

History of Establishment and Development of Relations between the South Caucasus and the EU

Kanan K. Dadashov

Postgraduate Student, Moscow State Institute of International Relations (University), Vernadsky Avenue, Moscow.

E-mail: canan.94@mail.ru

Kamilla K. Dadashova

Postgraduate Student, Moscow State Institute of International Relations (University), Vernadsky Avenue, Moscow.

E-mail: dadashova.kamilla@gmail.com

Nazim N. Abdullayev

Postgraduate Student, Moscow State Institute of International Relations (University), Vernadsky Avenue, Moscow.

E-mail: N.Abdullaev@inno.mgimo.ru

Mikhail A. Evdokimov

Postgraduate Student, Moscow State Institute of International Relations (University), Vernadsky Avenue, Moscow.

E-mail: evdokimov.m@inno.mgimo.ru

Leyla Sh. Mirzoeva

Postgraduate Student, Moscow State Institute of International Relations (University), Vernadsky Avenue, Moscow.

E-mail: mirzoevalle@gmail.com

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Abstract

The aim of the article is to define and analyze the stages of development and formation of relations between the South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia) and the European Union (EU) and other European organizations in a historical retrospective, as well as to identify possible prospects for expanding and strengthening mutually beneficial cooperation and interaction in the near future. At the same time, the analysis of activities of South Caucasian countries in the European organizations is narrowed to aspects that influence the process of European integration of these countries. Methods. In the research process a wide range of methods of scientific knowledge were used: analysis, synthesis, induction, deduction, generalization, systematization, forecasting, comparison. Results. During the research special

attention was given to the terms and determinants of the formation of the European vector of development of the countries of the South Caucasus at the turn of the XX-XXI centuries. The evolution of understanding and key aspects of the development and structuring of the EU policy regarding the development strategy of the South Caucasian region in general, as well as the need of participation and support of the South Caucasian countries in maintenance of national security and building state institutions, developing the economy and the humanitarian sphere are defined. In order to conduct a systematic analysis of evolution of relations between European and South Caucasian countries three historical stages were emphasized. Within the framework of each stage initiatives and ongoing cooperative programs are characterized, as well as key areas for establishing partnerships between the South Caucasian republics and European countries. Besides stages of the formation of conditions, the signing of agreements and implementing an action plan for EU membership of the South Caucasian countries were studied in historical retrospective. Conclusion. The results of the study led to the conclusion that, in the 1990s, the EU to a large extent viewed the South Caucasus binded to Moscow, taking into account the presence of Russia in the region and its active actions. The situation changed in 2000s, when the EU's interests and its interaction with the region deepened, and also after the armed conflict in Georgia, when Europe was concerned about the necessity of respecting and strengthening security in the region. Eventually security policy was supplemented by new dimensions of cooperation such as political, economic, humanitarian.

Keywords

Partnership, European Union, Agreement, Security, South Caucasus, Economics, Politics, Membership.

Introduction

South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia) is extremely complicated region in many terms, it's one of the most vulnerable and fragmented regions in the world where internal and external threats to security enhance each other. After almost thirty years of collapse of the Soviet Union, the region still suffers from conflicts, citizens are permanently in unsafe circumstances. Herewith, it should be noted that, although Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia are yet to achieve full political and economic integration in the modern international field, they are members of a great extent of different, sometimes opposite, organizations and unions. The history of establishment and development of South Caucasian countries was characterized by the western historian James Forsyth in a rather characteristic and vivid way: "South Caucasus is to certain extent unpopular region. Its history as a whole appears to be chaotic and complicated, arguably tragic, in complex

intricacies of which a very narrow circle of historians understands with some certainty” (On the approval of the “Concept).

Today the South Caucasus has become a place of confrontation between three powerful forces of the world - the United States, Russia and the European Union. In the summer of 2004, Washington declared this territory as zone of its strategic interests. Meanwhile South Caucasus is traditionally sphere of influence of Russia. The EU, unlike the USA and the Russian Federation, arranging its policy in Caucasus pays great attention not to military-political component but to socio-economic (Feldman, 2006). In fairness it is necessary to focus on the fact that in the early 1990s Transcaucasia didn't occur in the EU's radar since the region as a whole was considered a vague and distant periphery, was not of particular interest to European politics; besides, it was burdened with numerous problems and was completely under the influence of Russia (Report of the Committee, 1992).

Despite the different geostrategic trajectories of their positioning, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia actively articulate the choice of the European vector of development that is mostly associated with the experience and traditions of diplomacy of these countries. (Pipia, 2019).

Thus, considering everything mentioned above, the analysis of the evolution of the development and formation of the European vector of geopolitical relations between South Caucasian countries and, accordingly, the Caucasian agenda in the EU foreign policy (as well as European countries' national foreign policies) at the turn of XX – XXI centuries represents significant scientific interest early, which influenced the definition of the topic of this study, as well as the formation of its conceptual platform and scientific tools of knowledge.

Degree of Development of the Problem

Historical and political premises, as well as the process of the development of foreign policy relations in the states of South Caucasus with different countries and integrative groups, are studied in details by Russian researchers and Western historians, including A.S. Ayvazyan (Ayvazyan, 2018), Burova A.A. (Burov, 2008), Pipia I. (Pipia, 2019), Shtrubu E.V. (Shturba, 2016) and others.

Significant contribution to studying strategic and geopolitical aspects of confrontation A significant contribution to the study of the strategic and geopolitical aspects of the

confrontation of the world's leading factors in the South Caucasus has been made by such researchers as: Shabanov M. (Shabanov, 2015), Chizh A. (Chizh, 2020) and others.

Problems associated with the EU, other European organizations and European countries directions of the foreign policy activities of countries of South Caucasus, as well as frequent issues of the development of states are reflected in works of many scientists, including V.V. Degoev. (Degoev, 2005), Khugaeva T.G. (Khugaev, 2019), Shabanova M. (Shabanov, 2015), Shturba E.V. (Shturba, 2016) and others.

Separately the analytical report prepared by OECD on the European policy towards the South Caucasian region «Eastern Europe and South Caucasus: 2011», as well as the analytical review by J. Nixie "South Caucasus: a drama in three acts", should be noted. These studies give comprehensive and valid analysis of the foreign policy process in the region (Nixey, 2016).

Also, special attention goes to monography “Geopolitics of the Caucasus” by K.S. Gadzhiev (Gadzhiev, 2001) that is dedicated to the development of Caucasian region in post-soviet period.

However, despite the present scientific achievements and groundwork, some aspects of geopolitical processes on the territory of South Caucasus, as well as the peculiarities of the development and implementation of the European sub regional strategy remain insufficiently studied. In this context, historical milestones in the formation of consistency in relations between Transcaucasia and Europe on the basis of the synthesis of international political science, history and sociology require more fundamental study.

Materials and Methods

The usage of scientific, historical, documentary, source study methods in the process of research made the reveal of conceptual approaches to studying the history of establishment and development of relations between the Caucasian republics and the EU possible. The complex of methods determined the logical sequence of narration of text, structuring problematic areas of the study of various historical documents as sources of information.

Empiric method allowed to draw for critical analysis significant factual material from the documentary resources of State Archive of the Russian Federation, the Universal Database of Central Asia and the Caucasus (UDB-CAC), and the Archive of European Integration (AEI).

The comparative-historical method allowed to identify the similarities and differences between the phenomena recorded in the documents, to determine the genetic relationship, common and specific in the development of the European vector of the countries of the South Caucasus. The historical knowledge of documents means appliance of retrospective method, which allowed to reveal causal-resultative development of events happening in republics in real life. The descriptive-narrative method expresses the dynamics of relationships in the activities of the governments of the South Caucasus countries and the EU, as reflected in the documentary resource. The heuristic method is used for theoretical development of a model for searching for documentary sources of information. The analytical-synthetic method allowed to reconstruct the history, structure and content of documentary and information resources on the studied topic.

The methodological construction is enlarged by the archaic methods since the main object if study are documentary and information resources that are kept in archaic institutions.

The information base of the study consisted of axiomatic and non-axiomatic materials concerning the formation of relations of the South Caucasus countries with the EU. Regulatory and reporting documents were also processed in detail. Archives, monographs, periodicals, and informational publications were used to conduct historical analysis.

The aim of the article is to analyze the stages of development and formation of relations between the South Caucasus and the European Union in a historical retrospective, as well as to identify possible prospects for expanding and strengthening mutually beneficial cooperation and interaction in the near future. At the same time, the analysis of activities of South Caucasian countries in other European organizations is narrowed to aspects that influence the process of European integration of these countries.

The research objectives include the following:

- Highlighting and substantiating the stages of formation of relations between the South Caucasus countries and the EU, with formalization of political factors influencing the nature and specificity of the current political development of the Transcaucasian republics;
- Outlining key EU initiatives that contributed to the intensification and expansion of the European vector of development of the South Caucasus republics;
- The detailed analysis of the individual interests of the South Caucasian countries in Europe, highlighting their national priorities and the expected benefits of cooperation with the EU;

- The detailed examination and justification of the of the dominance of the economic vector of cooperation between the EU and the Caucasian republics.

Results

Historical Stages of the Development of Cooperation between the Countries of the South Caucasus and Europe

Baku, Tbilisi and Erevan currently call the rapprochement with Europe an important element of their foreign policy strategy, however, the ambitions regarding eurointegration in three capitals are different, and the possibilities of their realization depend entirely on the real situation in the Caucasus and the actions of their neighbors, which have significant weight on the world stage: Russia in the north and Iran in the south (European Economic, n.d.).

On the whole, two key directions of implementation of the European policy towards the South Caucasus states can be distinguished: the first is bilateral relations of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia with countries geographically located in Europe, primarily including the members of the CIS and, above all, Russia, then the former socialist countries of the EU and Western European states; the second is the relations of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia with leading subjects of European law (*sensu lato*). The former represents the EU including its institutions (the European Parliament, the European commission etc), the latter implies the Council of Europe and its administrative entities (Parliamentary Assembly, European Court of Human Rights etc). Also this is not limited above mentioned subjects, but includes OSCE and other European organizations and fields (Consequences of development, n. d.).

However, the mutual interest of the South Caucasus countries and Europe did not formalize immediately and went through a rather long historical period of formation. Let us consider the key historical stages in the development of cooperation in more detail.

1 Stage: The Beginning of the 1990s. XX c. -2003. The European choice of the South Caucasus countries and the EU's restrained support for the initiatives of the Transcaucasian republics.

After the collapse of the USSR, the republics of the South Caucasus, amidst increasing tension in their relations with the Russian Federation, stepped up their efforts to find allies among the cohort of developed countries and traditionally close centers of influence, and turned to the choice and justification of a new path of development. The key vector was

the orientation towards the West, particularly cooperation with Europe and leading international organizations (Consequences of development, 1991). The focus and orientation of the Transcaucasian republics toward Europe was caused by the desire to settle interethnic conflicts and stabilize the political situation inside the countries. However, these vectors were not the only determinants. The search for a new model of national development for the Caucasian states was also on the agenda (Residence Materials, n.d.).

The most convincing and lasting (since 1997) on the external political "European vector" of development is insisted by Georgia, which has prepared the "Concept on strengthening the stability of public life, ensuring security, supporting state sovereignty and restoring the territorial integrity of Georgia" (On Approval of the "Concept, 2005) in the framework of the work of its Parliament.

Armenia's priority foreign policy direction were its relations with Europe as evidenced by the visits of the head of the republic, B. Ararktsyan, to Strasbourg (early 1994) and the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe (September 1994) and being given the status of the "special guest" in PACE (1996).

Baku also gave priority to the European direction in its foreign policy, due to a number of factors. First of all, it was preceded by a gradual increase of European interest in the early 1990s of the twentieth century, when significant oil and gas reserves were discovered in the region (Notes on the situation, n.d.). As a result, in 1993, the European Commission proposed the TRACECA program, the Asia-Caucasus-Europe transport corridor. The country's leadership emphasized the importance of integration processes in all spheres of activity with the EU states.

Regarding the specific steps of the EU's cooperation with the countries of the Transcaucasus, we should elaborate on some of them.

The rapid development of relations between Europe and Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia can be traced back to December 1991, when the official recognition of their independence was published, the discussion of the prospects for cooperation (PACE, 1994) and the adoption by the Council of Europe of a project "common position" that specifically stressed the need to promote and assist the former Soviet republics in various ways in building and developing democratic institutions (Delegation Trip, 1991, European Political Cooperation, 1992).

In general, it can be noted that the Europe's increased involvement and interest in the South Caucasia region at the end of the twentieth century is due to the following factors.

Firstly, all three states wanted to develop relations with the EU in order to get help in confronting the enormous influence that Russia continued to exert (Promotion and Development, 1990). In this regard the EU started gradually including the South Caucasus republics in the first and second TACIS (Technical assistance to the Community of Independent States) programs, and then in 1996 involved them in signing the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (Materials received by the Chairman, n.d, Materials on international, n.d).

Second, the eastward expansion of the EU itself made the South Caucasus geographically closer to it, especially when Romania and Bulgaria joined the EU. The "Rose Revolution" (Georgia, 2003) was epochal for the EU's rapprochement with the Caucasian republics, thanks to which Mikhail Saakashvili was entrusted with governing the state. The new president stressed in his inaugural speech that "Euro-Atlantic integration is a priority of Georgia's foreign policy" (President Saakashvili's Inauguration, 2004).

Third is the energy factor. Azerbaijan, with its vast gas resources, plays a key role in the EU's efforts to diversify natural gas routes and sources (Documents of the 12th Regional Conference, n.d.).

II stage: 2003 – 2008 Enhancement of the EU' actions in the field of ensuring security in the republics and the region as a whole.

During the second stage, leadership in fostering and initiating South Caucasus-EU relations shifted to European institutions and policy makers, primarily due to the increasing security risks in the region and the need to resolve national conflicts.

Following Georgia's "Rose Revolution" in December 2003, the EU adopted a Security Strategy that emphasized the need for the EU "to take a stronger and more active interest in the problems of the South Caucasus," and national leaders declared that "we must expand the benefits of political and economic cooperation for our neighbors to the East as we pursue our state-building objectives. Certainly we should be more actively and deeply interested and involved in the problems of the South Caucasus, which over time will also become our neighboring region».

For their part, the South Caucasus states during this period focus on intensifying economic interaction (Package Examination Papers, n.d.). For example, in 2005

Azerbaijan had a trade surplus with the EU: exports amounted to about 2.4 billion euro, and imports from the EU were at 1.5 billion euro. Armenia accounted for 0.4% of total EU imports in 2005, with €528 million of exports to the region and €416 million of imports (National Statistics Office, 2020). Georgia's trade with the EU was characterized by exports of 264 million euros and imports of 495 million euros (National Statistics Office, 2020).

At this historical juncture, joint commitments, guarantees and instruments of support have been agreed upon and enshrined in the plans of all the states of the Transcaucasus. In a speech delivered at the Bled conference in Slovenia in August 2006, EU Commissioner for External Relations B. Ferrero-Waldner stressed the importance of these plans, stating that they were "designed to promote political reforms and sustainable development and to stimulate economic and social growth. (Benita Ferrero-Waldner, 2006).

III stage: 2009 Eastern Partnership – the present. Economic, political cooperation, expansion of the humanitarian ties.

The EU Eastern Partnership policy, adopted in 2009, covers six post-Soviet states: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. This project was created to support political, social and economic reforms in these countries in order to increase democratization and proper governance, energy security, protection of the natural environment, and economic and social development (Sturba, 2016).

An association agreement covering a range of trade and visa issues (liberalisation) was reached in the debate carried out within the framework of the Eastern Partnership (European Political Cooperation, 2000). Since the partnership encompassed both bilateral and multilateral dimensions, it was hoped that the multilateral route could provide a solid basis for the three South Caucasus countries to meet and strengthen their links with the European community (Report of proceedings, 1992).

Discussion

Individual Interests of the South Caucasus in Europe

Georgia. The EU-Georgia Association Agreement, including the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA), entered into force in July 2016. Since then, Georgia has made significant efforts to bring its legislation in line with EU regulations, enabling, among other things, the launch of a visa-free regime in the Schengen area since March 2017. The EU is Georgia's main trading, currently accounting for around 27% of total trade turnover.

The EU supports efforts to resolve the conflict in South Ossetia through the work of the European Union Special Representative and the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM), which contribute to stability and peace.

Armenia. Armenia's relations with the EU are currently highly ambiguous, which shows the need to move to the next stage of cooperation and to organise new negotiations that will outline key focus and points of convergence. Although Armenia was included in the Eastern Partnership program in 2009, in September 2013 the country refused to sign the Association Agreement with the EU, including the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area Agreement (unlike Georgia).

On 2 January 2015, Armenia joined the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), after which political and trade dialogue between the EU and Armenia proceeded in areas where it was compatible with the country's new commitments to the EAEU. Even though Armenia has signed a new agreement with the EU, Yerevan is making very slow progress in implementing it, despite the fact that a new reform-oriented government has been elected in the country.

Azerbaijan. The EU and Azerbaijan signed a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement back in 1999. In order to develop these relations the agreement was amended in 2006, 2007 and 2009.

Beyond that in February 2017 the parties initiated negotiations on the enlarged agreement (Proceedings on Interethnic, n.d.), which shall affect political, trade and energy issues, including the prospect of a visa-free space. Currently, Azerbaijan is a priority partner of the EU, which carries out about 40% of the country's total trade through oil exports (Soghomonyan, 2007).

However, despite the quite long history of establishing and building relations between the South Caucasus countries with the European Union, today we have to admit that the mutual attempts and aspirations of the partners have had limited results.

The most significant and voluminous achievements are in the economic block of cooperation, the EU has now become the largest trading partner of all three states, however, in the political sphere, in matters of security and integration into the global community, building democratic institutions and respect for human rights, there are not so many significant advances and striking results.

Conclusion

Summarizing the results of this study, the following conclusions can be drawn. In the 1990s, the EU largely viewed the South Caucasus as an attached part of Moscow, taking into account Russia's presence and activity in the region. This has changed in the 2000s, when the EU's interests and engagement with the region increased, and after the armed conflict in Georgia, when Europe became concerned about the need to respect and strengthen security in the region. Subsequently, security policy was complemented by new dimensions in cooperation, namely political, economic and humanitarian, which were reflected in the plans of the European Cooperation Policy and the Eastern Partnership program.

The support for the European vector of development of the South Caucasus countries is also confirmed by the new framework of bilateral and multilateral cooperation created by the European Union. However, during the period under analysis, from the end of the 1990s up to the present time, the achievements were much more modest in comparison with the declared goals and objectives.

The analysis conducted allows us to state the fact that the political orientation of the EU in the South Caucasus has not achieved the maximum possible results due to the lack of ambition on the part of both the EU and the partner states. While the EU has not had a vision for the future development of the South Caucasus region, the same can be said about the South Caucasus countries themselves, which not only have no clearly formalized future vision of the region, but are also largely unsystematic in their own development prospects, with the exception of Georgia.

In conclusion, it should be noted that today the states of the South Caucasus are much more fragmented than ever, and the only integration projects that have taken place are related to external actors. Therefore, in order to intensify cooperation with the EU and achieve real tangible results, the South Caucasian republics should balance their foreign policy, clearly define development priorities, overcome social and political confrontation within the country and achieve a peaceful resolution of the "frozen" conflicts.

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