ENP: An Adequate Instrument for Democratization and Conflict Management in the Caucasus?

I. Introduction

The purpose of this article is to identify and explain the difficulties the EU is encountering when formulating a coherent policy framework such as the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) to tackle specific, mostly ethnically colored disputes in the Caucasus. The article will therefore begin with a brief description of the region as a highly volatile and unpredictable, but highly strategic, spot and will continue with a discussion of the first EU attempts to include the region into its foreign policy realm. Section 3 will be dedicated to analyzing the policy framework of the ENP more in detail, and Section 4 will provide insight into the shortcomings and deficiencies of this policy in general. As single case study, Azerbaijan will be highlighted in the view of the ENP in Section 5, and the conclusion will again sum up the main arguments of the paper. Even though a detailed discussion on minority rights in this region does not form the article’s centre of attention, the article contains many direct references to “frozen conflicts” and how they are included in the ENP and which measures should be undertaken to improve EU-led conflict resolution on the ground.

II. A Brief Glance at the Strategic Importance of the Caucasus

How can we categorize and explain the importance that is ascribed to this subregion? The Caucasus, a picturesque mountainous region, conveniently located between the Black and the Caspian Seas and of strategic importance for the transport of energy resources to Europe, nowadays represents the biggest security risk in Eurasia. The whole region, which is marked by ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity, has been afflicted by armed conflicts, terrorist attacks and impoverishment during the past 20 years. The northern Caucasus subregion alone, including seven Russian federal

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subjects, is one of the most ethnically complex and at the same time conflict-ridden regions in the world. For instance, the Republic of Dagestan, with a population of about two million, contains more than 30 distinct ethnolinguistic groups. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the whole region managed to gain some degree of visibility in Europe and the rest of the world and not merely because of the ongoing conflicts. It was the strategic importance of the Caucasus as a geographic concept that led to an increasing awareness of the region in Brussels and Washington. However, in consideration of the divisions in the region, generated by ethnically motivated tensions, wars, blockades and trade restrictions, it seems like a curse that the region as such does not have a unique structure to allow Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia to discuss questions that affect the region as a whole on one platform. The August 2008 war in Georgia especially shows the lie of the denomination of “frozen conflicts”. The only “frozen” element turned out to be the peace and settlement process.

The strategic weight of the region rests on three main factors. First, a very important and increasingly dominant factor is Islamic radicalism: it is the irony of history that the Chechens and Ingush were brutally displaced to Kazakhstan under Stalin’s iron rule because of their supposed collaboration with the advancing German Wehrmacht. They maintained their strict Sufi fraternity in the steppes of Altai and even revived the beliefs of Kazakh Islam, which was already regarded as a folkloristic aspect of the past. It was the former Soviet Air Force General Dzhokhar Dudayev who declared the sovereignty of Chechnya in 1991 by swearing on the Quran, yelling, “Allah Akbar”, and thereby setting the stage for what would become two full-scale wars with atrocities on both sides and thousands of refugees. The major massacre of about 400 people, mostly children, in Beslan in September 2004 seems to underline how radical Islam and claims for secession in the region are interrelated. Additionally, because this attack was staged out of Ingushetia against a city in northern Ossetia, it appeared to be a blatant attempt to expand the Chechen conflict throughout the Caucasus. This is also compounded by inter-land claims within the Russian Federation, which demonstrates that regional conflicts cannot simply be downsized to episodes of war between one state and one substate actor. For instance, Ingushetia and northern Ossetia, both federal entities of Russia, have been for quite some time now involved in a long-stand-

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1 R. Craig Nation, “Russia, the United States, and the Caucasus” (Strategic Studies Institute, Carlisle, 2007), 1.
3 Sufism is also known as the mystical dimension of Islam. Although all Muslims believe that they are on the pathway to God only after death and the final judgment, those who affiliate with Sufism think that God can be experienced while one is still alive. See <http://www.uga.edu/islam/Sufism.html>.
5 Ibid., 14. This is the common Arabic expression for “god is great”.
6 Nation, op.cit. note 1, 6.