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COUNTRIES OF THE SOUTH CAUCASUS IN THE FOCUS OF THE EASTERN POLICY OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

Peculiarities and main stages of the European Union modern eastern policy formation are considered, including the countries of the South Caucasus – Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. The reasons have been brought to light for the weak presence of the EU in the region of the South Caucasus in the early 90s of the XXth century, in particular, the lack of understanding by European partners of the problems of this region; recognition of them as a sphere of influence of Russia; lack of tools in the EU to conduct foreign and security policy in the region, as well as to resolve conflicts there. The grounds for including the countries of the region in the sphere of the EU foreign policy are determined, such as the EU energy security; democratization of the South Caucasus as an important component of European security; reaching a compromise between European partners on strengthening the EU's presence in the post-Soviet space. Emphasis is placed on the peculiarities of the foreign policy priorities of Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan concerning the European Union, and the formation of cooperation, major achievements, problems, and challenges. It has been proved that from the very beginning of the institutionalization of the modern EU eastern policy, the countries of the South Caucasus have had different interests in cooperation with European partners. Thus, Azerbaijan – the development of economic cooperation with the EU, mainly in the energy sector and the restoration of the territorial integrity of the state; Armenia – investment and financial assistance from the EU, support for peace and stability in the Nagorno-Karabakh region; Georgia – strengthening the European movement, restoring territorial integrity, stabilization of the internal situation and in the South Caucasus in general. It is argued that it is the high level of conflict in the region that is the main obstacle to the full implementation of the EU regulatory force in the South Caucasus region. It is concluded that the main limitations of the EU's Eastern policy towards the countries of the South Caucasus are the lack of a clear strategy towards the South Caucasus, the lack of political and security cooperation, and a certain exclusion of the EU from resolving regional conflicts there. Besides, the effectiveness of the EU's eastern policy in the South Caucasus will largely depend on the influence of third parties, mainly Russia.

Key words: *European Union, Eastern policy, Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, South Caucasus, Russia, Eastern partnership.*

The collapse of the Soviet Union initiated the implementation of the concept of a «single political Europe», and the basis for its practical implementation was the European Union (EU). The enlargement of the EU by the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) has led to the shift of its borders to the east, which undoubtedly caused the actualization of European foreign policy towards its new neighbors, including the countries of the South Caucasus, such as Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan. The importance of the outlined region in the EU's foreign policy is gradually growing. Proof of this is the increase in the number of bilateral and multilateral agreements of the EU with the countries of the region, as well as the introduction of a number of European foreign policy initiatives. However, the EU cooperation with the countries of the South Caucasus is not easy, as they not only differ significantly in their level of development and foreign policy orientations, but are also characterized by a high level of conflict, intensified by competition for influence in the region between several international players (Turkey, Russia, Iran, China, and the EU).

The issue of transformation of the countries of the South Caucasus is studied by both foreign and domestic scholars in the context of the EU foreign policy. The achievements of such researchers as Galstyan N., Gonchar M., Huseynov F., Kolomiets O., Madoyan K., Nagornyak I., Snigyr O., Barbarska O., Benedyczak J., Dwyer A., Kasa E., Szeligowski D., Cianciara A., Legucka A., Piskorska B., Staszczuk A.,

Ziokowski M., and others are singled out. Most available studies do not take into account recent events in the system of international relations and the South Caucasus region (primarily, the intensification of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan in 2020; strengthening cooperation between the Russian Federation (RF) and Turkey, international sanctions against Russia, etc.). Therefore, the work aims to identify the features and prospects of modern EU policy towards the countries of the South Caucasus in the context of new geopolitical trends.

In general, Eastern policy was one of the priority areas of the European Communities during the Cold War. Evidence of this is the initiatives of French President Charles de Gaulle on pan-European cooperation «from the Atlantic to the Urals» or «Ostpolitik» of West Germany. The modern concept of the Eastern dimension of the EU foreign policy emerged in 1989 when the first discussions on EU enlargement by CEE countries began. Somewhat later, in 1993, the European Council declared the principle of «open doors» for its eastern neighbors. Given that the European political elite has not developed a unified approach to the format of cooperation with Eastern European countries, the process of shaping modern EU policy has been difficult. However, between 2004, 2007, and 2013, 13 new states joined the EU, of which only two – Cyprus and Malta – do not belong to the CEE region. Thus ended the first stage of the Eastern policy of the European Union in the modern interpretation. If at the initial stage of the EU's eastern policy the concept of «enlargement to the East» mostly had to do with the countries of Central Europe (CE) or was unified only with the process of building relations with Russia, then since the enlargement of the EU by the countries of the post-Soviet space Eastern Europe began to be understood as a European part of the former Soviet Union (except for the Baltic states) [12, p. 8]. The second stage of the EU's current Eastern policy concerns those Eastern European countries that are not members of the European Union but are in the sphere of its utmost interest. In general, according to Polish researcher A. Legutska, at the current stage, the EU's eastern policy concerns seven countries: the recipients of the Eastern Partnership (EP) and the Russian Federation. Therefore, the researcher conditionally divided all the EU's eastern neighbors into two groups. The first group includes Russia with which the EU is building strategic relations, as well as the northern dimension of its foreign policy, and the second – the CE countries, which are enveloped in the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) [13, p. 74]. However, most researchers understand the Eastern dimension of EU foreign policy exclusively in six EP countries (Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan). Therefore, modern Eastern policy of the European Union is a joint formulation of defined principles, working-out of institutional solutions, and adoption of specific decisions and actions through the structures of the European Union as well as the individual Member States in their comprehensive relations with the countries of Eastern Europe [10, p. 171]. In general, the goals of EU policy in Eastern Europe can be outlined in the form of a triad «security-stabilization-Europeanization» [8, p. 190]. According to B. Piskorska, in implementing the Eastern policy, the EU applies elements of «soft influence» on the eastern neighbors, mainly, the policy of deepening and enlargement policy [14, p. 240].

The policy towards the countries of Eastern Europe, first of all, was aimed at solving problems that concerned both the European socio-economic progress and the security of the European region [16, p.143]. There is no doubt that in recent years the space of Eastern Europe has become increasingly important for the EU, especially in the context of security. The EU applies «regulatory force» to this region, that is influences it and stimulates the desired transformations by spreading European norms and values. At the same time, according to O. Shapovalova, the effectiveness of EU regulatory policy in Eastern Europe remains low. There are several reasons for this, such as the limited tools used by the EU here; the insufficient activity of the political dimension of the EU regulatory force; political tension between the Russian Federation and the countries of Eastern Europe, which is a significant obstacle to the realization of EU goals here [8, p. 193]. In this context, the South Caucasus region is of particular importance, as the EU's involvement in resolving conflicts and transformations there can not only strengthen the EU's «soft power» and its position in the international arena but also strengthen the security of the European region.

The inclusion of the countries of the South Caucasus in Eastern European initiatives is explained by various reasons. It is a well-known fact that many EU countries categorically do not support the idea of its enlargement, especially by the countries of Eastern Europe. In fact, the involvement of the countries of the South Caucasus, when Azerbaijan and Armenia did not insist on the prospect of membership, was a kind of «signal» for opponents of the Eastern dimension of EU foreign policy that its direction will develop in the format of «integration without membership». The region was also characterized by conflict, so European partners saw the democratization of the countries of the South Caucasus as a way to establish security, because «democracies are not at war with each other». And, of course, the third reason is the strengthening of EU energy security [5, p. 355].

The South Caucasus is important due to its significance in energy and transport routes that provide energy transit to Europe from Russia, the Caspian region, the Middle East, and North Africa. The Green Paper states that by 2030, the EU will be forced to import at least 70% of its energy carriers, with a significant proportion coming from unstable regions and countries. Given that the EU's energy consumption is constantly growing, it was decided to expand and diversify these transit networks. This, in turn, has strengthened the EU's dependence on the geopolitical situation in peripheral and politically unsteady regions. Thus, the region of the South Caucasus, which is peripheral, but acts as a «geographical bridge» that allows bypassing the territory of the Russian Federation and provides transit to Europe from Central Asia, which is rich in energy resources [2, p. 353]. Here, the EU uses three main interrelated elements of external security policy to neighboring regions, namely: the introduction of new and development of existing energy and communication routes; maintaining regional stability for their uninterrupted functioning; supporting the process of Europeanization/democratization of the countries of the South Caucasus.

Nevertheless, the presence of the European Union in the South Caucasus region in the early 90's of the XXth century was the weakest in comparison with other Eastern European countries. Polish researcher A. Legutska singles out several reasons for this, such as 1) incomprehension by European partners of the problems of this region; 2) recognition of them as the sphere of influence of the Russian Federation; 3) lack of tools in the EU for conducting foreign policy and security policy in the region, including the resolution of conflicts there [13, p. 152]. The situation in the countries of the South Caucasus is the result of the hybrid aggression of the Russian Federation, first of all, this is about Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia, and Abkhazia. Thus, according to German political scientist Sh. Meister, the South Caucasus «is in the backyard of EU policy, despite the conflicts that have been and are there. This threatens the security and stability of the European Union» [9]. The analyst explains the relative passivity of the EU in this region for several reasons, such as 1) the reluctance of Brussels to go for another aggravation of relations with Russia; 2) different views regarding the process of forming a new type of relations with Russia, on the one hand, Germany, Italy, France, and on the other – Poland, Sweden, and the Baltic countries, including resolving conflicts in the South Caucasus [9].

And the states of this region at the turn of the XXth and XXIst centuries simultaneously experienced the processes of integration and disintegration, globalization and glocalization. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the development of international relations of these states was influenced by the unstable political situation in the region (Nagorno-Karabakh; Abkhazia and South Ossetia). At that time, the states of the South Caucasus adhered to a multi-vector direction in their foreign policy. This, on the one hand, has led to greater Russian pressure in the region, and on the other – to the strengthening of EU requirements for deepening of socio-political reforms here [11, p. 140]. Instead, the rapprochement of the countries of the region to the EU occurred after the accession of Georgia (1999), Armenia (2001), and Azerbaijan (2001) to the Council of Europe. From the very beginning of the institutionalization of the EU's modern Eastern policy, the countries of the South Caucasus have had different interests in cooperation with European partners. Thus, the development of economic cooperation with the EU, mainly in the energy sphere, and the restoration of the territorial integrity of the state have become priorities for Azerbaijan. Armenia, as a country with much more modest development indicators and resources, has always claimed investment and financial assistance from the EU, as well as support for peace and stability in the Nagorno-Karabakh region. Instead, Georgia immediately declared its European movement, but with an emphasis on the issue of territorial integrity, stabilization of the internal situation and the South Caucasus in general [7, p. 19]. As we can see, all countries in the region are interested in involving the EU in resolving the conflicts in the South Caucasus. European partners have tried to use elements of the theory of democratization of the world for this purpose. Hence, the idea of supporting in neighboring countries effective governance, democracy, the conceptual foundations of the rule of law for lasting peace and stability, regional cooperation, involvement in the European decision-making system, rather than the formation of new military-political blocs has matured. On this basis, the ENP, the EP and the Black Sea Synergy were proposed for the countries of the South Caucasus.

As already mentioned, all three countries form their own types of foreign policy based on national interests and the geopolitical position. Thus, the foreign policy of Azerbaijan after the collapse of the Soviet Union is characterized by stability, balance, and independence from external actors. The priority at the regional level is to weaken the position of Armenia and restore the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, and at the global level – to maximize the use of transit and energy potential of the state to strengthen its position in the international arena. At the same time, Russia, Iran, and Turkey compete for influence on the state [6]. Due to security issues, Azerbaijan adheres to the policy of equal distance between the EU and Russia.

The history of cooperation between Azerbaijan and the EU dates back to 1993, and on April 22, 1996, a bilateral agreement on partnership and cooperation between the EU and Azerbaijan was signed. This state is a member of the ENP and the addressee of the EP. This refers to the development of relations in two planes – economic and political, ie gradual economic integration and strengthening of political cooperation [3, p. 307]. Although cooperation is developing dynamically, the economic interests of both parties remain a priority, mainly in the energy sector. Thus, back in 2006, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the EU and Azerbaijan, the purpose of which was to create an energy partnership between the signatory parties and strengthen Azerbaijan's integration into the European energy market [3, p. 310].

It is important that Azerbaijan's participation in the EP is limited for several reasons. Firstly, Azerbaijan cannot fully benefit from the multilateral format of the Eastern Partnership, as it is hindered by the unresolved conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. Secondly, without being a member of the World Trade Organization, Azerbaijan cannot sign an agreement with the EU on a deep free trade area. Thirdly, the leadership of Azerbaijan insists on changing the format of the Association Agreement with the EU and offers its own modernized version of the Strategic Partnership Agreement.

Instead, the EU has repeatedly expressed concern about human rights violations, media freedom, and corruption in Azerbaijan. In fact, the state joins European initiatives but slows down reforms in the system of public administration and democratization of the state. In cooperation with the EU, Azerbaijan seeks to form the image of a European, reliable business partner; demonstration of its position on Nagorno-Karabakh; development of relations with the EU in the field of energy (development of gas transmission systems within the Southern Gas Corridor project) and trade; limiting the influence of both economic and political on the part of the Russian Federation; visa liberalization and signing a condition on a free trade zone, but in a limited format [15, p. 16-18]. Although cooperation between the EU and Azerbaijan is ongoing, the latter is not interested in deepening it, as it positions itself as a powerful regional player and strives for a balanced relationship with the EU.

All of Georgia's activities in the international arena are aimed at resolving issues of restoring territorial integrity, expanding international ties, and integrating into such structures as the EU and NATO. The main strategic partner of this state of the South Caucasus is the United States. Although Georgia avoids intensifying the confrontation with Russia, it continues its policy of non-recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Azerbaijan and Turkey are also strategic partners in the economic and security spheres for Georgia [6].

The development of relations between the EU and Georgia began in the early 90's of the XXth century. The first bilateral Georgia-EU relations were established in 1992. However, cooperation between the EU and Georgia underwent radical changes after the Rose Revolution (2003). In 2006, the ENP Action Plan was developed for Georgia, which served as the basis for the «People's Strategic Document» (2007). The next important stage of EU-Georgia cooperation is related to the introduction of the Eastern Partnership in 2009, and in 2014 Georgia signed an Association Agreement with the EU, which entered into force in 2016.

From cooperation with the EU Georgia expects membership prospects and enhanced security collaboration. The Georgian side also seeks to extend the European Monitoring Mission and the mandate of the EU Special Representative in the countries of the South Caucasus and the conflict in Georgia; development of infrastructure projects, which anticipates financial support from the EU in the field of transport and energy (for example, the construction of the port of Anaklia, the extension of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway to Europe via Turkey, Bulgaria, and Romania, etc.). A problematic moment in the development of relations with the EU may be the non-implementation of the Association Agreement in terms of justice, anti-corruption, and nepotism [15, p. 21-22].

Thus, the EU provides significant support for political reforms in Georgia, primarily to ensure the rule of law, a transparent electoral system, transformation into a parliamentary form of government, and an effective system of public financial management, etc. At the same time, the EU lacks the main impetus for reforms, namely proposals for membership in the European Union. The EU's role in resolving the issue of Abkhazia and South Ossetia also remains important. In the presence of tense relations with Russia, a real threat from it, the conflict potential of this state increases. This necessitates enhanced security cooperation between the EU and Georgia. EU-Armenia cooperation began with the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, which was signed in 1996 and entered into force in 1999. In 2004, Armenia joined the ENP, and in 2006 the EU-Armenia Action Plan was adopted. Subsequently, in 2009, Armenia became the recipient of the European Eastern Partnership initiative. And in February 2012, negotiations began on signing an agreement on visa facilitation and readmission. In October 2013, the European Parliament approved a visa liberalization agreement with Armenia. This country also intended to sign an Association Agreement with the EU, but on September 3, 2013, the President of Armenia S. Sargsyan stated Armenia's desire to join the

Customs Union under the auspices of the Russian Federation, but at the same time declared desire to continue cooperation with the EU [2, p. 361-362].

As a result, Armenia failed to paraph a free trade agreement with the EU. EU Commissioner Stefan Fule has openly stated pressure from Russia. Indeed, Armenia is heavily dependent on Russia and is its only ally in the South Caucasus under the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). There are two Russian military bases there – in the city of Gyumri and on the border with Turkey [2, p. 361]. Armenia is also dependent on Russia for energy supply, accounting for 60% of Russia's natural gas consumption and about 20% of nuclear energetics. Russia's monopoly is also reflected in Armenia's transport sector, as the Armenian Railways has been in a 30-year concession for Russia's South Caucasus Railway since 2008. Therefore, a significant change in Armenia's foreign policy requires at least a neutral attitude to this issue on the part of the Russian Federation, as well as the inviolability of Russia's security guarantees. Therefore, shortly, we should not expect sharp tracks in Armenia's foreign policy.

However, in December 2015, negotiations between Armenia and the EU on the possibility of a new framework agreement began. In 2017, Armenia signed a Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement with the European Union. Moreover, there were a number of reasons for this. According to K. Modeyan, Armenia's membership in the Customs Union was accompanied by significant geopolitical crises. In particular, it is a question of weakening of investment opportunities of the Russian Federation through the introduction of sanctions, and also aggravation of a situation on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border that provided a possibility of aggravation of the conflict [4]. As a result of a new armed confrontation, an agreement was signed in November 2020 to end the war in Nagorno-Karabakh between Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Russia. Analysts believe that, in fact, as a result, Armenia was defeated, and Russia and Turkey determined the course of the war in Nagorno-Karabakh, which means that the United States and the EU were on the geopolitical periphery. Another dangerous point is the introduction of so-called Russian peacekeepers in order to consolidate new borders, which will certainly increase Russia's influence in the South Caucasus [1].

We see that in relations with the EU, Armenia is trying to position itself as a country to which cooperation with the European Union is closer than for the countries of the «second EP speed», ie Belarus and Azerbaijan. However, due to its significant dependence on Russia in the field of security and economy, Yerevan formulates its European priorities quite «cautiously». Despite a balanced policy between the EU and Russia, Armenia expects the EU to present a new roadmap that will set out the goals of future cooperation. Armenia is not interested in EU membership, but it is interested in a free trade zone. Armenia also seeks to strengthen security cooperation, primarily to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and modernize the Metsamor nuclear power station. Instead, the EU expects more active actions of the Armenian authorities in the fight against corruption and oligarchic clans [15, p. 27-29].

In general, Armenia, due to its geopolitical and economic position, pursues a multi-vector policy. On the other hand, the EU has not developed a specific strategy for relations with this country, including the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, and is not ready for another strain in relations with Russia. It is most likely that relations between Armenia and the EU will remain in the traditional format, as well as the peculiarities of the country's foreign policy.

It is obvious that the main obstacle to the full implementation of EU normative force in the South Caucasus region is the presence of a number of regional conflicts and the low activity of the EU in their settlement. Russia is the most interested party in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Thus, relations with Russia in all countries of the South Caucasus are crucial for the international order of the region. Currently, relations between Georgia and Russia are in a stage of «cold hostility», Armenia is in a state of no alternative to Russia, while Azerbaijan is maneuvering between the EU and Russia [6].

Instead, the EU can use the «Balkan scheme» to resolve regional conflicts in the South Caucasus, which consists of three components: political (providing membership prospects), security (attachment of the EP countries to the European security system, strengthening cooperation in the security dimension) and modernization (internal changes in the countries of the South Caucasus in the direction of democratization and the formation of a market economy). First of all, it is Georgia, which can significantly strengthen the EU's presence in the region and, as a result, intensify cooperation with Armenia and Azerbaijan, including in the political and security sphere.

In fact, three scenarios for the development of cooperation between the EU and the countries of the South Caucasus can be predicted. The first is the actual increase in the political, financial, and military structures of the EU, which will help bring the countries of the South Caucasus closer to European standards, and, accordingly, limit the influence of the Russian Federation in the region. The second is the recognition of

Russian influence here, which will automatically limit the EU's influence and return Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia to their previous political course. The third is the most realistic, as it provides for a balanced foreign policy in the South Caucasus. That is, Georgia will continue to build ties with the EU, but Armenia and Azerbaijan will build cooperation with European partners in selective areas. Obviously, if the benefits of such cooperation will be greater than the proposals provided by other partners, mainly the Russian Federation [14, p. 183].

The main shortcomings of the EU's Eastern policy towards the countries of the South Caucasus are the lack of a clear strategy towards the South Caucasus, insufficiency of political and security cooperation, and a certain exclusion of the EU from resolving regional conflicts there. Also, the effectiveness of the EU's eastern policy in the South Caucasus will largely depend on third parties, primarily Russia, which may be the subject of further research.

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Турчин Я. Б., Івасечко О. Я. Країни Південного Кавказу у фокусі східної політики Європейського Союзу

Розглянуто особливості та основні етапи формування сучасної східної політики Європейського Союзу, у тому числі й щодо країн Південного Кавказу – Вірменії, Азербайджану та Грузії. З'ясовано причини слабкої присутності ЄС у регіоні Південного Кавказу на початку 90-х рр. ХХ ст., зокрема, нерозуміння європейськими партнерами проблем цього регіону; визнання їх сферою впливу Росії; недостатність у ЄС інструментів для проведення закордонної політики і політики безпеки в цьому регіоні, також й до розв'язання тамтешніх конфліктів. Визначено підстави включення країн даного регіону до сфери зовнішньої політики ЄС, як-от: енергетична безпека ЄС; демократизація Південного Кавказу як важливої складової європейської безпеки; досягнення компромісу між європейськими партнерами щодо посилення присутності ЄС на пострадянському просторі. Акцентовано увагу на особливостях зовнішньополітичних пріоритетів Вірменії, Грузії та Азербайджану по відношенню до Європейського Союзу, формування співробітництва, основних досягнень, проблемах та викликах. Доведено, що вже із самого початку інституалізації сучасної східної політики ЄС країни Південного Кавказу мали різні інтереси у співпраці з європейськими партнерами. Так, Азербайджан – розвиток економічної співпраці з ЄС, головню в енергетичній сфері та відновленні територіальної цілісності держави; Вірменія – інвестиційну та фінансову допомогу від ЄС, підтримку миру та стабільності в регіоні Нагірного Карабаху; Грузія – посилення європейського руху, відновлення територіальної цілісності, стабілізації внутрішньої ситуації та Південному Кавказі загалом. Стверджується, що головною перешкодою для повноцінної реалізації нормативної сили ЄС у регіоні Південного Кавказу є висока конфліктність даного регіону. Зроблено висновок, що головними недоліками східної політики ЄС до країн Південного Кавказу є відсутність чіткої стратегії до країн Південного Кавказу, недостатність політико-безпекової складової співпраці, а також певне відсторонення ЄС від розв'язання тамтешніх регіональних конфліктів. Також ефективність реалізації східної політики ЄС на Південному Кавказі значною мірою буде залежати від впливу третіх сторін, головню, Росії.

Ключові слова: Європейський Союз, східна політика, Вірменія, Грузія, Азербайджан, Південний Кавказ, Росія, Східне партнерство.