



## EU'S POLICY FOR AZERBAIJAN: CHALLENGES, ERRORS AND OPPORTUNITIES

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### Abstract

This research work is devoted to the study of the problems and failures in the effectiveness of EU's policy towards Azerbaijan. The study argues the problems start from the creators and their motivations for the EU's policy and then covers all stages on these levels: conceptual, strategic and tactical. First of all, European policy should be established by Europeans in the line with Europe's regional interests and ambitions. The policy should not be just in the frame of the general Western approach and should not take a position of the second-degree actor moving only with soft power. Optimizing the EU's policy towards Azerbaijan in a manner that retains EU's and Azerbaijan interests is a key issue in the resolving of current problems in EU-Azerbaijan relations and the integration of Azerbaijan into the EU. The objective must be to restore the prestige and attractiveness of the EU and the trust and belief of the Azerbaijani people in the EU structures and powers. In order to realize integration, the author suggests a renewal relation with the Azerbaijani government concerning the directions for the development of the pillars of the society.

### Keywords

EU's policy, Azerbaijan, relation, integration, interests, government

## AB'NİN AZERBAIJAN POLİTİKASI: ZORLUKLAR, HATALAR VE FIRSATLAR

### Öz

Çalışmada AB'nin Azerbaycan'a yönelik politikasının etkinliğinin sorun ve başarısızlıkları ele alınmıştır. Çalışma problemlerin AB politikasının yaratıcıları ve onların motivasyonlarından başlamakla daha sonra kavramsal, stratejik ve taktik seviyeler olarak tüm aşamaları kapsadığını savunuyor. Her şeyden önce, Avrupa politikası, Avrupa'nın bölgesel çıkarları ve emelleri doğrultusunda Avrupalılar tarafından kurulmalıdır. Politika sadece genel Batılı yaklaşım çerçevesinde olmamalı ve yumuşak güç ile tek hareketli ikinci derece aktör bir pozisyon almamalıdır. AB'nin ve Azerbaycanın çıkarlarını koruyan bir şekilde AB'nin Azerbaycan politikasını optimize mevcut AB-Azerbaycan ilişkilerindeki sorunların çözülmesi ve Azerbaycanın AB'ye entegrasyonunda önemli bir konudur. Amaç AB'nin prestij ve cazibesini kurtarmak, AB yapılarına ve yetkilerine Azerbaycan halkının güven ve inancını kazanmak olmalıdır. Entegrasyonu gerçekleştirmek amacıyla, Azerbaycan hükümeti ile toplumun sütunlarının gelişmesi yönünde bir ilişkinin önemi kaydediliyor.

### Anahtar kelimeler

AB'nin politikası, Azerbaycan, ilişkiler, entegrasyon, çıkarlar, hükümet

### Introduction

Relations between the EU and Azerbaijan are developing in a zigzag pattern in relation to long-term regional strategies and energy requirements, as well as current political interests and political attitudes which has created distrust from both sides to each other. The reason for this focus on the policy of the EU concerning the challenges and faults of the relations and the

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attempt to put the responsibility for the problem on the EU in this writing is because of the EU's place in the relationship as the stronger partner, additionally. The EU's approach to the relationship has the ambition of being a global actor with the aim of keeping the leadership in the problems of the region which includes Azerbaijan.

Relations between the EU and Azerbaijan, mutual expectations which generate these relations are quite contradictory. Adam Hug (2012, 2) expresses this relationship as “a tale of mismatched objectives and ambitions”. Any action from either side to overcome the contradictions, even to try to clear problems is not seen. This gradually drives the relationship to a deadlock and leads to more and more errors.

A contrast is also observed between the content and dynamics of the EU's policy which is created by the EU's motives and goals. More precisely, a lack of policy is emerging. One of the indicators of this is the negative direction of the relationship between Azerbaijan and the EU. This is occurring in the background of the relationship of Azerbaijan with the West as a whole, including the USA and started with the USA, with whom relationships have been cooling and creating a syndrome of unreliability. This creates a suspicion about the independence of the EU's political course concerning the region, which includes Azerbaijan. The EU's policy is perceived as wavering tactical moves in the background of the US policy and subject to the USA's strategic course in the region. Given that several distinguished US experts have said the policy of the United States in the region is admitted a failed strategy at all levels, it is not difficult to imagine how problematic an EU's policy which follows this strategy is. For this reason, authors present the current political strategy under the name of the Western policy. (Cornel S E, Starr F S, Tsereteli M, 2015)

### **Conceptual Problems of the EU policy**

As we have said, relations between the EU and Azerbaijan depend mainly on the attitude and policy of the EU as the spelling side in these relations. And, unfortunately, the EU does not own a strategy dedicated to Azerbaijan. However, the European Commission presents a political line which is in accordance with the conducted policy and agenda. It indicates that the current EU policy for Azerbaijan (EEAS. Azerbaijan) is founded on three bases: ENP (EEAS. Azerbaijan Action Plan), Eastern Partnership (Schäffer S and Tolksdorf D, 2009) and the European energy security question. Despite the differentiation created by the natural resources and energy policy of Azerbaijan which supports European energy security, the results of the study may be considered common for all the Eastern Partnership countries.

### *ENP*

As we have said above, the EU's policy for Azerbaijan is established on the ENP concept. The motive for this concept is to present an alternative to the policy of enlargement (Wolff S. 2011a, 2011b), which is based on the security problem as are all alliances and neighborhood strategies. The policy is directed not just to the solving of the security issue but is also related to the EU's ambition to be a global actor. (Turk D, 2010) However, the ambition of being a global actor as well as a guarantee of security for the European area creates a demand for suitable hard power



resources, including the opportunity and the ability to use it. The ideologues and authors of the ENP concept have directed the notion of “security” towards the cultural sphere for the purpose of replacing the insufficiency of hard power with soft power (Wolff S, 2011b). On the eve of the establishment of the ENP, the existence of conflicts in the near neighborhood of the EU (since that time they have grown) had to be evidence of the impossibility of passing the hard power through the framework of the whole security issue with the cultural security.

### *Eastern Partnership*

The second important base of the EU's policy is the Eastern Partnership program. This program emerged in response to the demand created by the problem of the necessary practical effectiveness because of the general character of the ENP for the different regions (Africa, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, South Caucasus). In other words, a differentiation inside the ENP was needed. However, various levels of the development and roles for the countries in the regional processes, and “different expectations vis-a-vis the EU” (Boonstra J and Delcour L, 2015, 2) have revealed the insufficiency of the activity within the framework of the Eastern Partnership program. Looking at the context of the policy of the EU, Azerbaijan’s unwillingness to carry out relations with the EU in the framework of this program, and refusing to participate at the level of head of state in the last session of the program proves the unsteadiness of this base (The European Council. Eastern Partnership Summit 2015).

### *Energy*

The third base mentioned the problem of energy security for the EU. In fact, this base was created by the energy and logistics policy of Azerbaijan and its activity in relation to the country’s goal of entering the European market. Unfortunately, in this case, the EU took a passive position and followed the role of the United States, even though, the issue possesses a vital importance for the EU because, “Direct Access to Caspian energy resources is the only reasonable way for the EU to ensure European energy security” (Efe H, 2012, 196).

In characterizing and summarizing the agenda of relations between the EU and Azerbaijan, we see that Europe conveys its requirement to Azerbaijan in the issue of energy security and wishes the integration of Azerbaijan into Europe in a cultural and ideological aspect (EEAS. EU-Azerbaijan 2015). As I said above, the EU tries to stay one word the scope of cultural security, even though, it has been mobilized to keep the international commitment to the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict through the OSCE Minsk group (Simao L, 2010, 17-18; Klever E, 2013).

However, when we talk about integration, we should not put at the forefront, cultural and economic integration, and put in the back integration in the political and security fields. Integration can occur as a whole system. The first and main question of integration is the security issue. It is obvious that cultural integration will be followed by political integration and the second will accordingly create a necessity to some alliance to address the security questions. That is why, the cultural course selected by our region frightens Russia the with



future possibility of NATO reaching its southern borders. Therefore, Russia is trying to prevent the integration of Ukraine into the EU using all means, including the occupation of territories and incurring sanctions. Again, for this reason, Georgia puts the security issue, that is NATO membership as a first priority in the Euro Atlantic integration policy (Kakachia K, 2013, 41). Recently, some experts have declared the necessity of “a higher political and security profile” of the ENP in Eastern Partnership countries (Delcour L, 2015, 12).

Another question is the approach to the integration process. I think that the approach to the problem should be changed too because, the integration process, as well as the relationships among regions and states are not based simply on geopolitical and economic-energy interests. As a core matter, this is usually spoken of as cultural closeness and adequacy. Usually, Europe is considered as the subject and its neighboring regions, including the South Caucasus is considered as the object. An effort to do whole work on the object is observed. In other words, the goal is to change these regions, to “civilize” them. It is a completely wrong approach.<sup>1</sup> If we intend to reach integration, then both sides should be able to learn from and understand each other. How can such a great social event such as the integration of regions happen in a case where the first does not understand the second and requires from the second to accept as of at most importance the issues which are necessary just for the first? The conceptual approach such as the exporting of value systems was already experienced by the Soviet Union and was unsuccessful.

The next interesting point in this question is that integration is seen as a duty of local governments to apply strategic and tactical requirements for an extended period. But integration should not be viewed as a process to be undertaken and implemented by the government. The political activity of the government is determined in a balanced way with many local political interests, geopolitical security factors and directions of the regional-global processes. However, the base for the activity of government is public opinion, it’s an emotional level. Although the Azerbaijani government constantly declares that it has already chosen the course of European integration (Alieva L, 2006, 3), it still behaves carefully and steps cautiously in this direction for reasons of the current geopolitical conditions and regional processes (Chatham House 2013, 6), especially the threat directed at the sovereignty of Azerbaijan by Russia through the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (Nuriyev E, 2007, 5). The Azerbaijani government has tried to create a strong economic foundation for political integration and has been involved in great regional economic projects which have served to the European energy security issue.

### **Regional - Global Terms of the Relations**

The EU is guided by the progress of democratization in its neighbourhood policy and relations (EEAS. European Neighbourhood Policy), and there are some regional and global conditions which highlight the process. However, democratization is, first of all, a regional - global event rather than local in the current globalized world. So, regional stability and security, especially the creation of its serious underlying foundation is the main condition. Any state and its people living in a conflict situation with the problem of territorial integrity may not put problems concerning democracy and human rights at the top of the agenda of things with which they are worried. Therefore, conflicts must not be kept frozen, but should be resolved as soon possible. Secondly, states and regions themselves, which are the guardian of democratic values at a global



level, should demonstrate a frank attitude to democratic and liberal rights both internally and abroad. They should form a tolerant environment, demonstrate an equal treatment to different races and religions inside and should not apply double standards. They should not sacrifice democratic principles for strategic interests in foreign policy. That is, they should start the solution from within themselves. They should start by displaying the principle of justice in their attitude towards regions. In other words, it is important to earn the trust of societies. Otherwise, talking about individual rights in the background of an indifferent attitude to the most natural rights of millions of people is met skeptically, it even creates rage. The result is those people understand democracy as a non-realistic, Utopian political ideology, political means like communism.

### **Problems of Relations between EU and Government of Azerbaijan**

One of the main problems here is that for the democratization and development of a civil society, the West, including the EU, is pursuing a political line through some NGOs and “democratic” persons by financing them. In my opinion, working with several individuals and NGOs by funding them is not an answer and cannot give positive results. On the contrary, they do not create a positive image in the community. It is already obvious to everybody that the development of a civil society through different persons and small NGOs is a bad policy and does not give successful results. This kind of policy might be initially based on good motives (Alieva L, 2006, 10), but mostly has given negative results. This policy has damaged relations between government and donor countries, as well as the reputation of leading states and international organizations in the countries of our region, including Azerbaijan. Together with the concept, the strategy was also faulty. The principles of selection concerning the activists were also wrong. To do business with cosmopolitan people is preferred. But the chance of their acceptance by the society and for them to be considered dear to the people are less. Such persons cannot be together with the public on issues with national significance and importance to which they have a sensitive attitude. They keep careful watch over those problems and give attention to the opinion of their foreign donors, who surely, do not want to go beyond the interests of their own states. For example, in Azerbaijan such “democrats” do not raise their voices and do not express a clear attitude about the biggest problem of the country - issues related to the solution of the Armenian-Azerbaijani Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, including the sending back to their home of 1,2 million refugees and IDPs, the everyday losses on the frontline of conflict, or the returning of captives. Yet they are engaged in the legal matters of individuals who have unfamiliar activities and compete then in the preparing of as negative as possible a report about the activities of the government in the social spheres and submit these reports to foreign states and organizations. Irrespective of the positive or negative opinion about domestic policy and the actions of the government, members of Azerbaijani society do not support such “democrats” (Bottger K, Falkenhain M, 2011, 19). At present, a phobia, fright and syndrome of mistrust has been formed in the governmental structure and various circles of the society concerning NGOs. This creates challenges and problems for the activity of the civil society institutions and for the formation of a civil society in general. In addition, this situation causes problems, a sense of unreliability and some undesirable trends in relations with the states which are the funding sources of the NGOs. So, this policy has not been successful. It has not caused the formation of a civil society, but rather the creation of problems and barriers for a civil society.



### **Problems with the Public Opinion of Azerbaijan**

Integration needs a serious social basis, that gives it legitimacy. Events in the Ukraine proved it. This requires the obtaining of respect, most importantly, the trust of public opinion. If great powers neglect the sensitive and vital problems of a country and do not consider themselves responsible enough to demonstrate justice, it means they agree with the situation of human right violations concerning the 1,2 million refugees. In this case, distrust by the public towards the great powers, including the EU, is unavoidable. “The position of the EU in the Karabakh issue - which is a national priority both for the government and for society - is unbalanced. There has never been the same level of support for the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan as there has been for that of Georgia or Ukraine” (Alieva L, 2015, 9). The sensitivity of the Azerbaijani people to the Nagorno-Karabakh problem and the approach of the international partners to this conflict defines public opinion and creates the psychological basis of trust or mistrust in the formation of attitudes (ISD. The European Union and the South Caucasus 2008, 22). The EU institutions which implemented sanctions on Russia for the occupation of the Crimea, but do not apply any sanctions on Armenia for the occupation of 20 percent of Azerbaijani territory, which includes the Nagorno-Karabakh region and 7 surrounding regions for more than 20 years, or push to fulfill the 4 requirements of UN Security Council Resolutions (UN CR 822 1993; UN CR 853 1993; UN CR 874 1993; UN CR 884 1993), openly demonstrates double standards. Surely, this attitude generates stereotypes causing distrust in the public, as well as government (Abbasov T, 2015, 60).

Another issue is the lack of confidence of the Azerbaijani public in the possibility of integration to the EU or the prospects of its adoption to this space. This distrust is justified because the Azerbaijani population is mostly Muslim and some European leaders have acknowledged in their statements that the EU is a Christian bloc (DW, 2007). The refusal of Turkey’s adoption to the bloc for over 60 years is the main source for this public opinion.

The position of various leading European states in this matter plays an important role too. Despite, France being a co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group, promised the Azerbaijani government to take an objective and impartial position when expressing their desire to be co-chair, yet France constantly supports Armenia (Shiriyev Z, 2013, 2) who ignores the UN Security Council resolutions and continues the occupation of the territories of Azerbaijan. Only recently Chancellor Merkel made a statement which conveyed the reality of the situation: “Russia plays an important role in this conflict. Armenia and Russia stick to a common position on this issue, so you can assume that we have a unified approach ” (Sattarov O, 2015; EurActiv.com 23.01.2015). Such cases do not allow a place for the will of the public to want integration with the EU in the face of threats from Iran and Russia.

Changing the approach to this question and proceeding with action could be effective and create positive results for the EU policy for Azerbaijan. Work related to democratization and human rights should be carried out by the states and their official institutions. And certain conditions should be considered.

The first condition is that efforts to the finding of the solution to the problem should be directed together and in the framework of mutual respect, but not through criticism, demands



and political threats. Commitments should be on both sides. The ability of great powers and organizations to make some commitments should be discussed. In other words, the question should be that which can be done mutually. Yes, Western leading states have a great experience in the implementation of democratic values and principles, but Azerbaijan has historic democratic traditions started a hundred year ago. Some NGOs or representatives of international organizations try to teach the community about women rights in a country where women have 60-80 percent of the activity in most areas of public life. In most cases, this is met with surprise by the people and is not accepted as the good faith.

Second, a connection by foreign public institutions with the civil society for the purposed democratization and intervention in domestic policy should not neglect public institutions. This type of activity causes a gap between the government and society instead of the formation of a democratic state.

Third, the nature of the work conducted by the states and their approach to the question of their commitments should change. Acceptance and changing of some laws in the legislation does not solve anything. Pillars of society should be worked. This means that the quality of education should be increased. Brain drain should be prevented through improving the life and working level of employees in the region, and the middle class should be developed. The presence of a strong intellectual and middle class not only makes possible the sustained application of universal values of a society, they also reveal them a natural way. A country with a strong middle class does not need any support in the sphere of democratization and human rights from abroad. In other words, the formation and strengthening of the middle class as a guarantor of democratic values and human rights should be the priority. Support of the EU and its structures in this area should include implementation of joint projects in the academic sphere and field of education, a joint action plans for the development of the middle business, as well as the establishment and expansion of cooperation at this level of business (Konrad Zasztowt 2015, 4-5). Unfortunately, economic cooperation between Azerbaijan and the EU only covers the activities of the energy sector (Liargovas P, 2013, 10-11) and the largest trans-national corporations. Rational forms of cooperation in this aspect will be beneficial for both sides. The development of the middle class would contribute to the formation of civil society institutions, for the solution of problems in the area of democratization, corruption and human rights in the natural way on a national basis without interference from abroad.

## Conclusion

As a result, we would like to point out that the solution to the problems in the EU's policy for Azerbaijan starts with the identification of the subject of the policy and interests of this subject. Thus, the EU's policy for Azerbaijan should be established by Europeans, should come from Europe's regional interests, and should be generated from its strategic needs. It is necessary to go beyond the existing approach and professional stereotypes (Cornel S E, Starr F S, Tsereteli M, 2015) not to repeat their wrongs (Cornell S E, 2015, 5-7). So as it should be noted that this approach and professional stereotypes has been made mostly by the US experts to date. Another important condition is that the approach to Azerbaijan should not be in within the general approach to the South Caucasus or post-Soviet region. The country and its indicators, its regional and strategic importance, political interests, sociopolitical processes, and public



opinion should be studied on the basis of the EU's interests, in terms of EU's security (not just Western). The participation of Azerbaijani specialists in the preparation of the EU's policy could benefit as well.

Compliance with EU standards in the fields of democracy, rule of law and human rights should not be accepted just as commitments by the Azerbaijani government in frame of opportunities depending on its will and interests. The whole process, including political will of the authorities, is based on public opinion and its emotional power. The formation of the necessary public opinion is a duty belonging to the EU. The elimination of a deep mistrust by modern Azerbaijani people, who are the carriers of European culture, towards the faithfulness of the EU's structures and states in respect of democratic values, human rights, equality and tolerance between races and the restoration of its image in public opinion should be the main target. After the realization of this goal, peaceful and constructive proposals can be carried out in discussion with the government.

There should be taken decisive steps towards the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The EU's fair and frank attitude should be displayed (Merabishvili G, 2015, 3). Double standards should be avoided. The content of the EU's interests in Azerbaijan and perspectives of relations should be precisely determined in the EU first, and then it should be clearly explained to Azerbaijan. The government and people of Azerbaijan should have a clear idea about the expectation of the EU from them, and should be convinced of the reliable partnership by real steps.

The development of a civil society in Azerbaijan should be viewed within the framework of the formation process of a liberal-democratic system. There is a need to focus on the development of the liberal economic and political system, not just NGOs. In other words, the development of the middle class and small businesses which are the basis of the liberal economy, enlargement of the middle class and the intellectual environment, strengthening of the political opposition which is a basis of a liberal political system should be priorities.

### Notes

1. Over 95 percent of the population are educated (graduated from secondary school) and modern. People of Azerbaijan have seen the great political events, several systems, possess a rich political and historical experience with a high level of political consciousness closed to the provocation. Although, the modern Republic of Azerbaijan has gained its independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union 24 years ago, it has established great powers for thousands of years, which history starts from Mannaeans and has statehood tradition of 3 thousand years, which has established the first democratic republic in the East in 1918. Since 1918 (before the United States, France and many other democratic countries in the Europe), it gave equal rights to women and men, the right to vote and be elected. Today 60-80 percent activity in the most areas of public life accounts for women. A high level of tolerance for all religions are observed at all levels of society, neither the government nor the public opinion do not allow the exploitation of religion.





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## AKADEMİK BAKIŞ DERGİSİ

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