



EU and NATO – how to secure stability for Armenia and the South Caucasus*

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Background

The South Caucasus has no a regional institutional structure. The situation is further complicated by closed borders between Turkey and Armenia, Armenia and Azerbaijan and Georgia and Russia. This critically low level of regional integration prevents actors from defining common policies and exploring ways out of the stalled conflicts, thus the patterns of insecurity are critically high. More integration into multilateral *fora* would ensure a higher degree of security. This is why the active Armenian membership of the OSCE, CIS, CoE and its partnership with NATO, in addition to its enhanced relations with the EU in the framework of the ENP/EaP, is of great importance both in terms of strategy and tactics.

Both the EU and NATO aspire to have constructive roles in ensuring the security and stability of the South Caucasus, though through different instruments. These roles are becoming increasingly complementary. Both actors have it in their interests for this region to be politically stable and free from conflict, thus actions taken by either party to further these goals are likely to benefit the other and the region as a whole. We are currently witnessing a transformation of declared goals into concrete policy proposals from both parties: through EaP on the EU side and through IPAP as far as NATO is concerned.

Turkey is a relevant actor with a particular perspective on this scenario. A key member of NATO and candidate for EU membership, Turkey claims to be seriously committed to a result-oriented political cooperation when it comes to multilateral actions in the NATO framework. Simultaneously, the country still has to demonstrate its commitment to “zero problems” with its neighbours, a declared foreign and security policy goal. In other words, it has to begin delivering concrete policy actions in its relations with Armenia, and pursue a genuine reconciliation. This process would trigger multidimensional cooperation with Armenia through strong confidence-building measures implemented by both sides and backed up by the major actors involved, namely the Euro-Atlantic community and Russia.

In analysing the complementary approaches of the EU and NATO, there are three key areas to explore: threat assessment in Armenia and the roles of the EU and NATO; positioning Armenia in the Russia-EU-NATO matrix; the Armenia-Turkey rapprochement.

1. Armenia: threat assessment and the role of the EU and NATO

There is a critical absence of security in South Caucasus. To explore this, Barry Buzan’s definition of state security can be helpful. He argues that a comprehensive understanding of state security can no longer ignore on the one hand non-traditional challenges to states, i.e. social and economic threats, absence of communication and transport networks etc., but on the other hand also not external

traditional military challenges as they were dominant in Cold War studies.¹ The theoretical shift introduced by Buzan is particularly important for the analysis of security perceptions of Armenia and South Caucasus in general. By stating that “security is a relational phenomenon”, Buzan argues that both in the case of traditional and non-traditional challenges to state security, the membership of a state to regional or sub-regional security and economic groupings is extremely relevant.²

The South Caucasus does not have a regional institutional structure enabling its actors to define common policies, so their efforts are directed more on a search of external support rather than on direct talks. As mentioned, this low level of regional integration results in a critically high level of insecurity. As for the relations between Armenia and the wider Euro-Atlantic community, they have been developing since the independence of the country from the Soviet Union. Primarily, these relations were set up at a national, bilateral level and thereafter, they were framed into a supra-national, multilateral framework (CoE, OSCE, EU and EAPC/NATO).

NATO’s focus is on security in the South Caucasus, while the EU’s approach is more multifaceted and comprehensive, including a strong focus on democratisation. NATO does require at least an evolving democracy as one of its preconditions for fostering relations with partner countries, though it has to be reminded that NATO did not focus on this point some years ago, when countries like Turkey, Greece or Portugal joined the Alliance. For the EU, however, democracy promotion is part of the core business. This is why their approaches are complementary. Accordingly, democratisation and good governance are not only functional to Armenia’s sustainable development, but are also a geopolitical asset and security guarantee in the wider regional framework. In this perspective, Armenia is committed to a difficult, but genuine process of democratic awareness raising, reform of law and its implementation.

While the inclusion of Armenia in the CoE was the first tangible milestone of the country’s European integration, the signature of a PCA, the involvement in the ENP and its upgrading to the EaP highlight the importance of Armenia for EU efforts to “develop a zone of prosperity and a friendly neighbourhood” by offering non-candidate neighbours enhanced cooperation. Similarly, Armenia was engaged with NATO in the framework of PfP and has upgraded its relations to an IPAP status. Armenia is not seeking full membership to NATO for the time being; still it is seriously committed in the implementation of IPAP provisions. Furthermore, Armenia contributes to KFOR in Kosovo through its peacekeepers and is considering deploying military personnel in Afghanistan in the framework of ISAF.

Apart from purely cultural reasons, engaging Armenia and the South Caucasus in general is important for the Euro-Atlantic community mainly in terms of its security and stability, *tout court*.

In the regional context, the Euro-Atlantic institutions are acting in an extremely polarised geopolitical environment, where the influence of external sources of power politics is prevailing over European soft and normative power. As regards the threat-opportunity dichotomy for the analysis of EU-Armenia

¹ Buzan B., *People, States and Fear: An Agenda For International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner publishers, London, 1991

² Buzan B., Waever O., De Wilde J., *Security: A New Framework For Analysis*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner publishers, London, 1998

and EU-South Caucasus relations, threats prevail over the opportunities. Among these threats are the proliferation of WMD and double-use technology, the growth of terrorist networks, organised crime, regional conflicts and state failure. The opportunities include the existence of a stable, secure and democratic periphery, energy security and diversification of energy corridors and the role of the region as a bridge between the EU, the Middle East and Central Asia. Thus, Euro-Atlantic institutions should be more active in the projection of confidence building measures in order to counter threats stemming from the region. Still, both the EU and NATO emphasise the importance of regional cooperation in South Caucasus.

As far as non-security threats to Armenia are concerned, it is clear that economic development is very much dependent on the transport and communication networks a country is part of. Armenia has been displaying a very positive macroeconomic performance in conditions of imposed geographic *quasi*-isolation. However, its inclusion in macro-regional networks is of vital importance for the country. As for regionalisation, there seem to be no mismatches between Armenian and European approaches. The EU has denied financial assistance to the BTK railway, which was meant to by-pass Armenia, now Armenia should move forward in making sure it is integrated into the trans-regional energy networks. The importance steel and coal had in post-war European integration, hydrocarbons can have in the stabilisation of the post-Soviet conflict-torn and segmented Southern Caucasus.

2. Positioning Armenia in the Russia-NATO-EU matrix

A second area to explore is the new trend which is gradually emerging in Russia-NATO relations. While on August 2008, Russia and NATO reached the lowest point of their relations, currently one can safely state that NATO and Russia are no longer adversaries.

A superficial analysis would define Armenia's military cooperation with Moscow and the former's participation to the CSTO as an obstacle for strengthening and deepening ties with the alliance. Paradoxically, Russia can have the same perception of Armenia-NATO cooperation. Still, Armenia-NATO relations can be an example of mechanisms used to enable a non-NATO country to keep its self-sufficiency and independence in foreign policy and security matters. Armenia can maintain a good relationship with Russia and the Alliance at the same time without risking its sovereignty or spoiling its ties with each side.³

In parallel, Armenia's reliance on Moscow as a security guarantor has been determined by threats, both real and perceived, from the hostile rhetoric of Turkey. On the EU side, the Union lacks coordination and capabilities to emerge as a security guarantor. A pragmatic and constructive political process between Turkey and Armenia would certainly facilitate the Europeanisation and reform of the Armenian security sector.

At a regional level, however, the South Caucasus is still characterised by conflicting geopolitical axes. The rise of complementary approaches by the EU, NATO and Russia would encourage cooperation in these areas, whereas exclusive approaches could risk deepening divisions. As for Armenia, it should

³ AA.VV, Options and Strategies for NATO: Pressing the Re-Set Button on the Strategic Concept, Bertelsmann Stiftung, July 2009, Brussels, p. 40

continue pursuing a complementary foreign and security policy without antagonising any of the other actors engaged in the region. Such a policy is essential in the situation of unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and still-to-be-normalised Armenian-Turkish relations. In particular, Armenian-Russian relations should be seen more as an asset than a liability both for Armenia and Europe. It is also worth bearing in mind the case of Ukraine, whose relations with the EU are at stake because of its increasingly strained relations with Moscow.

In the meantime, Russia should consider this strategic choice of Armenia positively, since it is in the former's best interest to have a stable ally with open borders in the Caucasus.

3. Armenia-Turkey normalisation: stabilisation of the macro-region ahead?

If there is a breakthrough in Armenia-Turkey relations, the threat assessments defining security strategies on both sides are set to be modified. This implies more stability in the region. For Armenia, among other effects, it will bring more opportunities to strengthen the complementary nature of its foreign and security policies. In parallel, a process of "resetting" in NATO-Russia relations is underway. Armenia can only benefit from that.

The two protocols on establishing diplomatic relations and normalisation of relations, agreed upon by Turkish and Armenian leadership, are not a point of arrival that would freeze and fix bilateral relations. They rather provide a working framework necessary to start normalization. The spill-over effect of such an engagement, in terms of conflict resolution throughout the wider region, would certainly increase the mutual trust of Euro-Atlantic and Russian political elites. Such a process would contribute to the transformation of political cleavages in the region into co-operational hubs. In other words, truly epochal shifts can be underway.

Decoupling between the Armenian-Turkish reconciliation and the Nagorno-Karabakh resolution is another guarantee for the success of the process. While the beneficial effects of a resolution of the conflict are evident, linking these two issues would be counterproductive in terms of both the negotiating format and conditionality. The solution has to be endogenous, but upheld by international efforts. In this perspective, the EU and NATO should be ready to contribute, together with other actors involved in the region, to post-conflict rehabilitation and peace-keeping once a final resolution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is in reach. Such an involvement would undoubtedly strengthen the EU's international stance on the combination of civil and military tools for conflict resolution and international advocacy for multilateralism.

The Armenian Genocide is a relevant issue in this case. After almost a century of hostility, Turkey's acknowledgement of the Genocide would be a major catalyst for the success of the whole process. It is also worth noting the significance of the complementary approaches of the EU and NATO. The EU has acknowledged the Genocide through both the European Parliament and a number of key member states, demonstrating its strong role on this issue. NATO has a different focus and prefers to keep out of this political question, not least because Turkey is its main ally in the region.

Furthermore, any attempt by Turkey to restore a neo-Ottoman territorialisation of the South Caucasus and Central Asia would kill the normalisation process at its very onset. In other words, the most beneficial contribution of the Turkey-Armenia rapprochement, the improved stability of the region, risks being erased if Turkey returns to hegemonic rhetoric in its foreign and security policy discourse.

Conclusion

Ensuring security and stability in South Caucasus is a key priority both for NATO⁴ and the EU.⁵ A transformation of Armenia-Turkey enmity logic is essential to guaranteeing stability across the macro region. The EU and NATO should commit themselves to implementing serious confidence building measures for the ongoing process. In order to add consistency to their action in the region, they should also coordinate their policies with Russia. In fact, normalisation of Armenia-Turkey relations and its stabilising effects over the wider region can be considered as the most appropriate occasion for the three to score a trilateral success. Furthermore, it will be the *casus pax* they need to re-launch their dialogue.

Again, they should continue emphasising the importance of regionalisation and economic growth in the Southern Caucasus in order to uphold peace efforts generated internally and to counter regional hegemony. To reduce the risk of potential regional hegemonies they should assist local actors in achieving stability and security. In this process, the EU and NATO should try to capitalise on the expertise acquired in the post-Dayton Balkans.

All South Caucasian states should be involved in transnational energy projects and Nabucco in particular. In this way, Russian antagonism to the project can be watered down, because of its shares in the Armenian energy transport and distribution network. As mentioned previously, Armenian-Russian relations are more of an asset to the EU, NATO and Armenia than a liability.

Finally, the region is still internally fragmented and is subjected to the strategic decision-making of external actors pursuing their own interests there. An ambiguous Cold War approach tending to some kind of balance of powers is still evident at the moment. All third parties involved should categorically renounce any form of a race for influence in the Caucasus, since their interests will turn out to be complementary, especially if the Armenian-Turkish normalisation process succeeds.

⁴ See NATO Security concept

⁵ See A Secure Europe in a Better World - ESS and ESS Review

List of acronyms

BTK	Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railroad
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CoE	Council of Europe
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
EaP	Eastern Partnership
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
EU	European Union
IPAP	Individual Partnership Action Plans
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PCA	Partnership and Cooperation Agreement
PfP	Partnership for Peace
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction
WW I	World War I

About EuFoA

European Friends of Armenia (EuFoA) is a young NGO which uses its network to facilitate contacts between Europe and Armenia, promoting good relations and understanding between the two sides, an area which has become one of the top priorities on the EU agenda.

As part of its activity, EuFoA has established the Europe-Armenia Advisory Council. This Council is a unique body to promote relations between Europe and Armenia from the European side. Composed of leading representatives from the political, business and cultural spheres from across Europe, it provides guidance on all major issues in these areas.

For more information on EuFoA and the Europe-Armenia Advisory Council, please visit our website at www.eufoa.org.

* This paper was written by Sargis Ghazaryan, reflecting input from a conference jointly organised by EuFoA and NATO in Yerevan on 13 October 2009.