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IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS:
OLD WINE IN NEW SKINS?**

by Nona Mikhelidze

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On 7 May 2009 in Prague the European Union inaugurated its Eastern Partnership (EaP). The initiative is based on a Polish-Swedish proposal of May 2008, which was held in standby until 2009. It took a full-blown war for the EU to pull this proposal out of the closet, as the August 2008 Georgian-Russian conflict and the ensuing Russian recognition of independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia posed new challenges to European foreign policy.

The EaP includes six countries – Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine, Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan – and concentrates on four policy dimensions: bi- and multilateral relations, governance and financial assistance. In terms of bilateral relations, the Eastern Partnership foresees Association Agreements including strengthened trade relations and enhanced political dialogue, whereas multilateral relations focus on energy projects. The EaP also aims at facilitating social development and creating stability, improving administrative capacities, enhancing regional cooperation by engaging with a wide range of international top and mid-level actors. The key objectives include the creation of a free trade area and gradual visa liberalization. The initiative also foresees meetings of Heads of State or Government of the EaP countries to be held every two years and yearly meetings of Ministers of Foreign Affairs.¹ The European Investment Bank declared its readiness to finance investment projects.

Looking into the substance of the Eastern Partnership and comparing it to past initiatives, the question is: does the EaP bring value-added to EU policies in the South Caucasus? To what extent is it a new EU policy towards the region? It will have to be more than a second round of the European Neighbourhood Policy in order to avoid further frustration stemming from the ENP. This paper tries to understand whether the Eastern Partnership proposes anything new beyond the already existing initiatives and whether it can be used to improve the EU's capabilities in addressing regional issues, especially those related to conflicts. Considering the fact that, in the EU's view, conflict resolution in the South Caucasus is possible only through long-term goals related to democracy and development, this study evaluates the impact of the European Neighbourhood Policy on these long-term goals in Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia and analyses the prospects for the EaP to represent a step forward in this regard.

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¹ European Council. *Joint Declarations of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit, Prague, 7 May 2009*. 8435/09 (Presse 78). Brussels, 7 May 2009.

The Eastern Partnership: a new initiative, a complementary policy framework, or a way to brush away frustration with the ENP?*Open questions facing the EaP*

Given its strategic location, the South Caucasus is a region in which major external powers are at loggerheads with each other. The EU's role in the region, in contrast to that of Russia and the United States, has always been low-key and centred on the provision of assistance to the South Caucasus countries. Since the mid-1990s, the EU has provided significant humanitarian and technical assistance to the region and in 2004 it included the South Caucasus in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). In the field of conflict resolution, however, little has been done, even if conflict settlement is one of the main priorities of the ENP. EU-Russia dialogue on conflict resolution in the Caucasus has been virtually absent. The principal means through which the Union has attempted to induce peace in the region has been through the provision of aid, as well as such indirect means as democracy promotion policies, state-building and civil society development, in an attempt to increase the appeal of reintegration of the secessionist entities into their respective metropolitan states. The European Union has also tried to promote conflict resolution indirectly through its regional cooperation initiatives. Thus, the EU started to promote Black Sea cooperation and launched its TRACECA-programme² which was abandoned, however, and thus failed to achieve its goal of diversifying energy supply routes to Europe and deepening the EU's energy ties with the countries of the region. By opting for limited engagement in the region, the EU may have avoided confrontation with Russia on the one, but on the other it has failed to achieve its objectives of conflict resolution, regional cooperation and energy diversification.

The frustration with past EU policies in the region was starkly brought to the fore by the August 2008 war, which also raised exponentially the perceived urgency of contributing to conflict resolution in the eastern neighbourhood. Thus the EU launched the Eastern Partnership. From the outset, several political as well as technical challenges have bedevilled the EaP. First, it is not clear whether the initiative is complementary to the Black Sea Synergy (BSS), launched by the EU in 2007, or whether it is a new policy. The objectives of both initiatives are quite similar, as the BSS, like the EaP, aims to stimulate democratic and economic reforms, support stability and promote regional cooperation. Second, the political weight of the initiative has suffered from the fact that the southern EU member states expressed their reluctance to engage in a new initiative to the east early on. German Chancellor Angela Merkel was the only leader of a major EU member state who attended the Prague summit; all heads of the EU Mediterranean member states were absent, thus confirming their indifference towards this "new" initiative. Indeed the French Foreign Minister declared that it was no sin 'to go East and South at the same time' (France clearly presses for EU-Mediterranean cooperation and to move funds in this direction. France pressed and succeeded in guaranteeing for the southern neighbours two-thirds of the 12 billion euros earmarked for the ENP between

² The Transport Corridor Europe Caucasus Central Asia programme provides technical assistance covering road, rail, aviation and maritime transport connections from Central Asia to Europe.

2007-13³). Because of the absence of a unified vision on regional priorities within the EU, decisions on assistance programmes are taken with difficulty, as some member states focus on the South Caucasus, some on the Mediterranean and others still on the Middle East. Arguably the Eastern Partnership became a priority for the EU when the August 2008 crisis coupled with the ensuing Czech Presidency. That the EaP is partially based on a Swedish proposal suggests that Sweden will sustain the initiative. However whether the east will remain a priority under the forthcoming Spanish and Belgian presidencies – both states that prioritise the Mediterranean and are viewed as members of the so-called “Friends of Russia Club” – remains to be seen.

Other fundamental questions also remain open: for instance, how will the available EaP funding be allocated and who and how will monitor expenditure in countries like Azerbaijan which have a high level of corruption? How can the European Union achieve its goals, especially those regarding the creation of free trade areas, if their creation requires capabilities and competences that are currently absent in the South Caucasian countries? Will EU assistance to the South Caucasian countries in the framework of the Eastern Partnership be conditional on democratic reforms and, if so, how will these reforms be measured and monitored? What are the sources of influence and leverage which the EaP can rely on to ensure compliance with European norms?

Does the EaP add to the EU's democracy promotion policies?

The Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit is silent on conflict resolution. It emphasizes only “the need for their earliest peaceful settlement on the basis of principles and norms of international law”.⁴ The EU has repeated the need to increase its “political involvement in ongoing efforts to address conflicts”...⁵ time and time again: “If the ENP cannot contribute to addressing conflicts in the region, it will have failed in one of its key purposes”.⁶ Yet, in spite of these statements, the European Union has remained passive and at times ambiguous or even contradictory in its efforts for conflict resolution. The EU's contradictory policy was highlighted in the drafting of the ENP Action Plans (AP) for Azerbaijan and Armenia, in which the EU underlined the importance of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity in the Azeri AP, while including a reference to self-determination and Nagorno-Karabakh in Armenia's AP. By sending such ambiguous signals, the European Union did little to pave the way for a formal and respected role in mediation activities. Ambiguity has also characterized the EU's stance vis-à-vis Georgia's conflicts. The EU has supported the peaceful resolution of Georgia's conflicts, without being directly involved in mediation and without reacting to Russia's provision of passports, weapons and political support to the separatist parties. The EU has also called upon Georgia to find a peaceful solution to its conflicts, but failed to commit itself fully to taking a part in international peacekeeping, while de facto accepting Russia's “peacekeeping” monopoly in the region.

³ Lobjakas, Ahto. *EU: New Initiative Suggests East Is Edging Out South In 'Neighborhood' Tussle*. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 30 May 2008.

⁴ European Council. *Joint Declarations of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit*, cit.

⁵ European Commission. *Black Sea Synergy - A new Regional Cooperation Initiative*. COM(2007) 160 final. Brussels, 11 April 2007.

⁶ European Commission. *Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on Strengthening the European Neighbourhood Policy*. COM(2006)726 final. Brussels, 4 December 2006.

Interestingly, the Eastern Partnership has consolidated this passivity. Beyond the above mentioned statement, the nuts and bolts of the EaP draw the EU away from rather than closer to conflict resolution efforts. The EaP reconfirms the EU's preference for economic assistance in post-conflict situations rather than active political involvement in conflict prevention and resolution. The European Commission preferred to provide humanitarian assistance of up to \$650 million to help Georgia in post-war reconstruction,⁷ rather than to react to the continuous Russian provocations in the several months that preceded the war in order to prevent the conflict.

Another means through which the EU can engage in conflict resolution is indirect: the promotion of good governance and democracy. In the context of the European Neighbourhood Policy, in fact, the manner in which the EU intended to contribute to peace was not through direct political participation in the settlement of regional conflicts, but by focussing on other priorities necessary for an organic and long-term understanding of conflict resolution. In particular, the EU has aimed at modernising the political, legal and administration systems of the South Caucasian states through the ENP. In 2006, "strengthening the stability and effectiveness of institutions guaranteeing democracy and the rule of law..., ensuring respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms"⁸ was the number one priority of the Action Plans. However, the EU has failed to achieve tangible results in this field.

In its progress report for 2008 on the implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in Georgia, the EU rightly outlines various shortcomings and some backtracking in democratization: the 2008 presidential election was accompanied by "the misuse of state administrative resources for campaigning, unbalanced media exposure of candidates, reported acts of voters' intimidation, lack of clarity in election-day procedures, and irregularities in counting and tabulation". It argued that "media freedom and pluralism in Georgia remains an area of concern."⁹ These conclusions are corroborated by Freedom House which ranks Georgia as a still hybrid system characterized by unbalanced governance with the parliament subservient to the executive. Regarding the development of civil society, Freedom House notes that even if there are no restrictions on civil society activities, their political relevance is highly circumscribed in that the government ignores their recommendations.¹⁰

Turning to Armenia, the 2008 progress report on the implementation of the ENP stated that the presidential elections in Armenia "culminated in the clashes of March 1-2 [2008], which left 10 people dead and led to more than one hundred arrests and a state of emergency which remained in force until 20 March". Further the report notes that in 2008 the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) raised the question of "the arrests of opposition supporters and members of Parliament, of the control over the electronic medias and of the freedom of assembly as well as of a number of

⁷ European Union Delegation of the European Commission to the USA. *Donors Give \$4.55 Billion for Georgia Recovery*. Washington, 22 October 2008.

⁸ European Commission. *ENP Action Plans (EU/Armenia Action Plan; EU/Azerbaijan Action Plan; EU/Georgia Action Plan)*. 14 November 2006.

⁹ European Commission. *Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2008. Progress Report Georgia*. SEC(2009) 513/2. Brussels, 23 April 2009.

¹⁰ Freedom House, *Nations in Transit 2009* (Georgia), Washington, 2009.

prosecution cases and convictions based solely on police testimony” in Armenia. Regarding the freedom of expression, there is a “lack of independence of the regulatory bodies and insufficient pluralism in the media.”¹¹ Also in the case of Armenia, Freedom House points out the shortcomings during the election process and the absence of public trust in elections. As for civil society, authorities tend to undermine their efforts towards democracy promotion.¹² Some representatives of civil society believe that the above mentioned ENP progress report on Armenia was not critical enough, going so far as to view the report as “dangerous” at a time “when Armenian government still holds dozens of political prisoners; when it successfully attacks the few independent media left in Armenia; when it amends laws to clearly bar demonstrations without any justification; when it conducted the election that did not meet the minimum requirements of freedom and fairness; when it uses the judicial system to deny citizens their rights; and when it uses the powers of the state to deny basic human and civil rights to the citizens”.¹³

Finally in Azerbaijan, the ENP progress report raises the same problems as in the case of the presidential elections in Georgia and Armenia. Regarding fundamental freedoms, it states that “negative developments on protection of human rights and freedom of media and expression in particular remain causes for serious concern. Media pluralism has been limited even more since the decision of the National TV and Radio Council of December 2008 not to extend the licences of foreign broadcasters to broadcast on local frequencies.”¹⁴ The regime in Azerbaijan is viewed as increasingly authoritarian and of particular concern are the recent constitutional amendments which make the lifetime presidency of Ilham Aliyev possible, confirming that Baku is not interested in pursuing domestic reforms and democratization. Azerbaijan participates in the ENP as a foreign policy initiative and does not intend to fulfil any obligations regarding democracy and reform issues. Oil resources give the government the necessary leverage in relations with the EU. Thanks to its energy resources, Azerbaijan is among the fastest growing economies and has no problems with exports in so far as Russia has offered to purchase all its gas resources. In an interview with the Russian “Echo Moskvi” radio in 2006, Azerbaijani president Aliyev said explicitly: “For us, a partnership program [with the EU] is not an attempt to ask for something and cry for help. Maybe they [the EU] will need us more than we will need them”.¹⁵ Baku prefers to refuse EU funding rather than feel obliged to implement EU requests and reforms. “New EU members receive billions of dollars of aid. We don’t need it. That is why we conduct an independent political course both domestically and externally, including energy diplomacy,”¹⁶ says Aliyev. On its side, the EU also seems to be interested primarily in energy relations with

¹¹ European Commission. *Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2008. Progress Report Armenia*. SEC(2009) 511/2. Brussels, 23 April 2009.

¹² Freedom House, *Nations in Transit 2009* (Armenia), Washington, 2009.

¹³ Partnership for Open Society. *Civil Society Experts Assessment of Progress Report Armenia “Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2007”*. Yerevan, 2008.

¹⁴ European Commission. *Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2008. Progress Report Azerbaijan*. SEC(2009) 512/2. Brussels, 23 April 2009.

¹⁵ Huseynov, Tabib. The EU and Azerbaijan: Destination Unclear. In: Tigran Mkrtchyan, Tabib Huseynov and Kakha Gogolashvili. *The European Union and the South Caucasus: Three Perspectives on the Future of the European Project from the Caucasus*. Europe in Dialogue 2009/01. Bertelsmann Stiftung, Gütersloh, 2009.

¹⁶ Rashidoglu, Azer. “Baku does care about the West?” (in Russian). In: *Zerkalo*, 9 July 2008.

Azerbaijan, rather than insisting on democracy, and has demonstrated its reluctance to criticize Azerbaijani officials for fear of hindering energy cooperation.

The Eastern Partnership has reinstated the EU's priorities of promoting the values and practices of democracy and good governance. In view of the failures and setbacks of the ENP in instilling domestic reforms in these countries, to what extent does the Eastern Partnership represent a step forward? In order to contribute to domestic reforms in the partner states, the EaP inaugurated the Civil Society Forum (CSF), in which several EU and EaP countries' civil society organizations would make proposals and recommendations to EU representatives. But does this add something specifically new that was lacking in the ENP? The answer would seem to be negative. All three ENP Action Plans with the South Caucasian countries emphasize the need to ensure freedom of the media, to assist in the fight against corruption by developing specific anti-corruption measures, to adopt civil service reform in order to improve good governance and transparency; and finally to ensure civil society involvement in implementing these priorities. During the drafting of the ENP action plans, local CSOs were invited to make recommendations, however some Georgian NGO representatives blamed Brussels for not formalising their involvement in the process. Also in Armenia, local NGOs were encouraged to draft suggestions for the AP, but were not allowed to see their government's draft and to participate in any official discussions. In Azerbaijan, the third sector was totally excluded from the process.

Likewise, in its working document on the "Potential Subjects for the Work of Eastern Partnership (EaP) Thematic Platform and Panels", the EU sees the need for exchanges on best practices on issues such as the "regulation of the media, the fight against corruption, transparent management of public goods and civil service reform".¹⁷ Here again, particular attention will be paid to the involvement of civil society in all EaP activities. However it is not clear how the EaP will manage to include local civil society organizations in its actions. Furthermore, engaging with Azerbaijani civil society, for instance, would also be problematic in view of the pending amendments which the Azerbaijani government has introduced that restrict NGO activities in Azerbaijan. According to these proposed legal amendments, foreign funding of NGOs would be limited to 50%¹⁸ and foreigners would be banned from establishing NGOs in Azerbaijan. Even if this proposal were to be postponed by parliament, it is clear that the third sector will have a hard time with its activities. Thus without designing a more concrete roadmap to achieve the EaP's goals and include local civil society in the process, the EU seems to be repeating old mistakes and simply adding new rhetoric to its policy practice.

EU's lack of engagement with secessionist regions

The third aspect against which to assess the degree of innovation of the EaP with respect to the ENP is the EU's stance towards the secessionist entities. The secessionist entities in the region had largely been ignored in EU policy. The ENP Action Plans,

¹⁷ European Commission. *Eastern Partnership: Commission Staff Working Document*. SEC(2008) 2974/3, Brussels, 3 December 2008.

¹⁸ Powley Hayden, Jessica. *Azerbaijan: Parliament Delays Vote on NGO Bill*. Eurasianet.org, 19 June 2009.

with their separate chapters about conflicts, did not propose any measure to lift the isolation of the non-recognized entities and involve them in the political, economical or educational initiatives of ENP. As such, the ENP failed in practice to support democratisation, human rights and civil society development in these regions. In Abkhazia, there have been a few EU-funded economic and infrastructure reconstruction projects.¹⁹ As for Nagorno-Karabakh, the EU has not channelled any funds, not even for humanitarian and rehabilitation programmes, partly because its engagement with the conflict zone was strongly impeded by Azerbaijani officials.

Yet, the European Union could play a key role through deeper engagement with the secessionist entities. It could contribute by engaging in projects aimed at spreading civic education in the conflict regions with an emphasis on democratic values; by supporting human rights organizations in the conflict zones; by encouraging civil society participation in inter-communal dialogue; by implementing economic projects in the conflict region and cooperating in the sphere of energy; by improving access to the internet and information facilities in the conflict zones. In this way, the EU would also strengthen the pro-European inclination of the secessionist entities, fostering the spread of European ideas and awareness of a European alternative. To do so, the secessionist parties must not feel physically and ideationally trapped and have to be connected to the mentalities and ideas developing in the wider Europe. All this would facilitate closer relations with the peoples of the metropolitan states, which could be encouraged through exchange programmes and the creation of opportunities for commercial and human relations. But the EU feels more comfortable with dealing with post-war rehabilitation and not with programmes that could raise eyebrows in both the metropolitan states and Russia.

Despite this potential, the Eastern Partnership makes no mention of an EU approach to non-recognized entities and how it could contribute to diffusing values and practices there. The EU is still in time to make such efforts, but the EaP proposal suggests that it is unwilling to move in this direction. Doing so would require the EU's engagement with Russia in so far as Russia is the lifeline of the separatist entities. It would also mean that the EU would have to persuade the metropolitan states that democracy promotion in the conflict zones could be a way to break their isolation and alter their negotiating positions. The prospects of inducing the Kremlin to agree with initiatives were (and remain) poor. However engaging Russia in regular dialogue on these questions could give positive results, or at least they could prevent the situation from the Russian side.

¹⁹ EU funded projects in and around Abkhazia amounted €25 million and included programmes such as the rehabilitation the Enguri Hydro Power Plant, "Humanitarian aid for the most vulnerable people of Georgia" in the framework of ECHO (European Commission Humanitarian Office), and three-year programme to support reconstruction in the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict zone and adjoining areas and to create conditions for the repatriation of refugees. Additionally several EU member states funded some projects for the development of Abkhaz civil society. See International Crisis Group. *Conflict Resolution in the South Caucasus: The EU's Role*. Europe Report 173. Tbilisi/Brussels, 20 March 2006.

EU-Russia and the EaP

Turning to Russia, the EU-Georgia ENP Action Plan stated that the EU should facilitate the improvement of Georgian-Russian relations. Furthermore the document pointed out that conflict resolution should be included in the agenda of an EU-Russia bilateral dialogue. Both these aspects remained outside of the EU's policy practice, however, given the crisis in Georgian-Russian relations which started with the expulsion in 2006 of six Russian intelligence agents accused of espionage in Georgia and the Kremlin's ensuing economic embargo on Georgia, and culminated in the August 2008 war.

Here again, the Eastern Partnership does not promise to alter the situation in EU-Russia relations. The EaP was met with relative indifference by Russia, which is excluded from the initiative, even though the proposal emphasized the possible need for third country involvement, supposedly meaning Russia. However it is not clear how the EU would envisage involving Russia and elaborating common aims with it in the framework of the EaP in view of Russia's goals in its "near abroad". The EU has already had significant difficulties in putting the South Caucasian conflicts on the agenda in its dialogue with the Kremlin, as well as issues pertaining to the democratic development of these states – something Russia has little interest in, given that this could facilitate their integration into Euro-Atlantic institutions.

The situation has worsened considerably in the aftermath of the 2008 war. Russia's eventual involvement in some EaP initiatives would necessitate Moscow's normalization of relations with Georgia. For such normalization to take place at least two objectives have to be pursued: (1) to take the strain off the critical phase in the relationship since 2008 and (2) to reconcile Russia with Georgia's course towards the Euro-Atlantic space and promote its genuine facilitation of conflict resolution in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Neither of these goals is achievable. It is unlikely that the EU would be able to press Russia to undertake particular measures in the conflict zones in so far as the European Union has little political influence on the Kremlin in this respect. Even if, from a Russian standpoint, the European Union has the advantage of being considered a relatively neutral actor or unthreatening player (unlike the United States and NATO) in the Caucasus, the Union has chosen not to leverage its comparative advantages in order to induce a change in Russia's positions. In other words, although Russia does not regard the EU as a competitor in this region, given that it is well aware that the European Union does not plan to expand further into the post-Soviet area in the near future, the EU is content with its secondary role towards Russia and has not attempted to change the mediation formats dominated by Russia.

Then again, this is precisely why Moscow does not take the EaP, just like it did not take the ENP, seriously. It is doubtful that Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov was serious when he said that through European Neighbourhood Policy and now Eastern Partnership the EU is trying to establish its own sphere of influence. The Kremlin is well aware that the EaP is unlikely to bring about any radical changes in the South Caucasus, as all its objectives are long-term with little immediate relevance, and thus does not consider them dangerous for its interests in the "near abroad". Indeed, the Eastern Partnership cannot be a cause for concern as it simply represents a minor

addition to the European Neighbourhood Policy, which Russia was never seriously anxious about.

Conclusions

In view of these considerations, it is unlikely that the Eastern Partnership's reputation will flourish. The European Union did not succeed in mobilizing the necessary resources for concrete policy changes in the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy and it is unlikely that it will manage to do so with the EaP. Difficulties persist in Georgia as well as in Armenia and Azerbaijan regarding decentralization, the rule of law, judicial and social reforms, the independence of the media, etc. The EU admits that "there has been limited tangible progress towards meeting the action plans objectives in the area of democratic governance"²⁰, but proposes nothing in the framework of the EaP to ensure more effective assistance for democracy and good governance. The open issues that bedevilled the ENP do not appear to have been resolved by the EaP.

In order to achieve "tangible progress", the European Union cannot shy away from expanding its policy on conflict resolution. Focusing only on indirect and long-term objectives cannot be a substitute for direct intervention in short-term crises as the transformation process in the South Caucasus is regularly hindered by local tensions. The Eastern Partnership is not a step forward towards dealing directly with these tensions. The South Caucasian countries feel lost in the sea of EU efforts and fail to distinguish between them, and this adds to their frustration. With regard to added value, it is obvious that the EaP offers nothing that was not possible through the implementation of the ENP-APs. Marie-Anne Isler Beguin, the head of the European Parliament's delegation to the South Caucasus, rightly noted that it seems that the EaP is just "an attempt to camouflage the weakness of the Neighbourhood Policy".²¹ It would have been far more sensible to analyse the progress of the ENP critically and only then draft a new initiative to overcome the shortcomings of existing mechanisms and policies. After the August 2008 crisis, however, the EU appears to have become more prudent in its actions towards the South Caucasus, more reluctant to insist on democracy and less willing to get embroiled in Caucasian tensions and take concrete steps that could trigger confrontation with Russia.

The EU has refused from the outset to make a substantial effort towards conflict resolution in the region. Indeed its political and diplomatic resources are insufficient to influence the peace processes. Yet, if that is the case, it may be best to reduce the scope for frustration by refraining from the regular rhetoric about the Union's prospective further engagement in conflict resolution. The EU's idea of enhanced relationships does not meet the expectations of the South Caucasian countries. The metropolitan states' problem has always been that they think that external actors can resolve their internal problems, including their territorial conflicts. The EU cannot and is not willing to act as a guarantor of security in the South Caucasus. If the EU does not wish to antagonize Russia, this should be made clear to its South Caucasian partners. Thus it should put an

²⁰ European Commission. Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2007. Progress Report Azerbaijan - Commission Staff Working Document. SEC(2008)391, Brussels, 3 April 2008.

²¹ Lobjakas, Ahto. Citing Russian 'Aggression,' EU Steps Up Neighborhood Plans. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. 21 January 2009.

end to the ambiguity in its rhetoric, which can only deceive the parties to the conflict and push them into passivity, and adopt a new strategy of openly declared disengagement in the conflict resolution process. The European Union has had at hand all the knowledge and understanding it needs to act towards regional conflicts in a manner that is both legally and morally correct. But the way in which the Union has avoided taking a firm stand on South Caucasus conflicts for the past fifteen years gives reason to assume that the EU will delay action further.

As for democracy promotion, efforts should be redoubled without dubbing them as conflict resolution policies. The EU should design a clear roadmap for democracy promotion in the framework of the EaP for each South Caucasian country, specifically accompanied by clear conditionalities and monitoring mechanisms. Furthermore, the European Union should insert in its dialogue with Russia the question of the integration of secessionist regions into EU democracy related projects, while being cautious to explain to the metropolitan states that this does not compromise the Union's standing regarding territorial integrity. Otherwise the Eastern Partnership risks becoming just another technical document destined for failure.

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

AP	Action Plan
BSS	Black Sea Synergy
CSF	Civil Society Forum
CSO	Civil Society Organization
EaP	Eastern Partnership
ECHO	European Commission Humanitarian Office
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
EU	European Union
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
PACE	Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe
TRACECA	Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia

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