

NAVIGATING ASYMMETRY: ENERGY INFRASTRUCTURE AS POLITICAL CAPITAL FOR SMALL AND MIDDLE POWERS¹

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ASİMETRİK DENGEYİ SAĞLAMAK: KÜÇÜK VE ORTA ÖLÇEKLİ GÜÇLER İÇİN ENERJİ ALTYAPISININ SİYASAL SERMAYE OLARAK ROLÜ

ÖZ Küresel enerji tüketiminde yaşanan artış, enerji güvenliğini uluslararası ilişkilerin merkezine taşımıştır. Avrupa Birliği (AB), tarihsel olarak enerji ihtiyacını büyük ölçüde Rusya'dan karşılamış; bu bağımlılık, Rusya'nın kaynak zenginliği ve coğrafi yakınlığı ile açıklanmıştır. Ancak Rusya-Ukrayna Savaşı ile birlikte AB-Rusya ilişkileri gerilmiş, enerji tedarik zincirleri zarar görmüş ve AB, enerji güvenliğini sağlamak için kaynak çeşitlendirme stratejilerini önceliklendirmiştir.

Bu bağlamda, enerji arzında süreklilik sağlamak, bunun için de tedarikçi ağını çeşitlendirmek isteyen AB ile müşteri portföyünü genişletmek isteyen üretici ülkeler arasında yeni işbirlikleri ortaya çıkmaktadır. Özellikle Hazar bölgesindeki Azerbaycan, zengin petrol ve doğalgaz kaynaklarıyla alternatif bir tedarikçi olarak öne çıkarken; Türkiye, jeopolitik konumu ve altyapı kapasitesi sayesinde stratejik bir enerji geçiş ülkesi olarak dikkat çekmektedir. Azerbaycan küçük devlet stratejisi ile hidrokarbon kaynakları üzerindeki egemen kontrolünü sağlamak amacıyla ciddi yatırımlar yaparken, Türkiye de bölgede orta ölçekli bir güç stratejisi güderek sahip olduğu bölgesel avantajlar üzerinden enerji merkezi olma konumunu güçlendirmeye çalışmaktadır. Azerbaycan-Türkiye işbirliğiyle geliştirilen TANAP ve Güney Gaz Koridoru (SGC), enerji arz güvenliğini artırırken, Türkiye'yi AB için vazgeçilmez bir ortak haline getirmiştir. Bu projeler, Türkiye'nin doğu-batı enerji akışında merkezi konumunu güçlendirirken, Azerbaycan'ın da kaynakları üzerindeki egemenliğini de pekiştirmektedir. Makale, küçük devlet stratejisi ve bölgesel güç analizine dayanarak, enerji geçiş altyapısının yalnızca ekonomik değil, aynı zamanda siyasi ve jeopolitik anlamlar taşıdığını savunmaktadır. Türkiye ve Azerbaycan örneğinde, enerji iletim yollarının kontrolü; egemenlik, ölçeklenebilirlik ve istikrar gibi unsurlar üzerinden bölgesel aktörlerin uluslararası sistemdeki konumlarını nasıl yeniden tanımladığını incelemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Enerji güvenliği, küçük devlet stratejisi, orta ölçekli güç, enerjinin jeopolitiği, tedarik zinciri kesintisi.

ABSTRACT The increase in global energy consumption has placed energy security at the center of the international politics. The European Union (EU) has historically met its energy needs significantly from Russia, a dependency largely explained by Russia's abundant energy resources and geographical proximity. However, the Russia-Ukraine war has strained EU-Russia relations, disrupted energy supply chains, and prompted the EU to prioritize diversification strategies to ensure energy security. In this context, new forms of cooperation are emerging between the EU which seeks to ensure the continuity of energy supply by diversifying its network of suppliers and producer countries to expand their customer base. Azerbaijan in the Caspian region stands out as an alternative supplier due to its rich hydrocarbon reserves, while Türkiye, with its geopolitical location and infrastructure capacity, has gained prominence as a strategic energy transit country. Employing a small state strategy, Azerbaijan shows significant effort to secure sovereign control over its hydrocarbon resources, while Türkiye is pursuing a middle power strategy in the region. Leveraging its regional advantages, Türkiye aims to strengthen its position as an energy hub connecting supplier countries with European markets. Developed through Azerbaijan-Türkiye cooperation, the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP) and the Southern Gas Corridor (SGC) enhances energy supply security, and positions Türkiye as an indispensable partner for the European Union. These projects have reinforced Türkiye's central role in the East-West energy flow while simultaneously strengthening Azerbaijan's sovereign control over its resources. Based on small state strategy and middle power analysis this article argues that energy transit infrastructure carries not only economic significance but also political and geopolitical implications. Using the cases of Türkiye and Azerbaijan, it examines how control over energy transmission routes allows regional actors to redefine their positions within the international system through dimensions such as sovereignty, scalability, and stability.

Keywords: Energy security, small state strategy, middle power, geopolitics of energy, supply chain disruption.

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1. INTRODUCTION: ENERGY SECURITY AND CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF THE THE EUROPEAN UNION'S DEPENDENCE

Being predominantly dependent on one major source has never proved to be a viable option. The oil crisis of 1973 and 1979 were critical periods for the whole world to prove its unreliability. A shock wave cascaded down through Europe in particular, as a result of Arab-Israeli wars and OPEC embargoes. As a response to these crises, energy security started to be amplified and diversification of energy resources, nuclear energy as an alternative, and increasing efficiency became prominent strategies of the EU countries. In the upcoming decades, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian gas became reachable for Europe and through construction of new pipelines, Russian gas started to be transferred to the West through Eastern Europe. Russia turned to be a net energy exporter, with 42.4% of its energy production being exported in 2023 (IEA: 2025a). Between 2000 and 2023, its energy exports increased by 58% (IEA: 2025a), indicating that many Western European countries' dependence on Russia has been steadily growing. Although it creates economic leverages for Russia by generating higher revenue, current account surplus, and budget support to finance public services and infrastructure heavy reliance on energy exports run the risk of economic vulnerabilities if the global prices drop in the long term. It also generates political leverages such as increased influence over the countries it has economic connections with, by offering Russia a stronger bargaining power (Khoma & Nikolaieva, 2025: 134), but domestically it can be a handicap, slowing economic diversification and reforms.

On the other hand, the picture of countries who are reliant on Russian oil and gas is more dim. Economically, relying largely on Russia created and will keep creating vulnerabilities when there are price changes, conflicts, or supply disruptions due to various reasons. And the recent history testifies to that. In the present context, 2004 Russian-Belarus crisis, successively 2006, 2009, 2014, and 2022 Russian-Ukraine crises caused gas cuts in the middle of the winter, exposing European vulnerabilities. These have radically changed the European energy strategy. Because, economically, continued dependence on Russian gas proved to be nonviable given Russia's status as the EU's major supplier. Politically, it became increasingly undesirable, as Russia had repeatedly used its energy exports as a tool of geopolitical leverage (Stern, 2006: 3). Even when European countries do not support Russia's political actions, they tried to avoid conflict or tensions with Russia for fear of retaliation on the supply side. For example, the EU refrained from imposing sanctions on Russian energy sector following its annexation of Crimea and the initial Russian-Ukrainian war in 2014 (Korteweg, 2018: 4). It clearly shows a leverage imbalance, where Russia has more influence over its customer nations than visa versa (Khoma & Nikolaieva, 2025). Hence, this singlehanded control of Russia provoked serious concerns among EU member states. In response, on the one hand, the West decided to impose economic sanctions with significant timing and exceptions by only banning seaborne oil imports as late as mid-2022² and, on the other hand, the EU announced REPowerEU to abandon Russian gas through a combination of energy conservation, increased liquefied natural gas (LNG) imports, expanded use of renewables, and new partnerships with Azerbaijan and African nations. Although countries took measures and devised policies for renewable energy sources, especially with Nord Stream 1 and Nord Stream 2 (which lie beyond the scope of this paper), European countries became much more integrated into Russian energy networks. And before the EU could effectively impose sanctions on Russian gas and opt for an alternative strategy, Russia reduced its flows and eventually cut them (Maynes, 2025).

² For further information see *EU sanctions against Russia explained*. (n.d.). Consilium. Retrieved October 15, 2025, from <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/sanctions-against-russia-explained/>

To ensure energy security, fastening the process of accessing alternative energy resources seemed to be the safest bet to ensure autarky but on its own it did not prove to be a tenable option that could save European nations from dependence. LNG, which proves to be a more flexible alternative for transferring gas, needs to overcome certain obstacles (Kırsacık & Erenel, 2019: 55). It involves complex logistics and higher operational costs, including liquefaction, transportation, regasification, and specialized infrastructure (Danilov et. al., 2019: 2). As a result, diversifying partnerships beyond traditional allies has emerged as an important course of action.

In that respect, the energy security concerns of the EU present advantages both for Azerbaijan, as a small state, and Türkiye, as a middle power which are more than economic in nature. This paper, in that regard, addresses an important question: How does energy transmission enhance the strategic positioning of Türkiye and Azerbaijan within the evolving energy security landscape of the European Union? Azerbaijan and Türkiye's importance lies not in the small volume of natural gas transmitted to the EU. It is more so about sovereignty, stability, and scalability which is vital for small and middle powers economically as well as politically in international relations. Although major powers often dominate the terms of bilateral relations due to their economic and political weight, secondary states—particularly middle and small powers—face challenges in managing international relations under the shadow of regional or global hegemony. These challenges are especially acute when historical asymmetries, such as former colonial or imperial dynamics, have established persistent power imbalances.

In this context, the strategic partnership between Türkiye and Azerbaijan emerges as a compelling example of how middle and small powers can leverage energy infrastructure and transit diplomacy to enhance their agency within an asymmetrical international order. In that vein, as energy security has become a persistent concern for the EU necessitating new partnerships, this created a leverage for its smaller partners. SGC emerged as an energy initiative designed to transport natural gas from the Caspian Sea region to Europe, bypassing Russia. This initiative bolsters Europe's long-term energy security while simultaneously enhancing the economic and strategic standing of both Azerbaijan and Türkiye.

2. AZERBAIJAN: FROM DEPENDENCY TO SMALL STATE LEVERAGE

Azerbaijan has proven natural gas reserves of 35 trillion cubic feet which is 95.8 times higher than its national consumption level and at its current consumption levels, it has 96 years of natural gas left (Worldometer: 2025). There is no doubt that Azerbaijan is a net energy exporter given the fact that 91 percent of the country's overall export is on oil and natural gas (IEA, 2025b). Accordingly, great amount of country's revenue, and welfare and prosperity of the individuals relies on how much it sells abroad. During the Cold War, Soviet Russia significantly restricted the capacity for independent action in the territories it dominated. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Azerbaijan emerged from Moscow's direct control, but decades of centralized economic planning had left it heavily dependent on trade links with former Soviet Republics. The sudden disruption of these ties placed Azerbaijan in a precarious position. At the time of independence, the oil sector became virtually the only viable economic asset capable of generating substantial revenue for the country (Huseynov, 2023; Muradov, 2021; Hoffman, 1999: 7).

Recognizing the strategic potential of its vast hydrocarbon reserves, Azerbaijan's post-Soviet leadership made a deliberate decision to leverage oil not only for economic recovery but also as a means of attracting foreign investment and asserting national sovereignty. Oil was no longer viewed merely as a commodity, but as a diplomatic and geopolitical tool, a "currency" that could yield long-term political and strategic returns (Naghiyev, 2023: 38; Hoffman, 1999:

10). This approach culminated in the signing of the “Contract of the Century” in 1994, which marked a pivotal moment in reclaiming sovereign control over energy resources and inviting international capital to develop the country’s oil infrastructure (Contract of the Century, 2020).

At a time when it was heavily under Russian and Iranian pressures, this contract signaled a strategic reorientation away from the Russian sphere of influence and toward integration with Western and regional powers. For a small state like Azerbaijan, survival and self-determination required forging international partnerships that would generate vested interest in the country’s success. As İbrahimov (2024) notes, such interest was essential to balancing the competing agendas of larger powers. In this way, Azerbaijan’s hydrocarbon diplomacy became a vehicle for restoring independence and asserting agency in a challenging geopolitical environment.

Azerbaijan is categorized as a small state in international relations due to its population size, limited military capacity, and relatively modest economic power, hence, facing considerable external pressure. On one side, the European Union seeks access to Azerbaijani energy as part of its broader supply diversification strategy. On the other, Russia regards the South Caucasus as a traditional sphere of influence and values Azerbaijan’s transit potential. Despite its size, Azerbaijan has pursued a proactive foreign policy, actively shaping its international identity and resisting pressures to align exclusively with either pole. Internally, the state has prioritized economic diversification to reduce its dependence on hydrocarbons, thereby expanding its capacity to make autonomous foreign policy decisions.

Classical international relations theory typically portrays small states as reactive actors, constrained by structure, dependent on great powers, and limited in their capacity to influence outcomes (Wolfers, 1962; Rosenau, 1966; Waltz, 1979; Mearsheimer, 2001). According to this logic, small states operate within a narrow margin of error, with their foreign policies shaped largely by external pressures rather than internal political dynamics. Such states are especially vulnerable to external shocks, including instability in neighboring transit countries, diplomatic coercion, or regional conflict, which can cause major disruptions in energy flow, with significant economic consequences. Azerbaijan somewhat challenges this view. As a landlocked country with no direct access to maritime export routes, the physical and political design of energy transit pipelines is critical to its national security and international agency.

Traditionally, Russia supported Northern routes that would allow it greater influence to control the flow of oil from Azerbaijan (İbrahimov, 2017: 137). The European Union’s post-Ukraine crisis policy shift toward diversifying suppliers aligned with Azerbaijan’s own strategy of expanding its customer base. This convergence enabled Baku to seize an opportunity: to use its geographic position and resource wealth not just for economic gain, but as instruments of geopolitical leverage to disassociate itself from Moscow’s sphere of influence. In doing so, Azerbaijan demonstrates that small states can exercise strategic agency (Colmorgen, 2021: 117) instead of aligning with stronger powers and without surrendering sovereignty by capitalizing on the asymmetries within the international system.

A significant manifestation of this strategy is the SGC, one of the European Union’s flagship energy diversification projects designed to reduce dependence on Russian gas and enhance European energy security. The SGC consists of three interconnected pipelines:

- the South Caucasus Pipeline (SCP), which transports gas from Azerbaijan through Georgia to Türkiye;
- the Trans-Anatolian Pipeline (TANAP), which carries gas across Türkiye from east to west;
- and the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP), which delivers the gas to the European market via Greece, Albania, and Italy.

The TANAP-TAP corridor, which constitutes the backbone of the Southern Gas Corridor, was designed to deliver gas from Azerbaijan's Shah Deniz field directly into European markets bypassing Russia.

In 2011, Azerbaijan initiated the proposal for TANAP, aiming to establish a direct line from the Caspian Basin to Europe through Anatolia. Construction began soon after, and as planned, gas deliveries started in mid-2018. TANAP currently delivers 16 billion cubic meters (bcm) of natural gas annually, 6 bcm of which supplies domestic demand in Türkiye, while the remaining 10 bcm is transmitted to Europe via TAP. The pipeline was designed with a 56-inch diameter, enabling it to scale up delivery in four phases:

- starting with 16 bcm (2020),
- rising to 23 bcm (2023),
- and eventually reaching 31 bcm per year at full capacity.

The Turkish segment of the pipeline spans 1,900 kilometers, traveling across 21 provinces from the Georgian border in the east to Türkiye's western frontier. From there, it splits toward Greece and Bulgaria, linking into broader European distribution networks.³

The post-2022 sanctions regime against Russia significantly altered the geopolitical landscape of energy supply in Europe, creating new structural asymmetries that Azerbaijan was well-positioned to exploit. As the European Union sought to reduce its reliance on Russian gas, Azerbaijan emerged as a politically acceptable and logistically connected alternative. This shift elevated Azerbaijan's importance in European energy diplomacy and enhanced its bargaining power, despite its status as a small state. By stepping into the gap created by Europe's energy crisis, Azerbaijan effectively exercised strategic agency without compromising its sovereignty. The country's ability to leverage its hydrocarbon resources and transit infrastructure in response to global disruptions underscores how small states can capitalize on international asymmetries to enhance their geopolitical relevance.

In a broader context, projects linking Azerbaijani natural gas to Western markets provide an access point for energy resources from the entire Caspian basin. These connections might allow other hydrocarbon-producing states such as Turkmenistan, Iran, and Kazakhstan to access Western markets through the infrastructure already established by Azerbaijan. It is promising in terms of facilitating access for Southern and Eastern Caspian states. Additionally, this dynamic enhances Azerbaijan's geopolitical relevance and underscores the significance of its economic stability and prosperity for neighboring countries (Kasim, 2021: 953).

3. TÜRKİYE: A MIDDLE POWER'S QUEST FOR STRATEGIC RELEVANCE

Türkiye does not possess remarkable hydrocarbon energy resources. However, the country's geographic position offers a rare strategic advantage: it is surrounded by countries that collectively possess nearly 70 percent of the world's oil and natural gas reserves, including those in the Caspian Basin, the Middle East, and Central Asia. On its own, Russia is a major producer and supplier of hydrocarbon resources. This location places Türkiye at the heart of the global energy map—not as a producer, but as a crucial transit country connecting resource-rich regions in the East with energy-dependent markets in the West. The post-Cold War period, when former super-powers' positions became much less determining, created a time of ambiguity in international relations giving more wiggle room to middle powers like Türkiye to

³ For detailed information see: TANAP Projesi ÇED Raporu (2013), <https://www.tanap.com/store/file/f2a733b732857d2da954a9ecf35b97fd.pdf> (accessed May 2025)

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capitalize on its geography in order to execute its foreign policy goals (Müftüler & Yüksel, 1997: 184).

Regardless of whether the EU imports its energy from the South Caucasus, Central Asia, or the Middle East, most export routes to Europe pass through or near Turkish territory. As long as this geographic reality holds, Türkiye maintains a pivotal role in Europe's energy architecture. This transit capacity, particularly through pipelines like TANAP, Blue Stream⁴, and TurkStream⁵ gives Ankara an opportunity to capitalize on its location and enhance its geopolitical relevance, even in the absence of large domestic reserves. While TANAP gives Türkiye an advantage by supplying gas from Azerbaijan's natural reserves, Blue Stream and TurkStream may expose the asymmetrical interdependence of Türkiye from an international relations perspective as Russia accounts for around 42% of Türkiye's natural gas imports which makes it the largest provider. The real vulnerability though is exposed when the relationship is based on dependence rather than interdependence.

Russia's relations with its 'western neighbours may have soured over the years due to Ukrainian conflict which put a strain on its dialogue with European countries. In order to keep its revenue stream, it needs to continue selling to European market hence making Russia more or less equally dependent on Europe. On the other hand, the investments it has made to provide gas to and via Türkiye has lots of fixed costs that needs to be compensated and turned into real profit which makes Russia dependent on Türkiye too. In a way, both countries have leverage over each other although this interdependence is tilted in favor of Russia making it asymmetrical (Akgül, 2024: 236-237). However, Türkiye manages to navigate this asymmetry by engaging in partnerships with various actors in other regions to fulfill its long-standing ambition to become an "energy hub" which has been central to its foreign policy and infrastructure strategy since the early 2000s (Güney, 2016; (Misiągiewicz, 2012). Türkiye pursues an "ambitious status-seeking" strategy (Parlar Dal, 2019: 587), in which energy connectivity plays a key role in elevating its regional and cross-regional standing as a middle power. By definition, middle powers play a stronger role than smaller powers and their interests are defined in regional terms (Müftüler & Yüksel, 1997: 185). In that respect, Türkiye's strategic alignment with the West has long coexisted with its active engagement in the Caucasus, reflecting a dual-track diplomacy that underpins its efforts to position itself as a key regional energy hub.

This balancing behavior is emblematic of middle powers: Türkiye navigates between major powers particularly the EU and Russia without becoming subordinate to either. In this context, Ankara leverages not only its energy transit role but also its broader geopolitical assets, such as its management of refugee flows, to strengthen its bargaining position with Europe (Okyay & Zaragoza-Cristiani, 2016: 51-62). In that respect, Türkiye capitalizes on being a middle power through its significant regional influence. In other words, Türkiye has actively balanced the EU and Russia by using its leverage as a transit route, and as a host country for refugees who prevents them from entering Europe, which gives Türkiye an important bargaining chip.

Türkiye's ability to balance these relationships while remaining formally aligned with the West confirms how energy transit can serve not only economic goals but also strategic autonomy. Even without being a major producer, Türkiye's geography, infrastructure, and diplomacy make it an indispensable actor in the evolving European energy landscape. And the post-Ukraine war context made the position and ambitions of Türkiye more relevant and easier to execute (Eldem,

⁴ Completed in 2002, Blue Stream is the gas pipeline project that is delivering Russian gas to Türkiye bypassing third countries such as Ukraine, Moldova, Romania, and Bulgaria. For detailed information see: <https://www.gazprom.com/projects/blue-stream/>

⁵ TurkStream is a Russian attempt to bypass Ukraine to deliver gas to South and Southeastern European market as a result of conflict of interests with the country in 2019. For detailed information see: <https://turkstream.info/> and <https://www.gazprom.com/projects/turk-stream/>

2025: 113). Because the European Union's urgent push to diversify energy sources, as discussed earlier in relation to Azerbaijan, also reinforces Türkiye's role as a key transit and coordination point between Eastern suppliers and Western consumers.

Throughout the 2010s, Türkiye invested heavily in energy infrastructure—not only to secure its own energy needs, but also to serve as the main conduit for natural gas from the Caspian and Middle Eastern regions to Europe. It has demonstrated its ambition to become a regional energy hub through substantial investments in major infrastructure projects, most notably TANAP, the centerpiece of the EU-supported SGC. TANAP serves as the critical link between the South Caucasus Pipeline (SCP), which transports gas from Azerbaijan, and TAP, which carries that gas into European markets via Greece, Albania, and Italy. Together, these pipelines form a corridor that allows natural gas from the Caspian region to bypass Russia, directly reinforcing both European energy diversification goals and Türkiye's regional leverage (European Commission, 2022).

TANAP represents a cornerstone in Türkiye's energy diplomacy and economic cooperation with Azerbaijan (İpek, 2025: 142). Originally, Türkiye's state-owned firms BOTAS and TPAO held a 20% stake, with SOCAR (Azerbaijan's state energy company) holding the remaining 80%. By 2013, Türkiye negotiated an additional 10% share, bringing its total stake to 30% (Erdoğan, 2017). These gains include transit fees, royalties, and local employment, while also contributing to the reduction of Türkiye's current account deficit.

TANAP's route extends 1,900 kilometers across Türkiye, traversing 21 provinces from the Georgian border in the east to the Greek border in the west. The pipeline's 56-inch diameter allows it to scale from an initial 16 billion cubic meters (bcm) annually (with 6 bcm allocated for Türkiye's domestic market and 10 bcm sent to Europe), to a planned full capacity of 31 bcm/year in later stages (TANAP, 2024). Its connection to TAP, which began construction in 2015 and delivered its first gas in 2019, solidifies Türkiye's role as the primary bridge between Eastern producers and Western consumers (TAP AG, 2020). Beyond TANAP, Türkiye considered alternative pipeline projects, such as the Interconnector Türkiye-Greece-Italy (ITGI), which was ultimately sidelined in favor of TAP. Nevertheless, Türkiye's broader strategy to multiply infrastructure options remained unequivocal.⁶

In this regard, TANAP serves both as a critical supply route and a means of anchoring Türkiye's geopolitical strategy within the broader energy network of Europe and Eurasia. As long as Caspian and Middle Eastern gas needs to reach Europe through land-based routes, Türkiye will remain indispensable to both regional producers and European consumers.

4. CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the strategic roles of Türkiye and Azerbaijan in the diversification of the European Union's energy supply through the development and operation of the Southern Gas Corridor. In light of declining North Sea production, the volatility of EU-Russia energy relations, global disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian foreign policy aggressions which finally culminated in the war in Ukraine, the significance of secure, diversified, and geopolitically viable energy routes has become greater. The TANAP-TAP corridor, in that regard, emerges as a critical infrastructure that not only enhances Europe's energy resilience but also promotes regional cooperation and integration through carrying Caspian Sea resources to Europe via Azerbaijan and Türkiye. This opportunity to connect Caspian region to the Western markets might offer other hydrocarbon-producing states to the South and East of the Caspian Sea a chance to broaden their customer base and diversify which will be

⁶ Erdoğan, Nuray. "TANAP PROJESİNİN TÜRKİYE VE AZERBAJYCAN ENERJİ POLİTİKALARINDAKİ YERİ VE ÖNEMİ." *Ömer Halisdemir Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Dergisi* 10, no. 3 (2017). <https://doi.org/10.25287/ohuiibf.319259>.

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benefiting their economies in the long-run. On the other hand, this contributes significantly to Azerbaijan's foreign policy efforts through making more independent connections to boost its sovereign control enhancing its greater strategic relevance in the region.

Beyond meeting immediate supply needs, this trilateral energy cooperation offers a compelling example of a positive-sum game in international relations. With improved energy security and a lower reliance on Russian gas, the EU is less constrained in responding to Moscow. In the past, that dependence constrained the EU's ability to impose punitive and deterrent measures against Russian foreign policy that ran counter to the EU's interests. Türkiye, on the other hand, solidifies its strategic ambitions as a trans-regional energy hub gaining economic advantages as well as political leverage owing to its geographical position. Last but not least, through the same cooperation, Azerbaijan secures long-term access to European markets, reinforcing its economic development, sovereignty, and international stature. These outcomes highlight the mutual benefits of energy diplomacy and demonstrate how infrastructure-led interdependence can serve as a stabilizing force in an otherwise fragmented geopolitical landscape.

This strategic positioning can be taken as a model by other smaller countries of the international system and inspire them to take advantage of their position. Major powers have been limited in number at any point in history and they do have coercive power and incentives when it comes to make others submit to their will. But that does not necessarily mean that other states have to bandwagon and follow the lead of big players. Even when small and middle powers fear punishment, and face political coercion or threat of withdrawn economic benefits, economic diversification can expand their room to maneuver. The strategic location of Türkiye, on the one hand, and abundance of natural gas resources for Azerbaijan, on the other hand, offered these middle and small powers an advantage they wisely seized. The same logic can be replicated elsewhere: states that convert a clear comparative advantage into multiple partnerships or create alternative foreign policies can resist pressure and bargain for better terms. When small and middle states do this, they show that leverage does not singly belong to major powers. It can be created and managed by those who understand their strategic assets and use them deliberately.

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