

## Chapter 3. Geopolitics in the Caspian Region

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**Abstract** *The chapter spans the geopolitics of the Caspian Region. In this chapter, the interests of the world policy's primary political actors: China, the USA, the EU, and Russia, towards Central Asia and the South Caucasus are considered. Then, the reasons behind their geopolitical involvement in the Caspian Region are analyzed. Besides, the policies of the traditional political actors in the region, Turkey and Iran, are looked at. The last part of the chapter covers the policy of the newly independent countries of the region.*

*The Caspian Region became a significant area for international energy companies in the 1990s due to the region's rich energy resources. In their turn, the governments of all the regional states of the Caspian Sea perceived energy deals with international energy companies as a quick and adequate strategy to rebound after the SU's breakup.<sup>1</sup>*

*The signing of key energy agreements between the region's new states and international energy companies to extract and export oil and natural gas resources gave the region tremendous importance.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the Caspian Region has essential reserves of oil and natural gas resources and some significant amounts of chemical elements such as copper, ore, iron, chlorides, etc.*

*The Caspian Region's energy issue is not only an economic question but also a political one because all actors involved consider energy diplomacy as an essential political tool.<sup>3</sup> In her study of the region, Shaffer argues that "energy and politics are intrinsically interlinked."<sup>4</sup> Therefore, energy diplomacy in the region is an integral part of geopolitical competition between states,<sup>5</sup> and is used primarily by the new states of the Caspian Basin as a significant "political weapon" to secure their independence and neutralize Russian political influence in the region.<sup>6</sup>*

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- 1 Kalyuzhnova, Y. (2008). *Economics of the Caspian oil and gas wealth: Companies, governments, policies*. Springer.
  - 2 Hoffman, D. I. (1999). Oil and development in post-Soviet Azerbaijan. *NBR ANALYSIS*, 10, 5-28.
  - 3 Shaffer, B. (2011). *Energy politics*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
  - 4 Ibid.
  - 5 Yazdani, E. (2006). Competition over the Caspian oil routes: Oilers and Gamers perspective. *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations*, 5(1&2), 51-64.
  - 6 Kubicek, P. (2013). Energy politics and geopolitical competition in the Caspian Basin. *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, 4(2), 171-180.

*The political and economic dynamics of the Caspian Region depend not only on political processes in the region but on political developments in other vital regions of the world, such as the Middle East and Central Asia, that undeniably influence opposition intensity for domination over the Caspian Region. For this apparent reason, the current meaning of this region has to be defined in the context of the general political constellation in world policy.*<sup>7</sup>

*There are some critical regional problems in the Caspian region. For instance, the lack of consistent economic development and secure energy transport pipelines,<sup>8</sup> and general security problems,<sup>9</sup> especially in the South Caucasus.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, the problems mentioned above in the region create an enormous opportunity for regional and international actors to manipulate them according to their state interests and regional policy. Russia and Iran mainly use these complications as a political tool for their statehood interests.<sup>11</sup>*

*Another interesting indicator of this region's political nature is a strategic political cooperation between states involved in the region's geopolitics. For instance, Muslim majority but secular Azerbaijan has close relations with Israel and the USA. In their turn, Russia, Iran, and Armenia are allies and have close political and economic ties. The next chapter of this chapter closely looks at the interests of the region's significant political actors.*

### 3.1 China's policy in Central Asia

The collapse of the SU called for a revision of Beijing's policy towards Central Asian countries. In the 1990s, several issues emerged in the relationship between China and Central Asia.<sup>12</sup> These include establishing new political and economic relations with the region's newly independent states, regulating territorial issues, establishing security, controlling the Uyghur population in Xinjiang, etc.<sup>13</sup> China managed to establish new diplomatic relations with all the region's newly independent states

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- 7 Ziegler, Charles E., and Rajan Menon. "Neomercantilism and great-power energy competition in Central Asia and the Caspian." *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 8.2 (2014): 17–41.
  - 8 Bahgat, G. (2002). Pipeline diplomacy: The geopolitics of the Caspian Sea region. *International Studies Perspectives*, 3(3), 310–327.
  - 9 Čufirin, G. I., & Chufirin, G. I. (Eds.). (2001). *The security of the Caspian Sea region* (No. 1). Oxford University Press on Demand.
  - 10 Kakachia, K. K. (2011). Challenges to the South Caucasus regional security aftermath of Russian–Georgian conflict: Hegemonic stability or new partnership?. *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, 2(1), 15–20
  - 11 Ghafouri, M. (2008). The Caspian Sea: rivalry and cooperation. *Middle East Policy*, 15(2), 81.
  - 12 Xing, G. (1998). China and Central Asia: towards a new relationship. In *Ethnic Challenges Beyond Borders* (pp. 32–49). Palgrave Macmillan, London.
  - 13 Pradhan, R. (2018). The Rise of China in Central Asia: The New Silk Road Diplomacy. *Fudan Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences*, 11(1), 9–29.

by the beginning of 1992. Consequently, Beijing signed numerous essential agreements with the regional states on economic cooperation, security, energy industry, cultural issues, etc.<sup>14</sup>

The unquenchable thirst for energy resources to power its rapid economic development, crucial to the establishment of internal stability of China,<sup>15</sup> are other significant points making critical China's active engagement in Central Asia.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, bilateral economic interests and the continuously developing economic power of China have led to the development of state relations between China and the region's states.<sup>17</sup>

In the last 10 to 15 years, Chinese power has emerged as a critical element in Central Asian politics. The Central Asian states are also very interested in economic and energy partnerships with China.<sup>18</sup> Thus, in contrast to the other essential political actors involved in Central Asia's geopolitics: the USA, Russia, and the EU, China invests enormous sums towards infrastructure and the energy sector of the regional states.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, for the Central Asian states, close cooperation with China is a critical factor in their foreign policy. China has forged close energy partnerships in the region, especially with Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan.<sup>20</sup>

In contrast to the EU and the US, which demand democratic reforms from the Central Asian states, such as the establishment of civil society and free market and the development of primary political institutions,<sup>21</sup> China has no political demands on Central Asian states. As a result of this, Beijing has emerged as a desirable partner for regional states.<sup>22</sup>

The core of Chinese diplomacy in Central Asia consists of using "soft power." Thus, the development of economic relations with regional states, active involvement in the energy industry, especially in Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbek-

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14 Xing (1998).

15 Peyrouse, S. (2016). Discussing China: sinophilia and sinophobia in Central Asia. *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, 7(1), 14–23.

16 Hoh, A. (2019). China's Belt and Road Initiative in Central Asia and the Middle East. *Digest of Middle East Studies*, 28(2), 241–276.

17 Pradhan (2018).

18 Cooley, A. (2012). *Great games, local rules: the new power contest in Central Asia*. Oxford University Press.

19 Ibid.

20 Overland, I., Kjærnet, H., & Kendall-Taylor, A. (Eds.). (2010). *Caspian Energy Politics: Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan* (Vol. 22). Routledge.

21 Bossuyt, F., & Kubicek, P. (2011). Advancing democracy on difficult terrain: EU democracy promotion in Central Asia. *European Foreign Affairs Review*, 16(5).

22 Sharshenova, A., & Crawford, G. (2017). Undermining Western democracy promotion in Central Asia: China's countervailing influences, powers and impact. *Central Asian Survey*, 36(4), 453–472.

istan, and construction of transport and communication systems are some of the numerous instruments of Beijing's "soft power."<sup>23</sup>

China is an initiator of different economic projects in Central Asia. For instance, "the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-century Maritime Silk Road" or "the Belt and Road Initiative" is a development strategy initiated by China during the Chinese president's official visit to Kazakhstan.<sup>24</sup> The project covers connectivity and cooperation between the Eurasian states and China.<sup>25</sup> The development strategy of the project aims to promote the free flow of economic factors. Besides, it encourages countries involved in the project to manage economic policy coordination.<sup>26</sup>

The problem of security in the region is one of the most challenging issues in Central Asia. The Central Asian states are located close to the world's most unstable areas, such as the Middle East, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Among the problems that bedevil them are drug traffic, terrorism, and organized crime. Fighting these problems has an important place in the political agenda of the region. However, such external troubles are not the only problems faced by the regional states after the SU's collapse. The lack of fundamental principles of democracy, and democratic institutions, the undeveloped state economy, the critical unemployment rates, and uncontrolled labor migration are several internal problems existing in Central Asia's states.<sup>27</sup>

The establishment of the "Shanghai Five" after the signing of the Treaty on Deepening Military Trust in Border Regions in Shanghai on 26 April 1996 stimulated a transition of diplomatic relations between Central Asian states and China.<sup>28</sup> The "Shanghai Five" comprises the Central Asian states: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, and China with Russia.<sup>29</sup> The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) was established based on "the Shanghai Five" in 2001. The main goal of establishing the SCO was to declare a fight against terrorism in the region, which is one of Cen-

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- 23 Dorian, J. P., Wigdortz, B., & Gladney, D. (1997). Central Asia and Xinjiang, China: Emerging energy, economic and ethnic relations. *Central Asian Survey*, 16(4), 461–486.
- 24 Zhiping, P. (2014). Silk Road Economic Belt: A dynamic new concept for geopolitics in Central Asia. *China Int'l Stud.*, 47, 33.
- 25 Li, P., Qian, H., Howard, K. W., & Wu, J. (2015). Building a new and sustainable "Silk Road economic belt." *Environmental Earth Sciences*, 74(10), 7267–7270.
- 26 Dave, B., & Kobayashi, Y. (2018). China's silk road economic belt initiative in Central Asia: economic and security implications. *Asia Europe Journal*, 16(3), 267–281.
- 27 Russian International Affairs Council, (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://russiancouncil.ru/upload/riac-wp-ru-cn-centralasia-28-en.pdf>
- 28 Hansen, F. S. (2008). The shanghai co-operation organisation. *Asian Affairs*, 39(2), 217–232.
- 29 Cohen, A. (2006). *The Dragon Looks West: China and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization*. Heritage Foundation.

tral Asia's central problems.<sup>30</sup> The potential of the SCO increased significantly with the joining of India and Pakistan in June 2017.<sup>31</sup>

Chinese President Xi's statement on the SCO' role during the summit in 2014:<sup>32</sup>

“The members of the SCO should take it as our responsibility to safeguard regional security and stability, enhance our ability to maintain stability, continue to boost cooperation on law enforcement and security, and improve the existing cooperation mechanisms.”

The critical aspects concerning Chinese policy in the region can be summed up with the following points:

- *Economic interests of China.* The economic partnership with regional states is the most critical aspect of interstate cooperation between China and the five regional states of Central Asia,<sup>33</sup>
- *A stable energy supply* has an essential meaning for country's development. For this reason, the states of the region: Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan, along with Russia, play an enormously important role in China's oil and natural gas supply;<sup>34</sup>
- *The creation of lasting security.*<sup>35</sup> China is one of two political actors alongside the EU that is welcomed by the regional states.<sup>36</sup> Thus, given the interests of the regional states in economic cooperation with China, it might be proposed that Beijing's active involvement in the region and influence over Central Asian states would gradually rise.<sup>37</sup>

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- 30 Wang, J., & Kong, D. (2019). Counter-Terrorism Cooperation Between China and the Central Asian States in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. *China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies*, 5(01), 65–79.
- 31 Adnan, M., & Fatima, B. (2020). Strategic and economic interests of Pakistan and India in Central Asia. *South Asian Studies*, 30(2).
- 32 Cordesman, A. H. (2015). *Afghanistan at Transition: The Lessons of the Longest War*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- 33 Chung, C. P. (2004). The Shanghai Co-operation organization: China's changing influence in Central Asia. *The China Quarterly*, 989–1009.
- 34 Pop, I. I. (2010). China's Energy Strategy in Central Asia: Interactions with Russia, India and Japan. *Revista UNISCI*, (24), 197–220.
- 35 Ong, R. (2005). China's security interests in Central Asia. *Central Asian Survey*, 24(4), 425–439.
- 36 Chen, Y. W. (2015). A research note on Central Asian perspectives on the rise of China: the example of Kazakhstan. *Issues and Studies*, 51(3), 63.
- 37 Blank, S. J. (2011). Dragon Rising: Chinese Policy in Central Asia. *American Foreign Policy Interests*, 33(6), 261–272.

### 3.1.1 China's policy in the South Caucasus

Since China has no direct borders with the South Caucasus, Beijing had limited geopolitical contact with its regional states. No Chinese president or Prime Minister has paid an official visit to the South Caucasus. Therefore, the relations between China and the regional states are not well developed. The South Caucasus is not a priority region for Beijing like Central Asia, where China has some vital interests because of the geopolitical importance and rich energy resources of the area.

However, the regional states see in the face of Beijing as a rising essential trading partner and a source of investment that all the states in the region sharply need. In contrast to Western political actors such as the EU and the USA, who make demands on human rights and the development of civil society issues, especially in Azerbaijan and Armenia, China does not have any political demands on the newly independent states of the South Caucasus.<sup>38</sup> Consequently, the only issue China is keen on is economic cooperation with Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia.<sup>39</sup>

As illustrated in the second chapter of the work, the South Caucasus is one of the world's most troubled areas. There are three ethno-territorial conflicts despite the small area and population of only 17 million. Beijing avoids any active participation in the reconciliation of these conflicts. As a rule, China does not make any official statements regarding these conflicts or call upon the dispute to be resolved by peaceful negotiations within international law frames. Consequently, China insisted on resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict within the relevant United Nations (UN) Security Council's resolutions and international law principles.<sup>40</sup>

Even though China pursues almost no political interests in the South Caucasus, China has a strong economic presence in the region. For instance, the "One Belt One Road" initiative is one of Beijing's economic projects covering the South Caucasus alongside Central Asia.<sup>41</sup> Georgia has signed a Free Trade Agreement with the Chinese government, which came into play on 1 January 2018,<sup>42</sup> while Azerbaijan is strategically important for China because of its energy resources and, most im-

38 Chiragov, F., Gasimli, V., Kakachia, K., Karimov, R., Makarychev, A., Mammadov, F., ... & Veliyev, C. (2015). *The South Caucasus—Between integration and fragmentation*.

39 Chung, C. P. (2004). *The Shanghai Co-operation organization: China's changing influence in Central Asia*. *The China Quarterly*, 989–1009.

40 Azernews.az. (September 16, 2015). China backs settlement of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict under UNSC resolutions. Retrieved April 25, 2023, from <http://web.archive.org/web/20190611140742/https://www.azernews.az/nation/87904.html>

41 Inan, F., & Yayloyan, D. (2018). *New Economic corridors in the South Caucasus and the Chinese one belt one road*.

42 Avdaliani, E. (2018). *Growing Chinese Interests in Georgia*. *CACI Analyst*, 15.

portantly, Azerbaijan's access to the Caspian Sea.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, China is involved in the motor industry in Azerbaijan and the financial sector in Georgia. In its turn, Armenia has signed some agreements with China in the political, economic,<sup>44</sup> and especially in the military-technical spheres.<sup>45</sup>

China's New Silk Road is a trade route linking China with Europe through Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey. There are two possible routes of the Silk Road. The first route goes from North China to Russia before reaching Europe, while the second route goes East-West across China and Kazakhstan.<sup>46</sup> Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (BTK) grandiose railway project, a part of the New Silk Road, went into service in October 2017 and is supposed to increase Chinese engagement in the South Caucasus.<sup>47</sup> This project makes it possible to connect the territories stretching from the east coast of China to the west coast of Europe. The route allows people to get to Europe from China in 15 days. It is twofold faster compared to the seaway and more than twice cheaper than air travel. Therefore, the trains will depart from China and arrive through Kazakhstan's Khorgos Gateway at the New Port of Baku in Azerbaijan.<sup>48</sup>

The project was planned to start in 1993. However, the key steps were taken only in 2007 when the heads of Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Georgia signed an appropriate agreement on realizing the project.<sup>49</sup> The BTK, which possesses one million passengers capacity, extends from Azerbaijan, Baku to Georgia, and Tbilisi before carrying on to Turkey. Moreover, it is expected to transport almost 6.5 million tons (mt) of cargo annually. The Azerbaijani and Turkish governments financed the construction of the project.<sup>50</sup> One of the most significant aspects of the BTK railroad is the bypassing of Russian territory completely.

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43 Lianlei, B. (2016). Azerbaijan in the Silk Road Economic Belt: A Chinese Perspective. *Caucasus International*, 6(1), 27-39.

44 Zank, W. (2017). The Eurasian Economic Union: A Brittle Road Block on China's "One Belt—One Road"—A Liberal Perspective. *Journal of China and International Relations*, 5(1).

45 Jensen, J., & Tarr, D. G. (2012). Deep trade policy options for Armenia: The importance of trade facilitation, services, and standards liberalization. *Economics: The Open-Access, Open-Assessment E-Journal*, 6, 1.

46 Shepard, W. (2017). How Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey Subverted Russia and Isolated Armenia with New Railway. *Forbes*, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/wadeshepard/2017/10/30/newsilk-road-azerbaijan-georgia-and-turkey-unite-over-new-rail-linearmenia-further-isolated>

47 Avdaliani (2018).

48 Shahbazov, F. (2017). Baku-Tbilisi-Kars Railway to Become Central Asia's Gateway to Europe. *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst Institute*.

49 Lussac, S. (2008). The Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railroad and its geopolitical implications for the South Caucasus. *Caucasian Review of International Affairs*, 2(4), 212-224.

50 Ibid.

The Central Asian countries have already indicated their interest in joining the BTK project. The main reason for their interest in the project is that the BTK is the shortest track connecting Central Asia with Europe, so the route makes it possible to transport the local goods through the BTK railway.<sup>51</sup>

Being located in the center of Eurasia, which in itself is a vast market covering 65% of the population, 75% of the energy resources, and 40% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the world, the South Caucasus can turn into a significant region for China soon.<sup>52</sup>

### 3.2 EU's Central Asia policy

Central Asia emerged as a critical region in EU foreign policy after the end of the SU. However, it took some time to develop a concrete program. Therefore, the relations between the EU and Central Asia entered into a new stage in June 2007. Hence, the Council of the EU adopted two strategies concerning the EU's policy in Central Asia. The first strategy was initiated in 2007. It adopted a so-called "Strategy for a New Partnership with Central Asia" by the European Commission (EC) of the EU on 21–22 June 2007. Due to the adopted strategy, the EU has some priorities in Central Asia:<sup>53</sup>

- Increase the resilience of the region;
- Political dialogue;
- Rule of law, education, environment;
- Security and stability.

The strategy covers cooperation in some fields like:<sup>54</sup>

- education
- the rule of law
- energy and transport
- environment and water
- threats and challenges that affect both sides (including border management & combating drug trafficking)
- trade and economic relations.

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51 Shahbazov (2017).

52 Shepard (2017).

53 Council of the European Union. (June 22, 2015). Retrieved April 25, 2023, from <http://web.archive.org/web/20200921010118/https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-10191-2015-INIT/en/pdf>

54 European External Action Service (EEAS). (May 17, 2015). Central Asia. Retrieved April 25, 2023, from [https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/georgia/2068/central-asia\\_ka](https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/georgia/2068/central-asia_ka)

A stable Central Asia is a strategically important region for the energy and transport interests of the EU. On the other hand, if there is destabilization, the situation would be accompanied by a widening of instability in the direction of Europe.<sup>55</sup> Therefore, as the security of the entire Eurasian continent partially depends on Central Asia's stability, this region has an essential meaning in the foreign policy of the EU.<sup>56</sup>

One of the critical spheres concerning Brussel's policy in Central Asia is the energy sector, especially in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. The drilling, transport of energy resources, and energy security establishment are crucial aspects concerning the EU's energy policy in the region. Consequently, the "Strategy for a New Partnership with Central Asia," adopted in June 2007 regarding collaboration between the EU and Central Asia, reflects the energy interests of the EU in Central Asian states. According to the adopted strategy, the EU has the following interests in the energy sector of the region:<sup>57</sup>

- Enhancing energy security by addressing the issues of energy exports/imports, supply diversification, energy transit, and energy demand;
- Transparency and capacity-building in statistics and the governance of the energy sector;
- Supporting and enhancing technological cooperation between the EU and the Central Asian states in the energy sector Supporting sustainable energy development, including the development of energy efficiency;
- Renewable energy sources and demand-side management;
- Attracting investment towards energy projects of common and regional interest;
- Supporting the rehabilitation of existing pipelines and constructing new pipelines and electricity transportation networks inside the region and towards Europe.

In June 2017, the new strategy of the EU towards Central Asia was adopted after ten years of initiating the first strategy by the EC. The so-called "reviewed and renewed" strategy covers some aspects like geopolitical developments, Central Asia's preferences, and the EU's 2016 Global Strategy. It is a golden chance for all the actors involved: the EU, the governments of Central Asian states, human rights orga-

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55 Mihalka, M. (2007, May). Not Much of a Game: Security Dynamics in Central Asia. In *China & Eurasia Forum Quarterly* (Vol. 5, No. 2)

56 Apokins, I. (2015). Reviewing the EU strategy for Central Asia: results and future prospects. *L'Europe en Formation*, (1), 10–17.

57 Council of the European Union. (2007, May 31). The EU and Central Asia: Strategy for a New Partnership. Retrieved April 25, 2023, from <http://web.archive.org/web/20180514203337/http://aei.pitt.edu/38858/1/st10113.en07.pdf>

nizations, and research communities to input the formation of the EU's new policy towards the region's states.<sup>58</sup>

A paper on the outcomes of proceedings by the EC was published in June 2017. The report explains the development of relations between the EU and the Central Asian states since adopting the first strategy in Central Asia. According to the document, the EU has achieved many goals in Kazakhstan, Kirgizstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Besides, it defines the forms of the partnership: the EU very welcomes the ministerial meetings between the EU and states of the region, the Cooperation Councils with the individual countries, and the political and security dialogues between actors.<sup>59</sup>

However, despite the adopted two strategies, the relatively active participation of the EU in the political processes of Central Asia, and the region's significance in the EU's policy, the EU still needs to achieve its previously established goals towards the region. There are some objective and subjective reasons for the unsuccessful policy of the EU towards the area.<sup>60</sup>

Goals such as the establishment of the rule of law, human rights, continuous stability, the foundation and development of democratic institutes and stability, and economic development of Central Asian states<sup>61</sup> have not been achieved yet.<sup>62</sup> The primary reason is that authoritarian regimes still perceive the democratic transition of the region as a threat to their further existence.<sup>63</sup>

The EU has been in dialogue on counterterrorist activity, the fight against extremism, and drug traffic since 2013. The meeting dedicated to counterterrorism activity issues, the fight against extremism and drug trafficking, was organized in Bishkek on 8 June 2017. However, the security problem, which is a crucial point of the EU's policy in Central Asia, is still significant. Religious radicalism<sup>64</sup> has increased,

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58 EUCAM Watch. (February 2018). Towards a new EU Strategy for Central Asia. Retrieved April 25, 2023, from <http://web.archive.org/web/20200323194309/https://biblio.ugent.be/publication/8548965/file/8548973.pdf>

59 Council of the European Union. (June 19, 2017). Council Conclusions on the EU strategy for Central Asia. Retrieved April 25, 2023, from <http://web.archive.org/web/20201216111522/https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/23991/st10387en17-conclusions-on-the-eu-strategy-for-central-asia.pdf>

60 Axyonova, V. (2014). *The European Union's Democratization Policy for Central Asia: Failed in Success Or Succeeded in Failure?* (Vol. 11). Columbia University Press.

61 Bossuyt, F. (2019). The EU's and China's development assistance towards Central Asia: low versus contested impact. *Eurasian Geography and Economics*.

62 Axyonova (2014).

63 Boonstra, J., & Tsertsvadze, T. (2016). Implementation and review of the European Union-Central Asia strategy: Recommendations for EU action. European Parliament Think Tank, 4.

64 Baran, Z., Starr, F. S., & Cornell, S. E. (2006). *Islamic radicalism in Central Asia and the Caucasus: Implications for the EU*. Uppsala University.

and Europe has undergone some terrifying terror attacks in the last few years.<sup>65</sup> Given the fact that Central Asians have joined groups such as Al Qaeda and ISIS in large numbers<sup>66</sup> and also fought in the Middle East and Russia, it is evident that the established goals like fighting terrorism and extremism in Central Asia remain relatively unaccomplished.

In terms of achieving established goals, official Brussels must engage more actively in the region's policy if it wants to establish security in Central Asia. Active political cooperation with important international policy actors, such as NATO and OSCE, would be very productive for Brussels in following its regional policy. Therefore, the lack of permanent security in Central Asia can be solved only through close cooperation with NATO and OSCE.<sup>67</sup>

### 3.2.1 EU in the South Caucasus

Having some severe security problems and consisting of the states with a “weak” and “fragile” economy, the South Caucasus is not in the list of the priority regions for the EU. However, the South Caucasus is a “buffer zone”<sup>68</sup> between Europe and West and South-West Asia. Moreover, this region possesses a modest amount of oil and natural gas resources,<sup>69</sup> and may connect Europe with Central Asia. Consequently, access to this region means isolation of Russia from the Middle East and partly from Iran and provides access to the Caspian Sea and Central Asia.<sup>70</sup>

However, the critical aspects of the EU's involvement in this region are the support of democratization, the establishment of continuous stability, and economic and commercial relations with Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia.<sup>71</sup> The EU also is a

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- 65 Voskopoulos, G. (2021). Soft Power, European Security Strategy and Radicalism: Cultural, Religious and Dimensional Challenges. In *European Union Security and Defence* (pp. 3-24). Springer, Cham.
- 66 Jani, M. H. (2017). Counter terrorist trends and analyses. *Journal of the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research*, 9(1), 18-19.
- 67 Warkotsch, A. (2006). *Die Zentralasiatische Politik der Europäischen Union: Interessen, Strukturen und Reformoptionen*. Frankfurt aM: Peter Lang.
- 68 Dekanozishvili, M. (2004). The EU in the South Caucasus: By What Means, to What Ends?. *EuroJournal. org-Journal of Foreign Policy of Moldova*, (06).
- 69 Jin, C., & Zhang, Z. (2018, November). Regarding the role of oil & gas industry on social infrastructure development in Azerbaijan and ecological problems. In *IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science* (Vol. 189, No. 5, p. 052004). IOP Publishing.
- 70 Cornell, S. E., Starr, S. F., & Tsereteli, M. (2015). *A Western Strategy for the South Caucasus*. Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies.
- 71 Delcour, L., & Duhot, H. (2011). Bringing South Caucasus closer to Europe? Achievements and challenges in ENP implementation. *Achievements and Challenges in ENP Implementation* (April 7, 2011). College of Europe Natolin Research Paper, (2011/3).

decisive player in the development of civil-democratic society and free trade.<sup>72</sup> The relations between the EU and countries of the South Caucasus have strategic significance in energy security spheres and fighting terrorism.<sup>73</sup>

EU possesses some “soft policy” levers concerning this region. For instance, all three countries of this region are members of the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) program initiated by the EU. Eastern Partnership (EaP), which covers the EU’s policy concerning the countries of East Europe and the South Caucasus, is another crucial political tool of the EU. The EaP was founded at the Paris Summit in May 2009.<sup>74</sup> The main goals of the establishment of the EaP are an acceleration of the political union and deepening of the economic integration between EU and six states of the Post-Soviets Space: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldavia, and Ukraine.<sup>75</sup>

Therefore, the EaP intends to address some critical issues, such as:<sup>76</sup>

- Stabilizing the neighborhood;
- Stronger neighborhood, stronger partnerships;
- Good governance, democracy, rule of law, and human rights;
- Proposed joint priorities for cooperation;
- The regional dimension;
- More effective delivery.

The work programs of the four EaP multilateral thematic platforms were established to achieve effectiveness in the partnership between the EU and member countries of the EaP. The work programs cover the following issues:<sup>77</sup>

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- 72 Paul, A. (2015). The EU and the South Caucasus—Time for a stocktake. *The South Caucasus*, 77.
- 73 EFE, A. P. D. H. (2012). Foreign Policy of the European Union Towards the South Caucasus. *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, 3(17).
- 74 Opitz, C. (2014). Die Europäische Union in unruhigem Fahrwasser: Eine deutsch-nordisch-baltische Reformpartnerschaft in Zeiten innen und außenpolitischer Herausforderungen. *Integration*, 37(4), 365–370.
- 75 Kerikmäe, T., & Chochia, A. (Eds.). (2016). *Political and legal perspectives of the EU Eastern Partnership policy*. Springer International Publishing.
- 76 European Commission. (November 18, 2015). Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy. Retrieved April 25, 2023, from [http://web.archive.org/web/20190209045802/https://ufmsecretariat.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/20151118\\_joint-comm\\_review-of-the-european-neighbourhood-policy.pdf](http://web.archive.org/web/20190209045802/https://ufmsecretariat.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/20151118_joint-comm_review-of-the-european-neighbourhood-policy.pdf)
- 77 European Union External Action. (January 2010). Eastern Partnership thematic platforms get down to work. Retrieved April 25, 2021, from [http://web.archive.org/web/20160628074048/http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/belarus/press\\_corner/all\\_news/news/2010/20100119\\_01\\_en.htm](http://web.archive.org/web/20160628074048/http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/belarus/press_corner/all_news/news/2010/20100119_01_en.htm)

- Democracy, good governance, and stability;
- Economic integration and convergence with EU policies;
- Energy security;
- Contacts between people.

Energy security is one of the central aspects of the EU policy towards the South Caucasus.<sup>78</sup> The involvement of the EU's energy companies in the development and production of the energy resources of Azerbaijan and the back of Azerbaijan by the EU in the establishment of safe and stable export routes to Europe are the central goals of the EU regarding its energy policy in the region.<sup>79</sup>

Azerbaijan and the EU signed a Memorandum of Understanding on reforming and modernizing the Azerbaijani domestic energy sector in 2006.<sup>80</sup> The EU perceives Azerbaijan as a new energy source for the diversification of its energy export sources.<sup>81</sup> However, given Azerbaijan's modest energy resources, it is clear that the country cannot play any significant role in the EU's energy security. Nevertheless, the two oil projects of Azerbaijan: BTC, Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (BTE), and Southern Gas Corridor (SGC) natural gas project, demonstrates Azerbaijan's interest in having close energy cooperation with the EU.<sup>82</sup>

These projects also have the US's significant political support. The former senior adviser of the US State Department Bureau of Energy, Daniel Stein, stressed Azerbaijan's essential role in the energy security of Europe during his speech at the 21<sup>st</sup> Caspian International Oil and Gas Conference in Baku on 4 June 2014. According to him, Baku's role even increased after the natural gas crisis between Russia and Ukraine in 2006, jeopardizing the energy security of Europe.<sup>83</sup> Besides, he stressed that the SD 2 natural gas project is an essential step towards the establishment of the energy security of the EU.<sup>84</sup> German former Chancellor Angela Merkel also stressed the increasing role of Azerbaijan as an essential partner for the EU during

78 Alieva, L., & Shapovalova, N. (2015). Energy security in the South Caucasus: views from the region. CASCADE, <http://weg.ge/sites/default/files/cascade-d8.3-working-paper-energy-security.pdf>, Workingpaper-Energy-Security.pdf [in English].

79 Van Gils, E. (2018). From 'Unilateral' to 'Dialogical': Determinants of EU-Azerbaijan Negotiations. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 70(10), 1572–1596.

80 EU-Azerbaijan (n.d.). Retrieved April 25, 2023, from <http://web.archive.org/web/20181014071930/https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/21862/eu-azerbaijan.pdf>

81 Van Gils (2018).

82 Bocse, A. M. (2019). EU energy diplomacy: Searching for new suppliers in Azerbaijan and Iran. *Geopolitics*, 24(1), 145–173.

83 Stern, J. (2006). The Russian-Ukrainian gas crisis of January 2006. *Oxford Institute for Energy Studies*, 16(1).

84 Azernews.az. (June 4, 2014). U.S. says Azerbaijan to play important role in Europe's energy security. Retrieved April 25, 2023, from [http://web.archive.org/web/20140825180837/http://www.azernews.az/oil\\_and\\_gas/67700.html](http://web.archive.org/web/20140825180837/http://www.azernews.az/oil_and_gas/67700.html)

her meeting with the Azerbaijani President: “Azerbaijan is an increasingly important partner, partly because of its growing economic momentum.”<sup>85</sup>

However, despite the ENP and EaP projects and close cooperation in the energy sphere, the EU does not have any uniform strategy and a clear plan in its regional policy towards the peaceful regulation of the conflicts, which are the essential hurdle on the way of development and economic prosperity of the South Caucasus.<sup>86</sup>

Since the regional countries accept the EU as a constructive partner in different spheres, the EU should increase its active involvement in the peaceful settlement of the conflicts, which have remained unsolved for many years. Instead of it, the EU supported only OSCE and the UN’s activity in regulating the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia. The active involvement of the EU could undoubtedly play a crucial role in the settlement of the disputes, which are a central cause of the instability and absence of regional cooperation between states of this region.<sup>87</sup>

According to Stefan Meister, the EU’s activity in the South Caucasus should be characterized as “half-hearted.” Therefore, the political activity of the EU only consists of some recommendations in the frames of economic and political transformation. However, the political and economic engagement of the EU in the sphere of democratization and the development of the market economy could be more productive if official Brussels could bring a significant contribution to the peaceful solution of the “chronic problems” of the region.<sup>88</sup> The participation of the EU through France in the peaceful negotiation of the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia in the context of the OSCE Minsk Group was another aspect that diminished the effectiveness of the EU’s involvement in the peaceful solution of the conflict.<sup>89</sup>

Establishing lasting security in the region and energy questions is in the USA and the EU’s mutual interests in the South Caucasus. However, the actors should follow a more active policy to limit the Russian government’s influence on the region’s political processes. An effective policy of the EU towards the South Caucasus states is simply impossible only through political rhetoric. The EU should use all political tools and be more insistent in achieving stability and prosperity in the region.<sup>90</sup>

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85 Bundeskanzlerin.de. (January 1, 2015). An Increasingly Important Partner. Retrieved April 25, 2023, from <https://web.archive.org/web/20190509184203/https://www.bundeskanzlerin.de/bkin-en/news/-an-increasingly-important-partner--428260>

86 German, T. (2016). *Regional Cooperation in the South Caucasus: Good Neighbours Or Distant Relatives?*. Routledge.

87 Haydar, E. F. E. (2012). *Foreign Policy of the European Union Towards the South Caucasus*. Uluslararası Kafkasya Kongresi Programı, 60.

88 Freizer, S. (2017). The revised European Neighbourhood Policy and conflicts in the South Caucasus: The EU’s growing conflict transformation role. In *The Revised European Neighbourhood Policy* (pp. 157-176). Palgrave Macmillan, London.

89 Meister (2013).

90 Ibid.

### 3.3 US policy towards Central Asia

The USA is the only superpower involved in the geopolitics of Central Asia. The establishment of democracy, the rule of law, a market economy, and the international community's regional states' integration are the USA's central goals in Central Asia.<sup>91</sup> However, two crucial aspects make this region vital to the foreign policy of the USA:

Firstly, the fight against terrorism is the most critical reason for the USA's presence in Central Asia. The terrorist attack of 9/11 in New York changed American foreign policy's direction thoroughly, so the US started having a more active policy in the region.<sup>92</sup> Considering the critical geostrategic position of Central Asia as a border region to unstable states like Afghanistan and Pakistan, this region has exceptional value in the USA's foreign policy.<sup>93</sup>

Secondly, the presence of the USA in Central Asia makes it possible to fight terrorism. Thirdly, the USA seeks to restrict its primary political opponents' influence in the world policy: China and Russia in the region.<sup>94</sup>

The region's significance for the USA increased dramatically after the breakdown of the USSR, but the apogee was reached after the terrorist attack in September 2001. The USA stationed its military contingents in Afghanistan after the 9/11 terror attack. Central Asia became a priority region in the USA's foreign policy with the beginning of the operations in Afghanistan to fight terrorism and create stability in the area.<sup>95</sup>

However, compared to the Indo-Pacific Region,<sup>96</sup> Central Asia is a less critical region for the foreign policy of the USA. So, a crucial political competition between the new world policy's two mightiest political actors, the USA and China, is observed in the Indo-Pacific region. Nevertheless, Central Asia also is a region that has tremendous meaning for the foreign policy of the USA because of its geographic location. The area is bordered on the North by Russia, on the East by China, and the South by

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91 Mankoff, J. (2013). *The United States and Central Asia after 2014*. Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies.

92 Nichol, J. (2010, August). *Central Asia: regional developments and implications for US interests*. LIBRARY OF CONGRESS WASHINGTON DC CONGRESSIONAL RESEARCH SERVICE.

93 Tanrisever, O. F. (Ed.). (2013). *Afghanistan and Central Asia: NATO's Role in Regional Security Since 9/11* (Vol. 106). IOS Press.

94 Chen, X. and Fazilov, F., 2018. Re-centering Central Asia: China's "new great game" in the old Eurasian heartland. *Palgrave Communications*, 4(1), pp.1-12.

95 Rumer, E. B., Sokolsky, R., & Stronski, P. (2016). *US policy toward Central Asia 3.0* (Vol. 25). Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

96 He, K., & Li, M. (2020). Understanding the dynamics of the Indo-Pacific: US–China strategic competition, regional actors, and beyond. *International Affairs*, 96(1), 1-7.

“fragile” states such as Afghanistan and Pakistan. All these states are of tremendous importance to the US foreign policy.

Russia and China see the USA's presence in Central Asia as a significant political threat to their regional interests.<sup>97</sup> While Washington supports the states in preserving their sovereignty, and improving the democratic atmosphere in these countries, the establishment of security in the area, and fighting against terrorism, Russia's interests predominantly carry an imperialistic character.<sup>98</sup>

According to the former head of government of the department for the democracy Human Rights Lorne Craner, the USA pursues the following interests in Central Asia:<sup>99</sup>

“The primary strategic goal of the United States in Central Asia is to see the development of independent, democratic, and stable states committed to the kind of political and economic reform that is essential to modern societies and on the path to integration and the world economy. The strategy that we follow is based on the simultaneous pursuit of three related goals. The first of these goals is security. Our counterterrorism cooperation bolsters these states' sovereignty and independence and provides them with the stability needed to undertake the reforms that are in their long-term interest. However, for these nations to be truly stable over the long term and to be fully integrated into the international community, to achieve their potential, they must allow for greater transparency, respect for human rights, and movement toward democratic policy. Finally, the development of Central Asia's economic potential, including its extensive natural resources, requires free-market economic reforms and foreign direct investment. This is the only way to improve the well-being of the region's people, diversify world energy sources, and facilitate these countries' movement into the world economy.”

During the presidency of Barack Obama, it was expected that American troops would withdraw from Afghanistan. However, projects like the “New Silk Road” initiated by the Obama administration and the “C5+1” initiative plan for cooperation with Central Asian states during Obama's second presidency showed how critical Central Asia was in the foreign policy of the USA.<sup>100</sup> Secretary of State John Kerry and the five foreign ministers of the Central Asian states met within the “C5+1”

97 Petersen, A., & Barysch, K. (2011). Russia, China and the geopolitics of energy in Central Asia. Centre for European Reform.

98 Blank, S. (2007). US Interests in Central Asia and Their Challenges. *Demokratizatsiya*, 15(3).

99 Ibid.

100 U.S. Department of State. (August 3, 2016). U.S.-Central Asia (C5+1) Joint Projects. Retrieved April 25, 2023, from <http://web.archive.org/web/20210322075951/https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2016/08/260805.htm>

initiative in August 2016. Moreover, a further five agreements between the USA and the Central Asian states were formed.<sup>101</sup>

The meaning of this region for Washington slightly decreased after the presidential election of 2016. Furthermore, since the Biden administration was new in the White House, it was difficult to predict the new administration's policy towards Central Asia and regional states. However, according to the White House, on 30 August 2021, the US troops officially left Afghanistan.<sup>102</sup> Nevertheless, given that this region's stability is a priority issue for the White House, it could be predicted that more active involvement of the USA in Central Asia will be observed in the future.

### 3.3.1 US policy in the South Caucasus

After the fall of the SU, the US became the most influential player in the area, and though it has some significant interests in the area, none of them can be considered vital for the USA.

The US interest in the South Caucasus is driven by factors such as averting the reactivation of frozen conflicts in the region, supporting the establishment of democratic reforms, and good governance tendencies in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia.<sup>103</sup> In their turn, the regional states are more than interested in close cooperation with the USA.<sup>104</sup> Therefore, they need Washington to keep their sovereignty and neutralize Russian dominance in the South Caucasus.<sup>105</sup>

If the USA had no clear policy towards the South Caucasus and Central Asia states in the first years after acquiring their independence, Washington's active involvement started in the 90s of the last century. Therefore, the USA's active engagement in the South Caucasus began with signing "The Contract of the Century" in 1994.<sup>106</sup> This energy agreement between the Azerbaijani government and international energy companies was the first large-scale energy deal in the Caspian region. Three years later, a so-called Partnership for Peace (PfP) was signed, which became

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- 101 Rakhimov, M. (2018). Complex regionalism in Central Asia: Local, regional, and global factors. *Cambridge Journal of Eurasian Studies*, 2, 16Y3O7.
- 102 Whitehouse.gov. (31 August, 2021). Remarks by President Biden on the End of the War in Afghanistan. Retrieved April 25, 2023, from <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/08/31/remarks-by-president-biden-on-the-end-of-the-war-in-afghanistan/>
- 103 Kuchins, A. C., & Mankoff, J. (2016). *The South Caucasus in a Reconnecting Eurasia: US Policy Interests and Recommendations*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- 104 Cornell et al. (2015).
- 105 Chiragov, F., & Karimov, R. (2015). Policies from afar: the US options towards greater regional unity in the South Caucasus. *The South Caucasus*, 95.
- 106 Ok, N., & Kocaman, S. (2013). The Economic Relations between the USA-Azerbaijan and Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Project. In *The 2013 WEI International Academic Conference Proceedings*.

another essential point that caused the USA's activity in the South Caucasus. PFP implied military cooperation between NATO,<sup>107</sup> European countries, and the former states of the SU, which are not members of NATO.<sup>108</sup>

The attacks of 11 September 2001 and the military operations against the Taliban and Al-Qaida in Afghanistan, and Saddam Hussein's dictatorship in Iraq in 2004 substantially increased the stakes for US foreign policy in the region. Moreover, this region plays a significant role in fighting terrorism not only in Afghanistan and Pakistan<sup>109</sup> but also in other crisis regions of the world, especially in the North Caucasus and the Middle East.<sup>110</sup>

NATO plays a very crucial role in energy security in this region.<sup>111</sup> In May 2003, NATO Secretary-General Lord Robertson stressed the vital role of the Caucasian states in the fight against terrorism and the creation of regional stability.<sup>112</sup> Moreover, after the acceptance of the concept at the Riga summit in 2006,<sup>113</sup> NATO follows an active foreign policy in the region for the diversification of energy sources.

Azerbaijan plays a crucial role in establishing energy security and the development of the energy industry in the South Caucasus. Within the framework of NATO, the country is involved in several initiatives.<sup>114</sup> The concept of Azerbaijan's national security, which was confirmed by the Azerbaijani government still in 2007, reflects the importance of the partnership between Azerbaijan and NATO. According to this concept, integration with NATO and creating a collective security system within Europe are the central aims of the Azerbaijani state.<sup>115</sup> NATO is also an important political actor in some issues like strengthening military security and Azerbaijan's energy security.<sup>116</sup>

107 Priego, A. (2008). NATO cooperation towards South Caucasus. *Caucasian Review of International Affairs*, 2(1), 1–8.

108 Nixey, J. (2010). The South Caucasus: drama on three stages (pp. 125–142). Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Sachsen-Anhalt.

109 Yalowitz, K., & Cornell, S. E. (2004). The critical but perilous Caucasus. *Orbis*, 48(1), 105–116.

110 Nixey (2010).

111 NATO.int. (April 7, 2016). Relations with Azerbaijan. Retrieved April 25, 2023, from [http://web.archive.org/web/20170313012510/http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_49111.htm?slectedLocale=en](http://web.archive.org/web/20170313012510/http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49111.htm?slectedLocale=en)

112 NATO.int. (May 2003). Speech by NATO Secretary General-Lord Robertson. Retrieved April 25, 2023, from <http://web.archive.org/web/20180628054949/https://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2003/s030515a.htm>

113 Monaghan, A. (2009). NATO and energy security after the Strasbourg-Kehl summit. NATO Defense College.

114 Melek, M. (2008). NATO and the South Caucasus: Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia on Different Tracks. *Connections*, 7(3), 30–51

115 Azizaga, T. O. G. Z. (2020). Azerbaijan-NATO relations 1991–2003.

116 Welt, C. (2019, October). Georgia: Background and US Policy. In Congressional Research Service Report for Congress.

If Georgia is undoubtedly the closest ally of the USA in the region,<sup>117</sup> different international organizations often criticize the Azerbaijani government because of freedom of speech, human rights, and free media in Azerbaijan.<sup>118</sup> However, interstate relations between the USA and Azerbaijan have a strategic nature. For Azerbaijan, US backing is essential to fight Russian influence in the region. Another critical point, which must be considered, is the USA's active involvement in Azerbaijan's energy industry. Therefore, the USA's political and economic support played a critical role in realizing all significant energy projects. For instance, the USA played a crucial role in realizing some vital energy projects like “the Contract of the Century,” the BTC oil project, etc. Additionally, the USA was one of the three co-chairs of the Minsk group responsible for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict's peaceful settlement.<sup>119</sup>

Different political experts and public figures emphasize the critical role of Azerbaijan in the South Caucasus. For instance, Dan Burton, the former chair of the House Government Reform and Oversight Committee, in his article for Washington Times, underlines Azerbaijan's important role in the region and policy of the USA in the South Caucasus:<sup>120</sup>

“Why is that important to America? It's in a part of the world that is in a chaotic state. After a mere 23 years of independence, Azerbaijan stands out as a friend to America and a stabilizing force in the region. Russia and Iran border Azerbaijan, and those countries' policies make it even more critical that the United States and the rest of the free world have a stalwart friend in the region. There are many other reasons why we should value our relationship with Azerbaijan. As America and Azerbaijan continue to face common challenges to our increasingly common values and goals, US officials should congratulate them for their total commitment to religious tolerance, freedom, and democracy. America and the rest of the free world need more friends like Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan, a 96 percent majority Muslim country, has demonstrated a commitment to religious tolerance and understanding.”

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117 Van Gils (2017).

118 Thepolitic.org. (August 21, 2013). An Interview with Richard Morningstar, U.S. Ambassador to Azerbaijan Retrieved April 25, 2023, from <http://web.archive.org/web/20161103220919/http://thepolitic.org/an-interview-with-richard-morningstar-u-s-ambassador-to-azerbajia/>

119 Meister (2013).

120 WashingtonTimes.com. (January 28, 2015). Why Azerbaijan is important to America and the free world. Retrieved April 25, 2023, from [http://web.archive.org/web/20191206152053/https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/jan/28/dan-burton-why-azerbaijan-is-important-to-america-/](http://web.archive.org/web/20191206152053/https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/jan/28/dan-burton-why-azerbaijan-is-important-to-america/)

Also, Jim Nichol, in his work<sup>121</sup> describes Azerbaijan as a country among the states supporting US anti-terror presence in Iraq, offering its airbase and playing an active role in the rebuilding of Iraq. Additionally, Azerbaijan supported US troops financially, militarily, and 50 Azerbaijani soldiers served until 2008 and pulled out in late 2008.<sup>122</sup>

The USA should follow a more active policy in such a “fragile” region to establish security in the area and stimulate the regional states’ political and economic development. Thus, there are some essential principles, which the US government should follow in the region:<sup>123</sup>

- *Prevention of conflicts from further escalation.* An attempt to prevent the frozen conflicts into an active stage should be a priority of the US policy in the region;
- *Further promotion of democratic values.* Since it is a relatively new region and Russian political influence over the region’s states is still very strong, and given Russian aversion to further democratization of the region, the USA should be more actively involved in its democratization.
- *Support of the EU’s engagement.* The USA should further promote democratization, the rule of law, and good governance policy in very close collaboration with the EU.

If the USA is seriously concerned about the development and democratization of the area, it should support the regional countries in their internal transformation and integration into the international community. Consequently, the USA should back these changes, not for a short period, but to establish long-term cooperation with the regional states to achieve the settled goals.

### 3.4 Russia’s policy towards Central Asia

Russia considers Central Asia, along with the South Caucasus and the Middle East, as one of the most critical regions in its foreign policy, so the importance of Central Asia for Russia consists of numerous political and economic aspects.<sup>124</sup> There-

121 Nichol, J. (2012, September). Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia: Political developments and implications for US interests. Library of Congress Washington DC. Congressional Research Service.

122 Nichol (2012, September).

123 Rumer et al. (2016).

124 Kozhemiakin, A. V., & Kanet, R. E. (Eds.). (2016). The foreign policy of the Russian federation. Springer. 335 Gabuev, A. (2016). Crouching bear, hidden dragon: “One Belt one Road” and Chinese-Russian jostling for power in Central Asia. *Journal of Contemporary East Asia Studies*, 5(2), 61-78.

fore, Russia uses all political and economic levers to keep the region's states under its control, and the Kremlin strives to prove, by its presence in the region, that it is still the most important political player of Central Asia, even after the fall of the USSR.<sup>125</sup> Consequently, Russia has often carried out its policy to show the USA and China that this is a Russian influence sphere.

Western experts were wrong in thinking that Russia would leave the region after the fall of the USSR. On the contrary, it started to follow vigorous policy towards Central Asia. Russia's policy in the region has an enormous impact on some priority issues like labor migration, economic integration, and the regional states' political coordination.<sup>126</sup>

Russia lost its official control over the regional states with the fall of the USSR. However, the situation changed dramatically after the first two presidencies of Vladimir Putin in 2000 and 2004. Russia won back its strategic position in Central Asia. It became one of the most influential political powers of the region because of Vladimir Putin's administration's systematic foreign policy towards Central Asia's states.<sup>127</sup>

In general, the Russian policy towards the region after the collapse of the SU can be divided into three stages:<sup>128</sup>

- *The first stage* spans the period after the fall of the USSR to the first half of the 90<sup>th</sup> of the last century. This period's primary characteristic was the lack of a clear concept in Russian foreign policy toward regional states. The Kremlin established the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) not as an instrument to achieve political control over regional countries but rather as a tool to procure a so-called "civilized divorce" between Russia and other new states region. Russia did not even attempt to defend the Russian minority population.<sup>129</sup>
- *The second stage.* Russia started to follow a more confident regional policy in the second half of the 1990s. Central Asia became a region of vital interest in Russian foreign policy, according to the decree issued on 14 September 1995. According to the so-called "Primakov doctrine," the rebuilding of lost Russian authority in world policy after the decline of the Soviet Empire started with recover-

125 Gabuev, A. (2016). Crouching bear, hidden dragon: "One Belt one Road" and Chinese-Russian jostling for power in Central Asia. *Journal of Contemporary East Asia Studies*, 5(2), 61-78.

126 Kavalski, E. (2010). *The new Central Asia: The regional impact of international actors*. World Scientific.

127 Buszynski, L. (2005). Russia's new role in Central Asia. *Asian Survey*, 45(4), 546-565.

128 Kavalski (2010).

129 Putin pretexts Russia's aggressive policy towards the former states of the Soviet Union very often for the sake of protecting the Russian minority in these countries. For instance, in the case of the crisis in Ukraine.

ing Moscow's influence over the post-Soviet countries, including Central Asian states.<sup>130</sup>

- *The third stage.* The Russian foreign policy towards the region changed dramatically after Putin came to power. Putin paid visits to Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan in the first years of his presidency. According to Russia's newly formulated foreign policy concept, the Kremlin invested significant investments in CIS and established closer political and economic relations with its strategic partners: India, Iran, and China. Putin's Russia strengthened control over the South Caucasus and Central Asia to fight terrorism in the regions. Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan became the allies of Russia in the region. At the same time, the other three countries, in the face of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan tried to follow a more balanced foreign policy between Russia and the West. However, the governments of these states also started taking Russia's increasing role in the region seriously. Even Kyrgyzstan, the most democratic state of the area, had to consider Russia's growing political influence over regional states. Therefore, Russia recovered its lost authority in Central Asia and became the most reliable political actor for Central Asia governments.<sup>131</sup> Moreover, organizations like the EEU<sup>132</sup> and the CSTO<sup>133</sup> established an excellent ground for the Russian government's "soft power."

The Kremlin policy consists of supporting the Central Asian states characterized by their pro-Russian political course. Therefore, the process of Central Asia's potential democratization through the modernization and liberalization of the regional states might mean the Kremlin's losing its political control over these states.<sup>134</sup>

Another critical factor, which brought Central Asia's autocratic regimes close to Russia, is the wave of "colored revolutions" in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan in the 2000s. The governments of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan real-

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130 Rumer, E. (2019). The Primakov (not Gerasimov) doctrine in action (Vol. 5, No. 06). Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

131 Malashenko, A. (2013). The fight for influence: Russia in Central Asia. Brookings Institution Press.

132 Kuznetsova, A. (2017). Greater Eurasia: Perceptions from Russia, the European Union, and China. Core Europe and Greater Eurasia: A roadmap for the future/Ed. by P. Schulze. Frankfurt am Main, 177-191.

133 Dubnov, A. (2018). Reflecting on a Quarter Century of Russia's Relations with Central Asia (Vol. 19). Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

134 Omelicheva, M. Y. (2015). Competing perspectives on democracy and democratization: assessing alternative models of democracy promoted in Central Asian states. Cambridge Review of International Affairs, 28(1), 75-94.

ized that without Russia's support, the "colored revolutions" could also occur in their countries.<sup>135</sup>

The US and the EU have made support conditional on reforms like civil society and a free-market economy, political transformation, etc. On the other hand, Russia does not have any demands from the regional governments. Therefore, the Central Asian states consider Russia a reliable partner because of the Russian government's autocratic regimes' political support. In general, some aspects of Russia's presence in the region give impulse to such issues.<sup>136</sup>

- the parliamentary democracy as a system in Western countries is not applicable in the regional states of Central Asia, except Kyrgyzstan;
- Political reforms cannot be realized;
- A permanent crackdown on civil society;
- The restriction of the activities of the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO).

### 3.4.1 Russia in the South Caucasus

Even after the SU's collapse and the involvement of Western political actors in the region's geopolitics, Russia is still one of the significant political actors in the South Caucasus. Since the South Caucasus, like other regions of the post-Soviet space, is considered by Russia as its own "backyard," the Kremlin,<sup>137</sup> even after the USSR's downfall, is an outside player and still follows its imperialistic interests in the region. Therefore, the Kremlin is persuaded that other political actors like the USA, EU, and Turkey will have a more active regional policy if Russia is not present in the area.<sup>138</sup>

The South Caucasus is one of the few regions on the world's geopolitical map where two of three neighboring states have no interstate relations with each other. There are no diplomatic relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia, while the Georgian state has no "functional" interstate ties with the Kremlin. Due to the existence of "frozen conflicts," the South Caucasus is easy for Russia to intervene.<sup>139</sup> It is possible that the South Caucasus could turn into a very peaceful and prosperous if the conflicts are resolved.

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135 Laruelle, M. (2009). Russia in Central Asia: Old history, new challenges?. EU-Central Asia Monitoring (EUCAM) Working Paper, 2(3), 20–39.

136 Laruelle (2009).

137 Peña-Ramos (2017).

138 Boonstra, J. (2015). The South Caucasus and its wider neighbourhood. FRIDE, Cascade Working Paper.

139 Ibid.

However, the conflicts keep this region extremely vulnerable and unstable. The Kremlin's interest in resolving the disputes would be a crucial step toward their regulation.<sup>140</sup>

The war against Georgia in 2008 was a demonstration of power by Russia and a strong message to the West. The Kremlin achieved its short-term tasks, such as the increase of "military spirit" in Russia, an attempt at self-affirmation as a world power, a demonstration of its military strength to the West, etc.<sup>141</sup> Besides, given the fact that Georgia has a close partnership with NATO<sup>142</sup> and it is expected that Georgia might become a member of NATO in the future, Russia's aggression can be seen as a demonstration of power to avoid a potential expansion of NATO in the region.<sup>143</sup> Long-term goals such as Russia's acceptance as a part of the international community and Russia's peaceful intentions towards other countries of the post-Soviet Region failed unambiguously because of the Russian government's aggressive policy towards neighbor states.<sup>144</sup> Simultaneously, the violence against its neighbors has increased the international community's suspicion of Russia.<sup>145</sup>

Russia is very interested in instability in the region.<sup>146</sup> Therefore, the military troops of Russia train permanently in by Russian military troops' occupied territories. For instance, in the summer of 2017, 16000 soldiers participated in the training held in Georgia's officially recognized territory. Russian military actions in Georgia's occupied territories violated Russia and Georgia's agreement after the war in 2008.<sup>147</sup>

Georgia cannot afford an open military confrontation with Russian military power due to its relatively modest potential. However, the West also tries to avoid a confrontation with the Kremlin to prevent damaging its political and especially economic interests with Russia. For instance, since Russia is the largest natural gas supplier for the EU, Brussels is involved in stabilizing the South Caucasus "half-

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140 Peña-Ramos (2017).

141 Cornell, S. E., & Starr, S. F. (Eds.). (2009). *The guns of August 2008: Russia's war in Georgia*. ME Sharpe.

142 Nilsson, N. (2018). *Russian hybrid tactics in Georgia*. Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program. <http://isdpc.eu/content/uploads/2018/01/Russian-Hybrid-Tactics-in-Georgia.Pdf> (Accessed June, 2018).

143 Karagiannis, E. (2013). The 2008 Russian–Georgian war via the lens of Offensive Realism. *European Security*, 22(1), 74–93.

144 Jonsson, O., & Seely, R. (2015). Russian full-spectrum conflict: An appraisal after Ukraine. *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 28(1), 1–22.

145 Nixey, J. (2012). *The Long Goodbye: Waning Russian Influence in the South Caucasus and Central Asia*. Chatham House.

146 *Ibid.*

147 Phillips, D. (2011). *Six Point Ceasefire Agreement between Russia and Georgia* (pp. 1–30). The National Committee on American Foreign Policy.

hearted.”<sup>148</sup> Consequently, the EU indirectly recognizes Russia as the dominant power in the South Caucasus.

Russia sees the USA and EU's political presence as a danger to its interests in the region. In that case, Turkey is a relatively less dangerous political actor for the Kremlin. Turkey is an active member of NATO, but at the same time, it has strategic relations with Moscow while there are several sanctions of the EU and the USA against Russia.<sup>149</sup>

The USA is a key political actor in the South Caucasus. The former Vice-President of the USA, Mike Pence, pointed out that Georgia has an essential meaning for the USA and is a strategic partner of the USA in the region during his visit to Georgia.<sup>150</sup>

“At this very moment, just 40 miles from where we stand, Russian tanks stand on occupied territory in South Ossetia. Today, Russia continues to occupy one-fifth of Georgian territory. To be clear, the United States of America strongly condemns Russia's occupation on Georgia's soil. The United States supports Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders. And under President Donald Trump, the United States of America will reject any claim, at any time, by any nation that undermines this enduring principle.”

A couple of days later, the chief of the Kremlin answered the former Vice President of the US during his visit to Abkhazia: “*Russia reliably guarantees the safety and independence of Abkhazia.*”<sup>151</sup>

Because of Azerbaijan's crucial strategic position<sup>152</sup> in the continent of Eurasia between the North and the South, the East and the West,<sup>153</sup> Russia pays attention to Baku in its South Caucasian policy. Several critical policy decisions by the Russian government show that the Kremlin is very much interested in:

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148 Meister S, (2013), p. 3.

149 Boonstra (2015).

150 Georgiaembassyusa.org. (August 18, 2017). US Vice President Mike Pence Visits Georgia. Retrieved April 25, 2023, from <http://web.archive.org/web/20180523033502/http://georgiaembassyusa.org/2017/08/18/us-vice-president-mike-pence-visits-georgia>

151 Novosti.ru. (n.d.). (August 8, 2017). Retrieved April 25, 2023, from <http://web.archive.org/web/20181123003924/https://www.ntv.ru/novosti/1893658/>

152 Mehdiyeva, N. (2003). Azerbaijan and its foreign policy dilemma. *Asian Affairs*, 34(3), 271–285.

153 Ibrahimov, R. (2014). US-Azerbaijan Relations: A View from Baku. *Rethink Paper*, 17.

- The establishment of Russian military bases in Azerbaijan;<sup>154</sup>
- The acceptance of Russia by the Azerbaijani government as the only political actor in the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia;<sup>155</sup>
- The export of Azerbaijani oil and natural gas resources via Russian territory;<sup>156</sup>
- Azerbaijan joining the EEU and CSTO.<sup>157</sup>

The Azerbaijani government understands that it has to adhere to a realistic political vision that integrating with the West is the only possible policy to neutralize Russian hegemony towards the state.<sup>158</sup> However, the Kremlin possesses essential levers against Azerbaijan, which should also be taken into consideration:

- Russia is the most important trade partner for Azerbaijan. Almost half of its trade rate falls to Russia's share, so the Russian market has vital meaning for Azerbaijan.<sup>159</sup>
- A substantial ethnic Russian minority population lives in Azerbaijan.
- The ethnic minorities, Lezgins and Talyshs<sup>160</sup> living in Azerbaijan can also be used by the Kremlin to destabilize the situation in Azerbaijan.<sup>161</sup>

Russia has a crucial role in resolving conflicts in the region. However, the disputes will only be resolved if Russia sees them as essential leverage to intervene in Armenia's, Azerbaijan's, and Georgia's internal issues. Therefore, Russia proved with its so-called "5-day war" against Georgia and the ongoing war in the territory of Ukraine once again that the Kremlin is ready to use all possible ways to keep its dominance

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154 Norberg, J., Westerlund, F., & Franke, U. (2014). The Crimea operation. Implications for future Russian military interventions. *A Rude awakening. Ramifications of Russian aggression towards Ukraine*, 41–50.

155 Cornell, S. E. (1999). *The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict*. Uppsala Universitet.

156 Ibrahimov, R. (2010). Azerbaijan Energy Strategy and the Importance of the Diversification of Exported Transport Routes. *Journal of Qafqaz University*, (29).

157 Oxford Analytica. (2020). Russia reviews Karabakh priorities to remain relevant. *Emerald Expert Briefings*, (oxan-db).

158 Cornell, S. E. (2015). *Azerbaijan since independence*. Routledge.

159 Huseynov, H. H., Jafarov, I. H., Vermeer, M., & Gaplaev, M. S. (2021, January). The modern pace of development and perspectives of horticulture in Azerbaijan. In *IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science* (Vol. 624, No. 1, p. 012197). IOP Publishing.

160 Starr, S. F., & Cornell, S. E. (Eds.). (2014). *Putin's grand strategy: the Eurasian Union and its discontents*. Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, Joint Transatlantic Research and Policy Center, Johns Hopkins University, School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS).

161 Blank, S. (2013). Azerbaijan's security and US interests: Time for a reassessment. *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute*, Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies.

in the region.<sup>162</sup> Russian diplomacy and its military presence in the South Caucasus serve to keep the current limbo and prevent the region's continuous stability.<sup>163</sup>

### 3.5 Turkey

Being an important political actor in the South Caucasus and Central Asia, Turkey has a tremendous political influence on the Caspian Region's regional states alongside other international political actors: the USA, China, Russia, and the EU. In addition, Turkey has close linguistic and historical ties with the region, and this "soft power" gives it extra leverage in its foreign policy toward the regional states.

In general, two points characterize the interests of Turkey in the Caspian Region:

- Functional political<sup>164</sup> and economic<sup>165</sup> relations with the regional states;
- The diversification of its energy sources by making use of the significant energy reserves of the region;

The policy of Turkey in the region can be divided into two periods:

- The first period spanned the Cold War when Turkey was not a significant political player in Central Asia because the USSR's existence did not enable Turkey to pursue an active policy in the Caspian Region.
- However, Central Asia became significant for Turkey after the Cold War and the USSR's fall. Nevertheless, since the Turkish government was not ready for the SU's collapse, Turkey had no strategic approach regarding its policy toward the new state of the region.<sup>166</sup>

Turkey possesses some "soft power" instruments regarding its regional policy. A shared language and historical ties make Turkey a desirable partner for Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Kyrgyzstan. Consequently, all Turkic-

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162 Mearsheimer, J. J. (2014). Why the Ukraine crisis is the West's fault: the liberal delusions that provoked Putin. *Foreign Aff.*, 93, 77.

163 Boonstra (2015).

164 Mearsheimer, J. J. (2014). Why the Ukraine crisis is the West's fault: the liberal delusions that provoked Putin. *Foreign Aff.*, 93, 77.

165 Boonstra (2015).

166 Mikail, E. H., Atun, Y., & Atun, A. (2019). Turkey-Azerbaijan Economical and Political Relations. *Open Journal of Political Science*, 9(3), 512–524.

speaking countries consider Turkey a kind of model state because of its secular statehood model and close cooperation with the West.<sup>167</sup>

Pan-Turkism<sup>168</sup> covers more than 120 million Turkic people and the area from West China to the Mediterranean Sea. In the first years after the SU's collapse, there was an idea to establish a union of Turkic states with a common market. Moreover, an international organization was founded to coordinate the Turkic culture's collective development in 1992. The states of the Post-Soviet Region: Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkey, became member countries. Consequently, the Parliamentary Assembly of Turkic-Speaking Countries (TurkPA) was established in 2008,<sup>169</sup> and one year later, in 2009, the Council of Turkic Speaking Countries, or with its other name, the "Turkic Council."<sup>170</sup>

Turkey started to follow a more "offensive" policy in the Caspian Region after the Justice and Development (AKP) Islamic conservative party came to power. Turkey created close relations with the states of the Caspian Region.<sup>171</sup> In the 1990s and the 2000s, Turkey was trying to move closer to the West. However, Ankara adheres to a more independent political course today.<sup>172</sup>

The energy resources of the region are of tremendous importance to Turkey. Turkey's role as a middleman between the Caspian region's energy exporters and the energy market is continuously growing as Turkey's geopolitical assertiveness increases in the area. Turkey is the primary opponent of Russia in the "pipeline policy" of the Caspian Region.<sup>173</sup> Since the USA is very interested in undermining Russia's energy transport monopoly, Washington supports Turkey's role as a critical energy transport country.

Consequently, Turkey is still a close partner of the West, especially of the USA in the region,<sup>174</sup> despite a relatively stagnate period in relations between the two coun-

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167 Kardaş, Ş., & Macit, F. (2015). Turkey-Azerbaijan relations: The economic dimension. *Journal of Caspian Affairs*, 1(1), 23–46.

168 The ideological movement appeared in the 80th of the 19 century and implied all Turkic peoples' cultural and political unification.

169 Durdular, E. (2017). Parliamentary Assembly of Turkic-speaking Countries TurkPA: Beyond Parliamentary Diplomacy. *PERCEPTIONS: Journal of International Affairs*, 22(1), 115–142.

170 Voeten, E., Strezhev, A., & Bailey, M. (2010). TURKPA Commission on International Relations, and "Recommendation on Basic Aspects and Prospects of TURKPA's International Cooperation."

171 Erşen, E. (2013). The evolution of 'Eurasia' as a geopolitical concept in post-cold war Turkey. *Geopolitics*, 18(1), 24–44.

172 Kutlay, M., & Dogan, S. (2011). Turkey and Central Asia: Modern Economic Linkages along the Silk Road. *Revue Analyse Financiere Q*, 1, 2011.

173 Orazgaliyev, S. (2017). Competition for pipeline export routes in the Caspian region: The new Great Game of the new Silk Road?. *Cambridge Journal of Eurasian Studies*, 1(5B75G8).

174 Öniş, Z., & Yılmaz, Ş. (2016). Turkey and Russia in a shifting global order: cooperation, conflict and asymmetric interdependence in a turbulent region. *Third World Quarterly*, 37(1), 71–95.

tries during the presidency of Barack Obama and Donald Trump. Even though it could be expected that the Biden administration will follow more reserved political and economic ties with Ankara, the years of Biden's presidency showed that Turkey is still a significant partner for Washington. Meanwhile, Turkey profits from the partnership relations with the Kremlin. Russia's position is undeniable in Ankara's energy security policy.<sup>175</sup> For this reason, the AKP government tries to keep a "balance" in its policy between the West and Russia.

Turkey's geographical location between the European energy market and the rich energy sources in the north, east, and south of the country creates an excellent opportunity for Turkey to be considered an "energy bridge" between Asia and Europe.<sup>176</sup> Even though there are some substantial disagreements between the EU and the Turkish government on some issues like the refugee crisis, the internal and foreign policy of Turkey, the essential role of Turkey as a transit hub for crucial natural gas and oil projects of the EU makes collaboration between Ankara and Brussels vital for both sides. Therefore, Turkey has emerged as one of the key political actors in the region in the last 10–15 years and plays a crucial role in exporting natural gas and oil resources from the Caspian region to the European energy market, and has become the "energy hub" for Europe.<sup>177</sup>

The EU has invested significant capital in energy projects with the participation of Turkey. For instance, one of the recent years' critical projects, the SGC natural gas project, is a strategic project increasing Turkey's importance for the EU. The natural gas transported from Azerbaijan goes through Turkey to the EU countries. Bypassing massive Russian territory is another essential point for all participating political actors. Therefore, the natural gas project helps the EU diversify its natural gas supplier sources and decreases its dependency on Russia, if not significantly. However, it is still a positive sign for the energy security of the EU.<sup>178</sup>

Turkey has implemented a somewhat successful energy policy, which has secured significant volumes of hydrocarbons and attracted enormous investments for the realization of ambitious energy transportation projects.<sup>179</sup>

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- 175 Yermekbayev, A., Khairullayeva, V., Iztayeva, V., Zhuztayeva, B., & Doszhanova, A. (2020). Relations Between Turkey and Russia in the Context of Energy Partnership. *International Journal of Energy Economics and Policy*, 10(4), 166.
- 176 Austvik, O. G., & Rzayeva, G. (2017). Turkey in the geopolitics of energy. *Energy Policy*, 107, 539–547.
- 177 Fischer, S. (2016). Turkey and the Energy Transit Question ". *Carnegie Europe*, 23.
- 178 Ala'Aldeen et al. (2018).
- 179 Koranyi, D., & Sartori, N. (2013). EU-Turkish energy relations in the context of EU accession negotiations: focus on natural gas. *Global Turkey in Europe II*, 23.

Turkey is a transport country for some projects like the BTC oil pipeline. Parallel to the BTC is the SGC pipeline from Azerbaijan, the Kirkuk–Ceyhan oil pipeline from Iraq, and the Tabriz–Ankara gas pipeline from Iran also go through the Turkish territory. It is around 3% of the world's energy export.<sup>180</sup>

Ankara's active involvement in the region's political and energy spheres is outside Moscow's interest, even though they are strategic partners in some spheres. For this reason, the Kremlin tries to prevent Turkey's active role in energy projects.<sup>181</sup>

### 3.6 Iran

Iran is one of the five states of the Caspian Sea. Iran is the region's second most important political actor considering its economic and political strength. The Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) policy often varies from other regional states' approaches.

In general, the policy of the IRI in the Caspian Region is divided into some stages:

- *The first stage* spans some significant political events like the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979,<sup>182</sup> which changed not only the internal and foreign policy of Iran<sup>183</sup> but also the existence of the country, the fall of the USSR, and the acquisition of independence by Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan.
- *The second stage* is associated with the Iranian government's understanding of the importance of the Caspian Region. By the end of the 1990s, Iran became very interested in realizing energy projects and having close bilateral relations with Russia.<sup>184</sup> Meanwhile, relations with Russia are vital for Iran because of its hostile relations with the West, especially with the USA. By that time, the political confrontation between Russia and the USA in the Caspian Region reached its highest intensity. Iran has become an active political actor in this political confrontation.<sup>185</sup>

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180 Ala'Aldeen et al. (2018).

181 Ivanova, I. (2019). Turkey in Central Asia: a Partner or a Rival?. *Asia and Africa today*, (7), 39–47.

182 Dabashi, H. (2017). *Theology of discontent: The ideological foundation of the Islamic revolution in Iran*. Routledge.

183 Rakel, E. P. (2007). Iranian foreign policy since the Iranian Islamic revolution: 1979–2006. *Perspectives on Global Development and Technology*, 6(1-3), 159–187.

184 Tabatabai, A., & Esfandiary, D. (2018). *Triple-Axis: Iran's Relations with Russia and China*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

185 Rasoulinezhad, E. (2016). Investigation of sanctions and oil price effects on the Iran-Russia trade by using the gravity model. *Вестник Санкт-Петербургского университета. Экономика*, (2).

- *The third stage* might have started with the removal of most UN sanctions against Iran in January 2016 because Iran agreed with the conditions of the international community regarding its nuclear program.<sup>186</sup> However, the presidential administration of Donald Trump decided to prolong the sanctions package.

Iran possesses significant oil and natural gas reserves. The energy reserves of Iran are tremendous. Iran is the only state in the Caspian region that is a member of OPEC. After Saudi Arabia, Iran has the largest oil reserves in the world. Consequently, Iran is among the ten oil and five natural gas wealthiest countries in the world.<sup>187</sup>

According to the EIA's report, Iran's crude oil output reached 4.7 million barrels per day (mbd) and 7.2 tcf (trillion cubic feet) of dry natural gas in 2017.<sup>188</sup> The BP's Statistical Review of World Energy 2017 reports that Iran possesses around 18% of the total proven world natural gas reserves, while Russia, with its 33.5 tcm (trillion cubic meters), and Qatar with 24.3 tcm natural gas reserves follow Iran and hold the second and third places respectively. According to EIA's report, Iran possesses the world's fourth-largest proved crude oil reserves. At the same time, Iran is the second-largest natural gas holder in the world.<sup>189</sup>

Iran's oil production decreased because of numerous sanctions against the Iranian government. However, after the lifting of sanctions, it had been considered an increase in oil production by 2017, even for a short period, so the oil production reached more than 3.8 million bpd by 2017.<sup>190</sup>

Despite its wealthy natural gas and oil resources, Iran cannot attract international investors to develop its energy resources. Other new Caspian Sea states have collaborated with major global energy companies since the USSR's fall. The international economic sanctions are the main hurdle towards involving international energy companies in Iran's energy sector.<sup>191</sup>

Iran was the closest ally of the West, especially of the USA, until 1979. The neighboring USSR, as well as Communism, was seen as a significant threat to Iranian

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186 Katzman, K., & Kerr, P. K. (2016). Iran nuclear agreement. Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service.

187 EIA.gov. (January 7, 2019). Country Analysis Executive Summary: Iran. Retrieved April 25, 2023, from [http://web.archive.org/web/20210308112051/https://www.eia.gov/international/content/analysis/countries\\_long/iran/pdf/iran\\_exe.pdf](http://web.archive.org/web/20210308112051/https://www.eia.gov/international/content/analysis/countries_long/iran/pdf/iran_exe.pdf)

188 Ibid.

189 IENE.eu. Iran Holds 18% of Total Global Proven Gas Reserves. Retrieved April 25, 2023, from <http://web.archive.org/web/20200223055919/http://www.iene.eu/iran-holds-18-of-total-global-proven-gas-reserves-p3510.html>

190 EIA.gov. (January 7, 2019).

191 Ahmadi, A. (2018). The impact of economic sanctions and the JCPOA on the energy sector of Iran. *Global Trade and Customs Journal*, 13(5).

statehood. However, the Islamic Revolution and the USSR's fall changed the geopolitical balance in the region dramatically.<sup>192</sup>

Jimmy Carter's administration implemented the first sanctions against the Iranian government in 1979. The sanctions restricted the bilateral relations between the USA and Iran in financial, trade, energy, and other spheres.<sup>193</sup> The international sanctions against Iran were adopted in 2006 when the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) found centrifuges for uranium enrichment in Iran. As a result, it was guessed that Iran intends to create a weapon of mass destruction. With the election of Hassan Rouhani after the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad,<sup>194</sup> who was well known for his offensive political course against the West, the situation started to change slightly.<sup>195</sup> The Iranian government announced its readiness to cooperate with the international community and discussed its "nuclear program."<sup>196</sup>

In July 2015, the USA, China, Great Britain, France, Russia, and Germany signed an agreement on removing economic sanctions against Iran. According to this agreement, Iran accepted the conditions concerning its refusal to develop the nuclear program further. It allowed access of the UN to its nuclear development and military bases.<sup>197</sup> However, the final decision on Iran's sanctions was made only in January 2017 when the IAEA announced that Iran fulfilled its obligations.<sup>198</sup>

The lifting of the sanctions might have influenced the economy of Iran in a very positive way. It would have allowed Iran to export its oil and natural gas resources to the world energy market. The relations between the USA and Iran started going in a positive direction close to the end of Barack Obama's presidency. However, the situation changed once more under Donald Trump's administration. Consequently, the new administration announced the pulling out of the USA from the nuclear deal with Iran.<sup>199</sup>

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192 Blight, J. G., Banai, H., Byrne, M., & Tirman, J. (2012). *Becoming enemies: US-Iran relations and the Iran-Iraq war, 1979–1988*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

193 Ibid.

194 Beeman, W. O. (2006). *After Ahmadinejad: the prospects for US–Iranian relations*. Iranian challenges, Chaillot Papers, 89, 96.

195 Ansari, A. M. (2019). *Iran, Islam and democracy: The politics of managing change*. Gingko Library.

196 Katzman & Kerr (2016).

197 BBC News. (11 June, 2019). Iran nuclear deal: Key details. Retrieved April 25, 2021, from (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://web.archive.org/web/20210320230915/https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-33521655>

198 Daugirdas, K., & Mortenson, J. D. (2016). *Contemporary practice of the United States relating to international law*.

199 Pompeo, M. (2018). *After the Deal: A New Iran Strategy*. US Department of State, 21.

Internationally isolated Iran looked for new partners to avoid a political and economic crisis in the country. Therefore, Iran joined the SCO still in 2004.<sup>200</sup> The other member countries of the SCO are China, Russia, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. The SCO's role for Tehran is characterized by the following aspects:<sup>201</sup>

- Tehran sees its membership in the organization as a good chance to establish its influence in Central Asia through collaboration with Beijing and Moscow.
- SCO is a military alliance. Therefore, Iran protects itself against the West through its membership in the organization.
- The economic relations, especially with two “locomotive political actors” of the SCO: China<sup>202</sup> and Russia<sup>203</sup> is the only possible way for Iran's economic “survival.”
- SCO makes it possible for Tehran to take an active role in the region's energy projects so that Iran can export its energy resources to growing energy markets like India and China.

The state relations between Tehran and Baku were always very intense.<sup>204</sup> For instance, the two countries' relationships deteriorated once more because of an adverse incident between the two countries in 2001.<sup>205</sup> Iranian ships threatened an Azerbaijani vessel and did not allow the vessel to accomplish its mission in the Caspian Sea.<sup>206</sup> It was not the only case when Iran showed its aggressive attitude toward its neighbor. For instance, Iran's airplanes have violated Azerbaijani space many times since Azerbaijan became independent. Another essential aspect of unfriendly Iranian policy against the Azerbaijani state is the strategic relations

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- 200 Song, W. (2014). Interests, power, and China's challenging game in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). *Journal of Contemporary China*, 23(85), 85-101.
- 201 Allison, R. (2018). Protective integration and security policy coordination: Comparing the SCO and CSTO. *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 11(3), 297-338.
- 202 Nejhad, F. (2016). An elaboration on the Iran-China relations in the path towards and after Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. *International Journal Series in Multidisciplinary Research (IJSMR)* (ISSN: 2455-2461), 2(4), 57-63.
- 203 Koolae, E., Mousavi, H., & Abedi, A. (2020). Fluctuations in Iran-Russia Relations During the Past Four Decades. *Iran and the Caucasus*, 24(2), 216-232.
- 204 Hasanli, J. (2006). *At the Dawn of the Cold War: The Soviet-American Crisis over Iranian Azerbaijan, 1941-1946*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- 205 New York Times. (July 25, 2001). Iran is accused of threatening research vessel in Caspian Sea. Retrieved April 25, 2023, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2001/07/25/world/iran-is-accused-of-threatening-research-vessel-in-caspian-sea.html>
- 206 Nassibli, N. (2003). IRAN'S CASPIAN POLICY: TIME TO MAKE A DECISION?. *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, 10.

between Azerbaijan and Israel, so official Tehran treats the strategic partnership between these states as a significant threat to its security.<sup>207</sup>

### 3.7 Azerbaijan

The SU's fall made Azerbaijan an independent country on 18 October 1991, alongside the other 14 states of the former SU. The country faced many problems during the first years of its freedom. The economic difficulties, occupation of almost 20% of the territory in Nagorno-Karabakh and seven surrounding districts-Kalbajar, Lachin, Qubadli, Jabrayil, Zangilan, Agdam, Fuzuli, which are officially recognized by international law as an integral part of Azerbaijan, the problem of one million refugees, the overthrow of a democratically elected president, the civil war in the country, and social issues were some of many issues that Azerbaijan faced in the first years of its independence.<sup>208</sup>

Due to its crucial geostrategic position bordering one of the world's two energy-richest basins, the Caspian Sea, between Europe and Asia, and on the crossroad of the "Silk Road," Azerbaijan plays an essential role in the political and economic constellation of Eurasia.<sup>209</sup> Additionally, the traditional and new communication, transport, and energy corridors also pass through this country.<sup>210</sup>

Therefore, Azerbaijan connects the North with the South and the East with the West. Azerbaijan's strategic geographical location enables the USA and Russia to fight terrorism by establishing security in the region and controlling close-located unstable areas.<sup>211</sup> Consequently, Azerbaijan is located on the North Caucasus's border, one of the terroristic groups' central locations. The terrorists from the North Caucasus fight in Iraq,<sup>212</sup> Afghanistan, Syria, and other unstable parts of the Middle East for the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), Jabhat al-Nusra, and other terror groups.<sup>213</sup>

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207 Göksel, O. (2015). Beyond countering Iran: A political economy of Azerbaijan-Israel relations. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 42(4), 655–675.

208 Cornell, S. E. (1998). Turkey and the conflict in Nagorno Karabakh: a delicate balance. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 34(1), 51–72.

209 Llanelli, B., 2016. Azerbaijan in the Silk Road Economic Belt: A Chinese Perspective. *Caucasus International*, 6(1), pp.27–39.

210 Cornell (2015).

211 Nichol (2012, September).

212 International Crisis Group. (2016). The North Caucasus Insurgency and Syria: An Exported Jihad?. Report no. 238 Europe and Central Asia.

213 Ratelle, J. F. (2016). North Caucasian foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq: Assessing the threat of returnees to the Russian Federation. *Caucasus Survey*, 4(3), 218–238.

The NATO army troops and planes can fly to Afghanistan through Azerbaijani territory. For instance, almost 40% of fuel, arms, food, and other cargo destined for Afghanistan's NATO mission were transported through Azerbaijan. Moreover, Azerbaijani peacekeeping forces have fought with other peacekeeping troops of NATO in Iraq, Kosovo, and Afghanistan.<sup>214</sup>

Azerbaijan is crucial to these political actors' policies as the largest economy and energy-rich country in the South Caucasus. For this reason, being located in such a complex region and the neighborhood of some critical states of the Eurasian continent, such as Iran, Russia, and Turkey,<sup>215</sup> Azerbaijan has to adhere to a stringent foreign policy because a bit of carelessness in its foreign policy might have fatal consequences for its existence.

The EU is the only political actor in the South Caucasus that adheres to a "soft policy," so it is probably one of Azerbaijan's most reliable and welcomed political actors. The relations between Azerbaijan and the EU have a strategic character for both political actors.<sup>216</sup> Consequently, the EU is more interested in an equal bilateral partnership than political dominance over Azerbaijan. The Azerbaijani Republic has been a member of the EC since 2001. The Azerbaijani government is aware that having a close partnership with the West can soften Russia's political and economic dominance.<sup>217</sup> However, the Kremlin's influence over the Azerbaijani government is so noticeable that Baku rejected signing an association agreement with the EU in 2014.<sup>218</sup>

Azerbaijan has been one of the member countries of the EU's ENP since 2004. An action plan was signed between Azerbaijan and the EU in 2006, consisting of a memorandum of understanding in the energy branch. The EU and Azerbaijan concluded another protocol within the Production Sharing Agreement (PSA) for Azerbaijan's participation in selected EU programmers and agencies.<sup>219</sup>

Baku is interested in having an active bilateral partnership with the EU, mainly in trade and economic collaboration,<sup>220</sup> and energy cooperation. However, the Azer-

214 Azernews. (December 4, 2017). Defense Ministry: Azerbaijan will increase its peacekeeping contingent in Afghanistan. Retrieved April 25, 2023, from <http://web.archive.org/web/20190201035523/https://www.azernews.az/nation/123389.html>

215 Cornell et.al. (2015).

216 Altunışık, M. B., & Tannisever, O. F. (Eds.). (2017). *The South Caucasus-Security, Energy and Europeanization*. Routledge.

217 Hasanov et.al. (2020)

218 Cornell (2015).

219 Gurbanov, I. (2017). Strategic Partnership Agreement: A New Chapter in EU-Azerbaijan Relations. *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 14(84).

220 European Parliament. (April 2017). Azerbaijan: Geopolitics and challenging dialogue. Retrieved April 27, 2023, from [http://web.archive.org/web/20190527184836/http://www.euro.parl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2017/599418/EPRS\\_BRI\(2017\)599418\\_EN.pdf](http://web.archive.org/web/20190527184836/http://www.euro.parl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2017/599418/EPRS_BRI(2017)599418_EN.pdf)

bajjani government intends to refrain from joining the EU.<sup>221</sup> It is a fundamental reason for the unwillingness of Baku to have more functional political relations with the EU. Angela Merkel's words pronounced during her official meeting with the Azerbaijani president in Berlin in 2015 indirectly stress the influence of the Kremlin over the Azerbaijani government:<sup>222</sup>

“Azerbaijan would like – if I have understood correctly – to have positive cooperation with the EU.”

EU sees Azerbaijan as an alternative energy supply source to the traditional energy sources: Russia and the Middle East.<sup>223</sup> The BTC oil pipeline connecting Central Asia with the Mediterranean Sea via Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey is an excellent example of an energy partnership between the EU and Azerbaijan. Another grandiose energy deal is the South Caucasus Pipeline (SCP) natural gas pipeline. To this project was invested €42 bn. investment.<sup>224</sup>

Azerbaijani natural gas is the only new natural gas source for Europe.<sup>225</sup> Since the natural gas project will play a modest role in ensuring of energy security of Europe<sup>226</sup> and relatively decrease the energy dependence of Europe from Russia, the SGC is supported by Europe very actively.<sup>227</sup> The USA also supports the project because of energy security in Europe. Therefore, the former president of the USA, Donald Trump, expressed his support for this project during its construction. He emphasized that this project has an essential meaning for the energy security of Europe:<sup>228</sup>

“I really appreciate our partnership with Azerbaijan, and I expect it to develop further. The US remains committed to the implementation of the “Southern Gas Corridor” project. I appreciate the significant efforts of Azerbaijan in maintaining energy security. I am ready for cooperation with you.”

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- 221 Bocse, A. M. (2019). EU energy diplomacy: Searching for new suppliers in Azerbaijan and Iran. *Geopolitics*, 24(1), 145-173.
- 222 Euractiv.com. (January 23, 2015). Germany calls Azerbaijan ‘an increasingly important partner. Retrieved April 26, 2021, from <http://web.archive.org/web/20210211021458/https://www.euractiv.com/section/sports/news/germany-calls-azerbaijan-an-increasingly-important-partner/>
- 223 Baran, Z. (2007). EU energy security: time to end Russian leverage. *Washington Quarterly*, 30(4), 131-144.
- 224 Bocse (2019).
- 225 European Parliament, [http://web.archive.org/web/20190527184836/http://www.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2017/599418/EPRS\\_BRI\(2017\)599418\\_EN.pdf](http://web.archive.org/web/20190527184836/http://www.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2017/599418/EPRS_BRI(2017)599418_EN.pdf)
- 226 Bocse (2019).
- 227 Hasanov et.al. (2020).
- 228 Siddi, M. (2019). The EU's botched geopolitical approach to external energy policy: The case of the Southern Gas Corridor. *Geopolitics*, 24(1), 124-144.

Energy resources are not the only factor that makes Azerbaijan important in Western states' policy towards Azerbaijan. The unfriendly relations between the West and Iran make Azerbaijan an important political actor in the West's regional policy, especially of the USA.<sup>229</sup> Therefore, even though Azerbaijan is criticized by US officials often because of human rights, free media, and freedom of speech policies in the country, Azerbaijan has a critical role in the USA's regional policy.<sup>230</sup> Besides, Israel, the closest ally of the US in the international political arena, has warm and perspective relations with Azerbaijan.<sup>231</sup>

In its turn, Azerbaijan tries to keep neutral relations with Iran. Even though both countries' population belongs predominantly to the Shia sect of Islam, the two states' relationships were always "distanced." In Iran, almost 35 million ethnic Azerbaijanis live.<sup>232</sup> However, the relations between Iran and Azerbaijan are not "friendly" because of some crucial factors:

- The secular and liberal form of Islam in Azerbaijan is perceived skeptically<sup>233</sup> by the fundamentalist regime of Iran,<sup>234</sup>
- Azerbaijan's strategic relations with Israel;<sup>235</sup>
- Cooperation between Iran and Armenia. Iran supports Armenia politically. Moreover, there are close economic relations between the two states. Additionally, the lion's share of Armenian natural gas need is supplied by Iran;<sup>236</sup>

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- 229 Eu.eot.su. (May 31, 2017). The US will continue to support the "Southern Gas Corridor" project. Retrieved April 26, 2021, from <https://web.archive.org/web/20171123203329/http://eu.eot.su/2017/05/31/the-us-will-continue-to-support-the-southern-gas-corridor-project/>
- 230 Valiyev, A. (2017). Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy: What Role for the West in the South Caucasus?. *Eastern Voices: Europe's East Faces an Unsettled West*, 135-149.
- 231 Alizada, U. (2015). *The Geopolitics of Azerbaijan: From Rivalry to Partnership between US and Iranian Interests* (Doctoral dissertation, Central European University).
- 232 Murinson, A. (2014). *The ties between Israel and Azerbaijan*. Ramat Gan, Israel: Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies.
- 233 Shaffer, B. (2002). *Borders and brethren: Iran and the challenge of Azerbaijani identity*. MIT Press.
- 234 Fateminasab, A. (2014). Investigating the challenges and barriers of convergence between Iran and republic of Azerbaijan. *Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Research*, 2(01), 51-57.
- 235 Souleimanov, E., & Ditrych, O. (2007). Iran and Azerbaijan: A contested neighborhood. *Middle East Policy*, 14(2), 101-116.
- 236 Fateminasab (2014).

Constant pressure by the Iranian government against the ethnic Azerbaijani population.<sup>237</sup>

Azerbaijan has to follow an accurate political course in the post-oil era. Considering the fall in prices of energy resources and Russia's aggressive policy towards its neighboring countries, the Azerbaijani government has to establish closer relations with the Western countries. Active ties with Western political actors such as the USA and the EU would play an essential role in Azerbaijan's political and economic development and decrease Russia's influence over Azerbaijan.

### 3.8 Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan is one of the five coastal states of the Caspian Sea, and it became independent after the decay of the SU, like Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan. Even though Kazakhstan is located on the Caspian Sea shore, it has some difficulties exporting energy to the world energy market due to the lack of direct access to the Caspian Sea. Like the other four states of the Caspian Sea, Kazakhstan possesses substantial energy resources, especially oil reserves. According to the Oil & Gas Journal (OGJ) report, the country possesses 30 bn. barrels (bb) of proved oil reserves.<sup>238</sup>

The importance of the energy industry for the country is tremendous. Therefore, the sudden collapse of the USSR put the newly independent state in a challenging situation. Kazakhstan suffered from a total absence of state institutions, unformed internal and foreign policy courses, economic difficulties, etc., like other former states of the former USSR.<sup>239</sup> However, the country's abundant energy resources enabled it to overcome some severe financial challenges in the first years of its independence.<sup>240</sup> Therefore, the binding energy contracts signed with the western energy companies helped the newly independent country maintain its sovereign

237 Kouhi-Esfahani, M. (2019). *Iran's Foreign Policy in the South Caucasus: Relations with Azerbaijan and Armenia*. Routledge.

238 EIA.gov. (May 10, 2017). Country Analysis Kazakhstan. Retrieved April 26, 2023, from [http://web.archive.org/web/20201217133324/http://www.ieee.es/en/Galerias/fichero/OtrasPublicaciones/Internacional/2017/EIA\\_Country\\_Analysis\\_Kazakhstan\\_10may2017.pdf](http://web.archive.org/web/20201217133324/http://www.ieee.es/en/Galerias/fichero/OtrasPublicaciones/Internacional/2017/EIA_Country_Analysis_Kazakhstan_10may2017.pdf)

239 Legvold, R. (Ed.). (2003). *Thinking strategically: The major powers, Kazakhstan, and the Central Asian nexus*. MIT Press.

240 Pomfret, R. (2005). Kazakhstan's economy since independence: Does the oil boom offer a second chance for sustainable development?. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 57(6), 859-876.

existence.<sup>241</sup> Moreover, an essential part of the state budget consists of incomes from the energy industry.<sup>242</sup>

Kazakhstan's former president, Nazarbayev's statement clearly describes the meaning of energy resources for Kazakhstan and its foreign policy:<sup>243</sup>

"At this time, our country is among the world's top ten countries by recoverable oil reserves. Kazakhstan holds the second-largest oil reserves outside OPEC... Apparently, such resources potentially place Kazakhstan among the world oil powers. We must become aware of our new geostrategic role in the global energy market, and develop our energy policy accordingly over the next ten to fifteen years. We find it essential to conduct an optimal, balanced, and transparent foreign policy. In the future, we are going to strengthen the reputation of Kazakhstan as a forward-looking, reliable international partner that contributes to global energy security with due consideration to its national interests stated.

There are some significant successes in the country's foreign policy achieved by the Kazakh government after over 30 years of sovereignty despite numerous troubles in the country's internal policy and democratic transformation. Therefore, Kazakhstan can be characterized as the most successful political actor among Central Asian states because of its achievements in the so-called "balanced policy"<sup>244</sup> between the West, China, and Russia.<sup>245</sup> Nazarbayev's government was keen to call this differentiated political partnership with different political actors a "multi-vector policy."<sup>246</sup> According to the Kazakh government, Astana has moderate political and economic relations with different political actors thanks to a "balanced policy." Consequently, the Kazakh government adheres to the "multi-vector policy" with various political actors that make it possible for Astana to maneuver between geopolitical actors and avoid its dependency on one particular actor.<sup>247</sup> The former prime

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241 Luong, P.J., & Weinthal, E. (2001). Prelude to the resource curse: Explaining oil and gas development strategies in the Soviet successor states and beyond. *Comparative Political Studies*, 34(4), 367-399.

242 Jumadilova, S. (2012). The Role of Oil and Gas Sector For The Economy of Kazakhstan. *International Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 6(3).

243 Cohen, A. (2008). *Kazakhstan: The Road to Independence: Energy Policy and the Birth of a Nation*. Silk Road Studies Program, Institute for Security and Development Policy [distribütör].

244 Diyarbakırlıoğlu, K., & Yiğit, S. (2014). Kazakh Multi Vector Foreign Policy in Action. *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations*, 13(4), 70-82.

245 Konopelko, A. (2018). Eurasian Economic Union: a challenge for EU policy towards Kazakhstan. *Asia Europe Journal*, 16(1), 1-17.

246 Hanks, R. R. (2009). 'Multi-vector politics' and Kazakhstan's emerging role as a geo-strategic player in Central Asia. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 11(3), 257-267.

247 Ibid.

minister and Director-General of the UN's Office at Geneva and current president of Kazakhstan, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, has the following opinion due to the “multi-vector policy” of Kazakhstan:<sup>248</sup>

“Several years ago, a blunt attitude to our relationship with Russia and China prevailed in some circles of the American establishment. They framed the issue this way “You are either with them or with us.” We kept explaining that as a key Central Asian state, Kazakhstan could not afford to have tense relations with its neighbors. This would contradict the country's long-term national interests and undermine regional security and stability... For us, relations with Russia, China, and the Central Asian countries are strategically important. Another policy course is simply not possible; it would be contrary to Kazakhstan's national interests.”

Some of the main directions of the “multi-vector” foreign policy of the country for 2014–2020 according to the concept of the foreign policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan approved by the Decree of the President of Kazakhstan of 21 January 2014 No. 741 are:<sup>249</sup>

- The ensuring of national security, defense potential, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of Kazakhstan.
- The strengthening of peace, regional and global security.
- The establishment of the democratic world order under the central and coordinating role of the UN.
- The further integration of the country to the world trade and economic system.
- The development of the economic potential of Kazakhstan etc.

The strategic paper: “Kazakhstan's way – 2050: common aim, common interests, common future” reflects the vital importance of cooperation and partnership with different political actors such as Russia, China, the Central Asian states, the EU, and the USA.<sup>250</sup>

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248 Cohen (2008).

249 Mfa.gov.kz. Concept foreign policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2014–2020 years. Retrieved April 25, 2023, from <http://mfa.gov.kz/en/content-view/kontseptsiya-vneshnoj-politiki-rk-na-2014-2020-gg>

250 Nazarbayev, N., & COURSE, N. P. (2013). Address by the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Leader of the Nation. Nazarbayev “Strategy Kazakhstan-2050”: new political course of the established state” Retrieved from [http://www.akorda.kz/en/page/page\\_address-by-the-president-of-the-republic-of-kazakhstan-leader-of-the-nation-n-nazarbayev-strategy-kazakhstan-2050-new-political-course-of-the-established-state\\_1357813742](http://www.akorda.kz/en/page/page_address-by-the-president-of-the-republic-of-kazakhstan-leader-of-the-nation-n-nazarbayev-strategy-kazakhstan-2050-new-political-course-of-the-established-state_1357813742)

Even though Kazakhstan's first president often underlined that Kazakhstan had to keep on a multi-vector approach between the West, China, and Russia, Russian political and economic influence on Kazakhstan and its government is undeniable.<sup>251</sup> The Kremlin possesses some tools of “soft power,”<sup>252</sup> which can be used in the case of a deterioration of interstate relations between Russia and Kazakhstan.<sup>253</sup> For instance, according to the World Population Review statistics for 2021, 23.7% of Kazakhstan's population consists of ethnic Russians.<sup>466</sup> The Russian language still has some privileges in Kazakhstan,<sup>254</sup> so it is unofficially the primary language of governmental institutions.<sup>255</sup>

Being Kazakhstan's ally, Russia has significant political and economic relations with Kazakhstan, and the two states cooperate in military, security, and even in cultural spheres.<sup>256</sup> The strategic cooperation between Russia and Kazakhstan covers some economic and political organizations and alliances like the Council of Heads of the CIS, CSTO, and SCO. Moreover, Kazakhstan is one of the key political actors of the EEU initiated by Moscow.

The establishment of the EEU was proposed by the end of 2011. However, the agreement for establishing the EEU was signed between the presidents of Russia, Vladimir Putin, Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, and Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev in Kazakhstan in May 2014. The agreement started to function in January 2015, and the member states of the EEU are Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Armenia.<sup>257</sup>

The primary purposes of the establishment of the EEU are:<sup>258</sup>

- Initiation of stable economic development of member countries.
- The member countries formed a united financial market for service, capital, and labor.

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- 251 Laruelle, M., Royce, D., & Beyssembayev, S. (2019). Untangling the puzzle of “Russia's influence” in Kazakhstan. *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 60(2), 211–243.
- 252 Zogg, B. (2019). Kazakhstan: A Centrepiece in China's Belt and Road. *CSS Analyses in Security Policy*, 249.
- 253 The Russian government has experience of leading of hybrid war in East Ukraine. [http://web.archive.org/web/20201230202750if\\_/https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/kazakhstan-Population](http://web.archive.org/web/20201230202750if_/https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/kazakhstan-Population)
- 254 Sabitova, Z., & Alishariyeva, A. (2015). The Russian language in Kazakhstan: status and functions. *Russian Journal of Communication*, 7(2), 213–217.
- 255 Laruelle et al. (2019).
- 256 Stevens, C. A. (2020). Russia–Kazakhstan Relations in the Early Post-Soviet Era: Explaining the Roots of Cooperation. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 72(7), 1153–1185.
- 257 Balakishi, S. (2016). Eurasian Economic Union: Russia's New Foreign Policy in the South Caucasus. Maastricht School of Management Working Paper, (2016/1).
- 258 Wilson, J. L. (2016). The Eurasian Economic Union and China's silk road: implications for the Russian– Chinese relationship. *European Politics and Society*, 17(sup1), 113–132.

- Economic cooperation between member states for modernization and increase of competitiveness of national economies.

Despite close relations with the Kremlin, Astana was very concerned with the annexation of Crimea and the “hybrid war”<sup>259</sup> leading by Russia in the territory of Ukraine.<sup>260</sup> The war initiated by the Russian government in February 2022 was accepted as another alarm signal by the current government of Kazakhstan. Therefore, the Russian government’s destructive policy in Ukraine<sup>261</sup> and in other former post-Soviet countries forced Kazakhstan to pursue a more cautious policy towards Moscow.<sup>262</sup>

One of the important actors in Kazakhstan’s multi-vector policy is the EU. The country is very interested in developing partnerships and cooperation with the EU. The EU and Kazakhstan signed an Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (EPCA) in Astana in December 2015. It was the first signed agreement between Brussels and a Central Asian state. The deal was ratified by all member states of the EU and the European Parliament (EP). The provision application started on 1 May 2016 and replaced the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement of 1999.<sup>263</sup>

Despite close bilateral relations with Russia and China, the EU is the largest trade partner of Kazakhstan. Over 30% of the trade of Kazakhstan is with the EU. Kazakhstan exports to the EU predominantly energy and some minerals, chemicals, and food products and the EU supplies Kazakhstan with machinery, transport equipment, and pharmaceuticals.<sup>264</sup> Kazakhstan imports from the EU some chemical products, plastics, medical devices, and furniture. The EU is the largest trade partner for Astana, and Brussels is Kazakhstan’s most significant foreign investor source. Therefore, over 50% of Kazakhstan’s Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) is from Brussels.<sup>265</sup>

China is a special political actor for Astana.<sup>266</sup> Its energy security and economic partnership in the region play a significant role for the Chinese government. There-

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259 Brletich, S. (2015). The Crimea model: will Russia annex the northern region of Kazakhstan?. *Geopolitics, History, and International Relations*, 7(1), 11–29.

260 Ibid.

261 Mearsheimer (2014).

262 Brletich (2015).

263 EEAS. (November 17, 2020). EU-Kazakhstan relations. Retrieved April 26, 2021, from [http://web.archive.org/web/20201228093014/https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage\\_en/4076/EU-Kazakhstan%20relations](http://web.archive.org/web/20201228093014/https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/4076/EU-Kazakhstan%20relations)

264 Kembayev, Z. (2016). Partnership between the European Union and the Republic of Kazakhstan: Problems and perspectives. *European Foreign Affairs Review*, 21(2).

265 Kembayev (2016).

266 Alff, H. (2014). Embracing Chinese modernity? Articulation and positioning in China-Kazakhstan trade and exchange processes.

fore, since Kazakhstan possesses the largest economy in Central Asia, Beijing pays special attention to its economic cooperation with Astana.<sup>267</sup> China's fast-growing raw material and energy demand and plentiful energy and natural resources are other factors making Kazakhstan a desirable partner for China. Alongside the country's energy industry, China has invested funds into the development of transport, uranium, heavy and light, and other industries.<sup>268</sup> Moreover, Kazakhstan is located at the crossroads of strategic overland routes connecting European and Middle East markets.

"The Silk Road Economic Belt" (SREB) project is an essential project between two states. SREB was suggested as a project by the Chinese president during his visit to Kazakhstan in 2013.<sup>269</sup> The project's primary goal is to establish transport corridors between China and Europe through Kazakhstan, Russia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey. The realization of the project needs the building of appropriate infrastructure along with transport ways.<sup>270</sup>

Kazakhstan is also relevant to Chinese security. Due to its geographical, ethnic, and confessional proximity to the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), the Chinese government leads a fight against Xinjiang's secessionist movement in the territory of Kazakhstan.<sup>271</sup>

The Kazakh government understands that Washington's political support is crucial in counterbalancing the consistently increasing Chinese and Russian role in Kazakhstan.<sup>272</sup> In its turn, the USA is interested in its political presence in Central Asia. After the fall of the USSR and the USA's energy companies' involvement, including Chevron, in the development and production of the country's precious energy resources, the destruction of Kazakhstan's nuclear weapon enabled Kazakhstan to have moderate political relations with the USA.<sup>273</sup> The largest energy company in the USA, Chevron, possesses significant shares in giant energy fields of Kazakhstan such as Tengiz, Karachaganak. Therefore, Chevron has a 50% stake in

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- 267 Álvarez, C. B. M. (2015). China-Kazakhstan Energy Trade Relations. *Journal of International Affairs*, 69(1), 57–69.
- 268 Kaiser, M. J., & Pulsipher, A. G. (2007). A review of the oil and gas sector in Kazakhstan. *Energy policy*, 35(2), 1300–1314.
- 269 Blanchard, J. M. F., & Flint, C. (2017). The geopolitics of China's maritime silk road initiative.
- 270 Na-Xi, L., Meng-Fang, H., & Shan-Bing, L. (2019). How the Belt and Road Initiative Can Help Strengthen the Role of the SCO and Deepen China's Cooperation with Russia and the Countries of Central Asia. *India Quarterly*, 75(1), 56–68.
- 271 Clarke, M. (2010). China, Xinjiang and the internationalisation of the Uyghur issue. *Global Change, Peace & Security*, 22(2), 213–229
- 272 Karasayev, G. M., Yensenov, K. A., Kaliyeva, M. S., Bagdatova, S. A., & Ermukhanova, H. K. (2020). HISTORY OF KAZAKHSTAN–USA PARTNERSHIP RELATIONS (1991–1996). *PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt/Egyptology*, 17(6), 590–600.
- 273 Kaiser & Pulsipher (2007).

Tengizchevroil (TCO),<sup>274</sup> the consortium runs the Tengiz energy field.<sup>275</sup> Moreover, the energy company possesses 18% of the shares in the Karachaganak field.<sup>276</sup>

Kazakhstan's current importance cannot be compared to the period right after the terror attack of 11/9. However, Kazakhstan is still crucial to the US's "War on Terror" in the region. Moreover, limiting Chinese and Russian influence in Kazakhstan and Central Asia is another factor stimulating the USA's active involvement in Kazakhstan.

### 3.9 Turkmenistan

Turkmenistan is the country with the smallest population in the Caspian Region. At the same time, after the RF, it is the second most richly endowed natural gas country among the former SU states. Unlike the other Central Asian countries, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan is not keen to have close bilateral relations with Russia and the West, the USA, and the EU. Consequently, if other Central Asian states have an economic and diplomatic partnership, at least with the Kremlin, Turkmenistan is closed even to Russia's involvement.<sup>277</sup>

The former first president of the country, Saparmurat Niyazov, who became the Turkmenistan president after independence in 1991, established the current state governance system. The significant income, mainly from natural gas and cotton exports, made it possible for Niyazov<sup>278</sup> to get absolute power over the country.<sup>279</sup> Niyazov's government made electricity, gas, and water-free in 1993. Besides, the Turkmen people could use public transport at a meager price. As a logical conclusion of the process, the people's Council of Turkmenistan declared him the country's lifelong president on 28 December 1999. The first president of Turkmenistan died on 21 December 2006. The reason for his death is still unknown.

274 Tengizchevroil is a joint venture between Chevron, ExxonMobil, KazMunayGas, and LukArco.

275 Financial Times. (July 6, 2016). Chevron and Kazakhstan see mutual benefits to oilfield expansion. Retrieved April 26, 2023, from <http://web.archive.org/web/20210227045259/https://www.ft.com/content/6b7c86fc-4305-11e6-9b66-0712b3873ae1>

276 Financial Times. (July 2, 2016). Oil groups offer \$300m to settle Kazakh dispute. Retrieved April 26, 2023, from <http://web.archive.org/web/20200812013601/https://www.ft.com/content/d7b881f4-2893-11e6-8ba3-cdd781d02d89>

277 Sullivan, C. J. (2016). Halk, Watan, Berdymukhammedov! Political Transition and Regime Continuity in Turkmenistan. *Region*, 35–51.

278 Polese, A., & Horák, S. (2015). A tale of two presidents: personality cult and symbolic nation-building in Turkmenistan. *Nationalities Papers*, 43(3), 457–478.

279 Polese, A., Ó Beacháin, D., & Horák, S. (2017). Strategies of legitimation in Central Asia: regime durability in Turkmenistan. *Contemporary Politics*, 23(4), 427–445.

After the death of Turkmenbashi, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow, who won the first election with 89% of votes in 2007,<sup>280</sup> became the country's new president. He had served as Minister of Health and the Vice Chairman of the cabinet before. The country's new president appeared in hopes of reforms towards creating a relatively "transparent" society to open the country to the world community, so Berdimuhamedow even started implementing some reforms. However, there are almost no changes after many years of Berdimuhamedow's governance. Therefore, the reforms had a predominantly "cosmetic character," and Turkmenistan is still far from a democratic society. It is enough to mention that he got 97,69% of votes in his last precedential elections in 2017.<sup>281</sup>

Turkmenistan adheres to "permanent neutrality" in its foreign policy alongside other European states like Austria, Malta, and Switzerland. In contrast to the other Central Asia countries, "absolute neutrality" in its foreign policy is a critical factor for Turkmenistan's foreign policy.<sup>282</sup> The "permanent neutrality" of Turkmenistan was recognized by the Resolution of the UN № 50/80 in December 1995.<sup>283</sup>

"Permanent or positive neutrality" means the active involvement of Turkmenistan's state in establishing peace and stability in the world and mutual relations between different countries of the world on equal and reciprocal principles of respect. Also, the concept of "positive neutrality" means that Turkmenistan has no hostile relations with any state and does not have any territorial claims.<sup>284</sup>

Due to this foreign policy concept as a UN member state, Turkmenistan considers its neutrality in foreign policy according to the UN's Resolution, and the Turkmen government accepts the priority of this international organization in all global political issues. For this reason, Turkmenistan defines its state strategies and principles of foreign policy in accordance with its international neutral position.<sup>285</sup>

According to Anceschi,<sup>286</sup> the foreign policy history of Turkmenistan consists of some stages:<sup>287</sup>

1992–1995 when the first president of the country took control over the foreign policy of Turkmenistan and established "the neutral foreign policy." Also, this time

280 Riss.ru. (February 13, 2017). Itoqi prezidentskix vivorov v Turkmenii ne stali neojiddanostyu (The presidential election results in Turkmenistan did not come as a surprise). Retrieved April 26, 2023, from <http://web.archive.org/web/20171226185135/https://riss.ru/analytcs/39109/>

281 Olcott, M. B. (2013). Turkmenistan: Real Energy Giant or Eternal Potential?.

282 Anceschi, L. (2008). Turkmenistan's foreign policy: Positive Neutrality and the consolidation of the Turkmen regime. Routledge.

283 Anceschi (2008).

284 Shikhmuradov, B. O. (1997). Positive Neutrality as the basis of the foreign policy of Turkmenistan. PERCEPTIONS: Journal of International Affairs, 2(2).

285 Shikhmuradov (1997).

286 Dr. Luca Anceschi is a Senior Lecturer in Central Asian Studies at the University of Glasgow.

287 Anceschi (2008).

was associated with the active backing of Turkmenistan by political actors and mainly by the UN and Russia. Moreover, the country had some functional interstate relations with Turkey and Iran.

1996–1999, this stage is characterized by restoring of close bilateral ties with Russia, mainly in the energy sphere. At the same time, a decrease in the intensity of relations with Turkey and Iran took place.

2000–2007 became an economically and politically challenging period in Turkmenistan's foreign policy because the Western media sharply criticized the country for establishing an absolute dictatorship. In 2003, the Russian and Turkmen governments signed a natural gas contract for 25 years. However, because of the West's sanctions against the Russian government, Russia was not able to invest in the building of the East-West and Caspian gas pipelines, and Turkmenistan blamed Russia for not adhering to the contract conditions. As a reaction to the Turkmen government's statement, Moscow decreased the volume of imported natural gas from Turkmenistan by 4 bcm in 2015, followed by a total stoppage of gas export.

The presidency of Berdimuhamedow was the fourth stage starting after the death of Niyazov. However, there were no changes in the country's political and economic life even after the first president's death. The government has absolute control over all spheres in the country, and Turkmenistan adheres to the same "neutral foreign policy" strategy. Meanwhile, the national currency's devaluation has worsened the difficult economic situation of Turkmen citizens even more, and all quotas and subsidies were stopped in 2015 by the decree of the Turkmen president.

The country's foreign policy means that Turkmenistan is not a member of the military and international organizations and does not belong to regional organizations like the SCO or the EEU. It is believed that Ashgabat is not a member of any organization because of its political and economic interests so that Turkmenistan can maneuver between different political actors.<sup>288</sup> However, there is a valid reason for the non-participation of Turkmenistan in any kind of organization at the regional or international level. The reason is the extreme autocratic character of the Turkmen government,<sup>289</sup> so the neutral foreign policy strategy creates an excellent excuse for Ashgabat to follow its authoritarian policy. Thus, the government does not provide any space for political influence from the international community.

Although it has no common borders with Turkmenistan, China is a significant political actor for Ashgabat. Thanks to its abundant energy reserves, especially natu-

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288 Kiepenheuer-Drechsler, B. (2006). Trapped in permanent neutrality: looking behind the symbolic production of the Turkmen nation. *Central Asian Survey*, 25(1-2), 129–141.

289 Koch, N. (2016). The "Personality Cult" problematic: Personalism and mosques memorializing the "Father of the Nation" in Turkmenistan and the UAE. *Central Asian Affairs*, 3(4), 330–359.

ral gas reserves, Turkmenistan is crucial to China's energy security.<sup>290</sup> If China sees Turkmenistan as another partner country for cooperation, in its turn, China has vital importance to Turkmenistan in such a challenging economic and political period. A key challenge to the energy reserves of Turkmenistan is caused by fast-growing energy consumption, the continually developing infrastructure of the country, and partly a rejection of coal by the government of China.<sup>291</sup>

Turkmenistan is very interested in the Chinese presence in its energy sector because of some key reasons:

- Chinese participation in the country's energy sector makes it possible for Turkmenistan to achieve a diversification of export sources.<sup>292</sup>
- Since the Turkmen government does not want to lose its absolute control over the country and Beijing is not interested in a political presence in Turkmenistan in contrast to Russia, China is the most desirable partner for Berdimuhamedov's government.<sup>293</sup>

However, despite a close partnership between the two countries in the energy sector, the relations between Ashgabat and Beijing in other spheres can be characterized as either weakly developed or having no partnership.

Russia has a significant influence on the states of the former SU. However, the Russian role in Turkmenistan is entirely irrelevant in contrast to the other countries of Central Asia. A disagreement between the Turkmen government and Gazprom on natural gas prices led to the loss of Russia, which was one of the two largest natural gas importers of Turkmenistan. Consequently, the Russian stoppage of importing gas from Turkmenistan became one of the two main reasons for the difficult economic situation of Turkmenistan alongside the fall of the energy prices in the world energy market.

Before the crisis in the world economy in 2008, Russia was buying most of Turkmen's gas. The export volume of natural gas had fallen from the point of 50 bcm/y to 10 bcm/y. This indicator was only 4 bcm/y before Russia stopped buying Turkmen

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290 Stronski, P. (2017). Turkmenistan at twenty-five: The high price of authoritarianism. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

291 Kong, Z., Lu, X., Jiang, Q., Dong, X., Liu, G., Elbot, N., ... & Chen, S. (2019). Assessment of import risks for natural gas and its implication for optimal importing strategies: A case study of China. *Energy policy*, 127, 11–18.

292 Stronski (2017).

293 Esen, V., & Oral, B. (2016). Natural gas reserve/production ratio in Russia, Iran, Qatar and Turkmenistan: A political and economic perspective. *Energy Policy*, 93, 101–109.

gas in 2015.<sup>294</sup> The refusal of Russia to import Turkmen natural gas made an economically difficult situation of Ashgabat even worse.<sup>295</sup> However, Gazprom announced the restoration of the natural gas import from Turkmenistan in April 2019.<sup>296</sup>

In contrast to US relations with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan ties can be characterized as “weakly developed.”<sup>297</sup> For instance, while the other states of Central Asia expressed their readiness to help the US government fight terrorism in Central Asia after the terror attack in New York, Turkmenistan reacted very “frostily” to the plea of the US government.<sup>298</sup> Niyazov’s government expressed its readiness to lend its airspace and land corridors just for humanitarian help, so the Turkmen government did not accept any plea to establish military bases and use of its airspace for military jets of the USA.<sup>299</sup>

The USA tried to involve Turkmenistan in the gas project to export gas through Azerbaijan and Georgia to Turkey, which would have positively influenced US-Turkmen relations because there were some hopes to “attract” Turkmenistan and make possible a democratic transition of the country. However, Niyazov had proclaimed himself the “lifelong” president of Turkmenistan by the end of the 1990s, so the government chose not to carry out economic and political reforms but instead established a totalitarian regime.<sup>300</sup>

The natural gas, oil, and textile industries are the most important spheres for Turkmenistan’s state budget. The sharp fall in energy prices in the world energy market has severely influenced the country’s already weak economy. Therefore, according to the government of Turkmenistan, the growth rate of Turkmenistan in 2017 was only 6,4%, while this indicator was 10,3% in 2014 before the fall of energy prices on the world energy market.<sup>301</sup> Therefore, Turkmenistan’s national currency’s deval-

294 Vesti.ru. (January 4, 2016). “Gazprom” otkazalsya pokupat turkmenskiy qaz (“Gazprom” refused to buy Turkmen gas). Retrieved April 26, 2023, from <https://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=705305>

295 However, in July 2019, Gazprom announced that the company and the Turkmen government reached a new agreement concerning the gas export from Turkmenistan.

296 Thediplomat.com. (April 25, 2019). Russia is buying Turkmen gas again. Why? Retrieved April 26, 2023, from <https://thediplomat.com/2019/04/russia-is-buying-turkmen-gas-again-why/>

297 Bohr, A. (2016). Turkmenistan: Power, politics and petro-authoritarianism. Chatham House, Royal Institute of International Affairs.

298 Nichol, J. (2010). Central Asia’s Security: Issues and Implications for US Interests. DIANE Publishing.

299 Nichol, J. P. (1997). Turkmenistan: Recent Developments and US Interests. Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress.

300 Bohr, A. (2003). Independent Turkmenistan. Oil, Transition, and Security in Central Asia.

301 Tfeb.gov.tm. Temp ekonomiceskoqo rosta Turkmenistana po itoqam 8 mesyatsev qoda sostavil 6,4 protsenta (According to the results of 8 months of the year, the economic growth rate of Turkmenistan amounted to 6.4 percent). Retrieved April 26, 2023, from <https://web.archive.org/web/20171109170742/http://tfeb.gov.tm:80/index.php/ru/2013-09-20-04-46-10/6>

uation made 22% at the beginning of 2015, which is the deepest devaluation among the former SU.<sup>302</sup>

The Turkmen government sees the Chinese government's loans as the only "rescue" in this challenging stage for Turkmenistan's economy. As a result, Turkmenistan is increasingly dependent on China.<sup>303</sup> Beijing gave Ashgabat some essential loans in the near past to investigate and develop one of the largest natural gas fields in the world: Galkynysh.<sup>304</sup>

According to the agreement between the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), a major state-owned Chinese oil and gas corporation, and the Turkmen government, 25 bcm of 30 bcm from the Galkynysh field extracted natural gas had to be supplied to China.<sup>305</sup> Since 2017, Turkmenistan has been delivering to China natural gas to pay out its loans.<sup>306</sup>

Turkmenistan imports mainly technology from China to implement energy projects, computers, and other technological goods. Alongside energy resources, raw materials for textiles are the second-largest export goods of Turkmenistan to China. China has tremendous influence in Turkmenistan, so Chinese energy companies' active participation implements even the investigations, development, and export of natural gas resources.<sup>307</sup>

The Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) is the largest natural gas project, and Turkmenistan has some critical concerns regarding this pipeline. The building of Turkmenistan's part of the enormous TAPI gas pipeline started in December 2015. The volume of exported natural gas is estimated at 33 bcm/a. The entire length of the pipelines crossing the territories of Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran reach 1800 km. The pipeline is seen as an essential project for accessing the South Asian market. It will connect Central with South Asia and decrease

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27-temp-ekonomicheskogo-rosta-turkmenistana-po-itogam-8-mesyatsev-goda-sostavil-6-4-protsenta

302 Sputnik.com. (February 12, 2015). Iz natsvalyut stran TSA bolshe vsego devalviroval turkmenskiy manat (Of the national currencies of CA countries, the Turkmen manat devalued the most). Retrieved April 26, 2023, from <https://ru.sputnik-tj.com/economy/20150212/1014356430.html>

303 Stronski (2017).

304 Mammadov, Q., 2015. Turkmenistan positions itself as Eurasian natural gas power. *Oil and Gas Journal*, 12.

305 Fergananeews.com. (17 April, 2018). Debt from the East. How it turned out that Central Asia is bogged down in Chinese loans. Retrieved April 06, 2021, from <http://web.archive.org/web/20200808172732/https://fergananeews.com/articles/9902>

306 Anceschi, L. (2017). Turkmenistan and the virtual politics of Eurasian energy: The case of the TAPI pipeline project. *Central Asian Survey*, 36(4), 409–429.

307 Jakóbowski, J., & Marszewski, M. (2018). Crisis in Turkmenistan A test for China's policy in the region. *OSW Commentary*, 31.

Turkmenistan's export dependency on Beijing and, in the future, on Russia.<sup>308</sup> It is essential to mention that the project's realization does not seem realistic without establishing absolute security in Afghanistan despite all favorable prognoses.<sup>309</sup>

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308 Indeo, F. Turkmenistan's Energy Strategy: Aiming to the Diversification of Export Routes.

309 Huda, M. S., & Ali, S. H. (2017). Energy diplomacy in South Asia: Beyond the security paradigm in accessing the TAPI pipeline project. *Energy research & social science*, 34, 202–213.