

The Role of the EU in the Security of the South Caucasus: A Compromised Specificity?

Damien Helly¹

According to its treaties, the EU has among its aims those of “peacekeeping” and “strengthening international security.” It has also set as goals the promotion of international cooperation, the development and strengthening of democracy and the rule of law, and the enhancement of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.² In practice, the EU tries to further promote stability and security, within the partner members as well as in interstate relationships in crisis or peacetime, through emergency or preventive actions, whether they rely on civil or military solutions.³

In the case of the South Caucasus, as in other parts of the world, the EU promotes two types of security: on one hand, an internal security that is threatened by separatism and social and political tensions and, on the other hand, an external security that is influenced by conflicts and tensions around key issues between states in this region. Any action taken by the EU depends on a set of seven necessary variables.

Diplomatic regionalism. In the Caucasus, the EU interacts with the OSCE, the European Council, the United Nations, and NATO, as well as with the CIS and the GUUAM, all of which are involved in European and Eurasian security.

Coordination between the EU and regional powers. EU action depends on the level of coordination it achieves with Russia, the U.S., Turkey, and Iran regarding the Caucasus.

Internal reforms of the EU. The EU’s capacity to act is in constant transformation. The establishment of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) in the early 90s and the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP), along with prospects for EU enlargement, constantly modify the structures of the EU as it attempts to reconcile the two simultaneous processes of enlargement and deepening of engagement.

European system of external action. The formulation of an external strategy for the EU vis-à-vis the South Caucasus depends on the coherence of new or revised positions of European institutions.

¹ Damien Helly is a Ph.D. Candidate at the Center for International Studies and Research Sciences Po, Paris.

² Treaty on the EU modified by the Treaty of Amsterdam, Article 11.

³ The civil dimension of crisis management triggers a debate: Is the argument which stresses the civil realm and prevention an alibi to mask the absence of the EU’s capacities as international actor and its true nature as a “political dwarf”?

National foreign policies. Member states of the EU pursue their own national foreign policies with unequal levels of Europeanization, thus affecting the coherence of the EU's external actions.

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict resolution. Security in the South Caucasus depends first of all on progress achieved through negotiations on the resolution of the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, which has been generally considered the main obstacle to the course of regional stabilization pursued by the EU.

Stability of local contexts. The EU, in order for its actions to have a lasting effect, remains reliant on the stability of local political and social environments, a condition that has not yet been established.

Depending on the situation, the EU can therefore act as a promoter of peace, or can assist in carrying out Russian and American policies, in more or less stabilized contexts.

European Perceptions of Security in the South Caucasus

The approach of a model of regional cooperation assistance that encompasses the three states of the South Caucasus goes back to the very model of European construction, but also to Tsarist regional management and its many transformations, especially the Transcaucasian Federation of 1918 and the Transcaucasian Federative Socialist Republic. Seven different European interpretations of the South Caucasus can be gleaned from speeches given and policies conducted by Europeans.

Pro-European interpretation. This view considers that the three Southern Caucasian States are bound to eventually integrate into the European Union. The potential Caucasian candidates are the target of European policies that aim to assure stability on the periphery of the future enlarged European Union. The EU is working on the connection and extension of trans-European transportation networks and corridors to the Caucasus and Central Asia (TRACECA⁴). By the same token, the European Council has agreed to integrate the three states in order to assist them in building democratic state structures. Europeans talk about "South-Caucasus," "Southern Caucasus," the "Caucasian Home," or the "Caucasian Common Market."

Caspian interpretation. For Europeans preoccupied with the access of Caspian hydrocarbons to European and global markets, the transportation of energy resources requires stability in the region, most notably through the protection of infrastructures. Thus the South Caucasus is seen as a transportation corridor, a linkage to the Silk Road to the south of Russia, and a strategic crossroads.

⁴ This European Commission program has aimed, since 1993, at establishing a competitive corridor of transportation from Europe to China while developing regional cooperation in this sector between the countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia. See Damien Helly, "Un corridor de transport Asie-Europe, l'Union européenne et sa Route de la Soie," *Courrier des pays de l'Est*, no. 1019 (October 2001), 52-64. See also www.traceca.org.

Emphasis on transitions. Inspired by the experience of Central and Eastern European countries, this interpretation of a “post-Soviet Caucasus” insists as much on legitimate basic reforms at all levels of society (democratization, privatization) as on inertia of mentalities in the face of change. In the long run, the absence of reforms produces threats to security—to nuclear security in the case of the Medzanor nuclear power station in Armenia, or to legal and economic security through the chaos produced by rampant corruption and organized crime.

Russia-focused interpretation. This view emphasizes the importance of the Russian factor and the interdependencies between the Northern and Southern Caucasus. European interests consist, then, in defending the independence of the three states vis-à-vis Russia and in limiting the contagion of Chechen conflicts. This explains European support for monitoring the northern borders of Georgia by the OSCE. Including the Caucasus on the agenda of the Russian/EU relationship framework illustrates these European concerns. This approach tends to retain the term Transcaucasia or “Zakavkazie” (beyond Caucasus).

Ethno-linguistic interpretation. This view stresses the diversity and complexity of the region and the legacy of conflict between groups, whether ethnic, religious, or regional. The comparison to the Balkans is operative here. Stability in the region is seen as necessary for the enlarged EU. Ethnic cleansing and regional conflicts legitimate a permanent EU engagement for the sake of peace in the framework of conflict prevention.

Developmentalist interpretation. This relies on European experience in development in cooperation with ACP countries (Africa–Caribbean–Pacific). The diagnosis of some European experts amounts to comparing the three Caucasian states to developing countries and consequently advocating the same recipes in economic policy as the Bretton Woods institutions (Poverty Reduction Strategy). It is, in effect, in the interests of the EU to deal with developed partners who are integrated in an international community and whose good governance does not threaten their stability.

Orientalist interpretation. This vision of the Caucasus directly links the region to the issue of the Orient and to its border disputes and juridical and historiographic affairs. It emphasizes threats to security stemming from a conflict of influence between Middle Eastern powers, namely Turkey and Iran (and Russia). The legitimacy of this European approach relies on proposing lasting solutions to historical disputes that constitute sources of instability (e.g., by fostering a renewal of Armenian-Turkish relations).

All European actors in the Caucasus resort to these seven interpretations simultaneously. However, some of them favor one approach over another, according to their interests and the circumstances. The Caspian interpretation, for example, outweighs other interpretations among British actors, while Swedish actors seem to opt for an ethno-linguistic logic and, consequently, favor the approach of con-

flict prevention. One should remember, however, that such schemas are always an oversimplification.

The Result of Ten Years of EU Action

Europeans in the Face of the Conflicts of 1992–1994

European institutions are neither set up for crisis management nor do they possess tools that are adequate to the task. Europeans indirectly participate in attempts aiming to avoid mounting tensions, to stop the escalation of violence, and to organize cease-fires and maintain them. The CSCE (to which the Caucasian states were admitted on January 31, 1992) and then the OSCE are in charge of the mediation of conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh and South Ossetia, while the Abkhazian crisis is dealt with by the United Nations and NATO, who prefer not to intervene, in spite of Georgian expectations.

This division of labor between multilateral organizations takes into account the prominent role of Moscow, whose hindering influence limits the OSCE's and UN's abilities to resolve conflicts quickly. It is especially thanks to Russia that lasting cease-fires were signed in 1992 (South Ossetia) and in 1994 (Nagorno-Karabakh). Up to the summer of 1992, when President Shevardnadze appealed to the United Nations, the Abkhazian crisis was discussed in a Russian-Abkhazian-Georgian framework. With regard to the regional powers, the European community played only a secondary role; enlargement to the east and the Balkan crises modified the external priorities of the Union. The Maastricht Treaty introduced elements of external and common security policy. Within Europe, the monetary union is in the works.

Starting in 1992, the European Commission launched programs for technical assistance in the Caucasus financed by TACIS, yet these actions did not follow any particular strategy, and conflict in the region impeded any hope for a long-term project. Political crises and violence marked the beginning of independence for the new states, causing local political instability.

During the years 1992–1994, Europe coordinated its national foreign policies on a case-by-case basis, without collective coherence and within a framework of diverse structures (CSCE, NATO, UN, EEC). France originated several initiatives concerning Nagorno-Karabakh, notably in coordination with Turkey (the French-Turkish appeal for assistance to Nagorno-Karabakh on March 9, 1992) and under a CSCE mandate (Kouchner's humanitarian missions of February-March, 1992). Great Britain was regularly consulted. This short period of unilateral policy led to the multilateralization of diplomatic action. The CSCE launched the Minsk group to work on the settlement of the armed conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh on March 24, 1992, but its plans fell through.

Relative Stabilization and the EU Initiatives of 1994–1999

The end of the military conflicts in the region (except for the notable case of Abkhazia, which did not see peace until May 1998) heralded a new period for European intervention. The signing of the “contract of the century” (September 1994) in Azerbaijan and the further development of projects on the transportation of hydrocarbons through Georgia to Turkey and Europe enjoyed a period of relative stability in the region.

The cease-fire obtained in Nagorno-Karabakh led the OSCE members to plan a peacekeeping intervention in which Europeans would play a not insignificant military role, in accordance with the Oslo decisions of June 4, 1992, allowing for NATO intervention under the OSCE mandate (at this time CSCE) in order to manage a crisis.⁵ The separation of the WEU from NATO and the creation of the ESDP called into question a possible EU intervention in the name of the same Oslo decisions. At the same time, the EU expected and considered itself ready to finance a campaign to rebuild conflict zones. The internal political climates of the Caucasian states were characterized by their instability at this time: presidents escaped several assassination attempts, corruption weakened state structures, and the rule of law remained to be put into place.⁶ In the face of these threats, Europeans supported reforms initiated from the perspective of the eventual membership of the three states in the Council of Europe. Georgia entered the Council on April 27, 1999, with Armenia and Azerbaijan following on January 25, 2001. The EU gave its total support to the peacemaking action of the Council of Europe, generating a climate of trust between and within the Caucasian states.⁷

The freezing of regional conflicts was connected with the progress of Western interests regarding Russia and Iran. NATO developed its Partnership for Peace, and even organized training exercises in the region. The European Commission tried to create measures based on trust by proposing an energy interconnection between Armenia and Georgia on one hand and Turkey on the other hand, or by proposing the reopening of the Baku–Yerevan railroad line. The EU began to express its interest in energy projects in the region, depending on the security and diversification of sources. The European position aimed, moreover, to defuse de-

⁵ Final press release of the North Atlantic Council in ministerial session, Oslo, June 4 1992. <http://www.nato.int/docu/fonda/b920604a.htm>

⁶ The attack on the Armenian Parliament in October 1999, the waves of kidnapping in Georgia, and the debate on dealing with the authors of coups in Azerbaijan show that the three states are not immune to political violence.

⁷ Avis 222 (2000), Membership request of Azerbaijan to the European Council <http://stars.coe.fr/ta/TA00/FOPI222.htm#1>, and membership request of Armenia to the European Council, <http://stars.coe.fr/doc/doc00/Fdoc8747.htm>. The two countries committed to “pursue efforts to solve this conflict [of Nagorno-Karabakh] exclusively through peaceful means,” and “to settle international and domestic disputes through peaceful means and according to principles of international law. (Obligation that is incumbent on all the Member States of the European Council), while resolutely rejecting any threat to use force against its neighbors.”

bates on the layout of the hydrocarbons pipelines while promoting, within the framework of the INOGATE program, a diversity of routes.⁸ In 1995 and 1999, the European Commission submitted two communications to the EU Council that aimed to formulate a common strategy toward the region and reaffirmed the engagement of the Union for regional security.⁹ But the Council offered no formal response.

Russia, in contrast, promised to withdraw its military bases under the framework of the OSCE, which it postponed doing in Georgia. It pursued its peacekeeping role in Abkhazia concurrently with the monitoring of an observation mission of the United Nations, the MONUG (UNOMIG). Iran, after unsuccessful mediations in 1992, stayed in the background, and maintained only tepid relations with Azerbaijan, who reproached Iran for welcoming dissidents and for its position on the status of the Caspian Sea. Discussions on the project, partly financed by the EU for the Armenian portion and envisaged from 1993 on as a gas pipeline that could open up Armenia by way of Iran, continued. By the end of 2001, Russian and French investors had been found but no building date had been set.¹⁰

Following the treaties of Amsterdam and the Helsinki Summit (December 1999), the second mainstay of the EU policy took shape; increasingly precise modalities were anticipated for a common foreign and security policy, especially the ESDP, which is scheduled to have ready by 2003 an interposition force of 100,000 men that can be mobilized within 60 days. Thus the eventuality of an EU intervention in the Caucasus became possible. However, the potential for external action of the EU was focused on the Balkans and particularly Kosovo, pushing the Caucasus toward the bottom of the European agenda. Moreover, the various peace plan proposals from the Minsk group for Nagorno-Karabakh (through various stages including a package settlement and the concept of a common state) came to nothing.

EU Assisting a Stabilization Policy: 1999–2002

The years 1999–2002 were characterized by the politicization of EU operations and, at the same time, by the emergence of cleavaes between the United States and Europe on certain topics. The signature of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCA) with the three Caucasian states in June 1999 in Luxembourg officially represented a qualitative breakthrough in EU–Caucasus¹¹ relations, in

⁸ The European Commission program has aimed since 1996 to improve the security of the provision of energy to Europe while participating in integrating networks of hydrocarbon transport and assisting in the access of these goods to global and European markets. See <http://www.inogate.org>.

⁹ COM (1995), 205 and COM (1999), 272.

¹⁰ “European Commission Ready to Assist Armenia in Laying Gas Pipeline from Iran,” *RosBusinessConsulting Database*, March 1, 2002.

¹¹ Cees Witterbrood, “Towards a partnership with the countries of the Eurasian corridor,” *Insight Turkey* 2:3 (July-September 2000), 11–21.

the sense that the EU and Caucasian countries became partners, linked on a juridical basis and engaged in a regular political dialogue. The Caucasus was put on the Euro-Russian agenda from the fall of 2000 on.

A political dialogue was set to be established, and in February 2001 the first visit of three took place in the region. In September, a French-German team pleaded in favor of a clearer wording of the EU strategy in the region, but the events of September 11 shifted the priorities of the Council, as Central Asia and fighting terrorism became the main concern. The French-German project intended primarily to define more precise lines of action and to improve coherence of European tools, together with other multilateral organizations and regional powers, but without building any common strategy, an inadequacy of the project that is readily admitted. Despite calls from the European Parliament for a firmer engagement of the EU in the region, the member states did not succeed in formulating a strategy regarding the South Caucasus.¹²

The EU declared its support for European regional organizations charged with security, and sometimes even became directly involved. The OSCE has been in charge of monitoring the Georgian-Chechen border since December 1999, and this mission was extended in December 2001 to include the Georgian-Ingushetian border. Georgian forces in charge of assuring the security of the monitors received material support from the EU, financed by the CFSP. The European Commission participated, under the framework of mixed structures for Georgian-Ossetian conciliation, in an OSCE campaign for the destruction of light weapons in South Ossetia; it assisted in the rehabilitation of Azeri regions liberated from Armenian occupation (EXXAP program); it developed measures based on trust (rehabilitation of the Ingury power station between Abkhazia and Georgia); and it insisted on the closing of the Medzamor nuclear station initially scheduled for 2004. The summit of Yalta in June 2001 recalled the attachment of the GUUAM to the TRACECA strategy while pointing out that this transportation cooperation program could serve as a point of contact with the EU.¹³ During the summer of 1999, and then at the time of the Key West negotiations on the principle of a territorial exchange in March–April 2001, the EU prepared to react to a possible peace agreement for Nagorno-Karabakh, in coordination with the entire international community.

Could the Caucasus become a theater for European military operations, as some Caucasian leaders would wish? What legitimacy would a European inter-

¹² Moreover, the member states do not all have the same positions. As an example, Greece continues to take advantage of its triple membership: Orthodox (soft military cooperation with Armenia, infrastructure projects with Iran, and pro-Russian sympathy), European and, NATO. The United Kingdom supports diplomatic mediations while pursuing commercial interests in the footsteps of the United States. Some states have been regularly opposed to sending a delegation of the Commission to Azerbaijan, which has been promised since 1997.

¹³ <http://www.guam.org>.

vention have vis-à-vis NATO? These questions have emerged with the hope for regional stabilization. The emergence of a European defense system has caused frictions with the Atlantic Alliance, and especially with Turkey, which is a member of the Alliance but only a candidate to the EU, whose role in the Caucasus in the case of intervention would become fundamental, notably at a logistical level. Europeans have not yet responded to these questions that have not yet appeared on the agenda: the European intervention force is not yet absolutely ready, the geographical boundaries of the intervention zone of the EU, the OSCE, and NATO remain blurred, and the maneuvering margin with respect to Russia is still uncertain. In accordance with its energy strategy of openness, the EU has begun a rapprochement with Tehran; financing of gas pipelines to the Caucasus could become a source of additional American discontent.

Impact of September 11: The EU Keeps its Distance from the United States

Based on European action over the last decade, did the events of September 11, 2001 cause a radical change in European policies or did they confirm already existing tendencies? European attention shifted to Central Asia after some unrest at the Key West conference in 2001, but the tensions of February–March 2002 in Georgia show that the Caucasus may suddenly return to the European agenda.

From the point of view of the United States, one can see some logic to its actions: by gaining a foothold in Central Asia, Washington finds itself at the hub of energy networks. The Caucasus, used as an air corridor for strikes on Afghanistan,¹⁴ is more than ever a corridor for the transport of resources from the Caspian Sea. The Caspian–Turkish pipeline projects (gas and oil) have benefited from the freeze of the conflicts and the stability that has ensued since 1994. Russian objections seem to have disappeared since the announcement by LUKoil of its intention to join the Baku–Ceyhan line. But the expected Western investments must now be secured; economic cooperation has engendered the necessity of cooperation in establishing security. This will take shape through the new processes of strategic cooperation between the countries where future energy infrastructures will be installed and, during the course of the Afghan campaign, through the announcement of the presence of American forces in Georgia.¹⁵ The renewed insistence of Washington on resolving the Karabakh conflict and the resumption of the Turkish-Armenian commission are tending in this direction, in spite of tensions following a recent spy incident. Russia, who one might have thought would use its menacing power in the face of these Western advances, seems to accept what can be interpreted as Russian-American cooperation; in January, Moscow confirmed its strategic presence in Azerbaijan by concluding an agreement on the rent of the radar station of Qabala. If one can talk about shared security co-operation in

¹⁴ Azerbaijan and Armenia accepted use of their air space by American planes.

¹⁵ Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey signed a new agreement on military cooperation at the beginning of 2002.

the region, Europe as a collective has been indeed excluded from it. In effect, the EU could not offer the region genuine guarantees for its security; its intervention force is not ready, and the Caucasian states have never received any assurance that they would one day become members of the Union. Only some European powers maintain a specific influence, like France and the United Kingdom, in diplomatic groups with the variable geometry of the OSCE or the United Nations.

Conclusion

Six months after the events of September 11, 2001, Europe has witnessed a spectacular advance of American interests in the region without any apparent Russian response. If this situation persists, the fruit of European efforts in regional cooperation will be harvested by the United States in the framework of a global Western strategy. The EU has been distancing itself from Washington for a few years: the renewal of relations with Iran that will soon make it a neighbor of a greater Europe, the commercial offensives of European companies in this country, and projects for regional cooperation and confidence-building have reinforced the thesis of a European specificity. Without expressing a common EU strategy, one can then observe the confirmation of a strategic “Western engagement”¹⁶ in which European political nuances risk being erased or taken over by some member states.

As for Turkey, it always seems to be closer to the United States than to the EU. The renewed ambitions of Ankara in the region since September 11 correspond to a logic of American penetration and are triggering new tensions. The more guarantees the EU has for the Turks for their membership prospects, the more the hopes and efforts of the Caucasian states to pursue a rapprochement with Europe will increase. But Brussels has, up to now, given no significant signal in this direction, since Turkey, albeit a candidate for membership, has not yet begun its membership negotiations.

The vision of a Caucasus as an extremity of Europe is beginning to be accepted, but certainly not to an extent that would allow one to speak of a “Southern Dimension” or a southeast flank in symmetry with the Baltic region. The proposal for a stability pact for the Caucasus has been put forth.¹⁷ It did not receive much attention at the Council, but garnered more enthusiasm at the Commission, at the Parliament,¹⁸ and among the South Caucasian partner states.¹⁹ September 11 confirms the hegemony of a Caspian interpretation of the Caucasus, essentially

¹⁶ See Neil MacFarlane, *Western Engagement in Central Asia and the South Caucasus*, Royal Institute of International Affairs, Chatham House paper, 1999, 72.

¹⁷ <http://www.ceps.be/Research/Caucasus/index.htm>.

¹⁸ <http://www.europarl.eu.int/meetdocs/committees/afet/20010326/AFET20010326.htm>.

¹⁹ “MEP Calls on EU to Step up Peace Efforts,” *European Report*, February 27, 2002.

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devoted to the layout of pipelines, whose construction will bring, in the end, not a single penny to the people.²⁰

²⁰ Habarlar, October 29, 2001. SOCAR, Botas, BP Set up Gas Export Company. "According to the agreement [on the Baku-Ceyhan gas pipeline], all work on the construction of a gas pipeline, and also the transit of gas, has been freed from taxes."