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Central Asia and the Caucasus

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- Energy Policy and Energy Projects
- Political Development Trends in the Context of International Antiterrorist Campaign

COOPERATION BETWEEN AZERBAIJAN AND THE EUROPEAN UNION: PRESENT STATE AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

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Relations between our republic and the European Union began to develop right after Azerbaijan officially announced its independence and the EU recognized this independence on 31 December, 1991, that is, right after the collapse of the U.S.S.R. Prior to this, relations were largely maintained on the basis of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement signed between this European structure and the Soviet Union in 1989.

Between 1991 and 1999 several agreements were signed, including a bilateral Partnership and Cooperation Agreement signed on 22 April, 1996 in Luxemburg for a preliminary term of ten years. In October 1997, both sides entered an intermediate agreement that envisaged putting several articles of this document into effect early, before all the members of the European Union ratified it. And on 1 January, 1999, this agreement finally came into force.

On the whole, until 1999 the EU's policy regarding Azerbaijan was purely instructive, since in the beginning the Europeans tried to follow the Americans in the "big game." The Paris Charter of the European Union (1990) called Azerbaijan, as part of the Caspian Region, a sphere of "general European interests," but the EU still did not have enough courage to deal independently with our state. Nevertheless, our country received significant aid from it in the amount of 370,194,000 Euro between 1992-2002/3¹ (the largest amount of aid among all the post-Soviet countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia). We should note in particular the EU's role in rendering technical aid under the TACIS program aimed at developing market reforms by providing consultation services, know-how, and passing on practical experience. Between 1991 and 2001, more than 150 projects were implemented in the republic, and between 1992 and 2001, the European Union spent a total of 370 million Euro on technical aid to our country.²

What is more, efficient aid is being rendered under the TACIS program in the transportation sphere. For example, several documents were adopted at a conference held on 7 May, 1993 in Belgium, including the Brussels Declaration and an agreement on introducing a technical assistance program financed by the EU. The TRACECA Program (the Europe-Caucasus-Asia transportation corridor) envisages reviving the ancient Great Silk Road and creating an East-West transportation corridor, which should bring the countries of the Southern Caucasus and Central Asia out of geostrategic isolation, as well as out from under Russia's control.

Today, the TRACECA Program is financing 28 technical assistance studies (for 37 million Euro) and 10 investment projects on infrastructure rehabilitation (for 48 million Euro).³ The TACIS projects in Azerbaijan are related to reconstructing the Baku port, eliminating the weak link on the Georgian-Azer-

¹ See: *Country Strategy Paper 2002-2006. National Indicative Program 2002-2003. Azerbaijan. Official document of European Commission*, 2003.

² See: Iu.A. Borko, "ES i vneshni mir. Otnosheniia s drugimi stranami SNG," *Evropeiski soiuz: fakty i komentarii*, No. 28, March-May 2002.

³ Documents from the Azerbaijan Foreign Ministry.

baijan border, building a new and restoring the old Red Bridge, the arch of which was erected as early as the 12th century, as well as to resolving the transportation problems caused by the rise in level of the Caspian Sea.⁴

The growing interest of commercial shippers in the possibilities presented by this corridor, particularly in the Caucasus, is significantly raising the TRACECA's influence in the region. During recent years, shipments along the Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan-Azerbaijan-Georgia route have increased 2.5-fold. For example, whereas in 1996, they amounted to 2 million tons, in 1999 they increased to 5 million tons, and in 2002 to 8 million tons.⁵

The EU also supports other programs, the purpose of which is to develop cooperation with the countries of the region and reinforce their economic independence, in particular: creating southern air ring routes and the INOGATE project—building oil and gas pipelines.

One of the most important areas of cooperation is implementing the European Commission Humanitarian Office program (ECHO), restoring population settlements in Azerbaijan that have suffered damage during combat action, and implementing a special program to clean up mine fields (mine action) in the liberated areas of the Agdam and Fizuli regions of our country. For example, between 2000-2002, the EU spent approximately 2,820,000 Euro on mine action.⁶

It should be noted in particular that the EU Commission approved the Indicative Program of main areas of assistance to Azerbaijan under the TACIS program for 2000-2003, which represents the general principles of cooperation between the European Commission and the government of our country. The republic was included in the TACIS⁷ program at the beginning of the 1990s.⁸ During its implementation, the main aspects of cooperation were defined, in particular improvement of the procedure for preparing the budget and budget legislation, reform of the state purveyor system, creation of a higher auditing institution in the form of an Audit Chamber, and reform of licensing and certification conditions, as well as of the statistics system for providing the government, businessmen, and society with reliable, high-quality and up-to-date information.⁹

The Indicative Program is being carried out in two stages, based on two-year plans, whereby the amount of financing of each amounts to 14 million Euro. According to the main areas of action for 2000-2001, assistance was distributed as follows: support of institutional, legal, and administrative reform—3.8 million Euro; support of the private sector and assistance to economic development—4.6 million Euro; and improving the infrastructure network—2.5 million Euro. In addition, a small project program is being carried out with a total budget of 2.4 million Euro, including the TEMPUS project (in education), the training of managerial staff, etc.¹⁰

Until 2006, under the EU Indicative Program, Azerbaijan will be allotted 35.5 million Euro in grants, which will be used to improve infrastructure, reduce poverty, develop private business, and reform court proceedings.¹¹

After the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement mentioned above came into force on 1 January, 1999, the European Union began to develop its relations more actively, not only with our republic, but with other countries of the region as well.

- First, meetings of the European Union-Azerbaijan Cooperation Committee have been held since 1999. For example, on 30 October, 2001, the regular session of the European Union-Azerbaijan Cooperation Council was held in Brussels, where a joint statement was adopted for the first time, in which the EU confirmed its willingness to play a more active role in the region, mainly

⁴ See: S.I. Cherniavskiy, *Novyy put Azerbajjana*, Moscow, 2002, p. 280.

⁵ Documents of the Azerbaijan Foreign Ministry.

⁶ See: *The European Union Mine Actions in 2000-2002. Official Document of European Commission, 2000-2002.*

⁷ See: M.V. Baba-zadeh, *Azerbaijan-ES: napravleniya sotrudnichestva i vzaimodeistviya*, Documents for the Scientific Conference Dedicated to the 80th Anniversary of President Heydar Aliiev, 25 April, 2003, p. 47.

⁸ *Ibidem.*

⁹ *Ibidem.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 47-48.

¹¹ See: Country Strategy Paper 2002—2006. National Indicative Program 2002—2003. Azerbaijan.

by supporting the efforts to prevent and settle conflicts. The participants also confirmed their joint determination to fight international terrorism.

- Second, the activity of the EU was stepped up in settling the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict. In recent years, the OSCE has been passively carrying out this function, and in this situation contribution from other international organizations, primarily the EU, is extremely important. As perhaps no other organization, the European Union can develop and put into practice a concept of all-encompassing stabilization in the region, in which political and economic elements would supplement each other along the lines of the Stability Pact for the Balkans. Recently, it has been proposed on several occasions that the EU draw up a similar Stability Pact for the Caucasus as the southern equivalent of an already existing “northern dimension.” For example, at the regular meeting of the European Union-Azerbaijan Cooperation Committee (Brussels, 12 July, 2002), a document was adopted in which the European Union welcomed the proposal by Azerbaijan to liberate and rehabilitate the Fizuli, Jabrail, Gubadlin, and Zangelan regions and create conditions for restoring railroad communication along the Baku-Nakhchivan-Erevan route. Somewhat earlier, representatives of the Cooperation Committee for the Southern Caucasus of the European Parliament denied Naira Melkumian the opportunity to come to Brussels as “foreign minister” of the self-proclaimed and unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, where Ms. Melkumian intended to hold official meetings in the European Parliament.¹²
- Third, there have been frequent visits to the region by delegations of the so-called “trio” (three foreign ministers of EU countries—the current chairing country, the former chairing country, and the next chairing country). In the summer of 2003, Finnish diplomat Heikki Talvitie, who almost immediately (in August of the same year) presented his mandate to the Azerbaijan government, was appointed as special EU representative for the Southern Caucasus. His authorities included assisting in the prevention of conflicts and participating in restoring territorial integrity in the region’s countries. All of these facts emphasize the EU’s desire to cooperate more closely with Azerbaijan. As for the foreign policy “trio,” the first visit of its representatives to the capitals of the three South Caucasian states in the spring of 2001 was held at the summit level, and on 7-8 July, 2003 the EU “trio” arrived in Azerbaijan headed by Italian Deputy Foreign Minister Margarita Boniver.¹³ There were another 14 people in the delegation, including from the European Commission, as well as from the Secretariat of the EU Council of Ministers. This visit mainly involved a discussion of political questions, including relations and partnership between Azerbaijan and the EU, the conflicts in the Southern Caucasus, the role and position of the European Union in their resolution, the changes in Azerbaijan and Europe, and so on.

Along with this, Günter Verheugen, EU Commissioner for Enlargement, intends to visit the South Caucasian countries soon to discuss the possibility of their participation in activity under the European Union program in keeping with his profile.¹⁴ The Azerbaijan authorities have already asked the European Union to include the republic in the list of “new European neighbors,” which will also be a topic of discussion during the upcoming visit. This status will allow our country to have a real claim to membership in the EU, where at present only two CIS states have the status of “EU neighbor:” Moldova and Ukraine. By the way, the West European mass media have recently been giving more attention to the question of further expansion of the European Union. The press reports that after Cypress, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia enter this structure, new contenders will be considered, mainly the Balkan states and some post-Soviet countries, one of which is Azerbaijan.

¹² See: *Ekho*, No. 117 (362), 22 June, 2002.

¹³ See: RIA Novosti, 7 July, 2003.

¹⁴ See: *Azerbaijanskije izvestia*, No. 7 (07), 13 January, 2004.

Our country, which has a population of 8 million people and an 11% increase in GDP in 2001, could be a contender for membership in the EU as early as 2007. The changes going on globally are raising the significance of European integration even more. What is more, along with the unwavering desire to ensure its own security, Azerbaijan should reconsider its strategy with respect to the new political environment. All of this must be taken into account when talking about the national interests of our state with respect to the EU's expansion toward the East. A component of this scenario is the fact that Azerbaijan has already become a full-fledged member of the OSCE and the Council of Europe and feels itself a part of Europe. What is more, due to its propitious geographic location and the fact that a multitude of different ethnic groups live here in a relatively small space, our country can be called a unique hinge-state between Europe, the Near and Middle East, as well as the new independent republics of Central Asia. The Great Silk Road passes through Azerbaijan, the traditional trade route from Central Asia to Europe, and also a new transit route that should ensure access of the energy resources discovered in recent years in the Caspian Sea Basin to West European and Mediterranean sales markets.

Due to Europe's new self-definition, as well as to Azerbaijan's changing economic and political priorities, there are convincing reasons to give special attention to the question of our country joining the EU. Any form of communication between Europe and Asia can be implemented through its territory, therefore the republic can become an "energy bridge" between these continents.

Instability in the Middle East and the search for new energy resources are forcing the EU countries to pay close attention to the supplies of hydrocarbons located close to the Caspian Sea. At present, they occupy seventh place in the world in terms of volume—after Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait, Iran, Abu Dhabi, and Venezuela. According to the estimates, one third of the world's resources of natural gas are concentrated in this region. If we look at Germany and Italy, more than two thirds of the blue fuel requirements of which are currently provided by deliveries from the CIS countries, it becomes clear why the headache related to this topic occupies an important place on the West European agenda. For example, whereas in 2003, European states exported approximately 500 billion cubic meters of gas, according to the forecasts of analysts, as early as 2004, this index will increase to 513, and to 530 billion cubic meters in 2005.¹⁵ Therefore, Europe is striving to diversify its purchases of natural gas in order not to be dependent on one supplier. Azerbaijan is in the same position, since industrial development of its Shakh Deniz field and other deposits will permit the country in the future not only to satisfy its requirements, but also to become one of the large exporters of natural gas to Europe.¹⁶

According to several western experts, the CIS oil-producing countries, primarily the states of the Caspian Basin, are capable of compensating somewhat for decreasing or even entirely removing the threat of the energy crisis bearing down on America and Europe. As a prestigious American journal *Foreign Affairs* reports, in 2002-2006, the U.S. can increase oil export from these countries by a minimum of 2 million barrels a day.¹⁷ According to the optimistic forecasts of western specialists, if the events in the Middle East develop unfavorably for the United States, after the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline goes into use (2005), with an increase in its capacity to 50 million tons of oil a year (2010) and Kazakhstan oil being hooked up to it, the export of oil from the CIS countries could in the not too distant future come close to its deliveries from Saudi Arabia.¹⁸ When considering the alternatives, American and European specialists do not exclude that over time the oil-producing states of the Commonwealth could together present serious competition for the OPEC countries.

For example, according to British Petroleum, in 2003, 47,776,300 barrels of oil (6.5 million tons) were obtained at the Chirag field, and the company's daily production on the Chirag-1 platform amounted to 131,000 barrels, with 46.1 million barrels (6.213 million tons) of the total amount

¹⁵ See: *Azerbajjanskije izvestia*, No. 14 (14), 22 January, 2004.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹⁷ See: J.H. Kalicki, "Caspian Energy at the Crossroads," *Foreign Affairs*, September-October 2001.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

of produced oil exported via the Baku-Supsa pipeline. The volume of profitable oil of the State Oil Company of Azerbaijanian Republic (SOCAR) was equal to 1.09 million tons.¹⁹ (For several technical reasons in 2004 production on the platform will decrease to 6.1 million tons, and its daily level to 125,000 barrels.²⁰)

In order to implement the prospective hydrocarbon production and transportation projects, reliable uninterrupted operation of the main pipelines must be ensured. From the viewpoint of European security, the Caspian belongs to the so-called “arc of vulnerability,” that is, to the conflict zone that extends through the Mediterranean, Black Sea, the Northern and Southern Caucasus, and Central Asia, which affects the geopolitical interests not only of Russia, but of other nations as well.²¹

In this way, in order to ensure reliable control over the flows of energy resources from Central Asia and the Southern Caucasus to Europe, we need to think about the next phase in establishing the external borders of the EU and NATO. The second stage in the enlargement of the North Atlantic Alliance to the East is close to completion, today it is symmetrical to the enlargement of the EU. In the end, this also applies to the formation of European security in the Southern Caucasus, where Azerbaijan can be a candidate for the so-called “third wave” of NATO’s enlargement, which will most probably be the final phase of Europe’s enlargement.

At present, in contrast to the Balkans which border directly on the EU, the Europeans do not feel an urgent need to step up their activity in the Southern Caucasus, and it is unlikely that anyone in Western Europe can currently imagine Azerbaijan as a member of the EU or NATO. In the post-Soviet space, European policy is proceeding from the observation of basic human rights and requires that the Caucasian and Central Asian countries build a civil society and law-based state as quickly as possible. From this point of view, the EU policy is not a support corset, but a strait jacket, which will structurally strengthen the former Soviet republics in a new system of Western Europe.

All the projects of the European Union, which is assuming increasing responsibility for implementing them, are aimed precisely at supporting the transformation process. As for Azerbaijan, during the past 10 years, it has taken several steps toward democratization: the death penalty has been abolished in the country, certain amendments have been made to the Constitution, the Election Code has been approved, the Ministry of Transport and the Ministry of Economic Development have been created, and certain measures have been taken to bring Azerbaijan legislation into harmony with European. But the main thing is that the EU has recognized the results of the presidential elections that were held in the republic on 15 October, 2003, announcing that in contrast to the previous elections, certain progress has been noted on the path to democracy.

Nevertheless, here it is expedient to look at two possible alternatives for the further development in events.

The first of them is that Azerbaijan may become a candidate for membership in the European Union. Regular coverage of this topic in the European mass media is ensured thanks to the activity of Olivier Dupuis, a European Parliament member and deputy from Belgium, and his supporters in the Transnational Radical Party (TRP), who organized the campaign for “immediate inclusion” of our republic and several other countries on the list of candidates for membership in the European Union. And in order to put this question on the agenda of the European Parliament meeting, the signatures of 500 deputies must be gathered from countries wanting to be included on this list (108 deputies of the Azerbaijan Milli mejlis have joined this initiative).²² The European Parliament may raise the question of instituting European Union sanctions against the leaders of the unrecognized separatist regime of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic on travel to EU countries. Whatever the case, the EU already has the experience of using sanctions against separatists. For example, in 2003, it compiled a list of leaders of the so-called Pridnestrovie

¹⁹ See: *Azerbajjanskije izvestia*, No. 9 (09), 15 January, 2004.

²⁰ *Ibidem*.

²¹ See: V. Kotilko, “Rossiia i Kaspii: geopoliticheskie interesy,” *Observer*, No. 7 (126), 2000.

²² See: *Ekho*, No. 19 (511), 30 January, 2003.

Moldovan Republic, who were forbidden to travel to EU states.²³ The U.S., Azerbaijan, Georgia, and many other countries of the world joined these sanctions.

Ankara has been allotted a special role in these processes. Statements made in Istanbul by head of the European Commission Romano Prodi and EU Commissioner for Enlargement Günter Verheugen are evidence of a new era in European integration. For example, Mr. Verheugen noted that the leaders of the European Union member states are in favor Turkey joining this organization, based not only on considerations of security and foreign policy.²⁴ After all, the situation changed after 9/11 and today most of the leaders of the EU countries are in favor of Turkey's membership in this organization.²⁵ From the latter it follows that after becoming a European Union member, this country will help Azerbaijan enter the EU. (A similar situation happened with Poland. Not wanting its eastern border to be the eastern borders of the EU for long, it spoke in favor of Ukraine joining the European Union.)

The many Islamic diasporas of several European Union states are also in favor of Azerbaijan joining, which want to see a country with a significant number of Muslim citizens be part of future Europe. Islam has essentially become a major part of the European cultural space, for which there are several reasons: emigration, the transfer to this faith of a certain number of Europeans, and also the fact that there are states in Europe, Bulgaria for example, where Islam is the religion of the significant national minority. According to the latest estimates, approximately 12 million Muslims live in 15 states of the European Union. This number does not include unregistered immigrants, so there are undoubtedly many more followers of this faith. This makes Islam the second or third largest religion in the EU, depending on how you define Christianity, as a united whole or by separating Catholicism from it.

The second development scenario is that Azerbaijan will not become a candidate for EU membership. But if this is the case, the republic will have the opportunity to join so-called "Greater Europe," which is a purely economic bloc supported by the European Union. Romano Prodi characterized "Greater Europe" as follows: "Everything apart from institutions."²⁶ In other words, it is essentially *bona fide* membership in the EU. During the undertakings in Saloniki, Greece, on 19-20 June, 2003, the European Parliament proposed including Azerbaijan in this structure. And during the meeting of the foreign ministers of the European Union countries on 26 January, 2004, a decision was made to revive the debates on relations between the EU and the Southern Caucasus,²⁷ which, judging by everything, will facilitate Azerbaijan's entry into "Greater Europe." One of the pluses of this bloc is the principle of the "four freedoms" (free movement of goods, services, capital, and citizens). Among the other areas of "Greater Europe" are measures to create an unprecedented free trade zone, in which a group of states will be included that neighbor on the EU in its extended format. Among them are Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, and Syria.

Of course, this requires the creation of an efficient mechanism of regional cooperation to establish a so-called "Caucasian Economic Zone" (or a free trade zone), which would include Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkey, and other countries. It could become a fundamental part of the general European economic space. By way of example, it is expedient here to mention the European-Mediterranean free trade zone. Its current assignments are mainly related to reducing customs duties, which the Mediterranean countries levy on import from the EU. But the partner countries are already enjoying the advantages of broad duty-free access to the European Union market, which is helping institutional and economic reforms in these states, and in the future will allow them to obtain the necessary investments and raise their competitiveness.

Summing up what has been said, I would like to note that movement toward the East in itself is undoubtedly the most complicated and large-scale project of EU expansion. Never before have so many countries tried to become members of the European Union at the same time, or have never undergone such mas-

²³ See: *Ekho*, No. 6 (744), 13 January, 2004.

²⁴ See: *Azerbajjanskije izvestia*, No. 12 (12), 20 January, 2004.

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

²⁶ See: *Ekho*, No. 15 (753), 27 January, 2004.

²⁷ *Ibidem*.

sive internal changes. Never before was the need for solidarity by the old members so urgent due to the significant lag between them and the new ones; Europe has not had to look at the East yet under the banner of globalization. In this respect, the European Union should not become a “European fortress,” on the contrary, it needs strong bridges that link it with its eastern neighbors. As for building these bridges, Azerbaijan should take a more active part in developing the EU’s strategic policy regarding its immediate neighbors. The future member states must be in favor of adopting the “eastern dimension,” in the same way as the northern dimension of trans-border cooperation. Their historical and cultural experience, as well as several other significant factors will make a contribution to developing the European Union’s new eastern policy.