

The EU's Quest in South Caucasus:

Energy Security & Pro-Active Engagement

By Zaur Shiriyeu*

The EU is implementing all the possible projects in order to lessen Russian gas dominance in the European market and in this regard one of those big projects is the "Southern Corridor", which includes Nabucco as priority project as well as ITGI, TAP and White Stream. None of these projects has been materialized as of yet and all of them heavily depends on Azerbaijani gas for their take off stage. When the EU high ranking bureaucrats visited to Azerbaijan on 13 January, 2011, President of European Commission José Manuel Barroso and the President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev signed a joint declaration on gas delivery for Europe in Baku. With this declaration, Azerbaijan for the first time committed itself to supplying substantial volumes of gas to the European Union in the long run, which has led Europe to access to Azeri markets. In the wake of this visit, the European Parliament (EP) adopted "An EU Strategy for Black Sea region" on 20 January, 2011. This strategy, among others, called in the EU as "more direct engagement" and "EU's leading role in the negotiations and peace-making processes". On energy security issues, the resolution stresses on the importance of the Southern Corridor and "the significance" of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG)

transportation to Europe in the form of the AGRI project. Although the document refers "energy security" issues, there is no link to Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which is the challenge area for EU and its energy security in the future. Similar document (on the need for a *European Union strategy* for the South Caucasus) concerning South Caucasus was approved by the EP on May 20, 2010. Unless Azerbaijani territories are liberated from the Armenian occupation and EU formulate a strategy to show its stance in the regional problems, peace and stability in the region will be unattainable. Accordingly, it some question arises such as is the EU "soft" or "smart" power in South Caucasus and why EU is not going to implement strong political will towards this region?

EU policy towards the South Caucasus has become an idiom only recently in political literature within last two decades. In 2003, the region, at a conceptual level, was recognized as an area where the European Security Strategy would typically apply. Until this period, the EU-South Caucasus policy was based upon energy issues; its policies towards the region did not meet aspirations of South Caucasus states since the member states of the European



Union reward their own national interests which contradicted with the overall policies of the European Union. During this time, the EU prioritized economic concerns over political and strategic ones. The lack of any sound political initiative toward the powerful policy was linked to the weaknesses concerning the EU's objectives and its strategic instruments.

The political transformation of the EU made its strategic instruments stronger as well as reciprocally and positively affected its policies towards region. The increasing interest of the EU in the region and in its neighbour countries to the EU's "soft power" initiatives include: Neighbourhood Policy and Eastern Partnership Programmes (EaP). In this regard, the EU's approach to the South Caucasus is identifiable as "soft power" which is the most sophisticated and advantageous way to exercise power. The American theorist Joseph S Nye, who coined the term, defines such in the following manner: 'soft power rests on the ability to shape the preferences of others... with intangible assets such as an attractive personality, culture, political values and institutions, and policies that are seen as legitimate or having moral authority [1]. The EU's soft power comes from its common values, or norms, namely the principles of democracy; the rule of law; social justice; human rights; the commitment to a market economy; social solidarity; sustainable development and the fight against discrimination.

This "soft power" query has been more acceptable for Georgia as the EU's instruments for its transformation were used. For Georgia, a strong European orientation is a main priority for the country's foreign policy; after the "Rose Revolution," the Georgian authority declared EU membership to be one of the country's chief foreign policy objectives. But, the August 2008 war abolished Georgians aspirations and trust to the EU. The war showed that for maintaining the sustainability of reform process in the Southern Caucasus countries channels for dialogue must be open. On the EU side, eliminating EU accession prospect, increasing weight of prominent members of the EU to pursue intergovern-

mental or unilateral policies, differences and lack of solidarity in the EU due to diversified political orientation among the member states would have destructive effects on the dynamics of socio-economic and reform process in the Southern Caucasus.

Otherwise, regional challenges comprise of: extremism, separatism and terrorism as well as territorial disputes, a regional arms race, environmental concerns and the rise of transnational organized crime threatening the EU's security. Subsequently, the appointment of European Union Special Representative for the South Caucasus was the sign of the EU's "smart power" initiatives. The virtually isolated conflict zones such as Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, where there is no official international presence, have been directly implicated in the overall regional powers' policy as well as EU. It is a matter of great importance that the EU must contribute to the peaceful resolution of conflicts and disputes between warring parties in the region. The EU policies are ineffective as long as status quo of frozen conflicts remain unchanged. In addition to the dramatic effects of frozen conflicts' on political and economical stability, the conflicts led to the strengthening of the hard politics tendencies of the governments, thus resulted in failure and ineffectiveness of reform and democracy movements. The EU will have a clear position on the settlement of all the conflicts in the EaP area based on the norms and principles of the international law and relevant international documents adopted. A differentiated approach on these conflicts does not serve the image of the EU as a credible and reliable partner, thus damaging the very idea of partnership.

Arguably, the August 2008 war between Russia and Georgia demonstrated the EU's "soft power" quest. It is hard to realize that any political, economical aims in this region exist, as regional politicians believed that without having "hard power" or a politically strong position they could still maintain cohesive relations with the region. This argument stands more discussable between the regions' politicians and academics that the South Caucasus must not

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be reduced to a zero-sum game between regional players, and that none of the conflicts have a religious or tribal basis. Essentially, after signing of Lisbon Treaty in 2009, the EU started to combine its soft and hard power better in the external relations by using the whole spectrum of policy instruments and economic resources. Theoretically, this should be done in a forward-looking, consistent and unified way. However, the abolishment of the EU Special Representative in February 2011 does not answer whether the EU's role is increasing as a "smart power" in this region or not. As stated above, the establishment of the EU's smart power in the South Caucasus for formulating future strategy should be to provide European values and interests in this region more effectively in order to extend the European zone of peace and prosperity, liberty and democracy.

Regrettably, soft power alone is no longer enough; merely being attractive is no longer adequate, either in South Caucasus, or in other regions. But going down the path of hard power is also not the answer as a big energy interest of the EU provides to protect energy lines as well as to become a stronger player in the security of region. The idea that some have already termed 'smart power' is an answer to EU's security policy regarding to South Caucasus. As the EU continues to develop its role in the world, the challenge is two-fold: to ensure coherence between the civilian and military sides; and to use soft, attractive power more strategically.

Finally, without giving prospects of enlargement to Southern Caucasus states and promoting their efforts to adopt *Acquis Communautaire* and Copenhagen Criteria, the EU policies will not be very efficient in the region. For this reason, clear (material) incentives, prospect of full membership and recognition of the European identity are the elements that the EU can stimulate for political and economic reform process in its European partners on a reference basis perceived as "legitimate". The EU's promotion of its values, norms and the demand for their adoption within their political and economical

system are justified through a consistent proposal for full membership, European identity and sharing the political and economic power of the EU. Therefore, the EU integration does not merely address material benefits. Equally important problems are evident in the post-Cold War era of belonging and identity, which justifies EU's stances and principles in the perspectives of EU partner states. Not only Southern Caucasus states need to deal with their internal and external problems efficiently, but the EU also must prepare herself for the role in which she would play and arrange necessary measures to deal with the Southern Caucasus states and immediate neighbours.

After all, the big historical lesson the EU has learnt is the lesson of integration. The integration is the only weapon with which can be achieved a lasting conciliation with the past and an investment in a better future. It should not be forgotten that without

solution of existing conflicts, it is impossible to apply an integration model for all regional countries. However, experts argues that [2] the current political instability in one important region for the European energy supplies gives a new strong argument to Azerbaijan in order to underline the importance of southern-

Caucasian stability in the European energy security and ask for a more active EU implication with regional security issues. **PR**

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- 1) Joseph S. Nye Jr, "Soft Power: The Means To Success In World Politics," 2005
- 2) Inessa Baban, Azerbaijan builds strong political bridges with EU, 28 February 2011, <http://news.az/articles/politics/32084>

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