

BILATERAL

AZERBAIJAN-RUSSIA COOPERATION ON REGIONAL SECURITY ISSUES

COOPERACIÓN BILATERAL ENTRE AZERBAIYÁN Y RUSIA EN CUESTIONES DE SEGURIDAD REGIONAL

Laman Garayeva

E-mail: karayeva@yahoo.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8881-4866>

Baku Slavic University, Azerbaijan.

Suggested citation (APA, seventh ed.)

Garayeva, L. (2025). Bilateral Azerbaijan-Russia cooperation on regional security issues. *Universidad y Sociedad*, 17(3), e5169.

ABSTRACT

The South Caucasus region retains significant geopolitical and economic importance due to its strategic location, access to the Black and Caspian Seas, abundant natural resources, and potential for transit of oil, gas, and other strategic goods from Central Asia, China, India, and other countries to Europe. But despite its relevance, there still remains a notable gap in research concerning the dynamics of bilateral cooperation on regional security issues, particularly between Azerbaijan and Russia. This study aims to analyze security models and regimes of cooperation within this setting, focusing particularly on regional states and non-regional players according to political and scientific criteria. The study demonstrates that the need to settle frozen conflicts is essential in order to enhance security and foster economic and energy cooperation between South Caucasus countries. Besides, the research emphasizes that an equal foreign relations policy, maintaining a balance between relations with Russia and the West, is a necessary condition for regional stability. The research suggests that cooperation, resolution of conflicts, and reconciliation of national interests are necessary for encouraging economic development and ensuring a secure environment in the South Caucasus.

Keywords: South Caucasus, Security models, National interests, Energy cooperation.

RESUMEN

La región del Cáucaso Meridional conserva una gran importancia geopolítica y económica debido a su ubicación estratégica, acceso a los mares Negro y Caspio, abundantes recursos naturales y potencial para el tránsito de petróleo, gas y otros bienes estratégicos desde Asia Central, China, India y otros países hacia Europa. Sin embargo, a pesar de su relevancia, aún existe una notable brecha en la investigación sobre la dinámica de la cooperación bilateral en materia de seguridad regional, en particular entre Azerbaiyán y Rusia. Este estudio busca analizar los modelos de seguridad y los regímenes de cooperación en este contexto, centrándose especialmente en los estados regionales y los actores extrarregionales, según criterios políticos y científicos. El estudio demuestra que la necesidad de resolver los conflictos latentes es esencial para mejorar la seguridad y fomentar la cooperación económica y energética entre los países del Cáucaso Meridional. Además, la investigación enfatiza que una política exterior equitativa, que mantenga un equilibrio entre las relaciones con Rusia y Occidente, es condición necesaria para la estabilidad regional. La investigación sugiere que la cooperación, la resolución de conflictos y la conciliación de los intereses nacionales son necesarios para impulsar el desarrollo económico y garantizar un entorno seguro en el Cáucaso Meridional.

Palabras clave: Cáucaso Sur, Modelos de seguridad, Intereses nacionales, Cooperación energética.

INTRODUCTION

The South Caucasus region, where Azerbaijan is located, has been historically plagued by long-complex conflicts, being the most notorious the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict which involve Azerbaijan and Armenia (Kazarian, 2025; Uzer, 2024). This ethno-territorial conflict has been the supreme security issue, and Russia classically played the role of a mediator and peacekeeper (Jafalian, 2022). The First Nagorno-Karabakh War (1988–1994) witnessed Armenia capturing extensive Azerbaijani territories, including Nagorno-Karabakh, and after various agreements Russian peacekeepers were deployed to monitor ceasefires. However, the Second Karabakh War of 2020 was a different scenario. Azerbaijan, with the help of Turkey, recaptured parts of Nagorno-Karabakh, leading to a Russian-mediated ceasefire on November 10th, 2020 (Markitantov & Vinnichuk, 2024). The conditions of the deal included the deployment of 2,000 Russian peacekeepers to the region to guarantee stability (Aslanlı, 2021). But in 2023, the situation changed as Azerbaijan launched a military operation to retake the remainder of Nagorno-Karabakh, prompting the early exit of Russian peacekeepers. This move, was significant, as it reflected Azerbaijan's emergence as an even stronger player, leveraging its energy reserves and geographical location.

But the Caucasus region also have broader tensions between Iran, Turkey, and Western countries, all of them trying to expand its influence, which leads to complex security dynamics. Perhaps due to this and due to the share history, Russia has attempted to keep regional influence through bilateral agreements on security cooperation, being perhaps the most relevant: 1) the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Security (1997), signed on July 3rd, 1997 and is the legal foundation of their bilateral relations based on mutual security and cooperation (Enveroglu, 2024) since it has served as a basis for other treaties and has facilitated their strategic partnership, and 2) the Declaration on Allied Interaction (2022), signed on February 22nd, 2022 two days before the beginning of Russia-Ukraine war, which look for further consolidation of the alliance on a bilateral basis rather than through regional institutions like the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) (Tomczyk, 2023).

However, Azerbaijan's current political and strategic relations with Russia have their origins in historical relationships. During the 19th century—and particularly following the Russo-Persian Wars (i.e. the Treaty of Gulistan of 1813 and the Treaty of Turkmenchay in 1828)—the territories comprising present-day Azerbaijan were integrated into

the Russian Empire. This integration began an extended process of administrative, economic, and military integration (although not always without resistance) that continued through the Soviet era. When the Soviet Union broke up in 1991, Azerbaijan regained independence but still retained close political, economic, and security relations with Russia based on shared security concerns. With time, the cooperation developed from post-Soviet turmoil into strategic partnership, though with inherent tensions due to competing regional interests. But in general Azerbaijan managed to achieve a compromise: while it pursues diversification in its foreign relations (engaging with the West (Garashova, 2023) and regional players such as Turkey (Vladimir, 2022)), it has maintained a pragmatic and often close security and economic cooperation with Russia to ensure stability and safeguard energy and transit interests (Cornell, 2015; Swietochowski, 1995).

But until today, ensuring security in the region is one of the most critical challenges since the control over this region enables influence over the political landscape in both the Middle East and Central Asia. The Caucasus issue has consistently remained one of the most complex and relevant topics in contemporary international relations (Sadiyev Saleh et al., 2021). In response to global internationalization processes, various forms of regional and global integration have been proposed. Notable among these are concepts such as the United States of the South Caucasus, the Caucasus Common Market, and the Caucasus Common Home. Current security challenges in the South Caucasus have been examined extensively in both domestic and foreign historiography (Brzezinski, 1997; Jonson, 2001; Main-James & Smith, 2003; Shaffer, 2004). Russian scholars (Gadzhiev & Kavkaza, 2001; Goble, 1997; Kaimazarova, 2008; Koibaev, 2014; Nadzhafov, 2005; Zhiltsov & Savicheva, 2021) have focused on Russia's interests in the South Caucasus, while Azerbaijani researchers (Eyvazov, 2004; Huseynova, 2003; Ismailov & Kengerli, 2003; Mammadov, 2017; Mirabdullayev, 2010) have analyzed the possibilities and advantages of a balanced, multi-vector policy based on their country's national interests. Turkish academics (Hakki, 2006; Tuncer, 2000; Ünal, 2019) have also addressed South Caucasus security issues within the context of the foreign policy priorities of regional states. However, in the field of international relations, there are insufficient works devoted to this issue of establishing and ensuring security in the region. Therefore, this research seeks to examine security frameworks and cooperation regimes between Azerbaijan and Russia, emphasizing on

its impact in the dynamics of the Caucasus region from a geopolitical point of view.

DEVELOPMENT

Security models in the South Caucasus

Security in modern geopolitics is a pressing theoretical and practical issue. Experts highlight various nuanced aspects of this concept. At the core of overall security lies national security. Without ensuring regional and global security, the creation of a national security system is out of the question. Therefore, specialists pay particular attention to national security issues. According to expert estimates, there are about 200 tension hotspots in the world. However, there are hotspots that have caught the attention of states determining the fate of the world either due to the presence of strategically important mineral reserves, their geographical position, or a certain role in solving political tasks along the West-East, North-South vectors. The Caucasus is also a zone of tension and geostrategic attention (Huseyn-Zade, 2013, p. 5).

The South Caucasus is geographically a region located at the border of Eastern Europe and Southwestern Asia, south of the Greater Caucasus Mountain range. This geopolitically important region has always been a place where the interests of many countries and peoples intersect, sometimes leading to sharp contradictions. However, the region has attracted attention not only for its geostrategic position but also as a source of energy resources and power transmission lines (Məlikova, 389). Zbigniew Brzezinski, a specialist in geostrategy, assessed the South Caucasus as the Balkans of the Eurasian space due to its strategic position (Brzezinski, 1997, p. 20).

The direct economic significance of the South Caucasus is relatively small, but its transit potential is enormous. The region's advantageous geography, the presence of energy resources, and developed infrastructure attract the interest of many countries, making the South Caucasus a subject of global politics. This ties the region to global processes. In geopolitical terms, the West, particularly the United States and the European Union, competes with Russia for influence in the region. For Europe, the South Caucasus is a neighboring region where the state of democracy and security takes priority in relations. For the United States, however, the South Caucasus holds almost exclusively geopolitical significance. Neither Russia nor the West is willing to cede their influence in the region to each other.

The southern borders of Russia are adjacent to the South Caucasus and therefore represent an important sphere of its strategic, political, and economic interests. It is believed

that escalating tensions near Russia's borders, particularly in the South Caucasus, which borders Russia's equally complex region, the North Caucasus, does not align with Russia's national security interests. This is emphasized in the Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation: to ensure national interests and achieve the strategic national priorities of the Russian Federation.

With the collapse of the USSR, external actors managed to extend their influence over the post-Soviet space. Simultaneously, the region began to split into countries that see their future in alliance with Russia; those oriented towards close cooperation with the West, led by the United States; those declaring a neutral status; and finally, those drifting from one power center to another, depending on international and domestic conditions. Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan, forming the South Caucasus region, belong to different groups with varying foreign policy orientations.

The first group includes Armenia, which is a strategic partner of Russia and actively participates in regional integration (Armenia is a member of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)). The second group consists of Georgia, which has declared its foreign policy goal to be integration into Euro-Atlantic structures (dramatic changes are now taking place there as well; the application to join the EU has been suspended until 2028). Finally, Azerbaijan belongs to the third group, as the country does not seek to join either NATO or the CSTO. Instead, Baku has joined the Non-Aligned Movement, and it is important to note that Azerbaijan and Turkey interact under the "one nation – two states" formula (Avatkok, 2022).

This is a crucial part of Russia's "Southern policy," whose main goal is to gain access to the "warm seas" (Dugin, 2003, p. 293). NATO's eastward expansion after the USSR's collapse as a geopolitical reality pushes Russia to implement the "southern doctrine." (Kuliyev, 1996, p. 195). Russia strives to maintain its dominant position and influence in the region by using the economic dependency and political influence of the regional countries and the advantages provided by the Moscow-centered structure created during the USSR era. Moscow decisively opposes the intervention of global players such as the USA, EU, and China in its "near abroad" (Tuncer, 388).

Regional conflicts and problems create conditions for justifying Russia's military presence in the region, and the process of solving these problems provides Russian foreign policy with the opportunity to maneuver in the direction of the region. (Shaffer). Thus, manipulating regional conflicts increases Russia's effectiveness in the region.

Although the inability to ensure stability due to regional conflicts prevents external players from playing an active role in the region, it provides Moscow with new opportunities to intervene in the situation in the South Caucasus (Ağacan, 2005, p. 54).

It is an indisputable fact that the Republic of Azerbaijan falls within the sphere of Russia's political, economic, and security interests (Mammadov, 2017). The Republic of Azerbaijan plays a key role in the balance of power in the South Caucasus region and the Caspian Sea coast (Gadzhiev & Kavkaza, 2001, p. 411). The strategic importance of Azerbaijan is determined by its geographical location, economic potential, energy resources, participation in energy and transport infrastructure, and balanced foreign policy. Distancing Azerbaijan from Turkish and Western influence, and incorporating it into the Commonwealth of Independent States, is one of Russia's foreign policy priorities (Mirabdullayev, 2010, p. 239).

However, there are many other risks and threats to the countries of the South Caucasus, including Azerbaijan. The current situation in the region has shown how unrealistic the hopes of the post-Cold War era were. Ethnic and territorial conflicts in the post-Soviet space and terrorist wars have become a serious threat to international security and a source of criminal activity. The imperfect activities of the security structures of the new independent states and the absence of cooperation mechanisms have created favorable conditions for this. Therefore, a well-thought-out, substantiated foreign policy is necessary for both the Russian Federation, whose southern borders are experiencing numerous conflicts, and the post-Soviet states, including the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Considering the international globalization processes occurring in the world, various forms of regional and global integration are proposed. Among them, the ideas of the United States of the South Caucasus, the Caucasus Common Market, and the Caucasus Common Home can be noted. The number of participants in such models varies from two (Azerbaijan-Georgia) to eight (Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia, Turkey, Russia, Iran, the USA, and the European Union).

The most actively discussed models are:

1. The idea of the Caucasus Common Home, which includes on equal terms the autonomous republics of the North Caucasus and the states of the South Caucasus;
2. The union of Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia;
3. The community of South Caucasus countries and Russia;
4. The unification of the three independent states of the South Caucasus, three border states, the United States of America, and the European Union (3+3+2).

During H. Aliyev's official visit to Georgia in 1996, a joint Declaration "On Peace, Stability, and Security in the Caucasus Region" was signed. The Tbilisi meeting became the initial stage towards promoting peace and stability in the Caucasus and the basis for the project of the Caucasus Common Home (Huseynova, 2003, pp. 110–111). Since 2010, the idea of a United Caucasus has been propagated by the former President of Georgia, M. Saakashvili, who announced the beginning of this project from the UN General Assembly platform. "But there are no differences in the cultural and human dimensions between the North and South Caucasus. There is a single Caucasus region that is part of European and world civilization" (Kusov, 2025), the Georgian President noted. He developed the idea of a United Caucasus on February 12, 2011, during a meeting with Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu. (Миркадыров). Despite this, all these projects remain merely abstract models, unimplementable due to objective and subjective reasons (Ismailov & Kengerli, 2003, p. 161). The integration model involving the three South Caucasus countries also proved unrealistic. It could not materialize due to Armenia's occupation of Azerbaijani territory and the claims of Armenian separatists on the Samtskhe-Javakheti region (Georgia) (Darchiashvili, 2000, pp. 178–188).

Within the CIS, there was a model of the Caucasus Quartet (Russia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia), where issues of regional conflict resolution and integration problems were discussed. Initially, Russia proposed this model (three plus one) at the Kislovodsk summit in 1996, where representatives of the South Caucasus countries and leaders of the North Caucasus autonomous republics (except Chechnya) participated (Ismailov & Kengerli, 2003). The "3+3+2" model was discussed at the OSCE Istanbul Summit in 1999 but was also not implemented (Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia + Russia, Turkey, Iran + USA, EU) (Nadzhafov, 2005, p. 61). In December 2020, after the 44-day Patriotic War between Azerbaijan and Armenia, Turkey proposed a new form of cooperation in the South Caucasus. The six-party cooperation was to unite Turkey, Russia, Iran, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia. This idea was supported by the President of Azerbaijan I. Aliyev and the President of Russia V. Putin.

New realities in the region have created new opportunities. As a result, on December 10, 2021, the first meeting of the "3+3" Regional Consultative Platform was held in Moscow, co-chaired by Deputy Foreign Ministers of Russia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Turkey, and the General

Director of the Iranian Foreign Ministry. In December 2020, Georgia's Deputy Foreign Minister Lasha Darsalia stated that Georgia would not join the project until the Russian side fulfilled its international obligations. Salome Zourabichvili, President of Georgia, addressing the plenary session of the Georgian Parliament in the fall of 2020, spoke about the need to create a new regional format – the Caucasus Peace Platform. Zourabichvili noted the necessity of Georgia's participation in such projects, adding that "The main task of official Tbilisi is to return its Caucasian specificity". Georgia's Foreign Minister David Zalkaliani confirmed in October 2021 the idea of his country's participation in regional cooperation projects in any form.

This project could help Armenia exit economic blockade and start cooperation with neighboring countries (Turkey and Azerbaijan). Reflecting the official Yerevan's position, Armenia's Deputy Foreign Minister Vahe Gevorgyan emphasized the need for comprehensive risk and threat assessments. Armenia is still hesitant. On October 7th, 2021, Georgia's Foreign Minister David Zalkaliani announced Georgia's refusal to participate in many international projects. He cited the reason as Russia's occupation of Georgian territory. Tehran is also interested in joining the regional alliance and the opportunity to attract new investments. The Islamic Republic of Iran has already participated in trilateral formats such as Azerbaijan-Russia-Iran and Turkey-Russia-Iran. Iran positively assessed this idea. "The tense situation in the South Caucasus can be resolved within the 3+3 format," noted Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian. This project would be a step towards the global economic market for all the countries in the region. However, for this to happen, the participating countries' interest and the resolution of bilateral conflicting issues are necessary. Thus, for now, this project remains a project.

Regional Azerbaijan-Russian cooperation

The issue of ensuring regional security and the participation of Azerbaijan and Russia in integration processes (subregional, regional, and global) remains relevant to this day, and certain steps are being taken in this direction. The geographical proximity of Russia's southern borders and its significance in Russian politics and economy underscore the crucial role of Russia's South Caucasus policy. Due to strategic and military partnership between Russia and Armenia, the South Caucasus region did not fall into NATO's security zone. Armenia became Russia's point of influence in the region, however, Russia managed to maintain partnership relations with Azerbaijan simultaneously.

Russia's military-technical cooperation with Armenia and Azerbaijan is quite indicative in the context of maintaining the regional balance of power. Russia serves as the main supplier of weapons and military equipment to both Yerevan and Baku. It is evident that the Kremlin aims to prevent any disruption of the established dynamic equilibrium in the South Caucasus. Azerbaijan is of interest to the USA and the EU as a major supplier of energy resources to Europe. But this does not mean that Azerbaijan poses a threat to Russia and can be considered a valuable trade and economic partner and a transit country for North-South transport corridors connecting it with Iran and Central Asia.

As always, Russia is the most active force in the Caucasian security complex, and therefore security relations between Azerbaijan and Russia should be based on the role that the South Caucasus plays in the national security of the Russian state and the regional functions of the Republic of Azerbaijan (Eyvazov, 2004). In an interview with the Russia-24 channel, President Ilham Aliyev of the Republic of Azerbaijan stated: "Relations between our countries are of a strategic nature, and political contacts are at a high level" (Huseynov & Vlasov, May 12). Russia became the main mediator in the negotiation process involving the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan after the signing of the Meyendorf Declaration (November 2, 2008). The Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, which was the most bloody and destructive in the post-Soviet space, was long considered the main threat to stability and security in the South Caucasus. This conflict was highlighted in the 2010 military doctrine of the Republic of Azerbaijan (Саттаров). At the current stage, this problem has been resolved – there is no longer a question of Nagorno-Karabakh.

The security and stability of the Republic of Azerbaijan are also affected by factors such as tensions surrounding the Iranian nuclear issue, unresolved issues related to the status of the Caspian Sea, and the activation of terrorist groups. It is also necessary to mention the threat from Iran and Armenian-Iranian military cooperation. This is why Azerbaijan needs a comprehensive, multi-vector security policy, with a carefully planned foreign policy strategy that avoids risky political initiatives. Today, Azerbaijan successfully develops relations with the United States, European countries, and countries of the Near and Far East. This policy is the most acceptable option. Although Azerbaijan is not a member of NATO, it develops cooperation within the framework of the Partnership for Peace program and the Eastern Partnership to ensure national security with the support of NATO's military-political guarantees (Koibaev, 2014).

Not being a member of military blocs, Azerbaijan has established cooperative relations with all countries in the region. Azerbaijan has chosen cooperation and realism over confrontation and utopianism. It is the only country that has good relations with its neighbors surrounding the South Caucasus. Being a member of the CIS, Azerbaijan does not belong to the CSTO and the EAEU. Azerbaijan has chosen a purely regional approach. Relations between the two countries further developed when the presidents of Azerbaijan and Russia signed the Declaration on Allied Interaction between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Azerbaijan in Moscow on February 22nd, 2022. A similar document, the Shusha Declaration on Allied Relations between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Turkey, was signed on June 15th, 2021, in Shusha. The document elevated the relations between the two countries to an allied level.

Of course, Azerbaijan takes into account its historical ties with Russia and its role in the South Caucasus region, but its own interests are of primary importance. The prospect of developing relations between Azerbaijan and Russia will depend on how these relations evolve after the 44-day Patriotic War. It is necessary to emphasize once again that Azerbaijani-Russian cooperation is one of the priority directions of both Azerbaijani and Russian foreign policy. There are several reasons for this.

Firstly, Russia, being a co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group (although today the activities of this group are almost irrelevant) and a state with access to the South Caucasus region. Secondly, both Azerbaijan and Russia are interested in stability along their common border. Both the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Russian Federation have the capability to combat transnational crime, terrorism, and separatism in the South Caucasus region. The withdrawal of Russian peacekeepers from Nagorno-Karabakh in April 2024 responds to the new realities in the region after Armenia recognized Azerbaijan's borders as of 1991. The contingent was deployed along the line of contact and along the Lachin corridor, which connects the region with Armenia, in accordance with the trilateral statement of Baku, Yerevan, and Moscow dated November 10th, 2020. The peacekeepers were supposed to remain in Nagorno-Karabakh for five years — until 2025.

On September 20th, 2023, a historic event occurred, the full impact of which on the future of the South Caucasus and Russian policy in the region has yet to be fully understood. The separatist stronghold in Karabakh, which had been supported by Armenia through military, diplomatic, and financial means for 32 years, declared its dissolution following a one-day counterterrorism operation by the Azerbaijani Armed Forces. On this day, Baku restored the

constitutional order of the Republic of Azerbaijan across the entire Karabakh economic region, and within a week, the remaining Armenian armed forces were disarmed and withdrawn to Armenia. Following this, the question of the fate of the Russian peacekeeping contingent arose. In the fall of 2023, Russian peacekeepers began to dismantle temporary observation posts along the former line of contact.

All these facts indicate that in the context of complex processes of global globalization, a pragmatic and open foreign policy is the key to stability and development. However, Russia still does not abandon its old position based on a centralized state system in relations with the South Caucasus countries, and therefore it experiences difficulties in establishing bilateral relations with equal status (Main-James & Smith, 2003). It is no secret that in the complex processes of global globalization, a pragmatic and open foreign policy is the key to stability and development. The significant political and economic potential that Azerbaijan possesses, combined with stable and pragmatic policies, should contribute to deepening mutually beneficial relations between Azerbaijan and Russia. Nevertheless, sovereignty remains as the fundamental principle of modern state policy in the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Energy security in bilateral relationships

Besides forceful methods, economic levers are used to ensure stability and security in the South Caucasus region. The main direction of Azerbaijani-Russian relations is trade and economic relations of a pragmatic nature. Russia is the main supplier of imports to Azerbaijan, and Azerbaijan is a strategically significant partner for Russia in the South Caucasus. Thus, security relations between Azerbaijan and Russia extend beyond the activities of special services and law enforcement agencies. They include numerous projects in political, economic, social, and humanitarian spheres aimed at creating a climate of dialogue and trust. Although there are positive trends in bilateral relations, there are still issues that require efforts from both states to resolve.

Building a unified social, political, and economic space in the South Caucasus could be a guarantee for overcoming the consequences of conflicts in the region. By uniting energy networks, the South Caucasus countries will become closer through collective responsibility, supporting each other. A common regional energy program will allow faster establishment of the lost infrastructure in Azerbaijan's de-occupied territories. Common restoration activities, supported by a common regional energy policy, will promote intra-regional rapprochement. Then,

de-occupied territories could become an example of successful multicultural policies in the South Caucasus.

In the early 1990s, Russia had a huge advantage as it was the only country in the region with a network of oil pipelines. The hydrocarbon resources of the Caspian region could only be exported through the territory of the Russian Federation. One of the main routes for transporting oil was the Baku-Grozny-Tikhoretsk-Novorossiysk and Tengiz-Novorossiysk pipelines. The port of Novorossiysk was among the top three key ports of the former USSR and sometimes led this ranking. However, after a few years, Russia began to lose its leading positions. The expansion of hydrocarbon production in Azerbaijan in the 1990s facilitated the implementation of pipeline projects. The construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline and the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline was the first step towards creating a new energy corridor that ensured the westward export of Caspian hydrocarbons.

In September 1992, the State Oil Company of the Azerbaijan Republic (SOCAR) was established in the country. Plans for the country's hydrocarbon resources development and their subsequent delivery to foreign markets were developed. With the commissioning of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, the Baku-Novorossiysk pipeline, which allowed Russia to influence Azerbaijan's policy, lost its strategic significance. As noted above, on September 20, 1994, Azerbaijan signed an agreement with foreign oil companies for the joint development of three oil fields — Azeri, Chirag, and Guneshli. The agreement, dubbed the “contract of the century,” determined the subsequent development of the country, including in the energy sector. Between 1996 and 2007, 26 international contracts were signed with Azerbaijan involving about 40 companies, including BP, ExxonMobil, Chevron, ConocoPhillips, Shell, Total, Agip, Statoil, and others, down to medium and small firms from various continents. Thomas De Waal, an analyst at the Institute for War and Peace Reporting, noted that the “Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline gave the region geopolitical significance and turned it into an important transit corridor for Caspian energy carriers” (De Waal, 2007).

The document was signed in January 1996. At the same time, Western countries actively promoted the so-called western route, which was supposed to pass through Georgia and then to Turkey. As a result, in March 1996, Georgia and Azerbaijan signed an agreement on the transportation of Azerbaijani oil through the Baku-Tbilisi-Supsa pipeline. It was commissioned in 1999. As part of these agreements, Azerbaijan signed an intergovernmental agreement on the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline with Turkey and Georgia. The agreement was signed in November 1999, and its construction

began in April 2003. The oil pipeline was commissioned in July 2006 (Zhiltsov & Savicheva, 2021, p. 335).

Gas production increased after the discovery of large reserves at the Shah Deniz field in 1999. This factor prompted Azerbaijan and Turkey to implement the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline project. Its construction began in 2002, and the gas pipeline was commissioned in 2007. Until 2017, 5-6 billion cubic meters of gas were supplied annually through the pipeline. The implementation of the oil and gas pipelines, which allowed Azerbaijan to supply its resources westward, bypassing Russia, strengthened its geopolitical positions in the South Caucasus (Kaimazarova, 2008, p. 456).

Before Vladimir Putin came to power, Russia's foreign policy was primarily based on security. With the adoption of the National Security Doctrine on January 10, 2000, and the Foreign Policy Doctrine approved on July 10, 2000, Russia's foreign policy shifted from being exclusively based on security principles to adopting a foreign policy strategy that also included economic elements. During this period, Putin started to pursue an active foreign policy within the geography of the CIS. By including its own companies in projects related to the extraction of Caspian energy resources and their transportation to the West, it tried to balance the Western states and companies in the region. Additionally, in its policy, it prioritized countries that had left its orbit within the CIS (Jonson, 2001, pp. 15–16).

After the commissioning of the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline, Azerbaijan considered various options for expanding gas supplies to external markets. In the context of this policy, the possibility of participating in the European “Nabucco” project was discussed, as well as support for the Trans-Caspian gas pipeline. However, the project was not realized due to the lack of gas reserves and consumers who could buy the supplied hydrocarbon resources. As a result, the “Nabucco” project was not implemented. At the same time, in 2011, Azerbaijan and the EU signed a declaration on the implementation of the “Southern Gas Corridor” project, which includes three parts: the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, the Trans-Anatolian pipeline (TANAP), and the Trans-Adriatic pipeline (TAP). In 2012, Azerbaijan and Turkey signed an agreement on the construction of the Trans-Anatolian Pipeline (TANAP). In 2016, the European Commission approved the construction of the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP). In May 2018, TANAP was launched. It starts at the Georgian-Turkish border and ends at Turkey's western border. The pipeline's capacity is 16 billion cubic meters. At the end of 2020, the TAP project was completed. The pipeline runs through Greece and Albania, then under the Adriatic Sea, and into Italy. The pipeline's capacity is 16 billion cubic meters of gas,

of which 6 billion cubic meters are designated for Turkey, and 10 billion cubic meters for Italy, Greece, and Bulgaria.

Russian interests in the South Caucasus aim to restore strategic control over this region. Today, Moscow, increasingly turning to neo-imperial policies, seeks to create new balances in the geopolitics of Europe and the South Caucasus through oil and gas diplomacy (Hakkı, 2006, p. 21). Reflecting this policy, Russia punishes countries that oppose it, as seen in the examples of Ukraine and Georgia.

Russia attempts to monopolize not only the extraction and control of oil and natural gas but also their sale. By owning the extraction of oil and natural gas, it also adds to its economy the share it will gain from the extraction and transportation of oil from the Caucasus and Caspian basins to the world market (Ünal). The reliability of the ties between the two countries in the era of peace in the South Caucasus was recently confirmed by the signing in Baku of a more detailed economic and socio-humanitarian “roadmap,” outlining the cooperation plan for 2024–2026.

Another key topic is the completion of global infrastructure projects. While Iran, with Russian assistance, prepares to build the “Astara–Rasht” railway section, Russia and Azerbaijan will focus on reconstructing border checkpoints and adjacent road infrastructure to ensure future capacity for the International Transport Corridor “North–South” and customs. Regarding the Zangezur Corridor, the parties will jointly influence Armenia, which has not yet started construction of its section through Meghri, and monitor bridge construction on the Iranian segment. For Russia, Azerbaijan’s logistics capabilities for export–import are crucial—launching the Zangezur Corridor and improving the “Baku–Tbilisi–Kars” route will create a new global route “North–West” (Aliyev, 2024)

Thus, it can be concluded that the energy factor, which occupies a special place in the foreign policy of the Russian Federation, influences the country’s current international status through its advantageous geopolitical position.

CONCLUSIONS

The South Caucasus is a region of fundamental geopolitical importance on the world stage due to its strategic position and the abundance of natural resources. Because of that, this region has become a focal point where the political and economic interests of various international actors have always converged. Thus, the interaction of regional states but also external powers in the South Caucasus has influenced the dynamics of bilateral relations. All of this has increased the interest of regional states in the peaceful resolution of conflicts in the region, the

development of economic ties, and the implementation of transboundary projects. However, it is necessary to consider the presence of serious internal and external forces with plans to destabilize the international situation in the South Caucasus. Under these conditions, the importance of regional interaction has increased and the search for a balance of power in the South Caucasus could compromise potential constructive solutions for the secure and stable development of the region.

Regional stability depends on the peaceful resolution of existing conflicts and the harmonization of interests among the South Caucasus states. Without this foundation of agreement, it is impossible to construct stable economic and energy cooperation that benefits everyone. But the regional security context is especially complex, with traditional rivalries and broader tensions involving Iran, Turkey, and Western nations. This background calls for careful management of bilateral and multilateral relations to avoid the intensification of conflict. In this regard, Azerbaijan’s bilateral agreements with Russia are a constituent basis for security collaboration. Prominent examples such as the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Security (1997) and the Declaration on Allied Interaction (2022) demonstrate the persistence of this strategic partnership, which has endured despite many geopolitical changes.

However, Azerbaijan continues to pursue a multi-vector foreign policy that maintains its traditional rapport with Russia while developing diversified relations with Western and regional powers. This policy is targeted at providing stability and protecting its national interests in a complex and changing environment. On the other hand, the development of international infrastructure projects such as the Zangezur Corridor and the modernization of transportation routes are vital to Azerbaijan’s logistics potential. These kinds of projects are considered important to both regional and global economic interactions, positioning the nation as a strategic logistics hub, but also serving to ensure security in the region. In spite of favorable trends, nevertheless, the region remains threatened by both internal and external factors. This fact underlines the need for further cooperation and active policy of regional states to be able to meet these challenges.

REFERENCES

- Ağacan, K. (2005). Time of Change: Russian Federation’s South Caucasus Policy. *Strategic Analysis*, VI (61), 54.
- Aliyev, Z. (2024). Zangezur Corridor: A new landscape in the geopolitical conjuncture of the world. *Revista Universidad y Sociedad*, 16(3), 33–38.

- Aslanlı, N. J., Araz. (2021). Russia's Policy During the 44-Day Karabakh War. *Insight Turkey*. <https://www.insightturkey.com/articles/russias-policy-during-the-44-day-karabakh-war>
- Avatkok, V. A. (2022). Turkey and Azerbaijan: One Nation - One State? *Mirovaya Ekonomika I Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniya*, 66(2), 90–100. <https://doi.org/10.20542/0131-2227-2022-66-2-90-100>
- Brzezinski, Z. (1997). *The Grand Chessboard. American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives*. Basic.
- Cornell, S. E. (2015). *Azerbaijan Since Independence*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315706221>
- Darchiashvili, D. (2000). South Georgia: Challenges and Security Tasks. *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, 7(1), 178–188.
- De Waal, . (2007). What's the Matter with Georgia? *The Wall Street Journal*. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB119550916696998354>
- Dugin, A. (2003). *Russian Geopolitics; Eurasianist Approach*. Istanbul.
- Enveroglu, E. (2024, April 18). *Azerbaijan-Russia relations overpower misconceptions about future of Garabagh*. Azernews.Az. <https://www.azernews.az/analysis/224821.html>
- Eyvazov, J. (2004). *Security of the Caucasus and stability of development of the Republic of Azerbaijan*.
- Gadzhiev, K. S., & Kavkaza, G. (2001). Geopolitics of the Caucasus. *International Relations*, 88–89.
- Garashova, S. (2023). United States – Azerbaijan Relations (1991-2020). *Eminak: Scientific Quarterly Journal*, 44(4). [https://doi.org/10.33782/eminak2023.4\(44\).688](https://doi.org/10.33782/eminak2023.4(44).688)
- Georgia will not be represented at the 3+3 format meeting in Moscow. (December 9). *Ekhokavkaza*. <https://ekhokavkaza.com>
- Goble, P. (1997). Geopolitics of the Post-Soviet South Caucasus. *Caucasus*, 2, 14–16.
- Hakki, C. M. (2006). *Russian Imperial Strategy from the Novgorod Principality to the 21st Century*. Istanbul.
- Huseynov, I., & Vlasov, A. (May 12). Russian-Azerbaijani relations. *Vestikavkaza*. <https://www.vestikavkaza.ru>
- Huseynova, I. (2003). *The Guarantee of Our Independence*. Education.
- Huseyn-Zade, R. (2013). *Collisions in the Caucasus*. Public Association of Azerbaijani Historians.
- Ismailov, E., & Kengerli, Z. (2003). The Caucasus in a Globalizing World: A New Model of Integration. *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, 26(2), 161.
- Jafalian, A. (2022). Le conflit du Haut-Karabagh : De la médiation formelle de l'osce à la médiation réelle de la Russie. *Études internationales*, 53(1), 39–68. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1090708ar>
- Jonson, L. (2001). The New Geopolitical Situation in the Caspian Region. In G. Chufrin (Ed.), *The Security of The Caspian Sea Region* (pp. 15–16). New York.
- Kaimazarova, M. (2008). Caspian territories of Russia and adjacent states in new geopolitical conditions. *Collection of Reports of the International Scientific Conference "Russian Neighborhood Policy"*, 456.
- Kazarian, D. (2025). Opium of the Media? The Evolving Role of Religion in Western News Coverage of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict. *Media, War & Conflict*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17506352241297926>
- Koibaev, B. G. (2014). *Russia and the South Caucasus: Geopolitics and security issues*. 317–324.
- Kuliyev, H. (1996). Russia's Azerbaijan Strategy. *Eurasia File*, 3(Winter), 195.
- Kusov, O. (2025). Saakashvili and the United Caucasus. *Svobodanews*. www.svobodanews.ru/content/article/24295665.html
- Main-James, S., & Smith, S.-M. (2003). *The Pattern of Russian Policy in The Caucasus & Central Asia*. Conflict Studies Research Centre.
- Mammadov, F. (2017). *Main directions of the foreign policy of the Republic of Azerbaijan 1991-2016*. SAM Publishing House.
- Markitantov, V., & Vinnichuk, O. (2024). The Second Karabakh War (2020): Causes and Consequences. *Eminak*, 4. [https://doi.org/10.33782/eminak2024.4\(48\).765](https://doi.org/10.33782/eminak2024.4(48).765)
- Mirabdullayev, A. (2010). *Russia's geostrategy in the post-Soviet space* [Doctoral dissertation]. B.
- Nadzhafov, E. (2005). *South Caucasus: The thorny path to security*. Scientific book.
- Sadiyev Saleh, S., Nasirov Khudam, Elman, Iskandarov Ibrahim, Khayal, & and Simons, G. (2021). South caucasus and a 'New Great Game': The communication of competition in securitized international relations. *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 29(2), 282–294. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2020.1826914>
- Shaffer, B. (2004, November 25). *Security in the South Caucasus*. NATO Parliamentary Assembly. <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/security-south-caucasus>
- Swietochowski, T. (1995). *Russia and Azerbaijan: A Borderland in Transition*. Columbia University Press. <https://cup.columbia.edu/book/russia-and-azerbaijan/9780231070683>
- Tomczyk, J. (2023, December 4). *Strategic Erosion: Russia and the South Caucasus after the Invasion of*. Stanford International Policy Review. <https://fsi.stanford.edu/sipr/strategic-erosion>

- Tuncer, I. (2000). The New Security Doctrine of the Russian Federation: The Near Abroad and Turkey. In G. Özcan & Ş. Kut (Eds.), *The Longest Ten Years* (p. 460). Istanbul.
- Ünal, L. (2019). Turkey's Transcaucasian Policy in the Light of Historical Reality. *Journal of Black Sea Studies*, 26, 555–576.
- Uzer, U. (2024). The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: Historical and Political Perspectives. *Middle East Policy*, 31(2), 152–153. <https://doi.org/10.1111/mepo.12742>
- Vladimir, A. (2022). Turkey and Azerbaijan: One Nation-One State? *World Economy and International Relations*, 66(2), 90–100. <https://doi.org/10.20542/0131-2227-2022-66-2-90-100>
- Zhil'tsov, S., & Savicheva, E. (2021). Regional security in the South Caucasus: Energy component. *Problems of the Post-Soviet Space*, 8(3), 331–340.