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The Conflicts in the South Caucasus and Their Impact on the Eastern Partnership

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The EU's increasing ambition

The split between the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) and the newly emerged Eastern Partnership (EaP) in 2009 marked a conceptual shift in the basic principles the EU used to apply to its neighborhood. The ENP as a policy instrument appeared insufficiently flexible and less sophisticated to reach the same effect in regards to two very different regional contexts – Southern Mediterranean and Eastern Europe.¹ The ENP as a political tool proved unable to fully employ the principle of differentiation without affecting the goals of strengthening the dynamics of regional cooperation among the partner states. The EaP has resolved the above mentioned dilemma by specifically addressing the six Eastern European states, from one side while introducing two dimensional processes - bilateral and multilateral, from the other. The resulting increase in the EU's involvement in the Eastern Europe along with the refinement and enhancement of the political means has affected practically all areas of cooperation including stability and security.

The EU engagement in the conflict resolution process in the South Caucasus can be virtually divided in three periods. Each phase is characterized by the EU's increased integrative ambition towards Eastern Europe, and at the same time, by its augmented aspiration to engage more robustly in the resolution of conflicts in the South Caucasus and Moldova.

“Background” in parallel with the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA)

The Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) with Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan (all signed in 1996) uses the following wording to describe its objectives: “development of political relations,” “to support democracy and to develop its economy,” “transition into a market economy,” “to promote economic relations,”² etcetera, without any promises of integration. Consecutively, it mentions the existed conflicts only once with the provision that “such (political) dialogue may take place on a regional basis, with a view to contributing towards the resolution of regional conflicts and tensions.”

1 Eastern Europe here is understood as encompassing the South Caucasus as well

2 Available online at: http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/georgia/documents/eu_georgia/eu_georgia_pca_en.pdf

Notably the poor institutional basis for conflict resolution has not impeded the EU's further activities in this field in the region. The policy actions just remained as the Council's prerogative and all the measures and decisions related to the conflicts in Georgia and Azerbaijan were addressed by the EU member states. This policy, which was fully dependent on their will, has not made any institutional commitments to Georgia or to any South Caucasian country. Among the key EU actions (indirectly) addressing the conflict resolution issues were the so-called Rehabilitation Program implemented since 1997³ in cooperation with the OSCE and the UN in the region, participation in the Joint Control Commission (JCC) in South Ossetia (1997); the “Caucasian Summit” in 1999,⁴ which adopted a joint declaration of all three South Caucasian Heads of the States and Governments. In addition, after introduction of the common European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP, established by the Treaty of Amsterdam, 1999) the EU executed the following joint actions: Support of the Georgian Border Guards,⁵ the establishment of the Rule of Law Mission in 2003,⁶ nomination of the European Union Special Representative in South Caucasus (EUSR) in 2003.⁷ All of these EU actions coupled with the number of resolutions adopted by the European Parliament, declarations of the Presidency and the Council, assistance packages devoted to the conflict resolution efforts or to facilitating a dialogue, etcetera, were produced in the unilateral context and never acquired a truly sustainable character and the secured engagement yet only had a temporary status. The fact that the mandate of the EUSR has to be renewed in every six months has become a subject of continuous speculations on its possible termination. The following conclusions can be drawn from the above: *despite the ultimate*

3 Available online at: http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/georgia/eu_georgia/tech_financial_cooperation/instruments/

4 Initiated during the German Presidency of the Council. See: <http://www.geplac.ge/newfiles/others/Speech%20Kakha.pdf>

5 Council Joint Action of 21 May 2002 regarding a contribution of the European Union towards reinforcing the capacity of the Georgian authorities to support and protect the OSCE observer mission on the border of Georgia with the Ingush and Chechen Republics of the Russian Federation, (2002/373/CFSP), Official Journal L 134, 22/05/2002 P. 0001 - 0002

6 Available online at: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/eeas/security-defence/eu-operations/completed-eu-operations/eujst-themis.aspx?lang=en>

7 Council Joint Action 2003/496/CFSP of 7 July 2003 concerning the appointment of an EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus. Official Journal of the European Union 8.7.2003, L 169/74

Table 1. Evolution of the EU's integrative ambition towards its Eastern Partners

Policy framework	Integrative ambition	Engagement in the conflict Resolution
PCA (Art 1.)	(to) develop political relations; to support... democracy and to develop its economy and the transition into a market economy; to promote trade and investment and economic relations between the Parties; to provide a basis for legislative, economic, social, financial, civil scientific, technological and cultural cooperation.	Such dialogue may take place on a regional basis, with emphasis on contributing to the resolution of the regional conflicts and reducing tensions.
ENP and ENP Action Plans (Wider Europe, EC Communication, 2003; Strategy Paper, EC Communication, 2003)	<p>...(to) create an area of shared prosperity and values based on deeper economic integration, intensified political and cultural relations, enhanced cross-border cooperation and shared responsibility for conflict prevention between the EU and its neighbors.</p> <p>To anchor the EU's offer of concrete benefits and preferential relations within a differentiated framework which responds to progress made by the partner countries in political and economic reform.”⁸</p>	<p>“...so long as conflicts persist there is a danger of spill over”⁹</p> <p>“Promote sustained efforts towards the peaceful resolution of the conflict in Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, Georgia.”¹⁰</p> <p>“Continuing strong EU commitment to support the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, drawing on the instruments at the EU's disposal, including the EUSR, and in close consultation with the OSCE. The EU is ready to consider ways to strengthen further its engagement in conflict resolution and post-conflict rehabilitation;”¹¹</p>
EaP Communication 2008	“...with strong political will on both sides the EaP will achieve its objective of political association and economic integration”	“The EaP should also promote stability and multilateral confidence-building with the goal of consolidating the sovereignty and territorial integrity of partners” ¹²

interest to take part in the resolution of the conflicts and in the stabilization of the South Caucasus region since the early 1990's, the question on the EU's commitment to engage was not matured yet till the “Big Bang” enlargement. The EU had left open a loophole that allows “an exit strategy” in case of complications or an emergency.

9 Ibid, p.9

10 EU / GEORGIA ACTION PLAN. Available online at: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/enlarg/pdf/enp_action_plan_georgia.pdf

11 EU / AZERBAIJAN ACTION PLAN. Available online at: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/enlarg/pdf/enp_action_plan_azerbaijan.pdf

8 Wider Europe— Neighborhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbors; Brussels, 11.3.2003, COM(2003) 104 final, p. 9

12 Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council, Eastern Partnership, COM(2008) 823 final, Brussels, 3.12.2008, p.10

European Neighborhood Policy brings about the change

Several important developments have changed the established rules of game. These are the EU's Eastward enlargement (2004),¹³ the CFSP and ESDP amendments after the *Amsterdam Treaty* entered into force in 1999; elaboration of the *EU Security Strategy* of 2003 and rethinking of the EU's role, mission and an inevitable necessity "to promote stability and prosperity within and beyond the new borders of the Union."¹⁴

The ENP Strategy Paper (2003), with its aim to reach a "significant degree of economic integration and political cooperation" with the Mediterranean and Eastern Neighbors attaches much importance to the conflict resolution. It endorses the following formula: "the ENP should reinforce the EU's contribution to promoting settlement of regional conflicts; increased efforts to promote the settlement of the conflicts in the region and to develop good neighborly relations are needed."¹⁵ Furthermore, the country-specific Action Plans provide much more structured set of necessary actions and measures with the aim of contributing to the settlement of the conflicts (see Table 1). The measures included in the Action Plans that were approved by the Council make an impression that the European Commission or other EU bodies can implement them without acquiring a further consent of the Member States.

Indeed, any necessary action, such as funding of a mission, new project, etcetera, always require a Council decision through the CFSP or ESDP (now CSDP) procedures. Implementation of a relatively complex set of measures and intentions listed in the Action Plans concerning the conflict prevention, crisis management or post-conflict peace building fully depends on the will of the member states at any given stage and situation. It is a relatively easier procedure to provide a humanitarian or technical assistance addressing the consequences of an open conflict. The brief analysis of the EU actions shows that the member states usually make relatively short-term decisions (like the renewable six-month mandate of the EUSR, disarmament, participa-

tion in JCC in Tskhinvali region, Rule of Law mission, etc). This makes us think that the EU Member States try to keep their options open regarding exit possibilities. In addition it takes the EU quite a long time to start any new actions that indicates the cautiousness of the EU. At least this was the case before the "08.08.08" Georgia-Russia war. One of the reasons of such a behavior could be the relatively limited budget of the ESDP/CFSP amounting to around two billion euro¹⁶ under the 7-year financial perspective (2007-2013). Despite of the limitations mentioned above the inception of the ENP Action Plans coincides with the EU's growing ambition to support peace processes. In regards to South Caucasus the rule "Stabilization combined with Integration"¹⁷ proves to be a basic feature of the ENP in general.

Table 1 shows how the wording and interpretation of the agreements and political declarations has changed during this evolution process along with the EU's growing interest in the region. Certainly, the EU's practical actions in the field of conflict resolution stayed weak and fragmented.

The EaP has a different potential

The overall objective of the Eastern Partnership is truly compelling. It uses a two-dimensional approach to bring the countries of Eastern Europe into a political association with the EU and to pave the way to their economic integration into the EU's internal market. At the same time, however, the relevant EC Communication and other EaP documents remain bizarrely weak on the conflict resolution issues. The most vivid indications of the conflicts reveal that the EU is mainly concerned about the conflicts because of "the closeness of main hydrocarbon transit pipelines to zones of conflict" as "instability in the Southern Caucasus can also threaten the region's energy security."¹⁸

Even if the "stability and security" is represented under the EaP First Thematic Platform activities domain no specific item is dedicated to the con-

13 The accession treaties had been signed by 10 countries by 2002 (K.G.)

14 Wider Europe— Neighborhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbors; Brussels, 11.3.2003, COM(2003) 104 final, p. 4

15 Communication from the Commission European Neighbourhood Policy Strategy Paper, Brussels, 12.5.2004, COM(2004) 373 final, p.11

16 <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/budget/data/LBL2011/EN/SEC03.pdf>

17 Kamov, Giorgi. EU's role in Southern Enlargement: the case of the Eastern enlargement and the neighborhood policy areas. Institute Européen des Hautes Etudes Internationales, June 2006

18 Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council, Eastern Partnership, Brussels, 3.12.2008, COM(2008) 823 final, p. 7

flict resolution in the Work Program 2009-2011 adopted at the EaP Foreign Ministers' meeting in December 2009. No Flagship Initiative under the EaP addresses this issue and no Panel has been dedicated to the conflict related topics. This does not mean that EaP format is neglecting the conflicts that concern at least three countries out of the six Eastern partners. Jos Boonstra and Neil Melvint (2011) assume that "...multilateral track has important dimensions in the areas of security and stability, but bilaterally the EaP does not engage in security dialogue, funding or programming".¹⁹ In this statement they refer to such mechanisms as the annual ministerial meeting, or the biannual summits. They describe a Flagship Initiative on Integrated Border Management as mechanism of cooperation addressing security related problems. I can partially agree with this evaluation as these mechanisms only cover the interstate context, but the main threat to the security in South Caucasus comes from the internal conflicts, especially in Georgia. For the most part, the same holds true for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The latter ignited an interstate conflict of Azerbaijan with Armenia and only in this particular context the established EaP formats can be effective.

Neither does the bilateral format introduce special mechanisms or instruments that could offer the EU a more concrete role. Yet again, all focus areas of cooperation encompass almost everything, including operation on the CFSP and CSDP issues, like crisis management or participation in operations, though in places other than South Ossetia, Abkhazia or Nagorno-Karabakh. The reasoning behind the EaP itself contradicts with what has been summarized above on the EU's growing integrative ambitions towards Eastern Europe – the EU expressing higher concerns over the unresolved conflicts and searching ways for a more robust engagement in the resolution efforts.

It is important to note that the launching of the EaP coincides with the hardest period in the security situation of the South Caucasus, in particular, the Russian incursion in Georgia in August 2008. The December 2008 EC Communication proposing the Eastern Partnership policy stated that in September 2008 the Council "asked for this work to be accelerated, responding to the need for a clearer signal of EU commitment following the conflict in Georgia

and its broader repercussions."²⁰ This introduction directly links the objectives of the Eastern Partnership with the task of defending (softly) the Eastern Partners, and Georgia in particular, from external threats and helping strengthen their European aspirations. It "signals" the EU's support of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia in this particular case and its further commitment to work (through the Eastern Partnership) toward elimination of any kind of consequences of the war. At the same time the whole communication fails to draw up new instruments or approaches to the conflict resolution or the peace building activities. Such a divergence between the declared intention and the real "program" could be interpreted as follows:

- a. The EU (or member states) did not want to put on the table any kind of agreed and crystallized commitment that could cause serious controversies with the current authorities of Russia.
- b. (From the other side) The EU has shown its determination to engage in the resolution, including interfering with Russia.
- c. To show the spirit of the Communication (on the Eastern Partnership, 2008) as dedicated to cooperation only in the fields that do not contain any potential threat to Russia's interest.
- d. By doing so, the EU has left a possibility to continue its work on the EaP without provoking any tensions and suspicions after overcoming the controversies with Russia.

The other reason for omitting the conflict resolution mechanisms in the EaP policy document, and consequently in all other directions of cooperation is the fact that the European External Action Service (EEAS) was not yet ready to tackle this task alone. The EEAS, the main "Patron of the EaP" among the EU institutional structures did not exist in 2008. The institutional links and coordination between the Commission Directorate General for External Relations (DG RELEX) in the past, having the financial means, but not proper mandate in CFSP) and the EU High Representative (EUHR) for CFSP/ESDP was not as strong and none of them alone had enough institutional or operational capacity to deal independently with conflict resolution in the South Caucasus on the long term policy basis. As I mentioned earlier the CFSP operations carried out by the EUHR always were subject to frequent revisions and to approval by the Council Joint Actions.

19 Boonstra, Jos and Melvint, Neil, *Challenging the South Caucasian Security Deficit*, Workin Paper No 108, Madrid, 2011

20 Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council, Eastern Partnership, COM(2008) 823 final, Brussels, 3.12.2008, p.2

Therefore, the EU continued its engagement with Eastern Europe (including the South Caucasus) in the region's most sensitive and pressing security issues through applying the already approved and still operational internal "intra member state" coordination tradition.

Despite this last observation, we can fully agree that the launching of the EaP coincides with the EU's increased integrative ambitions towards Eastern Europe (explicitly demonstrated in the EaP policy documents) and its increased engagement in addressing the security and stability (including conflict resolution and peace building) issues. For example, we witnessed the speed with which the EU, at that time under the French Presidency, reacted to the August 2008 crisis in Georgia, the arrival of the five EU member states' leaders (France, Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) to Tbilisi right after the outset of the war. The September 1st Extraordinary European Council followed by its a rapid decision on Joint Action establishing the EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia (EUMM).²¹ Moreover, on September 25, 2008 the EU approved another Joint Action designating an additional special representative (EUSR) for the "Georgia crisis"²² and has demonstrated an actual leadership in "Geneva talks" established to resolve the Georgia's conflict with Russia over South Ossetia and Abkhazia.²³ Furthermore, just recently the EU renewed the post of EUSR for the South Caucasus through combining the two mandates.

The EU spends more than 10 percent of its average CFSP budget (that amounted to approximately EUR 30 million in 2011)²⁴ annually on the EUMM and other security instruments in Georgia. This could be defined as a high share for such a small country as Georgia taking into account the fact that the EU is engaged in more than 20 conflicts throughout the world, including deployment of civilian and military missions. The EU's finan-

cial assistance to Georgia is considerably higher in comparison to that of Moldova where the EU carries out a Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM) and acts as an observer in the Transnistrian conflict settlement talks in the "5+2 format."²⁵ In addition to numerous EU actions, declarations, continuous support in international organizations and so on, the EU's respective structures are intensively focused on elaboration of the policy formulas that could contribute to the resolution of the conflicts in Georgia without infringing the fundamental principles of its territorial integrity. For example, the Non-Recognition and Engagement Policy towards Abkhazia and South Ossetia endorsed in December 2009, as stated by Baroness Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, is fully compatible and employable with the Georgian official Action Plan for Engagement.²⁶

Relatively high level of the EU involvement in Moldova and Georgia is not the case for the other South Caucasian conflict – Nagorno-Karabakh, where the EU could not succeed in providing an adequate assistance, because of the resistance from the Azerbaijani Government,²⁷ and in which the EU has no stake as a mediator. Consequently, its leverage to influence the outcome of the mediation is limited and can only interact indirectly through the France's co-chairmanship of the OSCE Minsk Group.²⁸ Indeed it is not excluded that EU considers the possibility of replacing France in the Minks Group. Other options propose France representing the EU under the mandate of Member States.

In conclusion, the above considerations suggest that the EU is in fact increasingly engaged in the conflict resolution process in Georgia, but it proves less likely that with the existing instruments it will be able to have an equal influence on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The EU's political and economic cooperation with the South Caucasian states and

21 Council Joint Action 2008/736/CFSP. Available online at: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/eeas/security-defence/eu-operations/eumm-georgia/legal-basis.aspx?lang=fr>

22 Council Joint Action 2008/760/CFSP of 25 September 2008 appointing the European Union Special Representative for the crisis in Georgia

23 Officially - "Geneva International discussions" (Council Joint Action 2011/518/CFSP of 25 August 2011 appointing the European Union Special Representative for the crisis in Georgia) unfortunately up to date did not bring any tangible results on rapprochement of views between main stakeholders. Indeed some benefits could be acquired from the establishment of a "incident prevention mechanism". Keeping the dialogue between sides alive is another "justification" of its usefulness.

24 For comparison see: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/budget/data/LBL2011/EN/SEC03.pdf>

25 The post of EU Special Representative for Moldova was stopped since February 2011, while it has been prolonged for Georgia by appointing Philipp Lefort EU Special Representative for South Caucasus and Georgia crisis. Available online at <http://vestnikkavkaza.net/news/politics/17250.html>

26 Available online at: http://www.enpi-info.eu/maineast.php?id=22133&id_type=1

27 Nona Mikhelidze, Eastern Partnership, and conflicts in South Caucasus: Old Wine in New Skins, Documenti IAI, page 8. Available online at: <http://www.iai.it/pdf/DocIAI/iai0923.pdf>

28 Stefan Wolff, The European Union and the Conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh Territory, Report prepared for the Committee on Member States' Obligations, PACE, Berlin 4-5 November 2007, p. 3. Available online at: <http://www.stefanwolff.com/files/EU-NK.pdf>

with the wider region as a whole is defined within the complex frameworks (including cooperation on the CFSP and the CSDP issues), but its engagement in the conflict resolution is not part of the same framework and lacks well-determined policy objectives.

Developments and new possibilities

The conflicts in the South Caucasus had an influence on the launching of the EaP. The following extract from the respective communication proves this assumption: “the Extraordinary European Council of 1st September 2008 asked for this work (writing the EaP Communication) to be accelerated, responding to the need for a clearer signal of EU commitment following the conflict in Georgia and its broader repercussions.”²⁹ This statement explicitly links the EaP with the EU’s new ambition to take responsibility for preventing conflicts and tackling their consequences in Eastern Europe, and in South Caucasus in particular. In my opinion, it marks a qualitatively different phase of the EU’s engagement in the region. At the same time, this does not mean that the EU intends to tackle the conflicts through the EaP mechanisms. I think that the EaP from the beginning was sought to be (in this context) a soft political instrument for preventing conflict escalations, eliminating the social, economic, ideological or other causes of tensions and other sources of instability in the region without taking part in the conflict (crisis) management itself.

After the Lisbon Treaty with the European External Action Service (EEAS) entering into force – a hybrid structure combining in it intergovernmental and supranational features, the chance for the EU as a Union, to become a more efficient and maneuverable actor on international stage has increased.

The issue of coordination of financial instruments under different institutional structures remains a problem, which needs to be addressed. Among the six main financial instruments used by the EU for its external action (ENPI, Stability Instrument, EIHDR, and others) only the CFSP fund (Chapter 1903 of the EU Budget) is under direct control of the EEAS, which is quite small

in comparison with others.³⁰ Giovanni Grevi and Daniel Keohane (2010) argue that “operational experience...has exposed the difficulty of ensuring the coherence and continuity between long-term Community programs and more circumscribed intervention under ESDP.”³¹

The EaP Summit in Warsaw in September 2011 intended to bring the issue of conflict resolution at the multilateral level by drawing the following promises in the joint declaration: “Warsaw Summit agrees to develop political cooperation and dialogue between the EU and partner countries, including as regards governance reforms, joint efforts to enhance regional security and resolve conflicts.”³² This declaration says something new in the sense that it expresses the will to make the conflict resolution a common topic for the multilateral cooperation among all actors of the EaP. Indeed, up to the moment this is just a declaration, not supported with any concrete idea or vision how this could be implemented.

In his speech at the Civil Society Warsaw conference³³ that sided the EaP Warsaw Summit, Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighborhood Policy Štefan Füle called the slow progress of the unresolved conflicts a “painful” fact and placed it along other setbacks to democracy in some EaP countries. At the same time, he spoke about Belarus and imposing sanctions to force the government to respect democratic values; no vision on how to address the unresolved conflicts, however, was expressed.

During the other international event, the EaP Civil Society Forum held in Poznan on 28 November 2011, when asked whether the EaP could be used to discuss the conflict resolution issues at multilateral level, again Commissioner Füle, avoided a direct response and referred to the former German Ambassador in Georgia. The latter only reiterated Germany’s interest to enhance the EU’s role in the South Caucasus.

29 Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council, Eastern Partnership, COM(2008) 823 final, Brussels, 3.12.2008, p.2

30 Available online at: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/budget/data/LBL2011/EN/SEC03.pdf>

31 Giovanni Grevi and Daniel Keohane, *Resources of ESDP. European Security and Defense Policy: The First 10 Years*. The European Institute for Security Studies, Paris, 2010, p. 92

32 Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit, Council of the European Union, Warsaw, 30 September 2011, 14983/11, PRESSE 341

33 Available online at: <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleases-Action.do?reference=SPEECH/11/619&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en#menu>

Impact of the protracted conflicts on the EaP's future

The protracted conflicts are dangerous for different reasons: they tend to escalate into the violent confrontation time to time; they usually keep certain territories out of control of the states and international community; the conflict zones serve as transit routes for smuggling of arms, drugs, trafficking and movement of terrorist groups. In general they severely undermine regional stability and development.

Over the years the EU and international community have allowed Russia to play the leading role in both conflicts in Georgia and Nagorno-Karabakh. The other big actor Turkey has also tried to intervene several times and offered itself as a mediator, to co-share with Russia the responsibilities for bringing stability to the Southern Caucasus. Turkey, however, could not realize this ambition (as the Turkish attempts to establish a South Caucasus security platform³⁴ and to de-freeze its relations with Armenia have failed).

The U.S. engagement in the South Caucasus has been seriously limited due to the ongoing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Naturally, the key actor with the growing interest in the region's long-term stability and willingness to invest in achieving this objective is the EU. The Eastern Partnership can be perceived as an additional instrument for fulfilling this aim.

The Eastern Partnership is a peaceful project the success of which depends on the will and interest of the participating countries to cooperate. It is difficult to imagine that the aims of the multilateral cooperation, with an intension to establish a Neighborhood Free Trade Area, would be fulfilled prior to Armenia and Azerbaijan reestablishing their diplomatic ties and getting out of the military standoff around Nagorno-Karabakh. Georgia, which is internally divided and partly occupied by Russia, can hardly bring any stability to the region.

At the same time the ongoing intensive work on the EaP bilateral track should have contributed to fueling the Union's desire to overcome the controversies, or to settle the conflicts.

The past two years have shown that a framework for the multilateral track ensures a smooth cooperation without any major problems, yet it fails to yield remarkable achievements. The conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-

Karabakh hinders the possibility to move forward with real regional integration, with establishing the Neighborhood Free Trade Area. It is also difficult to develop important regional infrastructure projects covering both countries. In addition, this conflict prevents Turkey from taking part in the cooperation as a friend of the EaP. Russia's engagement in this cooperation with the EaP is also of a great importance, but it is not possible because of the Kremlin's conflict with Georgia and the negative role it plays in Moldova's internal conflict. It proves obvious how much the conflicts hinder exploring the opportunities created by the EaP, impede development and deeper collaboration between the Partner countries. From the other side the positive influence of the EaP on the process of conflict resolution is limited. The conflicts' crucial impact on the EaP, its ability to effectively reach its envisioned objectives will be definitely fully acknowledged in the EU very soon.

It is symptomatic that on 16 November 2011, three years after the August 2008 war the European Parliament adopted a resolution on the negotiations of the EU-Georgia Association Agreement (AA),³⁵ in which it strongly criticizes Russia for the continuous occupation of the Georgian territories (Abkhazia and South Ossetia). The document urges Russia to withdraw its military forces from these territories and to revoke their recognition. The extremely strict language used in the resolution proves that not only Georgia's but also EU's interests are significantly damaged by the protracted Russian-Georgian conflict, which to a large extent prevents the EU and Russia from establishing closer and more effective relations.

Conclusions and recommendations:

The EU's efforts and interests to engage in the conflict resolution process in the South Caucasus have built-up over the years. Certainly, these activities are not placed in the same envelope with the other EU policies, nor included in the EU's common political frameworks or supported directly by any financial instruments, which are exclusively under the European Commission's control. They stay as separate issues subject to different planning

34 http://www.analyst-network.com/article.php?art_id=2481

35 European Parliament Resolution, containing the European Parliament's recommendations to the Council, the Commission and the EEAS on the negotiations of the EU-Georgia Association Agreement, (2011/2133(INI))

and implementation procedures, with extensive involvement of the member states in decision-making. Separate decisions are made for each particular case that makes a long term planning difficult. Furthermore, it discourages the partner states and makes them less confident in the significance and credibility of the EU's intentions. The weakness of the EU's Foreign Policy capacity also stems from the parallel actions of the EU member states. The majority of the EU member states have their own embassies in the South Caucasus, sometimes with quite big staff and resources. They implement individual policies, which time-to-time are not fully shared with the EU Delegations in the South-Caucasian countries. The coordination mechanisms are in place yet the embassies' subordination to the capitals is a stronger stimulus for them. The EU's aggregate diplomatic resource is rather higher than that of the USA, or Russia. At the same time, it is less efficient due the problems of overlapping and miss-coordination. To avoid these problems the diplomatic services of the EU and the Member States in the South Caucasus countries together with the EUSR representations should act with agreed plans and in full coordination. For improved work efficiency it would be better to place the main nucleus of the embassies' political staff under the EU Delegation and divide the tasks and responsibilities between the EU diplomats clearly, avoiding an overlapping.

I think that a long and medium term strategic planning approach is needed to be developed in the EU's policy towards the South Caucasian conflicts. The EU's activities should involve both, the purely Commission, and partly Council-dependent EEAS. The Member States (MS) should provide EEAS with more operational and decision-making power and capacity, with more flexibility to act in accordance with the strategic plans accorded between MS for medium term.

The Eastern Partnership cooperation format is fully compatible with the intergovernmental way of treating CFSP/CSDP (especially crisis/conflict management) issues in the EU and can be successfully used for conducting an effective dialogue with the partner states concerned with the existing instability in their immediate neighborhood. This is important for the sake of the EaP success for the first place, as the conflicts in the South Caucasus (and other parts of Eastern Europe) obstruct and downgrade the EaP's potential as an effective policy of regional cooperation and integration. It is becoming apparent that there will be no consid-

erable achievement in EaP (notably multilateral dimension) if there is no progress in conflict resolution.

It would be an important impetus to adopt a special Flagship Initiative for Conflict prevention and peace building in the EaP framework and establish Panels for the "Nagorno-Karabakh conflict" and the "Georgia crisis" through which the EU and its partner countries could develop a set of activities to discuss the existing conflicts, causes and to try to reach a common understanding and position, to explore ways of mutual support for solving the controversies (where they are) and for contributing to the reconciliation. Such work, conducted in a delicate way would increase trust between the states and strengthen the potential of the EaP.

Moreover, the bilateral dimension of EaP should also be reinforced with a special area of cooperation on conflicts and the EU should establish a closer bilateral cooperation on agreed aims and directions with the Georgian, Azerbaijani and Armenian Governments. The actions agreed under the ENP AP should be reinforced through the EaP format in the course of AA negotiations. Lastly, Russia and Turkey could join the Flagship Initiative at the later stage, when it starts to operate and when the involvement would be considered necessary and potentially productive.

Selected publications:

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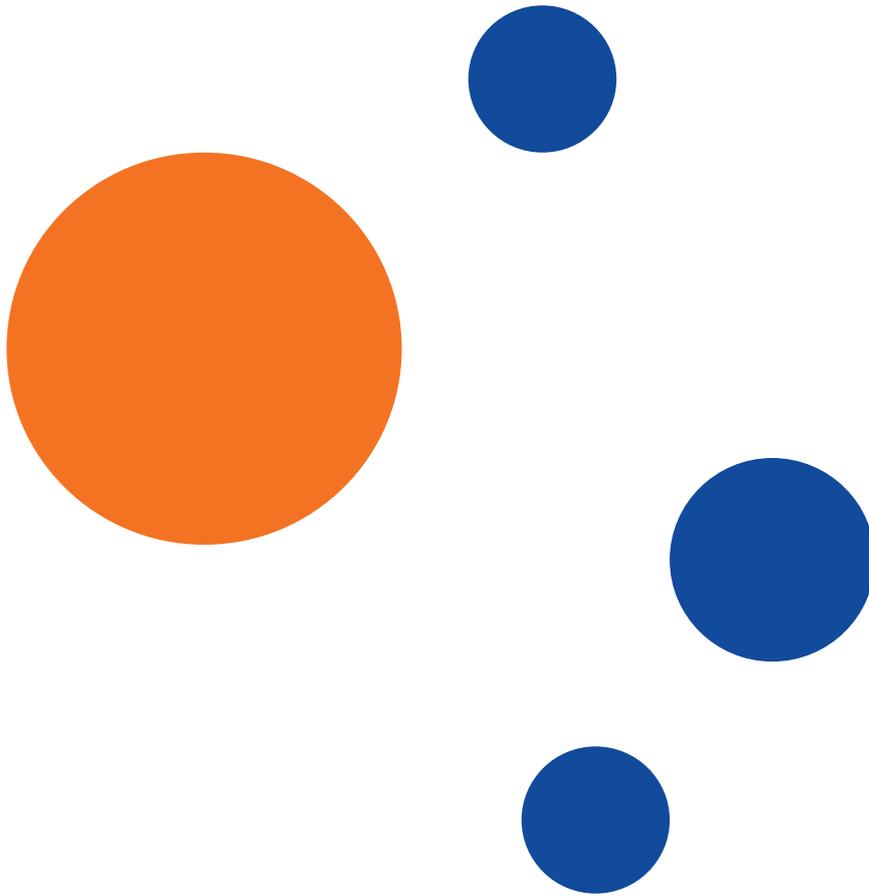
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