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Research Article

AN EVOLVING ENERGY PARTNERSHIP: THE EUROPEAN UNION AND AZERBAIJAN

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ABSTRACT

Azerbaijan is a fossil fuel exporter that the EU has paid special attention to since it began prioritizing energy security. This study analyzes the EU's positioning of Azerbaijan within its foreign energy policy. The article presents a chronological analysis of the significant events and dynamics of the past two decades from both EU and Azerbaijan perspectives, with reference largely to official documents. The gradual rise of Azerbaijan on the EU energy agenda is attributed to the EU's dependence on Russian fossil resources and the Russia-Ukraine energy crises. The article also focuses on the specific example of how Azerbaijan's advantage in energy bargaining has created an exception in the EU's normative neighborhood relations. Most recently, this energy partnership relationship has been evolving to include non-fossil resources as well.

Keywords: European Union, Azerbaijan, the Southern Gas Corridor, Russia-Ukraine war, Energy cooperation.

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INTRODUCTION

Energy has always been the crucial factor in the relations between the European Union (EU) and Azerbaijan. The EU is a major energy demand region, heavily reliant on energy imports, while Azerbaijan stands out in the Caspian region due to its significant natural gas resources and production. Although the foundations for this relationship were laid at the end of the last century, significant energy relations began to develop in the first decade of the 21st century. The reasons for this development, which has been almost uninterrupted despite the negative aspects of the normative dimension of EU-Azerbaijan relations, should be evaluated. By analyzing the last two decades, this study aims to identify the factors that led the EU to establish and develop this energy partnership with Azerbaijan, and those that have led the partnership to evolve to include other areas besides hydrocarbons. Upon analyzing this development process, the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, which eventually turned into a war in 2022, played a decisive role in EU-Azerbaijan energy relations.

The factors that we have identified as specific for the EU can basically be categorized under two main headings. The first is the EU's chronic energy dependence on fossil resources and foreign sources. Second, Russian fossil resources constitute the largest slice of this external dependence. Therefore, since the 2006 Russia-Ukraine natural gas crisis, the EU has been searching for new supply markets and for strengthening its energy transition (Proedrou, 2012; Cerrah, 2015; Atesoglu Guney, 2014; Cwiek-Karpowicz, 2013; Koksoy, 2022; Ultan and Saygin, 2022). For Azerbaijan, the primary factor has been the adoption and implementation of opening to foreign markets in energy as a state policy since the first years of independence. A complementary factor, which is not sufficiently emphasized but which we believe to be very important, is that Azerbaijan's strong energy history and capabilities have manifested themselves in a short period of time. In this context, the European market and the EU as its umbrella has emerged as an important market for Azerbaijan's natural gas over the years. Azerbaijan's ability to use its energy advantages as a soft bargaining tool that rewards by cooperation, rather than as a hard element in its overall foreign policy practices, is the second factor (Salayev, 1956; Bagirov, 1996; Azərbaycan Respublikasi Prezidentinin Katibliyi, 2001; Mirbabayev, 2008, 2013; Erhan and Gurbuz, 2013; Telli, 2015; Hasanov et al., 2020). This allows Azerbaijan to adjust regional balances and manage its foreign relations in its favor. One of the best examples of this ability can be seen in conducting its relations with the EU.

In this picture of mutual expectations, Azerbaijan became one of the reliable partners for the EU in its search for new supply markets. While the primary focus of this relationship is the trade of fossil resources, there have also been efforts to collaborate on green energy initiatives. However, this progress has not been entirely smooth and linear. During the realization of the Southern Gas Corridor (SGC), Azerbaijan utilized its energy bargaining advantage to manage a temporary disagreement in the negotiations on the Association Agreement (AA). This period coincided with the Crimea issue and EU's increased concern over its dependence on Russian fossil fuels. Therefore, this example of soft bargaining proved that Azerbaijan would become an energy partner that cannot be easily given up by the EU. Recently, due to the Russia-Ukraine war and the EU's

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desire for independence from Russian energy resources, EU-Azerbaijan energy relations have strengthened and evolved to include the green energy field. In the current situation, mutual decisions and steps are being taken to strengthen this momentum.

EU-AZERBAIJAN RELATIONS

Foundations

The EU recognized Azerbaijan shortly after the declaration of independence in 1991, and diplomatic relations were established in 1992. The first observer of Azerbaijan to the EU was appointed in 1995. Although the European Commission appointed a permanent representative in Azerbaijan in 1998, the mission was carried out by the French embassy in Baku until the opening of the representation office in 2000. The EU provided humanitarian aid to the country from the very beginning and signed a memorandum on free loan aid in 1995 (Commission of the European Communities, 1993: 264; European Commission Spokesman's Service, 1998; Huseynov, 2003: 40-41). The EU also established relations with Azerbaijan within the Commonwealth of Independent States on a multilateral basis. In this context, the TACIS program (Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States) was launched in 1991 with the aim of supporting the process of transition to market economies and democratic societies in the countries of Eastern Europe, South Caucasus, and Central Asia (Frenz, 2008: 6). The Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) as the main legal framework of bilateral relations between the parties was signed in 1996 and entered into force in 1999 (PCA, 1999).

The 21st century has brought forth various challenges and opportunities in the Eurasia region, specifically in Southern Caucasia and Central Asia sub-regions. These challenges and opportunities were rooted in the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Due to various internal and external factors, as well as Moscow's influence in the region, the EU's presence in the region has evolved cautiously. However, multilateral programs and projects including Azerbaijan that were initiated in the 1990s gained significant importance with the emergence of energy issues in the early 2000s. The EU's relations with Azerbaijan have been conducted through various tools, programs, or projects, including TACIS, TRACECA (Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia) and INOGATE (Interstate Oil and Gas Transport to Europe), until the country's inclusion in the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) in 2005 and subsequently its Eastern Partnership (EaP) dimension in 2009. TRACECA was launched in 1993 to support the political and economic development of the Black Sea Region, Caucasus, and Central Asia by improving international transport (TRACECA, 2022). INOGATE was initiated in 1996 to deal with gas and oil transportation between the CIS and the EU, with the aim of reducing their dependency on fossil fuels and imports, improving the security of their energy supply, and mitigating overall climate change (INOGATE, 2022).

ENP, EaP and Azerbaijan

ENP which came into scene with Commission communications in 2003 and of which general framework covering Eastern and Southern neighbors presented in

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2004 by placing those in EU's new geopolitical planning because of upcoming huge enlargement. Although roots of EU's policy approach towards countries and regions except candidates can be found in 1990s, ENP emerged as a new foreign policy tool at the beginning of the 21st century (Kahraman, 2008: 452). By taking "the opportunity offered by enlargement to enhance relations with its neighbors on the basis of shared values", EU decided to contribute "… to the development of a flourishing civil society to promote basic liberties such as freedom of expression and association" in neighbors by expecting "In return for concrete progress demonstrating shared values and effective implementation of political, economic and institutional reforms, including in aligning legislation with the acquis, the EU's neighborhood should benefit from the prospect of closer economic integration with the EU" (COM (2003) 104 Final: 3-4). A Neighborhood Instrument was also planned at the first stage with the objectives of promoting sustainable economic and social development in the border areas; working together to address common challenges, in fields such as environment, public health, and the prevention of and fight against organized crime; ensuring efficient and secure borders; promoting local, "people-to-people" type actions (COM (2003) 393 Final: 5-6). As set in Strategy document, EU having normative ideals undertook the task of making contribution to stability and good governance in neighborhood and promoting a ring of well governed countries with whom it can enjoy close and cooperative relations (COM (2004) 373 Final: 6). Covering 16 countries (Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Egypt, Georgia, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Republic of Moldova, Morocco, Syria, Palestine, Tunisia, Ukraine) ENP was organized in Southern and Eastern dimensions. EaP which included Azerbaijan has been formed in 2009 (COM (2008) 823 Final; SEC (2008) 2974/3) to better focus on regional instruments. Also specific policy tools were added to the policy, namely the Black Sea Synergy (COM (2007) 160 Final).

An Azerbaijan Country Report has been presented in March 2005 by the Commission after its suggestion for including Azerbaijan in ENP together with Armenia, Georgia, Egypt and Lebanon (SEC (2005) 286). A week before adopting the Action Plan concerning relations within the ENP, a Memorandum of Understanding on a Strategic Partnership Between the European Union and the Republic of Azerbaijan in the Field of Energy was signed in November 2006 (European Commission, 2006a). Then an EU-Azerbaijan ENP Action Plan was adopted for a five-year period as "… a political document laying out the strategic objectives of the cooperation between Azerbaijan and the EU" (EU-Azerbaijan Cooperation Council, 2006). Azerbaijan, together with other five Eastern European Partners- Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine- participated to the EaP which was launched at the Prague Summit in May 2009 as a specific dimension of ENP forming "a more ambitious partnership between the European Union and the partner countries" (COM (2008) 823 Final; Council of the European Union, 2009). While the components and priority areas of cooperation for the period of 2007-2013 was arranged by Azerbaijan Country Strategy Paper within the context of ENPI (European Commission, 2006b), 2014-2017 period was organized under ENI (EEAS and European Commission – Europeaid, 2013). Because EU-Azerbaijan ENP Action Plan has expired in 2011, parties have settled on an open-ended extension until the AA is signed (European Commission, 2012). EU-Azerbaijan ENP Action Plan implementation has been monitored and reported by annual

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progress reports which observe country performance since 2006. All these documents, and others not mentioned here, underlie ENP to develop relations with Azerbaijan in the areas of trade, investment, economy, social, finance, science, technology, and culture on an economic and political benefit basis.

As the EU established its framework of relations with Azerbaijan and launched the ENP, it had to address the issue of dependence on energy imports, particularly on Russian resources. Azerbaijan's role in the EU's energy policy will increase as the EU seeks to address these issues.

EU'S ENERGY IMPORT DEPENDENCY AND RUSSIA

In the early years of the 21st century, the EU has also begun to confront a long-standing problem that needs to be addressed more seriously this time around: dependence on fossil resources for energy and high import dependence for the supply of these fossil resources (Table 1).

Table 1. *EU27 Energy Import Dependency by Fuel (Net mass, %)*

	2000	2005	2010	2015	2019	2020	2021
Total	57.8	59.5	57.4	57.6	62.3	59.1	57.1
Solid fossil fuels	29.8	35.7	38.2	41.0	43.3	35.8	37.5
of which hard coal	43.2	52.5	57.7	63.0	67.9	57.4	59.7
Oil and petroleum products	99.8	101.2	102.1	104.7	105.0	105.3	99.7
of which crude and NGL	92.5	93.0	94.4	95.9	96.6	96.1	95.1
Natural gas	65.7	69.0	67.8	74.5	89.7	83.6	83.5

Source: European Commission, 2022a: 24; 2023: 24.

The 2006 natural gas crisis between Ukraine and Russia had a significant impact on European countries that rely on Russian natural gas transported through the Ukrainian transit line. This event brought energy policy to the forefront of the EU's agenda. The EU had already taken steps towards transitioning to new and renewable energies to achieve a more self-sufficient energy supply. However, the 2009 crisis accelerated the search for alternative purchasing markets for EU countries that were highly dependent on Russian natural gas at the time. Although some Central and Eastern European countries may be more vulnerable to Russia due to their geographical, political, social, military, and economic position, particularly their proximity to the Russian sales market and high purchases of Russian energy products (Table 2), they are not the only ones highly dependent on energy imports. Some of the most politically and economically powerful members of the EU have high total energy import dependency rates, too (European Commission, 2022a: 71; 2023: 71).

For example, the import dependency of an industrial actor such as Germany did not fall below 60 per cent in the first two decades of the century. Since 2010, Germany has been implementing a comprehensive transition to renewable energy program (Quitzow et al., 2016), and in 2021, the country accounted for 36.5% of the EU's total imports of solid fossil fuels. In the refining sector, the strong Netherlands has become increasingly dependent on imports, which have

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almost doubled in the last two decades. Again, five countries (the Netherlands, Germany, France, Spain, and Italy) account for 63.3% of total EU imports of oil and oil products in 2021, while these five countries account for 72.2% of total EU imports of natural gas, in varying order (European Commission, 2023: 51, 56, 60).

Russia occupies a prominent place among the high fossil dependency ratios in Table 1. Over the last two decades, Russia has been by far the most important supplier of crude oil, NGLs and natural gas to the EU. In 2020, Russian products accounted for 25.7% of extra-EU oil and NGL imports, 38.7% of natural gas imports and 53.9% of hard coal imports (European Commission, 2022a: 67-70). The overall share of Russia in the EU-27 energy basket across all products was estimated at 24.4% in 2020. Some EU members have become more dependent on Russian fossil resources **(Table 2).**

Russia has entered the EU's LNG market at similar dates and quantities as the United States. This dependency is perceived as a threat to energy security by the EU, which also had negative experiences during the 2006-2009 Ukraine-Russia natural crises. The LNG trade between the US and the EU began in 2016 and grew significantly with the 2018 agreement, resulting in a 2418% increase in US LNG exports to the EU market from 2018 to February 2022 (European Commission, 2022b). Following the beginning of the Russia-Ukraine war, new negotiations between the EU and the US in March 2022 resulted in decisions to increase investment cooperation and trade in the short and medium terms in the transition to green energy, particularly LNG. For the EU to achieve its goal of phasing out Russian fossil resources by 2027, commitments were made for the US to export at least 15 billion m³ of additional LNG to the EU market in 2022 and for the EU side to work to ensure stable demand for approximately 50 billion m³ of additional US LNG annually until at least 2030 (The White House, 2022). It should be noted that whether US LNG can substitute Russian natural gas in the EU market in the short and medium term, and to varying degrees in the member states, and its role in ensuring EU energy security in the medium and long term are two different issues (Keypour, 2022).

However, the fact that Russian LNG has fallen from second to third place in the EU's LNG imports from 2019 to 2020 and has been replaced by the US, while its dominance in pipeline gas continues, should be considered as one of the reasons for Russia's energy pressure on the EU. Because, considering that natural gas is the most popular energy source in the global transition to green energy, new and renewable energy-economy, and that the demand for it will gradually increase (especially in the transition phase from coal to gas) (International Energy Agency, 2019), it is understood that the mode of transportation in the transatlantic/intercontinental trade of this natural gas is the seaborne, and therefore the LNG format of natural gas will be important in this transition process for a few decades (International Gas Union & Snam, 2022; International Group of Liquefied Natural Gas Importers, 2022), especially for the consumer European market, this priority will be more evident. This demonstrates that investments and trade in LNG will play a crucial role in the energy sector, as well as in the competitions and collaborations in which it is a factor. It may even be a factor in some armed conflicts, such as the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Additionally, decarbonized gas derivatives, such as biogas and hydrogen, are expected to become more prominent soon.

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Table 2. *Imports from Russia in Gross Available Energy, 2020 (%)*

	Total	Natural gas	Oil	Coal
EU_27	24.4	41.1	36.5	19.3
Belgium	24.3	7.9	46.1	35.8
Bulgaria	15.4	72.8	13.1	8.2
Czechia	23.7	86.0	35.7	1.7
Denmark	21.1	52.4	27.6	86.3
Germany	31.1	58.9	35.2	21.5
Estonia	21.4	86.5	279.4∗	0.1
Ireland	3.2	0.0	6.1	5.2
Greece	46.5	38.9	73.0	8.9
Spain	7.5	10.5	8.8	43.2
France	8.4	20.0	15.7	29.7
Croatia	24.7	55.0	14.2	74.7
Italy	23.8	40.4	17.4	49.8
Cyprus	1.7	:	1.3	105.4∗
Latvia	31.0	100.1∗	25.5	95.6
Lithuania	96.1	50.5	202.7∗	69.1
Luxembourg	4.3	27.2	0.0	7.7
Hungary	54.2	110.4∗	57.4	11.3
Malta	7.5	0.0	8.7	:
Netherlands	49.0	35.8	70.5	50.3
Austria	16.5	58.6	7.3	9.2
Poland	35.0	45.5	76.3	13.4
Portugal	4.9	9.6	6.0	0.0
Romania	17.0	15.5	37.0	11.8
Slovenia	17.6	81.0	24.9	0.8
Slovakia	57.3	75.2	159.4∗	26.6
Finland	45.0	92.4	141.2∗	30.0
Sweden	8.5	13.9	32.5	22.7

Source: Eurostat, 2022.

Notes: (∗) above 100% indicates that the country imports more than it needs for domestic consumption and exports different energy product. (:) means share cannot be calculated.

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EU ENERGY SECURITY POLICIES AND THE POSITIONING OF AZERBAIJAN

In the past two decades, the EU has prioritized energy security and policy development, while also establishing an energy diplomacy network that grants it a unique institutional position within EU diplomacy. As part of these efforts, the EU has engaged in a dialogue with Azerbaijan. The 2006 Green Paper, one of the first important documents published in this context, highlighted the issue of the EU's dependence on hydrocarbons and foreign energy, particularly Russia. It proposed alternative natural gas supply sources and routes to address these problems, including independent supply to Europe from the Caspian region (COM (2006) 105 Final: 15-16). Efforts to include Caspian resources in the supply pool have been expanded in a short period of time. It is important to note Russia's close and influential position to Azerbaijan. However, establishing new ties with Azerbaijan and other producers in the Caspian region has been identified as a priority in foreign energy relations, as the transportation of Caspian energy resources to the EU has been deemed necessary. The transportation of Caspian natural gas to Europe has been prioritized through the Nabucco pipeline and the Trans-Caspian energy corridor (COM (2007) 1 Final: 9, 24-25).

Published in 2008, the EU's Second Strategic Energy Review brought the SGC to the agenda. Identified as one of the EU's highest energy security priorities, it was identified as one of the six priority infrastructure actions proposed to be carried out within the scope of infrastructure development, which is seen as crucial for meeting the Union's future energy needs (COM (2008) 781 Final: 4-5). In those years, the goal of integrated transportation of Caspian and Middle Eastern natural gas resources to the EU markets to meet future EU needs was clearly stated. The report also emphasized the need to include Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Iraq and in the long run Uzbekistan and Iran in this corridor. It was envisaged that the project would operate entirely within EU rules and based on EU investments, including transit countries such as Turkey on the road from the Caspian to EU markets. The importance of the transportation of Caspian resources to the EU markets has been constantly brought up in subsequent documents. In the Energy Infrastructure Priorities for 2020 and Beyond document, the Southern Corridor, which is planned to bring natural gas from the Caspian Basin, Central Asia and the Middle East to the EU, was identified and Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Iraq were highlighted as potential supply countries (COM (2010) 677 Final: 11, 32).

However, by the end of 2012, the EU's interest in this project had diminished as Nabucco was removed from the agenda and ultimately canceled. During this time, the TANAP (Trans Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline Project) was initiated through an agreement between Turkey and Azerbaijan in June 26, 2012 (Türkiye-Azerbaycan Antlasmasi, 2013). Shortly thereafter, Russia invaded Crimea in 2014, causing energy supply security to once again become a priority on the EU's agenda (Jarosiewicz, 2015: 10-11).

The 2014 European Energy Security Strategy did not address Central Asia in its entirety, but emphasized that Turkmenistan, along with Iraq and Iran, could contribute significantly to the expansion of the SGC in the long-term perspective for diversification of external gas supply sources (COM (2014) 330 Final: 16). The 2015 Energy Union Package also emphasized the need to intensify the work on

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the SGC in order to ensure the export of Central Asian natural gas to Europe, and stated that the EU will use all foreign policy instruments to establish strategic energy partnerships with Algeria, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, the Middle East, Africa and other potential producing and transit countries and/or regions to revitalize energy and climate diplomacy (COM (2015) 80 Final: 4, 6). In the same year, the Energy Diplomacy Action Plan reiterated the need to give special priority in the EU's foreign policy to vital partners and initiatives to strengthen the diversification of energy resources, sources of supply and routes, especially in the neighborhood (Council of the European Union 2015: 3, 6). Among these vital initiatives, the SGC was again mentioned.

As can be seen, the transportation of Caspian resources to the EU markets and the development of infrastructures compatible with the EU markets have become important in the EU energy approach. The EU's main focus in the region is natural gas. Central Asia is often considered together with the South Caucasus (especially Azerbaijan) in the same energy programs. This brings the EaP into the picture. The INOGATE Program, in which the Central Asian countries and all current EaP countries are partners, has been one of the longest running EU-funded energy technical assistance programs from 1996 until its conclusion in 2016. It has worked within the policy frameworks of the Baku Initiative since 2004 and EaP since 2009 (INOGATE, 2022). Following the conclusion of INOGATE in 2016, the new regional energy cooperation program between the EU, the Neighborhood and Central Asia is planned to focus on better use of energy statistics, sharing best practices and EU experience, and evidence-based energy policies. An EU contribution budget of around €20 million has been set for the period 2016-2020 (European Commission, 2016).

Azerbaijan is considered an important partner for the transportation of fossil resources from the Caspian region and neighboring areas to the European market. The country holds a strategic position as the starting point of the SGC, which is a vital route for the EU. As a result, Azerbaijan has been granted some privileges within the ENP and EaP. The EU's energy interests took precedence over the normative expectations prioritized by the ENP and the EaP. This was evident as the construction of the SGC was also a matter of concern at the time. At the beginning of this period, Joint Declaration on the Establishment of the Southern Gas Corridor and Protocol of Intention on the Establishment of a Working Group on the Southern Gas Corridor were signed on January 13, 2011 (Ministry of Energy of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2023). On May 29, 2018, the Corridor was launched and gas transportation to Turkey started on June 30, 2018 and to the EU market via Greece, Bulgaria and Italy on December 31, 2020. The gas flow through the Corridor to Europe paved the way for further energy cooperation between the EU and Azerbaijan, and on February 4, 2022, the parties agreed on the establishment of an energy dialogue between EU and Azerbaijan (Ibadoghlu, 2023).

Finally, it is important to emphasize a more general observation when determining Azerbaijan's position in the EU energy security agenda and planning. The European External Action Service considers the EaP countries, including Azerbaijan, as non-EU European countries (European External Action Service, 2023). Therefore, emphasizing such a definition by the diplomatic service of the EU's, we can conclude that Azerbaijan is one of the geopolitical Europeans, the

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EU's eastern neighbors (Sahin, 2021: 297). This is an approach that strengthens Azerbaijan's reliable position in the energy partnership. Azerbaijan is aware that this position, which has improved over the years, is due to its advantage of energy bargaining. The most notable example of such a situation can be observed during the negotiations with the EU on moving from the PCA to a comprehensive AA.

ADVANTAGE IN ENERGY BARGAINING: NEGOTIATIONS FOR A COMPREHENSIVE AGREEMENT

The EU aimed to replace previous Partnership and Cooperation Agreements with Association Agreements and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) arrangements within the framework of the EaP. However, negotiations for an AA were conditional on specific requirements. In particular, the partner country's membership of the World Trade Organization (WTO) was a condition for the completion of the DCFTA.

In 2010, the EU initiated talks with all three South Caucasian countries to sign AAs along with complementary DCFTAs (Zasztowt, 2015): 2A prerequisite for such an agreement was for the partner country to become a member of the WTO, but Azerbaijan had a long way to go before such accession. Additionally, the Azerbaijani government has not expressed any intention to sign the agreement. President Ilham Aliyev criticized the ambiguity of the term 'association' during the World Economic Forum meetings in January 2014 and announced that the country had no plans to sign the agreement. The Azerbaijani government has stated that the agreement is not a priority for the country (Abbasov, 2015: 58). Although Azerbaijan has made slow progress towards WTO accession and has a critical stance towards the AA, the parties have signed some significant documents: Agreements on visa facilitation (November 29, 2013) and readmission of persons residing without authorization (February 28, 2014), the Joint Declaration on a mobility partnership (December 5, 2013) and the Protocol to the PCA on a Framework Agreement on the general principles for Azerbaijan's participation in EU programmes (June 14, 2014) (Republic of Azerbaijan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023). While these developments have been taking place, Azerbaijan has proposed a Strategic Modernization Partnership (SMP) as a new model of cooperation. A draft text dated April 4, 2014, has been claimed to have been presented to the EU. According to some analysts, this suggested agreement did not aim to impose or mandate political and economic reforms, regional security, energy cooperation, sustainable economic growth, and support for deep and comprehensive democracy on the government of Azerbaijan. Instead, it aimed to promote these objectives (Abbasov, 2015: 58; Zasztowt, 2015: 2). In his speech at ADA University in Baku on June 14, 2014, European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso stated that the negotiations on the SMP should start immediately and the agreement should be finalized in the coming months, by emphasizing "… As part of our relationship, we are also interested in developing a strategic energy partnership, but I want to make it clear this is not the only interest in play. This is so vital for both of us…" (Barroso, 2014: 14-16). The possibility that the SMP might have a weak conditional character in terms of the EU's normative will raised the question of whether the EU was backtracking some rules at the expense of other interests.

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Putting Azerbaijan's SMP suggestion on table was not a sharp stepping back but clearly loosen some rules of ENP or EaP. Telltale sign of this will be revisioning ENP second time in 2015[2] and adopting a more flexible attitude towards neighboring partners, including Azerbaijan. This was a wide scale review with a need to answer the demands of partners with very different levels of ambition (JOIN (2015) 6 Final: 3). As explained in the Communication, the purpose of this review was to propose a more effective policy to build a more effective partnerships with the neighbors while pursuing own interests including the promotion of universal values: "The EU's own stability is built on democracy, human rights and the rule of law and economic openness and the new ENP will take stabilization as its main political priority in this mandate" (JOIN (2015) 50 Final: 2). Together with good governance, democracy, rule of law and human rights as focal points, 2015 review has been based on economic development for stabilization, security and migration and mobility for forming future relations with its neighbors.

In spite of country's withdrawal from AA negotiations in October 2014 and suspended PCA meetings in 2015, EU side did not relinquish and kept official talks with the country for grinding on bilateral relations (SWD (2017) 485 Final: 1). Commissioner Hahn visited Baku in April 2015. Donald Tusk, President of the European Council, in July 2015 and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy / Vice-President of the Commission Federica Mogherini in February 2016 also visited Baku. Reasons of that highest level of concern may be several but this instance certainly not a regularity for EU towards all neighboring countries. This gave an impression for us to consider other possible priorities (i.e. energy) other than Azerbaijan's democracy and human rights situation which EU always stresses on especially within ENP and EaP. Because it is known that country's slow democratic development and violations of human rights were in high importance for European Parliament (EP) those days. Parliament's resolution on the persecution of many human rights defenders in Azerbaijan adopted on September 18, 2014, stated: "… in the last few years the general human rights climate in Azerbaijan has been deteriorating, with a major escalation of government repression, pressure and intimidation directed at NGOs, civil society activists, journalists and human rights defenders taking place in recent months…" (European Parliament, 2014). First reaction was from Azerbaijani Parliament by announcing to re-consider their relations with EP and secondly, Azerbaijani government withdrew from AA negotiations, as mentioned before. But in May 2015, during Riga Summit of EaP, Azerbaijan expressed its intention on resumption of negotiations on a new agreement (SWD (2017) 485 Final: 1). Even though another stinging criticism by the EP emphasizing "… the overall human rights situation in Azerbaijan has deteriorated continuously over the last few years, with growing intimidation and repression and intensification of the practice of criminal prosecution of NGO leaders, human rights defenders, journalists and other civil society representatives" was adopted as a resolution in September 10, 2015 (European Parliament, 2015), the Council adopted a mandate to negotiate a comprehensive

2 The first review was in 2011. EU expected more additional reforms from neighbors. In return committed more rewards as additional financial and other kinds of support (COM (2011) 303 Final) and published A Medium Term Programme for a Renewed European Neighborhood Policy for the years 2011-2014 (SEC (2011) 650 Final).

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agreement with Azerbaijan in 2016 (Council of the European Union, 2016). On the same day President Aliyev's visit to Brussels, President Tusk announced the official launching date of talks on this new agreement as February 7, 2017, by highlighting energy relations and shared commitment to finalize SGC (Council of the European Union, 2017). So, the negotiations have been made since then.

Following this example, another significant development that strengthened Azerbaijan's energy position for the EU and, moreover, led to the start of the process of diversifying the scope of energy relations is the Russia-Ukraine war. Because with this war, the EU has expanded the scope of its energy supply security and started to intensify its initiatives to transition to renewable energy along with its climate targets. Azerbaijan's position has also been affected by these developments.

RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR: IMPLICATIONS FOR ENERGY RELATIONS

We can focus on two developments that embody the reflection of the Russia-Ukraine War on the EU's energy policies and relations. The first of these is the decrease in coal and oil trade, especially in coal and oil trade, as a result of the sanctions imposed by the EU on Russia, and in natural gas trade as a result of Russia using its natural gas card in return. The second is the energy transition program that the EU started in previous years but tightened with the war. This program specifically consists of the REPowerEU plan and related initiatives, which is a much more comprehensive transition program that aims to make Europe independent from Russian fossil fuels before 2030 (COM (2022) 230 Final). One of these related initiatives, the document titled External Energy Relations of the EU in a Changing World, has put forward a strategy for the development of international energy cooperation (JOIN (2022) 23 Final). These developments also provided the basis for strengthening Azerbaijan's position in EU energy supply.

The EU launched its first restrictive measures against Russia in 2014 with the illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol (Council of the European Union, 2014a, 2014b). The sanctions have been widely accepted and announced in packages since February 23, 2022, especially after military operations launched by Russia on February 24, 2022. Belarus is also included in these packages to the extent that it supports the actions of Russia (European Commission, 2022c). In the comprehensive packages adopted between 23 February 2022 and 18 December 2023, the energy-specific measures can be summarized as follows (European Council and Council of the European Union, 2022):

- prohibition on imports from Russia of oil, coal, and liquefied propane,
- price cap related to the maritime transport of Russian oil,
- prohibition on exports to Russia of goods and technologies in the oil refining sector,
- prohibition on new investments in the Russian energy and mining sector,
- inclusion of energy sector investors and businesspeople in sanctioned individuals list.

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The sanctions do not apply to natural gas in general, which is of strategic importance for the EU. Therefore, natural gas was Russia's trump card in facing sanctions. In retaliation for Russia's decision to pay for energy sales in rubles, some EU countries refused to comply, and Russia responded by slowing or cutting off the flow of gas (Liboreiro, 2022). Poland, Bulgaria, Finland, Denmark, the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, France, Austria, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic all experienced gas shortages. Trade data from the period immediately before and after the war shows that changes began to emerge within a few months. In 2021, 25.0% of the EU's total oil import value (25.9% of net mass) and 39.7% of its natural gas import value (44.5% of net mass) came from Russia. Imports of oil and natural gas from Russia have decreased significantly since the beginning of the war and the sanctions at the end of the first quarter of 2022 (Table 3 and 4).

In the second quarter of 2022, the EU imported EUR 90.4 billion (120.8 million tons) of oil. Azerbaijan's share was 4.4% in value and 4.0% in net mass (ranking 10th among the top importing countries in both shares). In the second quarter of 2023, the EU imported EUR 63.8 billion (116.6 million tons) of oil. Azerbaijan's share was 5.4% in value and 5.1% in net mass (8th among the top importing countries in both ratios).

Table 3. *Extra-EU Imports of Petroleum Oil (Shares in Value and Net Mass)*

Partner	2022 2. quarter		2022 3. quarter		2023 2. quarter		2023 3. quarter	
	V %	M %	V %	M %	V %	M %	V %	M %
Russia	16.9	21.5	14.4	18.3	2.7	4.0	3.9	4.4
Azerbaijan	4.4	4.0	4.6	4.0	5.4	5.1	4.6	4.4

Source: Eurostat, 2023a; 2023b.

During the second quarter of 2022, the EU imported natural gas, including LNG, with a total value of €73.6 billion (61.8 million tons). Out of this amount, €47.2 billion (43 million tons) was in gaseous state. Azerbaijan ranked fifth among the top importing countries, with a share of 6.6% in value and 5.2% in net mass. In the second quarter of 2023, the EU imported €36.9 billion worth of natural gas, including LNG, with €21.6 billion being in gaseous state. During this period, Azerbaijan ranked fifth among the top importing countries with a share of 6.0% in value and 7.1% in net mass.

Table 4. *Extra-EU Imports of Natural Gas in Gaseous State (Shares in Value and Net Mass)*

Partner	2022 2. quarter		2022 3. quarter		2023 2. quarter		2023 3. quarter	
	V %	M %	V %	M %	V %	M %	V %	M %
Russia	28.3	29.7	16.7	16.1	13.8	14.3	16.0	19.7
Azerbaijan	6.6	5.2	8.3	6.1	6.0	7.1	5.9	7.8

Source: Eurostat, 2023a; 2023b.

Azerbaijan's position in the EU import market is on the rise in both energy groups. Notably, there has been a significant increase in pipeline gas. In the third quarter of 2023, Azerbaijan accounted for 4.6% of the EU's oil imports by value and 4.4% by net mass. Azerbaijan ranked 9th among the top importing countries in both ratios, with an oil import share almost equal to that of Russia. During the same period, it ranked fifth among the top importing countries in both ratios,

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with a 5.9% share of pipeline gas imports in value and a 7.8% share in net mass (Eurostat, 2023b).

In the last 20 years, the EU has prioritized enhancing its energy policy both internally and externally, with a focus on transitioning to renewable and clean energy. This effort gained momentum after the 2006 Ukraine gas crisis and intensified following the illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014. The EU has published several strategies, including the European Energy Security Strategy, the Energy Union Framework Strategy, and the EU Energy Diplomacy Action Plan, to achieve these goals (COM (2014) 330 Final; COM (2015) 80 Final; Council of the European Union, 2015). In 2014, the Strategic Agenda was announced, which was updated in 2019. The agenda aimed to diversify energy and supply sources and achieve green energy targets (European Council, 2014; 2019). Shortly before the Covid-19 pandemic affected Europe, the European Green Deal was announced, which further solidified the transition to green Energy (COM (2019) 640 Final). The EU has become more determined in its goals regarding the transition to renewable energy. It has started to diversify energy supply markets and routes through external energy cooperation. Finally, the REPowerEU plan was launched about three months after the start of the Russia-Ukraine war. An important document in our context is the strategy for the EU to develop international energy cooperation as one of the plan's related initiatives (JOIN (2022) 23 Final).

According to this new external energy policy, the EU aims to realize complementary but different objectives together. First, it aims to diversify its energy supply and increase energy savings and efficiency in order to strengthen its energy security, resilience and strategic autonomy. Additionally, the EU seeks to accelerate the global transition to green and just energy to ensure sustainable, secure, and affordable energy for both the EU and the world. As a special case, EU also aims to support Ukraine and other countries that are affected by Russian aggression. Finally, the EU seeks to build long-lasting international partnerships and promote its clean energy industries worldwide. The first dimension of its foreign energy policy, which it is building in detailed steps to achieve these goals, is to diversify EU's gas supply. By emphasizing the EU's obligation to import gas from non-Russian sources, the aim is to increase purchases from existing suppliers and establish relations with new suppliers. At this point, in addition to Canada, Egypt, Israel, Japan, Japan, Korea, Qatar, Norway and Algeria, Azerbaijan and the SGC are emphasized. Azerbaijan's intention to increase pipeline gas exports to the EU has solidified its position as an important partner for the EU. As a result, the EU will intensify its cooperation with Azerbaijan "in the light of the strategic importance of the Southern Gas Corridor". Gas supplies to the EU and the Western Balkans would be increased by increasing the capacity of the Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) (JOIN (2022) 23 Final: 3).

The document's objectives were quickly realized with the signing of a new Memorandum of Understanding on Strategic Partnership in the Field of Energy between the EU and Azerbaijan on July 18, 2022. The agreement aims to increase the delivery of Azerbaijani natural gas to Europe through the SGC to 12 billion cubic meters in 2023 and 20 billion cubic meters per year by 2027 (AIR Center, 2022: 1-5). The new Memorandum also highlights the mutual interest of the EU and Azerbaijan in enhancing the development and deployment of renewable energy generation and transmission capacity. Among the topics

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emphasized in the energy dialogue initiated between the EU and Azerbaijan in February 2022, particular attention is given to oil, natural gas, renewable energy production, hydrogen, and energy efficiency.

These developments align with Azerbaijan's plans to increase investments in green energy, specifically hydrogen, and enter the export market in the coming years. Azerbaijan is carrying out joint projects with international energy companies and aims to generate approximately 19 GW of power between 2031 and 2037 for the production and export of green energy, hydrogen, and green ammonia. Azerbaijan aims to become a significant energy player in the Caspian-Black Sea-European Union Green Energy Corridor and through the Azerbaijan-Turkey-Europe route by exporting green energy (Dokso, 2023). One important step on this path is the agreement on green energy between Azerbaijan, Georgia and two EU members, namely Romania and Hungry. In December 2022 four countries signed an agreement to form a strategic partnership for the development and transmission of green energy. The agreement outlines plan for the four countries to collaborate on the development of a 1,195-km power cable under the Black Sea. This will create a renewable energy transmission corridor from Azerbaijan, through Georgia, to Romania, and ultimately to Hungary (Kubiak, 2023).

In the short term, the war between Russia and Ukraine provided an opportunity for Azerbaijan to expand its hydrocarbon exports to the EU market; in the longer term, it served as a catalyst for Azerbaijan's transition to green energy production and exports, which is crucial to boosting the country's green energy investments and supporting the EU's energy transition and climate goals. Azerbaijan continues to pursue a pragmatic and balanced foreign policy in harmony with its energy policy.

A SPECIAL CASE: THE NAGORNO-KARABAKH CONFLICT

It is also necessary to briefly touch upon the overlapping aspects of the EU's position on the Karabakh issue and the developments in energy relations over the past decade. The implementation of the Action Plans under the ENP means that the EU has become a potential actor in solving this regional issue. However, within the scope of the EaP, the EU's position on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict can be expressed in two points: First, a peaceful solution, and second, supporting the initiatives of the Minsk Group in this solution. Although the appointment of a special representative to the South Caucasus in 2003 (The Council of the European Union, 2003) and the implementation of the ENP and EaP policies, EU actions have not gone much beyond taking some initiatives, such as providing humanitarian support and facilitating dialogue between the conflicting parties.

The EU was expected to serve as a counterweight for Azerbaijan against the Minsk Group, which is headed by the US and France, where the Armenian diaspora is strong, as well as Russia, which supports Armenia. Over the years, the EU has expressed positive views and statements of support for Azerbaijan and has stated that it would not support the independence of Nagorno-Karabakh. These developments have paved the way for Azerbaijan to develop an opinion in this direction. Therefore, the EU was expected to participate in the resolution of the conflict. However, the EU maintained its cautious stance and emphasized

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the importance of the Minsk Group's efforts. A very prominent position was the EP's 2010 resolution demanding the withdrawal of Armenian forces from the occupied territories of Azerbaijan (European Parliament, 2010). It is also important to note that the timing of this decision coincided with the EU's inclusion of the SGC on its agenda in 2008 and its subsequent inclusion in its energy infrastructure priorities in 2010 (COM (2008) 781 Final: 4-5; COM (2010) 677 Final: 11, 32). Although the EU did not take any overtly partisan initiatives thereafter, it continued its traditional dialogue-building activities. After the first full-scale armed conflict in June 2010, escalating conflicts, particularly in 2014 (August and November), 2015 (December) and 2016 (April), took place at the same time as the implementation of the SCS and the EU-Azerbaijan negotiations on a comprehensive agreement. In these conflicts, the general position of the EU side has again been to call for a ceasefire and to continue efforts for a peaceful settlement. However, this stance has been criticized at various levels in Azerbaijan, emphasizing that the EU has been unfair in protecting Azerbaijan's rights in the Karabakh issue when considered together with the energy issue (Aras, 2017: 113-114).

After 2012, with Nabucco falling off the agenda and the signing of the TANAP agreement between Turkey and Azerbaijan, the EU put the SGC issue to rest for a while. However, with Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in March 2014, energy security has again risen to the top of the agenda for the EU. In the meantime, pressure on Azerbaijan from various NGOs and political groups on the SGC and TANAP intensified, and Azerbaijan faced protests over corruption, environmental degradation, and human rights violations (Mathiesen, 2017a; 2017b). It should be recalled that the EP resolutions of September 18, 2014, and September 10, 2015, on human rights violations were in this direction. Azerbaijan's reaction to the first resolution was to withdraw from the AA negotiations and suspend the PCA meetings. After the SPM proposal, high-level EU interest led to the launch of negotiations on a new agreement in February 2017.

While Azerbaijan has spent the last few years dealing with the Karabakh conflict and balancing Russia on the one hand and managing its relations with the EU on the other, the most significant effort and gains have been in the energy sector. The 2nd Karabakh War, in which Azerbaijan regained its occupied territories, started on September 27, 2020, and ended on November 10, 2020, about a month and a half before the start of natural gas flow to Europe via TAP. During this period, it cannot be said that the EU took any significant negative steps towards Azerbaijan. The EU's actions after the war were the establishment of the EUMCAP civilian observer mission (October 2022) and the EUMA civilian mission for supporting mediation (January 2023) (Kolarz, 2023).

Recently, there has been an emphasis on the potential for renewable energy investments in the Karabakh and eastern Zangezur regions (Morrow, 2022). Azerbaijan has invested in green energy, including in the Karabakh region, and has signed agreements with international energy companies such as BP, Masdar, and ACWA Power (Mammadov, 2022). In 2021, it was decided to establish a Green Energy Zone in the Karabakh region. The plan is to export the green energy produced in the region to Europe through the Azerbaijan-Turkey-Europe Energy Corridor (Genin, 2023). Given the significance of this region on the international transportation route, Azerbaijan's utilization of the green energy potential through international investments will not only provide infrastructure for the region's reconstruction but also support Azerbaijan's zero-carbon target in energy cooperation with the EU.

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CONCLUSION

In 1999, the EU included Azerbaijan in its circle of cooperation through the PCA. However, the EU's cautious approach towards the South Caucasus region began to change after the emergence of Russian natural gas crises in 2006. The EU has taken steps to improve its relations with the countries of the region, although its involvement has been mainly civilian and economic. Over the years, it has also established a partnership with Azerbaijan as a significant contributor to the flow of natural gas to the EU market. The emergence of the SGC as a strategic project in the EU's efforts to diversify energy sources, supply markets, and routes in the process of an energy transition integrated with climate action has been the main factor in strengthening Azerbaijan's position in the EU energy policy. Thus, Azerbaijan, as an ENP partner in the South Caucasus and a potential importer of natural gas, has come to the attention of the EU. However, despite the conditionality structure of the ENP and the EaP, Azerbaijan's attitude of avoiding normative demands in its relations with the EU and the uncertainty about the future of regional stability with the emerging Karabakh conflict on the one hand, and Russia's attempts to expand its room for actions in the Black Sea with the illegal annexation of Crimea, which endangered the planned natural gas projects, on the other hand, put the EU in a dilemma. The outcome was determined by the dynamics of energy geopolitics. The completion of the SGC and the flow of natural gas to the European market, which has been at the forefront of the European energy system in recent years, was considered a priority.

At the end of 2020, gas began flowing to Europe to meet the rising energy demand in the markets during the recovery process after the Covid-19 pandemic. However, the negative effects of the 2022 Russia-Ukraine war have now come into play. The EU has tightened its decades-long efforts to encourage member states to switch to renewable energy and has begun the phasing-out of Russian fossil resources. However, natural gas remains a critical resource in addition to the need to diversify renewable energy sources. Azerbaijan has taken advantage of this by increasing its natural gas production and exporting larger quantities to the EU market, while also planning to develop cooperation on non-fossil resources. Azerbaijan, which has depended primarily on fossil fuel production and revenues have had an energy partnership with the EU for almost two decades, but there is an opportunity to develop renewable energy potential and technologies that would benefit not only the EU but also Azerbaijan. This partnership has recently started to evolve with the advent of a renewable energy dimension. As in the past, it is likely that any future relationship between the parties will certainly require an energy dimension. This will pose both challenges and opportunities for Azerbaijan. Investing in renewable energy, particularly in the Karabakh region, will enhance Azerbaijan's foreign policy position.

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