), retrieved from https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49111.htm.
15. Fuad Shahbazov, "Could Vladimir Putin's Visit to Azerbaijan Shift the Regional Balance of Power?" *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 15, No. 144 (October 12, 2018), retrieved November 8, 2018, from <https://jamestown.org/program/could-vladimir-putins-visit-to-azerbaijan-shift-the-regional-balance-of-power/>.
16. Amat Adarov and Peter Havlik, "Challenges of DCFTAs: How Can Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine Succeed?" *WIIW*, (June 23, 2017), retrieved November 8, 2018, from <https://wiiw.ac.at/challenges-of-dcftas-how-can-georgia-moldova-and-ukraine-succeed--n-230.html>.
17. Luke Coffey and Efgan Nifti, "Why the West Needs Azerbaijan?" *Foreign Policy*, (May 28, 2018), retrieved November 20, 2018, from <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/05/28/why-the-west-needs-azerbaijan>.
18. Shamkhal Abilov, "Historical Development of the Azerbaijan Oil Industry and the Role of Azerbaijan in Today's European Energy Security," *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (July-September 2010), pp. 126-127.
19. "Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy," *European Union Global Strategy*, (June 28, 2016), retrieved November 12, 2018, from <https://europa.eu/globalstrategy/en/shared-vision-common-action-stronger-europe>, p. 29.
20. Martin Russell, "The EU's New Central Asia Strategy," *EU Parliament*, (January 2019), retrieved March 9, 2019, from [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/633162/EPRS_BRI\(2019\)633162_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/633162/EPRS_BRI(2019)633162_EN.pdf).

21. "Technical Information on Projects of Common Interest," *European Commission*, retrieved November 23, 2018, from https://ec.europa.eu/inea/sites/inea/files/technical_document_8_march_2016for_publication_-_change_22092016.pdf.
22. Svitlana Pyrkalo, "EBRD Board Approves Up to €500 Million Loan for Trans Adriatic Pipeline," *EBRD*, (July 4, 2018), retrieved November 24, 2018, from <https://www.ebrd.com/news/2018/ebrd-board-approves-up-to-500-million-loan-for-trans-adriatic-pipeline.html>.
23. "Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe," *European Union Global Strategy*.
24. Shamkhal Abilov, "The 'New Great Game' Over the Caspian Region: Russia, the USA, and China in the Same Melting Pot," *Khazar Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (2012), pp. 38-39.
25. Coffey and Nifti, "Why the West Needs Azerbaijan?"
26. Abilov, "The 'New Great Game' Over the Caspian Region," p. 36.
27. "Oil's Well that Ends Well: America Lifts Its Ban on Oil Exports," *The Economist*, (December 18, 2015), retrieved March 9, 2019, from <https://www.economist.com/finance-and-economics/2015/12/18/america-lifts-its-ban-on-oil-exports>.
28. Tim Daiss, "U.S. to Become World's Top Oil Exporter," *OILPRICE.com*, (May 2, 2018), retrieved March 9, 2019, from <https://oilprice.com/Energy/General/Citi-US-To-Become-Worlds-Top-Oil-Exporter.html>.
29. Dmitry Zhdannikov and Ron Bousso, "Exxon, Chevron Seek to Exit Azerbaijan's Oil After 25 Years," *Reuters*, (December 4, 2018), retrieved March 9, 2019, from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-exxon-azerbaijan-exclusive/exclusive-exxon-chevron-seek-to-exit-azerbaijans-oil-after-25-years-idUSKBN1O315D>.
30. Anahit Shirinyan, Zaur Shiriyev, and George Mchedlishvili, "Examining How the South Caucasus Is Responding to Trump," *Chatham House*, (August 24, 2017), retrieved November 16, 2018, from <https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/examining-how-south-caucasus-responding-trump>.
31. "A Secure Europe in a Better World," *European Security Strategy*, (December 12, 2003), retrieved December 2, 2018, from <https://europa.eu/globalstrategy/en/european-security-strategy-security-europe-better-world>, p. 11.
32. "Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe," *European Union Global Strategy*, p. 20.
33. "Council Decision: Establishing Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and determining the list of Participating Member States," *Council of the European Union*, (December 8, 2017), retrieved December 5, 2018, from <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-14866-2017-INIT/en/pdf>, p. 16.
34. "Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) Updated List of PESCO Projects," (November 19, 2018), retrieved December 8, 2018, from <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/37028/table-pesco-projects.pdf>.
35. Sven Biscop, "The Great Powers Have Their Ways," *Security Policy Brief*, No. 93, (December, 2017), retrieved from <http://www.egmontinstitute.be/content/uploads/2017/12/SPB93-The-Great-Powers-Have-Their-Ways.pdf?type=pdf>, p. 1.
36. Gerard Toal and Gela Merabishvili, "Borderization Theatre: Geopolitical Entrepreneurship on the South Ossetia Boundary Line, 2008-2018," *Caucasus Survey*, (January 24, 2019), retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1080/23761199.2019.1565192>.
37. Svante E. Cornell, "Pipeline Power: The War in Georgia and the Future of the Caucasian Energy Corridor," *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (2009), pp. 131-139.
38. John J. Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 93, No. 5 (September/October 2014), retrieved December 2, 2018, from <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2014-08-18/why-ukraine-crisis-west-s-fault>.
39. "State of EU-Russia Political Relations," *European Parliament*, (March 12, 2019), retrieved March 19, 2019, from <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//NONSGML+TA+P8-TA-2019-0157+0+DOC+PDF+V0//EN>.
40. Sven Biscop, *European Strategy in the 21st Century: New Future for Old Power*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019).
41. Leila Alieva, "The Eastern Partnership: The View from Azerbaijan," *European Council on Foreign Relations*, (May 19, 2015), retrieved November 15, 2018, from https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_azerbaijan3023.
42. Jo Coelmont, "Permanent Sovereign Cooperation (PESCO) to Underpin the EU Global Strategy," *Security Policy Brief*, No. 80 (December 2016), p. 3.
43. Biscop, *European Strategy in the 21st Century*.

thenewturkey.org

Published by SETA Foundation



GLOBAL NEWS-ANALYSIS PORTAL OF THE NEW TURKEY

**The
New** Turkey